

Anatomy of an Open Source Political Campaign

Devin Balkind's 2017 run for NYC Public Advocate

November 19th, Open Camps Conference, New York City
VoteDevin.com

Who is Devin?

- Technologist and open source advocate
- Run a nonprofit that makes open source disaster management software
- Born/raised in New York City, 31 years old, BS from Northwestern University
- Active in Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Sandy and “mutual aid groups”

What are his goals?

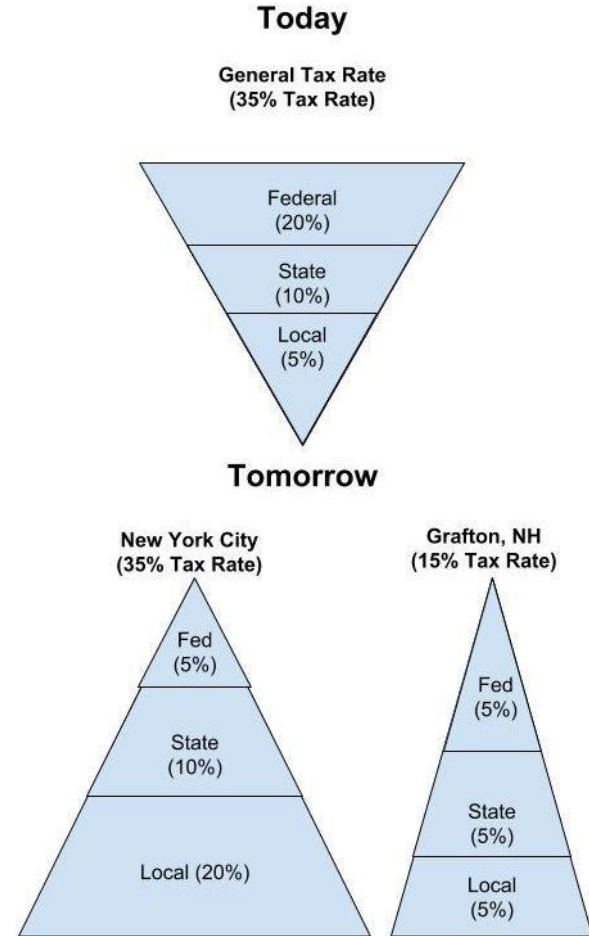
- Build momentum for #civictech candidates.
- Develop support for “Big City Libertarianism”.
- Develop useful software that helps New Yorkers.

The image shows a screenshot of a city simulation game. The main view is an aerial city map with a 'Pollution Data Map' overlay showing red hotspots. A 'Budget' window is open in the foreground, displaying financial data for January 1956. The budget is divided into Expenditures and Income. The total estimated income is \$53,712, and the total estimated expense is \$30,504, resulting in a positive cash flow of \$23,208.

Budget		1956 Budget January 1956		
	Adjust	Yr. To Date Expense	Year End Estimate	Meet Advisor:
Ordinances		\$0	\$3,264	
Neighbor Deals		\$0	\$0	(12)
Loans		\$0	\$0	(12)
Education		\$0	\$11,360	(12)
Public Health		\$0	\$3,000	(12)
Fire		\$0	\$2,360	(12)
Roads		\$0	\$1,632	(12)
Police		\$0	\$4,320	(12)
Mass Transit		\$0	\$4,968	(12)
		Year to Date Income	\$0	
		Estimated Income	\$53,712	
		Year to Date Expense	\$0	
		Estimated Expense	\$30,504	
Meet Financial Advisor:		Year to Date Cash Flow	\$0	
		Estimated Cash Flow	\$23,208	
		Current Funds	\$30,577	
		End of Year Funds	\$53,785	

What are his Politics?

- A progressive “Big City Libertarian” that wants more resources for local government and less for federal.
- “Flip the Pyramid”
- Focus on tech-enabled good governance.
 - Transparency
 - Accessibility
 - Participation
- Government operations should be organized around open source principles.
- We need to transition from a representative democracy to a participatory one.



What is the Public Advocate?

- Unique to NYC, created in 1989 when charter was rewritten.
- One of 3 city-wide positions. Others are Mayor, Comptroller.
- An ombudsperson holding government accountable to the Public.
- Organize government information for public benefit.
- Incumbent Letitia James is a lawyer, “progressive” Democrat.
- Her focus is helping marginalized people through legal means.
- Does very little open government, transparency, work.
- Produces lots of PDFs.
- Unbeatable.



Process

- Get on the ballot
 - Established parties: win a primary.
 - Independent parties: gather 3750 signatures. 7500 to be safe for a challenge.
- Get match funds
 - Raise \$125,000, max individual contribution of \$175, from over 500 people.
- Get into the debate
 - Raise over \$100,000 with a max individual contribution of \$5000.
 - Convince the sponsors that you're a serious contender.
- Get endorsements
 - Figure out who gives endorsements, how to connect with them, and then win their support.

Our Approach

This is a multi-cycle campaign to build momentum for #civictech candidates.

- **“Results not Rhetoric”**: do the work we believe the Public Advocate should do.
- **“Politician in your pocket”**: build products that deliver value to New Yorkers.
- **“Process over Politics”**: build and utilize public decisionmaking processes to arrive at positions on “hot-button” political issues.

Do all of this using open source tools and methodologies and while building a community that share ideas, information and code to improve NYC.

Our Collaboration Toolset

- [VoteDevin.com](#) WordPress for Public Communications ([backend](#))
- [Intercom](#) for Embedded Public Chat
- [Airtable](#) for Information Management ([backend](#))
- [NationBuilder](#) for Contact and Communication Management ([backend](#))
- [Slack](#) for Internal Communications
- [Google Drive](#) for File Storage
- [Github](#) for sharing code
- [Mailchimp](#) for supporters who want to create/manage their own lists
- [Facebook](#) Pages as primary means of social media engagement.
- [Twitter](#) as secondary means - personal account.

What We Built

We build five different software applications to show New Yorkers what we think the Public Advocate should be doing.

- Nonprofit Services Directory
- Capital Projects Database
- Public Participation Web App
- NYC Charter and Administrative Code
- Endorsement Tracking Database

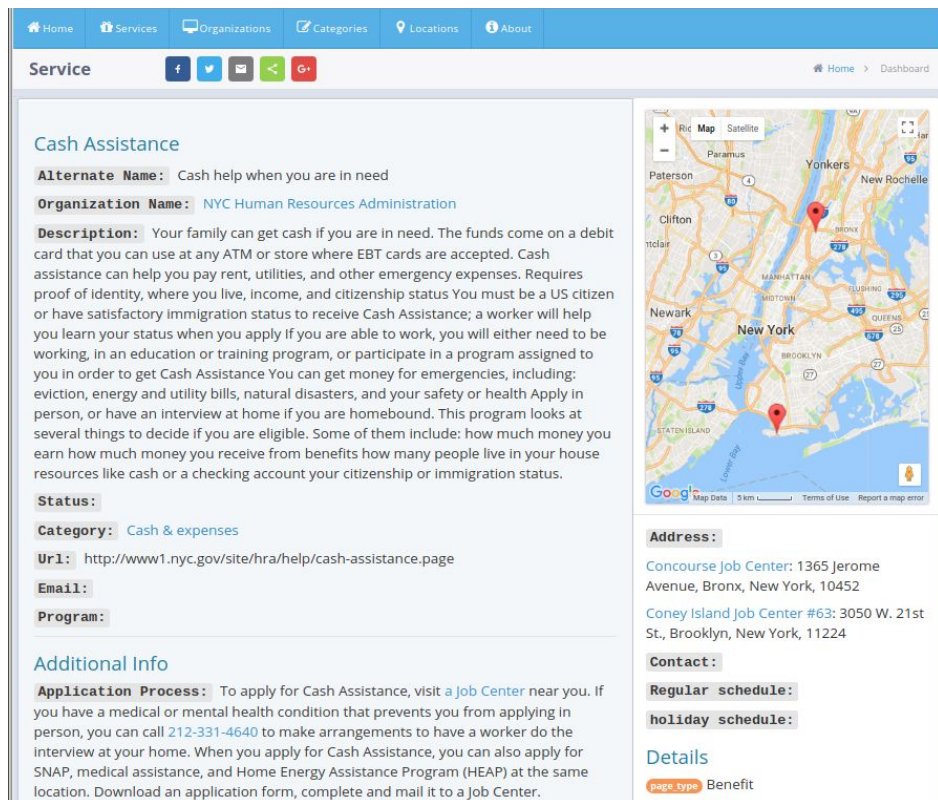
Nonprofit Services Directory - services.votedevin.com

Problem: NYC doesn't have a central directory of all services offered by nonprofits.

Solution: Create a directory/API using the Open Referral data standard so we can share this data.

Toolset: AirTable syncing data to a Laravel/MySQL system.

github.com/votedevin/services



The screenshot displays the 'Service' page for 'Cash Assistance' on the website. The page features a navigation bar with links for Home, Services, Organizations, Categories, Locations, and About. Below the navigation, there are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Email, and Google+. The main content area includes the following details:

- Service:** Cash Assistance
- Alternate Name:** Cash help when you are in need
- Organization Name:** NYC Human Resources Administration
- Description:** Your family can get cash if you are in need. The funds come on a debit card that you can use at any ATM or store where EBT cards are accepted. Cash assistance can help you pay rent, utilities, and other emergency expenses. Requires proof of identity, where you live, income, and citizenship status. You must be a US citizen or have satisfactory immigration status to receive Cash Assistance; a worker will help you learn your status when you apply if you are able to work, you will either need to be working, in an education or training program, or participate in a program assigned to you in order to get Cash Assistance. You can get money for emergencies, including: eviction, energy and utility bills, natural disasters, and your safety or health. Apply in person, or have an interview at home if you are homebound. This program looks at several things to decide if you are eligible. Some of them include: how much money you earn, how much money you receive from benefits, how many people live in your house, resources like cash or a checking account, your citizenship or immigration status.
- Status:** (empty)
- Category:** Cash & expenses
- Url:** <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/cash-assistance.page>
- Email:** (empty)
- Program:** (empty)

Below the main content, there is an 'Additional Info' section with the following details:

- Application Process:** To apply for Cash Assistance, visit a [Job Center](#) near you. If you have a medical or mental health condition that prevents you from applying in person, you can call 212-331-4640 to make arrangements to have a worker do the interview at your home. When you apply for Cash Assistance, you can also apply for SNAP, medical assistance, and Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) at the same location. Download an application form, complete and mail it to a Job Center.

On the right side of the page, there is a map of New York City with two red location pins. Below the map, the following information is provided:

- Address:** Concourse Job Center: 1365 Jerome Avenue, Bronx, New York, 10452; Coney Island Job Center #63: 3050 W. 21st St., Brooklyn, New York, 11224
- Contact:** (empty)
- Regular schedule:** (empty)
- Holiday schedule:** (empty)
- Details:** (empty)
- Page type:** Benefit

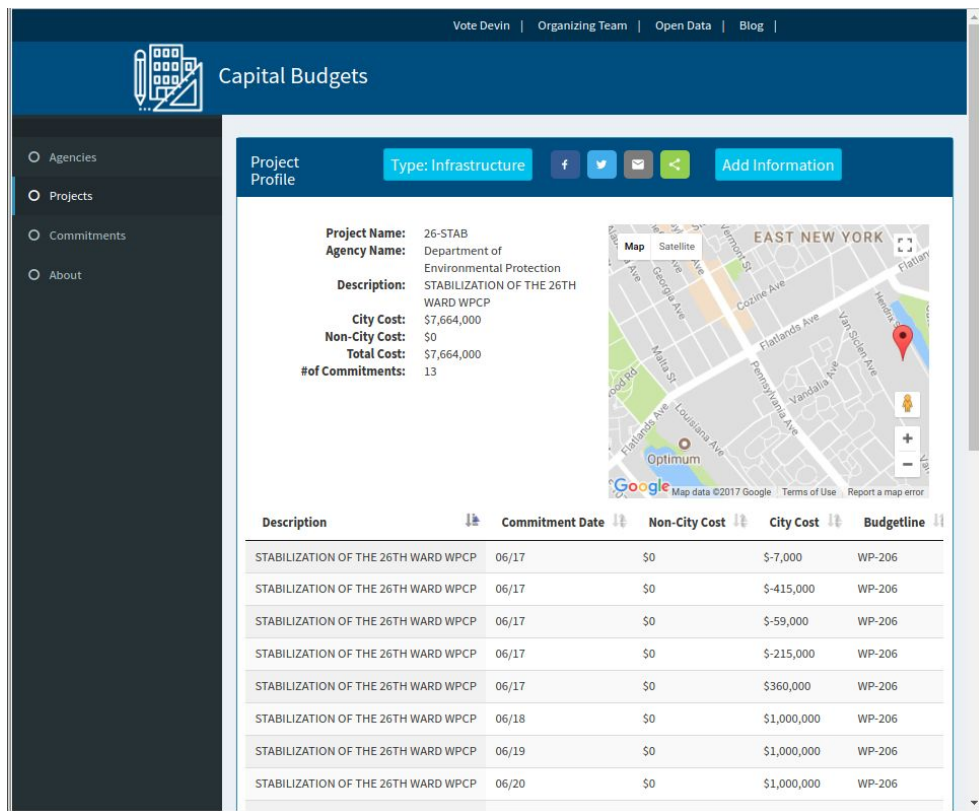
Capital Projects Directory - projects.votedevin.com

Problem: NYC spends ~\$15 billion a year on Capital Projects documented via a 2000+ page PDF.

Solution: Build a searchable website that gives every project a page (~10,000) and allows people to comment on them.

Toolset: Scraper (credit: Chris Whong), AirTable/Laravel/MySQL

github.com/votedevin/capital_budget



The screenshot displays the 'Capital Budgets' website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'Vote Devin', 'Organizing Team', 'Open Data', and 'Blog'. Below this is a dark blue header with the site logo and the title 'Capital Budgets'. A left sidebar contains navigation links for 'Agencies', 'Projects', 'Commitments', and 'About'. The main content area features a 'Project Profile' for '26-STAB' with the following details:

- Project Name:** 26-STAB
- Agency Name:** Department of Environmental Protection
- Description:** STABILIZATION OF THE 26TH WARD WPCP
- City Cost:** \$7,664,000
- Non-City Cost:** \$0
- Total Cost:** \$7,664,000
- # of Commitments:** 13

To the right of the text is a map of the project location in East New York, showing streets like Flatlands Ave and Vandalia Ave. Below the project details is a table of commitments:

Description	Commitment Date	Non-City Cost	City Cost	Budgetline
STABILIZATION OF THE 26TH WARD WPCP	06/17	\$0	\$-7,000	WP-206
STABILIZATION OF THE 26TH WARD WPCP	06/17	\$0	\$-415,000	WP-206
STABILIZATION OF THE 26TH WARD WPCP	06/17	\$0	\$-59,000	WP-206
STABILIZATION OF THE 26TH WARD WPCP	06/17	\$0	\$-215,000	WP-206
STABILIZATION OF THE 26TH WARD WPCP	06/17	\$0	\$360,000	WP-206
STABILIZATION OF THE 26TH WARD WPCP	06/18	\$0	\$1,000,000	WP-206
STABILIZATION OF THE 26TH WARD WPCP	06/19	\$0	\$1,000,000	WP-206
STABILIZATION OF THE 26TH WARD WPCP	06/20	\$0	\$1,000,000	WP-206

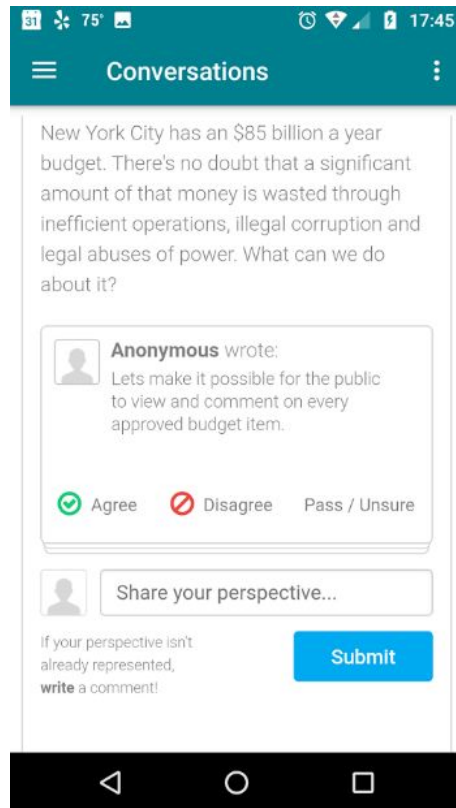
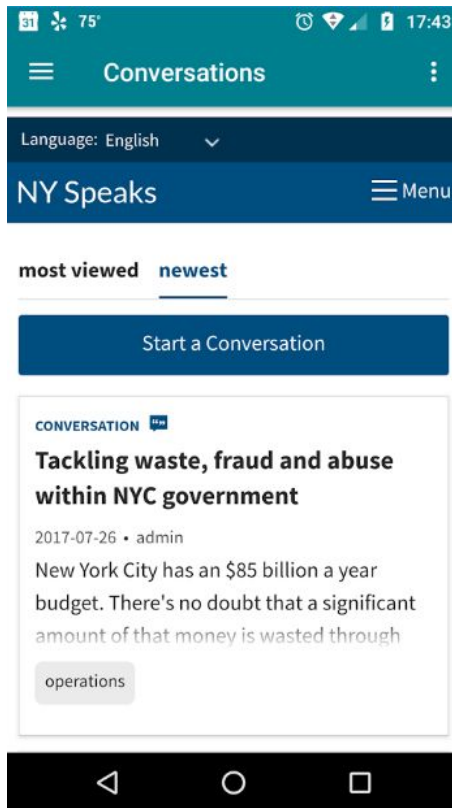
NYSpeaks Consultation System - nyspeaks.votedevin.com

Problem: New Yorkers don't have a platform to learn about issues, build consensus about what to do and pressure government to do it.

Solution: Combine best practices systems from other places (Taiwan and Madrid) to support a public consultation process.

Toolset: Pol.is, Consul, WordPress

github.com/votedevin/consul_conversations



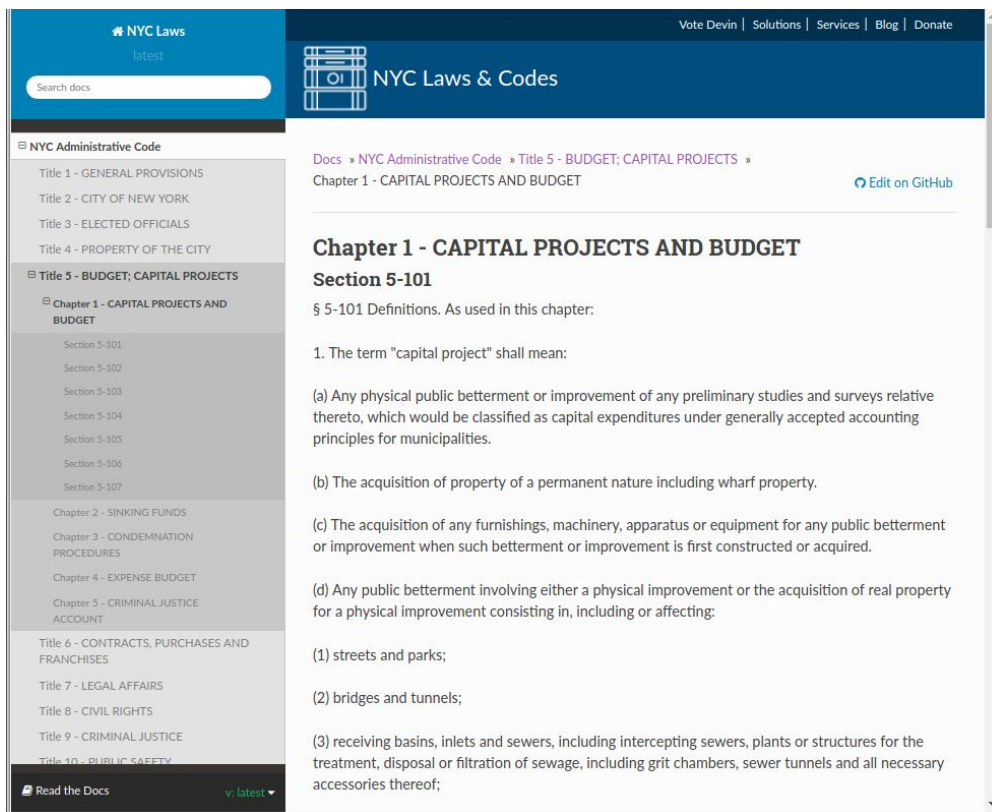
NYC Charter and Admin Code - laws.votedevin.com

Problem: NYC's Charter and Administrative Code run the city, but the State website that holds them is hard to search, browse and share.

Solution: Use simple and standard documentation software to display NYC's laws and codes.

Toolset: Python scraper (credit: Ben Kallos) and ReadtheDocs.org.

github.com/votedevin/nyclaws



The screenshot shows the NYC Laws & Codes website. The top navigation bar includes "NYC Laws", "Vote Devlin", "Solutions", "Services", "Blog", and "Donate". A search bar is present. The main content area is divided into a left sidebar and a right main panel. The sidebar lists the NYC Administrative Code structure, including Title 1 through Title 10, and Chapter 1 through Chapter 5. The right panel displays the content for Chapter 1 - CAPITAL PROJECTS AND BUDGET, Section 5-101. The text in the right panel reads: "§ 5-101 Definitions. As used in this chapter: 1. The term "capital project" shall mean: (a) Any physical public betterment or improvement of any preliminary studies and surveys relative thereto, which would be classified as capital expenditures under generally accepted accounting principles for municipalities. (b) The acquisition of property of a permanent nature including wharf property. (c) The acquisition of any furnishings, machinery, apparatus or equipment for any public betterment or improvement when such betterment or improvement is first constructed or acquired. (d) Any public betterment involving either a physical improvement or the acquisition of real property for a physical improvement consisting in, including or affecting: (1) streets and parks; (2) bridges and tunnels; (3) receiving basins, inlets and sewers, including intercepting sewers, plants or structures for the treatment, disposal or filtration of sewage, including grit chambers, sewer tunnels and all necessary accessories thereof;".

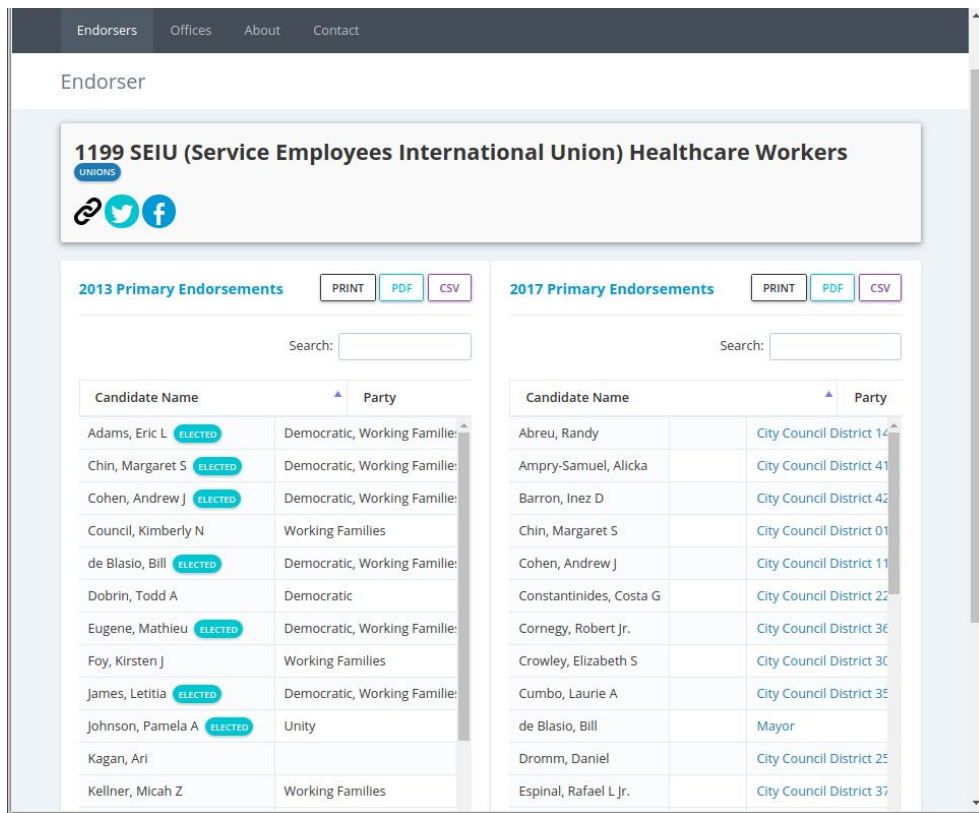
Endorsements Database - endorsements.votedevin.com

Problem: You can't win without endorsements, but it's hard to find out who endorses who and how to contact them.

Solution: Create a directory of organizations that endorse candidates and show who they've supported in the past.

Toolset: AirTable/Laravel/MySQL

github.com/nyendorsements



The screenshot displays the website interface for the Endorsements Database. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for "Endorsers", "Offices", "About", and "Contact". Below this, the page title "Endorser" is visible. The main content area features a header for "1199 SEIU (Service Employees International Union) Healthcare Workers" with social media icons for LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Below the header, there are two sections for "2013 Primary Endorsements" and "2017 Primary Endorsements". Each section includes a search bar and a table of candidates with their names and parties. The 2013 table lists candidates such as Adams, Eric L. (Democratic, Working Families), Chin, Margaret S. (Democratic, Working Families), and Cohen, Andrew J. (Democratic, Working Families). The 2017 table lists candidates such as Abreu, Randy (City Council District 14), Ampry-Samuel, Alicka (City Council District 41), and Barron, Inez D. (City Council District 42).

Candidate Name	Party
Adams, Eric L. ELECTED	Democratic, Working Families
Chin, Margaret S. ELECTED	Democratic, Working Families
Cohen, Andrew J. ELECTED	Democratic, Working Families
Council, Kimberly N.	Working Families
de Blasio, Bill ELECTED	Democratic, Working Families
Dobrin, Todd A.	Democratic
Eugene, Mathieu ELECTED	Democratic, Working Families
Foy, Kirsten J.	Working Families
James, Letitia ELECTED	Democratic, Working Families
Johnson, Pamela A. ELECTED	Unity
Kagan, Ari	
Kellner, Micah Z.	Working Families

Candidate Name	Party
Abreu, Randy	City Council District 14
Ampry-Samuel, Alicka	City Council District 41
Barron, Inez D.	City Council District 42
Chin, Margaret S.	City Council District 01
Cohen, Andrew J.	City Council District 11
Constantinides, Costa G.	City Council District 22
Cornegy, Robert Jr.	City Council District 36
Crowley, Elizabeth S.	City Council District 3C
Cumbo, Laurie A.	City Council District 35
de Blasio, Bill	Mayor
Dromm, Daniel	City Council District 25
Espinal, Rafael L Jr.	City Council District 37

The Results?

- Spent \$5,000 on software.
- Spent \$4,000 on advertising.
- Facebook: 500 page likes, 60,000 interactions.
- Websites: 5,000 hits.
- Three op-eds, two radio shows, one-hour long debate on cable.
- ~1% of the vote.

I DID get more votes than all other Libertarian candidates in NYC...

What's Next for the Software?

- Migrating systems to nonprofit controlled servers and domain names.
- Build Open Referral nonprofit service directories for service providers.
- Invest in the Capital Budgets project as an act of civic philanthropy.
- Collaborate with others advancing participatory democracy and issue-based public consultation processes throughout the city, offer software support.
- Turn the endorsements system into a marketplace where candidates and endorsing organizations can find each other.
- Keep the legal and admin codes up to date.
- Ready to collaborate on any/all of these initiatives.

What's Next for Me?

- Public Advocate is the only role I'm interested in performing in city government for the foreseeable future - so I think I'll run again in 2021.
- I'll help improve the operational effectiveness of NYC's Libertarian Party so they can become an "open source" party that supports #civictech candidates.
- Work in collaboration with NYC's other third-party candidates to create tools, culture and infrastructure that makes it easier for outsiders to run and win.
- Get friendly with NYC's local journalists, write op-eds, talk on podcasts and become better known among the media - so they don't ignore me next time.
- Continue doing all the work I normally do...

Let's Team Up

Let's build a community of open source #civictech people who run & win elections.

I'm here to help.

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