

Internet and Technology

Includes goals from these [Creative Communities Reports](#):

- Create the Infrastructure for State-of-the-Art Communications Technology (Manchester)
 - Improve St. Johnsbury's Online Presence
 - Internet Access (Randolph)
 - Promote the Digital Culture through a St. Albans Technology Service Provider
- It's important to **understand how infrastructure fits into the creative economy and economy in general**. Businesses interested in locating in a community will expect broadband availability not only in their offices, but also for their employees at home. Having a visible Wi-Fi presence in downtown, including providing computers in key locations for people without laptops, will help establish a community as up-to-date. Assess what businesses see as their technology needs and also brainstorm with them about what could be possible with better Internet access. Look at ways Internet connections tie into regional initiatives.
- Be sure to **explore what other communities have done**. Ask about strategies, pitfalls, lessons learned and about what options look best not only today, but ten years from now (including fiber optics). To connect with communities contact:
- VCRD's **Vermont Rural Broadband Project**, which assists rural towns with broadband issues, has many contacts. The website, VTRuralBroadband.org, contains links to other local projects across the state. Project managers: Al & Laura Duey, 802 467-1266.
 - The 5 Town (Tunbridge/Thetford/Chelsea/Royalton/Vershire) broadband project contact is **Janet Zug** at janet@zugglass.com.
 - Talk with **Ruth Wallman** at the **Lake Champlain Islands Chamber of Commerce**. They introduced a wireless system in their community with support from VCRD.
 - **Topsham Telephone Company's** parent company completed a project to bring fiber to all homes in Gouverneur, NY. The contact for Topsham Telephone Company is info@tops-tele.com, 802-439-5325.
- In addition to community-based contacts, many statewide programs can provide assistance. Start your investigation of local Internet availability by requesting a **Vermont Department of Public Service** map of existing services (publicservice.vermont.gov). State of Vermont resources include:
- **Tom Murray**, Commissioner, Dept. of Information and Innovation, Thomas.Murray@state.vt.us, 802-828-4141 – has responsibility for over-all telecommunications planning in Vermont.
 - **Dept. of Information and Innovation**, 802-828-4141, works with wireless providers and project; coordinates state broadband grant program.
 - **Chris Campbell**, Director, Telecommunication Division, Vermont Public Service Department, Chris.Campbell@state.vt.us, 802-828-4074 – author of the current state telecommunications plan; responsible for the regulatory side of telecommunications.
- Various programs around the state provide assistance to new businesses. See if any fit your model for providing technology. Examples include:
- **Vermont Small Business Development Center** (sbdcvt.org)

- **Champlain College's BYOBiz Program.** The Bring Your Own Business program specifically targets young people who have started their own business. It is an example of meshing education with existing entrepreneurship: <http://www.champlain.edu/BYOBiz.html>.
 - **Workforce Development Council** and **Workforce Investment Boards** do workforce skills training programs around the state. They will know successful strategies in engaging community residents in building new job skills. Contact **Chip Evans** at 802-828-4156.
 - **College and University Programs:** Colleges and universities train their students in skills necessary for the future workforce. They would have a sense of how to stay current with technology trends and teach the skills individuals need.
- USDA provides loans for start-up and expansion to companies through the **Intermediary Relending Program**, **Industrial Development Corporations**, **Vermont Community Loan Fund** and the **VEDA Small Business Loan Program** all have capital available to lend for business development.
 - USDA also provides **Rural Business Enterprise Grants (RBEG)** to non-profits and municipalities to help facilitate business development. If there is a planning, feasibility study, marketing or other technical component needed to launch this effort, they may be able to help. Contact **Sherry Paige** at USDA: (802) 828-6034.

Web Sites

- Delivering website content to hand-held devices will be especially important to visitors who are already in town and a citywide WiFi capability will be a benefit. Marketing to people already in the area is different than marketing to a broad web-wide audience.
- Identify what websites already exist in the community. A next step will be to get an up to date picture of what these websites offer, how they are managed, and whether they would be interested in participating in this project. Put together a short list of simple survey questions and distribute using surveymonkey.com, with follow-up phone calls where needed. All community businesses will benefit from a web presence, even if it is only used to present contact information.
- VCRD has worked with communities that undertake web projects at different levels of investment. A simple solution to a community website is a wiki or a blog. **Pownal**, **Putney** and **Brattleboro** offer examples of these easily-started websites.
- **St. Johnsbury** and **Rutland** offer examples of major website projects that require a significantly greater investment of time and funds. The [St. Johnsbury Creative Communities report](#) includes a detailed outline of action steps for creating a community website. More details are available from **Linda Fogg**, Director of St. Johnsbury WORKS! (802-748-7121) or visit discoverstjvt.com.
- Don't forget to advertise what already exists. This marketing includes letting people know about wireless hotspots, their options for high speed Internet, and potentially creating an online presence that shows the community is skilled in working with current technologies.

- Your web presence should tie in closely with brand identity. The **Place Creative Company** has a sophisticated and fun workshop called “Brand Focus” that could help. Contact Dave Speidel, Steve Crafts or Keri Piatek (placecreativecompany.com).
- Funding sources will be important for both launching and maintaining a successful website. One resource for researching opportunities is: **Everything Technology: Directory of Technology Grants** technologygrantnews.com/free-cash-grants-catalog.html. Talk with the **Vermont Community Foundation** about its **Sustainable Communities** grant program (vermontcf.org) or with the VT / NH branch of USDA about **Rural Business Opportunity Grants** (rurdev.usda.gov/rd/nofas/index.html)
- The *Rutland Herald* is one place to check. They have partnered with creative economy teams in Rutland around development of online community information.

Compiled by the **Vermont Council on Rural Development**, 802-223-6091, www.vtrural.org