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Horizon 2020 European Union Funding for Research & Innovation

Rebuild By Design

In partnership with the OECD Studies on Water: Stakeholder Engagement for Inclusive Water Governance

Published On: 03 November 2015

Organisation: Rebuild By Design

Country: United States

Level of government: Central government

Sector: Environmental protection

Type:

Launched in: 2013

Overall development time: 6 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

Description

Founded as a response to Superstorm Sandy's devastation, Rebuild by Design was dedicated to creating innovative community- and policy-based solutions to protect U.S. cities that are most vulnerable to increasingly intense weather events and future uncertainties. Initiated by the Presidential Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force and a partnership between U.S. Housing and Urban Development and the Rockefeller Foundation, Rebuild by Design's aim was to connect the world's most talented researchers and designers with the Sandy-affected area's active businesses, policymakers, and local groups to better understand how to redevelop their communities in environmentally- and economically-healthier ways, and to be better prepared for the next storm.

This competition addressed the structural and environmental vulnerabilities that Hurricane Sandy exposed in communities throughout the region, and developed solutions to better protect residents from the dangers posed by future climate events. Due to the enormity of this challenge, the Rebuild by Design process was developed to find better ways of implementing designs and informing policy.

The competition, named one of CNN's 10 Best Ideas of 2013, included a year of thoughtful engagement by the design teams who formed local coalitions to develop fundable, implementable solutions that will inform new policies on every level. Rebuild by Design and its partners have demonstrated that by working together in this regional design process, we can set ambitious, realistic, more resilient standards of development and infrastructure that respond to communities' needs within a new, changing world.

This case study focuses on the engagement strategy of the Rebuild by Design competition process from August 2013 to June 2014. Additional information on the process can be found at www.rebuildbydesign.org

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Why the innovation was developed

- Superstorm Sandy reinforced the strong ties between social and physical vulnerabilities, and showed that both are exasperated in the face of climate change.
- And all these vulnerabilities are interdependent on the regional scale and have a physical impact. A design approach brings in the opportunity for collaboration, research by design, and scenario development to better understand these interdependencies, connecting social and physical impacts with stakeholders and their needs to design solutions for mitigating and adapting to these risks and vulnerabilities.

- The goal of the competition was to promote innovation by developing regionally-scalable but locally-contextual solutions that increase resilience in the region.
- The competition also represented a policy innovation by committing to set aside HUD Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding specifically to incentivize the implementation of winning projects and proposals.

- Government
- Local communities
- Water institutions
- Civil society
- Service providers
- Business
- Regulators
- Science, academia, and research centres
- Financial actors

Results

Efficiency

- Cost-saving: Because of the competition framework, the design teams invested more time and effort into their projects than the stipend could have paid for on the private market. A non-official analysis shows that the process leveraged five times the work than what was paid for.
- The government, often using normal and less complex paths, would have not been able to create these innovative designs during the course of regular business. The philanthropic funding served as leverage for Federal investments: USD 4 million brought USD 930 million to the table. Rebuild by Design created a mechanism for the government to get the best design-approaches into hard infrastructure programs to ensure that what would be built would be an asset to the community on the long haul and every day, not just during storms.
- Sustainability/resilience: Rebuild by Design started from the premise that the interdependencies and vulnerabilities are met on the regional scale and opportunities and chances to mitigate and adapt depend on a regional approach and strategy. The Rebuild by Design process defined sub-regional proposals that connected a regional/local strategy with a suite of interventions ranging form policy and regulatory reform, communication and outreach strategies to the implementation of green and grey infrastructure projects.

Effectiveness

- Broader economic development: The impact Rebuild by Design brought to the region has a broader external economic effect. Measured through a concept Societal Cost Benefit Analysis, this impact might be captured over time. At this moment it is too soon to say how the external economic benefits will actually play out.
- Capacity-development: Rebuild by Design implemented a liaison structure during the competition, which required that each team receive support from two liaisons from two different partner organizations. Through this structure, representatives from partner organizations were exposed to integral community engagement—a new role for these organizations.

Service quality

Responsiveness:

- Acceptability/ownership of stakeholders involved: Stakeholder coalitions and groups on the ground have taken on the ownership of the project. The model created a network of hundreds of leaders that are invested in the outcome of these projects and are now working to ensure the government implements the projects with the same level of innovation and community –based design.
- 535 organizations throughout the Sandy-affected region, 64 communities, 141 neighborhoods and cities, and 181 government agencies were involved, have become educated, and are now owners and advocates of the implementation.Building on the legacy of what the Rebuild by Design process brought the region, HUD developed the National Disaster Resilience Competition and US AID partnered with Rockefeller Foundation to start of the Global Partnership on Resilience (GPR).
- Within that partnership, a Grand Challenge was built on the successful model of Rebuild by Design. Rebuild by Design continues to collaborate with resilience partners and together, build out the network worldwide to do research, develop case studies, exemplary projects, school programs, and more innovative Rebuild by Design type competitions across the US and even the world (Boston, the Bay Area, Sao Paulo).

Other improvements

- Rebuild by Design also encouraged a culture of cross-collaboration between designers, researchers, community based organizations, and ecologists. This was reflected in both the team structure itself, as well as the multiple stages that required multi-team cross collaborations.
- Collaboration was the middle name of Rebuild by Design, building capacity within the multitude of stakeholders; policy makers, politicians, decision makers, investors, designers, engineers, innovators, community groups, citizens, individuals, businesses, business community, and governments from all over.
- Collaboration as the main driver for innovation and understanding the complexity of long term climate change impacts and vulnerabilities and building capacity through collaboration and innovation to be able to prepare and respond better to build a resilient region through local and regional interventions.

Development

Design

Rebuild by Design was an initiative of President Obama's Hurricane Sandy Task Force administered by US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Rebuild by Design developed into a partnership of the Task Force with the Municipal Arts Society (a non-profit advocacy organization), the Van Alen Institute (an organization with experience in architecture and design processes), the Regional Plan Association (an organization focused on the entirety of the region through research and planning) and the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University. Each organization allocated significant staff, time, and expertise of the region during the design phase.

This partnership collaborated with State and Local governments including the States of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, and New York City in addition to a dozen federal agencies, local agencies, and local and regional stakeholders, community groups, and businesses.

Testing

- No methods were used to test the innovation.

Implementation

Tools used:

- Each design team was challenged to establish a multi-level coalition to collaborate and inform the design interventions that would be created for each geography within the Sandy effected region. Teams were judged on evidence that their engagement strategy truly informed the design of their proposals.
- These coalitions consisted of "project partners," or local community leaders and organizations, which were integrated into the design process as co-creators- essential as these projects move into the implementation phase, which will need local community support. The coalitions also consisted of "stakeholder groups"- existing organizations and individuals whose involvement and support would provide insight into the local challenges and help to refine the design solutions.
- Beyond developing strategic partnerships in their communities, design teams were required to host public workshops to ensure they were designing solutions that were embraced by their constituents. Considering the differences in projects, communities, and designers, Rebuild by Design partners did not set a specific format for how these workshops should be implemented.
- Instead, Design Teams were asked to work with local community partners in order to develop workshops or public programs that would attract the broadest audience, and allow for the greatest participation.
- While they were required to provide at least two public workshops - one to show the initial design ideas and obtain feedback early on, and a second to obtain feedback on a more final draft - most teams ended up providing whole series of collaborative meetings in a huge variety. Again, by establishing this engagement as a requirement, teams were motivated to produce meaningful opportunities for community input in the designs.

Resources used:

- Rebuild by Design was a public private partnership between the Federal Government (the federal Housing and Urban Development department) and philanthropic partners (the Rockefeller Foundation, the Surdna Foundation, the JPB Foundation, the Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation, the Hearst Foundation, and the New Jersey Recovery Fund).
- A total of USD 4 million was raised for the competition process - half of which was used for research and engagement. The remaining funds were allocated to each participating team.
- The implementation of the winning designs are supported through HUD's CDBG-DR (Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery) funding. A total of $930 million dollar is allocated for implementation.
- Additionally, Rebuild by Design went through a formal evaluation process that was financially supported by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Challenges and solutions

- The open-ended process of Rebuild by Design demanded a great deal of trust from the Federal and regional/local government. Allocating such a large amount of resources ($930M CDBG-DR) on the table without a pre-defined outcome and not informed by policy but by stakeholders and collaboration. Information through outside partners was a tension. Inclusiveness is often understood by all stakeholders in a way that is most profitable for each, with each person or group prioritizing themselves.
- Rebuild by Design, in its process, challenged that perspective, working off of the foundation that what is best for an individual may not be best for the collective. Rebuild by Design asserted that the aim for the common is best for all, and will bring real resilience, without mediocrity. In its process, Rebuild by Design drove innovation and design to a next level while also doing the same for collaboration. These innovations on process, engagement and projects met in all steps and phases of Rebuild by Design, but that complexity was not always understood by all parties, groups or individuals.
- The solutions identified and implemented to overcome these challenges included building trust amongst all participants of the competition, coordinating with local processes on the ground to mitigate replication and clear communication with communities about next steps in the competition. Additionally, Rebuild by Design ensured feasibility by working alongside project regulators and government implementing agencies. Establishing consistent and nimble coordination with federal and local governments expected to implement projects also proved to be solutions in overcoming the challenges.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- For more impactful stakeholder engagement, Rebuild by Design learned that it was important to integrate engagement within the scope of the competition itself, from the beginning and to set expectations high.
- Most designers, and government operators did not have such a high and intense level of engagement with the public around infrastructure projects.
- Teams were challenged, but also met this challenge with our high standards. Additionally, Rebuild by Design learned that it was equally important to continue to be committed to engaging communities after the competition to ensure the projects are built with the same innovation and community engagement. Planning for future involvement, until the projects are built will be necessary to ensure all the work that was invested remains.

Conditions for success

- Enabling factors for success in effective stakeholder engagement include “inclusive leadership”* that supports and encourages constant and consistent engagement with local communities, academia, professionals and thought leaders and activists. This multi-collaborative approach is key to ensuring a resilient process and resilient outcomes.
- Additionally, designing the outset and scope of the competition to demand, encourage and incentivize engagement was also an enabling factor in effective engagement. Building trust with all partners from the beginning and convincing them with the narrative, the appeal, and the promise, was key. Messaging this was part of the inclusive approach, resilience through seduction with over-delivering on that promise in every stage of the process.

Other information

For more information, visit: http://www.rebuildbydesign.org.