

State Blog Seeks Ideas for Clean Energy Apps

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A Department of Energy Resources marketer who wants to collaborate with civic-minded hackers has invited Massachusetts residents to submit ideas for clean energy apps by responding to a post on the Energy Smarts blog.

The post, "[Clean Energy Hack for Good](#)," encourages computer professionals to join a volunteer meetup called Code for Boston. Tom Witkin, the department's marketing and collaboration coordinator, plans to share the energy app ideas he receives with Code for Boston members to catalyze innovation.

Civic-minded hackers use their computer skills for good causes by volunteering to develop technology tools for governments and nonprofits. [A recent article in Grist](#) highlighted Nerds for Nature, a group which helps environmental nonprofits venture into the field of new technology.

Witkin first heard hacking described positively when he was invited to speak at the Cleanweb Hackathon. "It was a fascinating and absolutely energizing experience for me," he said. "There was a lot of pizza consumed and a lot of sleeping on beanbag chairs." Hackathons typically last over 24 hours.

Witkin wants to motivate local developers to think unconventionally about how to help utility customers save energy and tap into renewable resources. Clean energy apps can advance a wide range of home automation and energy goals. The apps can be designed for smartphones, tablets or PCs.

"I look at the hundreds of thousands of apps that exist for smartphones and never in a million years could I have thought of most of these," Witkin said. "A lot of these come out of the blue. A lot of the innovation that's coming out in applications is coming from people who don't think in traditional ways."

Witkin's office submitted a set of ideas to the Cleanweb Hackathon, which was partly sponsored by the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center. The suggestions included the following projects:

- Alternative Fuel Vehicle Fuel/Charging Station Locator
- Regionalized Vehicle Fleet Optimizer
- Real-time Electricity Price Reporter
- Net Metering Project Interconnection Status Checker

Although none of these ideas were used during the hackathon, Witkin hopes that other civic-minded hackers will join Code for Boston and bring these concepts to life.

Code for America, the umbrella organization which includes Code for Boston, has already developed an interactive map called [Solar Boston](#) which shows the locations of renewable energy installations in the city.

Witkin expressed interest in building an ongoing collaboration with Code for Boston volunteers and other interested programmers. “Our office sits perhaps a mile from Kendall Square, which is a magnet for software talent, and now the innovation district has grown up equally proximate to where we are,” he said.

Although the state does pay programmers to work on software for governmental use, Witkin sees this as an external project which will be volunteer-driven. “We’re looking for people outside our walls to get innovative and start thinking about what they can do in terms of clean energy,” he said. “The stuff that I would personally like to get done externally really has to do with how you get the public interested.”