

Conservation Quarterly

the MACC member magazine

Winter 2018



Annual Environmental Conference 2018

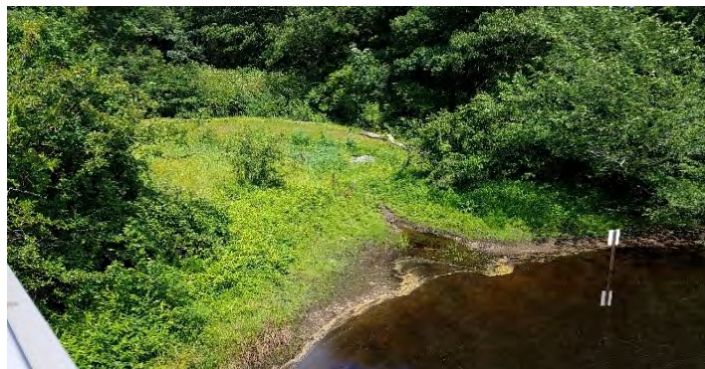
Funding Ecological Resiliency in your Town: The Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program

By Jeffrey T. Malloy and Gillian T. Davies

Nature-based solutions represent an integral, yet often under-represented, approach to climate change resilience planning and implementation. It remains imperative that the Massachusetts ecological community works to mainstream nature-based solutions into our ongoing efforts to establish normative climate resilience and adaptation practice. The Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program presents a grand opportunity to advance the practice of ecological resilience across the Commonwealth.

Promulgated through the Baker Administration's Executive Order 569, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) is implementing an exciting new program that draws upon state-level leadership and local-level stakeholder engagement, to advance our state's climate goals. The MVP program has already awarded over \$1-million to 63 Massachusetts communities, with each municipality receiving between \$15,000-\$32,000 (distribution of grant funding is based on population size and existing resiliency/hazard mitigation planning infrastructure). MVP grant awards are intended to fund a community's stakeholder engagement planning efforts, and the preparation of a vulnerability assessment report highlighting outcomes from the community engagement process. It is anticipated that additional funding will become available in future years for implementation of projects identified in the planning stage.

The MVP program marks a significant shift in how communities may approach climate adaptation and resiliency planning. Unlike the predominant climate modeling and community risk assessment approach to vulnerability planning, the innovative nature of the MVP program makes an explicit commitment to identifying and implementing stakeholder-driven solutions rooted in local-level considerations. Central to this program is the idea that nature-based solutions are an integral component of healthy and climate-resilient human communities. The ability of local municipalities to deploy nature-based solutions is dependent on active engagement from individuals involved in Massachusetts conservation and regulatory planning and implementation efforts.

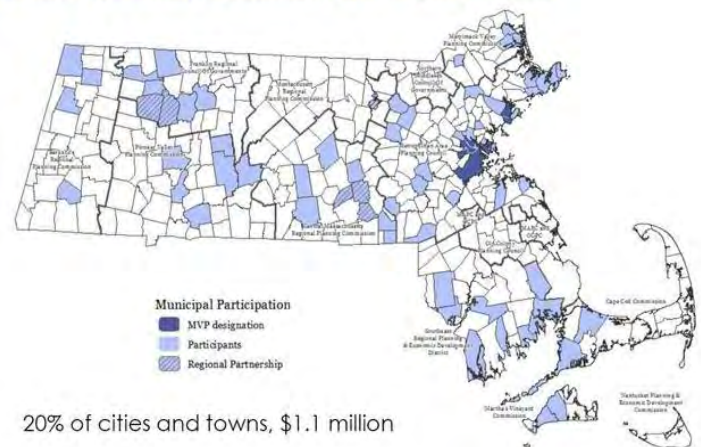


Nature-based solutions: restoration of riparian floodplain

Program Overview and Goals

The EEA's MVP program is a designation process intended to assist Massachusetts communities with the development of "action-oriented" climate resilience initiatives. Municipalities who complete the MVP program become certified as an MVP community, and establish eligibility for follow-up implementation-stage grant funding opportunities for local-level conservation and sustainability efforts and projects. Participation in the MVP program involves a simple application submitted to the EEA. Municipalities are required to designate a local project manager (e.g. town planner, engineer, or conservation agent) that acts as a point of contact for the grant and to serve as a liaison for climate planning within the community. MVP grant proposals must also identify how the community intends to commit to climate resilience planning and advance these efforts through the program. The local project manager will also work closely with a state certified provider that has been contracted with the community to conduct a stakeholder engagement workshop(s) and prepare a vulnerability assessment report.

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program 2017-2018

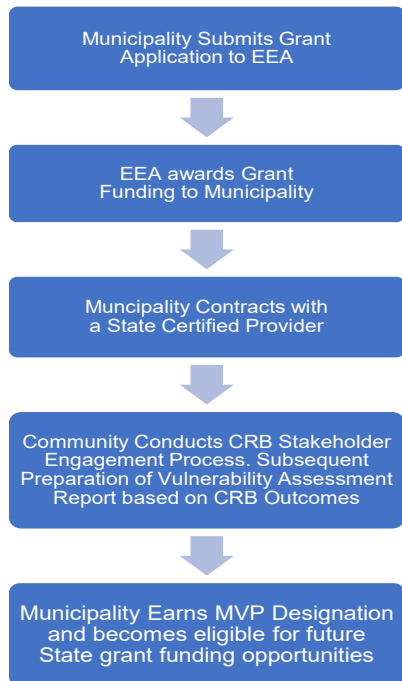


288 participants throughout the state were trained this past summer to become state certified providers in the MVP program. Under state procurement laws, MVP participating municipalities may choose to contract with any certified providers of their choice (i.e. standard RFP procedures are not required), however EEA recommends that municipalities consider at least 3 different potential state certified providers for these efforts. When selecting a state certified MVP provider to work with, EEA recommends that municipalities consider the following criteria: 1) experience working with municipalities, particularly in Massachusetts, 2) strong facilitation and community planning experience, 3) experience with climate change vulnerability assessments, hazard mitigation planning, or other risk assessments, and 4) ability to perform GIS analysis.

The MVP program relies predominantly on a stakeholder-driven planning process that will apply the Community Resilience Building (CRB) framework. Using the CRB framework, communities can identify and prioritize decision-making and implementation initiatives through proven integrative collaboration and dispute resolution techniques.

Collaborative decision-making will be supported through the Massachusetts Climate Change Clearinghouse (MA CCC) website, which will provide publicly available climate data for community stakeholders (i.e. the necessary downscaled climate data to facilitate planning efforts). The MA CCC website will be made available to the public soon.

EEA estimates that a commitment of 120-140 hours will be necessary for state certified providers to complete this designation process. An additional match of 80 hours of municipal staff time is also anticipated. The designation process consists of the following five distinct tasks: 1) establish core municipal team and select MVP certified provider, 2) prepare for workshops and data collection in a coordinated effort with state certified providers and the core community leaders, 3) conduct stakeholder engagement effort using the CRB framework, 4) preparation of a vulnerability assessment report that draws upon the outcomes of the CRB process (i.e. identification of local vulnerabilities, resilience strategies, and action-oriented resilience priorities), and finally 5) a follow-up listening session that presents the report findings and resiliency priorities to the public. Communities are also expected to maintain their MVP designation by demonstrating a sustained effort to incrementally build upon their climate resilience planning outcomes.



Simplified MVP municipal designation process

Suggestions for Community Involvement – Stay Involved

Massachusetts continues to be a leader in climate change mitigation and adaptation planning. The innovative nature of the MVP program presents many opportunities to make ecological resilience and nature-based solutions a predominant aspect of current and future environmental regulatory practice. In fact, The Nature Conservancy is looking to MVP to serve as a national model for local level adaptation/resiliency planning that integrates nature-based solutions into a mainstream response to the climate challenge. It is therefore imperative that groups, communities, and professionals who understand the complex relationships that exist between the natural environment and social organization, remain embedded within ongoing MVP processes throughout the state.

Through the MVP program, we can share our knowledge that ecological health and resiliency support community health and resiliency, and nature-based solutions save communities substantial amounts of money through avoided damage recovery and infrastructure construction costs.

In case you missed it: The MVP program is hosting a series of “ensuring MVP success” training webinars. These webinars are available live, or recorded, on the program’s website. For webinar details, please contact Jennifer Norwood at jennifer.norwood@state.ma.us.

<https://www.mass.gov/municipal-vulnerability-preparedness-program>

Jeffrey T. Malloy is Senior Resilience Planner, CFM, SSSSNE and Gillian T. Davies is Senior Ecological Scientist, PWS, SSSSNE with BSC Group, Inc.