

Urban Festival 2020: Empowering the Civic

Curatorial Statement

In this complex and changing world, how do we really empower and activate people to consciously participate in the transformation of South Africa's cities and towns? What are the big opportunities if people and places are empowered by technology to achieve our objective of inclusive, resilient, safer and liveable cities and towns? And how can an all-of-society approach to activating citizens be ensured if tech remains inaccessible to many South Africans? Introducing this year's Urban Festival theme: Empowering the Civic - an exploration into how the physical and virtual world can be harnessed to engage people in reimagining and shaping their own cities, both in these strange and uncertain COVID-19 pandemic times, and into the future.

The relationship between people and their government has always been critical to building a responsive and vibrant society, and is the bedrock of South Africa's democracy given our past. And today, with a global pandemic that has been thrust upon our lives, this is an important moment to examine whether our cities and towns work for us and how technology - old or new - can empower people and communities to drive and champion change where they live and beyond.

The challenges and the opportunities come hand-in-hand, as a need to physically distance from one another has pushed us into a virtual work environment that before this seemed many years away. Technology has suddenly become integral to our way of life but it is imperative to apply this beyond the way we work, to close the gap between city governments and those who live in cities. And in particular, to accelerate the goals of South Africa's Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) centred on enhancing access, growth and governance and achieving spatial transformation.

The Empowering the Civic edition of Urban Festival will therefore provide a platform to explore the potential of civic-tech to overcome current challenges and barriers and leap forward into new ways of civic engagement and mobilisation for urban development. Through this, it will aim to connect different parts of society, foster collaboration and seek solutions.

- How can new technologies improve governance and accountability, and make cities work better?
- Can it be used to bridge digital divides and support service delivery? To power town hall meetings, promote learning and improve democracy?
- Who is being left out, and how can we bring them in?
- Why can't it be used to build trust, educate, share information and make processes more transparent?
- What if it could be used to unlock the youth population and try innovative processes to really activate and build engagement?
- How can the use of Civi-Tech empower the people?

Urban Festival 2020 places a spotlight on everyday experiences and captures both the smart and big ideas, as well as "ordinary" responses to more connected and responsive future cities and towns.

About Urban Festival 2020

Urban Festival is a series of virtual engagements hosted by South African Cities Network (SACN), Civic Tech Innovation Network (CTIN), The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), Open Cities Lab (OCL), Journalism and Media Lab (JAMLAB), Our Future Cities (OFC) and others. The festival will run from 1-31 October 2020, culminating on World Cities Day.

With Urban Festival's overarching focus on inclusivity, accessibility and digital innovation, this year's programming will be primarily based around a Main Programme of speakers from government, independent organisations and industry. This will be complemented by an Emergent Programme of wide-ranging additional presenters and organisations who have responded to our Open Call.

Learning, collaboration and networking will be facilitated through workshops, lectures and discussion groups, and film screenings, Instagram takeovers, podcasts and virtual exhibitions will encourage engagement. All materials created for and during the event will be available on the festival webpage long after the actual event, ensuring that stories, tours, research and voices are preserved and can be used to foster greater understanding and therefore better solutions.

We therefore invite all civil society, organisations, designers, planners, story-tellers, civil servants, city-dwellers and urban enthusiasts to participate in Empowering the Civic; to begin the virtual conversation toward more accessible and inclusive future cities.

If you would like to host an event in response to the curatorial statement above, whether it is a webinar, workshop, virtual tour or something totally different please apply [here](#):

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