The U.S. Air Force Lab with MassChallenge selects inaugural cohort

By Jessica Casserly, 66th Air Base Group Public Affairs / Published April 27, 2020

HANSCOM AIR FORCE BASE, Mass. – The first 10 startups to participate in The U.S. Air Force Lab with MassChallenge, a two-year pilot project designed to increase non-traditional participation in Small Business Innovative Research program opportunities, were selected April 24.

Airgility, Inc.; Agile Data Decisions LLC; Colvin Run Networks; Jaxon, Inc.; Lynq Technologies, Inc.; Mesodyne; Pison; Sema; Sensatek Propulsion Technology, Inc.; and SimX, Inc. make up the first cohort to benefit from specialized mentorship and support from Air Force and MassChallenge experts through this program.

The U.S. Air Force Lab with MassChallenge is contracted through the Griffiss Institute and is a partnership between MassChallenge, a network of zero-equity startup accelerators; the Digital Directorate; the Command, Control, Communications, Intelligence and Networks Directorate; the Cyber Resiliency Office for Weapons Systems and the Air Force Research Lab.

As the cohort begins interacting with the program's customized resources, Hanscom's participating directorates will evaluate how the individual technologies might be utilized to support the warfighter.

"MassChallenge's expertise identifying startups for the Air Force to evaluate brings forward many new and evolving concepts and technologies," said Maj. Gen. Michael Schmidt, PEO for C3I&N. "We are grateful for the opportunity to begin this new phase and specifically look at technology insertion in areas such as C3I&N's software development, process automation, artificial intelligence and machine learning."

Representatives from Hanscom's directorates will be key contributors throughout the accelerator program.

"As PEO Digital progresses with the accelerator, we'll be working closely with MassChallenge to tailor and develop curriculum that fits the unique needs of the cohort," said Capt. Amanda Rebhi, chief innovation officer for Digital. "We will also be intimately involved with the program, essentially serving as subject matter experts

to guide the cohort as it navigate the Small Business Innovative Research program."

The CROWS team is also actively engaged in the program, assisting with company selections, submitting problem statements and judging applications, said Joe Bradley, director of CROWS and associate director of Engineering and Technical Management at Hanscom.

"CROWS is laser-focused on finding creative ways to advance mission assurance in cyber-contested environments," he said. "We will be helping the SBIR Phase I companies better understand our opportunities, connect with potential customers across the Air Force, and progress to SBIR Phase II and beyond."

According SBIR.gov, only Phase I awardees are eligible for Phase II awards, which are typically $1 million or less in total costs over two years. The Phase II objective is to continue research and development efforts started in Phase I and funding is based on a startup's results achieved in Phase I, as well as the scientific and technical merit and commercial potential of the project proposed in Phase II.

"The U.S. Air Force Lab with MassChallenge has streamlined a difficult step in the Phase I to Phase II transition, identifying a product-market match between the Air Force and solution providers," said Marissa McCoy, MITRE's Air Force cyber operations portfolio chief of staff. "As a judge and mentor for the program, I look forward to helping ensure that the Phase I awardees gain greater insight into government challenges and have the support they need to accelerate customer discovery. The MITRE team and I are eager to mentor companies to ensure the Air Force has access to the most promising technologies."

Cait Brumme, the managing director of MassChallenge Boston, expressed her congratulations to the 10 startups selected for the program.

"MassChallenge's startup-centered approach to acceleration will ensure that these companies are more effectively and efficiently able to bridge the 'valley of death' between Phase I and Phase II awards," she said. "Additionally, partnering with key defense stakeholders will validate early-stage startups while helping to de-risk the development of these applications."

Matt Misbin, co-founder and head of business development for Lynq Technologies, Inc., said they're excited to further accelerate their technology's integration into training and Department of Defense mission sets through this program.

“What drew us most to the program was the ability to engage directly with Air Force end users, the C3I&N Directorate, and MassChallenge’s corporate networks, as we look to also integrate our underlying network stack into other use cases in the commercial sectors, such as drones, autonomous systems and smart agriculture,” he said.

The accelerator program will kick off with a virtual “boot camp” April 27.

To learn more about the U.S. Air Force Lab with MassChallenge partnership, visit http://apply.masschallenge.org/en/usaf.

PHOTO DETAILS / DOWNLOAD HI-RES

Christian Melton, center, senior partnerships manager for MassChallenge Boston, discusses The U.S. Air Force Lab with MassChallenge program with Capt. Teresa Doskey, a contracting officer for Digital’s Force Protection Division, from left, Brian Carr, director of innovation for Command, Control, Communications, Intelligence and

Networks, Stacy Simon, Small Business lead for Digital, and Capt. Amanda Rebhi, chief innovation officer for Digital during a meeting at the MassChallenge facility in Boston, Mass., Feb. 21. The first 10 startups to participate in the two-year pilot project were selected April 24. (U.S. Air Force photo by Todd Maki)