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What Can the World Learn From 100 Resilient Cities?

The splashy initiative was meant to help urban areas cope with climate change. When it went under in 2019, its members got an unexpected lesson in resilience.

Before it was abruptly shuttered in August 2019, the nonprofit 100 Resilient Cities (or 100RC) had helped turn “urban resilience” — broadly defined as a city’s ability to survive, adapt and grow in the face of stresses — into a global movement. Launched just six years earlier with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, it was one of the largest initiatives to help cities cope with intensifying climate disasters and other emergencies, and to tackle the chronic challenges that stand in their way.

The nonprofit supported municipal efforts to hire chief resilience officers, provided grants and technical assistance, and — crucially — offered a forum in which its 100 member cities could share ideas and best practices.

By several measures, the program was making progress. So when Rockefeller’s president pulled its funding — which had amounted to $164 million by April 2019 — citing a “a shift in the foundation’s focus to delivering measurable results for vulnerable people,” cities were left wondering how they would continue and what would become of the movement.

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Bloomberg CityLab

By Linda Poon

October 6, 2022 at 7:34 AM PDT

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