

# Inside Philanthropy

## Is There an App for That? An Innovative Push to Cut Teen Pregnancies

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If you hang around the philanthrosphere, you hear a lot of talk about how a new generation of technology and business entrepreneurs use out-of-the-box approaches to solving the globe's most pressing social and health problems. But as we have pointed out, some of that supposed next-wave philanthropy, while certainly laudable, looks a lot like traditional philanthropy—wealthy people giving money to research and other institutions to fund the search for progress and breakthroughs.

Well, here's one new program that really is attempting to apply disruptive innovation to a serious social concern—teen and unplanned pregnancy—while also using an increasingly popular tactic in the philanthropy playbook: competitive awards.

Earlier this month, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy announced a call for entries for its new Innovation Next Awards, providing \$2.3 million in grants “to develop innovative technology-based approaches to preventing teen pregnancy.”

In its first round, the new awards program will give \$80,000 to 10 different teams. Selected teams will attend workshops on “design thinking” from IDEO, the Silicon Valley design and innovation firm. Five of the 10 teams will receive up to \$325,000 to develop their ideas into testable products.

You may have heard the phrase “design thinking” in connection with business or technical innovation, or problem-solving in a wide variety of situations. One of the central tenets of design thinking is the inclusion of the target audience in the process of creating a new product, process, brand, or whatever. It's hoped that this leads to greater empathy with the target audience and a multidimensional understanding of the situation that will drive the most creative and successful solutions. Teen pregnancy is, indeed, a complex issue that triggers lifetimes of repercussions for the mother, the children, the larger family and the rest of society. It contributes to poverty (especially child poverty), child abuse and neglect, father absence, low birth weight, school failure, and poor preparation for the workforce. Only 38 percent of girls who have a child before age 18 graduate high school.

Although the notion of design thinking has been used for decades in engineering, architectural and other circles, it achieved true buzzword status starting in the 1990s, popularized by IDEO and its founders. So it is not a complete surprise to find that IDEO is a key partner in the Innovation Next awards.

The National Campaign says it has already successfully used design thinking to develop Bedsider.org, a program to help 18- to 29-year-old women avoid unplanned pregnancy. Bedsider combines a website, mobile app, social media community, college campus outreach program, and a birth control resource for medical providers and their patients. According to the National Campaign, Bedsider is the first digital intervention in reproductive health in the U.S. with adults as an audience that has been shown to prevent unplanned pregnancy. The new awards will attempt to build on Bedsider's success to help younger teen girls.

The submission period runs from December 15, 2015, through January 31, 2016. Professionals from all backgrounds are encouraged to apply.

It's worth noting that we've reported on several initiatives in other areas that have sought to use technology, particularly mobile phone texting, to improve social or educational outcomes. With nearly every young person these days carrying a phone, there's a lot of hope that these devices can be tapped to help them lead better lives.