

The New York Recovery Network: E-Bulletin

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Headlines

City prepares to test new post-disaster home concept

The New York City Office of Emergency Management is testing a modular home designed for transitional sheltering of disaster survivors. View up-close photos of the prototype and learn about the need for and challenges of this innovative solution.

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Improve your chances for a grant award

Before you apply for that grant, make sure you've considered these six tenets: eligibility, originality, credibility, simplicity, connectivity and sustainability. The ideas in this article may improve the odds that your proposal will be funded.

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Status report: City Build it Back being implemented

Acknowledging issues with Build it Back, city officials announce changes to the program and reaffirm their intent to keep promises to Sandy survivors. A dashboard recently introduced allows website users to track progress.

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Recovery News

[FEMA Craig Fugate tells senators to address sustainability of National Flood Insurance Program](#)

The Times-Picayune, July 23, 2014

[Gov. Cuomo announces \\$175 million to cover local costs of rebuilding after Hurricane Sandy](#)

Gov. Cuomo press release, July 23, 2014

[Climate change is not the only cause of the rise in disasters](#)

The Guardian, July 21, 2014

[New Rochelle gets \\$1.4 million in FEMA Sandy aid to repair marina](#)

Lohud, July 21, 2014

[More than 2,400 Sandy-damaged trees in Brooklyn have been removed](#)

Daily News, July 20, 2014

FEMA provides funds for Sandy-related sewage decontamination in Nassau county homes

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand news release, July 18, 2014

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July 30, 2014

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Govdelivery.com

August 4, 2014

[Public Forum: A Resilient Future for the East Bronx Waterfront](#)

Governor's Office of Storm Recovery

August 5, 2014

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LES Ready and NYC Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene

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[Associate Director of Advocacy](#)

Addressing interim housing needs after a disaster in New York City

In September 2007, almost five years before Hurricane Sandy made landfall, the New York City Office of Emergency Management (OEM) held a design competition for a special kind of housing need.

The “What If New York City... Design Competition for Post-Disaster Provisional Housing” sought innovative designs for interim sheltering of survivors following a catastrophe. The competition focused on a fictional neighborhood called Prospect Shore. It had been hit by a Category 3 hurricane, leaving 38,000 families without housing. The design contest complemented the Coastal Storm Plan (CSP), which outlined the city’s response to a coastal storm emergency. It was a prophetic vision.

The NYC Department of Design and Construction (DDC) partnered with OEM, Rockefeller Foundation and Architecture for Humanity to seek new solutions to post-disaster sheltering in densely populated centers like New York City. The traditional post-disaster temporary housing unit is not practical for crowded urban locations.

Design and development

Following the competition, OEM and DDC developed an [Urban Interim Housing Unit Specification](#), a blueprint for post-disaster housing that included requirements for safety, environmental quality, durability and universal design. A “[playbook](#)” was also created for selecting the appropriate sites with the objective of keeping survivors in their own neighborhood.

In 2012, FEMA provided funding to OEM to build a prototype and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was designated as its project manager. The resulting three-story prototype site is located adjacent to OEM headquarters in downtown Brooklyn. The units were transported from Pennsylvania by seven trucks and were assembled in 13 ½ hours on a weekend in April 2014. It will remain at the site for two years.

The critical issue is the availability of these units at the time of a disaster. There would be a four month window between order and delivery. The solution may not be helpful for immediate disaster housing but could be useful for housing homeowners who are seeking temporary housing while their damaged home is being rebuilt.

“It just won’t be [ready] fast enough [for immediate use]. But it can be a very fast second response,” says James Garrison of Garrison Architects, which designed the prototype.

Designated manufacturers will be able to produce as many as 28 units per week. Although that’s not nearly enough for a disaster situation, multiple manufacturers could be placed under contract to deliver these modular homes when a catastrophic event occurs. The units can also be built in various stacked arrangements.

The prototype

The prototype is a stacked, three-story structure, which includes a 480-square-foot, one-bedroom unit and an 813-square-foot, three-bedroom configuration. Each unit includes a balcony and

furniture that were custom-built to conform to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-standards. Elevators can be installed to service the needs of those individuals who cannot climb stairs.

Each unit includes a living area, bathroom, a fully-equipped kitchen and storage space. All units are electric, are equipped with sprinklers and have temperature-control features. The ground floor is a public gallery with various displays of the prototype development.

A live-in experiment

To evaluate the livability of the structure, the units will soon be occupied by employees of various city agencies on a rotating basis at five-day intervals. The test period is scheduled to last for a year.

There are other questions that have not yet been fully addressed:

- Where will these units be deployed? There were discussions about placing these units on waterfront piers or public housing lots but no specific locations were finalized
- How will they be financed? The target cost for the units will be \$225 per square foot which would bring the manufacturing cost of a similar 3-story structure to \$473,000. Mass producing these structures could reduce the costs.

These units may have been envisioned for temporary use but are designed to last as long as permanent housing.

Related information

About the Post-Disaster Housing Prototype Program

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/whatifnyc/html/purpose/purpose.shtml>

Urban Post-Disaster Housing Prototype Program

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/whatifnyc/html/home/home.shtml>

What if NYC...Competition Archive

http://www.nyc.gov/html/whatifnyc/html/competition_archive/competition_archive.shtml

Garrison Architects

http://www.garrisonarchitects.com/projects/buildings/oem_housing_prototype

Improve your chances for a grant award

Government agencies and foundations that make large grants are more likely to read proposals in their entirety compared to readers in smaller companies. Proposal reviewers assign points and make comments throughout the grant application. Understand every detail of the Request for Proposal (RFP) thoroughly to be successful. Do not offer more information than what is asked for but be careful that you do not provide anything less.

Here are some ideas on how to improve the odds that your proposal will be funded:

1. Eligibility. Make sure you qualify before you start the process.

Confirm your eligibility and then make sure you have proof of eligibility. According to [one report](#), the Office of Housing and Urban Development rejected 40 percent of 281 applications because the organizations were not eligible to apply. The Office of Community Services reported it rejected one out of three applications. Eligibility can be found in the RFP, Request for Applications, Notification of Funding Availability or Funding Opportunity Announcement. Requirements are not always clear. Read that section carefully and contact the grant officer to review your eligibility.

2. Originality. Your proposed project may not be as unique as you think.

You have to make it stand out among many others competing for attention. Do your homework on whether your idea or project already exists. Check to see if the grantor currently has grant awards or contracts to doing similar programs. If that is the case, your proposal might be perceived as a duplication of effort. But if you have new ideas or you can show that your proposal offers significant differences or improvements, go for it. But always research similar proposals or projects first.

3. Credibility. Show you have broad community support.

Look for community leaders, groups and organizations in your locality that **will write letters of support**. Having their support will enhance the quality of your proposal and increase your credibility. Don't overlook your local public officials and government agencies or members of academic and professional groups who are familiar with your work in the community. Support letters should reference the key points of your proposal. Remember that gathering these letters may take quite a bit of time; it's important that this effort begin in the early stages of developing the proposal. When submitting your application, clearly identify these letters and include them in the proposal's appendix.

4. Simplicity. Avoid using jargon, buzzwords and acronyms.

Technical jargon and acronyms may not be understood by the reader. Avoid vague claims, trendy language and obscure terms - they won't impress the funder and may actually cause a negative reaction. The prose must be simple. Proofread for grammar, spelling and syntax errors. Have someone read it with fresh eyes. Readability is the key to a successful proposal. To be safe, seek out a neutral third party to review the proposal working draft for continuity, clarity and reasoning.

5. Connectivity. Develop a relationship with the grant reviewer.

Many grant writers will reach a point where the RFP guidelines cannot address all the unique aspects of a proposal. That is the time when the grant point of contact (POC) may be your most important ally. Nurture your relationship early. Call the grant POC to request an application. Get to know other agency personnel you may be dealing with. Ask for suggestions, criticism and advice about your proposed project. In many cases, the more agency personnel know about your proposal, the better the chance it will be supported.

Sometimes it is useful to send a proposal summary to a specific agency official in a separate cover letter, *and ask for review and comment at the earliest possible convenience*. Before you submit a request, check with the granting agency on specific rules and guidelines on receiving feedback before you anticipate the grant announcement. If the review is critical with many corrections or modifications that cannot be resolved, ask for a recommendation to submit to a more appropriate agency. If possible, arrange for a personal visit to the agency's regional office. Facetime not only establishes a direct personal connection, but may also bring out some finer points about the proposal.

Here are some additional tips:

- a. Schedule time to speak with a grant officer for additional assistance. Don't call at the busiest time of the day (ask first) or at the end of the day with lengthy questions. Same with email. You don't want your email to sit overnight in the grantor's inbox. Don't wait until the deadline is imminent to ask additional questions. It will just show that you have not been diligent.
- b. Attend informational calls and seminars about the proposal. You will often discover tips or gather additional information from other attendees' questions.
- c. It will be too late once the proposal is submitted if you didn't follow the detailed instructions in the RFP. If you are stuck on a particular requirement, make that call immediately. Grant officers first check to see if you followed RFP instructions and may not forgive you if you missed a significant point or omitted a step in the process that should not have been overlooked.

6. Sustainability. Show or demonstrate you are prepared for a long-term commitment to your project.

After your grant funds are exhausted how will you sustain your activities? The funder wants to know that your organization won't close its doors after they've sent you the last grant payment. How will this important program that you've designed survive after their investment has ended? Simply stating that you will raise more money is not sufficient. You must have multiple avenues of additional funding including individual donations, special events or other fundraising methods. Create a realistic plan or a 'red flag' may go up against your proposal. Don't neglect long-term sustainability if you want the funder to look at your proposal favorably.

For more information, please visit the New York Recovery Network's [section on grant writing](#).

Status report: Changes to Build it Back being implemented

Build it Back has made a commitment to break ground on 500 home construction projects and issue 500 checks before Labor Day weekend.

Hurricane Sandy left about 20,000 homeowners in need of repairs to their homes. Funded through HUD's Community Development Block Grant for disaster recovery, Build it Back was developed to help survivors repair or reconstruct their homes more efficiently by cutting red tape and providing direct assistance with contractors. Unfortunately the city's program has had a much slower start than the state's program to rebuild homes.

Acknowledging the problem, Mayor de Blasio announced [changes to the program](#) in April. Since the program was changed, construction started on 132 homes. Thirty homes are fully repaired.

"We really have turned it around and changed it from a system of 'no, you can't do this for this reason,'" said Amy Peterson, director of the City's Housing Recovery Office at a news conference announcing its progress. "We have over 650 projects that have actually gotten to design, that will help us certainly get to our 500 construction starts."

Here's how they did it:

- Assigned 21 building inspectors to work exclusively with Build it Back
- Expanded eligibility for acquisition and reimbursements to homeowners
- Developed a plan to better address temporary displacement during construction
- Convened regular interagency working group meetings to set priorities
- Created a regional group to expedite services
- Increased the individual program award for businesses
- Began working directly in underserved neighborhoods
- Expanded rental assistance, in collaboration with the American Red Cross, to undocumented New Yorkers displaced from their homes by the storm

The city's [website](#) displays a dashboard with the total number of construction starts, homes fully repaired and reimbursement checks that have been mailed.