

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Action Grant Case Study

Municipality: Town of Great Barrington

Project Title: CARE GB: Climate Action Resilience and Equity

Award Year (FY): FY21-22

Grant Award: \$ 81,800

Match: \$ 25,460

Match Source: In-kind and cash

One or Two Year Project: 2

Municipal Department Leading Project: Planning

Project Website URL: n/a

Community Overview:

- *What is the population size of your community and where is it located?* 7,100. Berkshire County.
- *Do you have any [Environmental Justice](#) or other Climate Vulnerable communities? (Think about both those who live and work in your town.)* Yes, Great Barrington has identified EJ communities based on income, plus other climate vulnerable communities such as an aging population and a growing number of minority populations and non-English speaking populations. People of color, immigrants, low-income, and/or non-English speaking individuals stand to be most affected by current and future emergency scenarios, climate change related or otherwise, yet they are often underrepresented in conversations about climate change mitigation and adaptation. And people who are lower-income or on fixed incomes are especially vulnerable to climate shocks and high cost of living, including high energy bills needed to stay cool during increasingly hotter temperatures.
- *Other unique traits of your municipality like who the top employers are, geography, history, etc.* Great Barrington setting in a river valley surrounded by forested mountains was the foundation for the 18th and 19th Century farms and industry on which the Town developed. And since the 19th Century the same scenic traits have made the Town a destination for tourists. Today, while the local economy depends on tourism and the service sector – generally low paying jobs – the area’s housing market is superheated by professionals and retirees moving to the area from metropolitan centers. Like many tourist towns, Great Barrington’s workers are spending more of their income on basic goods and can no longer afford to live in the Town in which they work. Household budgets are stressed by high housing, transportation, food and energy prices.

Project Description and Goals:

- *Where was the project located?* This was a Town-wide project.
- *What climate change impacts did the project address?* This was a broad project meant to address multiple public health impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities.

- *What were the specific goals and tasks of the project as stated in your application?* The goal of this project was to build a more resilient Great Barrington—one that has the tools to continuously build capacity to mitigate the impacts of and adapt to climate change. The keys tasks centered on working with trusted community partners to coordinate outreach and engagement to marginalized and underrepresented stakeholders and community groups, so that the Town would better understand the needs of these communities and implement actions so these groups can better adapt to and mitigate impacts of climate change.
- *Did your project meet the goals set forth in your application in terms of:*
 - *Employing nature-based solutions:* A key goal here was to educate groups about food production strategies that could help provide some self-sufficiency and which would also promote soil enhancement and pollinator habitat. We achieved this through partnerships with local farm who created and implement a youth and BIPOC food-based event.
 - *Improving equitable outcomes for and fostering strong partnerships with EJ and other Climate Vulnerable Populations.* This was the focus of our grant and we believe it was a success. New relationships were forged and/or strengthened between Town staff and volunteer Board members and a variety of service providers outside of government who serve underrepresented groups, e.g., nonprofit partners BRIDGE, Woven Roots Farm, and the South (Berkshire) County Food Access Collaborative, plus representatives from Construct, Inc. and Berkshire Grown who participated in our training and trust building process.

This project increased climate resiliency for EJ and climate vulnerable populations in Great Barrington by engaging and training town officials and key stakeholders in cultural competence, equity, and inclusion. The project built the town's capacity to center marginalized and vulnerable populations as it implements climate change preparedness and adaptation projects, and will ensure that future planning is equitable and inclusive of these communities. This project set the groundwork for future planning efforts critical for increased resilience of climate vulnerable populations.

- *Providing regional benefits.* This was not an explicit goal of the project, but we believe the engagement strategies and process are important models for other communities to follow. In addition, some of the individuals, partners, and nonprofits who participated in this process work regionally, so lessons learned will be transferred to other communities. Finally, the four key issues we learned about through this engagement process, and where future implementation projects will focus, are regional by nature. These are: transportation, housing, access to land for growing, and welcoming public open spaces.
- *Implementing the public involvement and community engagement plan set forth in your application.* The project engagement plan was successful. We utilized bi-lingual print, digital, and in-person communications to reach community partners and engage community members in the project.

- *Finishing the project on time.* The project finished on time.

Results and Deliverables:

- *Describe, and quantify (where possible) project results (e.g. square footage of habitat restored or created, increase in tree canopy coverage, etc.). Report out on the metrics outlined in your application.* Year 1 realized 10 weeks of intensive trust-building, cultural competency and climate justice trainings for Town staff and board members. This was via Zoom because of the pandemic. Year 2 included additional training with the Selectboard and Planning Board, a parks celebration event, and a youth BIPOC gathering. Project partner BRIDGE connected the town with Spanish speaking and minority populations and through their social media connected with over 2,000 followers on Facebook and nearly 1,000 on Instagram. Key town staff and boards received trainings including all members of the Selectboard and of the Planning Board, as well as the Planning Department and Town Manager's office.
- *Provide a brief summary of project deliverables with web links, if available.* Deliverables included the meeting modules for the trainings discussed above, as well as meeting outcomes including key themes and areas for action that emerged from the engagement process. Year 2 deliverables included a parks celebration event, a BIPOC youth gathering, additional board trainings, and a bi-lingual parks map/brochure. Additionally, on a parallel track to the MVP project, the Town's Agricultural Commission received a Mass EEA Planning grant delivered a robust food/agricultural planning engagement process and resulting report entitled "Growing Better Great Barrington" (GBGB). All of the project documents plus the GBGB report are gathered into the following google folder for the MVP program to access.
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1i3PR_78WgFfX508aoO7nb1z5f9BeHAX0?usp=sharing

Lessons Learned:

- *What lessons were learned as a result of the project? Focus on both the technical matter of the project and process-oriented lessons learned.* Unlike a construction project with a clear end result in mind, this project was at its core a social engagement project. It was as a participatory and iterative project, and from the beginning we did not necessarily know what the results might be. The more discussions we had, the more we learned about projects that would center underrepresented populations and projects that would meet their climate change mitigation and adaptation needs. The process of outreach, of discussions, and of continuing engagement took an immense amount of staff and volunteer time. It was very much worth it, but it was also much more intense than any of our core team anticipated.
- *What is the best way for other communities to learn from your project/process?* The grant materials provide a useful snapshot of each task, but the best way is to reach out to Planning staff or our volunteers.

Partners and Other Support:

- *Include a list of all project partners and describe their role in supporting/assisting in the project.*

Town of Great Barrington Strategic Sustainability and Livability Committee (SSL): these were members of the Core Team responsible for the development and implementation of this grant.

Town of Great Barrington Agricultural Commission: these board members developed and implemented the parallel grant process funded by Mass EEA.

Town of Great Barrington Assistant Town Manager: key staff implementer of the grant.

Multicultural BRIDGE: Subcontractor to the Town, delivered services under Year 1 and Year 2 of the grant.

Woven Roots Farm: Subcontractor to the Town, delivered Year 2 services.

Project Photos:

- *In your electronic submission of this report, please attach (as .jpg or .png) a few high-resolution (at least 300 pixels per inch) representative photos of the project. Photos should not show persons who can be easily identified, and avoid inclusion of any copyrighted, trademarked, or branded logos in the images. MVP may use these images on its website or other promotional purposes, so please also let us know if there is someone who should receive credit for taking the photo.*

Unfortunately, all of our photos have people who can be easily identified. Other materials are included in the google folder.