

# Ken's 2025/2026 David Prize Step 2 Submission

## **Question 1: Tell us about your New York and the opportunities you see for the city.**

My New York is the most diverse city on the planet, where nearly every culture, language, and economic reality lives side by side. It's a place of extraordinary wealth and influence, but also of poverty and exclusion, where access is often determined by language, familiarity, and proximity rather than need or merit. We don't lack opportunity or resources - we struggle with making them usable by ALL our neighbors.

Our new city leadership openly embraces the importance of representation, cultural literacy, and seeing the overlooked at the highest levels of civic life. Ideas once treated as marginal around cultural identity, history, education, and equity, are entering the mainstream civic conversation, creating space for long standing work to finally be received on its own terms.

At the same time, our extreme economic diversity creates parallel worlds that rarely 'see' each other. My lived experience spans those realities. I come from a blue collar background, yet have spent decades rubbing shoulders with the elite of government, technology, and industry.

The opportunity I see is to redesign access itself so civic systems, educational resources, and cultural knowledge can be engaged through a common denominator to almost all - the mobile phone. Today's AI makes it possible to meet people where they are linguistically, culturally, and cognitively. My goal is not to invent new power, but to unlock the power already in the palms of our hands, so more New Yorkers can actually use it.

**Question 2: How is your vision additive and unique to New York?**

My vision is additive to New York because it builds on commitments the city has already made. NYC is entering a rare moment of alignment between cultural recognition, educational intent, and political leadership in Mayor Mamdani, whose background includes formal study in African American Studies and a public emphasis on representation, historical literacy, and inclusive civic participation. His new Office of Mass Engagement intends to transform how New Yorkers participate in city government. CivicChat.NYC is an ideal tool to help make that commitment real by giving residents a conversational, multilingual way to understand how government works, who represents them, and how to act, without institutional gatekeeping.

BlackFacts.NYC is additive for the same reason. It does not reinterpret, replace, or compete with the City's 3 year, \$27MM Black Studies curriculum. It activates the curriculum - by transforming a static 520-page document into a conversational, AI powered teaching system, removing friction without removing rigor. Teachers will be able to talk to the curriculum to generate lessons, activities, vocabulary, and assessments already vetted for New York City's needs.

My work is uniquely suited to New York because it is designed to support our extraordinary diversity thriving inside systems never designed to speak back. By delivering access through conversation, my work makes New York's existing educational and civic power usable to the people who make the city what it is.

**Question 3: What have you already done to move your vision forward, and what's in the way of your vision becoming a reality?**

I've spent my entire career doing the same type of work-building and sustaining community-centered technology long before others were even thinking about it. Since 1995, I've architected, launched, and maintained independent platforms that put cultural knowledge, education, and civic power into the hands of people systems were not designed for.

More recently, I've been advancing this vision through NYC-focused work. CivicChat.NYC is online as a proof-of-concept platform demonstrating how real-time translation can help New Yorkers understand government offices in their language. And Diversity Schoolhouse-my existing AI-powered education platform in 14 states today-provides the technical and operational foundation for BlackFacts.NYC, which I'm building with guidance from current and former NYC educators.

What stands in the way is not vision or commitment, but capacity. As I have never secured significant external financing, I've invested all of my personal time and financial resources to move this work forward-absorbing risk, subsidizing development through external work.

Advancing this work under constant financial pressure fragments attention and limits how quickly systems can mature, collaborators can be trained, and public-facing tools can be deployed. The David Prize would remove those constraints-not by starting something new, but by enabling sustained focus, deeper collaboration, and accelerated execution on systems already in motion and ready to serve New York City.

**Question 4: Explain the difference \$200,000 would make for you and your vision.**

\$200K would convert work that currently struggles under constant financial pressure into sustained, reliable execution for NYC. I've always absorbed the financial risk to subsidize projects designed for public benefit before revenue. This has slowed delivery and limited my ability to deliver benefits to the people my projects are meant to serve.

\$200K would allow sustained, uninterrupted focus on deploying and expanding CivicChat.NYC and BlackFacts.NYC for use across the city, and engage residents in critical usability testing that is so often the Achilles' heel of technology projects. Doing this WELL requires outreach, coordination and follow-up that is better done by folks I know who are willing to work at affordable rates, but can't afford to volunteer.

It would also allow me to attend local networking events that I regularly pass on now, as these events add up QUICKLY.

Consistent focus would also make it realistic to engage several young developers I have known for years, to train them in hands-on, AI-assisted world-class conversational system development—repeating for New York City today what I did for Boston 30 years ago in 1996, when I put the organizations and businesses of Boston's communities of color online with a team of just 6 volunteers.

As I learned at the start of my career-technology, when used correctly is the most powerful multiplier of effort ever before imaginable, and the impact of well-designed systems is not linear-it is exponential- so  $X + \$200K = 10X!$

**Question 5 (Optional): Attach something that captures your work.**

<https://links.blackfacts.com/my-work>

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**Question 6: With regard to the vision you're sharing, how much money have you raised in the past year?**

\$1 - 10,000

**Question 7: Share a few achievements you're most proud of and why.**

The achievements I'm most proud of represent how I have used technology to deliver real value to real people who would otherwise be ignored by the industry.

In 1996, I launched Roxbury.com, which put Boston's Black neighborhoods online in a project I have yet to learn of any similar demographic ever receiving, especially as the 2002 update delivered self-service business listings and events 2 & 4 years before Yelp and Eventbrite were even founded.

In 1997, being named a Microsoft Most Valuable Professional was meaningful as peer recognition that there is no test for, and I have always suspected that I am the first Black MS MVP.

1997's BlackFacts.com is the world's first Black History search engine, and while similar systems (including those backed by institutions and money) have come and gone, BlackFacts remains up and running and today is the only place you can find an original Black History video for every day of the year.

The Official Website of the Government of Saint Lucia that I single-handedly built in 2014 has transformed how their government disseminates information to their 180K citizens to this very day.

Diversity Schoolhouse, the ed-tech version of BlackFacts used in schools across 14 states today and approved for NYC Public Schools, demonstrates how AI can be used to deliver 21st Century education to 21st Century students.

Each of these achievements represent bold, visionary examples of using technology to ensure that anyone with access can benefit from it.

### **Question 8: Share your story.**

I'm a boy from the 'hood formerly known as "Do Or Die" Bed-Stuy, who went to MIT and learned how to use technology to open doors of opportunity for others, as well as for myself.

I've spent the last 30 of my 63 years showcasing the meritocracy that technology works the same - no matter WHO controls it - to help level the playing field for people in general, and folks with backgrounds like mine in particular.

Driven by my personal mantra of "Duty and Opportunity"

(<https://links.blackfacts.com/duty-opportunity>) I created community technology projects that introduced my adopted 'hood of Roxbury to the Information Age, with pioneering work described in the 2019 book "Black Software: The Internet & Racial Justice, from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter" by NYU Prof Charlton McIlwain.

After two decades of frustration not finding forward-thinking partners, I gave up on Boston as fertile ground for innovative ideas, and returned to the "New and Improved" Bed Stuy in search of more forward-thinking community partners, which I have found both in local organizations and government.

In 2025 I decided to get out from behind the computer more, and in November facilitated the first of a series of "AI For the Community" workshops with the Brooklyn NAACP, helping my neighbors experience the power of AI tools they can run on their phone for free, and am looking forward to 2026 being the year my work will benefit hundreds of thousands of both my old and new neighbors here back home, in NYC.

**Question 9 (Optional): Add a video introducing yourself.**

<https://links.blackfacts.com/david-prize-video>