



Leaders Engaged and Activated to Drive System-wide change

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INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM COMPLETES ITS SECOND COHORT IN MERRIMACK VALLEY, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL FACULTY

Haverhill, MA (June 3rd, 2021) – With state and local regulations recently lifted, over 100 regional leaders convened for the culmination of the inaugural Merrimack Valley LEADS fellowship, an executive leadership program delivered in partnership with Harvard Business School faculty. In addition to a graduation ceremony, the event featured presentations from 9 project teams that were organized through the program around the themes of food security, affordable/fair housing, youth mentoring, racial equity, and small business supports. As a result of the pitches, over \$50,000 of funding was committed by philanthropists and foundations to launch projects to address these community and regional priorities.

“LEADS has served as a unique platform, not just for investing in people, but also for making real change for communities through the increased capacity and connectivity of its participants, and the catalyzing of these new project teams,” said Jeff Bussgang, a Senior Lecturer at Harvard Business School and general partner of Boston-based venture capital firm Flybridge. LEADS was co-founded in 2018 by Jeff and HBS Executive Education Director, Pam Hallagan, in collaboration with the Lawrence Partnership. The initiative has since scaled to serve Lowell and Haverhill, and is scheduled to grow to another region in 2022.

The presentations were provided feedback from a high profile set of panelists, which included state officials, foundation heads, and corporate leaders. One of the panelists, Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development, Mike Kennealy, remarked, “I want to congratulate the graduates of the inaugural class of Merrimack Valley LEADS fellows and express my deep appreciation for their willingness to bring new and innovative solutions to some of our region’s most difficult challenges. As we chart our course toward economic recovery, many of these issues, especially equity, support for small businesses, affordable housing, and food security, are central to the success of our strategy. I want to thank the Lawrence Partnership, Harvard Business School, and their partner organizations for their leadership in creating this fellowship and also commend them for their attention to these critical issues.”

The event was hosted at NECC’s Haverhill Campus, convening the 70 LEADS fellows from Lowell, Lawrence and Haverhill with other regional leaders participating as guests. State representative Andy Vargas, one of the three class speakers selected to give concluding remarks stated, “this opportunity has been transformational for me personally, while also creating opportunities for making lasting and deep change in my community and across the region. These are the people and relationships that will move our communities and our region forward.”

For more information about LEADS, including full bios of the graduating fellows, visit www.leadsmma.org

Other panelists during the event included:

- **Christine Abrams**, President/CEO of Commonwealth Corporation

- **Beth Francis**, President/CEO of Essex County Community Foundation
- **Betty Francisco**, CEO of Boston Impact Initiative
- **Jonathan G. Isaacson**, Chairman and CEO, The Gem Group, Inc.
- **Mike Kennealy**, Secretary of Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing/Economic Development
- **Glynn Lloyd**, Executive Director of Foundation for Business Equity and Mill Cities Community Investments
- **Lori Trahan**, Congresswoman, Massachusetts 3rd Congressional District

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