

Cross-Sector Problem-Solving Teams

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure

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



Citizen Ideas, Citizen Effort

New York, New York (pop. 8,100,000)
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“Change by Us NYC” is a new website created by Local Projects and CEOs for Cities, and run by the City of New York. It’s a place for New Yorkers to put their ideas into action by creating projects and building teams to make the city a better place to live. It is supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Knight Foundation and the Case Foundation. New Yorkers can use the site to suggest ideas for improving their neighborhoods, find organizations or action teams they can join, build a new action team to work on an idea and get information and support from city staff and other experts. Launched in July 2011, Change by Us NYC already has 1,200 active members and 190 projects underway. Small grants are available for composting, tree and park stewardship and community gardening and agriculture projects.

Communities have many potential problem-solvers, working inside and outside government. Usually these people are disconnected from one another, and unaware of how they might work together. Some cities have restructured the way City Hall works to make it easier for citizens and city employees to collaborate. Other communities are establishing online processes that connect people who want to work on similar ideas.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Build a stronger sense of community.
- Tap the power of citizens as problem-solvers.
- Give marginalized voices a place at the table.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Form inter-departmental teams within City Hall — or cross-sector teams including representatives from local government, school systems and other organizations — and assign them to work with different neighborhoods.
- Establish online GPS-based systems that allow citizens to identify problems such as potholes and graffiti.
- Provide online workspaces for small groups of citizens and public employees.
- Create online processes that allow citizens to formulate ideas and then assemble in teams to implement them.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- Teams receive some basic level of support and assistance.
- Teams receive recognition for their achievements.
- 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.