

495 MetroWest Partnership

SuAsCo Climate Collaborative – Q & A

9/29/26

What prompted the Collaborative, and what gap does it fill?

Communities across the SuAsCo watershed have already done valuable climate planning, but rivers, flooding, drought, and infrastructure networks cross town lines. An upstream land-use or drainage decision can affect a downstream community, while a town working alone may lack the data or capacity to evaluate the full problem. The Collaborative was created to connect local efforts, examine shared risks at the watershed scale, and help communities pursue solutions together. It is a two-year initiative supported by a \$450,000 Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant awarded to Concord in partnership with OARS and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC).

Who is participating, and what commitment is expected?

The watershed includes all or part of 36 municipalities. The Collaborative is open to those communities, along with community organizations, residents, and other partners; that does not mean every municipality has made the same formal commitment. Concord, OARS, and MAPC are the lead partners. Our steering committee currently includes five (5) municipal representatives, four (4) community-based organization representatives including a rep from a regional planning agency, and one (1) youth representative. We are asking communities to bring their local plans, data, and practical knowledge to the assessment and to participate where the findings relate to their priorities. We have not established a uniform staff-time requirement for every town right now, but a fee-based structure could be looked at in the future to support a coordinator for the Climate Collaborative so that it continues to function.

How will it be governed and sustained?

The steering committee, with municipal, community-based, youth, and regional planning representatives, is helping shape the vulnerability assessment and regional workplan. During this first phase, we will work with partners to define how the Collaborative makes decisions, shares information, and advances projects. OARS plans to continue convening the Collaborative after the current grant ends and will seek funding both for priority resilience projects and for the coordination needed to sustain the partnership.

How does the assessment build on municipal MVP plans?

Municipal MVP plans are a good starting point. We want BSC to draw on those plans and other existing work, then look across town boundaries for patterns that are harder to see

locally: connected flood risks, shared infrastructure, upstream and downstream effects, and gaps in access to resources. That regional view can help identify where several communities would benefit from coordinating their next steps. BSC will be looking at Hazard Mitigation Plans, local Climate Resilience planning by town or across several towns, other climate resilience projects such as Merrimack River Revive (another MVP grant looking at Climate resilience across 9 communities, 4 of which are within the SuAsCo), and they will be launching an interactive mapping tool to help residents identify hot spots, such as flooding, heat islands, etc.

What will it examine and how will risks be prioritized?

The assessment is being scoped around a few major items such as flooding, extreme precipitation, drought, and heat. We expect it to consider critical infrastructure such as culverts, dams, drainage and wastewater systems, roads, and other flood-prone assets, alongside rivers, wetlands, habitat, water resources, and the people who depend on them. BSC is now working through the methods and priorities. In judging cross-boundary risks, we want to consider the scale of the impact, who is affected, the role of natural systems, and whether coordinated action would produce a stronger result. OARS' early engagement has identified flooding, aging infrastructure, data needs, funding constraints, and reaching vulnerable residents as recurring concerns.

What data gaps have emerged, and what can municipalities contribute?

Participants have asked for more consistent watershed-wide information, especially on flooding and water resources. Local knowledge will be essential for interpreting regional datasets: towns can help identify repeatedly flooded roads, undersized crossings, drainage trouble spots, infrastructure condition, vulnerable facilities, and places where residents experience impacts that do not show up clearly on a map. We also want to understand where available data is uneven among communities. The assessment will compile and interpret existing information; it is not intended to become a new field-data collection program.

What products should communities expect, and when?

The goal is a shared regional picture of vulnerability, an inventory of important data gaps, and a set of priorities that can inform local decisions and future project development. The Collaborative also intends to produce a regional workplan and operational framework. We have met with BSC and are planning the next steps for the assessment with the steering committee. We should share a more specific schedule and description of public-facing products once that workplan is settled.

What is an example of a stronger multi-community project?

A connected series of flood-prone culverts is a good example. Replacing one crossing may help locally, but examining the stream system across several towns could reveal where improvements would reduce flood risk, protect roads, and restore habitat together. Partners could then sequence design and construction around the shared benefits. That is an illustration of the kind of opportunity we hope to identify, rather than a project the Collaborative has already selected.

How will the Collaborative turn findings into projects?

The assessment should give partners a common basis for choosing a small number of promising priorities. For each one, the next step would be to identify the affected communities and assets, a willing project lead, needed technical work, landowner and agency involvement, a likely funding path, and responsibilities for implementation. The Collaborative can help convene those partners and carry a project through successive stages of planning, design, permitting, and funding. Project selection and assignments will follow the assessment and discussion with the communities involved.

Which funding programs look promising, and what makes collaboration difficult?

Massachusetts MVP Action Grants are an important starting point: they support climate adaptation actions, and the Collaborative itself was funded through that program. The state's Environment & Climate One Stop brings several climate and environmental grant opportunities into a common application process. Depending on the eventual project, other programs for ecological restoration, water quality, infrastructure, or hazard mitigation may also fit. The challenge is that a watershed benefit may span several towns while a grant still needs an eligible applicant, documented municipal support, a defined site and scope, and someone able to manage the award and any match. We will evaluate programs against specific projects rather than assume one funding source fits the entire regional workplan.

Who would own and maintain a shared project?

That must be resolved project by project before construction funding is sought. The Collaborative can coordinate planning and help define agreements, but a road, culvert, stormwater facility, or restored property will still need a clearly identified owner or responsible entity (e.g., a municipality). For a project benefiting several towns, we would want to document who owns each asset, who operates and maintains it, how costs are handled, and how partners will respond if conditions change.

What is transferable to other watersheds?

The most transferable element is the process: start with existing municipal plans, bring local and community knowledge into a regional assessment, examine how risks connect across boundaries, and build a shared pipeline of practical projects. The watershed boundary gives this effort a useful way to study water-related risks, while the partnership model can be adapted to other regional challenges. OARS' first community meeting showed strong interest in sharing data, coordinating infrastructure and water management, and moving from planning to action.

What role should businesses, landowners, and utilities play?

They can contribute information about facilities, land, infrastructure dependencies, and disruptions that municipal datasets may miss. They may also own sites where a resilience measure could be built or managed. Their involvement should match the project: a utility might help assess service interruptions, a major landowner might help explore flood storage or restoration, and an employer might help us understand how flooding or heat affects workers and access to jobs. Community needs and public benefits should guide those conversations.

Where could the 495/MetroWest Partnership add the most value?

Its strongest immediate contribution could be connecting municipal and business perspectives: helping us hear where infrastructure disruptions affect employers and workers, bringing major landowners and utilities into relevant conversations, and sharing emerging project and funding opportunities with its network. As the assessment identifies specific priorities, the Partnership could help convene the people needed to move an individual project forward.

How will success be measured?

In the near term, success means useful participation across the watershed, stronger relationships among municipalities and community organizations, an assessment that communities recognize as credible, and clear priorities with identified leads. Over the following years, we should track whether those priorities advance into funded design and completed projects. Outcomes could include reduced exposure at known flood trouble spots, improved function of crossings and natural flood-storage areas (e.g., dam removal), and better access to resilience resources for vulnerable residents. We will need baselines and project-specific measures before claiming changes on the ground.