

Michigan Municipal League

# Detroit SOUP



David Lewinski Photography



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Better Communities. Better Michigan.



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## PROJECT DETAILS:

**NAME:**

SOUP

**DATE:**

2010-Present

**LOCATION:**

Detroit, MI, has grown to several other communities across the state and nation

**CATEGORIES:**

Community Organizing/Building Entrepreneurship

**THE GIST:**

A monthly public dinner event and presentation series where attendees vote to fund small to medium-sized arts and community projects.



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## PROJECT SCOPE:

Detroit SOUP is a crowdfunding potluck that brings people together to raise money and support for community projects. Attendees make a suggested donation of \$5 and listen to four pitches from people doing great things in their community—anything from cleaning up a park, to running an after-school program, to starting a small business. Over a potluck-style dinner, attendees connect, ask questions, share ideas, and vote on the project they like the best. The winner leaves with all of the money raised at the door to carry out their project and attends a future SOUP to report on the progress of their project.

**Inspiration:**

SOUP isn't unique to Detroit and there are numerous Detroit SOUP-like projects happening across the country. Detroit SOUP started with a small group of individuals who were trying to improve their community but needed their neighbors support to do so. Detroit SOUP's vision is to work with key community leaders to help change the way people engage with the democratic process by establishing neighborhood relational hubs across the city.

Past winners include a wide range of projects, and the only criteria for submitting a proposal is that the project has to benefit the city.

**Project Scope:**

Detroit SOUP's monthly Citywide SOUPs draw a crowd of anywhere between 100 and 300 people. The size of the donation is based solely on the number of

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participants who attend and donate to the pot (literally attendees toss their \$5 into a soup pot as they walk through the front door). At Citywide SOUPs, the winner usually goes home with \$700–\$2,000.

Detroit SOUP also helps support neighborhood-specific dinners in communities across Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park. These dinners occur quarterly and usually attract a smaller audience and fewer donations. Most neighborhood dinners are able to raise anywhere from \$200–\$1,000 for neighborhood-specific projects.

### **Accomplishments:**

From the first dinner in February of 2010 to the April 2014 Citywide SOUP (a total of 71 SOUP dinners in the city), Detroit SOUP dinners have raised nearly \$67,000 for Detroit-specific projects. In 2013, more than 4,000 people gathered at Detroit SOUP dinners across the city where they shared countless connections, resources, and ideas.

In 2013, Detroit SOUP started helping interested neighborhoods start their own neighborhood-specific dinners. As of April 2014, there are nine resident groups in Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park who plan, facilitate, and execute their own quarterly SOUP dinners to raise money for localized projects.

Over the years, SOUP winners include 10 small businesses, 15 community clean-ups or beautification projects, 6 food or urban agriculture related projects, 5 art projects, and at least 15 related to youth development. Some winners were one-time events, but many have continued through the months and years since they won support at SOUP.

### **Budget:**

The cost for running a SOUP can and should be minimal, and therefore more sustainable. Organizers are usually volunteers and the venue, food and other materials are usually donated. The hardest costs to get around are printing flyers and materials for the actual event (bowls, spoons, cups, voting box, resource board, tables and chairs, etc.).

### **Funding:**

SOUP organizing groups usually start with no capital, but some local grants and key community partnerships can help with funding startup and sustainability. Some SOUP organizing groups do small-scale fundraising at the actual event (selling SOUP swag, asking for donations for drinks, etc.) to support expenses. It's best to reserve all of the money raised at the door for the winning project. It can be helpful for SOUP organizing groups to partner with community nonprofits, businesses or institutions to print flyers, offer storage space for materials, and help with low-cost outreach initiatives.

### **Participants:**

To coordinate SOUP dinners, it's important to create a small SOUP board of key stakeholders from across the community: residents, nonprofits, churches, businesses, neighborhood associations, etc. This group of 5-10 participants will be able to plan, do outreach, and facilitate SOUP dinners.



Dinner attendance is often targeted at the neighborhood or community in which the dinner is held, but anyone is welcome to come! Citywide SOUP events often attract a large audience of Detroiters, suburban residents, out-of-town visitors and people with interests in placemaking, social justice, and Detroit.

#### **Inspiration:**

After working with resident leaders across Detroit, Detroit SOUP created an in-depth manual for starting and sustaining SOUPs. The document can be downloaded here <http://ge.tt/1eUWc691/v/0?c> and there are additional resources on the SOUP website <detroitssoup.com>.

#### **Here are important steps involved in the process:**

##### **1) BUILD A BOARD.**

Finding the right people to start a SOUP dinner is key! SOUP boards should be diverse and representative of the community in order to establish the best goals for the event, expand partnerships, and draw the largest audience possible. Try to find the people who might not always volunteer for things—the younger, more creative residents and members of different cultural groups are often a good place to start.

##### **2) OUTLINE GROUP VISION, GOALS AND VALUES.**

Before the board begins planning, it's important for everyone to share the same vision, goals and values for the dinner. Why are you doing this in the first place? What do you hope to accomplish? Outlining these early on help smooth decision-making and make it easier to track progress.

##### **3) DIVIDE BOARD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.**

Everyone on the SOUP board should have an important and active role. The SOUP team should have a lead coordinator, secretary, treasurer, outreach chair, food chair (someone has to organize donations for the potluck!), proposal chair (to manage proposal submissions), and more! Make sure everyone feels valued and involved, without being overworked.

##### **4) CREATE A TIMELINE.**

Make sure everyone is on the same page! The board will need to find a great location for the event, set the event date and proposal submission deadline and start outreach.

##### **5) DO OUTREACH.**

The most important aspect to the dinner is people! Each board member should encourage their friends, family, neighbors, business partners and everyone in the community to attend the event. Print flyers, create an online presence, make presentations at community events—do everything to spread the word on how to submit a proposal and to get people to attend the dinner.

##### **6) PLAN EVENT LOGISTICS.**

Boards will need to select presenters for the event, finalize logistics for the venue, and make sure there are enough food donations and materials. Board members will need to build an agenda and divide roles for each person to take on at the event (collecting money at the door, MC, vote counters, etc.).



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#### **7) HOST THE SOUP DINNER.**

Have fun, talk to your neighbors, meet someone new and encourage others to do the same. Take pictures at the event and document details of the dinner (number of attendees, money raised, winning project details). Celebrate the success of your SOUP!

#### **8) DEBRIEF AND GROW.**

After each dinner it's important for the board to gather feedback from SOUP attendees and to meet as a group to debrief the event. From the discussion, create a to-do list to continue things that are going well and improve on issues the group outlined.

#### **9) SUSTAIN.**

To be successful, SOUPs should occur regularly (monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly). The board should work to establish a SOUP model that works best in their own community.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- Start with the right people.  
Getting a great board together is the best way to host a successful dinner. SOUP can't happen with one organizer, it needs to be a collaborative effort of community residents, businesses and local institutions. Create an environment that is creative, collaborative, and can focus on the goals of the dinner.
- Limit rules.  
Detroit SOUP only has two rules: (1) Projects have to benefit Detroit (or the specific neighborhood hosting the dinner) and (2) Presenters can't use technology in their presentation (it keeps the playing field equal, reduces issues related to technology, and keeps the short presentations engaging). SOUP is a fun, creative project, so boards should avoid too many rules—allow for creativity!



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- **Avoid complication.**  
Becoming a nonprofit is a lot of work and there's no real reason to become one to carry out SOUP events. If funding is available and necessary, it can be helpful to partner with a neighborhood nonprofit in order to act as a fiduciary for small grants, use their meeting space and store SOUP supplies. Avoid the time and legal issues of becoming a formal 501c3, unless the community and board really push for it.
- **Keep it going.**  
SOUP spreads from word-of-mouth. The longer you can sustain SOUP dinners the better! More people will come, connect, raise money, and do great things in the community.

#### **Similar Projects:**

Detroit SOUP was inspired by InCUBATE ("a research group dedicated to exploring new approaches to arts administration and arts funding," [www.incubate-chicago.org](http://www.incubate-chicago.org)) who started the idea in a neighborhood in Chicago.

#### **Documents:**

The Detroit SOUP "How-To"  
<http://ge.tt/1eUWc691/v/0?c>

Connect with past winners! Detroit SOUP has a new app for smartphones where people can see all past SOUP winners on a map of Detroit. Just visit the App Store and search for Detroit SOUP to download.

#### **Experts:**

Amy Kaherl, [detroit.soup@gmail.com](mailto:detroit.soup@gmail.com)

# The Center for 21st Century Communities

## Building 21st century communities

Experts from around the world—in academic, business, and public sectors alike—agree that investing in communities is a critical element to long-term economic development in the 21st century. Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract and retain knowledge-based workers. Central to attracting this priceless commodity is *place*. Research proves that successful 21st century communities effectively leverage the assets summarized in this brochure. Learn more and stay engaged at [mml.org](http://mml.org).

## Who we are...

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic, and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change to achieve better communities and a better Michigan.

## What we know...

Never before have so many diverse interests, from academic researchers to the business community to government leaders, shared a single conclusion: Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract knowledge-based workers. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? *Place*, specifically vibrant 21st century communities.

## What we offer...

Through its Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), the League provides education, technical assistance, public outreach, and unprecedented access to experts and resources. The 21c3 is a “one-stop-shop” for communities interested in creating and sustaining livable, desirable, and unique places that attract the highly skilled, creative, and talented workforce of the next century.



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