

# Civic Crowdsourcing Enabled

Local governments strapped for funds can take a hyperlocal approach to funding community projects using a new GIS-based application. ZenFunder is a web application for civic crowdsourcing that lets residents help make their community a better place to live by proposing or contributing to projects in their neighborhood.

Monies raised go directly to solving a specific problem instead of disappearing into a general municipal fund. The application is unique in that it allows residents and governments to collaborate. Because cities, elected officials, and neighborhood councils can participate without being charged processing fees, 100 percent of committed money goes to funding projects.

A funding platform like Kickstarter, ZenFunder provides a quicker way to translate a good idea into reality. Built specifically to meet the needs of local government and education, it combines "crowdfunding" with participatory budgeting. ZenFunder makes sure requirements, budgets, and assessments are completed. Organizations that join ZenFunder can use either the free or premium versions. For an annual fee, the premium version provides more robust tools for managing funds.

With either version, after a city signs up for ZenFunder, anyone can create a new project. Once a project reaches a minimum funding threshold, it is reviewed by the city. If it is not approved, the money is returned to contributors. If the project is approved, it is posted on the website along with project details, requirements, and community comments. Project locations are mapped so residents can easily find projects to fund that are nearby. Contributions can come from local government, corporate sponsors, and community members.

In recent years, funding for projects that significantly contribute to the quality of life in communities has grown scarce for several reasons. Property taxes, the major source of revenue for most local governments, were adversely affected by the downturn in real estate values that began in 2007 and has still not completely reversed itself, according to a report for fiscal year 2012 issued by the National League of Cities. To fill holes that appeared in budgets, many governments depleted their reserves, which has, in turn, caused rating agencies to downgrade them, making it more difficult and expensive to borrow funds. Funding for local projects through

the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is also a less viable alternative. Between 2002 and 2013, total grant expenditures declined 23 percent according to a report issued by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

ZenFunder offers an alternative and innovative method for meeting a community's needs. When he first learned about ZenFunder, San José City council member Pete Constant immediately recognized its potential for aiding the city. The first project was raising additional funds to complete the Calabazas Library, which has been closed for remodeling for about two years. Although \$7.6 million had been spent on the structure, no funds were set aside for stocking the library shelves. This project would raise a little over \$325,000 to improve the library's collection. Two other projects, both for pedestrian crosswalk flashing beacons to improve safety at busy crosswalks, have also been proposed.

"ZenFunder is based on the premise that if everyone gives a few dollars, we can fund important hyperlocal projects that directly benefit our community," said Constant. "This is really democracy in action."

↓ Using ZenFunder, residents can work with government to improve their neighborhoods.

The screenshot shows a ZenFunder project page for "Books Needed for the New Calabazas Branch Library". The page includes a progress bar at the top showing stages: Proposed, Requirements, Approved, Funded, In Progress, and Completed. Below this is a navigation menu with counts for Home, Contributors (0), Updates (0), Comments (0), Media (11), Questions (0), and Requirements (0). A large photo of the library building is featured, along with a map of the location. A progress indicator shows 96% completion. The goal is \$7,926,090, with \$7,600,000 provided by the city and \$0 raised. \$326,090 is still needed. A "Contribute" button is visible with a minimum contribution of \$5 and 360 days remaining. The project is proposed by Pete Constant, and a "San Jose, CA Matching Funds" banner shows \$7,600,000 provided by the city. A text block at the bottom explains the fundraising efforts in partnership with the San Jose Public Library Foundation.

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## Books Needed for the New Calabazas Branch Library

Proposed Requirements Approved Funded In Progress Completed

Home Contributors 0 Updates 0 Comments 0 Media 11 Questions 0 Requirements 0

Calabazas is a 10,000 sq ft building, with a floorplan that is very open and well laid out for the library activities. It's opening in June, but we don't have enough funding to stock the library with books and materials!

Proposed: Mar 8, 2013  
Requirements Met: Mar 8, 2013  
Approved: Mar 8, 2013  
Funding Deadline: Mar 8, 2014

Tags: library calabazas books

### San Jose, CA Matching Funds: \$7,600,000

Funds provided by: San Jose, CA

In preparation for the opening of the Calabazas Branch Library, I am leading the fundraising efforts in partnership with the San Jose Public Library Foundation to raise \$300,000 to stock the library. It is important for residents to know that there has been enough funding set aside to open these libraries, but not enough