Collective Impacts: USDN Grant Fund Investment Exceeds $2.9 Million in 2016, Supporting 57 Projects

USDN continues to align and leverage its Family of Funds to support members as they advance their sustainability goals. This issue summarizes the 2016 accomplishments of the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance Innovation Fund, the USDN Innovation Fund, Partners for Places, and Peer Learning Exchange.

Full 2016 Annual Reports for each member of the USDN Family of Funds can be accessed here. Each article in this issue summarizes highlights from each report.

What began in 2009 as a $100,000 general collaboration fund evolved into four thriving funds designed to support communities as they advance their sustainability and carbon neutrality goals. These funds are supported by national and local funders:

- The USDN Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA) Innovation Fund supports a collaboration of international cities committed to achieving aggressive long-term carbon reduction goals.
- The USDN Innovation Fund supports collaborations of two or more core USDN member communities to develop innovations that address member-identified problems or opportunities in sustainability or scale proven innovations. Projects also have observing communities.
- The Partners for Places Fund, operated by The Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, supports collaborations between a community and a local funder to build stronger relationships across sectors and support adoption of innovations in urban sustainability.
- The USDN Peer Learning Exchange Fund supports learning exchanges between two or more member communities to accelerate the spread of innovative practices.

In 2016, the funds granted a total of $2,944,991 in support of 57 different projects:

Fund Name	2016 Amount Granted	Number of Projects Supported
CNCA Innovation Fund	$879,240	8
USDN Innovation Fund	$845,600	17
Partners for Places	$1,162,951	20
Peer Learning Exchange	$57,200	12
TOTAL	$2,944,991	57

Since 2009 and by the end of 2016, these four funds have re-granted just over $9.4 million for dozens of network-driven innovation development, scaling, and adoption projects. Essentially these are high-leverage, small-grant funds, with project size averaging around $80,000.
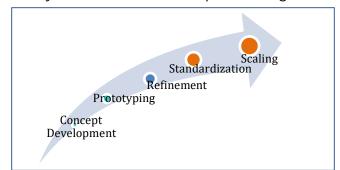
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Innovations proceed through a series of stages, divided into two categories: Developing and Scaling (progression represented in Figure 1).

Figure 1. Pathway from Innovation Concept to Scaling

- Developing (green and blue dots). Research and conceptualization, moving into prototyping, testing, and refining

- Scaling (orange dots). Spreading a proven innovation to other communities through standardization and scaling

The experience of these funds has demonstrated that local government sustainability directors:

- Continue to prioritize innovations that local governments find most important and within their control, and seek the discovery of practical, on-the-ground methods for implementation.
- Will mobilize to engage local funders, collaboratively manage projects, and rely on partner expertise to grow the field of urban sustainability from emergent to established.
- Collectively influence urban sustainability innovation undertaken by partners from all sectors from concept to scale (as show in Figure 1).

USDN begins 2017 with the implementation of their newly adopted strategic plan, and with tight coordination between the Family of Funds. This coordination allows USDN to better support multi-year and phased projects that advance innovations from concept to scale.

The goal is that lessons from all USDN supported activities inform each fund's direction, and allow local governments to continue to advance the field of urban sustainability as a strong collective voice.