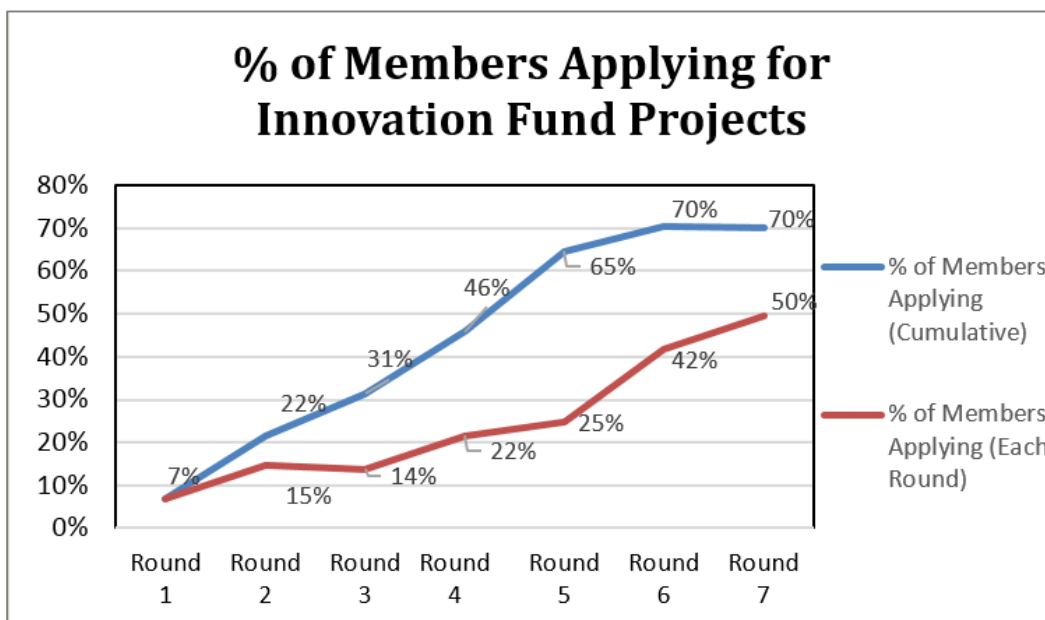


Innovation Fund Gains Ground in Popularity and Impact

The USDN Innovation Fund achieved record highs of awareness, value, and participation in grant projects. The Fund's impact is growing.

In 2014, the USDN Innovation Fund hit a new high: 50% of all USDN members participated in 1 or more letters of intent for the 2014 RFP, representing 68 total cities and counties. The cumulative percentage of member cities that have applied is 70%. In 2014 USDN member survey, 80% of USDN members said the value of the fund is high - a 20% increase since 2013, and members indicated that collaborative funding is more important than ever. In terms of USDN's value propositions, collaborative funding is now second only to peer exchange, USDN's primary value since its founding. The Innovation Fund Steering Committee still finds that even small amounts of funding can have significant impacts for the grantees and peers in the network.



In 2014, the Innovation Fund Steering Committee piloted increased financial and technical assistance as a way to strengthen grant project proposals and impact. The majority of the 20 letters of intent to propose submitted in the General RFP round requested this assistance. Since launching the hands-on, developmental process of member innovation ideas, members have noted that providing this additional support not only clarifies the project participants' thought processes but also focuses them on amplifying the impact of the completed projects. The quality of proposals is improving, as more support is offered and members increasingly understanding how to craft innovation hypotheses and metrics for measuring success.