







WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS ECONOMIC ECOSYSTEM SUMMIT

Regional Intelligence Report Executive Summary

Four counties, nine convenings, one longitudinal regional record: what Western Massachusetts learned between 2023 and 2026, and a shared platform for acting on it.

Springfield Creative City Collective | 1Berkshire

October 2026

The Summit Series at a Glance

Between 2023 and 2026, the Western Massachusetts Economic Ecosystem Summit (WMEES) developed from an early ecosystem-mapping and convening effort into a four-county, cross-sector regional learning process. Each convening generated observations, relationships, feedback, and questions that shaped the next, building a multi-year record of where conditions converged, where counties differed, and what connective infrastructure the region needs to move from recognition to implementation.

9	4	3	7	5
CONVENINGS	COUNTIES	YEARS OF RECORD	CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS	ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

From a Listening Session to a Four-County Record



FOUNDATION
Springfield
April 12, 2023 · Ecosystem Mapping Listening Session



SUMMIT #1
Springfield
December 1, 2023 · Networking Retreat



SUMMIT #2
Springfield
April 5, 2024 · Decision to rotate across counties



SUMMIT #3
Orange
June 7, 2024 · Rural entrepreneurship



SUMMIT #4
Pittsfield
September 6, 2024 · Cross-county innovation



SUMMIT #5
Hadley
December 6, 2024 · Municipal and legislative leadership



SUMMIT #6
Greenfield
April 4, 2025 · Municipal administration and identity



SUMMIT #7
Adams
October 3, 2025 · Cultural economies



SUMMIT #8
Holyoke
May 15, 2026 · Clean energy, manufacturing, food systems



SUMMIT #9
Florence
October 23, 2026 · Regional intelligence and stewardship

Evidence Base

The report draws on WMEES primary materials, including 2023 baseline surveys of 45 entrepreneur and business respondents and 22 stakeholder respondents, convening records, steering-committee discussions, event documentation, and participant observation. Those findings are placed in conversation with independent regional and statewide research on housing, infrastructure, rural development, entrepreneurship, clean energy, the creative economy, and inclusive growth. Where independent sources identify the same issue over time, the report treats that recurrence as evidence worthy of implementation attention rather than as a new discovery. The surveys served as a starting point; the findings are qualitative and longitudinal, not a statistically representative assessment of the region.

Seven Cross-Cutting Findings

Across three years of convening and independent research, seven findings organize the report.

1 Asset-to-Outcome Gap
The region has strong institutions and sectors, but they do not automatically become shared regional outcomes.

2 Recommendation Persistence
Capital access, infrastructure, housing, coordination, workforce, and administrative capacity recur across studies separated by years.

3 Implementation Capacity
Implementation capacity is itself economic infrastructure.

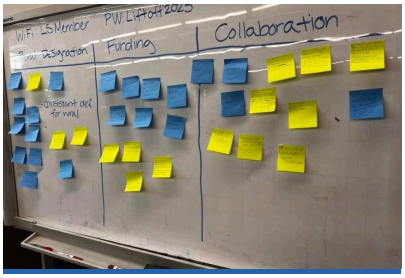
4 Access Is Not Accessibility
Staffing, match requirements, reimbursement structures, grant complexity, and local fiscal capacity shape who can actually use statewide programs.

5 Regional Equity
Equity requires differentiated implementation rather than identical treatment.

6 Relationships as Infrastructure
Relationships and intermediary organizations function as knowledge infrastructure.

7 One Ecosystem, Not Silos
Housing, transportation, workforce, energy, entrepreneurship, culture, public health, and community development operate as an ecosystem rather than isolated silos. The economy is shaped by many variables at once, and the region learns best when sectors learn from one another.













Four additional considerations also recur across the record: Administrative Accessibility, Differential Regional Impact, Knowledge Infrastructure, and Belonging and Institutional Trust. Together they explain why formally available resources do not reach every community in the same way.

The Regional Intelligence Framework

The report extends the Summit's findings through a Regional Intelligence Framework developed through the WMEES research process. It began with a recurring question: how could regional organizations report persistent difficulty accessing stable resources while state institutions announced substantial public investments? Both could be true, so the framework examines the availability of resources and their practical accessibility separately. Its central tool is the Public Investment Pathway:

Community Need → **Evidence** → **Recognition** → **Policy** → **Appropriation** → **Program Design** → **Application & Award** → **Expenditure** → **Local Implementation** → **Measurable Outcome**

Need-to-Outcome Gap
The interval between an identifiable public need and a measurable outcome.

Access Cost
The financial, administrative, and human resources spent pursuing a resource, even when no award follows.

Human Sustainability
Whether the people doing community and economic-development work can sustain it over time.

Translation Gap
How the same activity is read differently by administering agencies and applicants.

Institutional Learning Capacity
Turning longitudinal evidence and past outcomes into earlier recognition and better design.

Gap-Investment Infrastructure
The technical assistance, intermediaries, and supports that connect needs to investment.

SPOTLIGHT: THE MASSACHUSETTS LITERACY INVESTIGATION

Why an education case belongs in an economic report

The Summit series argued that the economy cannot be understood in silos. To test the framework, the report follows one public investment from documented need to outcome: the Commonwealth's Early Literacy appropriation (line item 1596-2437).

500,000+
residents estimated in 1988 to read and write below a fourth-grade level

$20M → $3.83M
FY2025 appropriation vs. reported projected FY2025 spending (80.9% difference)

236 → 225
Massachusetts fourth-grade NAEP reading scores, 2017 to 2024

The finding is not mismanagement. It is that appropriations, expenditures, and outcomes are distinct stages, and that a need can be documented for decades while results remain uncertain. The same method applies to housing, workforce, infrastructure, and public health.







Five Regional Advocacy Priorities

The advocacy platform is the action layer of the report. It translates recurring evidence into a shared four-county agenda while preserving local flexibility.

A **Economic Development, Capital Access & Business Support**
Strengthen capital pathways and investor readiness; build a durable warm-referral network; support succession planning as the ownership base ages; treat childcare and housing as business-support infrastructure.

B **Infrastructure, Transportation & Energy**
Expand regional transit and west-east connectivity; treat broadband as economic infrastructure; upgrade grid and rural substation capacity; pair infrastructure funding with project-delivery capacity.

C **Housing & Quality of Place**
Increase production and rehabilitation across all segments; create predevelopment and bridge-funding tools; design state tools that recognize rural feasibility and small-project significance.

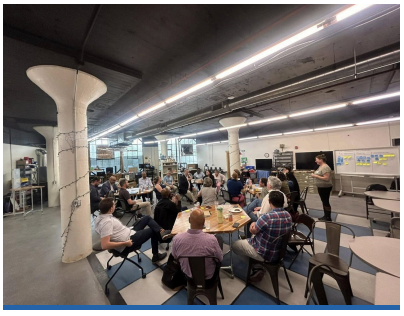
D **Community, Culture & Environment**
Treat cultural and creative infrastructure as economic infrastructure; connect recreation, public health, food access, and downtown vitality; develop shared storytelling that reflects the full four-county economy.

E **Workforce, Education & Demographics**
Expand apprenticeships and sector-aligned training; strengthen employer-education alignment; address housing, childcare, and transportation as workforce-retention infrastructure; treat Human Sustainability as part of the workforce the region depends on.

Across all five priorities, the platform calls for stronger four-county coordination, accessible state program design, shared data and accountability, warm referrals, project-readiness support, rural inclusion, and preservation of knowledge infrastructure. A Four-County Economic Development Compact or comparable mechanism could provide a shared table for joint advocacy without displacing existing institutions.





Representing Western Massachusetts

Western Massachusetts faces an economic-development question that is harder to quantify than housing or capital access: how the region understands and communicates its contemporary identity, internally and externally.

- **A long-standing marketing question.** The 2017 "West Mass" rebranding controversy showed that a regional identity cannot be treated solely as a marketing product. The process of defining a shared identity matters as much as the language.
- **Tourism is an asset, not a complete identity.** Foliage, farms, and trails matter, but a dominant tourism image can understate a region that also holds advanced manufacturing, research institutions, health care, clean energy, and urban economies.
- **Competing internal narratives.** State and federal partners hear different accounts from different parts of the region, which makes shared needs harder to identify.

The conclusion is that effective four-county development requires both **internal self-awareness and external legibility**.





Shared Responsibility

A central proposition of the report is reciprocal. Shared responsibility is not a substitute for equitable public investment; it is a condition of effective implementation. The responsibilities are not equal in authority or resources, but they are interconnected.

THE COMMONWEALTH

- Equitable investment
- Accessible programs and administrative systems
- Transparent implementation
- Technical assistance and institutional responsiveness

WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

- Use existing gap-investment infrastructure
- Maintain authentic relationships with state partners
- Develop project pipelines and document barriers accurately
- Preserve regional intelligence and communicate distinct community needs

MICRO
Residents, entrepreneurs, workers, and businesses experiencing conditions directly

MEZZO
Municipalities, nonprofits, educational institutions, and regional intermediaries

MACRO
State agencies, legislative institutions, executive offices, and statewide systems







Stewardship and What Comes Next

The Springfield Creative City Collective concludes its organizational work at the end of 2026. The goal is not to preserve the organization beyond its intended life, but to ensure that the relationships, regional intelligence, and policy priorities developed through the Summit series remain available to the region that created them.

Potential Stewardship Functions

- A living regional recommendation and implementation tracker
- Periodic four-county strategy sessions grounded in evidence
- Updated ecosystem maps, relationships, and referral pathways
- Research exchange among economic-development organizations, planners, municipalities, funders, and state partners
- Accessible regional information on public investment opportunities
- Preservation of WMEES records, findings, and methods

How to Use the Full Report

- **Municipalities:** identify shared challenges and opportunities for coordinated advocacy and shared capacity.
- **Policymakers:** examine the difference between program availability and practical accessibility.
- **Funders and EDOs:** identify gaps in connectivity, coordination, and implementation.
- **Researchers and partners:** build on the longitudinal record and the shared advocacy platform.







CORE CONCLUSION

Western Massachusetts does not primarily suffer from an absence of plans or assets. The recurring challenge is the conversion of assets, programs, research, and relationships into durable outcomes through accessible systems, implementation capacity, cross-county connectivity, and sustained institutional ownership.

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