

Pursuing Shared Value Through Partnership: A RISE Case Study on MIT Solve

About MIT Solve

[Solve](#) - an initiative of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) – aims to solve world challenges by serving as a marketplace for social impact innovation. Through open innovation challenges, Solve sources technology-focused social entrepreneurs from all around the world. Solve leverages MIT’s innovation ecosystem and a community of members (spanning corporations, foundations, and non-profit organizations) to support these entrepreneurs to help them create lasting, transformational impact. To date, Solve has held over 20 open innovation challenges, provided \$25 million in funding commitments for entrepreneurs (“Solver teams”), brokering more than 200 partnerships and impacting 33 million lives.



SOLVE

Problem We’re Trying to Solve

With over 30 percent of the world’s population living near coasts, the effects of climate change – including sea level rise, stronger storms, and ocean warming and acidification – are being experienced at an accelerated rate. Nowhere are the effects of a changing climate more destructive than in coastal areas, adversely impacting communities’ safety, housing, and livelihood at an unprecedented scale. While the challenges can seem insurmountable, coastal communities also demonstrate the incredible promise of resilience-based solutions. However, resilience – in the way it is currently designed, funded, and implemented – is often not fit-for-purpose for the communities that need it most. Often, these solutions lack innovative thinking and human-centered design often needed to look at perennial problems in new ways.

RISE Resilience Innovation Fund: How RISE and MIT Solve Worked Together

In recognition of the unique set of resilience challenges facing coastal areas, MIT Solve (Solve) sought to identify innovative solutions to support and enhance these communities. As part of their Challenge Design Workshop (CDW) series, Solve brings together social innovators from all over the world to crowdsource specific, actionable challenge questions that help shape their annual and global prize competition. RISE, through its [Coastal Community Challenges](#), shares in Solve's mission of nurturing big ideas, scaling open innovation, and promoting right-sized solutions to address complex societal challenges – particularly products and approaches that promote resilience across coastal communities.

As is often the case, the best ideas are borne out of collaboration. Demonstrating natural alignment in mission and approach, Solve and RISE decided to join forces. In the fall of 2017, Solve approached RISE to co-organize a CDW in the Hampton Roads

region of Virginia focused on coastal communities. For Solve and RISE, the joint initiative allowed both organizations to coalesce around an issue of mutual importance and leverage each other's strengths to amplify their impact.

Dr. Alexander

Dale, Solve's Sustainability Community Lead, saw these synergies from the beginning: "Our [Solve's] work demonstrates significant topical alignment with RISE. It creates a system in which RISE can leverage its network and access to funding with Solve's 'Solveathon' accelerator program – creating a direct pipeline of innovators, or 'Solvers,' who could then benefit from RISE's offerings." As Dr. Paul Robinson, Executive Director of RISE, described it, the collaboration offered an opportunity to "merge MIT Solve's well-established CDW process, global reach, and recognition in the space, with RISE's

The RISE Value Chain in Action



deep bench of resilience experts and access to the ‘resilience hub’ of Hampton Roads.”

The CDW also served as a structured opportunity for RISE to convene a broad spectrum of resilience experts and innovators across sectors to identify the most pertinent coastal resilience challenges. To prepare for the January 2018 CDW, RISE tapped into its partnership network, inviting nearly 60 local, national, and international stakeholders – including resilience leaders from the Hampton Roads area, municipal governments, military representatives, non-profit organizations, and academic research institutions. Led by Dale, the half-day CDW session brought together RISE’s partnership network to identify topics in the coastal resilience space, offer a systemic lens to view these issues, ask important questions, and drill down on five priority sub-topics for exploration. Those sub-topics – including flood management, data analytics, building viability, critical utility installation, and disconnected communities – helped inform the scope of Solve’s [Coastal Communities Challenge](#). The cross-sectoral perspectives and expertise brought by the unique consortium of CDW participants helped formulate actionable challenge questions that could be posed by Solve to resilience innovators around the world.

The CDW served as the springboard for a broader partnership between Solve and RISE. In the months that followed, Solve and RISE worked together to refine the scope of the MIT Solve Coastal Communities Challenge based on

input from participants and select “Solvers.” They then proceeded to design and host a new “Solveathon” event based in Hampton Roads, during which innovators would team up to ideate and design solutions to the problems identified during the CDW. Similar to the CDW, the Solveathon allowed RISE and Solve to – once again – benefit from their unique partnership. Solve provided their expertise in running accelerator programs to test and scale proposed solutions, and used their challenge platform to carefully select Solver teams. In turn, RISE was able to build on Solve’s pipeline and essentially pick up where Solve left off, by selecting potential resilient solutions from that pool, and securing additional funding through RISE’s \$1 million “Resilience Innovation Fund,” seeded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



Results

As a result of the partnership, Solve was able to forge stronger connections with coastal resilience experts and gain access to the resilience hub of Hampton Roads in Coastal Virginia, which served as a practical touchpoint for Solver teams to test their solutions. Through the RISE Resilience Innovation Fund, Solve was also able to well-position its cohort of Solver teams to become embedded in RISE's value chain – with the ability to apply for additional funding and further refine, validate, and advance their solution on the ground, as well as scale them into viable businesses. For RISE, the collaboration with Solve resulted in access to a pipeline of innovators who could benefit from additional resources to further advance and apply their resilience solutions in the “Living Lab” of Hampton Roads – a key part of RISE's model. RISE has also continued to leverage Solve's validated CDW structure, well-established process of running events, and visibility in the space as effective tools to bring the right stakeholders together.

In addition to the mutually reinforcing impacts of the partnership for each organization, Solve and RISE have also amplified lasting project impacts for Solver teams by embedding them within RISE's value chain.

RISE's partnership with Solve is one built on shared values, natural synergy, and a willingness to collaborate. Their partnership demonstrates the value of cross-sector participation, which is critical in sourcing and scaling solutions that can systemically address resilience challenges both in coastal Hampton Roads and around the globe. As new challenges arise in the coastal resilience space, RISE and Solve will seek to identify additional opportunities to join forces, yet again, and tackle these challenges together.

GROW Oyster Reefs

Evelyn Tickle is an architectural designer and founder of GROW Oyster Reefs, a company specializing in concrete reef building substrate products that dramatically increase the productivity of oyster reefs. GROW is an example of a Solve finalist that was able to successfully navigate Solve's process and later be selected as one of the teams chosen to obtain funding and business development support through RISE's Resilience Innovation Fund.

After participating in the Hampton Roads Solveathon – a partnership between Solve and RISE – Tickle was selected as one of the teams for Solve's Coastal Communities Challenge. As a Solver, Tickle benefitted from what she described as Solve's "ecosystem of support" – providing hands-on mentorship, refinement and validation of GROW's business model, as well as connections to new partners in other coastal cities, past Solvers, and other team members within her cohort.

Building on Solve's pipeline, RISE's regionally focused coastal resilience Challenge served as a natural next step for GROW's evolution. As one of the six recipients of RISE's "Resilience Innovation Fund," Tickle received additional funding, targeted business development, and mentorship support through RISE's accelerator program. Through RISE, Tickle was able to "build GROW's business model on a firm foundation and benefit from RISE's access to networks in the resilience space" and has continued to benefit from RISE's roster of mentors and "Resilience Innovation Hub"—RISE's workshop fabrication space. With funding and support from both Solve and RISE, Tickle has been able to build commercial-scale manufacturing processes to fabricate products for building additional reefs, test her product at several sites in Hampton Roads, and, as a result, help take her business to the next level.

Ready to Get Involved?

Without collaboration, solving our most complex resilience challenges remains outside of our reach. Partnering with RISE can advance your resilience goals, amplify your message, and maximize your impact. [Get in touch](#) with us to explore partnership opportunities!