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News, updates, and announcements from Code for Asheville

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## A Code for Asheville 2017 Retrospective

We did it. We made it through 2017. It’s been a stressful year and signs abound that 2018 might be a little eventful too, but I have to say that I’m ending the year in a more hopeful place than I started it.

I entered 2017 with a deep sense of apprehension about our country and where it might be headed.\* I’m still worried, but we have confirmed over the past year that when we stand up and do our part, it makes a difference. That has been true [on the national scene](#) and it’s been true of Code for Asheville members this year as well.

But I was feeling some doubt about that one night a couple weeks ago, wondering if Code for Asheville was really making much difference. I couldn’t sleep and finally gave up and got up to make coffee. I decided to sit down and just outline what happened with Code for Asheville in 2017.

I’d like to share that with you as we kick off 2018.

## January, February, March

Things began on a tense note here in Asheville as well. Former co-captain Patrick Conant had worked with Beloved Asheville to analyze data on patterns of arrests of possibly homeless individuals and brought their concerns to the attention of City staff and elected officials. In January and February tensions were high and heading higher.

But at the same time we also began planting seeds that bore fruit [later in the year](#). On March 4, we and the City of Asheville jointly sponsored [Open Data Day](#), where we grappled with the challenge of realizing the promise of open data. And the following Monday all the major stakeholders in the homeless arrest data conversation met and had a chance to hear each other's concerns and begin to lay groundwork for more productive conversation.

This newsletter was born on [February 6](#) and, after a somewhat wobbly start, has managed to keep on a sustained biweekly schedule since March! Early 2017 also saw the collaboration with Code for Greensboro to create a [statewide version](#) of the [Buncombe reentry resources hub](#) begin to ramp up. We're looking forward to the formal launch in the next few weeks.

The first quarter of 2017 ended strongly with the [launch](#) of [SunshineRequest.com](#), a site created and maintained by [PRC Apps](#) that makes it easier for citizens to make public records requests and to see requests others have made. Since then the site has received 62 requests and completed 55 of them so far!

## April, May, June

In our second quarter we deepened our relationship with those working to address homelessness. Following a brainstorming session at our April Community Night, Jesse Michel began working with Tracey Childers, Co-Chair of the Asheville Homeless Coalition to improve internal and external communications through their Facebook page and other tools. And Jim March [worked with Beloved Asheville](#) to set up a computer lab for the homeless community - [the lab launched](#) at the end of June and has been going strong ever since through the efforts of Jim and of Sabrah's Raven.

April and May also kicked off Patrick Conant's collaboration with the NAACP Justice Committee and Ian Mance of the [Southern Coalition for Social Justice](#) to bring [racial disparities in traffic stops](#) to the attention of City leaders. While those conversations were again initially challenging and tense, they have since led more to a [much more collaborative effort](#) to use data to improve policing in Asheville.

At our June Community Night we were [excited to welcome](#) Kathryn Bradley, a computer science teacher at Clyde A. Erwin Middle School, who gave a demo of the platform students use to build mobile apps. Tyler Bradley is leading the effort to find ways for Code for Asheville to work with Kathryn and her students next year.

## July, August, September

Our typically slow summer season was enlivened significantly by a [visit from the awesome Jen Pahlka](#), founder and Executive Director of Code For America. In addition to speaking and leading a lively discussion at our July Community Night, Jen spent all the next day meeting with City staff and community groups to learn more about all that's happening here in Asheville.

That event also marked the end of Jesse Michel's tenure as co-captain of Code for Asheville. I am so grateful for all his work in that role and delighted to welcome his ongoing efforts as an ordinary member (more on that below)!

Later in July we held a [joint hackathon](#) with Code for Greensboro to work on the reentry project with 7 people here in Asheville and another 20 in Greensboro. And in

September we kicked off Code for Asheville's latest effort, [a new storytelling platform](#).

## October, November, December

Jesse Michel has led the way on [StoryTell Asheville](#) by creating a [beautiful, but minimal site](#) for collections of stories about and by communities, with a focus on the voices of those who have traditionally not been heard and of those who are working to empower them. It only has placeholder content right now, but we began collecting stories of Code for Asheville members at our December Community Night and will continue that in January.

The other major theme of the final quarter of 2017 has been our connection to other brigades, both here in North Carolina and nationally.

In early October, [I represented Asheville at CityCamp NC](#) in Raleigh, presenting on the reentry project as well as helping kick off a new cross-brigade project, Are We Represented? You'll be hearing more about both projects in the next few weeks.

In mid-October Sabrah's Raven and Scott Barnwell [traveled to Philadelphia](#) to the first annual National Brigade Congress. I am very proud to say that while there they definitely continued Code for Asheville's tradition of national leadership!

And, finally, an early December gathering in Greensboro of leaders from all the North Carolina brigades resulted in the [official formation of the Open NC Collaborative](#), whose goal is to connect, support & strengthen NC brigades and help them extend their benefits to the entire state. I'm looking forward to discovering new ways for brigades across the state to learn from and support one another.

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So, looking back, perhaps we're not doing so badly after all. There are things that can be improved, and I'd love to figure out how to let more people plug in and make a difference. But mostly I'm proud of and grateful for the role Code for Asheville members have played this past year in our community and look forward to seeing where we go from here.

Eric Jackson  
Captain, Code for Asheville

\* Code for Asheville [is non-partisan](#). At the same time, everything we do is based on shared values of equity, inclusivity, government transparency, and respect for all members of the community. All of those values have been subject to direct attack this past year and we consider it a part of our mission to resist such attacks.

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## Volunteers Needed To Help with Blue Ribbon Committee Public Engagement Sessions

In June of 2017, the Asheville City Council created a Blue Ribbon Task Force for the purpose of discussing and ultimately advising the City Council about the creation of a new advisory board focused on human relations within the city. Since July 2017, the Blue Ribbon Committee has been working to develop recommendations on the Commission's mission, scope, and duties.

On Jan. 10 and Jan. 24, Asheville community members, especially those most impacted by discrimination, are invited to participate in a [community conversation on the draft recommendations](#).

During each session, community members will break into discussion groups facilitated by BRC members. The City's Equity and Inclusion Manager, Kimberlee Archie, has

asked Code for Asheville to help recruit at least 5 volunteer note-takers for these sessions. The City will provide computers for the purpose.

If you can be available to help with this important conversation, please contact [Lauren Showfety](#).

You may also RSVP to attend the events:

- [RSVP for January 10](#)
  - [RSVP for January 24](#)
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## News From the Network

### New York City Leads on Algorithmic Transparency

Invisible algorithms increasingly shape the world we live in, and not always for the better. New York City is the first city in the U.S. to do something about it with a bill to help ensure the computer codes that governments use to make decisions are serving justice rather than inequality. Read more [here](#).

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### Have a Story to Share?

We'd love to have your contribution. You can write something up about a Code for Asheville event or share something else going on in the civic tech world. Email us at [code4asheville@gmail.com](mailto:code4asheville@gmail.com).

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## Upcoming events

### 1/9 Brigade Planning Meeting

Our next regular planning meeting will take place on Tuesday, January 9 at 5:30pm at the Battery Park Book Exchange. RSVP [here](#) or just stop by.

### 1/11 Monthly Community Meetup

Our next Community Night will be on Thursday, January 11, 2017 at 5:30pm, at the Stephens-Lee Recreation Center. We'll continue gathering member stories for StoryTell Asheville and discuss opportunities and plans for 2018. RSVP on [meetup](#) or just show up.

Community nights occur on the second Thursday of each month at Stephens-Lee Recreation Center.

### Transportation for Seniors Hackathon (t4s) - 1/13/18

Come and explore creative information technology solutions to transportation challenges faced by the elderly. You will be working with seniors and other interested parties (government organizations, non-profits, businesses, volunteers). The Transportation for Seniors Hackathon (t4s) will take place on Saturday, January 13, 2018, from 12:30pm to 5:00pm at the Land of Sky Regional Council offices, 339 New Leicester Highway, Asheville.

Visit the [Meetup event page](#) to learn more and RSVP.

If you want to help plan for this hackathon, contact Jim March, Code for Asheville member, at [jimcmarch@yahoo.com](mailto:jimcmarch@yahoo.com).

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