

Community Involvement

An Economic Solution to Fund Cities: North America



*"We will not achieve our **economic growth aims** if we fall short in **education, public health, the environment**, and in promoting peace and security." (John Podesta – Center for American Progress)*

Increasing budget pressures are encouraging local governments to search for alternative ways to meet societal need through leveraging human resources to drive the development of public services. With basic services, public engagement can occur in the design, production, or delivery of utilities such as waste collection or education provision. Co-delivery programs go beyond involvement and engagement with the civil society, and consist of long-term relationships between a service provider and service users in which all parties make substantial resource contributions. Studies have shown that citizens are more willing to participate when the governing authority impelling such an initiative is more localized. Citizens are also being included in more administrative phases of urban governance through initiatives like

participatory budgeting and citizen planning. The following examples illustrate the possibilities for increased budget and service efficiency when cities adapt inclusive policies.

Harlem Children's Zone

The Harlem Children's Zone program represents a social project using the principle of co-delivery in one of the more difficult communities in New York City for children and families. This effort involves a "critical mass" of adult stakeholders working to improve the health and education outcomes of children in the community and a reweaving of the social fabric of the community. The project began on a pilot block in central Harlem in the 1990s and has since expanded to 97 blocks. The goal is to support children from early childhood to college to succeed and create an enriching environment as

opposed to a toxic popular culture of drugs, crime, and violence. The Harlem Children's Zone is widely heralded as one of the most successful anti-poverty programs in the county, an honor it managed to achieve without the help of federal money. Harlem Children's Zone Incorporated has a budget of \$67 million in the 2009 fiscal year. The Promise Academies component of the project has come under criticism for promoting the privatization of education in America. The project receives important, unrestricted funding from private foundations and donors to reduce dependency on public budgets and to invest in elements for which public funds would normally not be earmarked.

Participatory Budgeting in New York City

Eight council districts in New York City are currently participating in a participatory budgeting program to allocate a minimum of \$1 million of each districts discretionary capital funds. Projects being proposed and voted on (Sept. 2012- April 2013) include improvements to schools, parks, libraries and housing units. The age limit in New York to participate in the voting has been set at 16. The process began in 2011 with four NYC City Council Members turning the discretionary budget to a vote in their communities. In 2012, they were joined by four others. The three core goals of the NYC process are inclusion, equality, and

empowerment. Participating city councils work with the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP) as the technical lead and Community Voices Heard (CVH) as the lead on community engagement. The city-wide steering committee consists of several other civil society and academic partners to make the process and project a success.

Plan El Paso

Plan El Paso was adopted in March 2012 and incorporates walkable city strategies and other alternative and environmentally friendly transit modes. The plan is unique in that it represents the ideas and inputs of thousands of citizens through its extensive planning process. The Plan was written by the Planning and Economic Development Department of El Paso (Texas), along with private planning firm - Dover Kohl & Partners, yet considered opinions made at nearly 150 stakeholder meetings. The public planning process was eight weeks long, followed by citizen advisory committees over the course of a year and monitoring of comments left on a website launched specifically for the plan (planelpase.org). The process was rendered even more inclusive by making non-English speaking voices heard in the debate. The plan serves as a tool to evaluate development proposals, direct capital improvements, and guide public policy in a manner that is coherent with citizens' needs. □

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REolutions to Fund Cities

*This "Economic Solution" has been produced within the context of FMDV's **REolutions** program. REolutions, a four-year international program, offers an invitation to all urban actors to **Rethink Economic solutions** that operationalize sustainable, efficient, and resilient local development.*

Initiated by a consortium of local authority networks, REolutions concentrates on identifying, analyzing, transferring and pilot-implementing economic and financial strategies and mechanisms that have improved the impact and performance of local urban development policies.

Anchored and articulated at the regional level in a multi-actor setting, REolutions seeks to equip local authorities with the tools to integrate and operationalize a wide variety of financial resources for the endogenous development of their cities.

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