



# **Climate Catalysts**

## **Community Leadership**

### **Program**

**November 2021**



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### Vermont Community Leadership Program

Facing the climate challenge means mobilizing at all levels of human organization. Strong and inspirational leaders are key in unifying and sparking collective action. With hundreds of tight-knit communities, Vermont is a place that can model unique, powerful, and replicable local actions for growing the climate economy.

Produced by the Vermont Council on Rural Development, the **Climate Catalysts Program** brings together local leaders from Vermont communities for a year-long process focused on building peer connections, strengthening leadership skills and providing project development support. Participants work on implementation of a local project as a focus of their program participation. The goal is to move projects from concept to reality while investing in leaders who provide multi-faceted service to their communities.

Cohorts include a mix of new, emerging, and experienced leaders from a variety of large and small communities who have ideas for projects that are both ambitious and achievable. Participants receive training, peer connections, and consultative support as they develop and implements their projects.

This 3rd cohort launched in November 2021.



**Andrew Ahern** is an ECO Americorps member serving with the Brattleboro Office of Sustainability. He was born and raised in Massachusetts where he went to public school before graduating from Salem State University and obtaining a Masters Degree in Philosophy from Memorial University in Newfoundland Canada. Andrew brings a variety of professional, academic, and activism experiences with him to the Climate Catalysts program, including work with Mass Audubon, the Sunrise Movement, Interfaith Power and Light, among others. He's an avid reader, writer, hiker, and traveler when possible.

**Project:** A program on climate change solutions using Project Drawdown as a reference for discussing, developing, and implementing solutions within the Brattleboro community. The program will be a series of events centered around building consensus and getting buy-in from community members about what types of solutions are interesting, exciting, impactful, and achievable.



**Susan Alexander** is a self-employed environmental consultant currently serving as contracted management for the Lamoille Solid Waste District. Prior work includes Senior Scientist at Stone Environmental conducting ground and surface water studies across the US for 15 years. She also founded The Vermont Switchel Company based on an original family recipe. Susan studied Forestry at Syracuse University and Soil Science at Cornell. She resides in Cabot with husband Cedric and Covid dog, Bernie AlexSanders. She has 2 adult children and plays guitar with the Woodbury Broad Band.

**Project:** As the manager of Lamoille Soil, Susan seeks to: increase diversion of food scraps from landfills to reduce methane pollution, maximize food scrap collection and transportation efficiency to reduce carbon emissions, create compost to put carbon back into the soil, and support a circular economy.



**Shannon Choquette** is the current Outreach Coordinator for the Northeast Kingdom Waste Management District. After completing her studies in Environmental Science and Conversation Biology at Clark University in Worcester MA, she served multiple terms of services with both AmeriCorps and the Massachusetts-based Commonwealth Corps,

where she gained an appreciation for boots-on-the-ground environmental work. Shannon enjoys hiking in the White Mountains of NH and recently completed the NH-48. She currently lives in Burke with her fiancé, two cats, and a dog.

**Project:** Shannon will work to develop a district-wide outreach campaign focused on the benefits of removing food scraps from the landfill.



**Dana Clawson** serves as the Environmental Sustainability Coordinator for Hartford VT and is responsible for the implementation of Hartford's recently adopted Climate Action Plan. Previously, Dana was a HERS Rater in Massachusetts providing technical assistance and energy related testing services to homebuilders that were building in municipalities that required residential

construction to meet strict energy code requirements. He has also taught high school history & GED classes and worked in nonprofit administration. Dana holds a Masters in Public Administration with a concentration in Sustainable Community Development, California & Massachusetts Teaching Certifications in Social Studies, and has BA in Psychology & Sociology. Born in Rochester NY, Dana now lives in Plymouth Vermont.

**Project:** As Environmental Sustainability Coordinator Dana is responsible for the implementation of Hartford's recently adopted Climate Action Plan. The goal of this plan is to lower the town's overall green house gas emissions and prepare Hartford for the challenges associated with a changing climate.



**Callie Fishburn** is the new Energy Coordinator at the Bennington County Regional Commission having previously served as BCRC's AmeriCorps VISTA. She moved to Vermont from Maryland, where she interned for several environmental organizations and local government. Callie grew up in Frederick MD and graduated from Hood College with a degree in environmental science and policy. She spent eight months in Saskatchewan, Canada working with Indigenous communities before moving to Bennington where she currently lives.

**Project:** As the Energy Coordinator at BCRC Callie is working with municipal energy committees to implement their town energy plans, and promoting weatherization programs in Bennington County.



**Kevin Geiger** is the Director of Planning at the Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission where he has worked since 1999 on brownfields, emergency management, land use, housing, climate, water quality and forest planning. He holds a MS in Resource Management and Administration from Antioch New England Graduate School and a BA in Human Ecology from College of the Atlantic. He is also a former National Park Service wildlands firefighter. Kevin lives in Pomfret with his wife and is the Pomfret Town Moderator.

**Project:** As the Director of Planning, Kevin is in a position to influence the Commission's work on climate—lowering greenhouse gas emissions and increasing its resilience efforts—and will work to build more direct and effective policies and programs.



**Marissa Green** serves as the Community Consultant for the Charlotte Energy Shelf Program and seasonally serves as the manager for the Richmond Farmer’s Market. Marissa was born in New Jersey and has lived in Vermont for the past 13 years. In 2011, she graduated with a BS in Environmental Science from the University of Vermont. She lives in Charlotte with her husband and son.

**Project:** Promoting the Energy Shelf within the town of Charlotte to increase awareness and utilization of the free weatherization materials the program offers. The program’s goal is to lower heating-related energy consumption within the community.



**Steven Isham** is a retired research data analysis and a member of the St. Johnsbury Town Energy Committee. He graduated from Lyndon State College with a BS in Mathematics and from the University of South Carolina with a MS in Applied Statistics. Steve was born and raised in St. Johnsbury, though worked most of his adult life outside of Vermont. He returned in 2017 and worked until he retired in 2020. He lives in East St. Johnsbury with his two Labrador Retrievers, Barnabas and Zoe.

**Project:** As a member of the St. Johnsbury Town Energy Committee, Steve wants to develop an intra-energy committee system where area town energy committees can communicate with each other, share resources, and plan area-wide events.



**Kevin Lambert** is the Public Affairs Specialist for USDA Rural Development in Vermont, and enjoys promoting the various programs and initiatives defining the agency's positive impacts throughout the state. He worked previously in the private sector in corporate creative roles, so was thrilled to find an opportunity where he could apply his skills to meaningful humanitarian, environmental and economic-development work. An avid gardener and amateur forager and hunter, he is constantly exploring new ways to ethically provide, harvest and preserve food, and together with his herbalist wife, is committed to educating their two daughters on how to lead a healthy, self-reliant, sustainable lifestyle in the face of climate change.

**Project:** The project, tentatively called *Meat for Greens*, will focus on building a trade network of hunters, farmers and gardeners throughout the state, thereby reducing emissions through more local exchange (decreasing demand for cross-country shipments). A percentage of exchange will be reserved for those in the community experiencing food insecurity. Also, a byproduct of the bartering network could represent a softening of the sharp political differences driving people apart.



**Annie McLean** is the Community and Economic Recovery Specialist at the Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) and serves as co-lead on a project working to develop a climate tech software hub in the Northeast Kingdom. She holds an M.S. in City and Regional Planning from California Polytechnic University and has over 10 years of community development experience in Vermont. Annie grew up in Wilder and currently lives on a small farm in Sheffield with her husband and two children. She also serves on the boards of Northeast Kingdom Community Broadband, the Vermont Community Development Association, and Four Seasons of Early Learning.

**Project:** NVDA is working with several partner organizations, including the Center on Rural Innovation (CORI) and Northern Vermont University

via Do North Coworking to create an incubator program and support services focused on software and climate tech, including activities that support the growth and development of tech-enabled businesses in agriculture, forestry, and energy that help to reduce or capture carbon emissions. Programming will include business development services, entrepreneurship support, K12 STEAM outreach, and college partnerships with paid internships.



**Tom Roberts** directed Vital Communities, serving the Upper Valley, from 2015 to 2020. He previously worked for the Vermont Community Foundation as a philanthropic advisor, the Ottauquechee Health Foundation in Woodstock and in a variety of public service positions in California and New York. Tom has lived with his wife, Lorie, at Cobb Hill Co-Housing for 19 years and raised two children there. He also serves on the board of the High Meadows Fund.

**Project:** The project will include: (1) an initiative around the bio-diversity crisis, which is integrally linked with climate change but not getting as much attention, in an effort to raise the profile of this issue locally and link with others who are working nationally and internationally; and (2) supporting climate focused nonprofits in board governance, finance, development, and planning as a consultant.



**Ira Shadis** grew up exploring the headwaters of the Winooski River. He currently works as the Stewardship Manager for Friends of the Mad River. He has worked with the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Northeast Wilderness Trust, and the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps in roles that brought together education, public engagement, and conservation.

He lives in Montpelier with his partner, four cats, and six chickens.

**Project:** In his role managing Friends of the Mad River's Storm Smart program, Ira seeks to integrate climate resiliency principles into the



program's assessment tools and resulting recommendations. The goal is to provide opportunities for property owners and managers to take actions on their own property that can cumulatively add up to landscape level adaptation.



**Maddison Shropshire** is the energy planner for the Addison County Regional Planning Commission. She served previously in AmeriCorps as a water quality planner for ACRPC, a project lead for SBP disaster relief and as a crew leader with Vermont Youth Conservation Corps. Maddi grew up in Quechee, attended Miami University and is currently a dual masters student in climate policy and sustainable business. She lives in Hinesburg and serves as a junior board member for Green Up VT.

**Project:** As the regional energy planner in Addison County, Maddi will work to engage towns in and facilitate the development of community solar projects.



**Emma Wardell** is an undergraduate student at the University of Vermont with a major in Environmental Studies and minor in Sociology. With an expanding interest in the environmental impacts of the fashion industry, she's working to learn more about the nexus of these two areas through the identification of more sustainable and resilient practices within clothing production. Emma's hometown is Cazenovia, New York, and currently resides in Burlington with three roommates and her cat, Mako. On campus, Emma is involved in the Climate Communication, Action & Literacy Lab, an officer of the university's College Diabetes Network chapter, and has recently submitted a project proposal to UVM's Sustainable Campus Fund highlighting an innovative idea for garment waste mitigation and education on campus.

Project: The formal submission and proposal of this project has taken place and I am now awaiting feedback on its approval and funding status. However, provided all goes well, the project will address the necessary mitigation of garment waste on UVM's campus in a two-pronged approach, with the ultimate goal of implementing a permanent on-campus education and consignment store utilizing data and observations collected within the first phase.



**Marshall Webb** After graduating from UVM in 1972, Marshall, along with his siblings, started the nonprofit education organization that now owns and operates Shelburne Farms in Shelburne VT. Over the years he has held many positions at the farm including field hand, milker, assistant cheesemaker, Buildings and Grounds Manager, Special Projects Coordinator, and now Carbon Drawdown Coordinator. He has served on the boards of several local non-profits. His wife, Kate, is one of the Shelburne representatives in the State legislature and Chair of the Education Committee.

Project: Shelburne Farms has a goal of being carbon negative by 2028. Marshall is currently leading the effort to write a detailed plan and capital budget to enable the farm to reach that goal. The plan will be completed by spring of 2022.



**Allie Webster** is passionate about accelerating energy action and advancing climate leadership in Vermont that centers equity and justice. Allie lives with her family in Peacham and is an active member of the local Energy Committee and an Energy Planner with Northeastern Vermont Development Association, bringing over twelve years of experience supporting local communities and organizations with their energy and sustainability strategies and goals.

Project: Building and establishing trust and successful, supportive relationships with underserved, low to mid income, and energy-burdened community members in order to ensure equitable delivery of and access to programs that will enable a thriving, clean energy and climate smart future for all.



**Rose West** is an ECO AmeriCorps member serving with Hildene, the Lincoln Family Home in Manchester, Vermont. She is local to Southern Vermont, which is originally where her fascination for the natural world was nurtured. Rose was introduced to AmeriCorps through the Great Basin Institute as she served for Lake Mead National Recreation Area performing rare and invasive plant management. She recently graduated from St. Lawrence University with a degree in Conservation Biology, a newfound interest in insects, and impassioned to continue to contribute to meaningful projects to enact change.

Project: As part of her service with Hildene, Rose will implement a woody plant nursery for the restoration and outsourcing of native plant material to her local community. This project will require seed collection, propagation, nursery infrastructure development, promoting and planning.



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