

Public Interest Technology Commons of DC
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Final Report

We are pleased to provide this report of the activities we have undertaken under the New Venture Fund grant that funded the Public Interest Technology Commons of DC through September 2022. Overall, we have engaged in a wide variety of activities that have benefited law students in Washington DC, other PIT-UN members, as well as access to justice tech and reproductive data privacy researchers.

All of the George Washington University activities conducted with the grant funds were and are consistent with charitable purposes as set forth in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and The George Washington University complied with all provisions and restrictions contained in the Grant Agreement, including, for example and without limitation, those provisions relating to lobbying and political activity.

Overview

The mission of The Public Interest Technology Commons of DC (PIT Commons) is to initiate a paradigm shift on the career pipeline and placement front towards a collaborative and inclusive model of preparing law students, regardless of their home institution, to be leaders in the field of public interest technology. PIT Commons builds upon existing student and professional enthusiasm to advance this paradigm shift in professional and career development in the public interest technology space. PIT Commons is led by GW Law with support from Professors Jennifer Daskal and Gary Corn at American University and Professor Lateef Mtima at Howard University. PIT Commons receives additional support from the Institute for Intellectual Property and Social Justice – a DC area think-tank that addresses the social justice implications of intellectual property law and policy – and the Internet Law and Policy (ILP) Foundry – a network of emerging and established professionals passionate about Internet law and policy who are proven career development mentors in this space. PIT Commons has worked with existing public interest technology programs – including intellectual property clinics that support local creators, data science projects that focus on the public interest, and sponsors of networking events connecting students with young professionals – and has expanded access to these professional/career development opportunities to students across DC. PIT Commons has hosted a number of cross-disciplinary and cross-institution guest lectures and expert roundtables to provide students with meaningful professional development and networking opportunities.

Events and Activities

- In January 2021, PIT Commons and ILP Foundry co-hosted an event on election disinformation and voter suppression. Speakers included Professor Spencer Overton (GW Law), Professor Kristina Wilfore (GW Elliott School of International Affairs), and David Brody (Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law). Speakers discussed the nature of the misinformation and elections problem, and provided suggestions about how students could get involved. This was followed by breakout rooms in which attendees were able to select among the three speakers with whom they wanted to have a more direct conversation.
- In March 2021, PIT Commons and TechCongress co-hosted an event on opportunities for students with tech backgrounds to work in Congress. Speakers included Travis Moore (Founder, TechCongress), Geoffrey Cain (House Foreign Affairs Committee), Britney Lyons (Congressional Digital Services Fellow), and Aleena Khan (Program Associate, TechCongress). TechCongress staff, fellows, and alumni discussed and fielded questions about hot topics in the field, relevant skills, and Hill opportunities for students with tech backgrounds.
- In April 2021, PIT Commons and its partner the Tech Law and Security Program at American University co-hosted an interactive career panel. GW secured speakers from Public Knowledge (Senior Policy Council Jenna Leventoff) as well as recent alumni who worked at Public Knowledge before moving on to other roles at the Internet and Competitive Networks Association (INCOMPAS, formerly COMPTEL) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). Howard University School of Law secured participation by Kim Tignor from the Institute for Intellectual Property and Social Justice (IIPSJ). In addition to hosting the event, American University's Tech Law and Security Program secured participation by faculty who work at WilmerHale, as well as recent alumni who now work at ZwillGen, the Center for Democracy and Technology, and American University's Tech Law and Security Program.
- In Summer 2021, PIT Commons sponsored three summer externs working with the Institute for Intellectual Property and Social Justice (IIPSJ). IIPSJ was established to address the social justice implications of intellectual property (IP) law, by embracing principles of equitable access, inclusion, and empowerment, and its work includes social justice-cognizant interpretation, application, and revision of IP law. Our IIPSJ externs focused on the intersection of public interest, technology, and intellectual property, including the Communications Decency Act (CDA) Section 230, data privacy, and increasing diversity in the patent system.

- In Summer 2021, GW Law became a Partner Law School with the Access to Justice Tech Fellows Program, a non-profit organization designed to equip the next generation of civil justice leaders to ensure equitable access to justice for all.
- In Summer 2022, PIT Commons sponsored two Access to Justice Tech Fellows in connection with the Access the Justice Tech Fellows Program, under the supervision of Miguel Willis, Innovator in Residence, Future of the Profession Initiative, University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, and Executive Director, Access to Justice (A2J) Tech Fellows Program. The A2J Tech Fellows program matches law students from across the country with host organizations, typically legal service organizations, for a 10-week, paid internship. A2J Tech Fellows work on a variety of issues, all related to the intersection of technology and the law and harnessing these powers to increase access to justice for low-income individuals. Our partnership with the Access to Justice Tech Fellows Program, initiated with funds from this grant, has been very productive. Through this partnership, in the last two years, we have sponsored law students to two different host organizations: the Self-Represented Litigation Network (SRLN) and the Justice Impact Alliance. SRLN is a networking site that connects justice-based organizations and individuals in need of such services with one another to share innovative and evidence-based resources and solutions. The Justice Impact Alliance is a national non-profit founded by individuals whose lives were impacted by the justice system that seeks to change the lives of those similarly situated by working with justice-impacted leaders and allies to correct systemic injustices and inequality within our legal system. Our Summer 2022 funding of two Access to Justice Tech Fellows builds on the funding we provided for Tech Fellows in Summer 2021, which was partly funded through our other NVF grant, the Ethical Tech Initiative of DC.
- In Summer 2022, PIT Commons, along with the Ethical Tech Initiative of DC, established our Reproductive Data Privacy Initiative, in response to the historic ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Womens' Health Organization*, which overturned the long-standing protections accorded to those seeking abortions in *Roe v. Wade*. The project was born out of a need for clarity on the role of data privacy in connection with abortion services.
- In September 2022, our Reproductive Data Privacy Initiative convened a roundtable that brought together experts on the topic of reproductive data privacy for an in-depth discussion of these issues post-Dobbs. This roundtable, *Protecting Reproductive Data Privacy Post-Dobbs*, addressed issues surrounding protecting reproductive data after the landmark decision in *Dobbs*. The event, hosted at GW Law and livestreamed for an online audience, began with opening remarks from GW Law Dean Dayna Bowen Matthew. Dean Matthew, a leader in public health and civil rights law, spoke to the timeliness of the roundtable given the recent decision in *Dobbs* and the data privacy landscape as it currently stands.

Our keynote speaker was Congresswoman Sara Jacobs, cosponsor of the My Body, My Data Act, legislation designed to increase protection for personal reproductive health data and the data of people seeking reproductive health services. In her keynote, Representative Jacobs explained that the Act would limit the reproductive data that can be collected, retained, used, or disclosed to only that which is necessary to deliver a product or service. She described the mandate for regulated entities to develop privacy policies on how they store and disclose such data and discussed the Act's requirement that the FTC enforce the law and develop rules to implement it. Following Representative Jacobs' keynote, the panel portion of the event commenced. Maya Arigala, student researcher with ETI, moderated the panel. Panelists included:

- Jake Laperruque, Deputy Director of the Security and Surveillance Project from the Center for Democracy and Technology;
- Sara Geoghegan, Legal Fellow with the Electronic Privacy Information Center;
- India McKinney, Director of Federal Affairs with the Electronic Frontier Foundation;
- Cynthia Conti-Cook, a civil rights attorney and technology researcher; and
- Carmel Shachar, Executive Director of the Petrie-Flom Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology, and Bioethics at Harvard Law School.

The panelists discussed the numerous types of data about reproductive services that are collected by tech companies, and the ways that individuals can take steps to protect their reproductive data privacy. Panelists also discussed racial disparities in both reproductive health and state surveillance. The panel concluded by addressing how law students can get involved in this important work during law school and after graduation. The discussion continued with a speakers' dinner for the in-person speakers, moderators, and co-sponsors. Honoraria were paid to the speakers (other than the Congresswoman), as well as reimbursements for their reasonable travel and lodging expenses.

- Ongoing: Public Education Guide Research on Reproductive Data Privacy. Working from the insights gathered from the Protecting Reproductive Data Privacy Post-Dobbs roundtable, PIT Commons researchers are also developing a Public Education Research Guide on Reproductive Data Privacy. This Guide will be a small print-out, made available in both English and Spanish, that provides easy-to-follow, plain language steps for minimizing one's digital footprint while engaged in the activities of researching and accessing abortion services. The Guide is being developed in consultation with India McKinney, Director of Federal Affairs from The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF); Rory Mir, Associate Director of Community Organizing at EFF; and Daly Barnett, an engineer working on reproductive data privacy issues with EFF.



Social Media

We set up our PIT Commons of DC Twitter account and posted content (e.g., event info, information about job opportunities, etc.) on the Ethical Tech Initiative website and LinkedIn account.

Conclusion

We are grateful for the opportunities that this grant has provided for us to facilitate meaningful experiences for students throughout the Washington, DC area to learn about pressing issues in public interest technology and the law and to have made substantial strides in nurturing a new generation of public-interest minded attorneys in the field of public interest technology law.