



Collaborative Leadership – Public Perceptions in Fall River and New Bedford

BY COLLEEN DAWICKI

The value of collaboration is sometimes expressed mathematically as $1+1=3$. For cities, this formula means that when individuals and groups are brought together, their collective output can more than double because of the ideas, opportunities, and resources that are brought to bear by partners, especially when those partners reflect a diversity of constituents, issue areas, and sectors. In this first report of the UMass Dartmouth Urban Initiative's Civic Infrastructure Project, we set out to explore how collaborative leadership is perceived as a component of civic infrastructure in the Massachusetts cities of Fall River and New Bedford (learn more about those cities in Appendix A).

ABOUT THE CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT

Since its inception in 2008, the UMass Dartmouth Urban Initiative has worked closely with a number of partners in neighboring Gateway Cities of Fall River and New Bedford on projects spanning the breadth of urban policy issue areas. Every project has served to reinforce the idea that resources alone aren't the key to revitalization; instead, success in these cities is dependent upon the people, organizations, institutions, and networks that stand ready to mobilize in the face of crisis or opportunity. But these elements—collectively defined as a city's civic infrastructure—are rarely accounted for, never mind invested in.

In order to address the need for taking stock of civic infrastructure in Fall River and New Bedford, the Urban Initiative teamed with the

UMass Dartmouth Center for Policy Analysis to study civic infrastructure from the point of view of residents in these two cities. A telephone survey with 16 questions about civic infrastructure was administered to 800 adults during the fall of 2012. These findings were complemented by secondary data collected across a number of indicators in order to validate and contextualize survey findings.

In the next few months, the Urban Initiative will present these findings through a series of research briefs posted to its hallmark website, the [SouthCoast Urban Indicators Project](#) (SCUIP).

THE CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE SURVEY

Survey questions were adapted from two sources in order to make our findings more comparable to existing data from other communities. Questions related to satisfaction and well-being (findings for which will be reported at a later date) were derived from the Gallup Well-Being Index, while civic infrastructure questions were sourced from the National Civic League's Civic Index (a tool designed to measure civic infrastructure). A portion of the full survey tool—including a breakdown of responses—is found in Appendix B.

Surveys were administered to both cellular phones and landlines, with an even number of responses—400—collected from each city. Results were weighted to ensure representativeness of the sample.

CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE MATTERS

The elements that comprise civic infrastructure are simultaneously tangible and intangible. Tangible elements include a city's network of organizations, institutions, and agencies both within and across sectors, as well as the financial resources these networks are capable of mobilizing. Civic infrastructure also includes elements that could be characterized as civic engagement, the harder-to-measure aspects of a community's ability to engage and empower diverse stakeholders, build and sustain relationships, cultivate trust and understanding, and manage conflict.

Despite its cumbersome definition, there is evidence aplenty that civic infrastructure matters, and building it pays off. Communities with dense networks of institutions and organizations prove to be more resilient in times of crisis,¹ and the economic opportunities that result from these networks actually translate to lower rates of violence and better health outcomes for their citizens.²

While many cities have reaped the benefits of their strong civic infrastructures, the experiences of others serve to highlight the need for collaborative, cross-sector networks that are effective in mobilizing resources and engaging community members in decision-making. When post-Katrina rebuilding efforts quickly began to sputter, the Rockefeller Foundation identified the inability of New Orleans' public agencies and organizations to coordinate their efforts and engage citizens as a major stumbling block to the kind of change that was needed. Instead of problem-oriented grant-making, the foundation responded by targeting resources toward civic infrastructure needs like better community engagement, stronger relationships between organizations and sectors, and enhanced access to federal resources.³

Though building a strong civic infrastructure is a critical step for cities that seek systemic, sustainable change, it is not an end in itself. Instead, the ultimate outcome should be true civic capacity, which is the ability of a

community's decision-makers and stakeholders—not just its civic infrastructure, but also its *leaders*—to influence policy and drive change.⁴

THE CASE FOR COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

Collaborative leadership refers to a kind of leadership that engages stakeholders across sectors. Examples include public officials working with members of the business community, or nonprofit leaders collaborating with a university. This concept has also been characterized as “breaking down silos,” because a collaborative approach to leadership means that partnerships are formed outside of the structures (or silos) in which leaders typically operate.

Research done right here in Massachusetts presents a compelling case for the importance of collaborative leadership in urban revitalization. In a long-term effort to promote prosperity in Springfield, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston investigated lessons learned from peer cities they considered “resurgent” for their ability to reverse years of economic and population decline (largely triggered by the disappearance of manufacturing jobs).⁵ One of their key findings was that collaborative leadership was essential to a city's turnaround, whether the public sector, an anchor institution, or the business community took the lead. Not only was this approach necessary for long-term change, but it was also critical in demonstrating capacity to outside investors, including government agencies at the state and federal levels, the philanthropic community, and businesses considering relocation.⁶

MEASURING COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

In order to measure something as amorphous as collaborative leadership, the Urban Initiative has selected a set of indicators that draws exclusively on survey questions posed to Fall River and New Bedford residents. These questions relate to 1) overall perceptions about the degree to which citizens, government officials, nonprofits, and businesses work together to address challenges; 2) the degree to which municipal government collaborates with other sectors; 3) whether nonprofits collaborate versus compete for resources; and 4) the perceived degree of private sector engagement.

The civic indicators survey also measured characteristics of respondents so that we can analyze responses to these questions based on demographics, socioeconomic background, and even the degree to which survey participants are engaged in the civic life of their community.

It is important to note that these findings represent the first time such questions have been asked of Fall River and New Bedford residents, so there is no data against which to compare for the purposes of benchmarking. The Urban Initiative hopes to identify funding sources to support efforts to repeat this survey in the future for the purpose of measuring change over time. Until such data is available, context for interpretation can be gleaned from responses for subgroups. This cross-tabulated data shows how perceptions of collaborative leadership vary across and within the two cities.

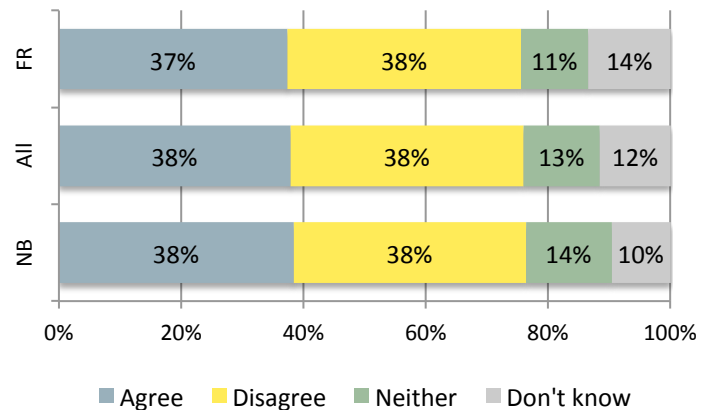
PERCEPTIONS OF COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP IN FALL RIVER AND NEW BEDFORD

Several of the civic infrastructure survey questions were designed to gauge the degree to which Fall River and New Bedford engage in collaborative leadership from the point of view of city residents. According to those residents, how are these cities doing?

1. Overall perceptions

Survey participants were asked if they agree or disagree with the following statement: “Citizens, government, private companies, and nonprofits in <CITY> all work together to solve problems.” Here’s how they responded:

Figure 1. "Citizens, government, private companies, and nonprofits in my city all work together to solve problems."



As Figure 1 shows, residents of both cities are generally split on their perceptions of whether or not their city exhibits a collaborative approach to problem solving.

Across both cities, there are some notable differences in responses among certain subgroups. Levels of agreement with this statement were generally higher among people who are satisfied with living in their city (45 percent*) and people who feel their city is getting better as a place to live (59 percent*).

Fall River. Among all respondents, 37 percent agree that citizens, municipal government, businesses, and nonprofits work together to solve problems in the city. A slightly higher proportion—38 percent—disagrees with the statement, while 11 percent neither agree nor disagree. Another 14 percent answered, “don’t know.”

* Denotes values that are statistically significant at the .05 level.

Across subgroups of respondents, the perception of collaboration is greatest among:

- those who report being satisfied with living in their city (46 percent agree with the statement), and
- those who feel that, as a place to live, Fall River is getting better (57 percent) or staying the same (46 percent*).

Conversely, little collaboration is perceived by those who are dissatisfied with living in Fall River (55 percent) and those who feel Fall River is getting worse (51 percent).

Disagreement with this statement is relatively high among males (44 percent), people ages 18-34 (47 percent disagreed), those with household incomes of \$75,000+ (44 percent), and people who are not registered to vote (46 percent).

Awareness of collaboration—denoted by those who answered, “don’t know”—is lowest among:

- respondents ages 35-49 (19 percent)
- people who are dissatisfied with Fall River (17 percent); and
- those who rarely or never read the newspaper (17 percent).

New Bedford. Thirty-eight percent agree that citizens, municipal government, businesses, and nonprofits collaborate to solve the city’s problems; an equal proportion (38 percent) disagree. Fourteen percent neither agree nor disagree, while 10 percent said they do not know.

High levels of agreement that collaboration exists are found among:

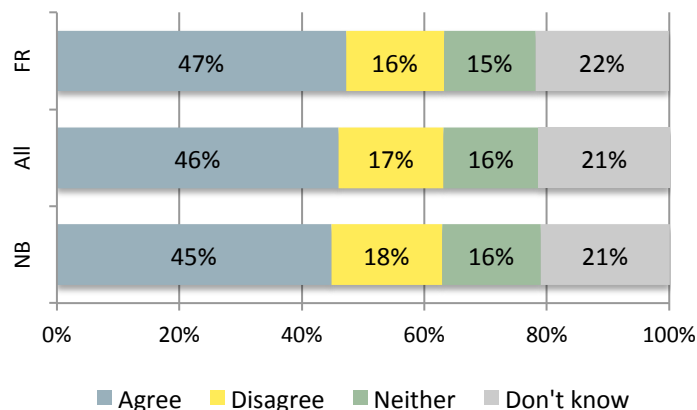
- males (47 percent*)
- people with college degrees (44 percent)
- those who are satisfied with living in New Bedford (45 percent*); and
- overwhelmingly, those who say that New Bedford is getting better as a place to live (60 percent*).

Conversely, disagreement with the idea that New Bedford has a collaborative approach to problem solving is highest among those who feel the city is getting worse (60 percent*) and those who are dissatisfied with living in New Bedford (65 percent*). Other subgroups with higher levels of disagreement include females (43 percent*), and those who did not vote in the last municipal election (44 percent disagree).

2. Municipal government as a cross-sector collaborator

Another survey question asked for agreement/disagreement with this statement: “<CITY>’s government works with nonprofits and the private sector to address the city’s challenges.”

Figure 2. "My city's government works with nonprofits and the private sector to address the city's challenges."



Relative to the previous question gauging overall perceptions of collaboration, there is greater consensus that this is true across both cities. On the other hand, many more respondents—a full 21 percent—do not know how to answer the question, signaling a lower level of awareness about the degree to which city government collaborates.

Across both cities, subgroups that agree to a greater extent that municipal government is an effective collaborator include people ages 65+ (51 percent), people earning \$75,000+ (52 percent), people with a Bachelor’s degree (54 percent), those who voted in the last municipal

election (51 percent), regular newspaper readers (54 percent*), people who are satisfied with their city (54 percent*), and people who feel their city is getting better (63 percent*).

Meanwhile, subgroups that *don't* perceive their municipal government collaborates with other sectors include people ages 35-49 (20 percent), people whose household income is less than \$50,000 per year (20 percent), those who are not registered to vote (20 percent), people who rarely or never read the newspaper (20 percent*), people who are dissatisfied with living in their city (30 percent), and people who feel their city is getting worse (25 percent).

Fall River. Compared to New Bedford, Fall River residents agree to a slightly greater degree—47 percent, compared to 45 percent in New Bedford—that their city government collaborates with the private and nonprofit sectors in its efforts to address Fall River's challenges. Sixteen percent disagree, 15 percent neither agree nor disagree, and 22 percent answered, "don't know."

Agreement is higher among:

- females (51 percent*)
- those earning \$75,000+ (57 percent)
- people ages 65+ (61 percent)
- college degree-holders (56 percent),
- voters (57 percent*)
- daily newspaper readers (56 percent*)
- people who are satisfied with living in Fall River (56 percent*); and
- overwhelmingly, people who feel that Fall River is getting better as a place to live (70 percent*).

Meanwhile, higher-than-average disagreement is present among males (23 percent*), those who are not registered to vote (24 percent*), the dissatisfied (27 percent*), and those who feel Fall River is getting worse (24 percent*).

New Bedford. Forty-five percent of New Bedford respondents agree that city government

collaborates with the private and nonprofit sectors to address the city's challenges.

Agreement is higher among:

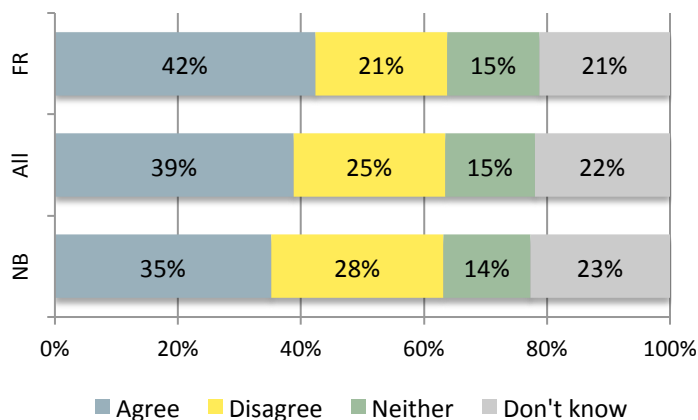
- younger residents (53 percent of 18-34-year-olds agreed with the statement)
- those with a college degree (53 percent)
- those who regularly read the newspaper (52 percent*)
- those who are satisfied with living in New Bedford (59 percent*); and
- those who feel New Bedford is getting better (59 percent*).

Above-average levels of disagreement that the city collaborates across sectors come from people who didn't vote in the last municipal election (22 percent*), those who don't read the newspaper (22 percent*), the dissatisfied (33 percent*), and those who feel New Bedford is getting worse (28 percent*).

3. Nonprofits as collaborators—not competitors

Because nonprofits champion such a variety of constituencies and issue areas, it is important to know not just whether these organizations collaborate across sectors, but also if they collaborate within their own sector to promote collective capacity and efficacy. Residents of the cities were thus asked whether they agreed with the statement: "Nonprofits in <CITY> work with one another to secure needed resources

Figure 3. "Nonprofits in my city work with one another...rather than compete."



rather than compete for them.”

Notably, this question was unlike most of the survey questions in that it revealed a distinct difference between the two cities surveyed: 42 percent of Fall River residents feel that nonprofits collaborate and 21 percent do not; comparatively, just 35 percent of New Bedford residents agree, while 28 percent disagree. (Data on the size and density of each city’s nonprofit sector can be found in Appendix A.)

Fall River. Forty-two percent of Fall River respondents agree that nonprofits collaborate rather than compete for resources; 21 percent disagree. Fifteen percent neither agree nor disagree, while 21 percent do not know the degree to which this statement is true.

Higher levels of agreement with this statement come from:

- females (47 percent)
- voters in the last election (49 percent)
- regular newspaper readers (48 percent*)
- people who are satisfied with life in Fall River (52 percent*); and
- those who feel the city is improving (53 percent).

Disagreement is greater among males (26 percent), people who are not registered to vote (33 percent*), the dissatisfied (31 percent*), and those who feel Fall River is getting worse (27 percent*).

New Bedford. New Bedford residents appear to perceive greater competition between nonprofits than their peers in Fall River, with just 35 percent agreeing that nonprofits work together and 28 percent disagreeing. Another 23 percent report not knowing, while 14 percent neither agree nor disagree.

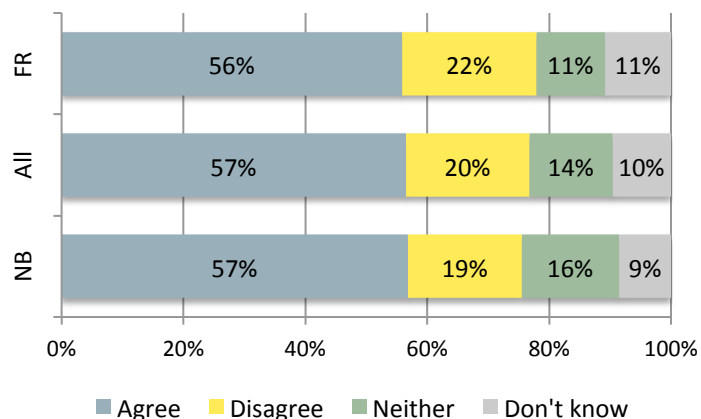
Agreement is greater among people who are satisfied with living in New Bedford (41 percent*) and those who feel the city is improving (46 percent). Disagreement is higher among:

- people whose households earn \$75,000+ (40 percent)
- those with a college degree (35 percent)
- people who are not registered to vote (32 percent*)
- those who are dissatisfied with living in New Bedford (39 percent*)
- people who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (33 percent*); and
- those who feel the city is declining (32 percent).

4. Private sector engagement

To round out the ability to understand the degree to which all sectors engage in a city’s problem-solving and self-improvement, the following statement was posed to residents of Fall River and New Bedford: “Businesses in <CITY> participate in efforts to improve the community.” Of all the questions related to collaborative leadership, this is the one that garnered most agreement: overall, 57 percent of respondents agree that the private sector plays an active role in city betterment, while just 20 percent disagree.

Figure 4. "Businesses in my city participate in efforts to improve the community."



Fall River. Fifty-six percent of Fall River residents agree that businesses engage in community improvement, while 22 percent disagree. Eleven percent chose “neither;” another 11 percent answered “don’t know.”

Higher agreement is present among:

- older residents (63 percent among those 50-64; 64 percent of those 65+)
- those with household incomes of \$75,000+ (62 percent)
- voters in the last election (62 percent*)
- regular newspaper readers (64 percent*)
- people who are satisfied with Fall River (62 percent*); and
- those who find Fall River to be improving (67 percent*).

Meanwhile, disagreement is particularly high among:

- people ages 18-34 (29 percent)
- those who aren't registered to vote (35 percent*)
- non-newspaper readers (31 percent*)
- people who are dissatisfied (32 percent*) or neutral (30 percent*) when it comes to Fall River's quality of life; and
- those who find the city to be declining (33 percent*).

New Bedford. Fifty-seven percent agree that businesses contribute to community betterment; 19 percent disagree. Another 16 percent answered "neither," while 9 percent don't know.

Higher levels of agreement exist among:

- people with college degrees (63 percent*)
- people satisfied with New Bedford's quality of life (65 percent*); and
- those who feel New Bedford is improving (71 percent*).

The sentiment that businesses *don't* engage in community improvement is more prevalent among people with incomes of \$75,000+ (26 percent), non-newspaper readers (26 percent), people who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with living in New Bedford (28 percent*), and those who feel the city is declining (27 percent*).

WHAT'S BEING DONE TO PROMOTE COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP?

As collaborative leadership is increasingly recognized as a vital component of the resilience and resurgence of smaller industrial cities like Fall River and New Bedford, an increasing number of initiatives are being undertaken to encourage and support this approach.

Statewide

To encourage the kind of collaborative leadership it identified in resurgent cities, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston announced a new initiative, the [Working Cities Challenge](#), in February 2013. This is a unique opportunity for 20 of Massachusetts' smaller cities to compete for up to \$700,000 in funds to undertake a project that will improve outcomes for low-income city residents. Successful applicants must not only demonstrate that their project will benefit low-income residents; they must also demonstrate that it will be done through collaboration across sectors and groups that are coming together for the first time or in a significantly new way.

Letters of interest—required for eligibility to apply for funding—are due to the Boston Fed in April 2013.

Nationwide

Living Cities, a philanthropic consortium of 22 major foundations and financial institutions, has invested in the value of civic infrastructure by creating its [Integration Initiative](#), a "one table approach" aimed at fostering the ability of five cities to strengthen and sustain their cross-sectional networks.⁷

The [Strive Partnership](#), which promotes cradle-to-career success for children in three Ohio cities, recognizes the development of a strong civic infrastructure as essential to its ability to have meaningful, measurable collective impact.⁸

ABOUT THE UMASS DARTMOUTH URBAN INITIATIVE

The UI is a division of the Center for Policy Analysis that addresses challenges and opportunities in the region's smaller industrial cities, with a particular emphasis on Fall River and New Bedford.

In addition to conducting applied research, evaluating programs and policies, facilitating collaborations, and providing technical assistance to cities and organizations therein, the Urban Initiative serves as a knowledge base for urban policy issues in the region. At the same time as the Urban Initiative builds capacity in cities, it simultaneously builds the capacity of UMass Dartmouth undergraduate and graduate students, who gain the unique opportunity to apply their coursework in the field by providing direct project support as staff and interns.

Learn more at <http://www.umassd.edu/urbaninitiative> or by contacting Project Manager Colleen Dawicki at 508-910-6407.

¹ [“Resilience Capacity Index – Civic Infrastructure.”](#) Building Resilient Regions, University of California Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies.

² Lee, M. [“The protective effects of civic communities against all-cause mortality.”](#) *Social Science and Medicine* 70 (2010) 1840-1846.

³ Rodin, J. [“Social innovation, civic infrastructure, and rebuilding New Orleans from the inside out.”](#) *Innovations* Volume 5, Issue 2 – Spring 2010.

⁴ Auspos, Brown, Sutton, & Kubisch. [Living cities and civic capacity: leadership, leverage, and legitimacy.](#) The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, March 2008.

⁵ *Toward a more prosperous Springfield: A Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Initiative.* Publications, presentations, data, and resources available at: <http://www.bostonfed.org/commdev/springfield/index.htm>.

⁶ Kodrzycki & Munoz. [Lessons from Resurgent Cities.](#) Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

⁷ T. Ross. [“Building a Resilient Civic Infrastructure: Reflections on the One Table Approach.”](#) *Living Cities*, June 2012.

⁸ Edmondson & Zimpher. [“The new civic infrastructure: the “how to” of collective impact and getting a better social return on investment.”](#) *Community Investments* Summer 2012 – Volume 24, No. 2. Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco.

Appendix A: City profiles

	Fall River	New Bedford
PEOPLE		
Population, 2010	88,857	95,072
Population change, 2000-2010	-3.35%	1.39%
Median age	38	36.6
Median income	\$34,236	\$36,172
People living below poverty	20.2%	22.7%
Adults with a Bachelor's degree	14.1%	13.7%
Unemployment rate, Feb. 2013	15.0%	14.0%
ORGANIZATIONS		
Nonprofits per 10,000	9.4	11.3
Nonprofit revenue per capita	\$3,801	\$9,070
Foundations per 10,000	1.74	2.45
Foundation grants per capita	\$24	\$53
Social organizations per 10,000	3.2	4.3
Congregations per 10,000	2	3.5
MUNICIPALITY		
Voter turnout, last municipal election	35.0%	37.8%
Federal grants per capita, FY09-11 average	\$435	\$366
State grants per capita, FY09-11 average	\$98	\$131
% of revenue from local taxes	30%	33%

Appendix B: Survey questions & results

(The following is a subset of questions posed to 400 residents of Fall River and New Bedford.)

A. Citizens, government, private companies, and nonprofits in <CITY> all work together to solve community problems.

	Fall River	New Bedford	Aggregate
Agree	38%	37%	38%
Disagree	38%	38%	38%
Neither	14%	11%	13%
Don't know	10%	14%	12%

B. <CITY>'s government works with nonprofits and the private sector to address the city's challenges.

	Fall River	New Bedford	Aggregate
Agree	47%	45%	46%
Disagree	16%	18%	17%
Neither	15%	16%	16%
Don't know	22%	21%	21%

C. Nonprofits in <CITY> work with one another to secure needed resources rather than compete for them.

	Fall River	New Bedford	Aggregate
Agree	42%	35%	39%
Disagree	21%	28%	25%
Neither	15%	14%	15%
Don't know	21%	23%	22%

D. Businesses in <CITY> participate in efforts to improve the community.

	Fall River	New Bedford	Aggregate
Agree	56%	57%	57%
Disagree	22%	19%	20%
Neither	11%	16%	14%
Don't know	11%	9%	10%