

Agencies Committed to Speed, Efficiency in Industry Partnerships for National Security

Officials from Homeland Security, Army Research Lab and In-Q-Tel discuss the components of successful collaboration with industry.

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In-Q-Tel's Paulo Dutra, Homeland Security Advanced Research Projects Agency's Douglas Maughan and Army Research Lab's Jaret Riddick at CXO Tech Forum: Uncle Sam Meets Silicon Valley. (GovernmentCIO Media & Research Photo)

Various government agencies are demonstrating their commitment to efficiency and timeliness in working with industry startups to advance national security, according to three officials from the Army Research Laboratory, Homeland Security Department and In-Q-Tel.

“Gone are the days of stovepipes,” said Douglas Maughan, director of the cybersecurity division at the Homeland Security Advanced Research Projects Agency under the DHS Science and Technology Directorate. “The startup companies are part of our team now. You have to bring them in and make them part of the team.”

DHS’ Silicon Valley Innovation Program, Maughan told attendees of the CXO Tech Forum Feb. 21, is investing in technologies from the commercial space and transitioning them to broader agency applications through a streamlined approach to working with industry.

Under the program, startups working on technologies the agency might be interested in can expect a contract from initial application in about 75 days, with up to \$800,000 granted over four phases in the course of 24 months.

An \$800,000 investment “is pretty good motivation” to get startups wanting to work for the government, Maughan said.

The most recent technologies to have come out of the program and are currently employed to secure our nation’s border include an all-electronic scanning radar system, an automated machine-learning capability to expedite the development of predictive models and software that enhances capability to screen foreign travelers, according to [the DHS website](#).

For the Army Research Lab, the best kind of partnerships lie in those whose objectives are a close match, said the lab’s Vehicle Technology Directorate Director Jaret Riddick. The lab is currently working with Uber on research development of rotor technology for the ridesharing giant’s Uber Elevate initiative for unmanned urban air mobility vehicles.

“[Uber] has a very specific problem they want to solve, and so the partnership works because of what we bring to the table and their immediate need,” Riddick told forum attendees.

One thing to note about startups from Silicon Valley, Riddick added, is to remember the roots of where many innovations came from.

“The building blocks of Silicon Valley are things that came out of basic research and early research investments from the government, in many cases the Defense Department,” he said, calling upon advancements such as GPS and the internet, which had received government funding before their widespread uses today.

The lab is an element of the newly stood-up Army Futures Command, established in July 2018 in Austin, Texas, with an aim to modernize the Army.

Another key for successful government-industry collaboration is for all sides to remain involved in the process.

“The more folks that you have ... the more likely you are to find a problem,” said In-Q-Tel Senior Program Manager Paulo Dutra, who countered the notion of such a collaboration presenting increased issues in security.

“If every intelligence community is using one particular tool, doesn't that mean if an exploit comes out they're all going to be vulnerable? Well, true — but the patch is going to come out to make them all safer, much faster as well.”

In-Q-Tel is a private nonprofit venture capital firm that invests in technology companies initially for the Central Intelligence Agency and now encompasses other intelligence agencies, including DHS.

The value of the collaboration on national security increases the more players there are collaborating on technology, Dutra said.

“If you have multiple agencies that are cooperating together to put out a tool suite that they want to use, chances are that tool suite is going to have a major impact on mission because everybody is leveraging each other to find the problem points.”

“In the past, I think we've not even been at the table [with startups],” added Maughan. “Now we're actually at the cutting edge with the startups, and they're actually bringing solutions to operational problems.”

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