
NEWS YOU CAN USE

For Immediate Release
2019CITZ0001-000014
Jan. 10, 2019

Ministry of Citizens' Services

Small tech firms filling a big need in B.C.

KAMLOOPS – New partnerships between government and B.C.'s tech sector are creating innovative software to help solve specific problems for British Columbians.

"Smaller technology companies operating in B.C. know that success often depends on an ability to solve problems and develop solutions quickly and efficiently," said Jinny Sims, Minister of Citizens' Services. "Our Province's new procurement strategy is making it easier for these firms to do business with government, turning their creative ideas and agile approaches into improved programs and services for British Columbians."

Just ask Two Story Robot founder Jonathan Bowers, whose company of six employees recently worked with the First Peoples' Cultural Council to upgrade online tools Indigenous communities can use to document their languages for future generations. The FirstVoices website helps pass on the languages and cultural knowledge of fluent Elders in the form of online dictionaries, alphabets, songs, stories and multimedia content that can be shared with people, now and in the future.

The \$10,500 contract was awarded to Two Story Robot through the Province's new Code With Us program. The program enables tech innovators to quickly and simply bid on small contracts to collaborate with public sector staff on improving programs and services.

"We probably wouldn't have encountered the FirstVoices application had we not engaged with Code With Us. It's really cool and a satisfying opportunity to be able to contribute in that way," Bowers said. "I'm excited to be able to do more of this in the future. I think it's a really good way for us, not just the company, but as citizens, to be a part of our larger community."

Two Story Robot applied for the FirstVoices project contract, which had been posted on the Province's BC Developer's Exchange website at the same time as they were also competing for a \$1.5-million Sprint With Us contract. This process involved the Province challenging tech firms to improve software used in oversight of the mining sector, giving them one week to design, develop and program a solution to an assigned problem.

"There's no way we'd be able to invest in a traditional procurement process. It would just be far too expensive for us to do," Bowers said. "That math is a lot easier to do when we don't have to spend months working on a complicated written request for proposals process."

Two Story Robot has also improved online tools that national avalanche forecasters use to protect the public and a system that helps young people enrol in their courses with online schools. Bowers said the opportunity to help improve the FirstVoices tools was a natural fit.

"It's really encouraging to see the way BC Developer's Exchange and the provincial government

are engaging with smaller companies like us,” Bowers said. “We’re very nimble, and that seems to be exactly what they’re looking for.”

Quick Facts:

- The Province has awarded 43 contracts through its new Code With Us program. Six contracts have been awarded following Sprint With Us opportunities.
- FirstVoices is an integral part of First Peoples’ Cultural Council’s strategy to support First Nations language revitalization work in B.C.
- Earlier this year, the provincial government made an investment of \$50 million to support language revitalization efforts throughout the province.
- According to the 2018 Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages, there are fewer than 6,000 fluent speakers of the 34 First Nations languages in British Columbia. However, the report also found an increase in the number of learners and younger fluent speakers.

Learn More:

Two Story Robot is a small web app development company located in Kamloops: www.twostoryrobot.com

The First Peoples’ Cultural Council is a First Nations-run Crown corporation with a mandate to support the revitalization of Indigenous languages, arts and culture: www.fpcc.ca

FirstVoices is a suite of web-based tools and services designed to support Indigenous people engaged in language archiving, teaching and cultural revitalization: www.firstvoices.com

Contact:

Joanne Whittier
Communications Manager
Ministry of Citizens’ Services
250 387-0172

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: news.gov.bc.ca/connect