1. Summary

The Graduate Student Council at MIT (GSC) will be conducting an all-day service event as part of the “Together in Service” MIT2016 event on April 19, 2016. The GSC is seeking proposals from city officials and interested community members in the City of Cambridge for pressing Cambridge civic needs that could be addressed (fully or in part) in about eight (8) hours by motivated teams of 4-10 people including MIT graduate and undergraduate students.

The purpose of this Request for Proposal (RFP) is to provide Cambridge officials and community members with guidelines for creating proposals that will be best suited for the format of this event.

2. Motivation

For many years, graduate students at MIT have expressed the desire to engage more fully with the Cambridge community. Many MIT graduate students live in Cambridge, but few feel that they are engaged with the city and its community on a truly meaningful level.

Many students at MIT are quite familiar with the concept of a “hackathon,” a focused event in which teams compete or collaborate to complete a defined task:

A hackathon (also known as a hack day, hackfest or codefest) is an event in which computer programmers and others involved in software development and hardware development, including graphic designers, interface designers and project managers, collaborate intensively on software projects. Some hackathons are intended simply for educational or social purposes, although in many cases the goal is to create usable software. Hackathons tend to have a narrow focus on a specific goal or process.

Using a similar framework, the Graduate Student Council will begin planning an all-day service event (with a working title of “Serve-a-thon”) in which teams of students and community members are tasked with designing solutions to pressing issues facing the City of Cambridge.

The overall motivating force for this event is simple. MIT has been in Cambridge for 100 years and this event will give MIT students an opportunity to celebrate and honor the community that welcomed their predecessors with open arms a century ago.
3. Purpose

The “Serve-a-thon” will provide a space for students and MIT community members to work alongside Cambridge community members to solve pressing civic needs identified by (a) the City, (b) members of the MIT community, and (c) residents and community members in Cambridge. This event will leverage the resources and publicity already in place for the service events taking place as part of the MIT2016 Together in Service Day on April 19, 2016 (an MIT student holiday). The Serve-a-thon will also act as a hub for students to learn about longer-term civic engagement opportunities available to them at MIT.

4. Proposal Guidelines and Requirements

This is an open and collaborative process. The event organizers (contact information below) are more than happy to help develop proposals with interested Cambridge and MIT community members.

Proposals shall define a problem or civic challenge facing the City of Cambridge that could benefit from an intensive (approx. eight-hour), interdisciplinary planning/problem-solving session.

Proposals may be selected in whole or in part in order to accommodate the time and personnel parameters inherent in the eight-hour “hackathon” format style.

Proposals should not require the use of proprietary/privileged information, software, or tools due to the open format of the event.

Proposals that have the possibility for additional follow-up development of solutions after the event ends (e.g. implementation of pilot programs by small groups of MIT students) are especially encouraged.

Proposals shall be submitted by January 15, 2016.

5. Event Format

Participants will be placed into teams upon arrival (or pre-registration), each of which will be tasked with developing potential solutions to a pressing civic need as identified by the organizers, chosen from the set of proposals submitted according to this RFP.

After a set amount of time (~8 hours), the teams will present their findings to a panel of representatives from the sponsoring organizations. Teams with outstanding ideas will be recognized and possibly rewarded. Exceptionally motivated MIT students could be tasked to provide longer-term implementation support for these ideas (possibly with some to-be-created position such as “MIT2016 City Fellow”).
6. Participant Demographics

All stakeholders will need to work to identify the potential participants to whom this event should be advertised. MIT undergraduate and graduate students will likely be the chief participant demographics, but this event also has the potential to engage local high school students and other Cambridge community members.

Individuals or groups submitting proposals are invited to, optionally, indicate participant demographics they would like to see engaged in solving their proposed civic challenge.

7. Proposal and Event Development Timelines

- January 15: Deadline for proposals
- Early February: Selection of civic challenges, follow-up with successful proposals
- Early March: Finalize civic challenges, announce details on GSC event webpage
- April 19, 2016: MIT2016 Together in Service Day, event commences
- Early May: Further development of civic challenges by smaller teams of MIT students, if applicable to the specific civic challenge

8. Proposal Format

Please use fonts no smaller than 12 point. Maximum proposal length shall not exceed 10 pages; however, proposing individuals or groups should note that civic challenges that can be described succinctly are more likely to fit the time constraints and thematic scope of the event.

Required Proposal Sections

- **Background**: provide an explanation for why this civic challenge exists in the City of Cambridge
- **Definition of Challenge**: clearly define the current state of this civic challenge, and describe any past attempts—successful or unsuccessful—to address it
- **Ideal Team**: describe key characteristics or skill sets of participants that may be best suited to develop solutions to proposed civic challenge
- **Solution Deliverable Format**: describe the deliverables that should be developed by participating teams in the course of the event, and indicate any opportunities for long-term development of solutions
9. Contact Information

The organizers of this event may be contacted directly at gsc-serve@mit.edu. This email address will include representatives from the following organizations:

- MIT Graduate Student Council (GSC), chief organizing group
- MIT2016 Steering Committee
- MIT Priscilla King Gray Public Service Center (PSC)
- MIT Office of Government and Community Relations
- City of Cambridge and Cambridge City Manager’s Office

Updates on this event will be posted to its dedicated webpage at gsc.mit.edu/serve.