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HONOREE:

Heat Seek

Honoree Proposal Description:

Heat Seek's sensors monitor heat for New York City tenants during the heating season. Learn how they are helping New Yorkers avoid and solve heating complaints.

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Organization Website:

<https://heatseek.org/>

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The Scherman Foundation
16 East 52nd Street, Suite 601
New York, NY 10022

2 February 2017

To Mr. Pratt,



Heat Seek works at the intersection of innovative technology and tenant advocacy to provide new tools in the fight to maintain affordable housing in New York City. A non-profit organization that empowers public interest attorneys, housing organizers, and city officials, we provide low-cost, web-connected temperature sensors to tenants facing heating abuse and harassment, and we analyze citywide data to provide new ways for advocates to reach and assist at-risk tenants.

Experiencing a housing crisis for decades, New York City's more than 5.6 million renters all live under the same Housing Code regulations that require landlords to maintain specific temperatures in a tenant's home throughout the winter months. While many of the complaints New Yorkers make each winter--more than 200,000 from 37,000 unique buildings--are simple landlord mistakes, we know from our work with tenant advocates that landlords commonly use heat as an effective way to harass and eject tenants so they can bring units up to market rate in historically underserved neighborhoods.

Heat Seek uses innovative technology and data analysis to target these bad actor landlords and support at-risk tenants and their advocates to *keep tenants in their rent-regulated homes*. Landlords make life miserable for tenants in a variety of ways--construction in hallways, refusal to provide pest control or make repairs, active intimidation-- but lack of heat is historically difficult for tenants to prove and the city to enforce. Landlords often game the inspection process by turning up the heat for a short time during the inspection window, and tenants traditionally have only one way of substantiating their claims: a handwritten temperature log, with a pen in one hand and a thermometer in the other, every hour for weeks on end. This kind of log is impossible for working people to complete and even if done correctly, will sometimes be rejected in court.

HEAT SEEK'S TECHNOLOGICAL RESPONSE

Heat Seek builds and deploys proprietary web-connected temperature sensors to low-income tenants whose landlords fail to adequately heat their homes. Essentially a thermometer connected to the internet, our sensor takes hourly temperature readings and then sends those to our servers via an onboard internet connection, meaning that tenants do not need wi-fi in their home to access our program. Through our online app, tenants and advocates can view a graph and print out a heat log of their temperature readings matched with external temperatures and time of day to show exactly when the building would be in violation of NYC's Housing Code. We provide this program *free of charge* to tenants and their advocates, and there are no eligibility requirements for tenants if they live in one of our target neighborhoods.

HEAT SEEK PARTNERSHIP MODEL

Heat Seek believes that technology can amplify the work of those on the ground--lawyers, organizers, and elected officials who have the primary, long-term relationships with tenants and historic expertise in this complicated ecosystem. After mutually identifying buildings owned by bad actor landlords in high-risk neighborhoods, Heat Seek places sensors in the units of multiple tenants within the building. Advocates then use our heat logs and temperature graphs in negotiation, litigation, or campaigns.

We also work with the city agency responsible for enforcing the Housing Code and maintaining New York's stock of affordable housing, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). They have access to all our data, in order to make unscheduled inspections and target particular landlords.

HARNESSING DATA TO PRESERVE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Traditionally, community advocates use an analogue model to identify at-risk buildings: relying on referrals, walk-ins, and word-of-mouth updates. While this type of intimate, on-the-ground knowledge must always be primary, we now have access to open data that can be analyzed to predict at-risk properties, even *before* tenants are evicted and the loss of affordable housing has occurred.

Heat Seek is developing a data tool that allows advocates to investigate publicly-available data points for every apartment building in New York City, especially the ownership information that is historically difficult to discover. This tool allows advocates to see complaints and violations, permits granted, tax liens, rent stabilization data, and more, along with complete lists of each landlord's other holdings. We will continue to develop this tool to both include more data and, in collaboration with tenant advocates, create a predictive algorithm that will help identify potential buildings to be investigated based on a set of criteria to be developed in conversation with our partners.

HEAT SEEK'S PROGRAM, LAST YEAR AND THIS YEAR

In the 2015-16 heat season, Heat Seek deployed sensors in 57 buildings throughout four boroughs, concentrated in Upper Manhattan, the South Bronx, Central and Eastern Brooklyn, and parts of Staten Island. We employed a strategy of providing technology to those advocates with active cases or campaigns in buildings experiencing heating issues, and we cultivated partnerships with over 13 organizations, including: the Legal Aid Society and Legal Services in multiple boroughs; CASA; MFY Legal Services; Crown Heights Tenant Union; Good Old Lower East Side; UJC; IMPACCT; UHAB; Fifth Avenue Committee; Tenants and Neighbors; Flatbush Tenant Coalition; and the Public Advocate's Office.

Three of the landlords turned on the heat after learning of Heat Seek monitoring their actions. Twelve cases entered housing court and received positive settlements for tenants in twenty buildings--including rent abatements, fines, and legally binding landlord pledges. Attorneys utilized heat logs in negotiations with landlord representation in order to effect better outcomes for tenants. In addition, HPD monitored our back-end data and deployed inspectors without warning to place violations for at least three of our buildings.

Too many of our tenants, however, could not find remedy in the complicated legal system, even with pristine data. Some of our advocate partners also struggled to integrate the data effectively in their work, and we knew we needed to make programmatic shifts for this winter.

With the support of our non-profit incubator, Beespace, Heat Seek undertook an in-depth study of our theory of change. Working with experts in non-profit systems and user-centered design, we conducted interviews with old and new partners in city government, legal services, and community organizing, to understand neighborhood and citywide strategies and hear their core pain points around resolving heat cases and using city data. This process helped refine our program hypotheses and goals for the 2016-2017 heat season and spurred the development of our predictive data tool.

This season, we've made two key changes to the way we target our sensors deployment: 1. In the zip codes up for re-zoning under Mayor de Blasio's housing plan, and 2. In buildings with historic heat problems that are owned by acknowledged bad actor landlords. Since the 200,000 calls New Yorkers make to 311 each winter for lack of heat are concentrated in traditionally under-resourced neighborhoods, we know that Heat Seek must target its sensor deployment not only to assist at-risk tenants, but also to produce data pictures that help decision-makers understand what is happening in these vulnerable neighborhoods. With our modest quantity of sensors, we decided to focus on the neighborhoods with the highest concentration of advocate resources *and* the greatest pressure on long-time rent-regulated tenants to make way for market rate housing: the rezoning zip codes.

We also target bad actor landlords with multiple holdings and a history of abusing and harassing their tenants, to provide concentrated impact against some of the city's worst offenders. Some of these landlords appear on the Public Advocate's list, others on Stabilizing NYC's target list of predatory equity landlords, and still others are

targeted by our advocate partners. While we wish we had enough technological and human capacity to engage all tenants being abused by their landlords, we decided to deploy our resources in service of tenants being actively *harassed* as an attempt to remove them from their homes. As part of this targeting shift, we have engaged fewer partners but are cultivating deeper relationships. This year, we are working citywide with the Legal Aid Society and Legal Services and different organizers in each borough: CASA in the Bronx; Make the Road NY, Flatbush Tenant Coalition, and St. Nick's Alliance in the Brooklyn; MRNY in Staten Island; and Faith in New York and MRNY in Queens.

In this new model, Heat Seek takes a more active role in referring potential buildings and selecting buildings to receive Heat Seek sensors. We also help our partners identify the most appropriate tenants to receive heat sensors, which greatly improves the likelihood of capturing cold readings. Although we are only halfway through the winter season, we have already gained valuable insights that will help us continue to refine our program model.

LOOKING FORWARD

Heat Seek is committed to using our technology and data skills to provide the most value to legal service providers and community organizers fighting to keep families in their homes and preserve affordable housing. We know that they face immense pressure from landlords who continue to develop more sophisticated methods to eject tenants. We believe that technology and data advocacy can provide tenants and advocates greater leverage in this fight, in several different ways: 1. Gaining a neighborhood-wide view of at-risk buildings, through a predictive data tool; 2. Monitoring landlord activity on a consistent basis. Heat Seek is eager to continue iterating with our partners and responding to the needs of tenants and their advocates.

REQUEST FOR 2017

As a small nonprofit with an overall budget of \$500,000 and two full-time staff members, Heat Seek cannot meet the overwhelming need of New Yorkers without heat. We desire, however, to reach greater saturation in the most at-risk neighborhoods and provide the high-quality and reliable data and resources that allow our program partners to work effectively and to keep more vulnerable and low-income tenants in their homes.

Heat Seek respectfully requests program support from the Scherman Foundation in the amount of \$50,000 to allow us to deploy and support more sensors to better meet the needs of our current partners and expand our program to additional partners and neighborhoods. These funds will allow Heat Seek to fully meet the stated needs of current partners and to engage four new partners in advance of the 2017-18 heat season. In particular, we seek to provide more resources to Faith in New York and MRNY for tenants in Queens and NYCC in Brooklyn and Harlem, and we look to engage further program design in collaboration with partners to respond to the changing landscape and meet the needs of our partners and their tenants.

We are grateful to have received support in the last fiscal year from several different funders, aside from individual donations: Blue Ridge Labs at Robin Hood; Beespace; Google; Microsoft; Twelve West Capital; Civic Hall Labs; Morgan Stanley; and Ellington Capital. We are currently soliciting support from New York Foundation, New York Women's Foundation, North Star Fund, Mertz Gilmore Foundation, New York Community Trust, Craigslist Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Altman Foundation, IBM Foundation, M&T Charitable Trust, and several others.

Especially in this new political climate, we appreciate your support of community-based organizations and their vital work to create and maintain vibrant, healthy neighborhoods in which families can remain in their homes. We are grateful for your consideration of our proposal, and we look forward to hearing from you. Please don't hesitate to be in touch with any questions.

Gratefully,



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