

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Action Grant Case Study

Municipality: Springfield

Project Title: People-focused Resilient Redesign and Retrofits for community/civic Infrastructure and critical facilities in Springfield MA

Award Year (FY): FY21

Grant Award: \$ 210,422.00

Match: \$ 75,889.64

Match Source: In-kind match funding

One or Two Year Project: one year

Municipal Department Leading Project: Disaster Recovery & Compliance

Project Website URL: <https://www.springfield-ma.gov/planning/index.php?id=636>

Community Overview:

- Population: 153,060
- Location: Hampden County, Western Massachusetts

Springfield is the Commonwealth's third largest city and one of several cities that is a majority people of color city. Almost the entirety of the City is highlighted in the Massachusetts EJ viewer. Springfield functions as a gateway city for migrant Puerto Ricans and immigrants and refugees from Central America, Vietnam, Eastern Europe, and African nations.

While the City is the employment and economic center for the region, most high paid workers live outside of Springfield, while City residents are more likely to be undereducated, and in low-paying positions or unemployed. City residents experience poverty and economic inequalities at higher rates than the rest of the state and continues to grapple with the consequences of systemic racism. The poverty rate in Springfield (before the effects of COVID) was 28.6% compared to the MA average of 11.1%. The median household income is \$37,118 versus the MA median of \$79,835.

Project Description and Goals:

- Project Location: The proposed work benefitted the whole city. However, the benefits of the projects were targeted to elevate the voices and feedback from EJ populations. Additionally, resident advisors were recruited with a focus on neighborhoods highlighted in the EJ viewer.
- What climate change impacts did the project address? The portfolio of projects was focused on improving trust between residents and local government, improving knowledge and understanding of city resilience initiatives, to address equity in public hiring, and reduce vulnerability for the City Hall complex that houses the center of Springfield City Government, the city's IT infrastructure and 311 resident call center
- What were the specific goals and tasks of the project as stated in your application?
 - Create a Resilient Springfield Resident Advisor Council that consisted of non-profit, social justice stakeholders, residents and senior city staff and department heads.

- Develop an improved communications/outreach strategy focused on more effectively reaching the City’s most vulnerable populations.
- Provide improved information to residents and neighborhood councils around action undertaken to improve the City’s resilience and implement the Climate Action and Resilience Plan
- Complete a racial equity in public employment assessment
- Complete a microgrid feasibility study for the Springfield City Hall Complex.
- Did your project meet the goals set forth in your application in terms of:
 - Employing nature-based solutions and Improving equitable outcomes for and fostering strong partnerships with EJ and other Climate Vulnerable Populations: The City’s strategy was focused on the human infrastructure and the intersection between human vulnerability to climate change and systemic disadvantages that increase the vulnerability of EJ communities. The projects did work towards building trust with residents, but that work is an ongoing process that must continue to be carried forward.
 - Providing regional benefits The City’s project was designed to be replicable to other gateway cities that experience similar issues with building trust and strengthening relationships with their most vulnerable populations. The City included a report on replicability within our submission.
 - Implementing the public involvement and community engagement plan set forth in your application: The City did implement the public involvement and engagement plan set forth in the application.
 - Finishing the project on time: The project was completed on time.

Results and Deliverables:

- Please see attached chart with deliverables and enclosed documentation.

Lessons Learned:

- One of the big takeaways from our projects is that the City has to do better communicating with our most vulnerable residents and that building trust is ongoing and continuous process. Our process revealed that the City is often doing work that residents support, but that the City isn’t doing a great job publicizing those projects to a wide swath of residents.
- Our microgrid feasibility study has demonstrated the importance of communication with eversource and working with them going forward to try and make the project feasible. It also has brought to the forefront the likely need for these types of projects to be prioritized with legislation and for utility companies to be brought to the table around how to create a smoother process for entities looking to explore and undertake these projects.

Partners and Other Support:

The City worked with the following entities to recruit and support resident advisors participation in the Resilient Springfield Council

- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- Public Health Institute of Western Mass
- Wayfinders
- Neighbor 2 Neighbor
- ARISE for Social Justice

Additionally, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission assisted the City with capacity building around residents and neighborhood councils, by providing strategies and information around how neighborhood councils can better communication with residents and how residents can be more engaged in the process.

The City contracted the following entities to complete studies and/or reports:

- Bloomworks, Inc., was responsible for developing an improved communication/outreach strategy.
- ARUP, Inc., was responsible for the microgrid feasibility study for the Springfield City Hall Complex.
- HR&A, Inc., was responsible for completion of an equity in public employment study.

Project Photos:

- Springfield's project did not include any construction and was focused on building human resilience. We have photos of the virtual resident advisor council meetings, but the instructions provided request that no individual person be easily identifiable in photos and that is not possible with the type of projects Springfield did.