Google Transparency Project | CAMPAIGN FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

US Digital Service

Google employees played a central role in creating the US Digital Service, raising questions about the procurement process, inside-knowledge and user privacy

HealthCare.gov was sending personal data to Google

Google and its employees were heavily involved in the launch of the U.S. Digital Service (USDS), a White House group[i] tasked with advising federal agencies on big technology projects and improving the federal government's websites.[ii]

Current and former Googlers have also disproportionately[iii] staffed the new office, which is partly made-up of temporary advisors that can return to their companies after a limited "tour of duty".[iv]

An analysis of publicly available information shows at least 13 of the new USDS employees are ex-Google software engineers, coders and executives, while one Google employee is a former member of the USDS. 18F, a group of technologists and designers working within the General Services Administration, and who have informal ties to USDS, includes another four former Google engineers and developers.

Those include:

Name	Org.	Date Hired	Google Position
Albert Wong[v]	USDS	7/14	Mgr. Chrome Site Isolation
Brian Lefler[vi]	USDS	7/14	Google Software Engineer
Eric Hysen[vii]	USDS	9/14	Google Technical Program Manager
Nathan Parker[viii]	USDS	9/14	Google Site Reliability Engineer
Matthew Weaver[ix]	USDS	10/14	Google Staff Site Ecologist
Kathy Pham[x]	USDS	11/14	Google Data Scientist
Sangeeta Narayan[xi]	USDS	2/15	Google Executive Recruiter
Grant Dasher[xii]	USDS	3/15	Google Staff Software Engineer
Rachelle Gupta[xiii]	USDS	3/15	Google University Program Specialist
Dennis Gilbert[xiv]	USDS	9/15	Google Technical Recruiter
Sabrina Williams[xv]	USDS	10/15	Google Software Engineer
Janine Gianfredi[xvi]	USDS	12/15	Google[X] and Project Glass Marketing

Amy Barker[xvii]	USDS	1/16	Google Corporate Counsel
Kadir Barry[xviii]	USDS	1/16	Google People Operations
Micah Saul[xix]	18F	N/A	Google Developer
Amanda Robinson[xx]	18F	9/15	Google Software Engineer
Victor Udoewa[xxi]	18F	N/A	Google Education Instructional Designer
Mike Bland[xxii]	18F	11/14	Google Software Engineer

The group has broad sway over large-scale government information technology projects. Key projects identified by USDS include redesigns and modifications to government websites related to immigration, veterans' affairs, social security, student loans, healthcare and small business.[xxiii] [xxiv]

What the data suggest

USDS employees at work

Google's intimate involvement in the creation of the U.S. Digital Service gives the company an inside-track on large government IT projects.

Current White House Chief Technology Officer Megan Smith—herself a former Google executive—stated in 2015 that USDS was designed with "limited tours of duty" in mind. "We want technical people to come and serve… But come for tours of duty: come as a reserve, come for two weeks, come for two years and come in and out of government just like our colleagues in other fields are doing."[xxv]

The large number of former Google employees working today at USDS as well as the fact that the Service was designed with such "limited tours of duty" in mind, suggests that many former Google employees working for USDS today may return to their Google jobs tomorrow with inside knowledge and relationships that could prove invaluable in securing large IT contracts for Google.

Questions Raised

Given Google's voracious appetite for our personal information and its close involvement with USDS, what privacy protections are in place for visitors' use of government websites?

On January 20, 2015, the *Associated Press* reported that the HealthCare.gov website was quietly sending consumers' personal data to private companies including Google's DoubleClick that specialize in collecting personal information for advertising and marketing purposes.[xxvi]

USDS' focus on revamping government websites related to citizens' most sensitive personal information—involving healthcare, veterans' issues, social security, school loans and immigration — raise concerns about whether Google is collecting data when we visit government websites. The Electronic Frontier Foundation has filed a complaint alleging that Google collects data on students, despite their promises to refrain from doing so.[xxvii]

[i] USDS is a part of the Executive Office of the President.

[ii] Officially launched on August 11, 2014 largely as an outgrowth of the shock teams of coders and software engineers recruited from private industry (many from Google) to repair the Healthcare.gov website during the six week period from October to December 2013.

[iii] Fast Company reported in June of 2015 that USDS had a staff of approximately 37 people with 140 more "in the network" according to then White House Chief Technology Officer Todd Park.

[iv] http://www.fastcompany.com/3046756/obama-and-his-geeks

[v] http://ben.balter.com/2015/04/22/the-difference-between-18f-and-usds/

[vi] https://www.linkedin.com/in/albertjwongseattle

[vii] https://www.linkedin.com/in/apathia

[viii] https://www.linkedin.com/in/erichysen

[ix] https://www.linkedin.com/in/nathanparker

[x] https://www.linkedin.com/in/matthewjweaver

[xi] https://medium.com/@USDigitalService/why-i-joined-the-u-s-digital-service-24c6682afce2#.euuj97mht

[xii] https://www.linkedin.com/in/recruitingdiva

[xiii] https://www.linkedin.com/in/grant-dasher-b45b7283

[xiv] https://www.linkedin.com/in/rachellegupta

[xv] https://www.linkedin.com/in/gilbert0369

[xvi] https://www.linkedin.com/in/sabrina-williams-509b52ba

[xvii] https://www.linkedin.com/in/janinegianfredi

[xviii] https://www.linkedin.com/in/amy-barker-20857a13

[xix] https://www.linkedin.com/in/kadirbarry

[xx] https://18f.gsa.gov/team/micahsaul/

[xxi] https://18f.gsa.gov/team/amanda-robinson/

[xxii] https://18f.gsa.gov/team/victor-udoewa/

[xxiii] https://www.linkedin.com/in/mike-bland-4127803b

[xxiv] http://ben.balter.com/2015/04/22/the-difference-between-18f-and-usds/

[xxv] https://www.fastcompany.com/3046756/obama-and-his-geeks

[xxvi] http://www.federaltimes.com/story/government/it/2015/04/13/obama-hopes-tech-talent-can-hot-wire-federal/25592829/

[xxvii] https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2015/01/healthcare.gov-sends-personal-data

[xxviii] https://www.eff.org/document/ftc-complaint-google-education