



HEAT SEEK

NYC

Board Prospectus 2022

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Mission

Heat Seek harnesses the power of technology to provide reliable, objective, accurate, and open data to help make the world a better place to live. Through our work, we provide tools and analysis to help vulnerable tenants advocate for their rights, build collective power, and demand safe, healthy housing.

In New York City (and many other major cities across the US) landlords are obliged to heat apartments to a safe, healthy temperature in the wintertime. Yet each winter, the city receives around 200,000 complaints about underheated buildings, concentrated in lower-income neighborhoods throughout Upper Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. Less than 7% of those complaints resulted in a violation. Insufficient heat is the #1 housing complaint in New York City, and thousands of New Yorkers are freezing in their homes with few resources to get the heat turned up.

Heat Seek is an innovative technology and social justice nonprofit changing the way tenants fight for their rights. Using web-connected temperature sensors, Heat Seek helps tenants document the temperature inside their apartments 24/7 and calculate exactly how often their apartments are in violation of NYC's heat requirements.

Heat Seek is not just technology in a silo, but deeply integrated into the systems, partners, and communities where the tenants we serve live. Specifically, Heat Seek is changing the way legal service providers represent tenants in housing court by providing reliable data needed to bring cases against landlords for demonstrable heat problems even when a NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) violation hasn't been issued. This is important, because HPD violations for heat can be extremely difficult to obtain under the current system. With Heat Seek, rather than waiting for a city inspector to confirm a heating issue, tenants and their advocates can reliably and accurately document the problem themselves and take action to get their heat restored.

Our goal is simple - to ensure that low-income and other vulnerable tenants in NYC (and eventually nationwide) are provided with the basic housing services that any person would expect in their home. We believe that all people deserve affordable housing that is safe, healthy, and dignified.

History

Heat Seek began as an open source civic hacking project in spring 2014. Our co-founder, William, was working late one winter night and realized the heat had been turned off—it was cold. Annoyed, he purchased an off-the-shelf temperature sensor and began to record and monitor the indoor temperature to prove it was below the legal limit. After carefully gathering a few weeks of data, he wrote a blog post about it.

A friend saw the blog post and, mentioning that his mother was a social worker in the Bronx, suggested the technology could be used to help a client of hers who was struggling to get adequate heat. City inspectors had come to his apartment and asked him to keep a handwritten temperature log, but his learning disability made it difficult for him to keep a consistent record. Nevermind the difficulty of writing down the temperature by hand every hour, for days. William installed an off-the-shelf temperature sensor for him right away.

Heat Seek's innovation was not the sensor technology itself, but the *application* of that technology to solve a pervasive social problem. Community-based organizations, public advocates, elected officials, and tenants were already trying to solve this problem in a low-tech, resource intensive way prior to Heat Seek. Rather than trying to duplicate or even usurp that work, Heat Seek has created a low cost, scalable technology product meant to support and bolster it.

Since its inception, Heat Seek has installed temperature sensors in over 200 [buildings](#) throughout New York City. We've partnered with over two dozen community organizations and legal service providers to ensure that our sensors are reaching the tenants who need them the most. Heat Seek is currently supporting numerous tenants with active cases in housing court.

Accomplishments

In 2014, Heat Seek won the NYC Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) [BigApps](#) competition, securing \$25,000 in startup capital. At the award ceremony, NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio praised Heat Seek by declaring us the “winningest” team in BigApps history, and saying that “[Heat Seek is] doing something very cool and very important”.

Heat Seek was also accepted into two prestigious incubator programs. The first, Blue Ridge Labs @ Robin Hood, is a program of the Robin Hood Foundation that supports social innovation through technology-enabled products and services aimed at the challenges faced by low-income Americans. The second, Beespace, is a nonprofit incubator dedicated to identifying and launching the next generation of nonprofits. To date, Heat Seek has raised over \$890k in capital and in-kind support.

More importantly, over the past seven years, Heat Seek has enabled tenants to capture tens of thousands of hours of temperature violations in their apartments. Our data has been used in NYC Housing Court and NYS Supreme Court to secure thousands of dollars in rent abatements and repairs for tenants. Furthermore, it has been used to compel landlords, often by court order, to submit to additional

inspections, perform boiler maintenance, replace radiators, make apartment repairs and even undertake building weatherization initiatives.

In 2019, Heat Seek successfully worked to get legislation passed through the New York City Council to require the 50 landlords in NYC with the highest ratio of heat violations to apartment units to purchase and install web-connected temperature sensors and submit to additional monitoring by HPD. Though these 50 buildings represent only a fraction of the 200,000+ heat complaints made to the city each year, we're enormously proud to have made an impact on how HPD targets the City's worst offender landlords and hope to expand the legislation to cover more buildings in the future.

In 2020, Heat Seek was named a winner of the NYCx Co-Labs Housing Rights Challenge and awarded a grant to pilot a Heat Seek program expansion in the Manhattan neighborhoods of Inwood and Washington Heights in partnership with HPD, NYCEDC, the NYC Mayor's Office of the Chief Technology Officer (MOCTO), and the NYC Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants (MOPT).

Most recently, in 2021, Heat Seek was awarded grants from Robin Hood Foundation and New York Community Trust totaling \$290,000, in furtherance of scaling impact and securing sustainable institutional funding.

Programs

During "heat season," which lasts from October 1st to May 31st, Heat Seek partners with tenant organizers, community based organizations, and legal service providers to install web-connected temperature sensors for tenants experiencing inadequate heat. In collaboration with our community partners, we select tenants who meet our programmatic criteria on a first come, first serve basis until we have exhausted our supply of sensors for the season.

Once a sensor has been installed in a tenant's apartment, Heat Seek's web platform monitors the temperature and humidity inside the apartment and provides real-time temperature data along with an hourly calculation of whether the apartment is in violation of the NYC Housing Code temperature requirements. Tenants can also opt in to receive a daily SMS message any time their apartment has been in violation for 3+ hours in a 24 hour period. Advocates can receive the same daily notification via email. Tenants and advocates can also log in to the Heat Seek app directly to download comprehensive heat logs detailing every hourly temperature reading and exactly how often the apartment was in violation of the NYC Housing Code. Heat Seek's goal is to support tenants and their advocates with easy access to the data they need to compel landlords to restore and maintain proper apartment heating for the long term.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in the fall of 2020, Heat Seek switched to remote sensor installation. This means that in the beginning of the heat season, Heat Seek mails a packet to each tenant with all the hardware necessary to install the sensor, along with detailed instructions on where and how to install the sensor. In many cases, Heat Seek also assists the tenant during the installation via telephone or FaceTime. While borne of necessity, the switch to remote installation will ultimately allow Heat Seek to

scale to more apartments and in the future, more cities in a way that wouldn't be possible with in-person installation.

Looking to the Future

As we look ahead, the need for Heat Seek has never been more clear. COVID-19 has upended our economy and made an already precarious housing situation in NYC even more unstable. Unprecedented numbers of tenants have been unable to pay rent, with low income tenants hit hardest by both the virus itself and the economic fallout of the pandemic. Bad landlords are skimping on heat to save money and, in some cases, using the lack of heat to force tenants to move out altogether.

Heat Seek has seven years of concentrated, small-scale work with tenants and advocates in NYC. We've developed a set of best practices for identifying buildings where our sensors can help, partnering with attorneys and tenant organizers to distribute sensors, collecting thorough & accurate data, and providing compelling testimony in Housing Court to help tenants get favorable judgments.

Building off of this track record, we're looking to tackle the systemic issues that make Heat Seek necessary in the first place - a broken HPD inspection system, a power imbalance between landlords and tenants in housing court, and a dispute resolution process that lacks teeth. **To prove that this isn't just a niche problem affecting a small number of tenants but rather a systemic failure to keep our affordable housing stock safe and healthy, we need to operate at scale in New York City.**

In order to operate at scale, we must:

- Expand partnerships with grassroots tenant organizations, community based organizations, and legal service providers
- Substantially increase in the number of sensors distributed to tenants each winter
- Train the trainers - give legal service providers the tools they need to train their colleagues on how to successfully use Heat Seek data in housing court
- Get the word out via a public awareness campaign to ensure tenants know Heat Seek exists as a resource
- Secure sustainable funding to ensure we can build on the successes of the upcoming heat season

Scaling up allows us to address the immediate needs of the thousands of New Yorkers without adequate heat in the wintertime *and* make the case for our larger scale vision - reforming the way housing issues are investigated and resolved in NYC.

In order to scale, Heat Seek must transition from the world of incubators, prize money, and challenge grants toward more sustainable funding sources. These include traditional nonprofit sources like foundation grants and individual donations, along with earned revenue from sensor sales and contract work.

Board of Directors

Heat Seek was fortunate to have a supportive and enthusiastic founding board. The members of the founding board provided crucial advice and an invaluable understanding of the business and nonprofit landscape we entered as we transitioned from a volunteer project into a nonprofit organization. They provided much needed feedback and expertise as we designed and implemented our pilot program, and they have welcomed us warmly into their respective fields of civic technology and housing justice.

Heat Seek's 2021-2022 board worked hard to position the organization for the future, both financially and strategically. Having secured grants from Robin Hood Foundation and New York Community Trust totaling \$290,000 in furtherance of scaling impact and securing sustainable institutional funding, the board also undertook a strategic planning process and is in the process of finalizing a three year strategic plan, carrying the organization into 2025, what will be Heat Seek's 10 year anniversary.

We are now looking to expand our board of directors. We are seeking board members who are excited by Heat Seek's mission, and through their personal and professional networks, can attract resources to the organization. If you believe your network will be excited about Heat Seek's mission, we're excited to meet them! We are also seeking board members who will thoughtfully engage in strategic thinking and problem solving in this exciting growth phase for the organization.

We are seeking in particular board members with skills and experience related to business (operations or finance), tenants rights advocacy, and communications (brand building and social media). Candidates with other backgrounds and experience will also be considered!

Critical Responsibilities of Heat Seek Board Members

- **Focus on fundraising and donor relationships.** A core requirement of serving on a nonprofit board is attracting resources to the organization so that the staff can carry out the mission successfully. In addition to a personally meaningful financial contribution, we expect each board member to work hard to deliver new funding sources of \$5k a year or higher to Heat Seek. This can be through personal fundraising or by sourcing and applying for available grants.
- **Proactively take on projects.** Board members are actively engaged in advancing the organization, whether through coordinating fundraising events, providing feedback on systems and operations, building brand awareness, deepening partnerships within the communities Heat Seek serves, or anything else the organization may need. Board members are expected to utilize their strengths, skill sets, and areas of interest to support the organization.
- **Engage in strategic thinking and problem solving.** Heat Seek staff rely on the board to make strategic decisions in the best interest of the organization, which requires board members to engage with information presented, be inquisitive, and deliberate with other board members.

Other Basic Responsibilities

- Commit to participating on the board for a two year term
- Be informed about Heat Seek's mission, programs, challenges and opportunities. Seek out ways to raise the profile of the organization through education and awareness to peers in your networks whenever possible.
- Be passionate about the mission of the organization, and value its commitment to social justice.
- Have a connection to New York City. It is preferred, though not required, that board members are based in New York City.
- Attend all board meetings. Meetings are held virtually, approximately once a month for 1.5 hours per meeting. However, the meeting structure and frequency will be determined by the board collectively at the start of the board term.
- Communicate by email and phone with other board members and with staff
- Be proactive in learning – and carrying out – the legal responsibilities of the board
- Comply with the by-laws and all board policies regarding conflict of interest, whistleblowing, anti-discrimination, etc.
- Comply with all applicable state and federal laws regarding nonprofit governance

What Board Members Can Expect from Heat Seek

- Clear and reasonable expectations
- Consistent, timely communication from staff
- Access to any information needed about the organization
- Personal and public recognition for your efforts
- Training, encouragement and strategic advice to carry out tasks
- Respect for the time, views, and talents you offer to the board

Join Our Board

To express interest in joining the board, please email a resume and brief statement of interest to Natasia de Silva. Select candidates will be contacted for an interview with two current members of the board.

Please note that if selected to join the board, new members will begin their tenure with Heat Seek with a 60 day 'trial' period. This period is intended to serve as a mutual de-risking, whereby the Heat Seek team can learn more about your work, dedication to the mission, and level of participation. Equally as important, you can ensure that Heat Seek is a good fit for your board service, and the time commitment and board responsibilities fit well with your schedule. It's an opportunity for us each to get to know each other, and then decide if Heat Seek board service is a good fit. At the end of the trial period, you'll be invited to have another conversation with an existing member of the Heat Seek board to discuss your continued participation.

Contact: Natasia de Silva, Board Chairperson, natasia.desilva@gmail.com, 808-391-5682

Please note: Heat Seek does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, gender expression, age, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of its activities or operations.