

Google Government Innovation Lab Reveals First Prototypes

Kern County, Calif., announces plans for two projects resulting from its work with the search giant.

BY JASON SHUEH / AUGUST 25, 2015



Kern County, Calif., is the first to unveil innovations from Google's Government Innovation Lab, a program designed to empower governments with the tech giant's moonshot methods and 10x results. FLICKR/SERVIZI MULTIMEDIALI

The first fruits of Google's inaugural [Government Innovation Lab](#) are nearly ripe.

In California's Central Valley, Kern County has announced two prototypes envisioned as remedies for a number of civic challenges. The first prototype is what officials call a Virtual Resource Library (VRL), an online hub that once finished, will act as a crowdsourced resource for county services and collaboration. The second prototype is an enterprise app designed to pluck data from departments for countywide analytics.

RELATED

- [5 Google Government Innovation Lab Projects Happening in San Joaquin County, Calif.](#)
- [Innovation Labs Improve Local Governments From the Bottom Up](#)
- [Google Spills Its Work Secrets and Gives Lessons in Boosting Creativity](#)

Jason Wiebe, a Kern County administrative analyst, said about two months have passed since the county began participating in the Google lab and work is underway to start user testing on prototypes sometime before 2016.

“The collaboration process was very productive,” Wiebe said. “It included key members from [county departments], IT staff from the county and representatives from Google, and **partners at ORA Systems** and SADA Systems.”

Kern is among three California counties to join Google as it takes 50 officials from each jurisdiction and pairs them with five civic challenges. [Alameda](#) and [San Joaquin](#) counties are fellow participants, with Alameda about to announce prototypes soon. San Joaquin County is kicking off its project this fall.

Guided by the lab’s director, James Waterman, Kern selected economic development, recidivism, workforce development, IT communications and the cultivation of internal county talent as its five focus areas. The resource library is expected to confront all these pressing issues while “IT communications” will be addressed by both the resource library and the data app.

Contributors to the VRL are expected to be Kern County staff and citizens alike. Internal department information will also be supplemented with data from California agencies, educational institutions, nonprofits, religious institutions and private enterprise.

“It is anticipated that the VRL will be a thriving hub of community activity,” Wiebe said.

As part of the VRL, a jobs, education and training portal will be crafted to connect job hunters with employment options. Kern’s unemployment rate, which was 10 percent in July, has struggled to rebound at the same pace as the state, which was 6.2 percent in July. The portal will evaluate a job seeker’s skill sets, demographic information, educational background and goals and match them with personalized opportunities for training and employment.

Wiebe said the second Google prototype grew from desires to channel actionable data freely between departments. Carefully navigating access and health privacy regulations, Kern County’s software will pull data from county systems and funnel it directly into a centralized database for analysis.

“This system will integrate key data — beginning with community health data — to facilitate analytics and preventative care measures,” Wiebe said.

Thematically, an overarching concept throughout was an awareness of unnecessary communication barriers — silos that existed in technology, but also in the culture of the county organization. A potent benefit was found in the team sessions. Wiebe said county staff formed small groups of about 10, and in a startup-like way, used their diverse departmental makeup to concoct solutions.

“Representatives from different county departments quickly realized there are a lot of shared goals and opportunities across departmental lines,” Wiebe said. “I strongly believe those individual team meetings were the most productive and collaborative moments.”

To nurture initiatives, Google has committed to play an advisory role as needed on current and future projects. Additionally, Kern County will feed its appetite for innovation with the construction of its first Office of Innovation, to be built in Bakersfield in about a year, described as a “state-of-the-art collaboration space for government, private sector, educational institutions, nonprofits and other community-based organizations.”



[Jason Shueh](#) | Staff Writer

[Jason Shueh](#) is a staff writer for *Government Technology* magazine. His articles and writing have covered numerous subjects, from minute happenings to massive trends. A San Francisco Bay Area native, Shueh grew up in the east bay and Napa Valley, where his family is based. His writing has been published previously in the *Tahoe Daily Tribune*, *Amazon Publishing*, *Bike Magazine*, *Diablo Magazine*, *The Sierra Sun*, *Nevada Appeal*, *The Union* and the *North Lake Tahoe Bonanza*.