

Working Cities Challenge

Final Assessment of Round I Progress

FINAL REPORT

May 2018

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Executive Summary

Overview of Working Cities Challenge

In May 2013, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (Boston Fed) formally launched the Working Cities Challenge: An Initiative for Massachusetts Smaller Cities. The Working Cities Challenge (WCC) encourages and supports leaders from the business, government, philanthropy, and nonprofit sectors in smaller, postindustrial cities to work collaboratively on innovative strategies that have the potential to produce large-scale results for low-income residents in their communities. Ultimately, the Boston Fed expects that the teams' efforts will build the cities' civic infrastructure leading to long-term improved prosperity and opportunity for residents in Working Cities.

The Boston Fed developed a competitive process for city selection in which a jury chose the winning cities with the grant award varying based on the strength of the cities' proposals. WCC announced in early 2014 the award of a total of \$1.8 million in grants to six working cities. The competitive grants included four implementation grants ranging in size from \$700,000 to \$225,000 over a planned three-year period awarded to Chelsea, Fitchburg, Holyoke, and Lawrence. In addition, WCC awarded two smaller \$100,000 one-year seed grants to Salem and Somerville. Based on the assessment of progress at the midpoint of the implementation period, the Boston Fed extended the grant cycle slightly and augmented the implementation grants. Following a second juried competitive application process, the Boston Fed awarded each of the four implementation cities an additional \$150,000 and extended the grant period through September 2017, making implementation a full three-and-a-half years. Beyond the grant funds, the working cities have received technical assistance and opportunities for shared learning and peer exchange. While perhaps less tangible than technical assistance, but no less important, the working cities now have greater visibility and new forums for access to funders as well.

The Working Cities Challenge represented a groundbreaking approach among the regional Federal Reserve banks. At the time WCC launched, no other regional Federal Reserve Bank had engaged in the community in this way. While other public, private, and philanthropic funders provided all funds distributed to the cities, the Boston Fed served as the backbone organization for the initiative, responsible for its design and implementation. The following organizations contributed to the grant pool made available to the working cities: MassDevelopment, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Living Cities, The Boston Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Move The World Foundation, Hyams Foundation, Ford Foundation, Massachusetts Competitive Partnership (MACP), MassMutual Life Insurance, Suffolk Construction, New England Patriots Charitable Foundation, Partners HealthCare, State Street Foundation, and Boston Private Bank & Trust Company.

Introduction to city-specific initiatives

The four cities selected varied approaches to their WCC initiative. Following is a summary of their focus and strategies:

Chelsea—Chelsea Thrives: The Chelsea team, led by The Neighborhood Developers, Roca, the city of Chelsea, and the Chelsea Public Schools, originally outlined a neighborhood-focused initiative that targeted the high rates of poverty and transience in the Shurtleff-Bellingham neighborhood. The team's initial strategy focused on the creation of a cross-agency data-sharing platform and three workgroups that it assigned the tasks of increasing private sector investment and the inspection of rental units, improving

quality of life through community engagement, and creating an integrated system to better connect residents to workforce training and educational services. By mid-2015, the team found that its effort involved a level of complexity with so many potential strategies that focus and resources were a challenge. With support from the Boston Fed, Chelsea Thrives adopted a new shared result in the fall of 2015 with a clear focus on public safety. With this revised result, Chelsea Thrives expanded its leadership group and reorganized to become a “table of tables,” a place that the multiple initiatives in Chelsea that all had activities relevant to public safety could meet, align strategies, identify gaps, and collaborate. Several large-scale efforts fall under the Chelsea Thrives’ umbrella, including prevention and intervention of substance use disorder and trauma; engaging residents to increase safety; youth protective programming; and improved physical environment—addressing problem properties and investing in new projects. While Chelsea Thrives staff played a leadership role in advancing some of the work related to youth and community engagement generally, each strategy has its own “champion” to move the work forward with Chelsea Thrives playing a coordinating role.

Fitchburg—ReImagine North of Main (RNoM): The Fitchburg team, led by the same four core partners over the course of the work—the city of Fitchburg, Montachusets Opportunity Council (MOC), NewVue (previously the Twin Cities Community Development Corporation), and Fitchburg State University (FSU)—has focused on the same 10-year vision for improving the North of Main neighborhood, but its strategies evolved substantially over the three-and-a-half years. RNoM initially pursued a complex set of strategies involving a combination of activities focused on the residents (i.e., early childhood education and improved access to services) and on the physical environment (i.e., cleaning up the neighborhood and focusing on specific built environment projects). Over the last year, the leadership team has come to recognize that it was spreading itself too thin and has narrowed and shifted from six to three key strategies: neighborhood development, economic development, and community engagement. RNoM now focuses on revitalizing the downtown through economic development strategies, addressing neighborhood development work through a focus on housing market conditions, and marketing the neighborhood as a gateway to arts and culture. The team is also trying to strengthen its efforts to engage neighborhood residents and to build more diverse leadership.

Holyoke—SPARK: The Holyoke team, led by the Greater Holyoke Chamber Centennial Foundation, involved several core partners including the city of Holyoke Planning and Economic Development Department, Holyoke Innovation District, Holyoke Public Library, SCORE, and the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center (MSBDC). SPARK first established a trio of programmatic activities to promote entrepreneurship, train existing and aspiring business owners, and prepare entrepreneurs to start a new business. SPARK eventually shifted from a program implementation orientation to an emphasis on strengthening the overall ecosystem and culture to support Latino and citywide entrepreneurs. This ecosystem orientation led SPARK to work with more partners, to seek to understand and improve the coordination and integration of partners’ services, and to address more barriers to business start-up and growth, including regulations, financing, and space.

Lawrence—Lawrence Working Families Initiative (LWFI): The Lawrence team, led by Lawrence CommunityWorks as the backbone organization and the Lawrence Public Schools, also involved the leadership of the city of Lawrence’s Office of Business and Economic Development, local workforce development service providers, ValleyWorks Career Center, Northern Essex Community College, and, toward the end of the initiative, the Lawrence Partnership. Much of LWFI’s efforts involved direct engagement with parents. LWFI worked to develop a system of parent engagement, coaching, job search support, referral to services and training, and to provide ESOL classes. The locus of activity is the Family Resource Center (FRC), a hub within the central administrative offices of LPS. As the initiative evolved,

LWFI recognized that it needed more intentional strategies for engaging employers in order to accelerate progress toward its shared result. In the latter part of the initiative, LWFI capitalized on a competitive state grant to collaborate with the Lawrence Partnership to support strategies involving local hiring and piloting of employer-driven workforce development efforts.

Evaluation focus


This evaluation seeks to document interim progress in a complex long-term change effort relying on a theory of change developed collaboratively and iteratively with the Boston Fed. Working Cities Challenge has a vision of achieving population-level change in communities over a 10-year period. WCC seeks to make change in communities through two pathways. The first WCC pathway to achieving change in the working cities is through a cross-sector collaborative effort aimed at addressing a specific shared result identified as a priority by each city. The second pathway to achieving change is through improving the cities' civic infrastructure, thus enabling the community to not only address its WCC-articulated result but also to better tackle other opportunities and challenges in service of revitalization and improved economic outcomes for low- and moderate-income residents. The Boston Fed theory of change asserts that if teams effectively apply four core elements—collaborative leadership, community engagement, evidence-based decision-making, and system change—in their work that the community is likely to see improvements in its civic infrastructure. The Boston Fed broadly defines civic infrastructure as “how well different sectors of a community—businesses, government, schools, community organizations, etc.—recognize interrelated interests so they can function together, across their different goals and perspectives to achieve outcomes that would benefit the public at large rather than privileged groups.” The evaluation team worked with Boston Fed staff to articulate a pathway that leads from the application of the four core elements in service of the city's shared result to the long-term civic infrastructure as well as economic and quality of life gains expected at the end of 10 years. Considered interim outcomes, the indicators of progress at the end of implementation are as follows:


- teams achieve progress toward the shared result;
- collaborative leadership is sustained and expanded;
- use of the core elements has deepened, is valued, and is diffusing within the partner organizations;
- there is greater resident engagement, and residents see value from engagement; and
- cities generate external recognition of their progress.


This evaluation focuses on how the work unfolded in each of the Round 1 cities and explores what the cities have achieved during the implementation period both in terms of progress toward the shared result and in terms of gains in the cities' civic infrastructure.


Interim progress on shared result

Each city developed a unique approach specific to advancing toward its shared result, so progress looks very different across the cities. This evaluation examines outcomes, both programmatic as well as system-oriented, that the Round 1 cities have achieved over the WCC implementation period as well the perception of impact to date on low-income people.

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All cities achieved measurable progress on their shared results in some form. The violent and property crime index in Chelsea dropped; Holyoke helped launch more than 30 new businesses; resident perceptions of Fitchburg’s North of Main neighborhood improved and the downtown shows modest improvement; and Lawrence helped more than 200 parents gain employment.
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Each of the WCC teams has demonstrated substantial progress in terms of system change in service of its shared result. Some system changes are subtle, such as shifts in what types of organizations are engaged in the work, the depth of relationships among stakeholders, or the perspectives or priorities of stakeholders engaged in the work. Other system changes are more concrete, such as changes in policies, practices, or resource allocations. Some examples of system change include stronger referral networks, new collaborative practices among unlikely partners, new city policies, and realigned resource flows. According to the survey of WCC stakeholders, 67 percent of WCC survey respondents report having made changes in policies, practices, or resource allocations (human or financial) in their organization in support of their city’s initiative goals.
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While only three years into a 10-year goal, the stakeholders in the four communities see an impact from the efforts for the intended beneficiaries of the work: low-income people. Three-quarters of engaged stakeholders across all four working cities believe the local WCC efforts have already made a difference for low-income people in their community.
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At times, the cities were challenged by either their own definition of the result or by lack of means to fully measure progress on their goal. To sustain and accelerate progress will require more strategic thought to how outcomes to date fit in a larger continuum of progress toward cities’ long-term result.

Contribution to civic infrastructure

This evaluation finds substantial evidence that the WCC teams have generated outcomes for their respective communities that extend well beyond progress toward their shared result. WCC appears to have influenced *how* organizations individually and collectively engage in community change work. Taken in aggregate, these changes represent improvements to the civic infrastructure of the working cities.


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The impact of Working Cities Challenge on the collaborative leadership of the Round 1 cities appears to be the most significant and profound outcome of the initiative. In all cities, stakeholders noted dramatic improvements in the level of collaboration. Teams saw significant benefits associated with that collaboration including less competition among nonprofits for resources, new partnerships supporting aligned efforts, greater alignment of municipal support with community priorities, and new levels of anchor engagement.
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WCC made progress in breaking down silos among key sectors including cities’ stronger relationships between nonprofits and municipal departments and a substantial increase in engagement from educational institutions and the business community.
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WCC teams have generally embraced the other core elements (community engagement, evidence-based learning, and system change), and teams have an increased awareness of the elements’ importance going forward. The degree to which teams see the core elements having contributed to

the shared result varies with system change seen as more directly contributing to the shared result than community engagement or evidence-based learning.


 **WCC helped position the working cities to attract outside recognition** of the positive achievements within the city, thus helping them to compete successfully for new resources to support their efforts. According to analysis developed by the Boston Fed and the city teams, WCC has helped to leverage over \$10 million in the four cities to support work related to the cities' shared result.


 **Teams demonstrate commitment to sustain the work going forward.** According to the survey, 93 percent of stakeholders believe that the organizations collaborating on WCC in their city will still be working together toward the desired result in three years.


 **Stakeholder perception of overall WCC impact on the cities is quite strong.** In total, 93 percent of survey respondents believe their city is better off because of their WCC efforts. The impact of Working Cities Challenge on the collaborative leadership of the Round 1 cities appears to be the most significant and profound outcome of the initiative.


WCC outcomes beyond winning cities

Working Cities Challenge impacted the thinking and, in some cases, actions of multiple stakeholders beyond those located in the winning cities.

 **WCC's greatest influence is on Massachusetts-rooted organizations where the Boston Fed has had sustained contact,** often through the WCC steering committee, the group that oversees the work of both Round 1 and Round 2 of Massachusetts' WCC implementation.

 **Two of the best examples of the ripple effects of WCC are perhaps MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative and Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development's Urban Agenda grant program.** In both instances, the WCC model aligned with, reinforced, and influenced the approach to cross-sector collaboration in key initiatives these two powerful statewide agencies introduced.

 **Stakeholders were most apt to adopt elements of WCC related to collaborative leadership,** although there are some examples of influence related to each of the core elements. While stakeholders certainly did not consider collaboration as a new concept, several stakeholders noted that their appreciation has deepened as a result of WCC. Stakeholders mentioned looking to WCC to learn about what it takes to make collaboration effective and have watched with particular interest aspects that appear important to collaboration such as dedicated staff and a strong lead organization.

 **The Boston Fed's role as the convener and backbone of the initiative has catalyzed new thinking nationally about the potential and possibilities of non-traditional conveners.** While stakeholders noted the particular benefits the Boston Fed could offer—the brand name, the connections to the business community, and the research capacity—the lesson drawn was to think about the unique

strengths that would benefit a specific initiative and then consider the unusual players who might bring those strengths to the table.



WCC influence on the other Fed branches has been slow to take hold, but recently there are promising signs that other branches are at least considering what a WCC-like effort might look like in other regions.



Influence on the non-winning cities appears less significant than was hoped at the outset of the initiative. While non-winning cities have continued some of the work toward the goals articulated in their WCC proposals, there is little evidence that the principles and core elements WCC espouses have shaped their approaches. The impact on non-winning cities is generally lighter and often colored by some resentment and negativity about the loss following the extensive application process.

Lessons

The experience of the WCC Round 1 sites offers insights for funders, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to make meaningful change for low-income people in small cities.

Shared result

- 1. Cities' choice of a shared result impacts the progress.** When teams landed on a shared result that resonated with the community as a key priority, energy and participation were strongest. When teams articulated a goal that was clear, concise, and understandable, they were better able to engage new stakeholders and build momentum. When multiple stakeholder groups could identify in the progress toward the shared result a clear benefit relevant to their constituency, collaborative energy appeared stronger. When the team articulated a result that was both ambitious and measurable, they were more likely to balance multiple strategies, programmatic and system-oriented, in service of the goal.
- 2. Neighborhood strategies pose challenges in terms of clarity of the result, making it difficult to focus and prioritize efforts.** When a city selects neighborhood improvement as a result, teams can struggle with issues around whether they choose strategies to improve the physical place or to improve the economic well-being of residents even if that means those residents choose to leave the targeted neighborhood. Efforts that tried to balance people- and place-based neighborhood strategies spread themselves thin and may eventually need to find ways to narrow and focus the work.
- 3. Flexibility to pivot based on learning and feedback is critical to team progress.** From the outset, WCC communicated to cities that this initiative was different from a traditional grant program that would expect teams to adhere strictly to the work plan laid out in their initial proposals. Teams that were willing to step back and re-evaluate their approach often accelerated progress after the period of reflection.
- 4. Aligning with other tables can be important** and may be a useful alternative to building all the capacity within a single table. The Round 1 cities demonstrated the potential of alternative governance structures to WCC's initial vision of establishing a single cross-sector table that includes all stakeholders relevant to achieving the shared result.

- 5. The teams' ability to attract and leverage external resources is an accelerant for the WCC efforts.** While WCC awards were valuable in providing funds for backbone support, such as the initiative directors' salary and, in some cities, in supporting pilot activities, for cities to make substantial progress toward their shared result, teams often needed to secure additional external funds.
- 6. Pre-existing civic capacity accelerates progress on the shared result.** The Round 1 cities that started with higher baseline levels of collaborative leadership and community engagement appear to have made more accelerated progress toward their shared result.

Collaborative leadership

- 1. Consistent, clear WCC messaging and support on collaborative leadership reaped benefits.** The WCC investment in backbone capacity of the lead organization—in particular in supporting an initiative director and in providing teams with adaptive leadership training that included key competencies needed for complex collaborative work, ongoing coaching, and peer support (among the initiative directors)—all appear to have facilitated the improved relationships.
- 2. Collaborative tables are generally most effective when everyone at the table has a specific role and task for which they are responsible.**
- 3. A strong initiative director is critical to building and sustaining collaboration** as well as moving the group forward in service of its shared result. The initiative director fulfilled administrative and analytical functions. The initiative director often served as the face of the initiative, which required strong communication skills. Most importantly, the initiative director played a critical role in weaving the network of stakeholders needed to move the work forward.
- 4. City engagement and aligned support is an accelerant, but is most effective when balanced with high-capacity organizations and leaders from other sectors.** In addition, active engagement and support from the next tier of city leadership needs to accompany mayoral support.
- 5. Business engagement appears most likely to occur through intermediaries** that represent the business community with limited engagement of individual businesses. Business engagement is more likely when strategies offer a clear and direct business interest, such as downtown improvement or small business development.
- 6. Cities demonstrated significant growth in collaboration among existing leaders and more limited progress with respect to building new leaders.** The experience of Round 1 cities would suggest that new leadership is not likely to increase significantly without greater intentionality and intent placed on that outcome.

System change

- 1. System change can be an important contributor to progress, but the types of system change may be more likely to be informal practice changes than formal policy changes.**
- 2. System changes are more likely to emerge from partner collaboration than planned policy change.** Many of the system changes emerged from getting the right people around the table who shared a commitment to a common vision and a sense of ownership of the work that involved looking at how their own organization could operate differently.

Evidence, data, and learning

- 1. The cities generally proved most adept and found greatest value in using data for learning at the early stages of strategy formation,** but need further assistance to use data for testing, assessment, and learning related to the strategies they have implemented.
- 2. Developing systems for sharing data can be valuable, but also challenging, to implement.** Multiple teams noted the value of breaking down silos among organizations with respect to data. Despite the value that teams recognize, developing formal data sharing systems and, in particular shared databases, can be quite time consuming and complicated by both technical challenges and privacy concerns.
- 3. WCC would benefit from having a more sharply defined point of view and set of supports for cities to support evidence-based learning.** Round 1 cities clearly understood that the teams' use of data was a priority for the Boston Fed, but teams generally did not appear to have a nuanced understanding of its role or its limitations.
- 4. Developing a rich approach for evidence-based learning may require dedicated, experienced capacity.** Teams often turned to the initiative director to implement the team's data strategy, but these leaders may not necessarily be the most appropriate people in terms of experience, skill set, or time to bring an approach to fruition.

Community engagement

- 1. When backbone organizations hold deep community engagement experience, teams are more likely to integrate engagement into implementation,** and the team is more likely to see the contribution of engagement in service of the shared result.
- 2. The "community" to engage may need to have multiple definitions.** Community engagement and resident engagement are oftentimes interchangeable terms, but the Round 1 cities highlight the point that community engagement at times needs a more specific definition of community, particularly for efforts not targeted on a specific neighborhood.
- 3. WCC would benefit from greater clarity on the anticipated role and purpose of community engagement.** The Round 1 cities pursued a range of activities under the banner of community engagement with varied intended outcomes, including general community building, advocacy, research for strategy design, program recruitment, and leadership building. Teams may benefit from additional discussion with Boston Fed staff about the intended initiative goals of community engagement in service of the individual city's shared result and building civic infrastructure.

Reflections on the initiative

- 1. The esteem and credibility brought by WCC's association with the Boston Fed as the convener provide a boost to the initiative both for cities and in the field.** In its dedication to WCC, the Boston Fed sent a powerful signal to the working cities and to the field about the value and importance of New England's small cities.
- 2. WCC's learning orientation and its embrace of adaptation is a powerful model.** Each of the Round 1 cities understood and appreciated the difference in the WCC approach from traditional grants that often carry an expectation to adhere to the work plan laid out in the original proposal.

3. **WCC asks the cities to embrace system change, but the Boston Fed has yet to fully grapple with the potential of an initiative-wide role in catalyzing broader system change** that could benefit both winning and non-winning working cities. While the Boston Fed itself is not in a position to engage in advocacy, the governance structure overseeing the initiative, either in its current form or perhaps through some modifications in its membership or structure, could consider a more activist role in developing an enabling environment in the state that can better support and accelerate the cities' efforts.

4. **WCC continues to grapple with the balance between city progress on a specific shared result and improvements to civic infrastructure.** WCC's revised theory of change emphasizes civic infrastructure gains as the primary pathway to improving the lives of low-income people, but the messaging to the working cities on that vision appears less explicit. As WCC continues in other cities throughout New England, the initiative may need to tackle the natural questions that arise about the balance between progress on the shared result vs. civic infrastructure gains.

1 Introduction and Overview

History and design of Working Cities Challenge

In May 2013, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (Boston Fed) formally launched the Working Cities Challenge: An Initiative for Massachusetts Smaller Cities. The Working Cities Challenge (WCC) encourages and supports leaders from the business, government, philanthropy, and nonprofit sectors in smaller, postindustrial cities to work collaboratively on innovative strategies that have the potential to produce large-scale results for low-income residents in their communities. Ultimately, the Boston Fed expects that the teams' efforts will build the cities' civic infrastructure leading to long-term improved prosperity and opportunity for residents in Working Cities.

The Boston Fed's interest in this approach emerged from the institution's own research that found a number of small cities had been able to either maintain or recover much of their economic stability through a combination of strong leadership, collaboration across sectors and institutions, and clear and broad-based strategies. Noting the importance of collaboration, the Boston Fed sought models that might incent or advance that practice in other struggling cities. The Boston Fed found a model in the work of Living Cities, a national philanthropic collaborative devoted to improving the lives of low-income people and the cities in which they live. Specifically, the Boston Fed adapted elements of Living Cities' The Integration Initiative (TII), which had used a model of cross-sector partnerships focused on system change to benefit low-income people in five major cities around the country since 2010. While Living Cities had applied the model to cities like Detroit, Michigan; Baltimore, Maryland; and Cleveland, Ohio, the WCC took the key principles and sought to apply them in smaller cities in Massachusetts. To determine which small cities it would deem working cities, the Boston Fed developed the following criteria: cities that have a population between 35,000 and 250,000, family income below the median, and a poverty rate above the median for all similarly sized Massachusetts cities. The 20 working cities include Brockton, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Fall River, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, Malden, New Bedford, Pittsfield, Revere, Salem, Somerville, Springfield, Taunton, and Worcester.

WCC relies on a competition model in which only the strongest applicant cities receive funding. The WCC invited all 20 working cities to apply for the grant funds. The application process extended over a roughly nine-month period from the initial outreach in the communities until the announcement of the winning cities. There were a number of steps in the application process during that time including an invitation to submit a letter of intent followed by workshops for stakeholders from each of the applicant communities. While cities could submit multiple letters of intent, by the time proposals were due in the summer of 2013, the Boston Fed only accepted one proposal from each city. Ultimately, a jury of external, unbiased experts made the city selections. The jury rated the cities on a set of clearly defined criteria broadly encompassing the following areas: degree of proposed cross-sector collaboration and resident engagement, quality of the planning process, the proposal's approach to system change and its focus on lower-income people, and the collaborative's focus on measurement and learning.

Based on the jury selection, WCC announced in early 2014 the award of a total of \$1.8 million in grants to six working cities. The competitive grants included four implementation grants ranging in size from \$700,000 to \$225,000 over a planned three-year period awarded to Chelsea, Fitchburg, Holyoke, and Lawrence. The level of grant funding varied by city. The cities' performance during the application process determined the size of the grant, with the most competitive city receiving the highest level of grant funds. In addition, WCC awarded two smaller grants, \$100,000 one-year seed grants, to Salem and Somerville.

Implementation Cities	Grant Award	Initial Timeframe
Chelsea	\$225,000	Three years
Fitchburg	\$400,000	Three years
Holyoke	\$250,000	Three years
Lawrence	\$700,000	Three years
Seed Cities		
Salem	\$100,000	One year
Somerville	\$100,000	One year

Based on the assessment of progress at the midpoint of the implementation period, the Boston Fed extended the grant cycle slightly and augmented the implementation grants. The Boston Fed recognized that the city teams dedicated months early in implementation to revising work plans, negotiating grant agreements, and hiring needed staff. Recognizing the delayed start to cities actually working toward their specific shared result, the Boston Fed offered to extend the implementation period through September 2017, making implementation a full three-and-a-half years. Moreover, the Boston Fed raised additional funds for which the cities could apply to support newly identified strategies that responded to learning, obstacles, and/or opportunities that surfaced in implementation. The jury awarded each city an additional \$150,000, although in some cases the awards came with specific contingencies that cities needed to meet prior to the release of funds.¹

In addition to the funding, the working cities have received technical assistance and opportunities for shared learning and peer exchange. In the first two years of the initiative, teams convened regularly for multicity learning communities that provided an opportunity to dive deeply into some of the practices WCC encouraged such as collaboration and collective impact, evidence-based learning, system change, and community engagement. Some gatherings focused on a specific sector such as workforce development. In the first two years, teams convened roughly four times annually to advance their learning. Besides the learning communities, WCC offered additional technical assistance to support the cities. In the first year, there was an allotment of \$5,000 to each city for whatever technical assistance it determined it most needed. Later in the initiative, WCC contracted with an expert in the use of data and measurement in advancing collective impact initiatives and offered each city 40 hours of consulting if interested. In the final 18 months of the initiative, WCC moved away from multisite learning communities and instead focused on a few customized programs in each city that responded more directly to the city's unique context and allowed for a larger portion of the teams to attend. WCC also placed an emphasis on building the capacity of the WCC city initiative directors through coaching, professional development, and periodic retreats for peer support and learning.

¹ While the implementation phase of WCC Round 1 officially concluded at the end of September 2017, the cities continue their engagement with the initiative while they explore pathways to sustaining the work. Both the Round 1 cities and the Boston Fed staff recognize that, in the effort to achieve outcomes in the first three-and-a-half years, there was limited attention to building sustainability in collaboration, in the strategies, or in the funding. Following another competitive jury-led process, the Boston Fed granted each of the four cities one year of additional funding, at a reduced level, to support sustainability planning. This evaluation does not report on city progress in the sustainability phase.

While perhaps less tangible, the working cities have received greater visibility and new forums for access to funders as well. The Boston Fed communications department developed materials that highlighted the cities and the work of their WCC teams. Boston Fed leadership frequently visited the WCC communities emphasizing their importance and raising the profile of the cities in the media and among other statewide leaders. WCC also has hosted an annual convening of funders to facilitate connections between the working cities and local, regional, and national philanthropy.

The Working Cities Challenge represented a groundbreaking approach among the regional Federal Reserve banks. At the time WCC launched, no other regional Federal Reserve Bank had engaged in the community in this way. While other public, private, and philanthropic funders provided all funds distributed to the cities, the Boston Fed served as the backbone organization for the initiative, responsible for its design and implementation. The Boston Fed's regional and community outreach department provided management and staff support in-kind for the WCC. In addition, the Boston Fed has contributed in-kind resources to the Working Cities Challenge, drawing on a variety of bank expertise including communications, legal, and research, among others. The selected cities also tapped Boston Fed expertise in direct support of the on-the-ground work.

Statute prohibits the Boston Fed from using its funds for grantmaking purposes. Instead, it used its convening powers to assemble its own cross-sector partnership in support of the Working Cities Challenge. The following organizations have contributed to the grant pool made available to the working cities: MassDevelopment, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Living Cities, The Boston Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Move The World Foundation, Hyams Foundation, Ford Foundation, Massachusetts Competitive Partnership (MACP), MassMutual Life Insurance, Suffolk Construction, New England Patriots Charitable Foundation, Partners HealthCare, State Street Foundation, and Boston Private Bank & Trust Company.

To provide ongoing guidance and oversight of the WCC, the Boston Fed has organized a steering committee with representation from Living Cities, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Boston Community Capital, Massachusetts Competitive Partnership, Fidelity Investments, MassINC, Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED), MassDevelopment, Clark University - Mosakowski Institute for Public Enterprise, Move The World Foundation, The Alliance for Business Leadership, and The Life Initiative.

Finally, the Boston Fed hired a third party evaluator, Mt. Auburn Associates, to document and assess the evidence related to progress Working Cities Challenge has achieved.

While WCC is now active with a second round of cities in Massachusetts as well as Rhode Island and Connecticut, the focus of this evaluation is on the Round 1 cities specifically, which represents a learning opportunity for the Boston Fed, WCC funders, and the broader field of practitioners interested in achieving equitable growth in small postindustrial cities.

Overview of Round 1 implementation cities

Demographics

The winning cities vary in population size from the smallest, Chelsea, at 38,244, to the largest, Lawrence, at 79,337. Since the start of WCC, Chelsea has experienced rapid population growth in recent years, with an increase of almost 10 percent since 2012. Lawrence's population has grown almost 4 percent over the

same period, while Fitchburg and Holyoke’s population has held steady, growing less than 1 percent over the four years.

	Chelsea	Fitchburg	Holyoke	Lawrence	Massachusetts
Total Population, 2016	38,244	40,441	40,280	79,337	
Percent Population Change 2012-2016	9.67%	0.38%	0.96%	3.9%	3.5%
Percent Hispanic Population 2016	65.6%	25.7%	49.98%	77.1%	10.9%
Median Household Income, 2012	\$45,319	\$44,742	\$33,438	\$31,319	\$66,658
Median Household Income, 2016	\$49,614	\$50,617	\$38,829	\$36,754	\$70,954
Poverty Rate (2008-2012)	25.0%	19.1%	30.6%	28.6%	11.0%
Poverty Rate (2012-2016)	19.3%	19.1%	28.6%	26.4%	11.4%
Total Employment 2016	16,319	12,987	22,466	29,764	
Percent in Change Total Employment 2012-2016	15.3%	5.0%	2.0%	17.5%	7.4%
Unemployment (January 2014)	9.20%	10.4	10.4	14.4	6.1%
Unemployment (September 2017)	3.1%	4.7%	5.6%	6.6%	3.9%

Each of the cities has a significant Hispanic population. In Lawrence, more than three-quarters and in Chelsea almost two-thirds of the residents are Hispanic. Holyoke is approaching 50 percent.

While the residents of all four cities are generally poorer than seen statewide, there are significant differences in economic performance among the winning working cities. Chelsea and Fitchburg enjoy household incomes at right about 50,000, well below the state average of \$75,297, but significantly higher than Holyoke (\$38,829) or Lawrence (\$36,754). All four of the cities have enjoyed significant income growth in recent years. Holyoke and Lawrence have experienced the most dramatic increase with household income rising 16 percent and 17 percent, respectively. Chelsea and Fitchburg also witnessed increases, though slightly less dramatic, with 9 and 13 percent increases, respectively. Rising income levels are no doubt one result of a strong economy. All four cities have witnessed their unemployment rate drop by more than half in recent years. Despite the overall improving economic conditions, the Round 1 cities continue to face high levels of poverty. While three of the four cities saw their poverty rate decline in recent years, each of the Round 1 cities continues to face poverty rates well above the state average and, in Lawrence and Holyoke, more than double the statewide average.

Focus

The cities selected varied approaches to their WCC initiative. At the outset, two of the four cities chose a neighborhood focus for their work and two chose a citywide goal focused on a specific population. Fitchburg and Chelsea each started with a focus on a particularly distressed neighborhood, in essence, pursuing a comprehensive community development approach. However, Chelsea found, midway through implementation, that a more focused measurable result that aligned with the opportunities and priorities seen in the community would be more effective and changed its result to focus on public safety and the perception of public safety citywide. This left only Fitchburg with a neighborhood focus. Holyoke maintained a citywide focus throughout with a consistent emphasis on improving the entrepreneurial ecosystem in order to accelerate the creation of new businesses. The team started with a clear focus on encouraging Latino entrepreneurs specifically, then backed off from an explicit demographic focus, and finally reintroduced an articulated focus on encouraging Latino-owned businesses as a subset of the

overall businesses created. Lawrence maintained a focus on increasing the income of Lawrence Public Schools (LPS) families with the primary effort placed on connecting parents to employment and training.

City	Initiative Name	Lead	Focus	Shared Result (2014)	Shared Result (2017)
Chelsea	Chelsea Thrives	The Neighborhood Developers (community development corporation)	Safety	Transform Shurtleff-Bellingham from a high-poverty and transient neighborhood to a place where the poverty and mobility rates both drop by 30%.	<i>Changed focus:</i> Decrease crime and increase the community's perception of safety by 30%.
Fitchburg	Relmagine North of Main	Montachusets Opportunity Council (community action agency)	Neighborhood improvement	North of Main will be a place where people want to live, work, and invest.	<i>Same focus, slight rewording:</i> Make the North of Main a neighborhood of choice whether for business, resident, or employee.
Holyoke	SPARK	Greater Holyoke Chamber Foundation (business association)	Entrepreneurship	Increase the share of Holyoke businesses that are Latino-owned from 9% to 25%.	<i>Same focus, more specific result:</i> Create 300 new businesses and increase Latino business ownership from 9% to 20%.
Lawrence	Lawrence Working Families Initiative	Lawrence CommunityWorks (community development corporation)	Workforce development	Increase family income by 15%.	<i>Same focus, removed numeric goal:</i> Increase in household income for families of students in the Lawrence Public Schools.

Strategies and implementation

Each city team determined the set of strategies to implement in service of its shared result. While the teams' initial strategies followed what they laid out in their Working Cities Challenge proposal, the Boston Fed encouraged the teams not to view their approach as static but to anticipate evolution and adaptation as they collected further evidence to understand the nature of the challenge as well as to assess their own progress. The teams all did, in fact, revise their approaches, in some cases dramatically and in other cases more modestly. Following is a brief summary of each city's approach to achieving its goal.

Chelsea—Chelsea Thrives: The Chelsea team, led by The Neighborhood Developers, Roca, the city of Chelsea, and the Chelsea Public Schools, originally outlined a neighborhood-focused initiative that targeted the high rates of poverty and transience in the Shurtleff-Bellingham neighborhood. The team's initial strategy focused on the creation of a cross-agency data-sharing platform and three workgroups that it assigned the tasks of increasing private sector investment and the inspection of rental units, improving quality of life through community engagement, and creating an integrated system to better connect residents to workforce training and educational services. By mid-2015, the team found that its effort involved a level of complexity with so many potential strategies that focus and resources were a challenge.

With support from the Boston Fed, Chelsea Thrives adopted a new shared result in the fall of 2015 with a clear focus on public safety. With this revised result, Chelsea Thrives expanded its leadership group and reorganized to become a “table of tables,” a place that the multiple initiatives in Chelsea that all had activities relevant to public safety could meet, align strategies, identify gaps, and collaborate. Several large-scale efforts fall under the Chelsea Thrives’ umbrella, including prevention and intervention of substance use disorder and trauma; engaging residents to increase safety; youth protective programming; and improved physical environment—addressing problem properties and investing in new projects. While Chelsea Thrives staff played a leadership role in advancing some of the work related to youth and community engagement generally, each strategy has its own “champion” to move the work forward with Chelsea Thrives playing a coordinating role.

Fitchburg—ReImagine North of Main (RNoM): The Fitchburg team, led by the same four core partners over the course of the work—the city of Fitchburg, Montachusets Opportunity Council (MOC), NewVue (previously the Twin Cities Community Development Corporation), and Fitchburg State University (FSU)—has focused on the same 10-year vision for improving the North of Main neighborhood, but its strategies evolved substantially over the three-and-a-half years. RNoM initially pursued a complex set of strategies involving a combination of activities focused on the residents (i.e., early childhood education and improved access to services) and on the physical environment (i.e., cleaning up the neighborhood and focusing on specific built environment projects). Over the last year, the leadership team has come to recognize that it was spreading itself too thin and has narrowed and shifted from six to three key strategies: neighborhood development, economic development, and community engagement. RNoM now focuses on revitalizing the downtown through economic development strategies, addressing neighborhood development work through a focus on housing market conditions, and marketing the neighborhood as a gateway to arts and culture. The team is also trying to strengthen its efforts to engage neighborhood residents and to build more diverse leadership.

Holyoke—SPARK: The Holyoke team, led by the Greater Holyoke Chamber Centennial Foundation, involved several core partners including the city of Holyoke Planning and Economic Development Department, Holyoke Innovation District, Holyoke Public Library, SCORE, and the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center (MSBDC). SPARK first established a trio of programmatic activities to promote entrepreneurship, train existing and aspiring business owners, and prepare entrepreneurs to start a new business. SPARK eventually shifted from a program implementation orientation to an emphasis on strengthening the overall ecosystem and culture to support Latino and citywide entrepreneurs. This ecosystem orientation led SPARK to work with more partners, to seek to understand and improve the coordination and integration of partners’ services, and to address more barriers to business start-up and growth, including regulations, financing, and space.

Lawrence—Lawrence Working Families Initiative (LWFI): The Lawrence team, led by Lawrence CommunityWorks as the backbone organization and the Lawrence Public Schools, also involved the leadership of the city of Lawrence’s Office of Business and Economic Development, local workforce development service providers, ValleyWorks Career Center, Northern Essex Community College, and, toward the end of the initiative, the Lawrence Partnership. Much of LWFI’s efforts involved direct engagement with parents. LWFI worked to develop a system of parent engagement, coaching, job search support, referral to services and training, and to provide ESOL classes. The locus of activity is the Family Resource Center (FRC), a hub within the central administrative offices of LPS. As the initiative evolved, LWFI recognized that it needed more intentional strategies for engaging employers in order to accelerate progress toward its shared result. In the latter part of the initiative, LWFI capitalized on a competitive

state grant to collaborate with the Lawrence Partnership to support strategies involving local hiring and piloting of employer-driven workforce development efforts.

Overview of seed cities

In addition to the four cities that WCC funded for three-and-a-half years to pursue strategies toward their shared result, WCC also provided seed grants to two additional cities. The seed cities submitted the same type of proposals as other cities in hopes of receiving implementation funds totaling closer to \$700,000 over a three-year period. Instead, the Boston Fed awarded the two seed cities with \$100,000 in support that lasted one year. The two seed cities, Salem and Somerville, spent several months figuring out how to scale back their initiative to match the time and funding provided. However, both cities did make progress over the year. Following is a summary of their efforts.

Salem: The city of Salem was the designated lead for the initiative, and North Shore CDC and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council played substantial roles in the partnership. The Salem team focused on the Point neighborhood with a goal of improving key socioeconomic characteristics of area residents, including income, poverty, and employment levels to mirror those for all Salem. The team used WCC to implement its recently completed Point Vision and Action Plan. The team sought to implement strategies in multiple areas including economic development, small business development, workforce development, and leadership development all focused on the Point neighborhood and its residents. During the seed year, partners completed a Commercial Corridor study and a Retail Market Analysis (both conducted by Metropolitan Area Planning Council), developed and launched a 16-week healthcare workforce training program with local colleges and healthcare employers, and supported small business training in Spanish. At the completion of the year, partners remained committed to the work and are continuing implementation of the Point Vision and Action Plan. The team reported building stronger relationships among partners and between the partners and Point residents. The initiative also led to more resources flowing into the Point, creating new opportunities for residents. Despite the seed year progress, Salem was unsuccessful in its application to be a Round 2 implementation city in Massachusetts.

Somerville: Somerville's WCC initiative focused on reducing unemployment among the city's low-income youth by 10 percent over 10 years by preparing participants for in-demand jobs in Somerville. The team, led by the city of Somerville, focused on the development of work experience pathways for youth and the use of technology in matching youth with job opportunities. Originally, the team wanted to develop a mobile application to help youth connect with short-term work opportunities, though it eventually worked with an existing platform. The technology, however, did not turn out to be an effective vehicle for reaching the target population. The team instead emphasized job skills training and case management with some soft skills training, ultimately placing 20 youth in jobs. The three main partners—the city, Somerville Community Corporation, and The Career Place—reported improving relationships and a better understanding of each organization's capacity and available services. The city of Somerville also applied for a WCC implementation grant in Round 2 but was unsuccessful.

The level of engagement seed cities had with WCC was substantially lighter and briefer than that of the implementation cities. The seed cities received far less funding and did not benefit from the additional two-and-a-half years of peer learning, technical assistance, or WCC guidance. While both seed cities can point to clear outputs that resulted from seed funding, the duration and intensity of the team's exposure to WCC appear to have been insufficient to warrant further evaluation of seed city outcomes. The rest of the evaluation will focus exclusively on the four implementation cities.

Evolution of WCC theory of change

Working Cities Challenge has a vision of achieving population-level change in communities. However, transforming the lives of low-income people in cities that have been struggling for decades is not a short-term endeavor. WCC envisions change in communities over a 10-year period. As a result, readers should view this evaluation as an assessment of *interim* progress since the Round 1 cities, at the time the evaluators conducted the research, were only three-and-a-half years into what WCC expects to be a 10-year change process. Given the long-term nature of the work and the fact that progress toward cities' population-level goals is not expected to be linear, a clear theory of change (TOC) is critical to the evaluation in order to address the fundamental question of whether the cities appear to be on a path to achieve the designed long-term outcomes.

The Boston Fed's articulation of the TOC has evolved since the start of the initiative. Prior to launching the WCC, Boston Fed staff developed a theory of change to guide the work. The TOC documented the expected progress of deepening collaboration, including building a shared vision, defining a common goal or result, collectively problem solving, implementing, and assessing progress toward outcomes in the targeted system. The original TOC emphasized cross-sector collaboration, use of data, and changing systems in order to achieve the city's shared result, which represents a population-level outcome for the community. The original TOC also anticipated that the work would improve civic capacity of the working cities such as improved capacity, collaboration, or new sectors engaging in civic efforts. The original TOC viewed these as beneficial spillovers of the work toward the shared result.

The Boston Fed has taken a developmental approach to Working Cities Challenge, applying a learning lens to the work and adapting the model based on learning. The Boston Fed applied that developmental approach to the theory of change. Since developing the original TOC in 2013, Boston Fed staff has both learned from observation of city progress as well as refined its own intervention as the initiative matured and expanded to additional cities. One important way in which the Boston Fed refined its intervention is by explicitly naming four core practice elements that it expected the cities to apply to their work. The Boston Fed formally introduced the core elements in the rollout of WCC Round 2 in Massachusetts. They quickly became part of the WCC lexicon, and WCC reinforced them retroactively for the Round 1 cities. As described in 2016, the four core elements laid out *how* teams were to go about their work:

1. **Collaborative leadership** — The ability to work together across the nonprofit, private, and public sectors to achieve a shared, long-term vision.
2. **Community engagement** — Authentic involvement of residents in your initiative, particularly those who will be impacted by your work.
3. **Evidence-based decision-making**² — Measuring progress toward an ambitious, but achievable, long-term goal and using this evidence to adapt strategies as needed.
4. **Systems change** — Altering activities, priorities, resources, capital flows, and/or decision-making structures within a larger system in order to better solve a problem or deliver services.

² In 2017, the Boston Fed renamed this core element as "Learning Orientation." This report will still refer to this core element as "Evidence-based Learning," which more closely aligns with how the element was discussed for Round 1 cities.

The Boston Fed considered the core elements as critical to making progress on the shared result, but also viewed them as best practices of an effective civic infrastructure. The Boston Fed broadly defines civic infrastructure as “how well different sectors of a community—businesses, government, schools, community organizations, etc.—recognize interrelated interests so they can function together, across their different goals and perspectives to achieve outcomes that would benefit the public at large rather than privileged groups.” WCC operates with the assumption the Boston Fed’s definition of civic infrastructure can become a reality if the cities make effective use of the core elements. If the cities can embed the core elements in how they regularly conduct business, then WCC, in fact, would improve the civic capacity and infrastructure of the WCC city. The Boston Fed introduced most of the elements to the Round 1 teams earlier in implementation, but more explicitly emphasized and reinforced them over time as the concepts crystalized for Boston Fed staff.

Given the importance of the core elements to WCC and the potential civic infrastructure benefits for the cities that could result from widespread application of the elements, Boston Fed staff felt by late 2016 that the original theory of change no longer accurately depicted the path to lasting economic gains for low-income people in the working cities. While the previous theory of change emphasized gains on each city’s shared result, the new set of outcomes placed a significant emphasis on measures of improved civic infrastructure. The newly articulated outcomes also more closely align with some of the factors that the Boston Fed previously identified in its research and publications as critical to economic gains in resurgent cities. Working Cities Challenge now states its long-term outcome as achieving lasting gains in economic outcomes and quality of life for low- and moderate-income residents in small cities by creating a civic infrastructure with the individual and organizational capacity, collaboration, and resources to make and sustain meaningful change. According to the new set of 10-year outcomes, WCC cities will make progress toward the following civic infrastructure goals:

1. **Leaders** who are capable, collaborative, adaptive, and representative of their communities.
2. **Organizations** (nonprofits, business, anchor, and government) that are stable, effective, and civic-minded.
3. **Networks** united around a shared vision for the city’s future and inclusive of the broader community.
4. **Residents** who are empowered to participate in civic life and have mechanisms through which to do so.
5. **Resources** available and aligned to support the highest potential work of leaders, organizations, networks, and residents.

Through a combination of a well-functioning civic infrastructure and the intentional and focused work in service of the shared result, WCC intends that cities will demonstrate outcomes in a sixth category:

6. **Improve the economic and social well-being** of low- to moderate-income residents. While WCC prioritizes teams sustaining work in service of their priority result set during implementation, the Boston Fed staff also understand that priorities shift as teams make progress on one front and identify new challenges. Regardless of whether the Round 1 cities commit a full 10 years toward their identified shared result, or evolve their focus as needed, WCC expects the teams to stay

committed for the long-term to achieving a measurable difference for low- and moderate-income residents.

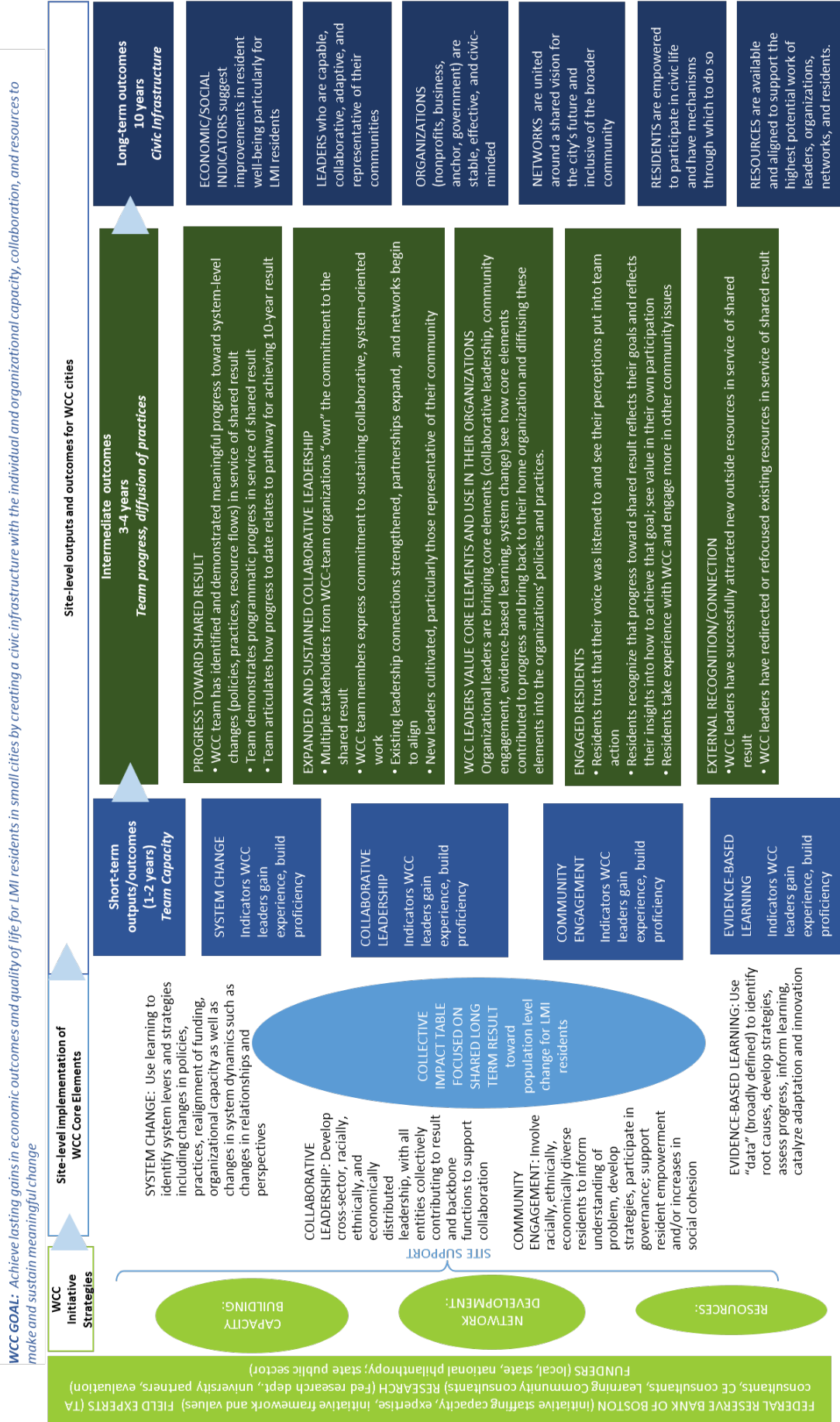
Expected interim outcomes

The evaluation team worked with Boston Fed staff to articulate a pathway that leads from the application of the four core elements in service of the city's shared result to the long-term civic infrastructure as well as economic and quality of life gains expected at the end of ten years. Considered interim outcomes, the indicators of progress at the end of implementation are as follows:

- **Teams achieve progress toward the shared result.** WCC teams have achieved programmatic progress as well as meaningful system-level changes (policies, practices, resource flows) in service of a shared result. Moreover, the team can relate the progress to date to a clear pathway for achieving a 10-year result.
- **Collaborative leadership is sustained and expanded.** Multiple leaders share ownership of the effort and have strengthened their connections through the work as well as have welcomed new leaders to participate. There is clear commitment to sustaining collaborative, system-oriented work. Partners have pursued new collaborative opportunities together as a result of their work on WCC, possibly including greater alignment with other collaborative efforts in the city.
- **Use of the core elements has deepened, is valued, and is diffusing within the partner organizations.** WCC organizational leaders see how the core elements are contributing to their progress and are bringing those core elements (collaborative leadership, community engagement, evidence-based learning, and system change) back to their home organizations and embedding these elements into the organizations' policies, practices, and resource allocations.
- **There is greater resident engagement, and residents see value from engagement.** Residents have been active partners in the design and execution of the cities' work and recognize that progress toward shared result reflects their goals and their insights, making their participation seem worthwhile.
- **Cities achieve recognition of their improved civic infrastructure.** WCC leaders have successfully attracted new outside resources in service of shared result. It is worth noting that the Boston Fed staff believe that WCC did not communicate this expectation fully to the teams. While the Boston Fed team did sponsor yearly gatherings intended to connect the working cities with a broad set of funders, staff do not feel that this was an emphasized focus of the intervention, and any progress the cities made to date in this category should be celebrated but not necessarily expected.

The complete updated theory of change is on the following page.

W C C Site - Level Theory of Change



Evaluation approach and methodology

This report focuses on how the work unfolded in each of the Round 1 cities and explores what the cities have achieved during the implementation period both in terms of progress toward the shared result and in terms of gains in the cities' civic infrastructure. Chapters 2 and 3 look at WCC's cross-site outcomes, but the case studies of the four cities (see Appendix) provide a deeper understanding of the evolution of the work and each city's unique context and factors. This report also explores the outcomes recognized at the end of Round 1 that extend beyond benefits to the four Round 1 cities, and looks at how WCC has influenced the broader field, whether through catalyzing work in other working cities or influencing the thinking and actions of other funders and policymakers. Finally, this report highlights the emerging lessons from this early round of work that the Boston Fed can further test and hone in the ongoing efforts of other WCC cities in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.

The findings in this report draw on the following sources of information:





- **Survey of stakeholders in four Round 1 cities.** From September through October 2017, the evaluation team conducted a survey to assess the outcomes of the WCC initiative. The evaluators sent the survey to all individuals who would likely be familiar with the goals, strategies, and accomplishments of the city initiative and/or who might have changed their perspective, practices, or policies in ways that align with the core elements and civic infrastructure outcomes the WCC theory of change anticipated. The survey sample, developed with input from the Round 1 city leads and initiative directors, included all members of the governance group as well as implementation partners not formally represented in the governance structure, members of other relevant city networks or collaboratives, and key individuals within partner organizations who have never sat at the governance table but are sufficiently informed by colleagues/staff. The survey mixed open-ended and closed-ended questions for a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis. Questions focused on perceived outcomes of the WCC initiatives, factors affecting those outcomes, and changes in stakeholder perspectives and behavior related to WCC priorities and the four core elements.
- **Interviews with at least 12 stakeholders in each of the four Round 1 Working Cities.** The evaluation team worked with the city lead and initiative director to identify the priority stakeholders to interview. The interviews, generally lasting 45 minutes, included a senior representative of the lead organization, the initiative director, key partners who sit on the team executive or steering committees and are involved in shaping and executing the work, public sector leadership, private sector leadership, representatives of other networks in contact with the WCC team, and, finally, stakeholders with a little more distance from the daily work who could offer a more neutral perspective on the impact of the WCC effort on the community. The evaluation team prioritized those stakeholders heavily involved to date, or those less involved but perceived as critical to effort going forward. The interviews probed stakeholders around perceived progress toward the shared result, use of core elements in achieving the results, and perceptions of changes in the civic infrastructure to which WCC contributed.
- **Interviews with key informants in select working cities that did not win implementation awards.** The interviews provide insight as to the ongoing impact of the non-winning cities' involvement in the application process. Interviews sought to learn what work has moved forward in spite of the lack of WCC funds. Since many of the non-winning cities participated in the application process for WCC Round 2 grants, and were surveyed and possibly interviewed as part of that evaluation, Boston Fed staff selected a small number of cities for interviews at this time to avoid overburdening individuals. The evaluators conducted four interviews.

- **Interviews with state and national leaders from the public, business, nonprofit, and philanthropic realms.** The evaluation team researched the potential influence of WCC on other organizations exposed to the design elements, priorities, and lessons gleaned from the city progress. The Boston Fed assisted in creating the interview list, which was composed of representatives of organizations that have funded the initiative (Round 1 or subsequent rounds), currently or previously served on the Massachusetts WCC steering committee, have partnered with the Boston Fed in support of the WCC initiative, or have had regular personal contact with Boston Fed leadership about initiative progress and learning. In total, the evaluation team interviewed 23 stakeholders.
- **Observation.** A representative of the evaluation team has attended convenings of the working cities, gatherings of funders, as well as individual customized learning sessions with individual sites. In addition, the evaluation team has observed select governance meetings over the four years, exploring how the teams are making use of the core elements in their work
- **Review of documents.** The evaluation team reviewed background documents, including annual work plans, six-month and annual reports that the teams submitted, and applications for additional funding, including proposals for tactical support as well as the current round of sustainability funding. The team read additional material as available, which included local evaluator reports, additional grant applications or reports for related grants, and team presentations. The evaluation team supplemented materials provided by the Boston Fed and by the teams themselves with a review of documents found through web searches. Web searches proved useful for identifying local media articles related to the local WCC efforts.

This report is the third evaluation Mt. Auburn Associates has conducted on the Round 1 cities. A baseline narrative report and a summary of midterm findings are available on the Boston Fed website (<https://www.bostonfed.org/workingcities/massachusetts/round1/evaluation.htm>).

2 Round 1 Outcomes: Progress toward Shared Result

Highlights

-  All cities achieved measurable progress on their shared results in some form. The violent and property crime index in Chelsea dropped; Holyoke helped launch more than 30 new businesses; resident perceptions of Fitchburg's North of Main Neighborhood improved and the downtown shows modest improvement; and Lawrence helped more than 200 parents gain employment.
-  Each of the WCC teams has demonstrated substantial progress in terms of system change in service of its shared result. Some system changes are more subtle, such as shifts in what types of organizations are engaged in the work, the depth of relationships among stakeholders, or the perspectives or priorities of stakeholders engaged in the work. Other system changes are more concrete, such as changes in policies, practices, or resource allocations. Some examples of system change include stronger referral networks, new collaborative practices among unlikely partners, new city policies, and realigned resource flows.
-  Three-quarters of engaged stakeholders across all four working cities believe the local WCC efforts have already made a difference for low-income people in their community.
-  At times, the cities were challenged by either their own definition of the result or by lack of means to fully measure progress on their goal. To sustain and accelerate progress will require more strategic thought to how outcomes to date fit in a larger continuum of progress toward cities' long-term result.

Overview

Each city developed a unique approach specific to advancing toward its shared result, so progress looks very different across the cities. Some cities developed programs and services, while other cities focused primarily on alignment or changes to systems. Regardless of the focus, each city demonstrates progress.

It was never the intent for the shared results that the cities selected to be achievable solely through the development and execution of a program; the intent was that reaching the scale of desired outcome would require system change. As a result, looking at progress at year three of a 10-year goal is a challenge in that the evaluation did not expect this to be linear progression toward the long-term goal. The interplay of pilots, programs with learning, adaptation, and system change is complex. In reviewing outcomes to date, it is important to consider the direct measurable progress made toward the shared result or the measurable progress on specific strategies or activities the teams identified as drivers of their shared result, and then also note the changes in the system intended to amplify progress.

The evaluation team, in collaboration with Boston Fed staff, developed a set of indicators by which to consider progress of the Round 1 cities. The table on the following page lists the indicators of progress related to the shared result, along with an aggregated assessment WCC progress in the four cities to date. The rubric sets out three broad categories on which to consider city outcomes. The first category looks specifically at what progress the teams have achieved in service of their shared result. The evaluation examined outcomes, both programmatic as well as system-oriented, that the Round 1 cities have achieved over the WCC implementation period as well the perception of impact to date on low-income people.

This evaluation also looked at how well the teams' work to date positioned them for longer-term outcomes related to their shared result. While these categories within the rubric represent less of the focus of the team's effort over the implementation period, they are included in the rubric because they represent key links in how the progress to date can translate into the 10-year outcomes that WCC envisioned. Given that the WCC cities are only a third of the way toward what the initiative expects to be a 10-year change process, the evaluation considers whether the Round 1 cities can articulate their progress to date as a step on a clear pathway to achieving their long-term goal. In essence, do the cities have their own clear theory of change that can relate the interim outcomes to a larger long-term strategy? The final category related to progress of the shared result is "communication of progress," which looks at how teams have shared their work and communicated progress to a broader constituency. WCC's theory of change sees this as important for multiple reasons. First, communication of progress is key to building a broader constituency to sustain and potentially accelerate efforts to achieve the shared result. Second, the theory of change assumes that the teams' focus on achieving the shared result, while applying the WCC core elements (collaborative leadership, community engagement, evidence-based learning, and system change), can change the civic infrastructure of cities. The rubric category about informing others of progress is based on the hypothesis that for the work on the shared result to translate into civic infrastructure gains, the effort must not only show progress but must also be widely understood by a broad set of community leaders before the practices can broadly become a new way of doing business in the working cities.

Assessment of Interim Outcomes toward Shared Result (Aggregated Round 1 Cities)

Indicators	Sub-Indicators	Progress
Team has a shared knowledge of progress toward shared result, including changes in systems.	Teams demonstrate programmatic progress in service of shared result.	Mostly Strong
	Teams contributed to several substantive changes in practices, policies, and resource flows .	Strong
	Evidence of changing relationships, changing perspectives, or changing capacity in service of the shared result.	Strong
	WCC activities in the cities have already made a difference in the lives of many low-income people .	Strong /Moderate
Cross-sector leaders, beyond the WCC team, are informed of team's progress toward shared result.	Teams regularly communicate progress toward the measurable shared result to a broad set of organizations/leaders .	Strong /Moderate
	Stakeholders beyond the core leadership group believe the initiative has achieved significant progress on its strategies .	Mostly Strong
Team demonstrates how the progress to date relates to the pathway that will achieve its shared result.	Most stakeholders interviewed can articulate how their progress to date can lead to greater scale toward their 10-year population-level result .	Moderate/Weak
	Teams articulate objective progress measures toward shared result, and can speak to team's positive performance relative to those measures .	Moderate

Key:

Strong	Mostly Strong	Strong /Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Weak	Weak
All cities demonstrate strong progress	3 cities demonstrate strong progress, 1 moderate	2 cities demonstrate strong progress, 2 moderate	1 city demonstrates strong progress, 2 moderate, 1 limited OR 2 strong and 2 limited	1 city demonstrates strong progress, 1 moderate, 2 limited OR 3 moderate, 1 limited	All cities demonstrate limited progress

Measurable progress toward shared result

All cities demonstrated progress on their shared results in some form. The violent and property crime index in Chelsea dropped 13 percent and 11 percent, respectively, between 2014 and 2016. Holyoke helped launch 33 new businesses. In Fitchburg, resident perceptions of the North of Main neighborhood have improved and the downtown shows modest improvement. Lawrence helped more than 200 public school parents gain employment.

The cities' **ability to demonstrate progress depends on a few factors:**

- **Specificity and clarity of the long-term shared result.** Chelsea, Holyoke, and Lawrence all had clear statements that were ostensibly measurable in nature. Fitchburg's result was broader, and a better indicator of the team's progress is its level of progress toward the specific drivers.
- **Team's ability to measure progress toward that result accurately.** One of the struggles for cities is that the data systems available to teams are often insufficient or even nonexistent to measure progress accurately. Because Lawrence's data point was no longer being collected, the team lacked a mechanism by which to track the degree of progress toward its shared result. Fitchburg also struggled with a method to measure its result, instead relying on multiple interim indicators with often a tenuous connection to the larger goal.
- **Initial emphasis on programs can generate tangible results.** Lawrence and Holyoke each emphasized direct service delivery during the implementation period and, as a result, can count specific individuals or businesses that have demonstrably benefitted from the services provided.
- **Clarity of results framework and the system drivers that most influence the shared result.** Even though various groups or teams operating independently addressed many of the drivers, Chelsea Thrives was able to align the various entities and unite them through a shared vision and a clear understanding of how their work contributed to that goal.

Chelsea

Unlike some of the other working cities, Chelsea has regularly tracked progress toward its measurable shared result. While it is impossible to attribute these changes directly to the work of Chelsea Thrives or even to the groups operating as part of Chelsea Thrives' "table of tables," the trends are worth noting. According to data provided by Chelsea Thrives, **Chelsea's violent crime index for the city has gone down from 10.8 in 2014 to 9.4 in 2016.** In Sector 4, **the area that includes downtown and the Shurtleff-Bellingham neighborhood, the violent crime index has gone down from 15.5 to 12.3,** after increasing to 16.3 in 2015. The property crime index in this area did rise, however, during this same period.

Chelsea Thrives' shared result is not just the actual reduction in crime but the perception of crime. Interestingly, **changing the perception of crime has proven challenging,** despite the reduction in actual crime rates. The Neighborhood Developers (TND) conducted a survey of 300+ randomly selected Shurtleff/Bellingham residents. TND administered the survey in 2009, 2013, and November 2016 to different sample groups. In response to the statement "My family and I feel safe here," only 64 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed in 2016 compared to 70 percent in 2013. Even with these results, multiple team members provide anecdotal evidence that those living and working in the neighborhood report feeling safer.

Chelsea Thrives' approach to achieving its shared result involved more alignment, coordination, engagement, and system change than it did the creation of programs or a suite of services like that of Lawrence or Holyoke, so attributing programmatic outputs to Chelsea Thrives is more problematic. Yet, Chelsea Thrives still contributed to several programmatic efforts providing support, engagement, and alignment with other efforts. For instance, the Chelsea Hub has **reviewed 205 cases of individuals at high risk of committing a crime and has successfully connected 133 individuals to services** since 2015. Another example is the work of the Beautification Committee, a cross-sector team focused on dealing with problem properties contributing to blighted conditions. Since the committee launched in 2016, the

group has reviewed 151 cases and **resolved 80 cases dealing with issues such as excessive trash, overgrown vegetation, broken streetlights, drugs or drinking, graffiti, and code compliance.**

Fitchburg

As Fitchburg's **shared result is more of a vision than a measurable result, it is difficult to define specific progress** that it has made. The team's vision is to make North of Main a neighborhood of choice by improving the overall quality of the neighborhood, but the team's approach to achieving that vision has evolved substantially over the three years. As a result, there are limited measures by which to assess overall progress and few strategies that it has pursued with sufficient longevity to demonstrate measurable progress. The team has had **some success with efforts it supported in its first two years, which it has now spun off to other organizations.** Specifically, under the self-sufficiency focus, the team worked with the Harvard Community Development project group to design a service delivery system to integrate the current systems of various providers in the area and to develop a common referral system. The Fitchburg Community Connections Coalition eventually assumed responsibility for this project. Footsteps2Brilliance, the team's early childhood initiative, is now part of the Fitchburg Public School system. Ultimately, the group decided that the activities did not sufficiently align with its shared result and sought organizations outside of the RNoM team to sustain them.

RNoM has also had **some impact on improving conditions on Main Street.** The team points to a net increase of about **three new businesses in the downtown.** While the team is not taking credit for all of these, it does believe that its work has contributed to more interest in downtown locations. The team also points to some **successful events that brought visitors downtown,** including Music on Main Street, the farmers' market, and its Trick or Treat on Main Street event, and to infrastructure improvements such as improved lighting for a park.

The team has also had success in identifying and getting **strong alignment around a project pipeline.** Specifically through RNoM, the city, FSU, and other key stakeholders agreed on the priority to develop two major catalytic projects, the B.F. Brown project, an abandoned school in the North of Main neighborhood that NewVue has prioritized for some time, and the Theater Block, a property that FSU purchased over the course of the WCC process.

Finally, the team points to the positive change in resident responses to the community impact measurement (CIM) survey as indicators of changing perceptions of the neighborhood. One-hundred ninety-eight residents completed the survey in 2013, at the start of the initiative, and again in 2016. **Recent respondents are reporting more positive perceptions of the neighborhood.**

Holyoke

SPARK is **more than 10 percent toward meeting its long-term result of creating 300 new businesses** in Holyoke. Over the three years, SPARK created and implemented a nine-week program catering to new and existing entrepreneurs and small business owners and served 70 participants. From that, SPARK contributed to the **creation of 33 new businesses of which approximately half were women-owned and half were Latino-owned.** The **new businesses employed 82 people.** In addition, the SPARK classes helped to **stabilize or grow an additional 13 businesses.** Furthermore, SPARK graduates have filled three vacant storefronts in the downtown.

While SPARK is only able to measure the new businesses that started as a result of the SPARK class, the team has made **improvements to the entrepreneurial and business development ecosystem that appear**

to be adding additional, but unmeasured, new business startups. Multiple stakeholders report expanded entrepreneurial activity and improved outcomes in Holyoke evidenced by the many Latino and women SPARK participants as well as new people participating in training workshops and other events. Massachusetts Small Business Development Center (MSBDC) and SCORE are working with more Holyoke entrepreneurs. Common Capital is seeing more applicants and making more loans in Holyoke.

Lawrence

LWFI has documented numerous positive programmatic outcomes that suggest positive movement in service of its shared result though it lacks a method to actually measure impact on its goal of increasing real household income of Lawrence Public School parents by 15 percent. At the start of the initiative, LWFI believed that it would be able to use the number of public school families qualifying for free or reduced lunch as a means for tracking progress toward its shared result, but federal changes to the program enabled all LPS families to qualify without an application, so LWFI's measurement tool disappeared. Most stakeholders engaged felt LWFI articulated its result more broadly anyway, generally communicated as improving the employment and economic stability of LPS families.

LWFI helped 201 LPS parents gain employment. Through coaching, referrals, direct training, and placement assistance, LWFI reports having connected with 650 parents and contributed to 201 parents gaining employment. According to LWFI, the **average hourly wage of parents placed was \$13.58, representing an average wage increase of 25 percent.**

LWFI helped parents gain skills, competencies, and certifications to make them more competitive in the workplace. Approximately 50 of the job placements followed the completion of home daycare provider training (approximately 60 completed training). In addition, 14 parents had job placements after completion of certified nursing assistant/home health aide training. LWFI also supported parents in increasing their English language proficiency and helped others receive recognition for skills they already possess. LWFI reports that more than 90 parents participated in ESOL training through the initiative with all reportedly increasing fluency (increasing student performance level). Finally, LWFI also helped nine parents who had earned their degree outside of the U.S. receive degree validation with the assistance of the Center for Educational Documentation (CED).

With WCC support, **LWFI also made substantial progress on a strategy to increase family engagement in the public schools.** The initiative's work to increase parent's comfort in the schools was part of its multi-generational effort first, to increase the likelihood of parents receiving resources through the Family Resource Center and, second, to improve student performance and family stability via parent involvement. LWFI reached more than 600 parents through Community Engagement Circles in a handful of city schools and trained more than a dozen parents to serve as facilitators of its engagement efforts. Survey analysis of the efforts found that the vast majority of families report an increased ability to get involved in the school and their child's education, and more than two-thirds have actually increased their participation.

System change related to shared result

Each of the WCC teams has demonstrated substantial progress in terms of system change. Some system changes are more subtle, such as shifts in what types of organizations are engaged in the work, the depth of relationships among stakeholders, or the perspectives or priorities of stakeholders engaged in the work. Other system changes are more concrete such as changes in policies, practices, or resource allocations. These changes have or likely will accelerate or expand progress, beyond what the teams can achieve

through programmatic activity in service of their ambitious long-term goals. According to the survey of WCC stakeholders, **67 percent of WCC survey respondents report having made changes in policies, practices, or resource allocations (human or financial) in their organization in support of their city's initiative goals.** This includes 65 percent of respondents in Chelsea, 61 percent in Fitchburg, and 75 percent in both Holyoke and Lawrence. Some of the changes noted include:

- **stronger referral networks** (Chelsea, Fitchburg, Lawrence, and Holyoke);
- **new collaborative practices** among unlikely partners (police and social service agencies in Chelsea, public schools and community organizations in Lawrence);
- **new city policies** (business permitting in Holyoke, housing policies in Chelsea, Complete Streets in Fitchburg, parent engagement policies in Lawrence Public Schools); and
- **realigned resource flows** (grants in Holyoke, loan fund reserve in Fitchburg, new staff in Chelsea, infrastructure investments in Chelsea, new staff and more seats in ESOL classes in Lawrence).

Chelsea

Chelsea Thrives contributed to substantial system changes that address the drivers of crime in the community. All types of system change are evident in Chelsea, including practice, policy, and realignment of resources. While multiple stakeholders stepped up and demonstrated tremendous commitment to operating in a new way, the city's commitment, led by the city manager's dedication to the effort, stands out as particularly notable. The city of Chelsea reportedly dedicated more than \$400,000 annually to the effort in addition to in-kind services.

- ✓ **Chelsea Thrives has contributed to the Hub, which has fundamentally changed how the police department, the city, and the social service sector engage with each other to prevent crime.**

The participating institutions have widely embraced and embedded the coordinated cross-sector case management process that engaged roughly 20 agencies representing local and regional law enforcement, criminal justice, mental health, public education, faith community, community development, youth development, and social services. Stakeholders note that it has changed police practices. While police bring roughly half the cases to the cross-sector group, they take the lead on only a quarter of the cases, allowing preventative social services to address difficult situations. As one stakeholder stated, "It's shifting issues to a more appropriate venue, and it's generating really deep collaboration around solving problems."

In addition to the practice changes noted between the police and service providers, the city has rallied additional support for the effort. For instance, the city has funded service providers, known as navigators, whose job is to identify some of the most vulnerable city residents and link them to integrated services. As the Hub discussions surfaced new needs, the city has stepped in with funding. As an example, when the discussion explored the contribution of the opioid crisis to crime in Chelsea and noted the lack of addiction treatment beds, the city funded additional treatment beds until a local hospital stepped in to provide that service.

- ✓ **New relationships built through Chelsea Thrives were responsible for securing the successful OJJDP and Byrne grants that are focusing on at-risk youth.**

Working together as part of Chelsea Thrives strengthened the relationships among the Chelsea Police Department (CPD), the Chelsea Collaborative, Roca, TND, and the city. According to the interviews, it was

the strengthening of these relationships and the conversations held as part of Chelsea Thrives that informed the content of the application for the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) grant and created the collaborative infrastructure that paved the way for successful award of and implementation of the grant.

- ✓ **The collaborative work of Chelsea Thrives has resulted in the engagement of many additional healthcare-related institutions and organizations that are now participating in efforts to achieve the shared result.**

While Massachusetts General Hospital has been engaged in Chelsea Thrives from the beginning, since the pivot to public safety and issues related to trauma and substance abuse, there has been further engagement and collaboration with the healthcare sector. In particular, the Cambridge Health Alliance, an important service provider in the region, has become an active member of the Hub and has become more engaged in Chelsea.

- ✓ **Chelsea Thrives united stakeholders around downtown revitalization, bringing parties together around a vision of an improved downtown that is both safer and, more importantly, improves the perception of safety in the area.**

The effort, led by the city manager and the Downtown Task Force, has brought new attention and resources to the downtown. Over the past three years, there have been a number of policy and practice changes that are contributing to improvements, including completing the “Re-imaging Broadway” planning process and the hiring of a downtown coordinator to provide a constant focus on downtown. In addition, the city has leveraged \$5.3 million for downtown infrastructure improvements, targeting the most visible and locally used part of Chelsea. The CPD has also dedicated additional presence in the downtown, leading anecdotally to an improved perception of safety in the area.

- ✓ **Chelsea Thrives has contributed to new attention and new resources in support of youth activities to provide healthy alternatives to risky activities.**

The Youth Opportunity Task Force, a cross-sector group composed of parents, youth, schools, police, city, and other community partners, highlighted gaps and opportunities related to youth programming. As a result, the city formed the new Parks and Recreation Department with two full-time and two part-time employees, and the Chelsea Community Schools agreed to sustain support for the summertime basketball pick up program that the task force piloted with WCC funds.

- ✓ **Chelsea Thrives contributed to policy changes aimed at expanding and improving housing in the city.**

Chelsea Thrives reports that unstable housing is a top risk factor identified through the work of the Hub. Early in implementation, Chelsea Thrives had catalyzed a targeted code enforcement effort, starting in 2014, aimed at reducing overcrowding and ensuring code compliance. The city policy change required the city to conduct in-home inspections of all housing units every five years. In addition, the policy change also required the school, police, and fire departments to notify Inspectional Services when they come across evidence of overcrowding. More recently, Chelsea Thrives was instrumental in generating support (through voter education and outreach and/or technical assistance to city leaders) for new policies that will expand affordable housing in the city—the Community Preservation Act passed in 2016 and an inclusionary zoning ordinance passed in 2017.

Fitchburg

The ReImagine North of Main team contributed to several system changes intended to improve the quality of the North of Main neighborhood. Most system changes related to economic development or downtown revitalization.

- ✓ **The efforts to revitalize downtown now involve alignment among a variety of stakeholders in Fitchburg.**

The stronger focus on economic development, particularly downtown revitalization, led RNoM to develop much stronger relationships with two business groups, Fitchburg Pride and the Fitchburg Plan. The work of the RNoM team and the new relationships it built with business-led groups have been instrumental in creating new perspectives on how to strengthen Main Street.

Related to the new collaborative relationships, developing a common pipeline of projects among the core leaders is also a significant shift in how development has occurred in the past in Fitchburg. Having the city, FSU, and NewVue all agree to strategic priorities and catalytic projects represents a new way of doing business in the city and may provide a much needed “market signal” to investors and the business community.

- ✓ **The effort has successfully branded the neighborhood as “North of Main.”**

Perceptions of the neighborhood targeted by the Fitchburg team have been relatively negative. The perception is that the area has high crime, instability, and poor housing. The RNoM effort has been successful in rebranding the neighborhood as “North of Main,” the beginning of ongoing efforts to improve perceptions and market conditions.

- ✓ **The advocacy effort of RNoM has resulted in policy and practice changes in the city that are directly related to downtown and neighborhood redevelopment.**

The work of RNoM has also resulted in some policies, practices, and resource flows that have the potential to contribute to progress on the shared result. These include successfully advocating for policy changes in the city, such as the Complete Streets Executive Order, changes in the traffic circulation in the downtown, and locating the farmers’ market downtown. In addition, these efforts have caused the city to change how it is addressing problem properties and to enhance its capacity in this area by using the CityNexus tool.

- ✓ **There are new financing tools and incentives to support businesses seeking to locate downtown or to improve their facilities.**

RNoM provided \$25,000 to create a loan loss reserve fund to provide credit enhancement of the chamber of commerce’s existing loan fund for small businesses on Main Street. By providing this cushion, this fund will be able to serve more small businesses that lenders may have perceived as high risk.

Holyoke

Holyoke’s SPARK has built a committed network of partners working to cultivate an entrepreneurial ecosystem that would foster the creation of the 300 businesses identified as the community’s shared

result. To that end, many of the partners have realigned resources or secured new resources, changed policies, or developed new collaborative practices in service of their long-term goal.

- ✓ **More trust exists among the WCC partners, and they view each other as collaborators within a common ecosystem pursuing a shared mission.**

The chamber of commerce has made Latino business development a higher priority and has taken on a leadership role in SPARK to advance this goal. Stronger relationships exist among WCC partners, including HCC and Nuestras Raices, which are jointly implementing a culinary training program, and among SCORE, the chamber, and the city in supporting entrepreneurs and business development. System boundaries have expanded to include SCORE and MSBDC as active partners, several Latino business owners in leadership roles, and education and workforce development organizations directly involved in the entrepreneurial/business development system.

- ✓ **SPARK is generating increased interest in and attention to entrepreneurship throughout Holyoke.**

Several stakeholders noted that more organizations and leaders are talking about entrepreneurship and helping people in their networks to start a business.

- ✓ **Partners are collaborating to address system barriers to entrepreneurial success in Holyoke such as limited workspace.**

SPARK work highlighted the limited availability of flexible, affordable workspace for entrepreneurs in the city. Despite significant vacancy in the city, there are few spaces available for entrepreneurs that do not require significant renovation and rehabilitation. Partners have worked with property owners to increase the availability of space for entrepreneurs and recently applied for state grant funding to develop a co-work space.

- ✓ **Changes in city policies and new city and state resource flows also contributed to SPARK's progress.**

The city's policy shift to allocate CDBG funding for business grants provided a valuable resource to help SPARK graduates launch their businesses. The simpler business certificate process that SPARK championed also reduced a bureaucratic barrier to formalizing a new enterprise.

- ✓ **SPARK community partners devoted additional resources to expand their own offerings in support of the shared result.**

The chamber, SCORE, and MSBDC, in particular, have expanded services such as training workshops, business mentors and business counseling, and free one-year chamber memberships.

- ✓ **SPARK partners have worked collaboratively to develop aligned programming to complement the SPARK offering.**

Holyoke Community College and Nuestras Raices worked in partnership to offer a culinary class. In addition, Western Massachusetts SCORE secured a national grant and partnered with SPARK to organize and host Holyoke Small Business Day. CareerPoint and the chamber changed their traditional computer training offering, tailoring the program more specifically toward SPARK's shared result, now offering a bilingual basic bookkeeping class specifically for entrepreneurs.

Lawrence

The primary system changes that LWFI leaders point to are the changes around collaboration in Lawrence—different organizations making policy and practice changes, reallocating resources, and working with each other in new ways to reach shared goals.

- ✓ **Service providers have a sharper focus on the parent population and prioritize parents in their programs.**

In particular, Lawrence CommunityWorks, Notre Dame Education Center, and The Community Group have increased efforts to recruit parents to their programs. The Career Center took several steps to better serve parents. In addition to providing career services on site at the Family Resource Center in the school building in Lawrence, the Career Center made process changes to help frontline staff better understand and support Lawrence parents when they sought services at the Career Center.

- ✓ **Stronger referral networks among service providers, the Career Center, and the schools now exist.**

Partners have a much clearer understanding of what each entity offers, are able to make personal referrals, and have even developed protocols to systematize the referral process for parents. LWFI has worked with LPS to encourage enrollment specialists at the schools to refer parents. In addition, members of the steering committee have trained frontline staff in their organizations to provide referrals. The former Career Center director echoed the difference noting the progression over the years from an “informed referral” to a warm “handoff” to a “clear referral document, with the analysis from LWFI of the [individual’s] needs.”

- ✓ **LWFI contributed to gains in workforce development capacity.**

LWFI has helped to bring or develop new workforce training in the city. LWFI recognized early on that language was often a barrier to employment for Lawrence parents and, through WCC, connected with Jewish Vocational Services (JVS), a well-known provider of ESOL classes in the Boston area. They reached an agreement for the organization to offer classes in Lawrence for the first time, making Lawrence part of JVS’ first pay-for-success deal involving ESOL education. In addition, LWFI’s work with the Lawrence Partnership, starting with the Urban Agenda grant, led to new employer-driven training initiatives in healthcare and manufacturing.

- ✓ **New relationships forged with the city’s director of business and economic development are having an impact on how the city perceives its role in connecting low-income residents to jobs.**

The inclusion of the LWFI director in employer outreach by the city’s director of business and economic development represents a potential change in the city’s approach to employer engagement and job opportunity for residents. The city director would regularly include the LWFI initiative director on business visits, enabling her to establish lines of communication with the human resource directors.

- ✓ **Partners’ commitment to sustain LWFI and to reallocate resources to enable LWFI functions to continue is further evidence of system change in service of the shared result.**

The institutionalizing of roles in service of the shared result is a critical system change. The Lawrence Public Schools will sustain the LWFI initiative director. While LPS chose not to sustain the family coach position, Lawrence CommunityWorks will continue to dedicate a coach to serve the parent population.

Difference for low-income people

- ✓ **While only three years into a 10-year goal, the stakeholders in the four communities see an impact from the efforts for the intended beneficiaries of the work: low-income people.**

In fact, three-quarters of engaged stakeholders across all four working cities believe the local WCC efforts have already made a difference for low-income people in their community. While the majority of stakeholders in each community see a benefit for low-income individuals, there was variation in stakeholder response, which is likely attributable to the clarity of the team's selected result, the perception of how the result impacts low-income people, and the approach the teams selected. For teams that emphasized system change in service of the result, the impact of policy, practice, and resource changes often occurs over a longer time horizon making it more difficult for stakeholders to identify the near-term benefit for low-income people. Programmatic approaches that deliver needed services to low-income people likely offer more obvious near-term benefit even if they can be more difficult to scale or sustain. In Lawrence, fully 96 percent of those surveyed felt that low-income people had benefitted from LWFI. This high percentage is likely due to two factors: first, Lawrence's intended result, increasing income for Lawrence Public School families, is a result that makes quite explicit how it will help low-income individuals; second, Lawrence offered direct services under the LWFI banner that led to 200 parents gaining employment. The direct service provision makes the benefit quite tangible in the eyes of those involved. Like Lawrence, Holyoke's approach involved direct services through its entrepreneurship classes, allowing for clear tangible beneficiaries; however, the link between business startups and benefit for low-income people is a little less clear, which likely is reflected in a smaller portion recognizing a benefit for low-income people—67 percent. The percentage of Fitchburg stakeholders who identified a benefit for low-income people resulting from RNoM was the lowest of the four cities—61 percent. This likely represents a combination of factors, including the lack of a clear measurable result for low-income people against which people can track progress as well as the fact that the chosen vision (make North of Main a *place* to live, work, and play) was more about improving a *place* with a more distant link to making a difference for individuals.

Communication of progress

- ✓ **WCC teams have not invested in substantial communication of their progress relative to their measurable result beyond discussions among the core team.**

In general, the Round 1 teams have made limited efforts to communicate their specific goal and their measurable progress toward that goal to broader constituencies whether that be a wider set of civic and organizational leaders, residents affected by the work, or the public at large. While some teams have or are developing materials highlighting participant stories of progress, it is rarer that teams have broadly made public the data tracking progress toward a measurable result. In some cases, such as Chelsea Thrives, the low profile is a strategic choice based on an articulated intention that the individual collaboratives that compose Chelsea's table of tables should own their individual progress toward the goal of improved public safety. In other cases, the lack of a clear measurable result or method by which to truly capture progress toward that measurable result makes it difficult to succinctly capture the progress made. In addition, cities may not have actually recognized the value of communicating their progress to the broader audiences; beyond Boston Fed support in crafting communication to external funders, it does not appear to have been a significant focus of Boston Fed support to the sites during implementation. These factors likely influence the fact that the survey responses from more peripherally engaged stakeholders (those not engaged in the leadership of the initiative) show a somewhat limited

understanding of the result and the progress made in service of that result in some cities. For instance, only 60 percent of peripheral stakeholders in Chelsea, 63 percent in Lawrence, and 43 percent in Fitchburg could articulate something close to the team's shared result (there were not enough peripheral stakeholders surveyed in Holyoke to analyze).

While one could argue that it does not matter if there is broad knowledge of progress as long as there is outcome achievement for low-income individuals, this ignores the need for broader understanding and support to achieve longer-term changes whether in service of the result or catalyzing civic infrastructure change. Communication may be important to sustaining political support and resources for the initiative, helping the effort to maintain or accelerate momentum post-WCC grant support. Also, given WCC's long-term goal of using the work toward the shared result as a vehicle for building broader changes in the civic infrastructure, it becomes more important for a wider constituency to understand that this effort is achieving demonstrable outcomes and doing so by using a key set of practices (core elements). Stakeholders are less likely to embed the core elements of collaboration, community engagement, evidence-based learning, and system change in their day-to-day practices unless there has been demonstrated value through substantial progress on the shared result.

Stakeholder perceptions of progress

Beyond the reporting of programmatic or system outcomes, another barometer of progress in the cities related to their shared result is the stakeholder perception of progress. To test stakeholder understanding of their local WCC initiatives and gain their perception of progress, the survey asked respondents to name the key strategies of the initiative and then rate the progress the initiative achieved. The evaluation team grouped respondents' open-ended answers (along with their corresponding rating of progress) into strategy areas. The following chart summarizes the results:

- ✓ **Stakeholders' responses suggest a generally positive view of the progress the WCC teams were able to achieve over the course of implementation. In almost every frequently named strategy in each city, the majority of stakeholders noted substantial progress.**

Stakeholders in Chelsea viewed progress related to community engagement most favorably, with eight of the 11 stakeholders citing the strategy noting substantial progress. The work around youth had the lowest perception of progress, likely a recognition that youth violence is a continuing challenge for the city. The Hub was less frequently associated with Chelsea Thrives, although rated quite highly for the progress achieved. In general, it appears that stakeholders had a more difficult time linking Chelsea Thrives to the specific strategies, perhaps because the initiative is more a table of tables and has not worked to brand the efforts of the other tables as Chelsea Thrives. While the majority of stakeholders saw substantial progress related to RNoM's key strategies, Fitchburg stakeholders generally had the lowest assessment of progress to date of the working cities with 59 percent recognizing substantial progress related to economic development, and 53 percent noting substantial progress related to community engagement. Holyoke stakeholders recognized a fairly narrow range of strategies associated with SPARK. Other than a general category of "collaboration," all other responses naming SPARK strategies referred to the classes and business assistance provided, of which stakeholders were quite positive with 69 percent citing substantial progress. Lawrence stakeholders clearly identified the coaching and workforce development assistance with LWFI and, in general, noted substantial progress related to the strategy. While survey respondents less frequently associated LWFI with parent and employer engagement, respondents did have a favorable view in terms of progress, particularly the parent engagement.

Pathway toward shared result

- ✓ **While in most cases the teams have made notable progress toward their shared result over the first three years, the teams are unable to articulate a logical pathway that takes them from the interim outcomes of today to the 10-year result.**






Based on this evaluation's document review and rounds of qualitative stakeholder interviews, the Round 1 city teams are finding it challenging to place their progress to date on a trajectory that suggests the cities will reach their shared result in 10 years. Despite ongoing work with the Boston Fed staff on a results framework intended to capture the drivers affecting their shared result and the short-, medium-, and long-term indicators of progress, stakeholders interviewed were rarely able to articulate a set of objective progress measures against which the teams could benchmark progress. Even informally, few stakeholders interviewed could articulate how their outputs to date relate to the 10-year shared result and how system changes achieved and strategies they are pursuing will lead to greater scale toward their population-level result. Teams that had success with direct service delivery that are seeking funds to sustain that work with less of a clear focus on systems approaches can amplify their work thus far to achieve a greater scale of impact. Some stakeholders argue that the envisioned results require a far higher and longer period of sustained grant support for programmatic work to achieve the desired impact, and that the focus on desired system change diverts attention from the real need.

Conclusion

After three-and-a-half years of implementation, the research suggests that all of the Round 1 cities can celebrate outcomes in service of their shared result. The balance of system change versus programmatic progress toward the shared result varied across the cities. At times, the cities were challenged by either their own definition of the result or by lack of means to adequately measure progress. Regardless, the majority of stakeholders across the cities point to demonstrable outcomes and believe that low-income people are already benefitting from the progress to date. Next steps for WCC and for the cities themselves is to think more strategically about how their outcomes to date fit in a larger continuum of progress both toward their long-term result and to anticipated gains in civic infrastructure.

3 Round 1 Outcomes: Contribution to Civic Infrastructure

Highlights

-  The impact of Working Cities Challenge on the collaborative leadership of the Round 1 cities appears to be the most significant and profound outcome of the initiative. In all cities, stakeholders noted dramatic improvements in the level of collaboration. Furthermore, teams saw significant benefits associated with that collaboration including less competition among nonprofits for resources, new partnerships supporting aligned efforts, greater alignment of municipal support with community priorities, and new levels of anchor engagement.
-  WCC made progress in breaking down silos among key sectors including cities' stronger relationships between nonprofits and municipal departments and a substantial increase in engagement from educational institutions and the business community.
-  WCC teams have generally embraced the other core elements (community engagement, evidence-based learning, and system change), and teams have an increased awareness of the elements' importance going forward. The degree to which teams see the core elements having contributed to the shared result varies.
-  Teams demonstrate commitment to sustain the work going forward. According to the survey, 93 percent of stakeholders believe that the organizations collaborating on WCC in their city will still be working together toward the desired result in three years.
-  Stakeholder perception of overall WCC impact on the cities is quite strong. In total, 93 percent of survey respondents believe their city is better off because of their WCC efforts.

Introduction

The long-term change WCC intends to catalyze in the working cities is multifaceted. The previous chapter focused on one set of WCC outcomes: progress in service of the 10-year result around which teams organized their work. This chapter tracks the outcomes related to a second goal for WCC cities that has come into sharper focus over the course of Round 1: to improve cities' civic infrastructure so that it includes capable and collaborative leaders, stable and effective civic-minded organizations, networks

united around a common vision, empowered residents, and sufficient resources to support high-potential work. While the Boston Fed always viewed this as a vital outcome of the WCC initiative, over the course of Round 1 it has sharpened its focus on civic infrastructure both in terms of the outcomes that WCC can achieve and in terms of the support that WCC can offer in service of those goals.

Despite the increasing clarity around the emphasis of WCC theory of change on civic infrastructure outcomes, the primary focus of the WCC teams' work over the past three-and-a-half years has been squarely on the shared result the city selected. Thus, it is important at this juncture to look at how the cities' efforts to date serve as a *bridge* to those longer-term civic infrastructure outcomes that seek to make changes in how leaders, organizations, networks, and residents act and how resources flow. The evaluation team worked with Boston Fed staff to articulate a set of anticipated changes at the end of implementation that builds from the work of the teams to date and should set the cities on a path to further civic infrastructure growth over the full 10-year timeframe. The extent to which the four Round 1 cities did or did not make progress toward an improved civic infrastructure is not an indicator of a specific success or failure of the WCC teams; the task WCC articulated was specifically to address their shared result. The evaluation team views the attempt to assess the cities' progress with respect to civic infrastructure as a test of WCC's theory of change that hypothesizes that the specific work toward the result can produce the civic infrastructure gains without that specific intention of the teams.

The evaluation considered progress of the Round 1 cities with respect to changes in the civic infrastructure in five major outcome areas:

1. **Expanded and sustained collaborative leadership.** The concept of collaborative leadership was foundational to the creation of WCC as prior Boston Fed research found this was the common element among smaller cities that had shown resilience in the face of changing economic conditions. The rubric seeks to unpack the varied indicators for collaborative leadership, including distributed leadership in which multiple parties share responsibility for achieving the cities' ambitious goals, commitment to sustained work, new and deeper relationships among leaders, and the inclusion and development of new leaders particularly those representative of the ethnic diversity of the communities. The rubric also assesses how the team has built greater alignment in the city, looking for early indicators that the WCC teams started to reach out to other networks and align efforts toward a broader citywide goal.
2. **Value and diffusion of core elements.** Given the emphasis placed on utilization of the core elements as a means of achieving progress toward the shared result, the rubric seeks to test the uptake of these practices more broadly among WCC partners. The rubric looks at what value the partners saw in the use of the core elements in achieving their result, as well as examines the extent to which partners have already made changes in their policies, practices, and resource flows to support greater use of the core elements within their organizations.
3. **Engaged residents.** The evaluation does not include methods to test whether there has been a measurable change in the degree to which residents are engaged in their community. Rather than assess the actual change in residents, the rubric looks at the steps teams have taken that could plausibly lead to more engaged residents. The rubric assumes that for WCC to have contributed to residents being more engaged, teams would have had to take three steps: first, regularly seek the input of residents; second, make use of the insights shared by residents by actively and visibly incorporating resident feedback into strategies so that residents can see that their input is valued and

used; and, finally, demonstrate progress to residents so that they feel like they own the progress and recognize that their input was critical in achieving the progress to date.

4. **External recognition.** Whether as part of an intentional process or as a byproduct of the improved civic infrastructure, WCC envisions that the cities will be better positioned with a variety of external stakeholders leading to an improved image for the cities and, importantly, new resources to help achieve the cities' goals. This evaluation considers the early progress WCC teams have achieved through their work toward the shared result.

Overview

The evaluation finds substantial evidence that the WCC teams have generated outcomes for their respective communities that extend well beyond progress toward their shared result, but ultimately affect the communities' capacity to tackle any challenges in the future, regardless of the specific goal. WCC appears to have influenced *how* organizations individually and collectively engage in community change work. Taken in aggregate, these changes represent improvements to the civic infrastructure of the working cities.

The most prevalent and likely most powerful improvements appear to be the changes in relationships among key actors within their respective communities. Interviewees repeatedly referred to the connections and sense of collaboration as a critical outcome of the initiative. There is also greater collaboration between individual organizations and among larger groups of organizations as well as in the alignment of activities among networked groups. Beyond improved collaborative leadership, WCC has also made a difference with respect to embedding some of the core elements through changing perceptions of WCC partners and ultimately changing policies and practices elements within the partner organizations to better align with the core.

Assessment of Interim Outcomes Related to Civic Infrastructure (Aggregated Round 1 Cities)

Outcome Areas	Indicators	Sub-Indicators	Round 1 Cities' Progress
Expanded and sustained collaborative leadership	WCC team organizations demonstrate distributed leadership, sharing responsibility for achieving the shared result.		Mostly Strong
	WCC teams demonstrate preparation for sustaining collaborative, system-oriented work in service of shared result.		Strong/Moderate
	Existing leadership connections strengthened and new leaders are identified and engaged.	Initiative resulted in new or deeper relationships among organizations and/or catalyzed changed perspectives among leaders.	Strong
		New partners have been welcomed into the leadership of the initiatives.	Strong
		Partners place increased priority on working with leaders who represent the racial and ethnic diversity of their cities.	Strong/Moderate
		Stakeholders cite rising, new, talented civic leaders who reflect the diversity of their communities.	Strong/Moderate
Teams have ongoing collaboration with other networks, collaboratives, or other key organizations active in related systems in the city formally or informally on issues that extend beyond the specific WCC result.		Mostly Strong	
Value and diffusion of core elements	WCC teams see substantial contribution of core elements in progress toward shared result.	Stakeholders note collaborative leadership made a substantial impact on the outcomes achieved.	Mostly Strong
		Stakeholders note community engagement made a substantial impact on the outcomes achieved.	Moderate/Weak
		Stakeholders note use of data made a substantial impact on the outcomes achieved.	Moderate/Weak
		Stakeholders note system change made a substantial impact on the outcomes achieved.	Strong/Moderate
	Organizational leaders bring core elements back to home organizations and diffuse into practices and policies.	Partner organizations have changed systems to support stronger collaborations with other leaders or leading organizations in the cities.	Strong
		Partner organizations have changed systems to better engage residents.	Strong
		Partner organizations have changed systems to better use data.	Strong/Moderate
Engaged residents	WCC partners regularly sought out resident voices and insights when developing strategies		Strong/Moderate
	WCC teams' strategies directly respond to resident insights.		Moderate
	WCC teams demonstrate accountability to residents by directly communicating progress toward shared result.		Moderate/Weak
External recognition	WCC leaders develop or improve relationships with entities outside the cities, including attracting new outside resources aligned with shared result.		Strong

Key:

Strong	Mostly Strong	Strong /Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Weak	Weak
All cities demonstrate strong progress	3 cities demonstrate strong progress, 1 moderate	2 cities demonstrate strong progress, 2 moderate	1 city demonstrates strong progress, 2 moderate, 1 limited OR 2 strong and 2 limited	1 city demonstrates strong progress, 1 moderate, 2 limited OR 3 moderate, 1 limited	All cities demonstrate limited progress

Expanded and sustained collaborative leadership

- ✓ **The impact of Working Cities Challenge on the collaborative leadership of the Round 1 cities appears to be the most significant and profound outcome of the initiative.**

The final survey of WCC stakeholders overwhelmingly supported the change in relationships among organizations in the working cities. In total, **92 percent of all survey respondents agreed, and a full 72 percent strongly agreed, that their city's WCC effort had facilitated new or deeper relationships among organizations in the city and/or catalyzed changed perspectives among local leaders.** The recognition of new relationships was strongest in Lawrence where notably 87 percent of respondents strongly agreed that the WCC effort had facilitated new or deeper relationships, with Holyoke and Chelsea not far behind at 83 and 75 percent strongly agreeing, respectively, and Fitchburg somewhat lower at 53 percent. Some of the changes noted in the cities related to the increased collaboration include:

- **Stronger referral networks.** Organizations report having a better understanding of what each entity does and are far more able to not only connect those in need of services with the right organization, but also are often able to make a more personal handoff, decreasing the chances that a person in need falls through the cracks. The evaluation noted such changes in Chelsea, particularly around the work of the Hub; in Lawrence, among the nonprofits, schools, and city stakeholders looking to connect parents to services or employment; and in Holyoke, among the various departments and organizations providing services related to small business development.
- **Less competition among nonprofits for resources.** Cities noted more joint funding applications as well as a clearer understanding of different organizations' strengths allowing for more efficient partnering.
- **New partnerships supporting aligned efforts.** Chelsea, Fitchburg, and Lawrence have helped to catalyze or support the growth of new collaborative efforts working on related, but distinct, community change efforts.
- **Greater alignment of municipal support with community priorities.** Teams remarked on a new spirit of collaboration and support from municipal leaders in service of team priorities. Teams noted support from the mayor or city manager in identifying resources to support team goals, key departments working in new ways, as well even more autonomous municipal organizations such as police departments or public school systems looking at their own institutions and how they can contribute to broader community priorities.
- **New levels of anchor engagement.** There were changes in how several institutions have engaged in the work including Northern Essex Community College in Lawrence, Fitchburg State University, and Holyoke Community College.

Representative Comments on Collaboration

“...I would say the biggest indicator is that there is so much more collaboration and initiative in the community. People are really more apt to work together and there is less competition in the community than there has been in the past.” —Chelsea

“[The collaboration] creates a sense of accountability, camaraderie, and urgency. Everyone loves it and it’s just permeated the whole city. That’s the biggest change in the city so far.” —Chelsea

“I think it might feel like process, but from my perspective, it’s the biggest positive outcome because, if they can sustain it, it’s the key piece here. It really makes you feel like you’re not in this alone and you can do something bigger than what your agency may have previously taken on because you have this big collaboration behind you.”—Fitchburg

“It’s more collective than it was before...if we’re really successful, RNoM will go away and it will just be how we do business—as opposed to right now— we need to remind ourselves to do this collectively.”—Fitchburg

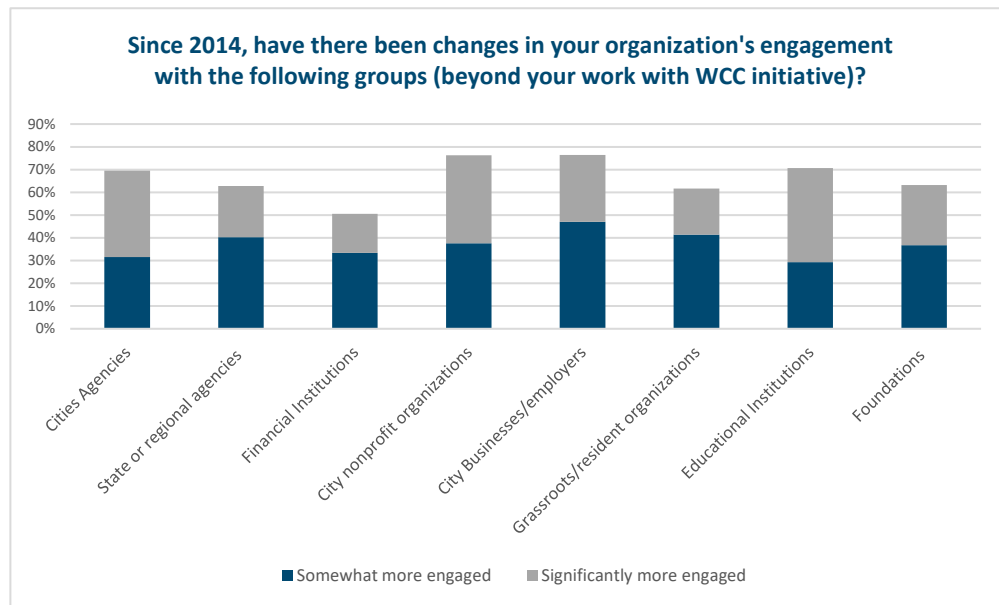
“I think there’s more of a climate where... because of our strong partnership on SPARK, that there’s a perception that City Hall is a willing partner to their initiatives and goals.”—Holyoke

“The real success of the initiative is that the challenge brought the city together on several different levels which is a great benefit. We engaged a whole bunch of new partners in the process. You can’t just look at it from the WCC result standpoint; you need to look at the larger landscape because constituencies have been brought together...Benefits have been way beyond where the city of Lawrence had been going—all by bringing the right people together.”—Lawrence

“The relationships that have been formed are not going to go away. When there’s a new grant, everyone’s already thinking about how we can collaborate... If the initiative went away tomorrow, the partnerships are not going away. Everyone understands what everyone does, that’s what the initiative was able to do.”—Lawrence

- ✓ **Collaboration increases were notable not just between organizations within the same sector but also across sector boundaries, often breaking down siloes between nonprofits and municipal departments or agencies or between those sectors and the business community.**

Cross-sector collaboration appears to have increased significantly during the three years of implementation. The survey asked organizations that had engaged with the Working Cities Challenge efforts in each of the cities about how their engagement with other sectors had changed during the three-year timeframe, and more than 75 percent of respondents noted some increase in engagement with nonprofits and the business community.



While engaging the business community was not always easy for the WCC collaboratives, there was clear progress over the implementation period. Based on survey results, 29 percent of respondents noted a significant increase in engagement with city businesses, and 47 percent reported somewhat more engagement with the business community. In general, the collaboratives had the greatest success in engaging business intermediaries or membership organizations rather than individual businesses. Examples of these organizations would include the chamber of commerce in Holyoke, the Lawrence Partnership, and the business-led collaborative, the Fitchburg Plan. Holyoke provides a strong example of progress; there, the chamber of commerce and its foundation, while engaged from the start as the team’s backbone organization, have deepened their commitment to SPARK goals. The chamber now focuses more on growing its membership among Latino business, and the foundation has made entrepreneurial development a key priority. Also in Holyoke, Easthampton Savings Bank is planning to open a Holyoke branch as a result of advocacy of the bank representative who sits on the ecosystem committee. The bank also offers business loans to graduates of the SPARK program who would not qualify for traditional loans.

- In Fitchburg, there is increased interaction and potential alignment with the Fitchburg Plan, a business-led organization that is focusing on economic development in the city. While it is still not clear how the two groups will work together in the future, the relationship between RNoM and the Fitchburg Plan is stronger, partially because of the involvement of both groups in the Kresge Foundation Capital Absorption work, which took members of the RNoM team and the Fitchburg Plan to a multiday convening in Las Vegas.

WCC also appears to have had a significant impact on collaboration with educational institutions whether K-12 or higher education. Of particular note, 41 percent of respondents indicated a significant increase in engagement with educational institutions (71 percent overall indicated either significant or moderate increase). In fact, each city can point to deep or growing connections with educational institutions including Chelsea Public Schools, Fitchburg State University, Lawrence Public Schools, Holyoke Community College, and Northern Essex Community College.

✓ **The collaboration extends beyond relationships between individuals or organizations to alignment of networks, taking steps toward a shared vision for the city's future.**

Each WCC team has aligned work to some degree with other collaborative efforts in the city, bringing new focus and resources to the work. Below are some examples of stronger alignment:

- In Fitchburg, Relmagine North of Main contributed to the greater alignment of multiple economic development efforts in the city including The Fitchburg Plan, the downtown strategies of Fitchburg Pride, and the city's Economic Development Plan. In particular, the relationship between RNoM and the Fitchburg Plan is stronger, and the groups will explore even closer collaboration, perhaps merger, in the future.
- In Lawrence, there is stronger alignment of multiple networks in service of building the skills of Lawrence residents to create a better-prepared and more competitive workforce that benefits all Lawrence residents. LWFI has contributed, but the Lawrence Partnership has played a leadership role in aligning as well as catalyzing these efforts, which include LWFI, Lawrence Partnership's Training Consortia, and the new early college and career pathways pilot program involving the high school and local colleges. While LWFI cannot take "credit" for the multiple forces shaping that community priority, it has played a role in aligning the networks and ensuring that Lawrence's adult low-income residents continue to be a focus of the efforts going forward.
- In Holyoke, there has been some progress on aligning business development with place-based economic development efforts in the city. Alignment of multiple networks has been less of a focus for SPARK; however, there is some evidence of early attempts to align SPARK's effort on small business development with MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) in Holyoke and Holyoke's Innovation District.
- Since Chelsea Thrives is, in fact, a "table of tables," the entire focus of the work in recent years has been on aligning networks. The fact that there is strong consensus in the city that reducing crime is a top community priority has helped to galvanize multiple tables, including those focused on youth opportunity or downtown revitalization, to share a vision and identify their own contribution to achieving the citywide goal.

- ✓ **Stakeholders increasingly recognize the value of pursuing collaborative approaches and have made changes in their organizations to support greater collaboration.**

Both city interviews and survey results support the fact that stakeholders now value the power of collaboration more than at the start of WCC and are taking steps to incorporate collaborative approaches in their work. The survey found:

- almost **83 percent of respondents now see sharing decision-making and responsibility with other organizations as more important** than they did at the start of the initiative; and
- nearly **80 percent of survey respondents now see it as more important to build new relationships with individuals and/or organizations or to bring different types of organizations into problem-solving discussions**, including 57 percent who see it as *significantly* more important.

Many stakeholders report that their organizations have taken steps to implement more collaborative practices. In fact, 69 percent of survey respondents report having changed policies, practices, or resource allocations (human or financial) to develop stronger collaborations with other leaders or leading organizations in the city, including 75 percent of respondents in Chelsea, Holyoke, and Lawrence, and 58 percent in Fitchburg.

- ✓ **The WCC initiative generally had a greater effect on the levels of collaboration among existing leaders in the cities than it did on generating new leadership. However, there were still some notable improvements in nurturing new community leaders.**

The cities varied in the degree to which leadership development was a significant emphasis of their work. The most common success among the cities in terms of catalyzing new leaders is the WCC initiative directors themselves. The visibility, connections, mentorship from powerful city leaders, and skill building through WCC all likely accelerated the professional development of the directors. In Fitchburg and Lawrence, the initiative directors are now taking the skills developed through WCC and applying them to important new roles in the community. Unfortunately, the highly regarded initiative director in Chelsea has recently departed for an out-of-state opportunity.

WCC does appear to have had a generally positive impact on leadership based on several measures tested in the survey. In all four cities, roughly half or more of respondents strongly agreed that new partners had been welcomed into the leadership of the initiative. In Holyoke, most notably, 91 percent of respondents strongly agreed that new partners had been welcomed. WCC collaboration appears to have also led to a change in perspectives about the importance of working with diverse leaders. Overall, 43 percent of survey respondents noted a strong increase in the priority they place on working with leaders who represent the racial and ethnic diversity of the city. This varied from a high of 63 percent in Chelsea to a low of 31 percent in Fitchburg. Overall, stakeholders have a positive view that their cities have a group of rising, new, talented civic leaders that reflects the diversity of their community (52 percent strongly agree). This no doubt stems from many factors in the community, not necessarily the result of WCC, but it offers valuable insight into the current state of the cities' civic infrastructure with respect to leadership. The outliers on this measure were Lawrence, on the high side, where 78 percent of survey respondents strongly agree the city has a group of rising, talented civic leaders, and Fitchburg, where only 26 percent strongly agree with the same statement, suggesting that the city may need to focus additional attention on cultivating a new set of diverse leaders.

Two of the four cities actually pursued intentional strategies to cultivate new leadership. Chelsea had some noteworthy success with its effort. Chelsea Thrives' lead, The Neighborhood Developers, used WCC support to operate a successful resident leadership training program from which the city manager has readily selected many graduates to serve on city boards and committees. In addition, interviews suggest that the presence of Chelsea Thrives and the strong and persistent collaboration that has been present in the community contributed to the creation of a new resident-led group, the Chelsea Hill Community group that was inspired by the models applied to the downtown area. Fitchburg had intended to build resident leadership as part of its community engagement strategy and RNoM did send 12 residents to NeighborWorks' Community Leadership Institute, but there was no reference to any particular outcomes in terms of residents developing new leaders.

SPARK did not have an intentional strategy to build new leaders in the community, but it has indirectly contributed to leadership development through bringing several Latino and new business owners into leadership roles within the chamber of commerce and engaging SPARK businesses in new roles.

Like SPARK, LWFI did not have an intentional strategy for generating new community leaders through the WCC initiative. However, LWFI did contribute to some degree to the formation of the Lawrence Partnership, not an individual leader, but an entirely new leadership body in the city that now serves as a critical platform for cultivating business leadership in the city.

✓ **While only three years into what WCC considers a 10-year goal, it appears that teams have developed the broad and deep leadership commitments necessary to sustain the work going forward.**

Throughout the initiative, Working Cities Challenge has sought to instill in participants the importance of distributed leadership so that not one organization alone, but instead many organizations, hold the authority and the responsibility for achieving the results. Both survey and interviews suggest a high level of distributed leadership among the organizations engaged, which should position the team to continue to make progress moving toward the shared result in years to come. Overall, 87 percent of survey participants agree, including 66 percent who strongly agree, that their organization is responsible for helping to achieve the initiative's result (in collaboration with other partners). Among the core team—those involved in leadership of the city initiatives—those numbers increase to 71 percent in Chelsea, 89 percent in Fitchburg, 84 percent in Holyoke, and 86 percent in Lawrence.

93 percent agreed (74 percent *strongly* agreed) that the organizations collaborating on WCC in their city will still be working together toward the desired result in three years.

Despite the overall level of optimism at sustaining the work in service of the shared results, some common themes surfaced in stakeholder interviews suggesting that teams will need to mitigate risk. The largest concern is the commitment in organizations, not individuals. The three years of implementation generally built very strong relationships among deeply engaged stakeholders. However, interviews in multiple cities express concern about either recent turnover or the risk of staff turnover in the future undermining the knowledge and commitment that the initiative has built. The loss of Chelsea's initiative director to another state, the transition to new local roles by both the Lawrence and Fitchburg initiative directors, the change in leadership at the Lawrence Career Center and pending change of the superintendent of

Lawrence Public Schools have all raised concerns about how collaboratives weather staffing changes. An additional risk in sustainability is how the collaboratives look beyond sustaining their existing work but re-evaluate their progress in light of their ambitious goals. In most cases, sustaining the programmatic work of the past three years will not be enough to achieve the articulated results, so teams need to rethink strategies to not only sustain current efforts but also to consider alternatives that might accelerate progress beyond what they have achieved in the first three years.

Value and diffusion of core elements: community engagement

- ✓ **WCC's impact on community engagement practices is mixed. While each Round 1 city appears to have deepened its commitment to community engagement related to its participation in the initiative, stakeholders have a more mixed view as to whether their use of community engagement had a strong impact on their progress toward their shared result.**

The stakeholders engaged in WCC cities appear to have a stronger appreciation of the importance of community engagement and have made changes in policies, practices, and resource flows to better engage residents. Approximately 72 percent of survey respondents now view seeking the perspective of a racially, ethnically, economically diverse body of residents to inform approaches to improve the city as more important. Almost 83 percent of survey respondents noted an increase in importance of pursuing strategies to support resident empowerment/leadership (36 percent see it as significantly more important). Beyond changes in perceptions, more than half of all survey respondents across the cities reported that they have made system changes to better engage residents.

The cities that have seen the greatest contribution from community engagement to progress on their shared result started the initiative with lead organizations known for their strength in community engagement. In these cities (Lawrence and Chelsea), community engagement was effectively built into the WCC initiatives and modeled for other partners. This appears to have led to uptake from other initiative partners.

In Lawrence, while the greatest gains related to community engagement appear to be in the Lawrence Public Schools, the community college also sees progress in this area. In Lawrence, “community” really refers to parents since that is the population affected by the shared result. LPS was interested in increasing parent engagement in the schools. Support and modeling from LWFI, in particular led by the capacity of Lawrence CommunityWorks, helped to accelerate its efforts. LPS has spent the past year developing a districtwide strategy for parent and family engagement, has hired an assistant superintendent to focus on that issue, and has changed job descriptions of frontline staff to work with parents more holistically. In addition, Northern Essex Community College points out that LWFI contributed to the institution’s changing culture and practices with regard to engaging the community in Lawrence. The college president remarked that the college has shifted “entirely the way we manage and administratively structure our Lawrence campus” in part based on learning and discussions occurring at the LWFI table.

In Chelsea, the greatest gains appear to be in city government’s embrace of community engagement. The Neighborhood Developers, the lead organization for Chelsea Thrives, had pre-existing strength in community engagement that provided strong capacity from the outset. However, as the team was able to build community engagement into initiative practices and to prove its value, it appears that the city has embraced the practice, as is demonstrated by the significant resident engagement in the downtown revitalization efforts.

Other Round 1 cities experienced less success in using community engagement to advance their work, but still saw value in the practices and have made changes in policies, practices, and resources to better engage residents. The Fitchburg team recognizes the importance of community engagement and intends to focus the initiative heavily in this area in future years under the leadership of the FSU provost who brings new expertise in this area to the team. Stakeholders, however, did not particularly see significant impact from community engagement in contributing to the shared result to date. While initially community engagement was not a particular strength of the WCC effort in Holyoke, interestingly, the team's perception of its importance expanded dramatically. In response to a survey question about the importance of pursuing strategies to support resident empowerment/leadership, 69 percent of Holyoke respondents said it was significantly more important. This is more than double the average of all WCC survey respondents.

Value and diffusion of core elements: evidence-based learning

- ✓ **WCC's contribution to evidence-based learning is similar to its influence on community engagement. The Round 1 cities generally see it as more important and have incorporated practice and policies to better use data, yet they have mixed assessments of the contribution that use of data made in achieving progress toward their shared result.**

Working Cities Challenge placed heavy emphasis on the use of data as a critical element to the work of the teams. Teams varied in their receptiveness to this emphasis as well as their capacity to effectively implement the vision the Boston Fed put forth. Despite the varied success of the teams in making use of data for learning and decision making during the three years of implementation, there does appear to be much wider acceptance today of the value and need to incorporate data in regular practices. The survey found nearly 90 percent of respondents now see using "data" to develop strategies, assess progress, inform learning, and catalyze adaptation and innovation as more important (41 percent significantly more important) to making change in the community than they did at the start of the initiative. In addition, 45 percent of all stakeholders changed policies, practices, or resource allocations (human or financial) to better use data. Chelsea and Lawrence made large gains. Fitchburg and Holyoke saw smaller changes with 37 percent and 25 percent, respectively, reporting any changes to policies, practices, or resource allocations with respect to data use.

Interestingly, the change in perceptions as well as policies and practices with respect to use of data appears disconnected from the cities' perception of the impact the use of data had on the progress teams made toward their shared result. While more than 75 percent of all respondents at least somewhat agreed that their initiative regularly used data to refine strategies (36 percent strongly agreed), only 31 percent felt it made a substantial impact on progress (though an additional 41 percent felt it made at least a modest impact).

Chelsea appears to have made the biggest advance in its use of data with 60 percent of respondents indicating changed policies and practices with respect to data. Data use and evidence-based decision-making is not necessarily new in Chelsea. Organizations like TND, MGH, CPD, and the public school system all collected and applied data before Chelsea Thrives began. The growth of data use in Chelsea has less to do with individual organizations using data, but more to do with the sharing and joint use of data. Team members agree that the establishment of a shared system of data greatly improved their applications, and a recent federal grant will even deepen data collection and analysis by providing more capacity to the work.

WCC's focus on data was not an easy fit for the Lawrence team, particularly for the lead organization, Lawrence CommunityWorks, whose executive director readily admitted a preference for action over analysis and emphasized the importance of anecdotal information on the ground over spreadsheets. The lack of an ability to measure its shared result also hampered the team. Despite these potential misalignments, the team did embrace the need for data and, in fact, 54 percent of LWFI survey respondents noted system changes with respect to data use. In the end, the greatest civic infrastructure change with respect to data appears to be Lawrence CommunityWorks itself; multiple staff members noted a changed perception of the value of data as well as improved systems to facilitate its use within the organization.

In Fitchburg, 37 percent of stakeholders report changing policies or practices in support of greater use of data, but the most significant changes have been within the city. Due to the influence of the RNoM team, the city of Fitchburg identified a number of areas where it has changed its overall approach to be more data driven. Fitchburg saw the least value from use of data in terms of its contribution to progress on the shared result, however.

Holyoke reports the lowest level of policy or practice changes with respect to data, although 33 percent of respondents did indicate that use of data had a substantial impact on progress to date. The SPARK team is making progress in its use of data that will hopefully demonstrate additional value for stakeholders in future years. The partners engaged in supporting entrepreneurs have committed to a common intake form and are now implementing a shared Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database to share information, and track and assist entrepreneurs and businesses.

Value and diffusion of core elements: system change

- ✓ **The WCC teams achieved system change outcomes in their work, and stakeholders value system change in its contribution to their progress. However, it is difficult to assess the degree to which participating organizations have embedded more deeply a system lens or “system change approach” as the way of doing business separate from collaborative practices.**

The four Round 1 WCC cities all achieved demonstrable system changes in their work toward their shared result, often emerging from opportunities identified through the new and deeper collaborative relationships rather than a clearly articulated and intentional strategy to change systems. According to the survey, 77 percent of stakeholder respondents agreed that they had pursued system-oriented strategies (45 percent strongly agreed). Moreover, 75 percent believed system strategies had some positive impact, with 38 percent noting a strong positive impact on their work. The efforts appear to have deepened participants' perceptions of the value of a system focus. Nearly 90 percent of survey respondents now see pursuing strategies to change policies, practices, and funding flows as more important (51 percent significantly more important) to making change in the community than they did at the start of the initiative.

Beyond the perspective shift, it is difficult to document how the value placed on system change manifests itself in organizations. Interviews suggest that for most stakeholders, the elements of collaborative leadership and system change are so intertwined that it is impossible to distinguish civic infrastructure changes related to system change from civic infrastructure changes related to collaborative leadership. Most system changes celebrated in the working cities were because of changing relationships, perspectives, and boundaries occurring through the collaborative work. The power of establishing the cross-sector table, reaching consensus at the table about the system drivers affecting the shared result,

carefully considering who needs to be at that table and adjusting as necessary, and continually working collaboratively to identify and take steps toward that result appears to be the general path toward system change in WCC. As a result, stakeholders' embrace of collaborative leadership gives an assurance of some continued emphasis on system change.

Engaged residents

- ✓ **Most of the Round 1 cities generally sought out resident voices and insights; however, teams need to reflect more deeply on how the strategies they are incorporating directly reflect resident insight and values. Without a cycle in which residents actively shape the work and see how their effort drives outcomes, it is unclear how WCC efforts will achieve the long-term outcomes of residents who are empowered to participate in civic life.**

Three of the four cities intentionally built resident engagement into their strategies. Chelsea's multiple teams and task forces (e.g., Problem Property Task Force, Youth Opportunity Task Force) often included residents as active participants, and some were resident led (e.g., Community Enhancement Team). Chelsea Thrives' strategies also included neighborhood safety walks that TND and residents co-led. LWFI in Lawrence ran Community Education Circles in several schools as mechanisms for building parent engagement in the schools. The LWFI lead, Lawrence CommunityWorks, organized resident-led design teams to ensure participant input as a key part in the development of some new strategy elements. Fitchburg also focused on resident engagement, although the goals tended to be more community building (neighborhood clean ups, Porchfest, window box competitions) than opportunities for building resident engagement in the strategies RNoM selected. The Fitchburg team did create a Resident Leadership Task Force with an intention to focus on developing new resident leaders. Holyoke focused the least on resident engagement. With a citywide strategy focused on entrepreneurial development, the team struggled with the role and purpose of engaging residents while focused specifically on creating 300 new businesses in Holyoke. Instead, the team engaged the small businesses community, primarily through networking and pitch events like Holyoke soup nights or through outreach activities intended to drive enrollment in its entrepreneurial training program.

Round 1 cities' success in incorporating resident input in their strategies was more mixed. While roughly 50 percent of survey respondents in Chelsea and Lawrence strongly agreed that residents/target population informed their initiatives, only 26 percent in Fitchburg and 8 percent in Holyoke strongly felt the same. Interviews confirmed the survey results, surfacing few concrete examples of how resident engagement led to specific strategies, affected the design of the strategies, or otherwise informed the design of the initiative.

- ✓ **Accountability to residents for progress on the shared result has not been a major emphasis of teams' work to date.**

WCC teams have not placed much emphasis to date on directly communicating with residents about the measurable progress they are making toward a 10-year goal. While some teams have or are currently investing in materials to tell the story of their progress, conversations suggest that the teams generally aim these communications at other professionals representing organizations in their community, not directly at residents. Without such mechanisms of accountability, it is unclear how residents can see the macro results of their engagement and feel empowered to own community change work in their city.

External recognition and connections

- ✓ **WCC helped position the working cities to compete successfully for new outside resources to support their efforts.**

According to analysis developed by the Boston Fed and the city teams, WCC has helped to leverage over \$10 million in the four cities to support work related to the cities' shared result. Following are specific details of the cities' successes:

- Fitchburg reports leveraging WCC funds with an additional \$5.6 million to support aligned activity. The most significant source of funds has been the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, which has committed \$2 million in Fitchburg to date. The city also received a more than \$3 million federal grant for lead remediation thanks to a joint effort of several RNoM partners. In addition, NewVue was recently the recipient of a \$500,000 NeighborWorks Project Reinvest grant that it will use for home rehabilitation and sidewalk improvements in North of Main. In the application, NewVue referenced its role in RNoM and used the collaboration as "the value add."
- SPARK has brought new resources, including approximately \$490,000 in state funding, into Holyoke and has catalyzed expanded services provided by several organizations. The largest state award was \$250,000 under the state Urban Agenda program to support multiple SPARK activities and \$140,000 from Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation. In addition, small business development resources in Holyoke have expanded through new counseling, training, and lending activities by SCORE, MSBDC, and Common Capital that SPARK helped bring to the city.
- Chelsea has been very successful in attracting new funding sources since the establishment of Chelsea Thrives, securing over \$2.3 million in aligned funds. The most significant funds raised were from federal grants. Chelsea Thrives secured the city a million dollar grant from the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). More recently, the city won one of eight \$1 million grants from the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation program to support Chelsea Thrives' collaborative effort towards public safety.
- Lawrence has attracted significant additional funds to directly support the LWFI initiative as well as contributed to the success of attracting additional aligned funds. LWFI has successfully raised approximately \$1.8 million in grant funding related to its shared result from the following sources: W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Herman and Frieda L. Miller Foundation, Massachusetts EOHEd's Urban Agenda grant, Cummings Foundation, Clowes Foundation, and LISC Economic Resilience Initiative. Beyond the funds Lawrence raised to support LWFI, the momentum in the city is generating additional external funding for aligned activity. For instance, the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation announced in the summer of 2017 a \$2 million gift to support Lawrence Public Schools to support the early college and career pathways pilot program

In addition to these funds, the working cities have garnered new respect and recognition from external stakeholders. Particularly noteworthy, both Lawrence and Chelsea won Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) Culture of Health Prize during the Working Cities Challenge and, in both cases, RWJF cited WCC activities among the positive aspects of both cities. In addition, the city of Fitchburg, with support from RNoM, was selected by Smart Growth America to participate in a two-day "(Re) Building Downtown" technical workshop. Beyond the specific awards, multiple interviews with state leaders indicated that the WCC cities are now in a better position for future funding. Through collaboration, they

have identified key community priorities with broad support from civic leaders and can articulate clear rationales for their priorities.

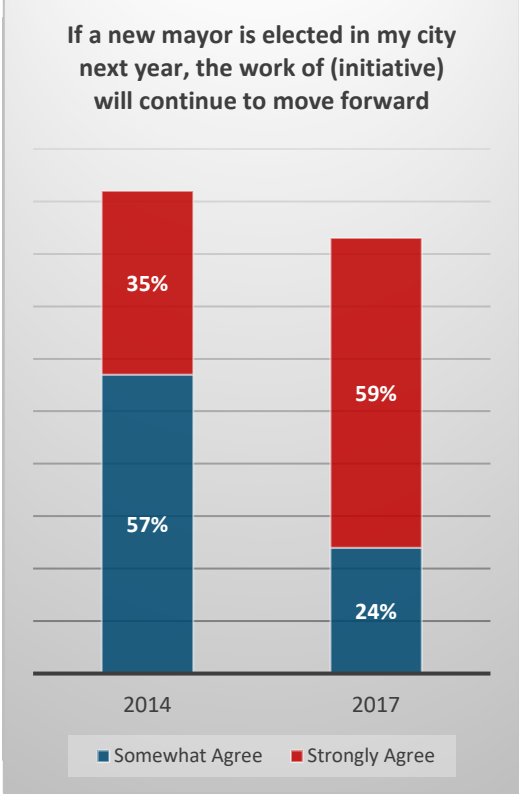
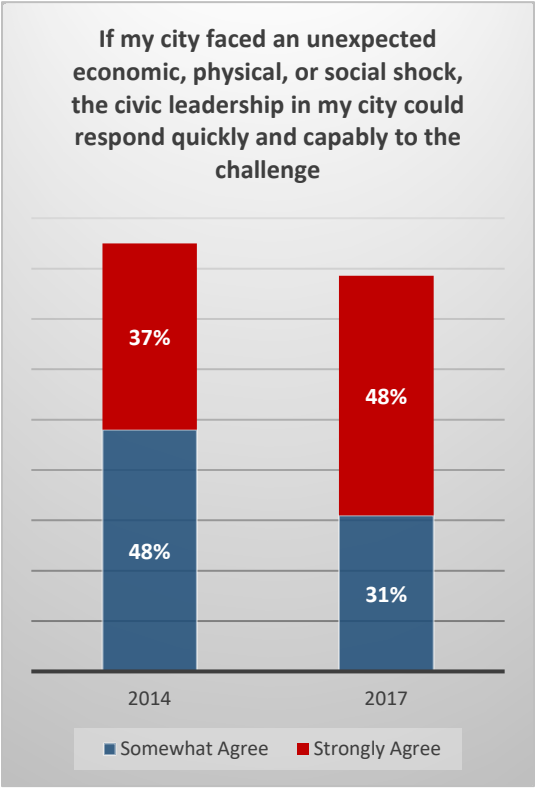
Conclusions

The progress of the four Round 1 cities with respect to civic engagement suggests that the Boston Fed is correct in its hypothesis that improvements to civic infrastructure can be produced as a spillover, a positive externality of the work toward the team's shared result. Each of the cities saw increases in the perceived value of employing the practices recommended in the four WCC core elements, and many stakeholders made practice, policy, and resource change flows to make better use of the core elements. Of all of the elements, collaborative leadership resonates with stakeholders as having made a substantial impact in their work and most likely to make a sustained difference in how their communities operate. Beyond the core elements, the Round 1 teams contributed to their cities' civic infrastructure by building new connections and attracting new resources to their communities as well as aligning their work with other local networks to build a larger coalition seeking aligned positive change.

While the improvements to civic infrastructure are generally quite strong, WCC may want to reflect with teams going forward on how to better achieve WCC's long-term goal of increasing the overall level of engagement of residents in their cities beyond those practices put in place to achieve the shared result. While there are areas for further reflection and improvement, the perception is that WCC's impact is incredibly strong. In total, 93 percent of survey respondents believe their city is better off as a result of their WCC efforts.

Is your city better off because of the WCC initiative?	
Chelsea	100%
Fitchburg	87%
Holyoke	84%
Lawrence	100%
Overall	93%

Part of the interest in improving civic infrastructure stemmed from a desire to make the working cities more resilient. At the outset of Round 1, Boston Fed staff and some steering committee members expressed a goal that the work toward the shared result and the subsequent gains in civic infrastructure would prepare cities to better weather unexpected shocks to the system or political upheaval. The survey offers some final insight into how civic infrastructure gains thus far have translated into changes in perceived resilience. There were two questions asked on both the 2014 baseline survey as well as the final 2017 WCC survey intended to capture changes in the perception of city resilience. This report should point out that the survey respondents overlap somewhat, but not entirely, between the two surveys, so the evaluators cannot state conclusions confidently. However, it is interesting to note that while the overall level of confidence on the two measures of resilience appears to have declined between 2014 and 2017, there is a greater percentage of leaders who have strong confidence in the cities' ability to be resilient in the face of political change or other unexpected shocks.



4 WCC Outcomes beyond Winning Cities

Highlights

- WCC's greatest influence is on Massachusetts-rooted organizations where the Boston Fed has had sustained contact, often through the WCC steering committee. MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative and Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development's Urban Agenda grant program are particularly important efforts in the state in which WCC has played a role in shaping the efforts.
- Stakeholders have been most likely to adopt elements of WCC related to collaborative leadership, although there are some examples of influence related to each of the core elements.
- The Boston Fed's role as the convener and backbone of the initiative has catalyzed new thinking nationally about the potential and possibilities of non-traditional conveners.
- WCC influence on the other Fed branches has been slow to take hold, but recently there are promising signs that other branches are at least considering what a WCC-like effort might look like in other regions.
- While non-winning cities have continued some of the work toward the goals articulated in their WCC proposals, there is little evidence that the principles and core elements WCC espouses have shaped their approaches.

Overview of WCC strategies for influence

Working Cities Challenge impacted the thinking and, in some cases, actions of multiple stakeholders beyond those located in the winning cities. The Boston Fed leadership and staff have promoted the underlying concepts, design principles, initiative approach, and early lessons through multiple channels. WCC quickly garnered attention across the state and nationally both for the new model and for the new role the Boston Fed assumed. Details of the initiative have appeared in national media, including *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, Bloomberg News, and NPR. In addition, leadership of the Federal Reserve has also promoted the initiative. Boston Fed President Eric Rosengren has served as a strong spokesperson for the initiative, touring the Round 1 cities, speaking at multiple events about the initiative, and presenting the initiative to his fellow regional Federal Reserve Bank presidents. Then Federal Reserve Bank Chairman Janet Yellen further heightened the WCC profile when she toured one of the winning cities.

Additional leaders from the Boston Fed have regularly spread the word of WCC, speaking at philanthropic gatherings as well as to business groups both in Massachusetts and around New England.

WCC staff have also shared lessons emerging from the initiative. In the spring of 2017, WCC staff authored an article in *Communities and Banking*, a Federal Reserve publication, entitled “Sparking Change in New England’s Smaller Cities: Lessons from Early Rounds of the Working Cities Challenge.” WCC staff have also shared lessons from the initiative as participants in a learning exchange that the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation convened, at an event that the Greater Ohio Policy Center and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy sponsored, and on a webinar for members of Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities.

Another key vehicle for sharing the WCC model and emerging lessons were annual events to connect the working cities with a broad network of potential funders. WCC sponsored annual Funders’ Plenaries in which the cities themselves could share their progress and learning and engage in dialogue with a host of state, regional, and national funders as well as state policymakers. While primarily viewed as events in which the cities could pitch their strategies and potentially catalyze new funding relationships, the panel discussions with city teams as well as the more informal conversations were likely the most tangible ways, short of site visits, for philanthropic stakeholders to more deeply understand the WCC initiative.

WCC viewed the competitive application process as another vehicle for influence. WCC invited all 20 working cities to apply for the grant funds. The application process extended over a roughly nine-month period from the initial outreach in the communities until the announcement of the winning cities. There were a number of steps in the application process during that time, including an invitation to submit a letter of intent followed by workshops for stakeholders from each of the applicant communities. While cities could submit multiple letters of intent, WCC only accepted one proposal from each city. Boston Fed staff conducted site visits to several communities to gather more information on the collaboratives and the proposed initiatives. Given the intensity of the application process, the Boston Fed anticipated that the cities would find a way to sustain the collaboration that the process sparked, as well as some of the WCC elements, even in those cities that did not ultimately receive implementation grant funds. The desire to affect change even in the non-winning cities continued to be reflected in the WCC interventions, particularly in the first year of implementation when several of the WCC learning-oriented gatherings of cities included both winning and non-winning cities. For years 2 and 3 of implementation, the focus of the learning convenings was more squarely on the winning cities as the Boston Fed realized that it was difficult to tailor content appropriately for all of the cities simultaneously. Despite the fairly low touch with non-winning cities, the Boston Fed has remained interested in the long-term influence of its model on the broader set of working cities.

WCC’s most intensive engagement in terms of profiling details of the initiative design and sharing nuanced lessons emerging from the work was in the regular meetings of the steering committee. The Massachusetts steering committee oversees the work of both Round 1 and Round 2 WCC implementation. Composed of WCC funders, the steering committee members were deeply engaged in the work. The committee regularly discussed site progress in its quarterly meetings. Steering committee members often served as members of the jury whether for Round 1 implementation, Round 2 design grants, Round 2 implementation awards, Round 1 tactical assistance grants, or Round 1 sustainability grants. Steering committee members at times engaged directly with the cities to help advance their work. The steering committee members were the primary consumers of the assessments of site progress, whether developed by staff or by the evaluation research team.

Evaluation research

To better understand how WCC has influenced other organizations and initiatives to date, the evaluation research team conducted a series of interviews with organizations that had some type of ongoing engagement with the Boston Fed and, thus, would be more likely to have experienced sufficient exposure to WCC concepts and learning to have potentially internalized the ideas and practices. Working in collaboration with Boston Fed staff, the evaluation research team compiled a list of WCC stakeholder organizations. The list relied heavily on members of the Massachusetts WCC steering committee, but also included other national and local partners as well as other branches of the Federal Reserve Bank system. The evaluators interviewed a stakeholder from each key organization. In addition to the stakeholder interviews, the evaluation team conducted an additional set of interviews with some of the cities that did not receive implementation grants to see what ongoing influence WCC has had on the cities' work and collaboration. The evaluation team interviewed several of the non-winning cities shortly after the announcement of the Round 1 grant awards. The evaluation team then conducted follow-up interviews at the end of Round 1, mixing non-winning cities and seed cities, and those cities that received one-year grants that ended in December 2014, to explore what work catalyzed by WCC the cities had been able to sustain without additional funds.

Key influence findings

- ✓ **WCC's greatest influence outside of the winning cities is through the deep ongoing engagement that some of the organizations have been able to sustain with the Boston Fed, most often with members of the steering committee.**

Working Cities Challenge appears to have had the greatest influence on organizations' practices and policies when there was ongoing interaction, allowing for repeated exposure to the concepts, principles, and core elements of the initiative. Understanding is nuanced further when stakeholders have been able to follow the successes and challenges of the cities themselves and see both the benefits and barriers to applying the WCC model. This most often happens with members of the steering committee, particularly those based in Massachusetts and whose work often involves the Massachusetts working cities. National funders and other branches of the Federal Reserve were less likely to see specific contributions from WCC to their thinking and work. Influence on the non-winning cities is generally light as well.

- ✓ **Two of the best examples of the ripple effects of WCC are perhaps MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative and Massachusetts EOHEd's Urban Agenda grant program.**

WCC aligned with, reinforced, and influenced the approach to cross-sector collaboration of two key statewide organizations, MassDevelopment and the Massachusetts EOHEd. At the time that WCC Round 1 launched, MassDevelopment was preparing to launch its TDI. The core concepts of building cross-sector partnerships resonated within MassDevelopment, and the organization built collaborative concepts into TDI, taking the "same model and applying it in a place based way." A former MassDevelopment leader suggested that WCC influenced the thinking behind the design of TDI, although it was moving in that direction already. WCC was perhaps most influential with the MassDevelopment board; the fact that the Fed, with its brand name credibility, had embraced an approach emphasizing collaboration was useful in garnering the support of the MassDevelopment board for TDI.

The influence of WCC’s focus on cross-sector collaboration is evident in the EOHED’s Urban Agenda grant program, which initially launched during WCC Round 1 and is currently issuing a second round of funding. In both rounds of Urban Agenda grants, the intent of the grants was to support collaborative work. For the second round of Urban Agenda grants, the preparatory materials specifically quote Fed research on collaborative leadership and the importance of establishing community agreement on priorities and approaches. A leader within EOHED underscored the emphasis noting that successful Urban Agenda applicants won’t just cite “flashy academic studies” to document the value of their proposed approach, they will need to “demonstrate that you’ve gone cross-sector, you’ve got residents and actual stakeholders involved in responding to the issues with multiple strategies.”

✓ **Many stakeholders deepened their appreciation of cross-sector collaboration as a valuable tool in community change.**

While stakeholders certainly did not consider collaboration as a new concept, several stakeholders noted that their appreciation has deepened as a result of WCC. A senior state policymaker remarked that WCC “reinforced the power of collaboration.” An advocate for Massachusetts gateway cities stated that the original research the Boston Fed conducted around collaboration in resurgent cities was quite influential; the WCC made the concept stick.

Some stakeholders point to WCC’s emphasis on collaboration as having a more direct influence on the design of other efforts. For instance, MACP’s CEO remarked that State Street Corporation’s CEO’s exposure to WCC, both through MACP as well as through his role on the board of the Federal Reserve Bank, influenced Boston Workforce Investment Network (Boston WINs), a State Street program.

Boston Community Capital (BCC) noted that the value of collaborative leadership plays a greater role in its investment decisions than it did prior to WCC. A BCC senior leader mentioned a greater willingness to invest in cities where leadership has rallied around a specific vision and can clearly articulate how a specific investment serves that vision. That perspective is true for BCC’s work in Massachusetts and is part of its strategic growth plan as well. BCC has brought the perspective on the importance of cross-sector collaboration on a common goal to its work in other states. The CDFI has closed several investments in Memphis in part because BCC leadership saw that leaders from multiple sectors had coalesced around a common goal of improving education in the city and had assembled a pipeline of projects in support of their goal.

WCC also contributed to a more nuanced understanding of collaboration. An academic researcher with gateway cities expertise remarked, “WCC has deepened my appreciation of the possibilities of collaborative leadership and the difficulties of achieving it.” Stakeholders mentioned looking to WCC to learn about what it takes to make collaboration effective and have watched with particular interest aspects that appear important to collaboration such as dedicated staff and a strong lead organization. Another stakeholder commented that WCC contributed to their learning about the appropriate role of the public sector in cross-sector collaboration, recognizing now that it is likely best for the public sector



“I came into this initiative with a fair degree of skepticism about how meaningful the cross-sector partnerships could be, whether practice in the cities could change at a systems level. I’m pretty impressed across the board with how strong a commitment there seems to be across important sectors in the cities.”—Statewide community development investor

“The collaborative leadership model represents an opportunity for community development for the long term, way beyond the challenge itself.” —State official

to participate, but not lead the team. Yet another stakeholder noted that the WCC lessons helped her organization make a more informed choice when approached to serve as the backbone organization for a collective impact style initiative. Ultimately, the organization declined the offer to serve as a backbone recognizing, as a result of WCC, what that work actually involved.

- ✓ **There are some, though fewer, examples of how WCC emphasis on the other core elements has influenced perspectives and behavior to date.**

While the influence of WCC's focus on collaborative leadership was most pervasive, research showed isolated examples in which the WCC emphasis on the other core elements—evidence-based learning, system change, and community engagement—had an impact on perspectives and behavior as well.

- **Evidence-based learning:** WCC has influenced The Life Initiative (TLI) with regard to measurement. Boston Community Capital noted that it hired a senior vice president of impact and learning, in part influenced by WCC's focus. In addition, TLI focuses on using measurement as a strategic tool, moving away from measuring outputs to looking more specifically at the social impact of investments. The analysis has led the organization to shift the types of investments to maximize impact. While WCC "wasn't the only influence," senior leadership saw WCC as making an "important" contribution to the change.

Similarly, WCC played a reinforcing role in MACP's approach to data and measurement. MACP is working to make its philanthropic efforts more strategic, and seeks to use data-driven evaluation with a goal of making longer-term commitments to the most impactful work.

- **System change:** WCC has shaped an ongoing discussion within MACP about the balance between program activity vs. system change. Last year, MACP conducted an analysis looking at the impact of all its past work. After reviewing the themes of success, the board has explicitly articulated a direction for the organization that is more policy-driven. MACP cites its approach to education and workforce as an example in which it has pivoted from supporting programs at a single college to supporting broader system approaches to affect policies and practices. MACP sees this pivot as influenced by the systems focus in WCC.
- **Community engagement:** WCC appears to have had the least influence on stakeholders' approach to community engagement. In some cases, stakeholders already have prioritized community engagement and it already reflects in their work. For others, they see a limited role for community engagement in their work, or have made a small but fairly limited effort to incorporate it in their work, or, in some cases, admit that this is an area in which their organization needs to focus some attention in the future.

The most common influence of WCC related to community engagement was more a function of collaborative leadership. Multiple stakeholders recognized that this is part of establishing a shared community vision and goal across multiple sectors and reflecting the priorities of the community itself. Boston Community Capital in particular noted that it has "integrated community accountability" in its underwriting.

In some cases, stakeholders described the value of the core elements taken in combination. Together, at least two stakeholders cite the combined core elements as the most likely building blocks for equitable growth. As one state level stakeholder remarked, "The challenge, and the bigger city iterations of the challenge, is a set of practices that could crack the nut on equitable growth. The public sector has been doing traditional grantmaking for a long time, and equitable growth isn't happening." The Funders

Network (TFN) Older Industrial Cities program is in the process of developing a set of design options for TFN’s philanthropic members that could follow the WCC model, but that would incentivize inclusive economic development strategies. TFN views the use of the core elements as critical to the potential initiative. As one TFN leader states, “[WCC’s] insight about the pieces that need to be in place in order to make something successful is super valuable. They have a framework of core elements. Those will be relevant no matter what the topic is. Those elements are great core tenets for the design of any similar grant-based program—evidence-based learning, community engagement, system change, collaborative leadership.”

- ✓ **WCC is built on a strong foundation of research, advocacy, and state policies supporting gateway cities in Massachusetts, further elevating the profile of smaller cities across the state, and providing an opportunity for some additional stakeholders in the private and philanthropic sectors to better understand, and potentially channel investment to, the “gateway” or “working” cities.**

Both national and local funders noted the value of WCC in providing better visibility into the challenges and opportunities of smaller midsized cities. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation cited the Boston Fed’s background information on small cities as influential in the design of Invest Health, a national initiative launched in 2016 exclusively focused on 50 small and midsized cities. A few other national stakeholders interviewed for this research noted opportunities to apply lessons about smaller cities to emerging work in West Virginia where there appears to be a groundswell of interest from local stakeholders to apply cross-sector collaborative approaches to improve economic conditions in that state’s struggling cities.

“We were informed by the experience in the working cities and what they were reporting as lessons learned, about the ways all these sectors were working together. It conformed to what I was observing, so it was very reinforcing and helped me frame larger investments in these gateway cities.” — Regional philanthropic stakeholder

While national stakeholders were more interested in the general lessons that WCC could provide on challenges, opportunities, and promising approaches for working with small to midsized cities, state-level funders and policymakers were looking for on-the-ground intelligence about the specific cities in which they currently invest or hoped to expand activity.

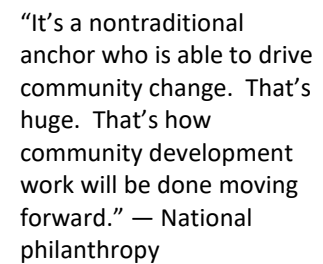
WCC’s focus on the working cities has made some difference in investment in working cities, though relatively modest. While some state-level stakeholders have taken steps to increase their investment in specific winning working cities as a result of WCC, at least one stakeholder has taken steps to benefit Massachusetts smaller cities more generally. WCC has reinforced MACP’s priority to expand its focus beyond Boston, specifically to improve conditions in struggling cities around the state. For instance, when launching a digital health initiative in the state, MACP intentionally sought partners that would support efforts outside of Boston. Another regional philanthropic stakeholder suggested that the “pay for success project in the state of Massachusetts is taking lessons from WCC, and it is affecting private foundations becoming involved in new geographies,” and further asserted that pay for success models might, in fact, be an effective way to leverage what was learned in WCC.

- ✓ **The role the Boston Fed played as the convener and backbone of the Working Cities Challenge was quite influential for a number of national stakeholders.**

A powerful lesson learned, particularly by some of the national philanthropic stakeholders engaged in WCC, was the power of the Boston Fed as a convener. As one person noted, “When the Fed invites people

to things, people tend to show up. It's an institution that people want to be associated with. I think you get best efforts from people in a way that you wouldn't if this were just any old awards competition."

Interviews note that the particular power of the Boston Fed is its ability to engage the private sector more effectively than most alternative organizations. The Boston Fed's own governance structure engages many private sector civic leaders. By also sponsoring WCC, the Boston Fed created bridges to community development and community investment that are often less accessible or of less interest to the private sector. Some felt that the Boston Fed could have made better use of its relationships with the private sector on behalf of working cities. Stakeholders still believe that the Boston Fed can be a powerful broker between the business community and the sites that lack the knowhow and connections to foster those relationships independently.



"It's a nontraditional anchor who is able to drive community change. That's huge. That's how community development work will be done moving forward." — National philanthropy

While the Boston Fed itself may not always be the appropriate or willing convener, WCC encouraged others to think "out of the box" about the potential of "nontraditional conveners" or the "role unlikely institutions" can play. While stakeholders noted the particular benefits the Boston Fed could offer—the brand name, the connections to the business community, and the research capacity—the lesson drawn was to think about the unique strengths that would benefit a specific initiative and then consider the unusual players who might bring those strengths to the table.

- ✓ **Working Cities Challenge appears to have had a limited influence to date on the approaches of other Fed branches across the country; however, there are signs of increasing interest among some branches. While it is unlikely that there would be replication of WCC in other Fed branches, discussions are underway in what a city-based approach could look like in other regions, customized to the regional conditions and to the goals of the specific Fed branch.**

Despite the broad recognition of the unique power of the Federal Reserve Bank as a convener, other regions have been slow to embrace a role similar to that chosen by the Boston Fed. Shortly after the launch of WCC, the swell of interest in the initiative generated a sense that perhaps other Fed branches might embrace aligned versions of the approach. While it is still possible that WCC will have ripple effects through the system, that process is proving slow at best. The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco is a partner in a new multisite, place-based initiative known as SPARCC. While the San Francisco Fed was in regular communication with Boston at the earliest stages of development of this initiative, SPARCC ultimately involved three other organizations in addition to the Fed that together play the initiative-convening role. SPARCC's design and intent was ultimately less reflective of WCC than it was on the experience of the other SPARCC initiative leaders and funders.

While the influence of WCC on other branches of the Fed has been perhaps less than originally anticipated, there are signs that interest in exploring WCC-like approaches in other regions is again on the uptick, in some cases spurred by new leadership at some of the other regional Fed branches. Interviews suggest there is still some interest in exploring the potential of a multisite place-based initiative in other Fed regions, with some initial research underway in Atlanta, Dallas, Philadelphia, and Chicago. A few of those branches are exploring what an initiative focused on inclusive economic development might look like. However, there appear to be aspects to the Federal Reserve culture and operations that will make widespread replication unlikely.

- ✓ **WCC's influence in non-winning cities was limited, although each of the cities interviewed continued to make progress toward the goals for which it sought WCC funding.**

The evaluation team reached out to eight cities, including six cities that received no WCC funding and the two cities that had received one year of seed funding. While not all cities were responsive to interview requests, the team successfully interviewed four cities. All four report that the work laid out in their original proposal has continued in some form.

The impact on non-winning cities is generally lighter and often colored by some resentment and negativity about the loss following the extensive application process. Cities that received no funding had limited interaction with Working Cities Challenge over the full Round 1 implementation period and were not privy to the ongoing communication about putting the core elements into practice. Several of the cities applied for implementation grants for WCC Round 2, although for some cities the proposal reflected a different goal and was composed of a new set of stakeholders, so the sustained contact was limited. Even those that had sustained engagement from the application of Round 1 to the application of Round 2 dropped off after WCC denied funding a second time. Moreover, for those that followed WCC for some length of time, it did not appear that the lessons emerging from the work had any influence on them. One stakeholder interviewed, who does continue to seek out occasional updates of the winning cities, remarked, "If we had half of the resources, we'd be further along. We were ready to hit the ground running. It's left a lot of people in [our city] bitter against the Fed for not giving us the funds."

Despite the frustration and disappointment often felt by non-winning cities, all of the cities interviewed at the end of Round 1 had made progress toward the goals they had laid out in their original WCC proposal, although the degree to which they acknowledge WCC contribution varies. Overall, the cities that did not receive implementation funding focused more on concrete steps of progressing toward their long-term result than they did on process elements of the WCC model—community engagement, system change, evidence-based learning, and collaboration. To the extent that they incorporated the core elements in their work, it most often reflected practices that existed in the community prior to the WCC application process. The exception is some sustained influence on collaboration. Some cities reported that at least some of the organizations brought together initially have continued to collaborate in some form.

Of the cities interviewed, each had sustained work toward its specific shared result—early childhood in Lynn, food security in Springfield, sector development (offshore wind) in New Bedford, and workforce development in Somerville. While Lynn has struggled to secure external funding to support its effort, the partners continue to collaborate and remain committed to their goals even if the pace of progress is slower without the additional resources. Somerville and Springfield have received philanthropic funding to support work aligned with their WCC goals. New Bedford, led by the city's Economic Development Council, has continued to aggressively pursue a sector-based strategy of encouraging offshore wind as an energy source for the state while simultaneously positioning New Bedford as the hub for the emerging sector.

Not surprisingly, WCC was most impactful for the city that received seed funding for a year as opposed to those that just participated in the application process. Somerville, which received seed funding, has continued to focus on workforce development efforts, although it abandoned the central project proposed as its WCC initiative. Somerville Community Corporation (SCC), one of the original key partners, credits WCC with catalyzing the organization's jobs program, started during the year of WCC funding and has continued through current day. WCC served as a catalyst for initial collaboration, providing useful seed funding and valuable peer learning, particularly useful for organizations engaging in workforce

development for the first time. With participation from SCC, the city of Somerville is in the midst of a strategic planning process to determine its future approach to workforce development. Though it does not credit WCC with instilling the system change approach, Somerville has been successful in pushing for policy change to benefit employment outcomes in the city. In late 2017, the city voted to raise the current housing linkage fee and instill a new jobs linkage fee for incoming development. The fee will help fund training for existing residents.

- ✓ **The rapid expansion of Working Cities Challenge into surrounding states is itself a strong indicator of the influence of the WCC Round 1 effort.**

Prior to the completion of the Round 1 implementation, WCC had already expanded into two New England states, Rhode Island and Connecticut, at the request of public, philanthropic, and private sector leaders in both states. Rhode Island, which launched its WCC initiative in 2015, was the first state to replicate WCC. Then, in March 2016, Connecticut became the next New England state to participate in the Working Cities Challenge. In each state, the expansion has involved cross-sector support, including significant leadership and funding from state government, key regional philanthropic leadership, as well as active engagement from some significant employers, the latter particularly in Connecticut. Stakeholder interviews conducted as part of the kickoff of the WCC Rhode Island and Connecticut evaluations cited the thoughtful and intentional design of the initiative (in particular, the articulation of the core elements and portfolio of support for the cities beyond the grant funds), the focus on collaboration, and the emphasis on evidence-based progress as critical to their decision to move forward.

Conclusion

Working Cities Challenge has contributed to the perspectives, policies, and practices of state agencies, investors, and philanthropy. In virtually every case, WCC was one of many influencers most often playing a reinforcing role to previously catalyzed perspectives. WCC helped put a spotlight on small cities in Massachusetts and beyond. WCC's greatest impact appears to be in reinforcing and deepening stakeholder commitment to collaborative leadership, although many stakeholders saw value in the other core elements as well and have taken steps to strengthen their own approach to evidence-based learning.

WCC's greatest influence appears to be on organizations heavily engaged in the Massachusetts WCC steering committee. Those stakeholders have the deepest and most nuanced understanding of the cities, the initiative, and the progress to date. For those who do not directly attend steering committee meetings, personal interaction with Boston Fed staff appears critical for sharing WCC insights and lessons.

To the extent that Working Cities Challenge hopes to extend its influence in future years, stakeholders offered a few suggestions as to the best vehicles to accelerate WCC's impact. Finding better channels to reach philanthropy will be important. At least one stakeholder noted that the *Communities and Banking* article was excellent, but the audience for the magazine may not reach those most likely to benefit from the lessons shared. Staff may want to prioritize presentations at key philanthropic conferences as well as regional funders' networks to better educate place-based funders in other parts of the country. One stakeholder cited an upcoming opportunity in Boston to heighten WCC's profile—Boston will host the Urban Land Institute's annual conference in the fall of 2018. In addition to more presentations at conferences, one stakeholder suggested a regular blog that would be highly accessible and digestible for practitioners. The credibility of the Federal Reserve Bank makes the platform for sharing the insights gleaned, but WCC's influence would likely expand with a more intentional strategy to extend the initiative's impact.

5 Emerging Lessons from WCC Round 1

Introduction

The experience of the WCC Round 1 sites provides valuable insights for funders, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to make meaningful change for low-income people in small cities. Given the rapid expansion of WCC from four cities in one state to 16 cities in three states with potential for further expansion, Working Cities Challenge—the Boston Fed, the steering committees that oversee the initiatives in each state, and the cities themselves—have the opportunity to reflect on the early experience and consider how their own implementation might adapt and evolve based on the initial experience of Round 1. In many ways, the process of learning from the Round 1 cities' early experience is the opportunity for all engaged stakeholders to apply the WCC core element of evidence-based learning.

The reader should view the lessons emerging from the first four cities' experience, however, as hypotheses for testing as opposed to validated conclusions. The reality is that the evaluator drew lessons from a sample of only four cities that brought a unique historical context to their WCC work, selected significantly different topics on which to focus their work, chose unique approaches to achieve their goals, and drew a variable set of stakeholders to the work. While the small sample size and variation in application of WCC make it difficult to draw evidence-based conclusions, all parties would be remiss to not further reflect on what they can glean and apply from this initial experience. Lessons and reflections fall into three distinct categories—those related to how cities make progress on their specific shared result (e.g., employment, business creation, safety, neighborhood improvement), those related to the impact on cities' civic infrastructure, and, finally, lessons related to how WCC or other initiatives can best support the cities' efforts.

Lessons related to progress on shared result

✓ Cities' choice of a shared result impacts the progress.

WCC cities spent the past three-and-a-half years rallying time, energy, and resources in service of a specific shared result. Yet, not all results were equal in their ability to rally partners or resources, nor were they equal in terms of the apparent difference they were able to achieve for low-income people. The experience of the Round 1 cities would suggest that selection of a shared result pass the following litmus test:

- **Importance to the community.** When teams landed on a shared result that resonated with the community as a key priority, energy and participation were strongest. Chelsea's pivot from a neighborhood improvement focus to a citywide focus on public safety illustrates this well. Interviews suggest that with the original focus, people voted with their feet, and meeting participation was low. Energy switched with the change to public safety. The issue of public safety in Chelsea is highly visible and impacts all aspects of the community, including the perceptions of those who live outside the city. With this focus, Chelsea Thrives was naturally able to garner strong support from key community leaders like the city manager and the police chief as well as commitment from a number of distinct, yet intersecting, networks. Survey and interviews suggest

that stakeholders feel strongly that Lawrence and Holyoke also selected a shared result that was critical to the community. The breadth of involvement in Lawrence and the depth of the mayor/city hall's commitment in Holyoke likely reflect the importance of the result those cities selected.

- **Clear enough to communicate readily.** Each city's progress depended on bringing new partners to the table to work toward the common goal. Facilitating that outreach was a clear, crisp goal statement that the partners could easily share and repeat, and that new partners could clearly identify how they could contribute. Reducing crime and the perception of crime by 30 percent in Chelsea and creating 300 new businesses in Holyoke appeared to stick fairly well as a concise "elevator pitch." The goal is understandable and concise. Lawrence's specific shared result rarely resonated with people but was translated and broadly accepted as something closer to increasing parent employment, which seemed sufficient for that group.
- **Multiple stakeholders experience benefit from progress.** While WCC articulates that the ultimate beneficiaries of WCC should be low- and moderate-income individuals, the work on the ground demonstrates that there is value when stakeholders can identify benefits particularly relevant to their constituency. The Lawrence Partnership, which represents the business community, became more involved in Lawrence when it was clear that increasing employment for Lawrence parents could also mean creating a more skilled, prepared workforce for local employers as opposed to only increasing the income of low-income individuals in the city. Lawrence Public Schools' sustained commitment in Lawrence was not only its desire to improve parent employment, but also because it believed that student performance would increase if family stability improved. As Fitchburg's RNoM expanded to include a greater focus on Main Street, the business community's engagement increased because they could more clearly see the effort as producing economic development outcomes for the city at large as opposed to only residents of North of Main. Chelsea viewed improved public safety as not only benefiting residents, but also having the potential to increase commercial activity in downtown.
- **Ambitious and measurable.** Since the outset of WCC, the initiative has stressed the importance of changing systems to achieve population-level change in the working cities. Teams, in a desire to achieve tangible early results, often developed programs and services in support of their goal. While often successful, they can be fairly small in scale relative to the result set. With a bold but measurable result, teams are more likely to keep in mind the need for multiple strategies in service of the goal and to consider more out-of-the-box approaches and not depend on service delivery as the path to population change. As an example, Holyoke originally set a goal of reaching 25 percent Latino business ownership share by 2020, which would have required the creation of roughly 320 new Latino business. The team later revised its result to create 300 new businesses of which 20 percent (approximately 60 businesses) would be Latino-owned. While creating a more measurable numeric target was useful to focus the team on a clear objective, the team in some ways lowered the bar on its bold result. While the SPARK team has started to pursue a systems approach to achieving its goal, the team will need to resist the temptation to over-rely on graduates of the SPARK entrepreneurial class as the sole or even primary pathway to achieve its goal.

✓ **Comprehensive neighborhood strategies do not appear to align well with WCC's goal of achieving measurable progress on a clear result.**

Neighborhood strategies represent challenges in terms of clarity of the result, making it difficult to focus and prioritize efforts. When a city selects neighborhood improvement as a result, teams can struggle with

issues around whether they choose strategies to improve the physical place with goals around improved housing stock, or better quality of life in the neighborhood, or strategies to improve the economic well-being of neighborhood residents even if that means the residents may choose to leave the targeted neighborhood. Efforts that tried to balance people- and place-based neighborhood strategies spread themselves thin and eventually had to find ways to narrow and focus the work. Fitchburg, for instance, originally had six different focus areas that mixed people- and place-based strategies, although it has recently narrowed to three focus areas. Fitchburg's "result," to make the North of Main neighborhood a place where people want to live, work, and invest, remained extremely broad and somewhat ill defined. The breadth led one key stakeholder to say the team did "a little of everything and a whole lot of nothing." In another example, a pivotal moment in Chelsea's progress appears to be when the team moved away from a neighborhood strategy and selected a clear, crosscutting issue around which the community could rally.

✓ **Balance the focus on gaps and challenges with approaches that align with community assets and build on momentum or opportunity.**

While often results are chosen from a deficit mindset (e.g., What is your city's biggest problem?), Lawrence provides an interesting example in which the team's result intentionally focused efforts both on a pressing city challenge (employment), but then focused more specifically on the parent population so that the initiative could align with an apparent area of opportunity in the city—the turnaround effort in the public schools, which were in receivership at the time WCC launched. The Lawrence team recognized that this was a bright spot in the city on which it could build momentum and where it could accelerate progress by rallying additional attention through WCC.

✓ **Flexibility to pivot based on learning and feedback is critical to team progress.**

From the outset, WCC communicated to cities that this initiative was different from a traditional grant program that would expect teams to adhere strictly to the work plan laid out in their initial proposals. As a learning-oriented initiative focused on addressing complex challenges that in many cases have persisted in communities for decades, there was an expectation that sites would adapt their approaches as teams learned from experience, incorporated new stakeholders in the process, and seized opportunities as they arose. This was a sharp break from traditional grantmaking, and cities embraced that spirit of adaptation to varying degrees. The boldest example of a working city embracing that flexibility is Chelsea. Many stakeholders who were part of the original Chelsea team describe the early stages of the implementation process as a kind of "floundering," but the team was quick to adapt and eager to fix what was not working. The team's acknowledgment of its difficulties and willingness to pivot likely saved the team months and even years of wasted time. After working with WCC consultants and evaluators, the team was able to refocus its goals and strategies. Fitchburg's more recent decision to narrow its strategies to three key areas is reflective of the adaptive principles as are Lawrence and Holyoke's pivots to more system-oriented strategies.

✓ **Aligning with other tables can be important and may be a useful alternative to building all the capacity within a single table.**

The Round 1 cities demonstrated the potential of alternative governance structures to WCC's initial vision of establishing a single cross-sector table that includes all stakeholders relevant to achieving the shared result. Chelsea Thrives operated as a table of tables, more of a coordinating body that built alignment among multiple collaborative groups that were contributing toward the goal of improving public safety.

Chelsea Thrives perhaps had less control of the overall course of the work and less opportunity to brand the effort, instead giving credit to the individual collaboratives driving pieces of the work. It appears that this choice enabled multiple pieces of work to move forward in an accelerated yet coordinated fashion. In a different example, Lawrence's LWFI built a close collaboration with the Lawrence Partnership instead of building significant private sector representation at its own table. In aligning the networks, leaders eliminated any duplication of efforts and prevented overtaxing the same private sector leaders whom groups might have tapped to sit at both tables. Rather than the tables competing for attention and resources, the groups reinforced each other. Fitchburg's RNoM is now in a similar position as it has built closer relationships with the stakeholders behind the Fitchburg Plan, strengthening some of the economic development strategies of its work as a result. The group is now determining how best to align or potentially fold efforts together going forward.

✓ **The teams' ability to attract and leverage external resources is an accelerant for the WCC efforts.**

While WCC awards were valuable in providing funds for backbone support, such as the initiative directors' salary and, in some cities, in supporting pilot activities, for cities to make substantial progress toward their shared result, teams often needed to secure additional external funds. In Holyoke, contributions from organizations that historically had a regional focus, such as SCORE, MSBDC, and Common Capital, were valuable as was assistance from state grant programs. Lawrence was successful in aligning and leveraging philanthropic funds (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Herman and Frieda L. Miller Foundation, Cummings Foundation, Clowes Foundation) and state funds to both deepen its impact and broaden its strategies in service of its shared result. Chelsea benefitted from large federal grants related to its shared result. A long-term substantial grant from the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts enhanced Fitchburg's efforts. WCC efforts and cities' success at attracting outside funds appear to be a virtuous cycle in which cities are in a better position to seek outside funds as a result of WCC, and then cities are able to demonstrate more progress toward their shared result because of the additional funds making them yet more competitive in the effort to attract additional outside resources.

✓ **Pre-existing civic capacity accelerates progress on the shared result.**

WCC intends to serve as a vehicle to both advance cities' shared result and to improve cities' civic infrastructure in the process. WCC Round 1 demonstrates that dual goal is feasible. However, the Round 1 experience also suggests that cities that start with a strong level of civic capacity at the outset may be likely to see more accelerated progress toward their shared result. In particular, Chelsea and Lawrence, both cities that achieved meaningful progress in service of their shared result, appeared to have a strong starting foundation related to their civic infrastructure. Interviews suggest that the baseline level of collaboration and community engagement capacity were quite strong. Both communities were home to notably high-capacity nonprofits that could effectively shepherd the work, bringing a gravitas to the efforts both within the city and with external funders. The Chelsea, Lawrence, and Fitchburg teams all benefitted from the inclusion of strong community development corporations, either in leading or supportive roles on the team. Chelsea benefitted from decades of stable city leadership and handled the transition of city managers during WCC implementation with apparent ease. Lawrence had suffered from negative concerns about its municipal government, but was in a moment of change at the outset of WCC that built positive momentum related to both municipal operations and the public school system.

Lessons relating to improving civic infrastructure

Collaborative leadership

- ✓ **WCC operated with a consistent line of sight that increased collaboration was both a critical input to achieving the cities' shared results and critical to the civic infrastructure of the cities, independent of the shared result. The consistent focus, coupled with the grant funds and targeted training and assistance, appears to be a successful combination that can catalyze and nurture collaboration.**

The core principle of Working Cities Challenge was collaboration, based on the Boston Fed's earlier research on resurgent cities. Cross-sector collaboration was foundational in the initiative design. Boston Fed only selected cities that demonstrated cross-sector collaboration to be part of the WCC. WCC expected that the work of the cities be owned not by a single organization but by the collective group. The intent of the application of the other core elements—community engagement, systems change, and learning—was to involve the cross-sector collaborative team. The Boston Fed emphasized its focus on collaboration through all WCC communication, assessments, and feedback to the cities, as well as through additional training and targeted support.

The experience of the four Round 1 cities reinforced the importance of collaboration and its value to the communities. Stakeholders see it as the most important of any of the core elements in terms of accelerating progress toward the shared result. In addition, the collaborative relationships clearly extend beyond the work specific to the shared result and are benefitting other streams of work in the cities. While each city brought a different history and context to the work, which included varying levels of prior experience in collaborative work, each city noted a significant change in the relationships among city stakeholders. Based on the survey results across all four cities, 92 percent of all respondents agreed, and a full 72 percent strongly agreed, that their city's WCC effort had facilitated new or deeper relationships among organizations in the city and/or catalyzed changed perspectives among local leaders.

The cities' progress with regard to collaboration was not simply the result of requiring it in the original RFP; the research suggests that WCC was able to directly contribute to improving collaboration in the cities. The WCC investment in backbone capacity of the lead organization—in particular in supporting an initiative director and in providing teams with adaptive leadership training that included key competencies needed for complex collaborative work, ongoing coaching, and peer support (among the initiative directors)—all appear to have facilitated the improved relationships.

- ✓ **Collaborative tables are generally most effective when everyone at the table has a specific role and task for which they are responsible.**

The governance tables in the cities evolved over the three years. Early on, some groups acted more like advisory groups to the lead organization than owners of the work. In some cases, without clear roles, stakeholders disengaged from the work. Each city revamped its governance table in some way over the three years. For Lawrence, city stakeholders felt that narrowing the table so that it included only those who would actively contribute to achieving the shared result was a pivotal change. For Holyoke, expanding the table to include other providers of small business assistance was a valuable change as the team focused more on building the ecosystem of resources to support entrepreneurs. Fitchburg kept an advisory committee that met quarterly as a way to report progress to a broader constituency, but also had a core table of leaders responsible for decision-making and implementation of the work. The outlier to some extent is Chelsea, which embraced a table of tables approach in which multiple initiatives that all

had activities relevant to public safety undertook the day-to-day work. The Chelsea Thrives table allowed those stakeholders to meet, align strategies, identify gaps, and collaborate, but acted as less of a decision-making body.

- ✓ **A strong initiative director is critical to building and sustaining collaboration as well as moving the group forward in service of its shared result.**

The Round 1 cities demonstrate the importance of having dedicated staff to support the collaborative table. The role is a challenging one, as it requires a broad set of competencies. The initiative director provided backbone support to the collaborative, organizing meetings, maintaining group communication between meetings, and was often in charge of collecting and analyzing the data to support team learning and decision-making. Yet, these administrative and analytical competencies were only a portion of the initiative director's role. The initiative director often served as the face of the initiative, which required strong communication skills. Most importantly, the initiative director played a critical role in weaving the network of stakeholders needed to move the work forward. The initiative director needed to be adept at applying the skills of adaptive leadership, building trusting relationships across the community. The mix of skills needed for the initiative director also depends on the level of ongoing engagement from the lead organization. The intensity of involvement of senior leadership from the lead/backbone organization varied significantly across the cities. When a highly visible and respected director of a lead organization played a very active role in WCC, the initiative director assumed more of a support role rather than leadership.

Both Chelsea and Holyoke experienced transitions in their initiative directors during the implementation period and, in both cases, the new initiative directors made a positive difference in their cities' collaborative efforts by bringing a better balance of the skills and competencies required in the position. Stakeholders in all cities believe they would not have been able to make the progress that they did without the critical role of the initiative director.

- ✓ **Support from the public sector accelerates progress but requires a careful balance in which the cross-sector table truly owns and leads the collaborative efforts, and they are not overly associated with or dependent upon the mayor or city manager's leadership.**

Strong and sustained support from political leaders is valuable to initiating and sustaining cross-sector collaboration. The challenge for municipal leadership is how to support without either dominating or building dependency. All of the four Round 1 cities enjoyed the support of their top municipal figures. However, the varied involvement offers some lessons for municipal engagement in other cross-sector tables.

Cities that have experienced leadership transitions provide perhaps the most valuable lessons. When Chelsea's city manager, who had served the city for 14 years, left in the first year of WCC implementation, there was concern about what the transition would mean for the initiative. In the end, the strength of the civic leaders outside of government, combined with a new city manager who fully embraced the value of cross-sector collaboration, allowed the initiative to flourish. Fitchburg offers additional insight into the balance required with mayoral leadership. Fitchburg's initial WCC proposal reflected the passionate vision of the mayor at the time. However, department heads did not match the commitment of the mayor. As the mayor's interest in the effort waned, the initiative lacked consistent support. When the mayor left office, the initiative stalled but eventually accelerated under the new administration, which provided more consistent support from multiple municipal leaders.

The Round 1 cities' experience suggests that a cross-sector table must truly lead the work. City engagement and aligned support is an accelerant, but is most effective when balanced with high-capacity organizations and leaders from other sectors. In addition, active engagement and support from the next tier of city leadership needs to accompany mayoral support.

- ✓ **Engagement of the business community at cross-sector tables was primarily through organizations representing the business community with limited engagement of individual businesses. WCC may want to reflect on what cities gained or lost as a result of their reliance on intermediaries.**

While the leadership of the Boston Fed brought a credibility to the WCC effort in the business community, the four city efforts rarely enjoyed sustained involvement from individual businesses and generally drew on the voice of business groups or public-private partnerships to represent the private sector. The Greater Holyoke Chamber Centennial Foundation served as the backbone organization in Holyoke. LWFI formed closer ties with the Lawrence Partnership over the course of the initiative, eventually inviting its executive director to join the steering committee. In Fitchburg, the RNoM group strengthened ties with two business groups, Fitchburg Pride and the Fitchburg Plan, primarily as a result of RNoM's increasing focus on downtown revitalization. Yet, individual businesses infrequently engaged in setting strategies or making decisions about the direction of the work. Two business owners were influential members of the Holyoke governance group, but this leadership was more the exception than the norm. Engaging individual businesses can be a major challenge because of the time involved and the fact the owners and managers of small businesses are often already wearing many hats and are unable to take time from their full-time work. If engaging individual businesses in leadership roles is a priority, teams may need to consider issues like meeting times much in the same way teams need to grapple with how residents can engage in leadership. Beyond logistics, however, there are issues of focus. Business engagement is much more likely when there is a clear and direct business interest, such as downtown improvements in Chelsea and Fitchburg, small business development in Holyoke, and job training in Lawrence.

- ✓ **If building new leadership is explicitly part of the WCC intent, the Boston Fed and city teams need to think more intentionally about how to build leadership development into the process.**

While collaborative leadership appears to have two components—collaboration and leadership—Round 1 cities have consistently demonstrated significant growth in collaboration with less clear indications of progress with respect to leadership. WCC has likely contributed to some improvement in the capacity of existing leaders. Teams were primarily composed of existing strong leaders in the city, so the WCC effort generally helped to break down silos among leaders instead of necessarily cultivating new leaders in the community. The existing leaders appear to have built a stronger understanding and likely capacity related to the core elements as demonstrated by survey results pointing to changed perspectives with regard to collaboration, community engagement, use of data, and system change.

WCC appears less effective in general at cultivating a new cadre of leaders in the Round 1 cities. Beyond the capacity built among the initiative directors, there were limited examples of new leaders emerging from this work. The instances in which cities noted progress with respect to new leadership was when the city considered leadership development training or boot camps an element of their strategy. WCC could better define what it means by collaborative leadership and make more explicit any goals regarding collaborative leadership. There appears to have been little guidance or support from WCC during Round 1 that expressly laid out goals around developing new leaders in cities. The experience of Round 1 cities would suggest that new leadership is not likely to be a significant outcome without greater intentionality and intent placed on that outcome.

System change

- ✓ **System change can be an important contributor to progress, but the types of system change may be more likely to be informal practice changes than formal policy changes.**

For many, conversations of system change focus on policy changes—formal changes in municipal zoning, regulations, permitting, or even desired policy change at the state level—but for small cities, practice change may be more important. While the Round 1 cities did demonstrate some of the formal policy changes related to their work (e.g., in-home inspection policy in Chelsea, changes in the city’s small business permitting and reallocation of CDBG funds in Holyoke, Complete Streets Executive Order in Fitchburg), most stakeholders see the more informal practice changes resulting from partners’ deeper understanding of the problem and shared commitment to the result as achieving the most important system changes. The following are just a few examples of the more informal system changes cities were able to achieve: improved referral systems in Chelsea (Hub), Lawrence (workforce), and Holyoke (small business); changing city practices in addressing problem properties in Fitchburg; and partners offering new or additional services or activities for the targeted population (all cities).

- ✓ **System changes are more likely to emerge from partner collaboration than planned policy change.**

While WCC asked each city to identify system strategies in both the proposal stage and early in implementation, many of the system changes emerged from getting the right people around the table who shared a commitment to a common vision and a sense of ownership of the work that involved looking at how their own organization could operate differently. In Lawrence, for instance, the relationships built among the city, the schools, the Career Center, the community college, and community-based organizations led to multiple changes in how the organizations work internally and with respect to each other, few of which anyone could have planned or even predicted at the outset, but rather that emerged from their shared commitment to the goal. Likewise, in Holyoke, midway through the initiative, the partners’ vision for the initiative and the nature of collaboration shifted to how they function as an ecosystem to nurture and support entrepreneurs in Holyoke. Partners looked to address gaps in the ecosystem (new classes, new resource centers, new grant program) and to rethink how partners work with each other to support entrepreneurs (e.g., formal agreements, pursuit of a common intake form, and development of a common database).

- ✓ **There is a greater likelihood of sustaining system change when there are multiple champions within partnering organizations.**

Many of the WCC teams have a single representative of an organization engaged in the WCC city initiative. These individuals are generally of a level of seniority and authority that they are able to promote system changes within their organization to align with WCC goals. The outstanding question is whether those changes penetrate deeply enough within the institution to create lasting change. If an organization does not embed system change deeply enough, there is a risk that a change in leadership could jeopardize the progress achieved. In addition, given the WCC goals of broad adoption of the use of the core elements as a path to improved civic infrastructure, it appears important that a broad swath of the community embrace the use of the elements, not just the handful of leaders sitting at the local WCC governance table.

Lawrence serves as an example of why it is important to broaden ownership of organizational system change. Lawrence is dealing with current and pending leadership transitions. LWFI was able to achieve system changes within the local Career Center largely because the Career Center director, a partner within LWFI, championed the goals. When the operator of the Career Center changed hands in July 2017, and

the career center subsequently hired a new director, it left questions as to what changes the career center would be able to sustain under new leadership. More recently, the superintendent/receiver of the Lawrence Public Schools announced his impending departure. Given that the schools are the foundation of the LWFI effort, it will be a risk factor to assess moving forward, whether the commitment to parent employment and income survives the upcoming transition. The pending departure of the superintendent is only one reason to engage multiple LPS stakeholders in the LWFI initiative. The large institution with dispersed centers of authority requires breadth of engagement. While LPS has multiple stakeholders deeply engaged in LWFI, the lack of active participation of school-based staff, including principals, has been a challenge to attaining the depth of system change required to fully achieve LWFI goals.

- ✓ **Teams need to consider whether system change beyond city boundaries is essential to achieve WCC goals and how to build support regionally when necessary.**

While by design city boundaries anchor WCC, progress toward teams' shared result can depend on system changes beyond city lines. Teams should be prepared to think beyond city-centric approaches. LWFI, for instance, with its goal of improving employment and income outcomes for Lawrence parents, faces a labor market that is inherently regional. While Lawrence is certainly a hub of regional employment, with an average commute of over 23 minutes, it is likely that a substantial portion of residents hold jobs outside the city. The workforce development structures recognize the regional nature of employment; the regional workforce investment board covers Methuen, Haverhill, and Lawrence. LWFI strategies to meet the skills needs of employers or to affect changes in employer practices will likely need to be regional in nature. Over the three years, Holyoke's SPARK team became more regional in focus. The team recognized that systems of support for small businesses were not necessarily contained within city boundaries and effectively engaged regional small business service providers to boost the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Evidence, data, and learning

- ✓ **The Round 1 cities generally proved most adept and found greatest value in using data for learning at the early stages of strategy formation, but need further assistance to use data for testing, assessment, and learning related to the strategies they have implemented.**

Each of the cities effectively used data to design and implement strategies. In Fitchburg, the team conducted housing studies and downtown marketing studies, inventoried Main Street properties, and worked with the city to develop a database of problem properties. Lawrence used multiple surveys of employers, service providers, and parents to inform its work. Holyoke used data to better understand business needs and barriers by conducting a business survey. Chelsea studied local crime statistics to more effectively target its work, exploring not only geographic hot spots, but also looking at the impact of factors such as weather on crime. The use of data resonated for the teams. Research showed that teams value the use of data, and it was common for partnering organizations to note changes in their own organizations to better use data.

While the teams generally used data effectively in the design and implementation of strategies, they struggled to set up systems to regularly test the effectiveness of their specific strategies and, in some cases, even to assess progress toward their long-term shared result. Both Holyoke and Lawrence were able to measure programmatic outputs of their work—results from classes, training, coaching—but neither city was able to measure progress toward its shared result at a population level. Fitchburg also struggled to assess its progress toward the result. Chelsea was in a better position to use crime statistics

to track progress toward its shared result, but had few data mechanisms to understand the effectiveness of its specific strategies (e.g., downtown improvement, youth opportunity) in driving the changes in crime.

✓ **Developing systems for sharing data can be valuable, but also challenging, to implement.**

Multiple teams noted the value of breaking down silos among organizations with respect to data. Stakeholders developed a stronger understanding of both the system and of the target population by sharing data. Chelsea cites the progress made on data sharing as making the city more competitive and ultimately successful in securing additional external funds for its work. Some teams have pursued common intake forms to facilitate data sharing. Despite the value that teams recognize, developing formal data sharing systems and, in particular shared databases, can be quite time consuming and complicated by both technical challenges and privacy concerns.

✓ **WCC would benefit from having a more sharply defined point of view and set of supports for cities to support evidence-based learning.**

Round 1 cities clearly understood that the teams' use of data was a priority for the Boston Fed, but teams generally did not appear to have a nuanced understanding of its role or its limitations. Also, there did not appear to be consensus among cities on the intended role of the data or the highest priorities for data use. Particularly early in Round 1, there seemed to be little clarity about the differences in using data for problem definition, strategy development, partner accountability, hypothesis or pilot testing, or communication of progress. There was also limited attention paid to the challenges of secondary data at the local level, such as the margins of error in the American Community Survey or the time lag data availability. In addition, there also seemed to be limited conversations about what indicators the team could sufficiently influence as to be meaningful measures of team progress. Finally, as teams grapple with the potential of administrative data sources, they could likely use additional support to overcome technical and privacy concerns to facilitate more data sharing. Moving forward, the Boston Fed may need to offer more dedicated support to teams to define a clear data strategy that articulates what data, for what reason, at what time. The Boston Fed has more recently reframed this core element, referring to it as learning orientation. This reframe holds potential to shift conversation back to learning priorities, which will hopefully help teams prioritize what data they truly need to accelerate learning and progress.

✓ **Developing a rich approach for evidence-based learning may require dedicated, experienced capacity.**

Teams often turned to the initiative director to implement the team's data strategy, but these leaders may not necessarily be the most appropriate people in terms of experience, skill set, or time to bring an approach to fruition. Chelsea's progress on data suggests that dedicated expertise may be a needed element to accelerate evidence-based learning. Chelsea Thrives benefitted from the backbone organization's staff and technological capacity related to data integration, data tracking, and data visualization. In addition, Chelsea Thrives dedicated grant funds to support experienced staff time to data collection and analysis. As an alternative approach, Fitchburg contracted with an outside local evaluator who helped in the collection and analysis of data for the team.

Community engagement

- ✓ **When backbone organizations hold deep community engagement experience, teams are more likely to integrate engagement into implementation, and the team is more likely to see the contribution of engagement in service of the shared result.**

Both The Neighborhood Developers in Chelsea and Lawrence CommunityWorks brought community engagement and community organizing experience to their respective initiatives at the outset, enabling them to bring tested practices to the initiative without extensive capacity building. Teams in these cities, based on survey results, reported greater use of community engagement in the initiative and are in stronger agreement that community engagement had a significant impact on progress toward their result. However, cities without strong capacity on the team and more mixed success in implementation of engagement practices still reported a strong uptick in the perceived value of engaging residents as a result of WCC.

- ✓ **The “community” to engage may need to have multiple definitions.**

Community engagement and resident engagement are oftentimes interchangeable terms, but the Round 1 cities highlight the point that community engagement at times needs a more specific definition of community. An alternative phrase to community is the “target population” or “people affected by the team’s work.” In a neighborhood-based strategy, defining a resident population is clearer, such as defining community in Fitchburg according to geographic boundaries—the residents of North of Main. In Lawrence, the core community to engage was the parents of Lawrence Public School students. As Chelsea Thrives’ strategy evolved from a neighborhood-based strategy to a citywide public safety focus, the definition of community shifted from the residents of Shurtleff-Bellingham to Chelsea residents more generally. The Holyoke team never fully defined its target population and never actively implemented a community engagement strategy beyond raising awareness of entrepreneurial ideas or conducting outreach for SPARK’s entrepreneurship classes. In particular, there remained some ambiguity as to whether the community to engage included all aspiring entrepreneurs, all residents, Latino aspiring entrepreneurs, or Latino residents more generally.

To the extent that WCC teams pursue community engagement as a means of understanding the problem and crafting informed strategies, teams may need to be more expansive in their definition of community. For instance, LWFI engaged not only parents when forming strategies but also, through its relationship with the Lawrence Partnership, conducted extensive outreach to the community of employers that could employ job-seeking parents. Without engaging both stakeholder groups authentically and recognizing a dual-customer approach, strategies may not be fully reflective of the barriers and drivers that a team needs to address to achieve the desired results.

- ✓ **WCC and the Boston Fed would benefit from greater clarity on the anticipated role and purpose of community engagement.**

The Round 1 cities pursued a range of activities under the banner of community engagement. The varied approaches reflect a diversity of goals from the engagement itself. Some engagement appears to have served the goal of placemaking or community building; examples of placemaking include neighborhood cleanups, adopt-a-park, and window box competitions. In other cases, engagement seems to have served a goal of outreach and program recruitment, such as school-based parent engagement to identify parents interested in LWFI’s coaching services or outreach efforts to identify aspiring entrepreneurs for SPARK classes. Other engagement aimed to better understand the problem a city needed to address or to inform

the development of strategies such as LWFI's use of surveys and parent-led design teams. Some community engagement was more in the service of leadership development. For instance, Chelsea and Fitchburg pursued resident leadership training, and Holyoke included resident entrepreneurs on its governance table.

With such a wide range of community engagement activities that teams could pursue and a similarly broad set of outcomes those activities could achieve, teams may benefit from additional discussion with Boston Fed staff about the intended goals of community engagement in service of the individual city's shared result and WCC goals with respect to community engagement. For instance, this evaluation surfaced a WCC priority on community engagement outcomes that demonstrates the teams not only listened to resident feedback, but also made multiple adjustments to strategies based on that feedback, an indicator of progress on which few teams excelled. Similarly, the rubric of progress suggests a premium on community engagement activities in which the team shared measurable progress outcomes with residents as a vehicle for remaining accountable to residents; yet, research shows limited activity devoted to this type of resident engagement. If, in fact, these are priorities of WCC, the Boston Fed may need to be clearer to teams about those goals and how teams might go about implementing approaches aligned with those priorities.

Reflections on WCC initiative

- ✓ **The esteem and credibility brought by WCC's association with the Boston Fed as the convener provide a boost to the initiative both for cities and in the field.**

In its dedication to WCC, the Boston Fed sent a powerful signal to the working cities and to the field about the value and importance of New England's small cities. In the evaluation interviews, Round 1 city stakeholders talked about city pride as a result of WCC selecting their city to be part of the initiative. The Boston Fed's involvement elevates the initiative, connoting a level of prestige and credibility and a validation of the efforts that preceded the challenge that positioned the cities to be competitive. Boston Fed leadership amplified the value of the association and raised the cities' profiles by visiting fairly regularly, highlighting WCC at other speaking engagements, and tapping relationships and connections to build the cities' network with both funders and the business community.

The value of the Boston Fed's association extends beyond the direct benefit to winning cities. It appears to have affected which organizations engaged in the leadership and funding of the initiative and affects who follows the findings and lessons emerging from the work. Engagement of the business community and of community development lenders likely stems from longstanding relationships with the bank. Even field leaders without substantial pre-existing relationships with the Boston Fed noted in evaluation interviews that when the Fed issues an invitation to an event, they are not likely to ignore it. WCC may want to consider whether the initiative has fully harnessed the power of the Fed's gravitas in the field and its relationship with the banking and business community in the service of achieving outcomes for low-income people in the working cities.

- ✓ **WCC's learning orientation and its embrace of adaptation is a powerful model.**

Each of the Round 1 cities understood and appreciated the difference in the WCC approach from traditional grants that often carry an expectation to adhere to the work plan laid out in the original proposal. All the teams, to some degree, embraced WCC's expectation that city teams would learn through their initial efforts and adapt their approach based on the insights gleaned from the additional

information. Each of the cities saw benefit in the evolution of its work, whether that be Chelsea changing its focus entirely, Fitchburg narrowing the breadth of strategies, or Holyoke and Lawrence broadening their approach to incorporate more of a system orientation. The interaction with Boston Fed staff as well as the team of WCC consultants in many cases aided this evolution, and the cities incorporated the changes with the full support of the Boston Fed team.

The Boston Fed team supporting WCC sought to model the practice of learning and adaptation, gaining insights from early successes as well as failures in its early work with Round 1 cities. The team has modified the initiative in big and small ways based on the experience of the Round 1 cities. In some cases, the Round 1 cities themselves were able to benefit from the changes and, in other cases, future rounds of WCC were able to reap the benefits. The Round 1 cities appreciated the Boston Fed team's flexibility in adapting its approach to technical assistance and learning. Based on feedback from the teams over the three years, WCC reduced the number of cross-site gatherings and focused more on customized capacity-building activities held in each city to allow a larger team to participate and benefit from the support. Other changes based on the Round 1 experience more directly benefitted future WCC rounds, such as the introduction of a six-month planning process—the design phase—prior to cities' submission of an implementation proposal, the standardization of grant levels across cities, and the elimination of the seed grants. The Boston Fed team's willingness to acknowledge challenges and test new solutions demonstrated the practices that were encouraged of the cities themselves.

- ✓ **WCC asks the cities to embrace system change, but the Boston Fed has yet to fully grapple with the potential of an initiative-wide role in catalyzing broader system change that could benefit both winning and non-winning working cities.**

Over the course of Round 1, several issues surfaced through the work of the city teams that were larger system issues than any one team or city could possibly tackle. For instance, the challenges related to cliff effects, workforce development pathways for non-U.S. citizens, and access to specialized or localized runs of secondary data were all issues that arose during Round 1 implementation. Beyond the specific barriers that surfaced, interviews suggest a need for a more unified voice representing the needs and perspectives of working cities in the state. While the Boston Fed itself is not in a position to engage in advocacy, the governance structure overseeing the initiative, either in its current form or perhaps through some modifications in its membership or structure, could consider a more activist role in developing an enabling environment in the state that can better support and accelerate the cities' efforts.

- ✓ **WCC does not appear to have reached full clarity on the initiative balance between progress on a shared result and improvements to civic infrastructure.**

WCC's revised theory of change emphasizes civic infrastructure gains as the primary pathway to improving the lives of low-income people in the working cities. WCC's 10-year outcomes emphasize changes in leadership, organizations, networks, residents, and resources in addition to changes in economic and social indicators. The priority placed on the four core elements (not fully articulated until midway through Round 1) appears to be in service of those long-term civic infrastructure gains. However, WCC generally communicates these elements as the pathway for teams to make progress toward their shared result, not as a more comprehensive way the city can or should operate. As WCC continues in Round 2 in Massachusetts as well as in rounds in Rhode Island and Connecticut, the initiative may need to tackle the natural questions that arise about the balance between progress on the shared result vs. civic infrastructure gains. Are the strategies pursuing the shared result and civic infrastructure necessarily the same? Is progress on a shared result a necessary step in order to achieve the civic infrastructure gains?

Are civic infrastructure gains maximized when treated as a spillover or positive externality of the cities' work as opposed to a transparent intention of the team? The intent of this evaluation is not to answer these questions, but observation through the evaluation research suggests they are questions worthy of additional discussion among Boston Fed staff and WCC steering committees.