



News Media Contacts

Amy Blalock, Public Affairs Manager, City of Durham
919.475.7735 (mobile)
Amy.Blalock@DurhamNC.gov

Henry R. Jones, Public Information Specialist, Durham County
919.560.0000
publicinformationoffice@dconc.gov

News Release

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2021 Innovate Durham Partners Chosen to Bring New Ideas to City of Durham and Durham County Governments

DURHAM, N.C. – Three startup companies will get the chance to bring their new ideas to the City of Durham and Durham County governments by spending the next 16 weeks testing out innovative solutions with local challenges.

City and County staff collaboratively selected three partners – Acta Solutions, Coworks, and DayWatt – for the [2021 Innovate Durham cohort](#). The program allows startups and entrepreneurs to use local government as a lab to test out an idea, product or service while having access to local government staff, data, and facilities.

Innovate Durham received 40 applications from companies interested in participating in the fourth year of the program. A review committee, made up of City and County leadership, narrowed the field to a list of finalists who pitched their ideas to City and County staff. Due to COVID-19's effects on collaboration and staff availability, the number of selected partners during this 2021 cohort has been scaled down to three. The focus of the selection was on technologies that can help benefit City and County employees and residents.

"It's a testament to Innovate Durham that we received so much interest and are running the program virtually this year," said Mariel Klein, business services administrator for the City of Durham. "It's so important during everyone's recovery from COVID-19 that we continue to support programs like Innovate Durham that are bringing business and government communities closer and using innovation to knit Durham into an even more resilient community."

The 2021 Innovate Durham partners and their assigned test-case departments are as follows:

[Acta Solutions](#)

Durham County Register of Deeds

Acta Solutions is a software-as-a-service company that automates customer service communications for local governments to save time, increase revenue, and speedily provide residents, developers, and businesses with the services they need by intelligently suggesting automated responses that staff reviews before sending.

[Coworks](#)

Durham County Department of Social Services

Coworks provides a space management portal that allows users to organize billing, conference room/meeting space, desk reservations and more as well as a member portal to assist people working in a shared space.

[DayWatt](#)

City of Durham General Services Department and Durham County Department of General Services

DayWatt's technology enables rooftop solar installations on commercial buildings to supply long-term backup power to the facility during blackouts, a feature unavailable with conventional renewable energy approaches. In addition to

offering cost-effective power outage resiliency, the system also provides lifetime benefits through lower energy bills, decreased maintenance, and reduced carbon emissions.

“We recognize that the past year has been difficult for the startup communities and for local government. Innovate Durham continues to provide a symbiotic relationship between startups and Durham’s local governments, which can be leveraged to address some of the difficulties that have arisen from COVID-19,” said Hannah Hemphill, business services librarian with Durham County Library. “Our goal is to bring innovative ideas into the City and County to help us better serve the Durham community through the recovery phase.”

This year, the Innovate Durham cohort is creating partnerships with more than one single department. DayWatt is working with the City and County of Durham to collect data on the most optimal placement for solar installations that provide backup electricity. Meanwhile, Acta hopes to expand beyond the Register of Deeds and pilot its software with other County departments to increase efficiency in email responses. Additionally, Coworks is seeking to use public and private spaces in order to help the County’s Department of Social Services with flexible work schedules and convenient work sites for its field agents.

The pilot period for each startup began on May 10 and will finish on September 3. Each partner will meet regularly with Innovate Durham staff, as well as, with selected City and County departments to help test their products throughout the pilot period. On September 30, partners will present their accomplishments and discuss the pilot period at a ‘Demo Day’ event, which will be open to the public through a virtual live stream. Details on Demo Day and how to watch will soon be provided on the [Innovate Durham webpage](#).

For more information, visit the [Innovate Durham webpage](#) or contact Klein by [email](#) or Hemphill by [email](#).

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