

Open in app ↗

≡ Medium

🔍 Search

✍ Write



US Ignite Celebrates the Newest Leaders in Smart Cities



City Innovate

Follow

4 min read · Jun 19, 2018



Ride Along Receiving US Ignite Award at the BridgeSF Conference on May 22nd, 2018

As cities around the world rapidly urbanize, they will need to be more connected, more efficient, and “smarter” than ever before. And last month in San Francisco, City Innovate presented the US Ignite Awards at Bridge Summit Conference, celebrating some of the startups that are making that a reality.

The competition was held on the first day of the conference on Startups Day, which featured Demo Day for Startup in Residence. Demo Day featured 14 of the 17 startups from around the world that worked with government partners such as Houston, San Francisco, Washington DC, and Miami-Dade County.

These innovations — from a company that uses ‘internet of things’ technology to monitor public trash cans to a GIS mapping service for analyzing local resident demands — were presented and total of \$10,000 were awarded for projects aiming to bridge together public and private sector solutions to municipal challenges.

The five winners of this competition — Nordsense, Gruntify, ZenCity, Conversation.one, and RideAlong — all fused public policy and cutting edge innovation in new and creative ways. US Ignite judged the projects along three categories: impact, implementation, and innovation, according to Will Barkis, Technical Advisor at City Innovate and Volunteer Technical Advisor at the City of San Francisco’s Office of Civic Innovation, who served as a judge on the panel.

The winning startups ranged from innovative chatbots (Conversation.one) aimed at improving information resources at the San Francisco International Airport to platforms developing better tracking mechanisms for individuals experiencing homelessness (RideAlong) to an app that’s

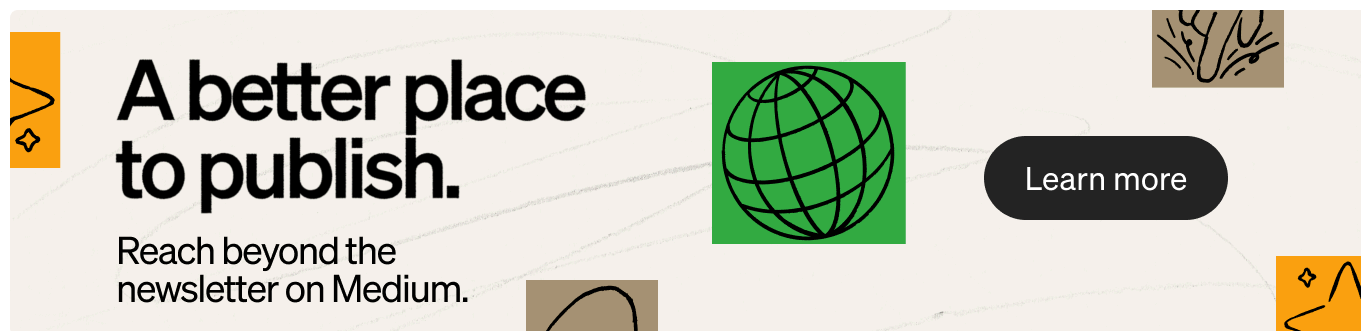
helping the Metropolitan Transport Commission with real-time response to car accidents ([Gruntify](#)).

One of these winners, [Nordsense](#), employs smart city technology to tackle a problem that plagues cities the world over, from New York City to Delhi, India: trash.

According to the World Bank, the world produces about 3.5 million tons of trash each day. What doesn't end up either in towering landfills or ocean garbage patches twice the size of Texas often litters the streets of our cities, overflowing municipal trash cans and spilling onto our sidewalks.

Nordsense used smart city technology, such as small sensors on public trash bins that connect to a centralized municipal system, to address this problem head on.

“Right now, the only way the city knows [that a trash bin is overflowing] is when someone calls 3-1-1,” Barkis said. Nordsense, on the other hand, employs ‘internet of things’ technology to allow governments to “better understand and report back, in order to do something more intelligently about the state of the trash cans.”



A better place to publish.
Reach beyond the newsletter on Medium.

[Learn more](#)

Another winner, ZenCity, takes on the challenge of helping cities listen — really listen — to their constituents, through the use of artificial intelligence (AI) technology.

ZenCity taps into everything from social media feeds in a given municipal region to municipal hotlines. The application then aggregates data into a GIS-enabled map that analyzes emerging trends in real-time, allowing cities to more quickly respond to the needs and demands of the people who live there. The startup has gone truly global, expanding beyond the US to various cities in Israel and Europe.

“All of these services we do in a city — from transportation and mobility to public safety to waste,” Barkis said, “can all be enabled by these tech layers.”

“This is important because developing useful technology to solve meaningful challenges is difficult and these two initiatives complement each other to do just that: create meaningful uses of technology to help our communities work better,” he added.

Why the Conference Was So Important

To Barkis, the BridgeSF event and the US Ignite Awards showcased the potential — and the need — for cross-sector collaboration, as cities are increasingly held to higher standards of efficiency for service delivery.

“Maybe the biggest single driver of the ‘smart cities movement’ is the expectation people have now of a high-quality customer experience,” Barkis said. “I think people are demanding a new level of experience and it’s not just from private companies. We’re expecting the government to change, too.”

City Innovate partnered with US Ignite in February 2018 as a Smart Gigabit Community aimed at building the foundation for smart communities across the country. City Innovate represents the San Francisco Bay Area through its

Startup in Residence program, giving startups the opportunity to address municipal challenges in a new way.

Organizations like City Innovate with its STIR program, Barkis said, are at the forefront of this emergent movement.

“STIR has proven to be a high impact model for civic innovation,” Barkis said. “STIR surfaces real challenges faced by city departments, gets buy-in from appropriate internal stakeholders, solves some of the procurement challenges by aligning its application process with the requirements for city Request for Proposals, and finally brings together startups with internal champions within City Hall to collaborate and solve those stated challenges.”

“US Ignite is trying to create real, meaningful impact in a diverse set of communities across the country — not just big, tech-forward cities — that is enabled by advanced information and communication technologies,” he added “San Francisco joined the US Ignite Smart Gigabit Communities program in January and our focus has been to align Startup in Residence with the US Ignite Initiative — we think both will benefit from the collaboration.

City Innovate will continue to update readers on the promise of broad-sector collaboration in cities of all types, as we aim to make cities smarter, safer, and, ultimately, better places to live.

[Smart Cities](#)[Govtech](#)[Civictech](#)[Startup](#)[Civic Engagement](#)



Written by City Innovate

446 followers · 639 following



Helping governments address their challenges through emerging technologies

No responses yet



Dpmartintech

What are your thoughts?

More from City Innovate



In startupinresidence by City Innovate

Spotlight on STIR Cities: Tony Batalla, Head of Information...

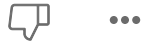
Tony Batalla is Head of Information Technology at the City of San Leandro. He ha...

City Innovate

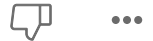
City Innovate Announced STIR Labs 2020–20201 Cohort


STIR Labs, sponsored by the National Science Foundation, leverages STIR’s track record an...

Nov 30, 2017  27



Sep 10, 2020  17

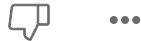



 City Innovate

Product Manager

We're looking for an experienced and passionate Product Manager that will...

Aug 20, 2020  73



 City Innovate

Customer Success Manager

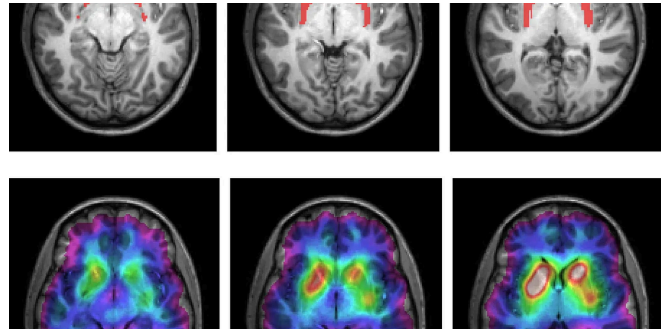
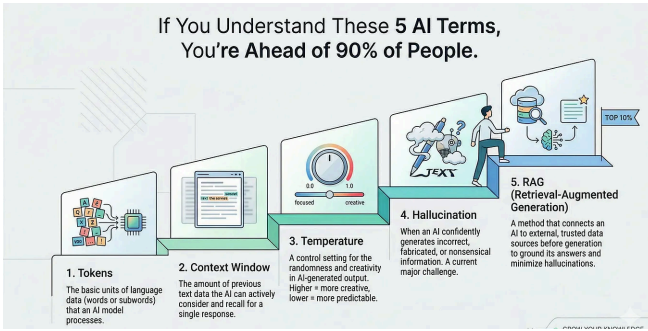
We're looking for an experienced and passionate Customer Success Manager that...

Aug 20, 2020  16



See all from City Innovate

Recommended from Medium

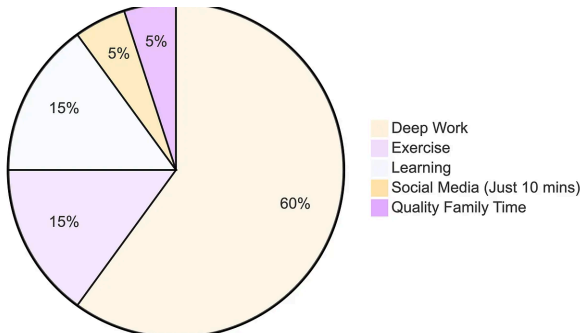


Medium AI In Towards AI by Shreyas Naphad

If You Understand These 5 AI Terms, You're Ahead of 90% of...

Master the core ideas behind AI without getting lost

★ Mar 29 🖱️ 8.4K 💬 169



Medium AI In Level Up Coding by Kusireddy

I Stopped Using ChatGPT for 30 Days. What Happened to My Brai...

91% of you will abandon 2026 resolutions by January 10th. Here's how to be in the 9% who...

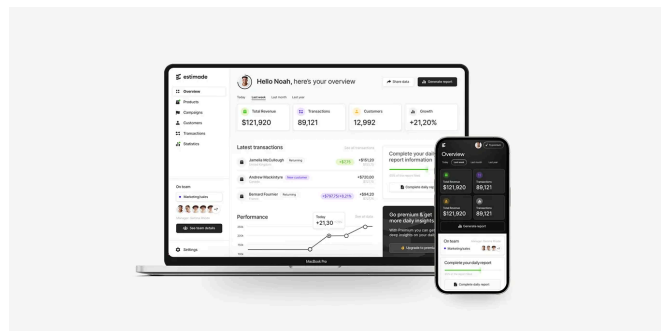
★ Dec 28, 2025 🖱️ 12.9K 💬 490

WRITE CATALYST In Write A Catalyst by Dr. Patricia Schmidt

As a Neuroscientist, I Quit These 5 Morning Habits That Destroy You...

Most people do #1 within 10 minutes of waking (and it sabotages your entire day)

★ Jan 14 🖱️ 46K 💬 938

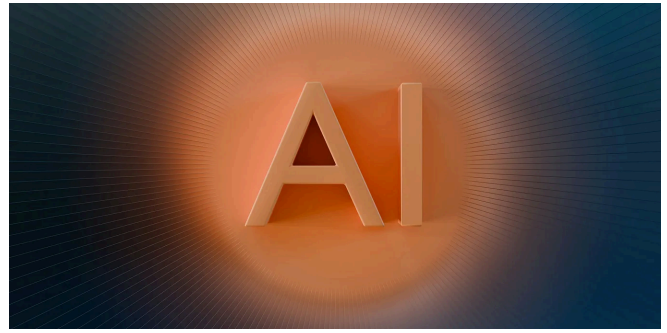


Michal Malewicz

The End of Dashboards and Design Systems

Design is becoming quietly human again.

★ Nov 26, 2025 🖱️ 6.8K 💬 283



 In Code Like A Girl by Shruti Mangawa

Why Reading More Books Wasn't Making Me Smarter

I Realized I Had Been Reading Wrong My Entire Life

★ Dec 10, 2025 🖱️ 12.4K 💬 526 🗨️ ...

 In Predict by Tasmia Sharmin

Palantir CEO Says Only Two Types Will Survive AI (And Elite Degrees...

Alex Karp told Gen Z there are “basically two ways to know you have a future.” Vocational...

★ Mar 26 🖱️ 3.3K 💬 260 🗨️ ...

See more recommendations