

To: NYC Council – Committee on Technology
From: Noel Hidalgo, Executive Director of BetaNYC



Re: Testimony to the NYC Council for Preliminary Budget Hearing - Technology

Wednesday, 18 March 2026

Dear Chair De La Rosa, fellow Council Members, and Staff,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding the Preliminary Budget for the Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI). This testimony is submitted on behalf of BetaNYC as we prepare for Open Data Week and the NYC School of Data.

While New York City led the way with the world's first open data law, a lack of staffing—particularly in technical roles—continues to undermine the program's effectiveness and the vital work of automating agency datasets. To ensure OTI meets its potential, we urge the Council to adopt the following structural and budgetary recommendations:

1. Structural Reform for Accountability

Based on Reinvent Albany's analysis of the City's technology management¹, we recommend moving away from a centralized "Tech Czar" model toward one defined by agency-level empowerment:

- **Restructuring for Oversight:** Better resource and then consider moving OTI's specialized offices, such as Open Data, Data Analytics, and 311, under the Deputy Mayor for Operations to better integrate technology across agency management.
- **Modernizing Procurement:** Fund reforms to tech contracting that lower barriers for smaller, agile vendors, reducing reliance on expensive, long-term incumbent contractors.
- **Prioritizing Service Design:** Reallocate budget from speculative projects toward the essential work of improving the digital user experience for services like 311 and other constituent-facing front-ends, while enhancing information flow within agencies. OTI must ensure that digital front doors are easy to use, accessible, and secure. Within Agency operations, digital and data services also need to be easy to use, accessible, and secure.

1

<https://reinventalbany.org/2025/12/government-watchdog-mamdani-must-harness-city-tech-for-everyday-new-yorkers/>

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2. Modernizing Digital Service Delivery

OTI requires a clear mandate and resources to improve how New Yorkers interact with their government.² We recommend the following priorities:

- **Scale NYC Digital Service:** Fund service design roles embedded within line agencies to ensure digital tools work for all residents.
- **Modernize 311:** Invest in 311 as the city's "front door" by unifying intake, status tracking, and feedback loops.
- **Establish an Open Source Program Office:** Adopt secure, reusable code citywide to ensure every "tech" dollar builds local capacity and avoids proprietary lock-in.
- **Standardize Data Plumbing:** Fund the creation of shared schemas and APIs to ensure agency data is interoperable and efficient.

3. Investing in Digital Equity and Literacy

Technology is only effective if it is accessible to all New Yorkers. We urge the Council to:

- **Advance the Internet Master Plan 2.0, aka "Broadband Adoption Plan":** Provide the funding necessary to close the digital divide and ensure privacy-by-design in all city infrastructure.
- **Fund Literacy Partnerships:** Support digital and data literacy programs in partnership with community groups, including proven citywide initiatives such as NYC Open Data Week and the NYC Open Data Ambassadors program. These initiatives provide free, accessible training that helps New Yorkers engage with public data, understand city services, and participate in civic life.
- **Expand Apprenticeships:** foster programs that develop the next generation of public-interest technologists and build civic literacy programs. We want to see apprenticeships target CUNY students and help us collect vital data on public-realm assets.

4. Restoring the Open Data Team

The current NYC Open Data Team consists of only four data analysts/coordinators supported by two CUNY fellows. This is a critically small number for a world-leading program.³ Pre-COVID, the team included five additional staffers, including a director of civic engagement and additional data engineers.

² <https://www.beta.nyc/2025/11/18/dear-mayor-elect-8-gov-tech-ideas/>

³

<https://reinventalbany.org/2026/03/fully-staff-nycs-world-leading-open-data-program-reinvent-albany-beta-nyc-testimony-to-council/>

We ask the Council to:

- **Fund 11 full-time staff members:** This must include at least three software developers to return the team to pre-COVID levels.
- **Hold an Oversight Hearing:** The Council should hold a hearing on Open Data Compliance to understand the obstacles the program faces, similar to the February 2024 hearing.

5. Clearing the Automation Backlog

Staffing shortages directly impact the City's efficiency. Currently, out of 978 datasets eligible for automation, 353 remain in a backlog. Additional funding and staff will strengthen the program by:

- **Improving Data Management:** Increasing capacity for data quality reviews, automation, documentation, and help desk responses.
- **Meeting Mandates:** Adding staff for engagement programs like NYC Open Data Week and NYC Open Data Ambassadors to help agencies meet their civic engagement mandates.
- **Scaling Best Practices:** Ensuring that data sharing and analytics practices are shared across all agencies and baked into municipal operations.

By investing in these structural reforms and restoring essential staffing levels, the Council can ensure that NYC's technology infrastructure is transparent, efficient, and accountable to all New Yorkers.

We thank you for your time and consideration.

Noel Hidalgo

Executive Director

BetaNYC, a partner project of the Fund for the City of New York