

Private Funding Is Boosting City Resiliency Against Array of Threats

Philanthropy from the private sector will become increasingly important in the face of drastic cuts in federal funding for city and state environmental programs. The Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities Program is a model for this much-needed private support of state and local sustainability efforts. 100RC is a \$164 million dollar initiative launched in 2013 that "empowers cities to design, implement, and manage proactive solutions to the challenges posed by urbanization, globalization, and climate change, including short-term shocks such as natural disasters, and long-term stresses like sea-level rise and cyber security vulnerabilities."

Cities selected for the program receive funding to hire a chief resilience officer for two years who prioritizes, coordinates, and manages resiliency activities. Cities also receive support from experts who help them develop "resilience strategies." In addition, participating cities have access to a "platform of partners" that provide technologies and services to help implement their strategies. These partners include non-profits, businesses, and universities, including Swiss Re, The Nature Conservancy, and Microsoft. Participants also are part of an established network of global cities that share information.

Far more cities apply to the Program than are accepted — over 1,000 applied for the 100 slots. Participants in the 100RC program include cities around the world, and cities in many regions of the United States participate, as the list indicates: Atlanta, Berkeley, Boston, Boulder, Chicago, Dallas, the District of Columbia, El Paso, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Louisville, Miami, Minneapolis, Nashville,

New Orleans, New York, Norfolk, Oakland, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Seattle, St. Louis, and Tulsa.

My hometown, Nashville, was recently selected for the 100RC Program. This afforded me the opportunity to participate first hand, along with other local stakeholders, in a day-long kickoff meeting — referred to as an "Agenda-Setting Workshop" — with Mayor Megan Barry and her staff, and representatives of the Rockefeller Foundation. Our group spent a full day working through several exercises aimed at identifying the potential acute shocks and long-range stressors our city faces, as well as the city's strengths and weaknesses with respect to addressing them. The experience highlighted the tremendous challenges that urban areas face as the climate warms and their populations grow.

Cities selected for the program receive funding to hire a chief resiliency officer

The process also emphasized the value of planning for resiliency in a way that not only prepares cities but makes them better places on an everyday basis — whether through efficient transit or effective ecosystem management. As Rockefeller explains, "Resilient systems withstand, respond to, and adapt more readily to shocks and stresses to bounce back stronger after tough times, and live better in good times."

Nashville's next step will be to hire a CRO and continue the six-to-nine-month process of developing a resilience strategy that sets out the city's priorities, as well as specific actions and projects. Many participating cities already have hired their CROs. In addition, about a dozen cities have issued their strategies, which set out "a call to action" for increasing resilience.

Some of these cities work with platform partners to develop and



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implement their plans. For example, Swiss Re announced in 2016 that it would help cities such as New Orleans "understand the risk exposure of critical assets under current and future climate scenarios," so they can plan for and lessen such risks. Some cities that are not in the program have also hired CROs, a preliminary indication that the 100RC may be having the intended effect.

Bloomberg Associates, an international philanthropic consulting firm, is another example of a private-sector organization that is supporting cities' efforts to improve the quality of life of their citizens. Similar to the 100RC Program, Bloomberg Associates works across numerous disciplines, including sustainability and transportation, and "enhancing citywide resilience" is among the services it offers. To date, it is providing in-depth, pro bono consulting services to about half a dozen cities. Although the approach is time-intensive, Bloomberg Associate's Adam Freed says "changing the culture," and the way that problems are defined and addressed is a "valuable approach" that can have "far reaching impact."

Cities across the United States face daunting challenges, including the effects of population growth and climate change. Private investment that builds capacity to react and endure is not only welcome but is essential in an era of meager federal support.