

Report on how other Gateway cities could replicate Springfield's work on "Resilient Communications"

Lack of confidence in city government emerged as an issue in Springfield's Community Resilience Building process. The city applied for an MVP Action grant in 2018 to address this problem but was not funded. The city continued to work to implement the recommendations of our [Strong, Healthy & Just: Climate Action & Resilience Plan](#), and made significant progress on a number of priority actions. Eventually we were funded for a similar project in 2020-2021 and we know that other Gateway cities that have a comparable gap in trust between the city and their majority Black and Brown residents could replicate our work to systematically build trust by improving communication.

One of the key lessons learned from this process is that it is important to do the work as best you can with the resources you have and keep applying for outside funds but never give up and never stop working. Commitment will show through to your residents; when the city assessed status of the 2017 SHJ plan in 2021 we were gratified to learn that we had made progress on 81% of the 54 top priority actions.

After Springfield was severely damaged by a June 1 2011 tornado, city department heads from Public Works (DPW), Planning and Economic Development (OPED), and Parks, Buildings, Recreation and Maintenance (PBRM) started meeting regularly and were eventually successful in securing over \$17 million from the National Disaster Resilience program. We learned that breaking down silos in city government is key to success in combatting the climate crisis--reducing GHG emissions and building community resilience, and it is also essential to improving communication with residents. If city Department Heads and their senior staff do not know what their colleagues are doing and do not have a habit of collaborating across departments and effectively communicating with one another, it is very hard for the city to communicate well with its residents. Everyone both inside of and outside of large institutions can feel the culture of the institution and if it is a culture of silos and keeping information close to the chest and not sharing unless required to do so, this mode of operating will filter out to residents. Happily, so does a culture of cross department collaboration and open communication.

The Coalition of organizations, entities and people who came together to develop Springfield's Climate Action & Resilience Plan including the newly connected city departments referenced above and the regional planning agency, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, with the Public Health Institute of Western Mass and the grassroots community organizing group, Arise for Social Justice effectively modeled open and transparent collaboration and communication. Our strong relationships with one another and the resulting trust enabled us to join forces and secure a very competitive grant from the [Kregse Foundation's Climate Change Health Equity initiative](#). The coalition learns from success and based on members' experience of collaborating on other projects in Springfield; we expanded our coalition to include Wayfinders Community Development Corporation focused primarily on housing but with a small community building and engagement staff as well as the Springfield Neighbor to Neighbor group. Comfortably acknowledging and identifying gaps in our coalition and knowing how to fill them is a hallmark of our success.

Securing a strong outside consultant to honestly and openly assess how the city communicates with residents during times of crisis and disaster was essential. We drafted an RFP and advertised it and sent it to firms identified through research and conversations within the coalition, but only one entity responded. Fortunately for us, the respondent, [Bloomworks](#), is a very well qualified consultant with a track record of success in this work.

Building on success and taking the time to grow trust is essential to the success of this work. From 2018 to the end of 2020, when this work started, our coalition members had three years to deepen our working relationships and grow trust. One way we did this is by building on and using existing successful initiatives. Wayfinders started their [Resident Health Advocate program](#) in 2018; we consulted with their staff and the Resident leaders as we designed our City Department Head/Resident Council. Indeed several of the Resident Council members have been trained as Resident Health Advocates by Wayfinders.

Allow plenty of time for process and relationship building. We met only seven times for one hour over six months and we still devoted at least 20 minutes of that precious time together to building relationships, getting to know one another, and establishing trust. As government workers we can sometimes fall into the trap of prioritizing product over process. For the work of building trust and improving communication, process is the product and you cannot skimp on it.

Building trust and improving communication takes hard work and requires a significant role from city residents. Our Resident Leaders were compensated for their time and were also supported by organizations to make sure they could successfully participate in this work. Our work took place during the pandemic so we could not share meals, but we do recommend building food and informal socializing into your work plan as well as providing for child care and transportation to and from meetings.

Feel free to reach out to Tina Sullivan at the Springfield Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience [Resilient Springfield - Climate Action and Resilience \(springfield-ma.gov\)](#) and Catherine Ratté, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, cratte@pvpc.org 413/285-1174

Summary of lessons learned and advice for replication

- do the work as best you can with the resources you have and keep applying for outside funds but never give up and never stop working
- breaking down silos in city government is key to success in combatting the climate crisis-- reducing GHG emissions and building community resilience, and it is also essential to improving communication with residents
- learn from success
- Comfortably acknowledging and identifying gaps in our coalition and knowing how to fill them is a hallmark of our success
- securing a strong outside consultant to honestly and openly assess how the city communicates with residents
- Building on success and taking the time to grow trust is essential to the success of this work
- Allow plenty of time for process and relationship building
- For the work of building trust and improving communication, process is the product and you cannot skimp on it
- Just as city staff are paid for their work it is essential to compensate Resident Leaders for their time and knowledge