



Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos joins tech titans on Pentagon's innovation advisory board

BY ALAN BOYLE ([HTTPS://WWW.GEEKWIRE.COM/AUTHOR/ALANBOYLE/](https://www.geekwire.com/author/alanboyle/)) on July 28, 2016 at 12:53 pm



(<https://cdn.geekwire.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/160616-blue.jpg>)

Jeff Bezos is the founder of the Blue Origin space venture as well as Amazon. (Credit: Blue Origin)

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos is joining the Defense Innovation Advisory Board, a 15-member panel that's meant to help the Pentagon adopt some of the private-sector ideas that have fueled America's tech industry.

The panel is chaired by a tech titan who's arguably one of Bezos' biggest competitors (<http://mashable.com/2014/10/14/google-vs-amazon/>): Eric Schmidt, the executive chairman of Alphabet, Google's parent company. Other members include LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman, Instagram COO (and Facebook veteran) Marne Levine, Code for America founder Jennifer Pahlka and astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson.

Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announced Bezos' appointment this week (<http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/857710/secretary-carter-names-additional-members-of-defense-innovation-advisory-board>), and numbered him among "the most innovative minds in America."

In addition to founding Amazon, Bezos owns The Washington Post and the Blue Origin space venture. During an April fireside chat at the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs, Bezos told me that he was “very excited” (<https://www.geekwire.com/2016/interview-jeff-bezos/>) about Blue Origin’s potential involvement in space missions for the Defense Department.

“Not that I really need any additional passion or motivation for space, but I have to tell you that all of us at Blue Origin find the fact that we are going to get to help with the national security missions incredibly motivating,” Bezos said.

Carter made his announcement at the opening of a new East Coast office in Boston for the Defense Innovation Unit Experimental, (<https://www.diux.mil/>) also known as DIUx. Like the innovation board, DIUx was created to strengthen the Defense Department’s connections to private-sector innovations.

“We’re making some serious investments here,” Carter said. “The latest budget I’ve proposed will invest \$72 billion in research and development next year alone. And for context, that’s more than double what Intel, Apple and Google spent on R&D last year combined.”

Carter said the Defense Department is putting a high priority on “developing new partnerships with the private sector” in Seattle, Silicon Valley, Boston, Austin and other innovation hubs.

The Pentagon has a long record of pioneering technologies through its Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (<http://www.darpa.mil/>), or DARPA. That agency works on national security technologies that may (or may not) result in commercial spin-offs, and it’s provided a model for the NASA Innovative Advanced Concepts (<https://www.nasa.gov/directorates/spacetech/niac/index.html>) program as well as the Energy Department’s ARPA-E (<http://arpa-e.energy.gov/>) program. In contrast, DIUx will look at practices and technologies that were created by the private sector and could be quickly adapted for national defense.

The advisory board is due to begin its work over the summer and provide Carter with a set of initial recommendations by October. In addition to Bezos, Schmidt, Hoffman, Levine, Pahlka and Tyson, board members include:

- Adam Grant, professor, Wharton School of Business
- Danny Hillis, computer theorist and co-founder, Applied Inventions
- Walter Isaacson, president and CEO of the Aspen Institute

- Eric Lander, president and founding director, Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard
- J. Michael McQuade, senior vice president for science and technology, United Technologies
- William McRaven, chancellor, University of Texas System
- Milo Medin, vice president, Access Services, Google Capital
- Richard Murray, professor, California Institute of Technology
- Cass Sunstein, professor, Harvard Law School

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