

'Hackathon' aimed at helping migrants, research

November 1 2013, by Laura Wides-Munoz

Journalists, activists and technology enthusiasts in 20 U.S. and Latin American cities will brainstorm and code their way toward understanding migration patterns across the Western Hemisphere this weekend, the latest effort to use digital collaboration to rethink immigration's role in society.

Backers of the Americas Datafest say they hope participants in the 48-hour meetups will produce, apps, websites or programs that can be useful to migrants, the nonprofits that work with them and the researchers who study these issues.

Datafest organizer Teresa Bouza first became interested in creating hackathons in 2012 at Stanford University, where she sought to help journalists become less afraid of big data. She said the hackathons are also a moment for those who usually work in very different fields to come together and show off what they do.

"Most people have a technical background, since without them you can't do anything, but it's also really important to have people who know the problem, because the developers are really good with the coding but may not understand the issues," Bouza said.

This weekend's Datafests will take place in Miami, at Harvard and Stanford universities and other colleges around the country. They will also take place in Mexico, Ecuador, Central America and even Madrid. Amnesty International, media companies like EFE and Univision, and

tech firms like Facebook and Microsoft are among the sponsors. The top global projects will compete for \$2,000 awards.

Facebook and Microsoft have become increasingly vocal advocates of comprehensive immigration reform, including measures to adjust the status of the roughly 11 million people living in the country illegally, but their immediate interest lies in making it easier to bring in more temporary high-tech workers.

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