# PUBLIC SECTOR FUTURE podcast – Episode 5 -- Challenge-based approaches to Public Sector innovation

Talent:

1. Olivia Neal [host]

2. Jeremy Goldberg [guest]

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**OLIVIA NEAL:** Hello and welcome to Public Sector Future. This is a show for anyone who cares about using digital approaches in the public sector to deliver better outcomes. We explore stories from around the world where public servants have been successful at driving change, and we meet the people behind the stories, hear their firsthand experiences and the lessons learned. Throughout the series, we discuss technology and trends, as well as the cultural aspects of change.

Today, we’re joined by Jeremy Goldberg, Jeremy recently joined Microsoft’s Worldwide Public Sector team. He’s worked in government in the city of San Jose, San Francisco, the city of New York, and most recently was leading technology for the governor of New York State. We’re going to be exploring one of the projects he was responsible for when based out of the New York City mayor’s office of the chief technology officer. Jeremy designed and implemented a new approach to bringing bold ideas and breakthroughs into the public realm in order to benefit New Yorkers.

Jeremy, thank you so much for joining us today.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** It’s so great to join you today, and quite a few places that I’ve stopped along the way, in terms of working on civic innovation and technology. But it’s so great to be here and to be a part of the Microsoft family.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Well, thank you. I mean, that is quite a list of areas that you’ve been, and it was quite tricky picking one subject area to focus on. But I think the program that we’re going to talk about today will be really interesting for people in terms of thinking about how to bring those two worlds of public sector and private sector and innovation together in one space.

And so, maybe we could just start a little bit by talking about what was your role in the city of New York at the time when you started leading this program?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** First of all, it’s so great to go back in time a bit and start with this work that we were doing in New York City through NYCx, and in particular, because the impact that we made. And when I say “we,” I mean the team of people that were behind the creation and development of the work.

My role at the time was Deputy CTO for NYCx, and in that capacity, I served as the head honcho leader of organizing a team that would develop a first of its kind program in the city of New York, where we leveraged the city assets, the city spaces as a testbed for new and emerging technologies. And I’d come to this job and this work as a passion and relocated with my family from San Francisco to New York City when the then-CTO of – in the mayor’s office under the de Blasio administration, Miguel Gamino, recruited me out of SF to tackle this big, bold and really revolutionary idea to help transform New York City.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Well, it’s a really – a real passion project, then, to pick up your whole family and move all the way across the country and take this on, and maybe just a little bit of context for people in terms of the area that you are serving. I think everybody knows what New York is. Everybody’s heard of New York. But how many people are you serving in the city of New York?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** So, when we were looking at this work, it was based upon the mayor’s agenda for one New York City or as what he had called “One NYC.” And the mayor’s office of the CTO was really about how to make technology work for all New Yorkers. So, ~~when we’re looking at it,~~ we’re looking at a population of between eight to 10 million people across the city, across the five boroughs. And often, that also includes people who are coming from other parts of the region who are commuting in and utilizing city services, experiencing ~~you know~~ the great culture, the tourism and the nightlife of this city. So, we had, with all that in mind, a heavy task ~~uh and a~~ and a burden of sorts to try to tackle these issues with a collection of partners.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Wow, ~~uh~~ quite a responsibility and an amazing opportunity as well as you. So, could you tell us a little bit about the NYCx program? Can you tell us what was the program and how did this come to life?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Sure. So, quite a team effort, to say the very least. When we launched NYCx, this was going back to October 2017. And the objective and vision was New York City would call upon tech pioneers to make New York City the most fair, equitable and sustainable city in the world. And the notion was that the program at the time would be dedicated to improving service delivery through technology, spurring economic growth through new civic tech jobs, increasing digital inclusion efforts for all New Yorkers, and really looking at how to open up urban spaces as test beds for new technologies that have yet to be commercialized or proven.

And we base this program around two different types of challenges: Moonshots and co-lab or community challenges that engage the tech industry to help solve these real-world problems. Now, bringing this to life, packaging this concept in a way that was clearly innovative and therefore deemed risky, when you look at concepts such as this in the terminology of emerging tech or yet-to-be commercialized technologies, often the default reaction from a public sector leader is, ~~often~~ is that something I’m really willing to take a risk on, in the first place, is actually sitting down and having the conversation with you.

The good news is through our presentation to the mayor, he agreed with the premise and said it would help advance his agenda for the city.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** It’s interesting thinking about how you got this program started, how you generated the enthusiasm to get it going. So, there was really some stakeholder management, some getting the right people on board, getting that political drive. And then I think, as you all know, from – from having worked in public sector environments, presumably, you also had to convince and sell the idea to people internally as well to get that time and their buy-in, because none of these projects are ever standalone. They’re always integrating with other things. Was that a challenge?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** It absolutely is, I think, at a starting point, the active listening in terms of what it takes to get an innovative program from concept to launch to actual impact, which means where a resident says, government is working for me.

And so, the first thing I do is I look to the people that were working in this office in New York City prior to my showing up.. As someone who wasn’t a native New Yorker, how do we take our concepts, our ideas and really ensure that we’re meeting New Yorkers where they are, and they have high expectations, which we understand.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** I think those are really important points. I really like the emphasis that you gave on acknowledging and learning from the people before you, and the active listening role, because I think that’s something that can often be very difficult if you’re already inside a public service organization and you have the new person who’s come in with the bright ideas, and they’re going to fix everything, and they just wonder why you haven’t thought of it yet. That can be quite alienating for people, and I’ve seen that happen in lots of scenarios. So, I think those pieces of advice for people coming in are really important.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Right, and it’s an appreciation of culture and place, and being invited in to be a participant in that, that you are here to make the city a better place to live for people, to make your contribution in this way as a public servant. And in particular, if you’re trying to push the envelope as an entrepreneur or an innovator in government, when you’re tackling issues around procurement or better solutions that exist that are out there and exposing that emerging technology to people who are policy makers or electives or city officials, that’s tough. That’s really hard work. And bringing the right stakeholders to the table, that really begins with them trusting that where you’re heading is in a way that’s going to be beneficial to those that you serve.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** And so, with the NYCx challenges, when you setting this program up, who did you see as the main beneficiaries of this program? Is it the people, the New Yorkers who are receiving these services? Is it the companies who are getting the opportunity to test their new technology out, or is that a combination of all of that?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** It’s a combination of all of that. And to really understand it and kind of zoom in onto the Moonshot program overview and a little bit of the methodology that will illustrate that.

The Moonshot program was really the kickoff. That was when we announced to the world, the mayor did, that we would be launching **NYCx**. And it was really a response to two overarching trends: One, widening local challenges; and two, disruptive technological change.

So on the former, in terms of the local challenges where we were, in 2017, facing declining aid and federal government was kind of retreating from a lot of really important global kind of existential threats or issues – climate, affordable housing, health – cities were being asked to tackle immense challenges by doing more with less, including adopting innovative approaches to procurement partnerships and technology adoption.

So, when it comes to the disruptive technological change piece, we know technology is evolving faster than even, the private sector can often project, and requiring governments to engage with industry much more frequently, develop more rigorous understanding of the needs, and to build more proactive policy to help govern a lot of those technologies.

So, with those trends in mind, the Moonshot concepts and programing was really developed to invite global problem solvers to partner with the city, develop and test these solutions to pressing real-life challenges. And in practice, what that meant is that **NYCx** would work with city agencies on the biggest and most urgent problems to make progress on those with the goal of using the tech to improve lives. So, Moonshots are the ambitious part of this, and they were tailored to, I guess tethered to rather the city’s One NYC plan, a strategy for becoming fair and more equitable.

When we launched, that the challenges had to be codified. We wanted to make sure there was a knowledge bank available so that others that wanted to leverage it, utilize it well beyond the time that we’re going to spend there, that it could be something that any agency could adopt.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** So, you were operating from a central agency within the city, and then you’d partner with the other departments or other agencies to identify their challenges in line with the One NYC plan, and then bring them into the program. is that right?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Yeah, that’s accurate. And the good news is, we were coming from the mayor’s office as that sort of central office that could help to guide and direct traffic on a lot of these issues. And we could call the meeting, and we had the convening power of City Hall to be able to bring those agency heads, the deputy mayors, and individuals who were working on these projects on a day-to-day to the table.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** And was this program a program that you had funding for to run outside of the members of your team? Was there kind of seed funding for these challenges or how are you getting things going?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** It’s a great question, and my approach and my team’s approach to this, at the time, we were no stranger to having to be nimble and resourceful and doing more with less, right? So, even though the federal government aid was being reduced, we already had a small budget to begin with. It was our hypothesis, and my colleague, Yusuf, and Gary both conveyed the same. We don’t necessarily believe that it’s the money that’s going to be the driver for companies, for startups to engage with us in these initiatives. Rather, it’s the affiliation, the association with the city and the ability to demonstrate, in New York City, the capabilities of the product, but also tweak the product as needed, as you learn what works and what doesn’t work.

And so, we had a small budget. We’re talking less than $100,000, and we had to demonstrate evidence of progress, show we were really aligning to a lot of the objectives on the economic development side to tap into some of the resources there.

The big key piece here that really did resonate with the agencies was they had already set aside budget for procurements for various needs that they had. And so, in partnering with an agency, again, it goes back to trust, where they believe that we can actually deliver on what it is that we’re setting out to accomplish, they were able to set aside and allocate those dollars that would have gone for a traditional RFP, set aside those so that if, in fact, one of these solutions or problems that we would solve with a company or startup would be solved, they could move forward and enter into a contract, an agreement, with that company as part of our program.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Okay, so actually, it helped those teams as well, then, move forward a bit more quickly, if they did find the solution that met their needs.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** It did. For those companies trying to enter in the government technology space, for example, it was a great way to prove out the product. And it was a way for the city agencies to fast track, frankly, what can traditionally be a longer, more cumbersome process to buy something. that was also a way to kind of move that process along with a little more efficiently, if also not disruptively at times, because these things are not perfect.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** So, Jeremy, the whole program sounds fascinating. What I’d like to do now is maybe dove a little bit deeper into one of the specific challenges. I think would be interesting to get a sense of what were these actual problems that you were trying to solve?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** One of our Moonshot challenges was focused on cybersecurity, but in particular, if we go a layer or two deeper, were really focusing on the city’s 240,000 small businesses. And like most major cities around the globe, those small businesses depend upon being able to open up at 9am, if you’re going to show up to grab your cup of coffee or if you’re going to drop off your clothes at the cleaners, those places need to operate. And typically, there are five-to-10 people that may be employed there. And they’re really sort of a lifeblood of the actual city and the fabric of the community.

And so, this challenge sought to support the development and deployment of innovative and affordable solutions that ensure the city’s small businesses are resilient to cyberthreats. That means at the point of sale, for example, where that transaction might be done with Square or if it means how you account and keep your bookkeeping, for example, are you saving those files on a hard drive, which is mostly what they’re doing, that are going to be easily accessible by a cyberattack?

And when we launched this, it was with a half a dozen internal agency partners in New York City, and nearly a dozen international partners that represented local and national government leaders from Paris and London, Helsinki, Berlin, Japan, Israel and industry experts from Jerusalem Venture Partners and the Global Cyber Alliance. this challenge was probably, at that point in time, the most successful one to date. There were over 170 proposals, several compelling incentives, including acceptance into our city economic development, cyber accelerator. There was support for international market expansion and a $1 million investment from Jerusalem Venture Partners into some of the companies that were selected as the winners.

The conclusion of the challenge, when we made the selections for the partners, we launched the first of its kind training for small businesses to complement the solutions. And so, that’s an example of where we really tackled something that is affecting small businesses, but folks around the globe, and really focused on the individual New Yorker.

Another example that I’ll mention is one that we launched, and it was the second of our challenges focused on climate. And this challenge saw innovative and accessible EV charging solutions to accelerate progress on the mayor’s goal of having 20 percent of new vehicle registrants be EVs by 2025. And we launched that challenge in partnership with the city of Paris and more than half a dozen agencies. We have34 applications from around the world and invited six finalists to test a range of these technologies across New York City.

One of these included a technology retrofit to lampposts into level two car chargers, for example – this was the first in the U.S. – and mobile chargers to top up stationary vehicles, wireless charging. We really saw some amazing stuff.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** What I find interesting about these examples as well is the international nature of them, the idea that these aren’t problems that are just New York City problems. They are problems that are shared by many other cities around the world. And I think that’s a really interesting perspective to take on it.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** That’s right. And anything that we would do when I was working in the public sector, the approach was what’s something that’s repeatable, scalable and available to our colleagues and our partners in any city that is wanting, willing, eager to learn from us and to take it and do it themselves. That is the greatest thing one can do, as you’re driving innovation from within the public sector, is to share. we all have a responsibility here to solve these big problems.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Absolutely. And with that in mind, what were your main findings from running this program? If you were talking to somebody else who thought they were interested in setting up something similar in their own government, what kind of advice would you give them?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** For lessons learned throughout, it’s a constant awareness and paying attention to the things that you’ve tried previously, I think is number one, and to the extent you can, documenting that work; and that means the failures and the things that went well, and you can constantly improve upon them.

So, to get really specific, we did a great job in through the **NYCx program** to develop what we call a Moonshot Launchpad Playbook. And we did that in partnership with Cornell Tech here in New York City. And it’s available to anyone who wants to use it. It is a methodology for designing the Moonshot challenges. So, number one is take a look at the playbook we developed.

On a practical level, to do these types of programs, you really need a senior champion and buy-in to experiment, especially in the first year. And that senior champion that provides air cover, having that buy-in is tremendously important to block and tackle for you so that you can do the work that you want, that you know is important, that you know is risky, but it is critical for a city.

A third thing would be to use the first year to really learn, but also to show your progress. Frequent reports back, depending on who you’re speaking with all of them will have a flavor in terms of what they’re looking for you to share with them, frequently doing that is really important.

Now, of course, you really have to take and leverage is when a partnership goes well, even when it’s not complete, when you have someone from an agency or partner saying, that this work is working well and telling others about it, that probably is the most effective way, and lesson learned, which is having others speak about your work when you’re not there and feeling ownership because they should; we’re co-creating this together.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** There’s so much that for people to learn from in terms of thinking very broadly about partnerships, having these champions really keeping ~~up~~ people updated on progress and sharing the successes.

There was one thing I wanted to ask you earlier, I read that within the program, you had over 400 global companies and organizations participating and that half of those were minority or women-run businesses. how did you go about making sure you’ve got that diversity in participation, because that’s not something that you always see in these types of challenges? Could you share about what you did to ensure that diversity and approach?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:**  I’m thrilled you’ve asked that question. This is an area where my observation, having worked in a few different cities, is that often, the work that we do and the people that are doing it isn’t reflective of the community that we’re serving when we’re in government. And it was critical, as part of everything we would do in the definition of the problems that we were trying to solve, that we had people reflective of the diversity of the city at the table.

From the concept ideation to the development of the challenges we would issue to the user research we would conduct, to the programing, to the panels, to the speakers, we were very, very clear that in every part of it, women, people of color, the visually impaired, the accessibility nature of all this work, which is often really left out of the conversation, making sure that’s incorporated.

And with all that said, it’s all about the people that you bring on to your team. So, as we develop this programing to be more inclusive the team that was running the program, my colleague Yusef and my colleague Gary, developed this program concept called Inclusive Entrepreneurship. they identified that there are opportunities to really support early stage, high growth potential entrepreneurs who are building businesses and startups.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Thank you. I think that’s such an important part of making a program like this success. And I really love that focus on bringing the people who are in the city that you’re setting to be a part of that process, and making sure they’re reflected in the decisions that are getting taken. So, thank you for sharing that.

One final question for me: We’ve heard a lot about the success of this program, and you’ve clearly worked on a whole range of very impactful programs in all sorts of different places across the U.S. And in this show, we also want to highlight and celebrate the work of public servants from all around the world.

So, I wanted to know from you what piece of work or what team have you seen doing something which has really inspired you or that you’ve learned from, is there anything out there that you think people should go and check out because it’s exciting?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** One area I’m very inspired by, and learning much more about and spending time thinking about these days is in the remote and distributed workspace. And prior to our new reality or new normal due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, 18F at the federal level in Washington, D.C., had already organized their employees to be a distributed workforce.

And I’m really compelled and curious about what distributed work looks like in government, and where the future lies with that. what does this look like in the longer term? So, not only for the great work that 18F does in terms of consulting around purchasing and procurement and agile, but in particular around the distributed workforce. So, that’s one thing.

So, most of the time, I try and keep up with what’s happening with the team out of London, and Theo Blackwell’s work. I think quite a few things in the city of Amsterdam, certainly, as they were looking at policy, the policy arena around the Airbnb, issues of home sharing and other things. So, it’s – it’s a remarkable time to look out and see what’s happening, and eager to see what people do in this next wave around health and climate issues, of course, too.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Well, Jeremy, I think this is about will we have time for. Thank you so much for spending the time with us today and talking through this. I feel like we probably could have carried on talking and learning more for another hour. If people are interested in finding out more about you or your work, where can they go to learn more?

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** I try to keep my social media up to date as much as possible. You can follow me on Twitter @JeremyMGoldberg, or you can check out some of the Moonshot Playbook work that we’ve produced on the New York City website for the mayor’s Office of the CTO.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** Wonderful. And for all our listeners, we’ll put links to those on our show page as well.

So, Jeremy, thank you so much for joining us today and all the very best.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Thank you for having me.

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**OLIVIA NEAL:** Thank you to our guest, Jeremy Goldberg, and thank you to all of you for joining me today on Public Sector Future. Our goal is for you to learn something new and be inspired to think differently about your own digital transformation journey.

If you’ve enjoyed today’s episode and want to help others find it, please share, rate and review the show. It really does help people find and discover new shows like this one. And remember to listen and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. Check out our show page for links to all of what was discussed today, and if you’d like to reach out and send your questions or feedback, you can find me on Twitter @LivNeal or on LinkedIn. See you next time.

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