

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Action Grant Case Study

Municipality: Chelsea (with Revere and Winthrop)

Project Title: Envisioning Resilience in the North Suffolk Region through Community Preparedness

Award Year (FY): 23-24 (extended from only FY23)

Grant Award: \$ 87,500

Match: \$ 29,175

Match Source: in-kind

One or Two Year Project: originally 1, now 2

Municipal Department Leading Project: Housing and Community Development

Project Website URL: <https://act.allacesinc.com/nsors>

Community Overview

The North Suffolk Region includes the cities of Chelsea and Revere and the town of Winthrop, located directly north and west of Boston. Their combined population is about 120,000 residents, a majority of whom meet one or more Environmental Justice criteria. Many residents are immigrants from around the world, and many of those are undocumented, leading to challenges of communication and access to services and resources. As a result of geography and historic disinvestment, the region is exposed to a range of climate hazards: coastal flooding, stormwater flooding, extreme heat, and poor air quality. The North Suffolk Office of Resilience and Sustainability was founded in 2021 to address climate adaptation and mitigation on both a municipal and regional scale, and the regional nature of this project stems from both the interconnected networks in this region and from the municipal relationships cultivated across the region by NSORS.

Project Description and Goals

This project explored community-based resilience across the North Suffolk region. Specifically, the project sought to understand how municipalities (across departments) are preparing for emergencies, how community-based organizations are connected to those plans (if at all) and what the opportunities are to fill gaps and make connections to ensure that emergency planning for climate impacts will reach and meet the needs of all regional residents. As such, this project addresses all climate impacts.

Our project had four phases, with some overlap:

1. **Municipal and community organization interviews.** These were conducted in-house by NSORS staff in the fall/winter of 2022, and a summary of findings explored highlights and takeaways from these conversations, which reached 19 municipal employees and 19 CBOs.
2. **Creation of a steering committee.** Chelsea contracted with All Aces Inc to lead the remainder of the phases, the first of which was the creation of a steering committee to

guide the community engagement and the process of developing recommendations. The committee was comprised of mostly CBO representatives with one staff person from each municipality, and met approximately monthly in spring-fall 2023 to guide the project.

3. **Community engagement.** With the guidance and participation of the steering committee, All Aces conducted outreach and engagement at 7 community events in the summer-fall of 2023. They collected 214 survey responses exploring what Chelsea, Revere, and Winthrop residents would do and need in the case of a climate emergency, and how they would/would not rely on the City and other organizations to meet those needs.
4. **Recommendations.** Based on the interviews, steering committee input, and resident surveys, All Aces drafted a set of recommendations for the North Suffolk region as we work to integrate community organizations and residents into municipal emergency preparedness plans.

As a regional project, this effort helped to develop and strengthen relationships between the three municipalities and local CBOs, a clear regional benefit. It also engaged residents, organizations, and municipal employees throughout the process. By choosing to work with CBOs and attending events that specifically serve climate vulnerable populations, we hope that we were able to include and even center the concerns and perspectives of those residents of the North Suffolk region. This project received an extension (from FY23 until FY24) and finished on time as per the amended contract.

Results and Deliverables:

As a result of this project, the North Suffolk region has a clear series of next steps for pursuing a local resilience network. This will likely be a hybrid of several models: physical resilience hubs, a communication network that allows for better communication between residents, CBOs, and municipalities, and emergency preparedness resources for CBOs. All Aces provided a list of key next steps as well as cost estimates for these steps, positioning NSORS to pursue additional funding for these overlapping projects in the future. NSORS is also connected to two prospective MVP Action Grant proposals put forward by the Resilient Mystic Collaborative that would explore regional resilience hubs and two-way emergency communication in greater depth.

This project had three main deliverables:

- Summary of Interview Findings (early winter 2023)
- Background research on Existing Models (May 2023)
- Final Report (2024)

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.
- What is the best way for other communities to learn from your project/process?

Going into this project, we assumed we might choose one “model” of resilience network to pursue – physical hubs, communications, trainings/resources for organizations, or maybe something we hadn’t considered yet. Ultimately, the recommendations show that we need all of these to create a truly robust network – physical spaces to provide resources, CBO support to ensure that everyone can collaborate and to ensure continuity, and communications to keep all stakeholders connected. This reframing of the project – with the recommendations focus on more *how* to create a network rather than *what* it would look like – are so helpful as we consider how to operationalize these ideas.

From a process perspective, this process emphasized that projects like this should be 2-year projects at minimum, because most projects with robust community engagement components can generally not be completed in the 10 months of a grant cycle. We felt very fortunate to receive an extension, but know that we cannot count on this and will plan more buffer times for similar projects in the future.

We are excited that much of the learning from this project will be incorporated into two upcoming RMC projects focused on resilience hubs and communications, which will serve as an important way that local communities can learn from our project. Municipalities beyond the Mystic River Watershed can contact NSORS to read our reports and learn more.

Partners and Other Support:

This project was led by the North Suffolk Office of Resilience and Sustainability, a regional office that supports the City of Chelsea, the City of Revere, and the Town of Winthrop. All three municipalities were actively engaged in this project, participating in the steering committee, interviews, and a municipal focus group.

Many community-based organizations were also involved. The following CBOs participated in interviews; those with an * also served on the steering committee, meeting monthly for approximately 6 months during the core of this project.

Al-Huda Society	San Lucas Episcopal Church
Beth Israel Deaconess Health Care Chelsea*	Revere CARES*
Chelsea Community Connection*	Revere Mobile Market*
Chelsea Jewish Lifecare*	Temple Emanuel
Community Action Programs Inter-City (CAPIC)*	The Neighborhood Developers*
GreenRoots	The Salvation Army*
Healthy Chelsea	Winthrop Casa*
Housing Families	Winthrop Mothers Out Front
Jordan Boys and Girls Club, Chelsea	Women Encouraging Empowerment

Project Photos:

A few representative images from engagement events: Revere Sandcastle Festival, Revere Senior Center Luau, Chelsea Back-to-School event. We did our best to meet residents where they were!

