

Michigan Municipal League

Revolve



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Better Communities. Better Michigan.



PROJECT DETAILS:

NAME:

Revolve

DATE:

2012–Present

LOCATION:

Detroit, Michigan

CATEGORIES:

Live, Work, Play
Built Environment

THE GIST:

Revolve is a pop-up retail initiative that partners community leaders, building owners, entrepreneurs, and artists to activate vacant storefronts with transformational businesses and art installations. Businesses have included eateries, galleries, and clothing shops, among many other entrepreneurial ventures.



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PROJECT SCOPE:

The Challenge:

How can we fill vacant spaces or enliven neighborhoods when little to no market demand exists?

Overview:

Inspired by the pop-up revolution in cities throughout Europe, Revolve seeks to foster this model by building upon the evolution and vibrancy of Detroit's neighborhood business districts through a series of temporary-use projects. The program collaborates with entrepreneurs, community leaders, and property owners to collectively transform neighborhoods, starting with the West Village. Revolve also provides resources and project management to implement these projects and leverage short-term investments into sustainable long-term investments. Revolve's end goal is to fill the spaces with full-time paying tenants, punching life into the city's retail scene and creating vibrancy on once-sleepy streets.

Accomplishments:

- Invested over \$540,000 and created 40 new jobs in the first year for The Villages.
- Provided a safety net for two culinary entrepreneurs to test additional businesses.

- Launched the establishment of four new permanent retail businesses in The Villages: CraftWork restaurant and bar, Red Hook coffee shop, Detroit Vegan Soul, and Tarot and Tea.
- Created buzz about Detroit's retail and business revitalization.
- Enlivened vacant storefronts and put people and art where sidewalks stood empty.
- Spiffed up, cleaned, and renovated abandoned spaces for retail.

Organization:

Revolve is a program of the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation. While there is a single project manager coordinating the program, many volunteers including artists, business owners, and designers support the projects during the construction and deconstruction phases. It is very much a collaborative effort.

Budget/Equipment:

Pop-ups executed by Revolve range from \$5,000 to create a 5,000 sq ft coffee shop to no cost at all for some events, especially those with substantial volunteer support. Revolve relies on matching grants to help bolster its projects, and the program has committed an additional \$40,000 to develop participants' brand and marketing platform.

Funding:

In several cases, the program has also used crowdsource funding to bring projects to interested neighborhoods. This funding model worked particularly well in Lafayette Park, where neighbors wanted a coffee shop just around the corner from where they live and work. Revolve has also had significant grant support from local foundations to help build-out projects as well as private investment from building owners.

Participants:

The entrepreneurial community in Detroit is thriving. Revolve relies upon diverse participation to keep the experiences new and innovative. Culinary artists, fashion designers, performance artists, and traditional retailers have joined the pop-up revolution. Revolve projects attract customers and support from local neighborhoods, but there is also a citywide and regional draw.

Inspiration:

Pop-up is an affordable and sexy solution for economic development and a catalyst for long-term investment and economic growth. Revolve never loses sight of its end goal to have the experiences be permanent. Its structure allows businesses to experiment and to change the conversation, experience, and perspective in a neighborhood, frequently adding liveliness to its character and investment in its economy.

Actions Taken:

1) HAVE URGENCY.

The Revolve team always considers working quickly and effectively. Make a three- to six-month timeline for your pop-up project and get started. Come up with a definitive start and end date and use this to your advantage. There is no time to waste when working on temporary projects.

2) CONSIDER CONTEXT.

Each Revolve project is site-specific. A pop-up is also an opportunity to test-run small businesses, expand existing businesses in second locations, or have a temporary showcase. Choose neighborhoods with strong community organizations, good building owners, market demand, and bubbling entrepreneurial interest. Whether your goal is to fill a block of vacant buildings with pop-up tenants or host a single-day event, consider the following questions:

- Where should we pop up?
- What does this community need?
- Who could benefit from a pop-up in the community?
- Who will participate?
- What impact would you like to have on the physical space?
- What impact would you like to have on the surrounding neighborhood?
- When would be the best time to start?

3) MAKE IT LEGAL.

Revolve uses legal contracts that have been modeled after the city of Pittsburgh's pop-up program. These documents include: (a) agreement between building owner and tenant and (b) agreement between Revolve, building owner, and tenant. The license agreements describe the pop-up experience, owner requirements, free rent and/or electricity, and outline a 30-day notice for vacancy.

4) FIND COMMITTED PEOPLE.

Dedicated property owners, entrepreneurs, and community leaders are key partners for successful pop-up projects. Revolve projects have been a pretty easy sell, especially if there is a 2:1 matching grant on the table for property build-out, a commitment to innovative marketing, and additional business resources for participants.

5) SPREAD THE WORD.

Revolve spends a good bit of time and energy building its brand and its marketing campaigns. Pop-up is a great way to experiment and change the conversation and experience in a neighborhood in person and online.

6) CONSTRUCT.

Revolve relies heavily on volunteers during this phase of the project. Friends, family members, neighbors, and creatives band together to create cool spaces and experiences. All construction projects have challenges, and you have to be prepared to roll with the punches. Seek advice from local experts and borrow tools, equipment, and furniture to cut down on project costs and promote community ownership.

7) SHOWCASE THE EXPERIENCE.

Plan an opening event that will attract a variety of participants and really highlight the new business or activity. Recruit artists and consider unexpected ways to animate the space and street to attract foot traffic.

8) CONTINUE MARKETING EFFORTS.

Revolve consistently promotes new content about its pop-up projects through social and traditional media. Word of mouth will always be the strongest recruitment technique, but it is important to document and share stories about the project.



9) CELEBRATE.

Enjoy what you have created. At this stage in the game, it is important to reach out to your partners and thank them for their hard work and dedication.

10) DECONSTRUCT.

Recruit volunteers that experienced the pop-up to help you deconstruct. This is often a popular event as family and friends will come by to retrieve borrowed furniture or grab the last cup of coffee with the team. Always leave the space in better condition than when you found it.

11) PAUSE BEFORE POP.

Evaluate your experience and consider your successes and failures. Pop-ups allow you to understand what works and determine what could succeed in the neighborhood. Maybe the location needs to be shifted or the idea was not a great fit, but you are one step closer to a long-term solution.

Lessons Learned:

- You Get Out What You Put In.
“Engage with more people, find the right tenant, and it will be a better experience.”
- Failure is OK.
“There is limited risk with a pop-up, so evaluate your choices and find the experience empowering.”

Experts:

Michael Forsyth, Revolve Director, mforsyth@degc.org

Similar Projects:

Project Pop-up
Pop-up City

Documents:

Revolve Pop-up Guide—*Coming Soon*

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.

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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