

Michigan Healthy Urban Environments Final Project Report

Michigan Healthy Urban Environments Pilot Program

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Executive Project Summary

Project Title Michigan Healthy Urban Environments (MiHUE)

Project Area Environmental Justice and Community Economic Development

Project Team Public Sector Consultants

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Project Overview

Climate change is both an immediate and hidden threat in Michigan. Its causes are integrated with extractive systems and policies based in capitalism and white supremacist culture which are connected to the complex solutions of racial equity. COVID-19 has highlighted disparities in health care and economic stability which foreshadow some negative impacts caused by climate change events. Through a precursory assessment of the region, Public Sector Consultants (PSC) identified key problems and potential right-fit solutions.

Many cities and communities are developing community resilience programs. We looked to Grand Rapids, Detroit, and Ann Arbor as successful Michigan peer programs. Public Sector Consultants, in partnership with several community organizations and contributors, developed the Michigan Healthy Urban Environments (MiHUE) initiative as a pilot program in Mid-Michigan that engages directly with individuals and coordinating organizations to dismantle barriers to access resources and improve just outcomes in support of the climate resilience and justice movement.

Problem Statement

Current statewide and regional efforts show that the community already has the necessary resources, experience, and knowledge, but the organizations and individuals most concerned with the climate justice movement are not always acting in the same spaces or connected to a broader community resilience context. In addition, although we are all negatively impacted by climate change, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are disproportionately impacted and are not genuinely represented in the current environmental and climate change movement. The region lacks a solid and stable infrastructure to challenge systemic barriers necessary to make the bold changes necessary to create a just climate future, and the MiHUE intends to change that.

Environmental justice analysis from the University of Michigan and the State of Michigan's [MiEJScreen](#) Environmental Justice Screening Tool indicates Mid-Michigan is an area that needs direct investment and coordinated efforts around community climate resiliency. While the State and other entities do have a focus on environmental justice in Michigan, much of the attention is directed toward infrastructure resilience, which, while also important, can overlook community voices, needs, priorities and unidentified impacts of climate change.

Revised Scope of Work

In June 2022, the Michigan State University Center for Community and Economic Development (MSU CCED) Comprehensive Economic Recovery Initiative (CERI) program team (referred to throughout this report as MSU CCED) and PSC agreed to amend the original scope of the project as new partners and developmental elements were identified.

The revised scope of this work focused on identifying grant resources to support a pilot implementation of the MiHUE concept in Mid-Michigan. The project generated language and budgets for the potential grant applications. Ongoing research will identify funding sources including, but not limited to, foundations, government agencies (federal, state, and local), corporate sponsors, and other funding programs that align with the mission and outcomes of MiHUE and the MSU CCED.

Milestone 1

As a result of Milestone 1 research, the MSU CCED and PSC project team has identified an alternative scope of work for this project and are proposing an amended project scope for Milestone 2. The Lansing Economic Development Corporation (LEDC) needs an entity to facilitate the implementation of the corridor improvement plan approved by the City of Lansing. The improvement plan aligns with the MiHUE scope of work and serves to further local business diversification and revitalization through an emphasis on economic development that residents both approve of and desire to take on as a collective responsibility.

Additionally, a LEDC corridor development specialist has begun creating a deliverable to serve as the blueprint for future Corridor Improvement Authorities (CIAs) working toward successful corridor improvement plan approval (and a plan for quick implementation). The MiHUE program partners can identify viable community organizations and leaders within the Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Boulevard corridor in Lansing to serve as the administrative entity necessary to achieve the CIA improvement plan objectives.

Milestone 2

Milestone 2 included the facilitation of three additional discussions with the Lansing Economic Development Corporation, Capital Area Sustainability Partnership, MSU CCED, and City of Lansing resulting in the outcomes identified below. Milestone 2 is complete.

- Map alignments between the CIA and MiHUE projects
- Assess substantive criteria to support the value of a partnership
- Create language that demonstrates the interconnected nature of economic development and environmental justice
- Identify grant opportunities for a joint project
- Deliver a final report that includes recommended next steps

The PSC project team convened monthly check-in meetings with MSU CCED's Nathaniel Hooper and Emma Gilbert to share progress, but also to leverage MSU CCED's knowledge and network in support of the project outcomes.

Milestone 3

Milestone 3 is the final summary project report along with the supporting documents provided in a shared drive, which contains funding research, grant language, a definition of environmental justice that illustrates the relationship between sustainability and economic development to underpin MiHUE project work, identifying potential stakeholder network in Lansing, and highlighting current granting opportunities for the project team to pursue post-project close. Milestone 3 is complete with this report.

Solutions and Community Impact

Building resilience provides benefits in two separate but interrelated ways: it enables individuals, communities, and organizations to better withstand a disruption more effectively, and it enables them to improve their current economic and social systems and situations. With higher resilience, individuals and communities can build new relationships, take on new endeavors and initiatives, and reach out for new opportunities. More specifically, community resilience, related to climate change or other large-scale disruption, could attract capital investments in mitigation infrastructure and new large-scale projects such as renewable energy projects. Business and entrepreneurs could interact with BIPOC communities within this sphere, especially if justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) is at the core of the investments.

Future grant proposals by MiHUE will approach job creation and positive economic contribution in two primary methods, although other opportunities may be discovered during the initiative's development. First, all interactions with the community requiring or requesting the involvement or participation with BIPOC community organizations or individuals will provide compensation for contributions. This could be in the form of fellowships for community research, engagement stipends, and the like.

The second primary possible method of economic generation will be to connect environmental and climate justice and economic revitalization that intentionally creates opportunity for job creation for the residents in the surrounding community. Also, while this research was not part of the original MiHUE scope of work, we considered job training programs in sustainability, climate action, and other fields like renewable energy, which provide training to practitioners in frontline communities and encourage/catalyze climate-risk reductions and clean energy or other climate-mitigating investments in those communities. This initiative would not only provide potential jobs in the community through the attraction of capital investments, but it also provides climate change specific and certified training from several national organizations depending upon the sector. Some of these organizations include Association of Climate Change Officers, International Society of Sustainability Professionals, American Society of Adaptation Professionals, North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners, United States Department of Energy, United States Climate Resilience Toolkit and numerous regional job training centers and community colleges, who provide job training in many sustainability sectors to upcoming climate, renewable energy, and sustainability professionals from

BIPOC and underserved communities, thus investing in the professional development of the people within the community. This human capital investment would provide those individuals with credentials and experience.

There is also an opportunity to gain experience more about the economic impacts of community climate resilience, and this exploration will be included in the formation of MiHUE programming. Mid-Michigan is a unique community and there likely exists unique characteristics and context that have yet to be discovered.

Recommendations

After several in-depth conversations and brainstorming sessions, project partners PSC, LEDC, and the MSU CCED recommend the following actions to secure MiHUE program funding to continue implementation efforts:

Utilize the updated grant language to pursue funding in the high-priority areas identified by project partners.

The updated grant language was provided through collaboration with MSU CCED and other project partners and populated into a [shared document](#). This language was centered around anticipated grant applications regarding transportation, equity, business and workforce development and education. These specified topics were selected from several existing grant categories identified and agreed upon by the collective project team based on the objectives outlined in a definition of environmental justice (also created by this group). The grant language outlined in this document also aligns with shared objectives from LEDC's corridor improvement plan process and firms up the relationship between community redevelopment and environmental justice.

Pursue the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grants identified through the grant research process as a beneficial, potential funding source for the MiHUE program.

These federal grants are purposed towards workforce development, community technical assistance centers, and environmental justice efforts. The specific grants are listed below.

- [Justice40 Initiative](#): The federal Justice40 Initiative provides grants for transportation projects in areas with key disadvantages in environmental, health, and climate change resilience factors. Seeing how mobility and infrastructure are two key elements for the environmental and social health of a community, transportation grants could provide the MLK corridor with significant improvements for greater community engagement via personal and public transit options; decarbonization efforts; and non-cosmetic, infrastructure-related improvements to community wastewater systems and greenspaces.
- [Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Grants](#): The EPA Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) Grants provide funding to nonprofit organizations for training and green jobs opportunities for residents in disadvantaged communities. The grants not only provide the opportunity to build a thriving economy and boost employment rates, but also can be used to

kickstart efforts towards necessary green infrastructure on a residential and commercial scale for communities needing the most support.

- [The Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers \(EJ TCTAC\) grants](#): The EPA has announced grant funding to establish the Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (EJ TCTAC) program. The EPA is partnering with the Department of Energy (DOE) to provide funding for five to ten centers across the nation supporting underserved communities, including rural and remote communities. The TCTAC will provide technical assistance, training, and capacity-building support to communities with environmental justice and energy concerns such as those outlined in the program objectives for MiHUE and regions of Mid-Michigan.

Develop the MiHUE mission and vision statements.

The project partners formulated a definition of environmental justice (see Appendix) to be used as the core principle on which MiHUE will build its vision and mission statements and organizational objectives. MiHUE will collaborate with MSU CCED and LEDC to ensure the outlined organizational objectives align with best practices of climate action and sustainability planning.

Establish the MiHUE program direction and necessary elements for implementation.

The program partners will conduct facilitated meetings to brainstorm future planning scenarios and grant funding applications processes as well as to identify potential partnering community organizations in Mid-Michigan. As previously stated, the MiHUE program requires an acting community organization to serve as the grantee for any federal funding secured and to execute the grant's targeted objectives. The MiHUE program can use previous research conducted by the LEDC to consider the community assets and challenges identified in the [2016 Southwest Lansing Action Plan](#), which can be accessed via the [Ingham County](#) website, and identify community partners that can meet these identified needs.

Appendix A. Grant Language

MSU Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED), Michigan Healthy Urban Environments (MiHUE), and Martin Luther King, Jr. Corridor Improvement Authority

Aurelius Christian, Ann Erhardt, Joy Johnson, Nathaniel Hooper, Joey Allen, Emma Gilbert, Marianna Coelho Uchoa

[Environmental justice \(EJ\)](#), as defined by the EPA, is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Environmental justice and urban corridor redevelopment go together, yet there is little defined cooperation between the two in a traditional approach.

Typically, disadvantaged communities have not only suffered economic hardship, but the effects of poor planning and environmental care as well. For decades, factories and industries have polluted areas with harmful smoke and chemicals. Large, inefficient roadways create significant noise and air pollution, while also reducing the capability of residents to walk/bike or use public transit to go about their daily activities. Those effects can translate into divestment and decline for neighborhoods and business centers.

Revitalization efforts, then, must seek to combat such negative influences. MiHUE, as a community partnership organization, would serve as an effective voice moving forward in establishing the environmental health and climate resilience needs through the lens of redevelopment. Community leaders can assist with necessary environmental reviews and visioning projects for properties like Logan Square.

The [2016 Southwest Lansing Action Plan](#), which included the MLK Corridor as its eastern boundary, identified the following attributes as major favorable and unfavorable aspects of the current community.

EXHIBIT 1A. South Lansing Community Challenges and Assets

Community Challenges	Community Assets
Lack of after school programs	Citizens with a vested interest in strengthening the community
Perception of the area as "high crime"	Strong, multi-generational residents
Auto-oriented development and neighborhoods with curvilinear street design	Faith-based leadership, with close to 100 faith-based organizations
Limited walkability and bikability	High quality townhomes
Strip malls instead of traditional urban development	Large number of parks
Unappealing intersections and corridors	Active neighborhood / community groups
Lack of community convening areas	Strong interest in small business development
Lack of commercial property maintenance from owners	Vacant land for potential development
Negative geographic area and branding perception issues of being on the "Southside"	Branding opportunity for identity establishment

A CIA can be targeted towards the economic and infrastructure-related topics seen in the figure above: fixing the lack of urban development, maintenance, and community gathering space; taking advantage of opportunities for small business and vacant land development; and creating a unique identity for the corridor. MiHUE has the unique chance to establish itself in the strengthening of the corridor through this process. Potential avenues include building connections with community/faith-based groups and long-term residents; filling the after-school program gap; taking an active role at the table for redevelopment discussions; and shining a light on the natural resources and greenspace available. As the CIA generates community involvement, it is imperative that MiHUE's presence is felt to generate discussion surrounding environmental resilience.

It is also important to recognize that environmental health and climate resilience are often not easy or approachable topics to the general community, and the mission of MiHUE reflects the need to bridge both this knowledge gap and the opportunity gap. It would be beneficial to frame environmental issues and solutions through the lens of economic redevelopment, to better highlight the importance of those solutions to the neighborhoods they are implemented in. That lens is explored further below.

Several grant categories exist that can firm up this relationship between community redevelopment and environmental justice.

Transportation

Mobility and infrastructure are two key players for the environmental and social health of a community. Transportation grants could provide the MLK Corridor with significant improvements for personal and public transit options. Vehicle and freight traffic can be reduced through traffic control measures such as lane reduction. Street landscaping and wastewater improvements can create greater greenspace and resilience beyond simple aesthetics. Decarbonization, which is a major focus for South Lansing, can begin with smart and innovative transportation design. Better mobility provides the corridor with a vibrancy not often found in older urban areas; it contributes to customer attraction for local businesses and economic participation for residents.

Potential grant example: The federal Justice40 Initiative provides grants for transportation projects in areas with key disadvantages in environmental, health, and climate change resilience factors.

Equity

South Lansing is a disadvantaged community by typical bureaucratic standards, lower income and higher unemployment being the main indicators. The proportion of minority residents further qualifies the corridor for investments in equity building to reduce undue economic and environmental strain.

Business/Workforce

Resilience demands economic support just as much as it does physical and community infrastructure. As a corridor redevelops, there is opportunity for “green job” creation - that is, jobs that are either directly

influencing positive climate and environmental results or operating in spaces with positive results. A high proportion of manual labor or service sector jobs in this area serves as an advantage to invigorate the economy with encouraged investment in green manufacturing facilities, restaurants, and independent retail.

Technical Assistance / Capacity building, support workforce development initiatives

Example grant: The Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) Grants of the EPA provide disadvantaged communities' non-profit organizations with money to train residents on green jobs and to "reap the benefits of revitalization and environmental cleanup."

<https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/documents/20-03.pdf>

Education

Engaging students of both K-12 and higher education levels is possible given South Lansing's location. For the corridor itself, this means creating research and development opportunities for innovative ideas at local sites, as well as exploring community caretaker roles (i.e., involving students in the upkeep of greenspace, community gardens, etc.). MiHUE can better facilitate the fostering of educational opportunities by creating communication between schools and the CIA as new infrastructure and community-led projects are discussed.



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