

Systems that Encourage Innovation by Citizens

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

BUILDING BLOCK 11 OF 12 - IMPROVING PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Wikis and “crowdsourcing” are two of the most commonly used online tools for gathering citizen input. Both methods allow people to propose ideas and work together to refine and prioritize them. Some cities are building these kinds of tools into the way they govern, partly by providing incentives for people to participate. A few cities have even created local currencies that citizens can exchange and redeem for prizes or services.

Building Bonds in the Local Economy

Macon, Georgia (pop. 91,000)

Contacts: Kevin Slavin, Chairman and co-Founder of Area/Code, (212) 254-5800, contact@areacodeinc.com;
Marc Fest, Vice President of Communications at Knight Foundation, (305) 908-2677, fest@knightfoundation.org,
www.maconmoney.org/

“Macon Money” is a social networking game that builds person to person connections throughout the community while supporting local businesses. It was developed by Area/Code Entertainment and funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The game was introduced to Macon in October 2010 and completed in June 2011. Before the game started, \$65,000 worth of Macon Money was printed and distributed to residents of Macon. Each player got half a “bond” and to turn it in had to find a person holding a matching half. To find their match, players could use social media, online message boards, the Macon Money website, face-to-face events and any other appropriate ways. After a player found his match he and his “partner” decided how and where to spend their Macon Money. The total value of issued bonds was higher than the total value of Macon Money. Therefore, the players had to act fast before the organizers ran out of the money. After finding the other half of their bond and cashing it in, participants could request one more half bond and play again. Forty-one local participating businesses accepted Macon Money bills from more than 2,600 winners and redeemed them for U.S. dollars. Businesses of different kinds, including shoes and apparel, food and drink, entertainment and services, benefited from the new customers who were spending money locally. Macon Money won the 2011 FutureEverything Award for outstanding innovation in art, society and technology. Through real-world rewards, Macon Money brought together more than 3,000 diverse local residents, created social bonds, positively impacted local businesses and entertained people who lived in and visited the community.



PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Develop smarter, more widely supported policies.
- Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Use online crowdsourcing to harvest and prioritize ideas for making progress on a particular issue, or for improving a public service.
- Use wikis to involve people in creating a shared document or plan.
- Create a local currency and use it to reward citizens for generating ideas or making other contributions to problem-solving.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- Participants are recruited proactively, with a special emphasis on reaching segments of the community that have historically been marginalized or under-represented.
- They are incorporated into the regular policymaking routines on particular issues.
- They are connected to official public meetings and face-to-face deliberative processes on key issues.
- They are connected to citizen spaces in neighborhoods, schools and online settings.