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A New Initiative for Massachusetts Smaller Cities

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The Boston Fed announces the Working Cities Challenge, an initiative to advance collaborative leadership in smaller cities and support ambitious efforts to improve the lives of low-income residents.

Smaller cities in Massachusetts have faced an uphill battle. Most are former manufacturing centers grappling for decades with job loss and its spillover effects. They have higher unemployment and lower college attainment than the rest of the state. At the same time, the cities have assets. They are centers of their respective regions, with richly diverse populations, and are home to dozens of colleges, universities, and hospitals.

The Road to Growth

Boston Fed research has shown that smaller cities' ability to spark economic growth and development depends on the ability of leaders to work together. Such collaboration is most successful when the public, private, and nonprofit sectors develop a shared vision and agenda, and when the collaboration includes grassroots participation.

Building on these research findings and our belief in the abil-

ity of these cities to recover and become centers of regional growth, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston is launching an initiative aimed at identifying and supporting collaborative leadership in small cities in Massachusetts and is laying the groundwork for a possible future rollout to other New England states.

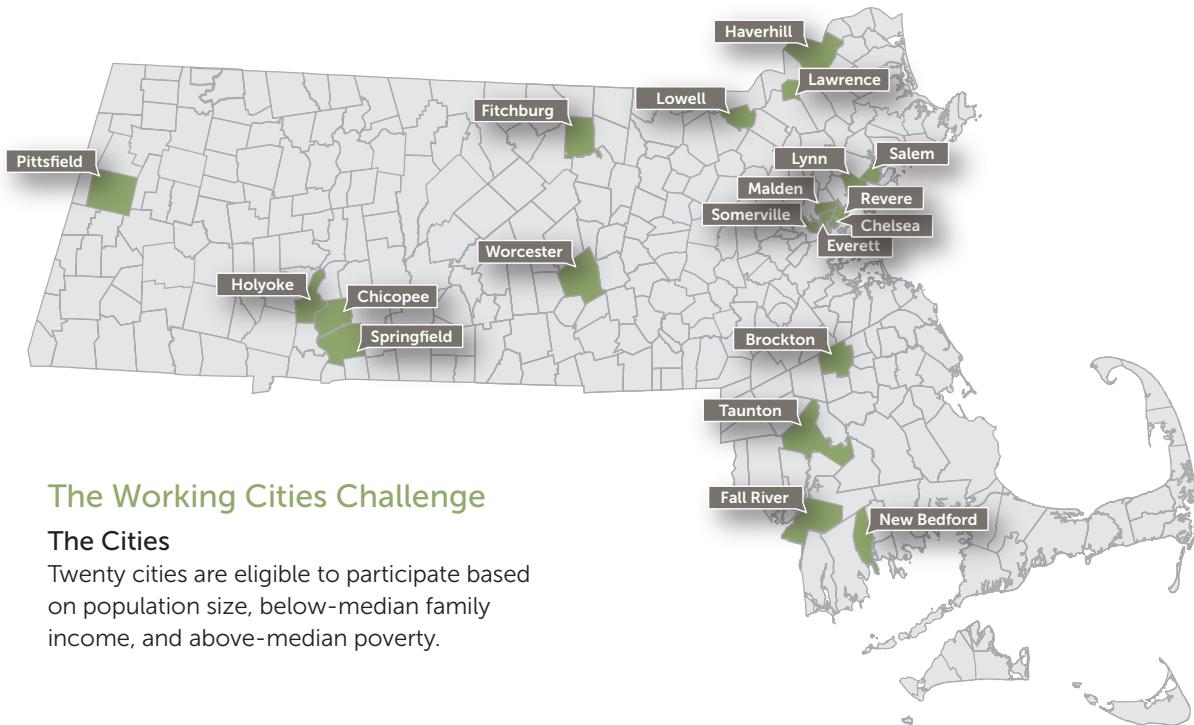
The competition, or challenge, will provide grants to promising efforts that exemplify and advance cross-sector collaboration and have positive, long-lasting outcomes for low-income people and communities in those cities.

The Working Cities Challenge

The Working Cities Challenge aims to (a) advance collaborative leadership in Massachusetts smaller cities and (b) support ambitious work that improves the lives of low-income people in those cities.

The Challenge operates as a competition for grants to promising efforts that strengthen working relationships between public sector, private sector, and nonprofit leaders in these cities, working together on a shared goal that has a positive impact on low-income people and neighborhoods. Winners will be chosen by a jury of experts, excluding the Boston Fed, and will receive awards of up to \$700,000 over three years.

Additional cities with promising projects will receive smaller seed grants. All applicants will need to raise a 20 percent match with a combination of local funds and in-kind resources. Cities that don't make it to the finals will still benefit because the competition will



The Working Cities Challenge

The Cities

Twenty cities are eligible to participate based on population size, below-median family income, and above-median poverty.

be bolstered by networking and training opportunities for participants. We will also work with winners to access philanthropic debt for qualified projects.

It would be up to each city to propose a suitable initiative. The lead enterprise can come from any sector, not necessarily the municipality. A successful effort must be able to show the possibility of a demonstrable, measured impact for the low- to moderate-income residents of a city over the long term. Such efforts might arise in the following areas but are not limited to them:

- transit-oriented development to better link residents to job opportunities
- anchor-institution-driven economic development
- integrated approaches to education and workforce development
- deep and lasting transformation of urban real estate such as public housing and industrial land
- fostering of entrepreneurship, including efforts that build upon the documented growth in Latino-owned businesses
- public health or public safety

Whether a collaborative brings all parties together to give urban youth better alternatives to crime—or to welcome and support refugees and immigrants or to make sure all children are reading at grade level by age eight or to turn old warehouses into multipurpose innovation hubs—we hope you will submit an ambitious project that demonstrates how people who don't usually work on the

same thing are sharing roles and responsibilities and are proposing a change likely to have an impact long after the Challenge is over.

The following cities are eligible to participate: Brockton, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Fall River, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, Malden, New Bedford, Pittsfield, Revere, Salem, Somerville, Springfield, Taunton, and Worcester. They were selected based on population size (between 35,000 and 250,000) and being above the median poverty rate and below the median family income for their peers. The cities have a combined population of 1.25 million and an average poverty rate of 21 percent.

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To learn more, visit the website
www.bostonfed.org/WorkingCities.



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