

To: NYC Council - Committee on Technology  
From: Noel Hidalgo, Executive Director of BetaNYC  
Re: **Oversight hearing of Local Law 49 of 2018 (Open Algorithms Law)**



Thursday, 4 April 2019

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*“We [...] want to ensure that New York City leads the way in ethical algorithmic government. We want transparency around data tools, algorithms, artificial intelligence, and tracking. We want New York City to be the thought leader in smart, ethical, algorithmic government.”* - Noel Hidalgo, 4 Jan 2016<sup>1</sup>

It has been 1186 days since these words were pressed. In that time, the Council introduced legislation, pioneering legislation was passed, the task force crystalized, two press releases were published, and two public hearings have been scheduled. From the public’s perspective, not much has happened and this is disappointing. Thank you for hosting this hearing to bring transparency on this important topic.

On March 1, a broad coalition of groups sent a letter to the chairs reiterating our desire for *“a robust and inclusive public engagement process, review of evidence-based research, and ongoing public communication about the Task Force process and work are necessary predicates to any publication that the Task Force produces.”*<sup>2</sup>

How can we trust the output of the process if there is this lack of transparency?

On its website, you can’t find press releases, meeting notes, nor the actions it has taken so far. Also troubling, we can’t not any timelines, nor task force processes. This is disappointing.

While we are honored to have privately meet with some of Co-Chairs and be one of the few groups being considered for a follow up community meeting, we offer the following advice for the next steps.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://bit.ly/BetaNYC-2016-YearInReview>

<sup>2</sup> <http://bit.ly/2Vlw0QN>

## BetaNYC's advice for the task force:

- **Task force website** — share as much information about the task force as possible. This includes press releases, task force meeting dates, agendas, timelines, etc. Additionally, a public events calendar and a public glossary of terms are necessary.
- **Process** — while I can see who is on the task force, I can not see how the task force will make its recommendations nor when it will make recommendations. We call on the task force to openly publish its process and timeline. We can not trust the outcome of this task force without transparency of the process.
- **Physical public forums** — first, record and/or live stream them, and figure out how to use them constructively. Additionally, these conversations must be held at an accessible level. Technical and academic speak must be kept to a minimum and various forms of translation need to be provided. Promoting online / offline dialogue via a twitter hashtag is critical. Currently, the community is using *#NYCalgorithms*.<sup>3</sup>
- **Community Public Forums** — should be as accessible as possible and provide an opportunity for any community member to understand how their lives are impacted. To this extent, the task force's website should have a section dedicated demystifying algorithms, bias, data, and impact. Additionally,
- **Digital Public Forums**, all public or community forums should have their ideas mirrored online. We have seen several governments use Consul<sup>4</sup> for effective idea generation and commenting. We implore this task force to do the same.

As always, BetaNYC and its 5,000+ community members is always ready to help.

Thank you,  
Noel Hidalgo

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<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23NYCalgorithms&src=tyah>

<sup>4</sup> <http://consulproject.org/en/>