

Sustainable Communities Innovation

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Organisation: US Department of Housing and Urban Development

Country: United States

Level of government: Central government

Sector: Housing and community amenities

Type: Communication, Partnerships, Public Service

Launched in: 2009

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI) established the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC) between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Transportation (DOT). The PSC works to coordinate federal housing, transportation, water, and other infrastructure investments to make neighborhoods more prosperous, allow people to live closer to jobs, save households time and money, and reduce pollution. The partnership agencies incorporate six principles of livability into federal funding programs, policies, and future legislative proposals. The PSC innovates place-based policy through its engagement of philanthropy and local entities, public and private, in order to affect positive change in their communities.

Why the innovation was developed

- SCI was developed amidst growing recognition that the siloed federal approach to community development was costly, complicated, and inconsistent.
 - Three US federal agencies, the EPA, HUD, and DOT, aligned to coordinate investments per this initiative.
 - The partnership awarded grant money to 143 regions and communities through two programs: the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant, which supported the creation of comprehensive regional plans and the implementation strategies for existing plans that had a goal of equitable and sustainable growth, and the Community Challenge Planning Grant Program, which was awarded to jurisdictions and localities to reduce barriers to achieving affordable, economically vital and sustainable communities.
 - Philanthropy played a pivotal role, from the partnership's incubation and design period to the launch and grant awarding phase when philanthropies engaged.
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Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction, Increase citizen engagement, Support economic growth

Main beneficiaries

Civil Society, High-risk populations, Low-income groups

Results

Efficiency

- Through cross-sector and intergovernmental partnerships within the US, grant makers and philanthropies were able to ensure that programs were working toward similar goals.
 - This prevented duplicative results and streamlined processes in communities.
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Effectiveness

- These efforts were more effective at implementing holistic community solutions to issues of equity and sustainability because they recognized the power of foundations and community actors to extend their expertise beyond grant making.
 - SCI gave philanthropy an opportunity to provide leadership, knowledge, and connections to ensure an effective implementation and successful program.
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Other improvements

Development

Design

The design of the SCI was done across US government agencies and in collaboration with philanthropy in recognition that both sectors have different strengths. The US federal government has the power to scale a program across multiple jurisdictions and with numerous stakeholders across the country. This project encouraged philanthropies to work effectively with local leaders to build capacity and convene networks in order to successfully launch programs at the community level. Please see the attached document to assess how philanthropies worked with local and federal government agencies to inform the design and implementation of the project.

Testing

- We know that housing, transportation, equity, environment, jobs and other fundamental issues are interconnected from previous experiences, so aligning resources to benefit this multitude of issues across communities was a clear goal.
 - The role of the US government in the SCI is as grant maker, so each of the SCI grantees was a test and/or pilot in itself.
 - The federal government sourced best practices from each grantee and created the Sustainable Communities Resource Center.
 - The resource center was then leveraged in communities implementing their own grant as a best practices tool.
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Diffusion

- This is an ongoing, iterative process. Place-based initiatives and policies that were innovated with SCI have been replicated in similar programs that utilize philanthropic partnerships to implement meaningful policy.
 - Other programs include Promise Zones, Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2), and Promise Neighborhoods.
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Partnerships

US federal government agencies (EPA, DOT, and HUD), civil society, and local government actors.

Civil Society, Other Public Sector

The partnerships were central to the innovation process. Philanthropy acted as conveners, communications consultants, and advocates for communities. The US federal government partnerships worked to align resources in order to provide sufficient funds for each grantee and worked closely with

philanthropies and grantees to ensure effective use of grant dollars to promote equity, sustainability, and inclusion within their communities. For more information on the individual partnerships, please read more in the attachment on each grantee community.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- SCI is exemplary of how to utilize philanthropic collaborators to leverage their knowledge of local communities and capacity to convene networks of stakeholders to affect positive change.
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Conditions for success

- It is necessary to have philanthropic partners who have the capacity to convene stakeholders as a legitimate and trusted resource in their community.
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Other information

The Sustainable Communities Initiative is unique in its engagement inter-agency and across sectors. It promotes a holistic strategy for communities through collaboration between United States government agencies, federal, state, and local, and between philanthropic entities. Recognizing the scope of the change that is meant to be affected by policy, SCI encouraged local communities to engage in the community development process. SCI created an environment of collaboration that paired US federal resources with support from the philanthropic community to create a mutual stake in success, collective impact, and accountability for these programs.

