



COVID-19 Surveillance FOIA Project

FACTSHEET

Whitehouse Office of Science and Technology Policy Tech Surveillance Response to COVID-19

Background: New policies stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic make it easier for government and private companies to collect and share vast amounts of our personal information. To learn more about the government’s plans with our personal data and which private companies they are working with, Just Futures Law, Mijente, MediaJustice, and the Immigrant Defense Project launched the COVID-19 FOIA Project.¹ In June, we received around 500 pages of records from the Whitehouse Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), the office for the Chief Technology Officer Michael Kratsios, in response to our FOIA request. OSTP coordinates the Whitehouse’s tech response to COVID-19.

The records show the Whitehouse’s close coordination with numerous tech companies to propose a vast expansion of surveillance tech and data collection under the health crisis. This is especially troubling considering that the Trump Administration and local police are already working with some of the same tech companies to surveil protesters, criminalize Black and brown communities, and deport immigrants.

Records can be accessed here: <https://justfutureslaw.org/covid-19-foia-project/>

Highlights include:

- The main government actor is Michael Kratsios, the Chief Technology Officer and former chief of staff for Peter Thiel who founded Palantir and other tech surveillance giants. He is also in charge of research and engineering at the Department of Defense.²
- **Uber** was offering up trip data for disease surveillance.
- **Github** was trying to make a centralized repository for pandemic modeling.
- **Dataminr** is a massive data broker (they claim to mine 10,000 public data sets). They offered all their data and listed various federal and local agencies currently using Dataminr for Coronavirus including HHS, CDC, and various NY agencies.
- **National Fusion Center Association** submitted a proposal for a “bold” COVID-19 Social Distance App. Fusion centers are state and local law enforcement intelligence

centers which work closely with DHS. This is heavily redacted because the Whitehouse asserted trade secrets privilege under exemption 4.

- Whitehouse response with tech companies, termed the COVID-19 Tech and Research Task Force, was broken down into three groups:
 - *Location Data Stream* - members include: **Camber, ESRI, Facebook, Google, Harvard School of Public Health, Nielsen, Unacast, Uber, Veraset**
 - *Clinical Data Stream* - members include: **AWS, Color Genomics, Emsi, Gates, Google, Ro, NAVIGO**
 - *Hosting & Privacy Stream* - **AWS, ESRI, Facebook, Google, Harvard School of Public Health, Microsoft, Mozilla, Salesforce, R4, SAP**
 - Other orgs participating include: **Amazon, Datavant, Twitter**
 - The tech industry coordinator was **Hangar**, a tech investment firm.
- On March 19, Senator Markey sent a Congressional letter to OSTP raising concerns over their collaboration with tech companies, particularly location data.³ This led to a number of press inquiries to OSTP. See attachments.
- Three days later, late Sunday night of March 22, OSTP staff sent an email asking to be removed from calendar invites to the Task Force stating: “. . . the Tech Task Force is a private sector group with no government affiliation.” These emails were followed by a number of heavily redacted internal emails and communication with the Whitehouse. See attachments.

Written by: Karen Munoz

Edited by: Julie Mao

Just Futures Law

July 28, 2020

Endnotes:

¹ Just Futures Law, COVID-19 FOIA Project (last accessed July 28, 2020) <https://justfutureslaw.org/covid-19-foia-project/>.

² Patrick Tucker, *Peter Thiel's New Man in the Defense Department*, Government Executive (July 14, 2020), <https://www.govexec.com/defense/2020/07/peter-thiels-new-man-defense-department/166871/>.

³ Ed Markey, *Markey Queries White House on Plans to Use Americans Location Data for Coronavirus Response* (Mar. 19, 2020), <https://www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/markey-queries-white-house-on-plans-to-use-americans-location-data-for-coronavirus-response>.