

Equity-Centered
Engagement through
Climate Resilience
Policy
in Massachusetts

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Democratic ideals of public participation

- We should be able to influence decisions that affect us¹
- Having that opportunity is a necessary foundation for human flourishing²

Fiorino (1990)¹; Allen (2023)²; National Research Council (2008)³

Instrumental claims of public participation

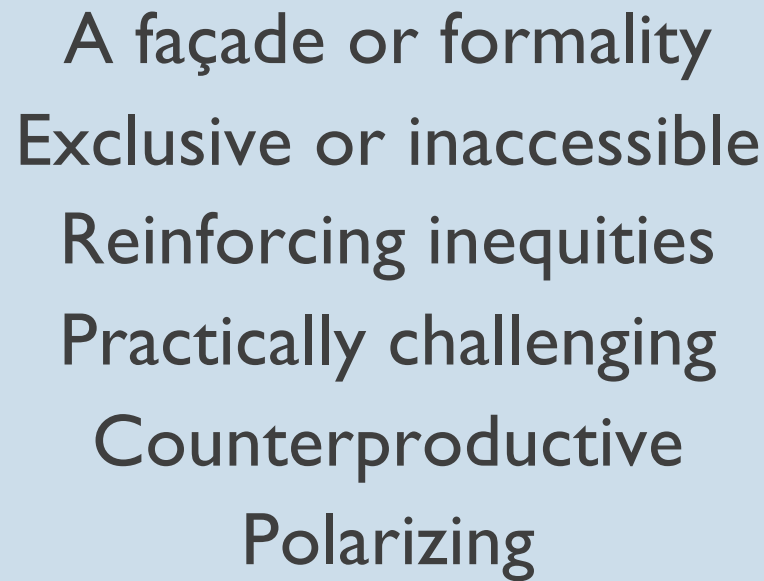
- Related to legitimacy, quality, capacity, durability³
- And many other claims that lack sufficient evidence³

Participation in local resilience contexts

- **Decisionmakers determine who benefits¹**
 - Resilience decisions can affect how people survive & thrive
- **Local knowledge & experience are practical assets²**
 - Understand the context for appropriate solutions
 - Communities are experts in their own experiences
- **Social capital strongly influences community resilience³**
 - Communities with stronger networks recover faster from disasters
 - Bridges must be built across groups & to those in power

In reality, public participation is often...

“a managerial exercise...‘domesticated’ away from its radical roots”¹



A façade or formality
Exclusive or inaccessible
Reinforcing inequities
Practically challenging
Counterproductive
Polarizing

Status quo resilience planning:

Technical experts

Climate change data

Physical infrastructure

→ Tends to reinforce inequities



Municipal
Vulnerability
Preparedness

MVP 2.0 resilience planning:

+ Community experts

+ Social vulnerability data

+ Social infrastructure

→ Aims to address inequities



THE MVP 2.0 PROCESS



What is MVP 2.0?

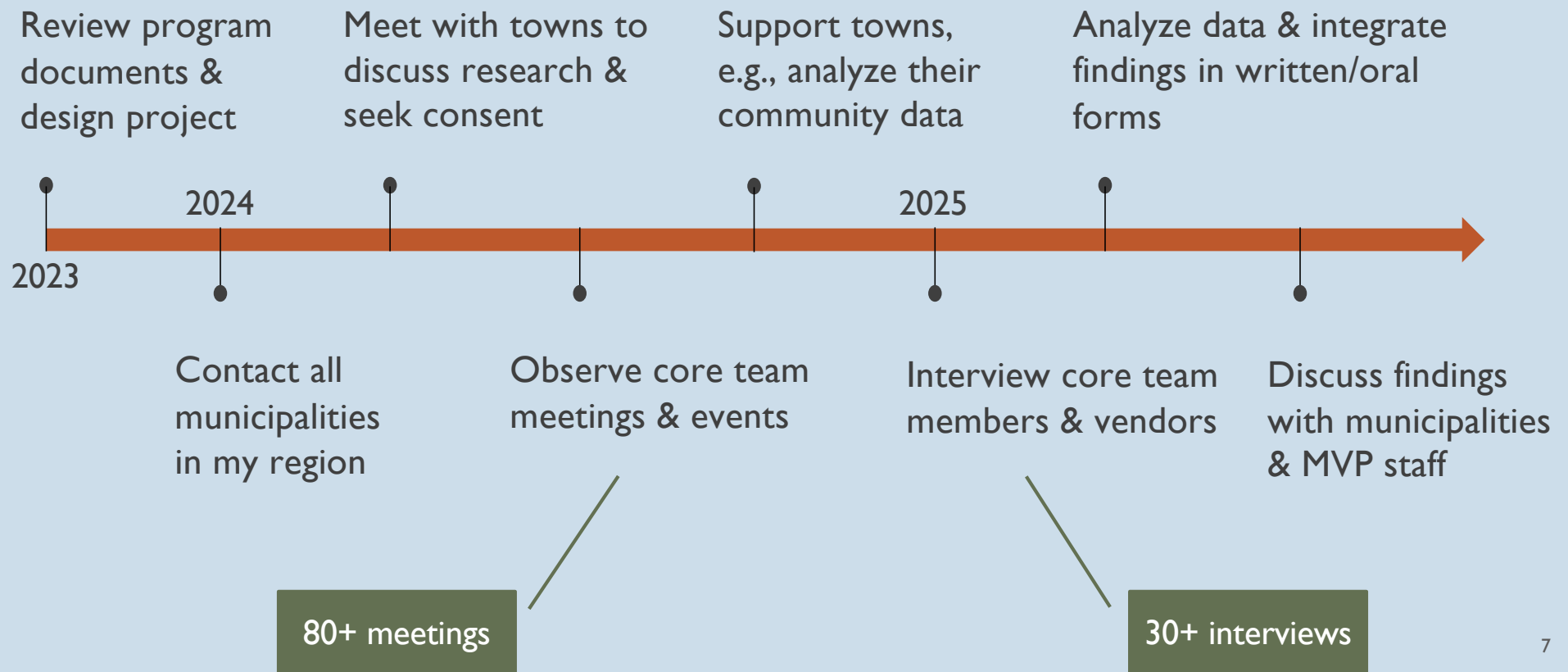
A state agency's attempt to:

- Enable community based & equity centered resilience planning

By providing municipalities:

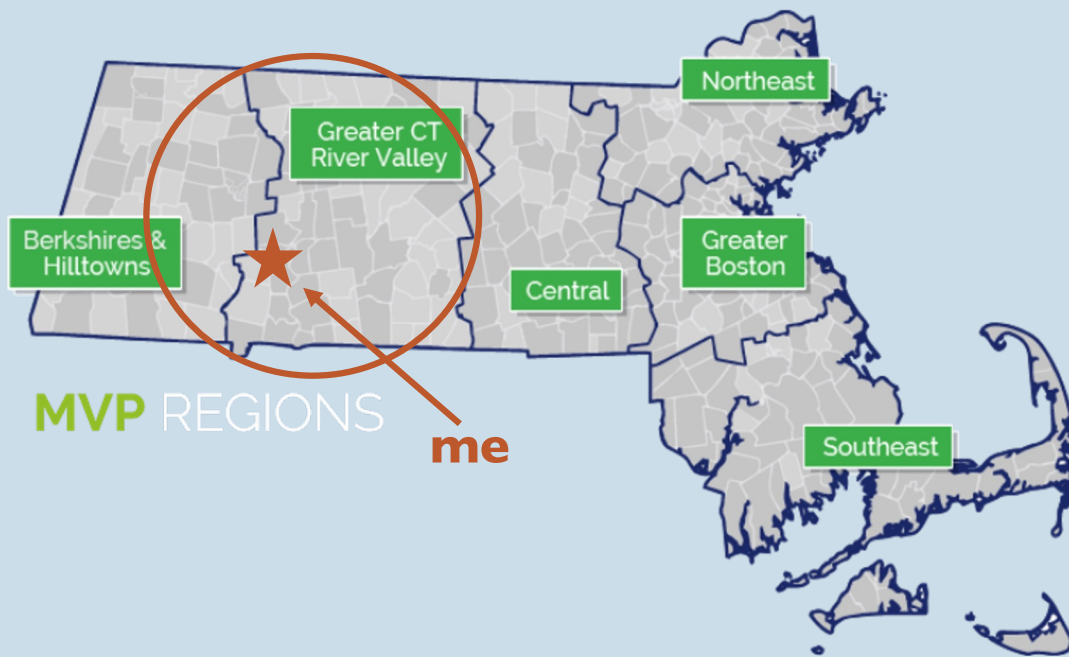
- Funding for engagement & projects
- A framework for bringing new voices into resilience decisions & considering social vulnerability

Overview of MVP 2.0 Study Process



Study Area

Most data comes from 4 municipalities in Western Massachusetts with insights from 6 other municipalities (mostly but not all) around Boston



MVP REGIONS

me



What do engagement experiences and participation outcomes look like in MVP 2.0?

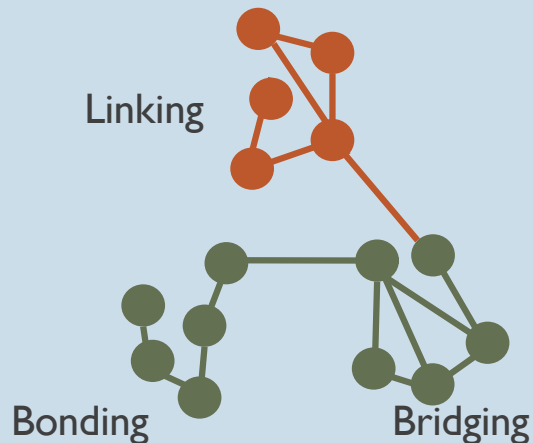
Example 1: changes in relationships for core team members

Changes in relationships? Early interview findings...

People made new connections and/or strengthened existing ones.

Different types of social capital

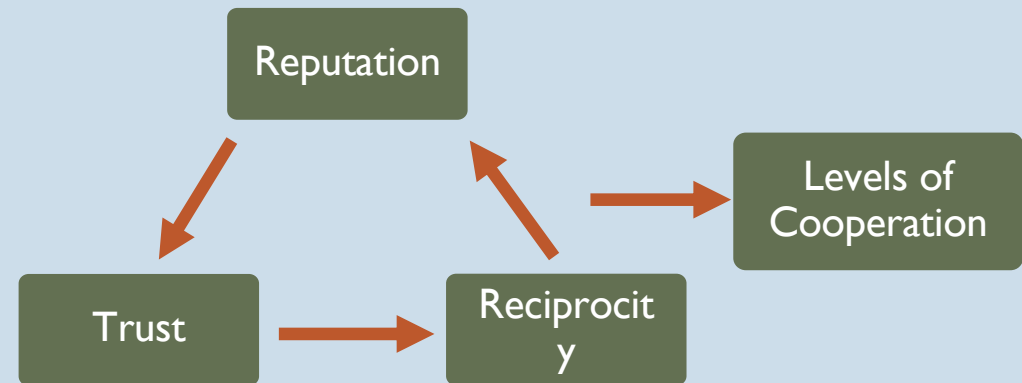
- Friendships, connections across groups, collaborations & resources to contact



adapted from Aldrich (2012)

Collective action to achieve goals

- Saw good intentions & willingness to work together persistently



adapted from Ostrom (1998)

Some of my favorite quotes on relationships...

“Lots of people, I'd be like,
Can I be your friend?”

“Working on a committee with [name] was just fun. She has a really amazing attitude and very creative ideas about community work.”

“Boy, I got **a lot closer with her throughout**”

“Connecting with [name] was the best thing”

“She can call me up and say, Hey, [name]...can you meet about this topic, or **this opportunity came through, can we do something with it?**”

“[name] who I knew kind of in passing but had never spent any one-on-one time with, and she is probably **one of my favorite people on the planet**”

“I would feel **comfortable just calling up any of these people**”



What do engagement experiences and participation outcomes look like in MVP 2.0?

Example 2: community engagement

Community engagement? Early interview highlights...

- **Core teams tried many different engagement methods**
 - Events, focus groups, interviews, surveys, festivals, forums, dinners, pop-up stands
 - Teams who had never worked together were willing to try new things
 - Teams made real efforts to listen to different segments of the population
- **People with connections to priority populations talked to them**
 - E.g., by hosting their own event or going around their neighborhood
- **During engagement activities...**
 - People came to learn & participate – many good ideas generated
 - Lots of two-way communication & face-to-face engagement
 - Resilience conversations occurred for the first time in some cases

Community engagement? A few lessons learned...

Participation in resilience expanded, but still missing perspectives.

- **Despite their best efforts, some people didn't feel successful at reaching priority populations, e.g.,**
 - They mostly saw people who regularly show up to public events
 - They learned there's a lack of infrastructure for reaching certain populations
 - They know certain populations are less likely to go out in public right now

“Sometimes it's just really hard to get people involved”

Community engagement? A few lessons learned...

Surveys (often default)

gathered lots of feedback, but limitations + design issues

Host events (often default)

didn't always reach new folks even when planned inclusively

Partner with existing events

generally good results; some events are not the right setting

Meet people where they are

generally good results; still sometimes hard to find people

Tailor the language

ask about specific experiences vs. resilience, climate change

Be mindful of the budget

with hopes of doing many activities, some didn't get funded

Send the right people

consider existing relationships, comfort talking to strangers

Have deeper debriefs

how does what we learned here relate to everything else?

Overall takeaways...

This model gives resources to collaborative teams of municipal staff & residents to do community-based resilience planning.

- **These MVP 2.0 pilot communities...**
 - Report varying success at engaging certain populations, but tried many methods
 - Show early evidence that suggests strengthening social networks
- **This isn't the whole story!**
 - Data collection & analysis still underway
 - Many other factors affect engagement outcomes, e.g., facilitation
 - Many other MVP 2.0 goals & potential impacts
 - And offshoots, e.g., people are pursuing new collaborations & using new engagement methods on other projects

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Thank you
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