

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Action Grant Case Study

Municipality: Town of Montague

Project Title: Montague Comprehensive Plan

Award Year (FY): FY 2022

Grant Award: \$ \$80,000

Match: \$ 28,800

Match Source: Town of Montague

One or Two Year Project: Two Year

Municipal Department Leading Project: Planning & Conservation Department

Project Website URL: www.montagueplans.org

Community Overview:

- What is the population size of your community and where is it located?

The Town of Montague has 8,580 people and is located in Franklin County, MA along the Connecticut and Millers Rivers.

- Do you have any [Environmental Justice](#) or other Climate Vulnerable communities? (Think about both those who live and work in your town.)

The Town of Montague has 4 Census Tracts that are considered Environmental Justice due to income. The MVP 2.0 process has identified the following Climate Vulnerable communities in town: unhoused residents, renters, low-income households, households that speak a language other than English, immigrants/asylum seekers/refugees, people of color, older residents, youth and parents of youth, people with a disability, people dealing with substance abuse issues and people in recovery, LGBTQ+, and neurodivergent residents.

- Other unique traits of your municipality like who the top employers are, geography, history, etc.

Montague is located in the Connecticut River Valley with fertile farmlands and a history of hydropower. It is composed of 5 villages and has historically relied on manufacturing for an employment base. This still remains true, although the largest contributors to the tax base are now energy producers and the town's economy has been diversifying, including outdoor recreation.

Project Description and Goals:

- Where was the project located?

The project is located in the Town of Montague.

- What climate change impacts did the project address?

This project created a long range Comprehensive Plan for the Town. This plan incorporates climate change, its impacts, and resiliency throughout its discussions and recommendations to help steer the town over the next 10-15 years.

- What were the specific goals and tasks of the project as stated in your application?

Goal: To incorporate climate resiliency into the Montague Comprehensive Plan

Tasks: 1) Project involvement, management, and reporting; 2) Public involvement and community engagement; 3) Prepare a sustainability and climate resiliency chapter of the comp plan; 4) Prepare a housing chapter of the comp plan; 5) Prepare a transportation chapter of the comp plan; 6) Prepare a community facilities and services chapter of the comp plan; 7) Prepare an economic development chapter of the comp plan; 8) Prepare a land use & zoning chapter of the comp plan; 9) Complete Comprehensive Plan.

- Did your project meet the goals set forth in your application in terms of:
 - Employing nature-based solutions
 - *Nature-based solutions, policies, and projects have been incorporated into the Sustainability and Climate Resiliency chapter of the Comprehensive Plan.*
 - Improving equitable outcomes for and fostering strong partnerships with EJ and other Climate Vulnerable Populations
 - *Enhanced outreach to EJ and other Climate Vulnerable Populations was conducted for community engagement. New methods of outreach were piloted including hiring community liaisons and specialized focus groups. Transportation, childcare, and translators were provided for workshops and meetings. All advertising materials were also translated into Spanish. These efforts allowed the team to reach out to EJ and Climate Vulnerable Populations much more successfully in the past. Survey results were largely representative of the population's composition.*
 - Providing regional benefits
 - *As part of community engagement, the project team also partnered with a number of regional social service agencies to gather additional insight into vulnerable populations. This partnership has strengthened the relationships between these organizations and the larger region providing a stronger regional network.*
 - Implementing the public involvement and community engagement plan set forth in your application
 - *The public involvement and community engagement was very successful for this project, although there were important lessons learned throughout the process. The original proposal was to hire a community liaison that would assist the project team with outreach to vulnerable*

populations. Finding a liaison, working out the payment and employment structure with the town, and managing the liaison's time/projects turned out to be very difficult and not as effective as hoped.

- *The original application called for 3-5 Steering Group meetings in the first FY and 4-6 meetings in the second FY. It was not an issue to have that many meetings in the first year as many of the tasks were getting started and input was needed. However, 4-6 meetings in the second year became too many for the Steering Group and not necessarily a productive use of the group's time as tasks become more underway. The Steering Group asked that the Project Team pivot to having more meetings with municipal boards and committees to ensure that there was buy-in and support from different perspectives at the town level who will be implementing the plan. The Steering Group was still included in many communications so that they were aware of project/task status.*
- *Finishing the project on time*
 - *There were no issues with finishing the project 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.
 - *Public participation metrics:*
 - *Attendance numbers: February 2023 Workshop – 100 people, March 2023 Virtual Workshop – 40 people, June 2024 Open House – 80 people, June 2024 Virtual Open House – 6 people. Mass in Motion Focus Group – 15 people.*
 - *www.MontaguePlans.org Website engagement: 1,271 views and 656 visitors as of 6/12/24.*
 - *Survey responses: 352 (4% of total population)*
 - *Favorable Votes of Adoption from Planning Board, Select Board, and Montague Town Meeting (measurable within 6 months of grant timeframe).*
 - *These votes have not yet occurred.*
 - *Adherence to the Implementation schedule of the Comp Plan (measureable within 2-5 years of the grant timeframe)*
 - *Implementation of the Plan has not yet begun.*
- Provide a brief summary of project deliverables with web links, if available.
 - *The primary deliverable for the project is the Five Villages: One Future: Comprehensive Plan for Montague, which can be found at the project website www.montagueplans.org. This website also summarizes the public engagement that occurred as part of the planning process for this project.*

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.

The primary lesson learned for this project was that using a Community Liaison as a way to reach under-represented populations was a much harder task than anticipated. Finding a person to serve as a liaison was time-consuming. Determining how the liaison would be paid within the fiscal structure and policies of the Town's finance department was also problematic. It was necessary to outline clear activities and projects for the Liaison, which was bit of chicken-and-egg scenario, in which the Project Team were hoping to use the insights of the Liaison into the target community to steer their activities.

Another lesson learned was that mailing postcards to all households and businesses in town to advertise public engagement opportunities was a very effective method of communication for the Town of Montague. As a result of the postcards, many new residents attended the final Open House that had not been previously engaged in the process previously.

Expecting too many meetings from a Steering Group was another lesson learned. In order to keep residents and stakeholders invested through the process, it is important to respect their time and use it effectively.

Overall, the process was phased well and allowed for good public outreach at various stages of the project, while ensuring that the deliverables were completed.

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

Before using a Community Liaison, think through how one would locate a person willing to be one, exactly what their scope of work would be, and the financial/employment implications of their position with municipal staff. Also be sure to allocate enough staff time/funding to manage the liaison – more is needed than you think.

Partners and Other Support:

- Include a list of all project partners and describe their role in supporting/assisting in the project.
 - *Franklin Regional Council of Governments – regional planning agency staff were hired by the Town to assist in the writing and completion of the public outreach process and plan writing.*
 - *Steering Group – composed of 21 residents and business owners in Montague representing many different aspects of town. Provided input and advice on ways*

to best conduct community engagement, as well as feedback on draft surveys, memos, findings, and draft chapters.

- *Chapter Subcommittees – a Steering Group subcommittee was formed for each chapter of the plan and were composed of Steering Group members, relevant Town officials, and other residents with an expertise on the topic. Reviewed draft chapters and provided comments and feedback.*

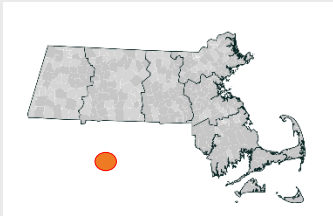
Project Photos:

- 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.

Montague Comprehensive Plan



Montague FY23/FY24



www.montagueplans.org

AWARD \$80,000

MATCH \$28,800

PROJECT TYPE Planning

CORE PRINCIPLES DEMONSTRATED Building community capacity for climate resilience; achieving broad and multiple community benefits.

DESCRIPTION This project created a long range Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Montague – *Five Villages: One Future*. This plan incorporates climate change into all aspects of the plan and recommends implementation strategies to increase the town's resiliency.

