



MAYOR ALEX B. MORSE

CITY OF HOLYOKE

**MEDIA ADVISORY  
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**Holyoke Named Recipient of \$250K Working Cities Challenge Grant**

BOSTON- A cross-section of leaders convened at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston on Wednesday to celebrate the announcement of grants under the [Working Cities Challenge](#) program, a community development initiative for Massachusetts' gateway cities. Holyoke was the recipient of a \$250,000, three-year award that will be used to implement SPARK, an entrepreneurship and social venture development center in downtown aimed at putting city residents at the forefront of economic growth.

“This award is more great news for the future of the City’s Innovation District,” Mayor Alex Morse said. “We’ve been working hard to position Holyoke to compete in the modern economy, which requires us to stimulate innovative projects and in businesses ventures. With the collaboration of some of Holyoke’s finest organizations and community leaders, this funding will allow us to assist local residents in bringing their innovative ideas to fruition.”

SPARK (short for Stimulating Potential, Accessing Resource Knowledge) will be geared towards identifying, recruiting and stimulating Holyoke residents and organizations that have a “spark” or desire to move their innovative projects or business proposals from concept to reality by emphasizing a whole-community approach to entrepreneurship, individual learning, and leadership training. The program will provide access to a broad range of community based resources from a collaborative of partners from non-profit, government, private business and higher education, collectively linked on-line and at numerous human-driven public networking sites throughout the city.

The recognition makes Holyoke one of only six cities that won a total of \$1.8 million to support projects that build on cross-sector collaboration and strengthen civic leadership. Last spring, 20 eligible communities applied to participate in the initiative. Applicant cities focused on employment challenges, adult education, and workforce development for youth, among others.

SPARK will be run through the Greater Holyoke Chamber of Commerce Foundation in partnership with several key partners, including the City, Public Library, Food & Fitness Policy Council, the MGHPC, Holyoke Community College, CareerPoint and the JUNTOS Collaborative. Monetary and in-kind matches were also provided by the Chamber Foundation, Regional Employment Board, Holyoke Library, Housing Authority and Holyoke Gas & Electric.

Kathy Anderson, President of the Holyoke Chamber of Commerce pointed out that “the Chamber has many programs and workshops to help businesses and but there are many others, including JUNTOS Collaborative, the Library, the City and others do. But there are so many more resources in Holyoke than those who attend our workshops could access if they only knew how. SPARK will tie these and other spaces from the private sector to generate more economic activity.”

“This project is a perfect example of how public and private organizations can come together to empower the community to be productive and profitable with their talents” said Marcos Marrero, Director of Planning and Economic Development for the City of Holyoke. “We can’t just think of innovation as pursuing the next big tech company. Many of our own people have great talents and ideas, and sometimes they just need the assistance to make them happen. This will allow the City to more aggressively unleash innovation and entrepreneurship from within.”



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Wednesday's announcement was attended by the Governor, members of the philanthropic community, Boston Fed officials, private sector leaders, and representatives of city government, nonprofits, and businesses in many of Massachusetts' gateway cities.

Funding awards have been made possible by the Massachusetts Competitive Partnership, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, MassDevelopment, Living Cities, Bank of America, The Boston Foundation, Surdna Foundation, the Move the World Foundation, the Hyams Foundation, and Boston Private Bank and Trust. Other key partners in the endeavor include Boston Community Capital, which will serve as fiscal agent, and MassINC, which is a long-time leader on small city initiatives.