

Mass in Motion Local COVID-19 Response Research

Overview

This research sought to understand how Mass in Motion (MiM) coalitions, in responding to new levels of food insecurity and physical inactivity at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, had leveraged emergency response into changes to local policies, systems or environments (PSE). MiM is a program of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) that works with communities to increase opportunities for healthy eating and active living (HEAL).

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) conducted similar research in the [Summers of 2020](#) and [2021](#). During the 2021 research, MiM Coalition Coordinators shared the observation that there was a great increase in activities, particularly in the food security space, and a breakdown of ‘silos’ during the moment of crisis. However, coordinators were concerned about how these changes would be sustained when the crises waned.

These observations and concerns focused the 2022 research; where previous efforts focused on documenting the often-programmatic strategies used by MiM coalitions to respond to immediate need, this iteration of the research narrowed on changes that had become permanent (see Figure 1).

Our goals were twofold:

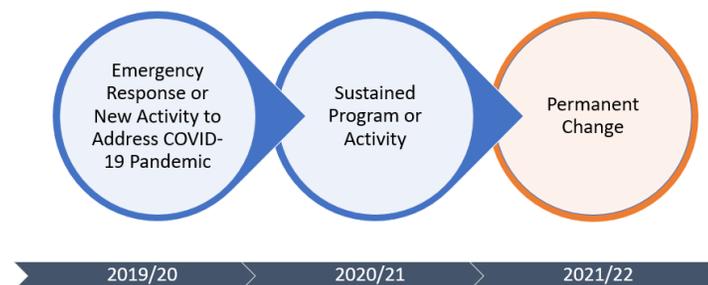
1. Describe Mass in Motion PSE successes in the context of COVID-19
2. Identify best practices to inform:
 - Sustainability guidance
 - Opportunities to build connections between Coordinators/Coalitions
 - Opportunities to integrate findings into MDPH statewide PSE initiatives

We asked MiM coalition coordinators two questions:

1. What changes from your COVID-19 response work has or is likely to become a permanent change?
2. What is one piece of advice you would give a colleague who sees potential for an emergency or immediate HEAL response to become a permanent change?

This memo first describes some of the themes identified around successful PSE change, then describes the methods used to identify them, and the topics and notes that informed them.

Mass in Motion and COVID-19 HEAL Responses



PSE Success Findings

MiM Coordinators brought the principles and values of MiM to new partners. In the examples shared, MiM coordinator involvement in strategies was described as introducing a Root Cause Analysis perspective to new partners. This theme was noted also in 2021, but in 2022 Coordinators shared examples of partners who have adopted these values for themselves.

MiM Coordinators have advanced policy changes/new policy. Coordinators shared that the pandemic shifted public and municipal interest in and support for policy change around social determinants, particularly food insecurity, making it a more supportive environment to (re)introduce policies supportive of HEAL work.

Partnerships have been deepened and/or formalized. Several MiM Coalitions formalized municipal task forces to coordinate and deliver community food access initiatives or created new food councils or coalitions to support long-term community preparedness and resilience. However, a few noted that this systems change was dependent on finding sustainable funding. As noted in both the 2020 and 2021 research, COVID-19 revealed or heightened pre-existing food access and food system gaps; these formalized bodies can help coordinate anti-hunger efforts and address foundational food systems challenges.

Another emerging theme under partnerships was relationships formed around emergency response leading to site use agreements for HEAL activities (MelWak for outdoor classes; Revere, Cape Ann & Weymouth for food distribution).

MiM coordinators described partnering with a wide range of groups: school, the Y and other CBOs, other municipalities, community health centers, private businesses, food pantry, and early childcare services. These are similar partners to those described in previous years' research.

New hires were made within organizations or municipalities. Coordinators described municipalities finding funding to make permanent new hires brought on to support acute needs during the pandemic. These new positions tend to be direct service roles providing resources and support to residents. This finding aligns with the program development theme in that these hires reflect an expansion of services and the need for increased support capacity.

New funding sources were leveraged for HEAL initiatives. Multiple MiM Coordinators have leveraged ARPA funds to support MiM strategies. Generally, most coordinators noted securing resources beyond what was available to the municipality pre-COVID-19 to fund expanded programs, hires, and changes to the build environment.

MiM Coordinators re-imagined program delivery to address barriers to access. Many MiM Coordinators shared examples of emergency food programs that found new ways to reach people during the pandemic. While there has been some return to pre-pandemic models, elements of these new distribution models remain (e.g., online ordering, pickups at central hubs, some still delivering). Community hubs are emerging as an important element of the emergency food work (e.g., North Shore Community College sites, Revere League of Special Needs building, Senior Center, local churches), representing a shift to prioritizing current congregations spaces of underserved populations by centering these locations in food and service delivery.

A few coordinators mentioned leveraging increased collaboration with other organizations during COVID-19 to update or create more comprehensive resource guides for residents.

There were local emergency response strategies not mentioned as a PSE successes area. Addressing technology barriers/the digital divide to enable remote economic opportunities and social support maintenance, an activity multiple coordinators mentioned during previous iterations, was not mentioned by any as a PSE success.

Strategies to incentivize outdoor physical activity were also much less frequently mentioned in this iteration of research.

Suggestions for Replicating PSE successes

- 1. Build partnerships.** Most MiM Coordinators stressed the importance of the relationships formed with people doing similar work, community partners, academic communities, and priority populations. These partnerships were credited as the source of support, capacity, information and data, funding, and long-term buy-in.
- 2. Build on existing momentum.** A coordinator recommended looking “at an area that is requested by the community and already has some capacity/or similar work and assist with expanding that and helping to implement and pull in partners to assist.” Many of the PSE successes speak to the leveraging of momentum built around emergency food efforts towards adoption of urban agriculture ordinances, food policy councils, etc.

Data Collection Methods

A facilitated group discussion was used to collect responses from MiM coordinators about their local emergency response work during COVID-19. The specific questions are listed below:

- What changes from your COVID-19 response work is or is likely to become a permanent change?
- What is one piece of advice you would give a colleague who sees potential for an emergency or immediate HEAL response to become a permanent change?

These questions were posed at two regional MiM Coordinator meetings hosted by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the first on May 17th and the second on May 18th. At each meeting, MAPC staff provided a brief presentation with background on the research before giving coordinators a few minutes to reflect on the questions and then facilitating a group conversation. MAPC staff did live note taking on Google Jamboard.

At the May 18th meeting, the group only discussed the first question due to a shortened meeting time from technical difficulties.

Two MAPC staffers met on two separate occasions to index the Jamboard notes by topic and identify themes, a process facilitated by Jamboard user interface, which allows for easily movable/organizable notes. The first meeting focused on identifying and organizing data by major topics, the second on identifying themes within the organized data. Analysis was done inductively, without a set codebook. However, staffers were informed by the codebook developed in the 2021 Local COVID Response Research, reviewing it before analyzing the new data.

Due to limited data for the second question, these responses were not analyzed.

Conversation Notes Organized by Topic

What changes from your COVID-19 response work has or is likely to become a permanent change?

Brought the principles and values of MiM to new partners

- FRCOG: Rachel was elected running on a MiM-influenced platform!
- Taunton: The Y moved from emergency food response through Fair Foods distribution program to banding together as the Old Colony Y system regionally to recognize food insecurity as an issue and have it become a key focal point of the Y's mission going forward
- Taunton: Systemic change includes top to bottom training of staff to address food insecurity needs of community members instead of relying on one person or people
- FRCOG: Influencing and bringing questions to the table - bringing the principles and values of MiM to new partners and contexts and finding people more open

Advancing policy changes/new policy

- PVPC: Palmer "made a health chapter for the master plan to bring HiAP"
- Revere: We are also developing a Revere Food Policy Council (looking at resiliency models like Lawrence).
- Revere: the Urban Farming Ordinance we passed last year will continue to be a template to grow and start new initiatives.
- FRCOG: Working with new partners on strategies. Ex. working with transportation planners on Healthy Aging work and school on local sourcing.
- Salem: Urban Ag ordinance allowing people to sell what they grow. Previously introduced and was contentious. Pandemic showed the fragility of local food system and increased support.
- Worcester: A group of community partners formed to coordinate emergency food needs in COVID. Group has transitioned (been made permanent) into Mayor's Taskforce on Food Security.

New Funding Sources

- Salem: Muni has committed funding for a park update
- Revere: A number of staff positions were created through Covid and ARPA funding to increase community engagement and participation from the most marginalized communities and those disconnected from local government. Our Covid Ambassador Program changed to a Community Health Ambassador Program and in FY23 to a Community Health Liaison Program.
- Lawrence: Distribution for food and delivery of restaurant food during COVID. Now looking at regional collaboration with funding beyond municipal
- Salem: ARPA funding for kitchen that can support community meals

- Lynn made food security task force, fundraised 2.8 million. made this work more permanent. also mutual aid list that they do together. the food piece lives in Lynn now.
- Revere: youth workforce development work expanded to include Digital Navigators. Summer youth jobs program through YouthWorks funding will now be year round to sustain career development for Revere youth.

Program Development (new or expansions)

- Cape Ann: Food pantry (The Open Door) is now a permanent order groceries online or call in order for pick up or delivery. In store shopping is closed for good. Community meals are delivery or pick up only no longer a meal site.
- Cape Ann: Food Pantry Model Changes are permanent
- Cape Ann: Expanded services to No. Shore Community College sites to reach college students with food access needs.
- Revere: Our farmers market restarted a CSA program which is one of popular programs vs low participation in 2015 and 2016.
- Revere: The building we used for emergency food distribution was turned back to the city from the League of Special Needs and will become the future home of a Revere Food Hub.
- Everett: The senior center transformed into a food pantry hub during the pandemic and continue to have 2 pantry days per week in addition to restarting programming
- Everett: Meal delivery and grocery delivery for seniors started during COVID but has been continuous since March of 2020. The Senior center transformed into a food pantry hub during the pandemic and although the COA is currently starting programming for seniors back up, they continue to have two pantry days per week.
- Worcester: A group of community partners formed to coordinate emergency food needs in COVID. Group has transitioned (been made permanent) into Mayor's Taskforce on Food Security.
- MelWak: Expansion of free community grab-and-go meals at local churches. The Food Drive is permanent now, a reducing food waste organization.
- MelWake: Free outdoor exercise in parks we are hoping to make permanent via Parks/YMCA.
- Lynn: when covid hit, food pantry shifted to pickup model. now can order online for groceries or call by phone to be delivered or pickup.

Resource guides or coordination

- Cambridge: We developed a guide to food resources that is still used citywide and now being expanded
- PVPC: Branched out so coalition is meeting to coordinate efforts around fire victims, housing and immigration, vaccine distribution, created video resource guide. Zoom have facilitated.
- Fall River: Created Mental Health resources for students and teachers.

Deeper Partnership

- Lawrence: Distribution for food and delivery of restaurant food during COVID. Now looking at regional collaboration with funding beyond municipal
- Lawrence: Creation of a Safe Routes to School Task Force by the Public Schools aiming to increase bike/ped education and coordinated activities with SRTS/LPS/DPW/SRTS
- Salem: Partnerships - need to work with neighboring communities, but this is still a work in progress
- FRCOG: Working with new partners on strategies. Ex. working with transportation planners on Healthy Aging work and school on local sourcing
- Law: The Greater Lawrence Health Center will be sharing de-identified chronic disease information for food map.
- Fall River: Coalition building, created group with new agency partners and they have flourished. Begun as emergency response, e.g. food distribution.
- Taunton: The Y moved from emergency food response through Fair Foods distribution program to banding together as the Old Colony Y system regionally to recognize food insecurity as an issue and have it become a key focal point of the Y's mission going forward
- Cambridge: Expanded partnership with early education childcare programs for developing new sets of services
- Camb: Deeper Partnerships are now allowing for more work together such as expanded services to food pantries- Cambridge
- Lawrence: increasing walkability, created walking maps for all elementary and middle schools. increase engagement with walking maps and working with school admins

Site-based work

- Revere: The building we used for emergency food distribution was turned back to the city from the League of Special Needs and will become the future home of a Revere Food Hub.
- Weymouth Food Pantry expands and partners with other South Shore towns to become South Shore Food Bank
- Cape Ann: Expanded services to No. Shore Community College sites to reach college students with food access needs.
- MelWake: Free outdoor exercise in parks we are hoping to make permanent via Parks/YMCA.

Formed a food council/collaborative/made a task force permanent

- Worcester: A group of community partners formed to coordinate emergency food needs in COVID. Group has transitioned (been made permanent) into Mayor's Taskforce on Food Security.
- Created the Northern Berkshire Food Access Collaborative.
- Lynn made food security task force, fundraised 2.8 million. made this work more permanent. also mutual aid list that they do together. the food piece lives in Lynn now.
- PVPC: Emergency response partners around food distribution. Developed a food security plan and looking for funding for a food policy council to move the work forward without MiM funding
- Lawrence: Creation of a regional Food Resiliency Group, looking at food resources and gaps in the Gr. Lawrence area and Haverhill

- Revere: We are also developing a Revere Food Policy Council (looking at resiliency models like Lawrence).

New Hires

- Everett: New employees have been hired specifically to deliver the meals/groceries from the COA food pantry.
- Cambridge: Food and supplies services for people in Quarantine and Isolation are being expanded and updated with new staff and capacity
- Revere: A number of staff positions were created through Covid and ARPA funding to increase community engagement and participation from the most marginalized communities and those disconnected from local government. Our Covid Ambassador Program changed to a Community Health Ambassador Program and in FY23 to a Community Health Liaison Program.
- Revere: Our language justice work created a full-time Language Justice Coordinator who will move to the DEI/Talent and Culture office in FY23 to work on further systems and policy changes.
- MelWak: Each community hired Social Services Coordinators
- Revere: youth workforce development work expanded to include Digital Navigators. Summer youth jobs program through YouthWorks funding will now be year round to sustain career development for Revere youth.

What is one piece of advice you would give a colleague who sees potential for an emergency or immediate HEAL response to become a permanent change?

- See if anyone else is already doing something for the same issue. find people doing similar work, this helps you get support too
- Seek support from community partners to assist with PSE change.
- partnering with academic communities - helps to analyze data and sustain processes and go after funding
- don't stray from core values - making sure those experiencing the challenge are involved in the solutions. will have more buy-in long-term
- Gather good data on thee intervention to make the case for additional funding
- Engage the target population in developing the response
- look at an area that is requested by the community and already has some capacity/or similar work and assist with expanding that and helping to implement and pull in partners to assist.