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Immediate Release

Starting with NYC, new initiative weighs pros and cons

of data re-use for COVID-19 and future threats

BROOKLYN, New York, Wednesday, June 24, 2020 – The Governance Lab ([The GovLab](#)), an action research center at [New York University Tandon School of Engineering](#), with the support of the [Henry Luce Foundation](#), announced the creation of [The Data Assembly](#). Beginning in New York City, the effort will explore how communities perceive the risks and benefits of data re-use for COVID-19. Understanding that policymakers often lack information about the concerns of different stakeholders, The Data Assembly's deliberations will inform the creation of a responsible data re-use framework to guide the use of data and technology at the city and state level to fight COVID-19's many consequences.

The Data Assembly will hold deliberations with civil rights organizations, key data holders and policymakers, and the public at large. Consultations with these stakeholders will take place through a series of remote engagements, including surveys and an online town hall meeting. This work will allow the project to consider the perspectives of people from different strata of society and how they might exercise some control over the flow of data.

After the completion of these data re-use deliberations, The Data Assembly will create a path forward for using data responsibly to solve public challenges. The first phases of the project will commence in New York City, seeking to engage with city residents and their leaders on data governance issues.

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“Data is increasingly the primary format for sharing information to understand crises and plan recovery efforts; empowering everyone to better understand how data is collected and how it should be used is paramount,” said Adrienne Schmoeker, Director of Civic Engagement & Strategy and Deputy Chief Analytics Officer at the [NYC Mayor’s Office of Data Analytics](#). “We look forward to learning from the insights gathered by the GovLab through The Data Assembly work they are conducting in New York City.”

The Data Assembly will be the first-ever public deliberation of the possible benefits—such as using mobile data to measure the impact of social isolation—and drawbacks of re-using data for COVID-19 response. It will inform if and how policymakers can responsibly re-use personal data for crisis management and for more effective, inclusive policymaking after the pandemic.

The effort will explore the responsible re-use of data to improve disease treatment, identify supplies, and generate other insights. While understanding how data could be transformative for COVID-19 response, it will explore widespread concerns about possible harms from re-use. For example, re-use of data for COVID-19 could restrict people’s freedom of movement and result in extreme quarantine measures.

“If used responsibly and effectively, data could help to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19,” said Stefaan Verhulst, Co-Founder and Chief Research and Development Officer of The GovLab. “But to unlock data’s value, we need to rapidly get smarter about the policy and governance challenges resulting from re-using data, as well what public expectations are.”

The work recognizes that policymakers must determine an appropriate balance between the potential benefits and costs of re-using data. This balance should take into account the different, and sometimes contradictory, needs and values of different stakeholders.

“Too often, policy is designed and conducted in a top-down manner, with little citizen input,” said Dr. Mariko Silver, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Henry Luce Foundation. “We believe this more inclusive effort will yield trusted and effective data policies in the fight against COVID-19.”

Additional information on the project will be published in the coming weeks. Interested parties are invited to subscribe to The GovLab’s Data Stewards Newsletter or visit its website (<http://datastewards.net>).

About the New York University Tandon School of Engineering

The NYU Tandon School of Engineering dates to 1854, the founding date for both the New York University School of Civil Engineering and Architecture and the Brooklyn Collegiate and Polytechnic Institute (widely known as Brooklyn Poly). A January 2014 merger created a comprehensive school of education and research in engineering and applied sciences, rooted in a tradition of invention and entrepreneurship and dedicated to furthering technology in service to society. In addition to its main location in Brooklyn, NYU Tandon collaborates with other schools within NYU, one of the country’s foremost private research universities, and is closely connected to engineering programs at NYU Abu Dhabi and NYU Shanghai. It operates Future Labs focused on start-up businesses in downtown Manhattan and Brooklyn and an award-winning online graduate program. For more information, visit engineering.nyu.edu.

About the Henry Luce Foundation

*The [Henry Luce Foundation](#) seeks to enrich public discourse by promoting innovative scholarship, cultivating new leaders, and fostering international understanding. The Foundation advances its mission through grantmaking and leadership programs in the fields of Asia, higher education, religion and theology, art, and public policy. Established in 1936 by Henry R. Luce, the co-founder and editor-in-chief of *Time, Inc.*, the Foundation's earliest work honored his parents, missionary educators in China. The Foundation's programs today reflect the value Mr. Luce placed on learning, leadership, and long-term commitment in philanthropy.*

About The Governance Lab at the NYU Tandon School of Engineering

The Governance Lab's mission is to improve people's lives by changing the way we govern. Our goal at The GovLab is to strengthen the ability of institutions — including but not limited to governments — and people to work more openly, collaboratively, effectively, and legitimately to make better decisions and solve public problems. We believe that increased availability and use of data, new ways to leverage the capacity, intelligence, and expertise of people in the problem-solving process, combined with new advances in technology and science, can transform governance. We approach each challenge and opportunity in an interdisciplinary, collaborative way, irrespective of the problem, sector, geography, and level of government. For more information, visit [thegovlab.org](#).

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