



# Vermont Council on Rural Development

# 2015 Annual Report

<http://vtrural.org>

The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping Vermonters and Vermont communities develop their capacity to create a prosperous and sustainable future through coordination, collaboration, and the effective use of public and private resources. A dynamic collaboration of federal, state, local, non-profit, and private leadership, VCRD is uniquely positioned to build partnerships to address policy questions of rural import. We welcome your comments, suggestions, membership, and support.



**VERMONT COUNCIL ON  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

[www.vtrural.org](http://www.vtrural.org)

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In 2015 VCRD said goodbye to wonderful board member **Steve Patterson** of Northeastern Vermont Development Association who had reached his term limit after 12 years of committed service, and from our congressional liaison category, **Tricia Coates**, as she moved to a new job with the Vermont State Colleges. In 2016 we bid farewell to **Ruth Wallman** with her retirement from the Islands Chamber of Commerce, and former board chair, **Bob Ackland**, who reached term limit. Bob will stay closely involved in the organization as an Emeritus Member of the board.

New Board Members joining us during 2015 included **John Sinclair**, Forest Supervisor of the Green Mountain & Finger Lakes National Forest, **Hal Cohen**, Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Human Services (a returning board member), and **Arthur 'Buzz' Schmidt**, founder of GuideStar International and President of the Brattleboro Retreat Farm. And in 2016, we are very excited to welcome **Ed Vilandrie** of Barnet, Vermont and **Rob Miller**, CEO of the Vermont State Employees Credit Union.

# The Arc of Progress

VCRD works to catalyze community action and to promote policies and programs to support their success. This year our efforts have focused on **Community Visit processes, supporting working lands enterprises, and advancing Vermont's opportunity in the Climate Economy.**

## COMMUNITY

It's easy to build a list of problems. And it's easy for members of a community to enumerate everything that could or should be done for the future, a wish list of how things could be. Sometimes these lists are so long that they are paralyzing; we only have so much human capacity to get things done, and it's difficult to know where to start.

One of the ways that VCRD is useful is that we serve a function that is almost the opposite of politics; we encourage members of a community—whether it's a local town or a policy group—to look at common themes of vision and values as starting points for action planning. Rather than focus on disagreements, it can be uplifting to ask, “*What do you stand for as a community?*” “*What is within your power?*” “*What action will have the most impact for building a positive future?*”

VCRD Community Visit processes provide a neutral disciplined structure for local residents to build powerful ideas for community revitalization or transformational action. But its real usefulness, perhaps, is in depersonalizing these issues and providing community members with the opportunity to prioritize, choose directions, move from the 100 things we should do to the three or four projects we are going to line up behind to get done. Success comes from full community engagement, collective vision, prioritization, and action.

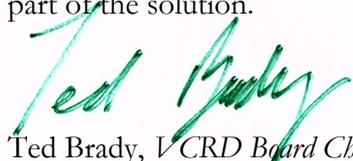
We're encouraged to see the leadership of energetic, committed people working together to advance projects that will leverage the future of their communities. In the past 20 years we have worked with more than 50 towns and cities, which have built more than 200 community projects and engaged thousands of volunteers; we are proud to partner with their leadership!

## THE CLIMATE ECONOMY

VCRD learns from each community we serve and we add up findings to identify public policy needs for the future. VCRD is charged by the Farm Bill to look at the larger policy challenges and opportunities that communities face, and to identify ways to advance community and economic development policies and programs statewide. Looking ahead, the VCRD Board has identified advancing Vermont's Climate Economy as a fundamental need for the future progress of Vermont.

What does progress mean in an era of climate change? It means strengthening democracy with mutual participation and seizing the fundamental economic opportunities that can have practical impact on our carbon footprint here, but also contribute ideas and practices to the world at large. Bottom line, our communities, our state, and our country are in an international competition to advance creative business solutions. Some places in the world will deliberately nurture innovation to lead and to capture the imagination of entrepreneurial and mission oriented youth and other creative folks. Why not Vermont? VCRD has dedicated itself as a convener to advance ways to create jobs and prosperity for the future by getting ahead of climate change, not just bemoaning it, and is working to unite Vermonters to lead and model business and community solutions.

We can attract and nurture a new generation of entrepreneurial action and make Vermont a model of rural renewal. We invite you to help by joining the Vermont Climate Economy Partnership; let's all be part of the solution.



Ted Brady, VCRD Board Chair



Paul Costello, VCRD Executive Director

# PROGRAMS

## Community Visits

At VCRD we are inspired by local leadership throughout the state. In every town we serve, we find people who are eager to come together; who want to work in greater unity and who want to get practical things done. In the end, community and economic development is all about local leadership. State and federal agencies and non-profits can help, but they are most useful where a community lines up together, sets priorities, builds a spear point for collective action, and then becomes a squeaky wheel for resources and technical support—this is the essence of the Community Visit process.

In 2015, VCRD led Community Visits in **Swanton**, **St. Johnsbury**, and **Craftsbury**. These five-month long strategic action planning sessions set community priorities and built task forces to move projects ahead:

- ▶ **Swanton** is advancing economic development; addressing substance abuse; improving outdoor recreation; building an Arts Council; and improving traffic management and walkability in the downtown.
- ▶ **St Johnsbury** is developing a warming shelter; improving community communications and promoting positive town image; redeveloping the riverfront; improving housing; and revitalizing downtown buildings.
- ▶ **Craftsbury** is advancing land protection; improving cell phone and broadband access; and building partnership between the school and the community.

In December 2015, VCRD began work with key community leaders and stakeholders in **Hardwick** to identify key issues and ways to invite all members of the community to take part. Visits are also planned with the town of **Vernon** in Spring 2016 to identify key economic and community development initiatives in the wake of the closure of Vermont Yankee and with the town of **Brighton/Island Pond** in Fall 2016.

## Ideas for the Future of the Northeast Kingdom

The “Ideas for the Future of the NEK” forums were produced by the NEK Collaborative and VCRD to gather ideas and set directions for work to advance the prosperity and vitality of NEK communities.

In the Summer of 2015, NEK leaders, organizations, and concerned citizens came together in community forums in **Newport**, **Canaan**, and **Hardwick** to share their ideas for action to support the economy, boost opportunities, and support the quality of life of Kingdom residents. Ideas ranged from strengthening downtowns and village centers and supporting small business development, to supporting quality education, engaging youth and enhancing the region’s farm and forest economy. These ideas were collected and reported back to residents at the final session in **Lyndonville** to decide key priorities for collaborative action in the region.

The Final Report documents the process, capturing the ideas from forums, collecting shared points of vision for the region, and documenting action priorities for the Kingdom. To see the report, go to: <http://vtrural.org/programs/community-visits/reports/NEK-Collaborative>.



**BELLOWS FALLS:**

*“VCRD hosted its first community visit to Bellows Falls, at a time when the community was really at a loss on how to move forward. Ten years later we have an active main street, a strong arts community and a great integration between our industrial park and downtown.”*

~ Robert McBride, RAMP, Bellows Falls

**ST. JOHNSBURY:**

*“I have been involved in dozens of planning sessions and community forums here in St. Johnsbury over the last 15 years and I can truly say that this event was, by far, the best – and will, without a doubt, result in productive outcomes for St. Johnsbury.”*

~ Mike Welch, St. Johnsbury Community Visit Chair

**SWANTON:**

*“I have never seen as much activity, excitement, and accomplishment in our town. VCRD is doing meaningful work that will improve the quality of life in Vermont towns for generations to come. I will always be grateful.”*

~ Sandy Kilburn, Swanton Resident

**CAMBRIDGE:**

*“It is genuinely thrilling to see the different constituencies come together and do good things for our community. The most significant results of the process are the lasting effects in the town around community engagement. The town has been transformed.”*

~ April Tuck, Cambridge Community Visit Chair

**CRAFTSBURY:**

*“I have been hearing such a great buzz today after all of the fun yesterday. Thanks again for helping our community get reinvigorated. I really believe in the task forces that have been formed and their determination and ability to better serve our community.”*

~ Emily Maclure, Craftsbury Community Visit Chair

Community Visits in **3** Communities:

**665** Community Members participated

**271** Community Volunteers joined task force groups to move projects forward

**85** federal, state, regional, non-profit, and philanthropic leaders participated and continue to serve as resources to task force groups

**\$36K** in donated service hours

**12** new projects initiated

*The task force groups in each community have already accomplished an impressive list of activities including: holding craft fairs and community arts events; mapping recreation sites and creating signage to highlight key assets; planting trees and building flower beds around town; hosting a nationally recognized planning consultant for a workshop and discussion on sidewalk and traffic improvements; advancing a spoke and hub system to unify efforts to address substance abuse; bringing together the community and engaging local organizations and businesses with a community block party; creating a Community and Economy Development Coordinator position; opening a 12-bed warming shelter to be available to those in need through the winter; bringing landlords together, initiating a housing inventory, and hiring a municipal staff person to focus on building code enforcement; inviting editors and writers to cover events in New England-wide publications as a way to promote positive town image; creating a new town map for visitors; revitalizing the Discover St. Johnsbury website with a searchable business directory; hosting a riverfront cleanup day; initiating longer term projects towards an appraisal and potential purchase of two riverfront properties for public access and enjoyment; holding two business-to-business events; hosting the Fresh Tracks Capital Road Pitch in August 2016; working to invite new businesses to town; hosting nine community conversations on land use; establishing Open Gym time at the school for community recreation; developing a Community Calendar in print and on the town’s website linking all calendars of local businesses, schools, and organizations; developing grant applications to institute high-speed broadband service; starting a mountain bike club and bike rental in partnership with the Craftsbury Outdoor Center; working with artists to design signs that make the town safer and more welcoming to locals and visitors; forming a new task force to address concerns about road safety, speed, and sidewalks; conducting a traffic study and planning for traffic and safety improvements including pathways to unify all parts of town.*

# PROGRAMS

## Working Lands Initiative

The working landscape is central to our economy, quality of life, and core values as a people. VCRD leads the Vermont Working Landscape Partnership of over 1,000 individuals and organizations rallying together to support farm, forest, and value-added development through the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative (WLEI) which we helped to build. Since 2012, WLEI has invested in farm and forest enterprises by spurring start-ups, supporting growing businesses, and building infrastructure to support jobs, communities and the landscape of Vermont. After three years of the program:

- ▶ **112** agriculture and forestry projects have been funded
- ▶ **\$3 million** in Working Lands funds were distributed
- ▶ **\$4.9 million** in matching funds were leveraged
- ▶ **106** new FTE jobs were created
- ▶ Aggregated gross income increased by **\$12 million**

Visit the WLEI website at [workinglands.vermont.gov](http://workinglands.vermont.gov) to find out more.

## Vermont Higher Education Food Systems Consortium

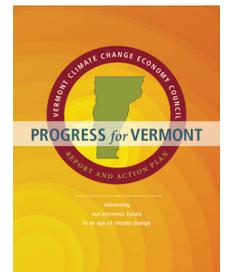
VCRD is helping Vermont advance as the national epicenter for food systems education. Founded and facilitated by VCRD, the Vermont Higher Education Food Systems Consortium (VHEFSC) is made up of Vermont colleges with significant agriculture and food systems programs including **Green Mountain College, Middlebury College, New England Culinary Institute, Sterling College, University of Vermont, Vermont Law School, and Vermont Technical College** (and other VSC partners). In 2015 the Consortium produced its first VT Food Systems Study Tour with curricular activities at each school. VCRD leads the collective marketing around the idea of VT as the “nation’s food systems epicenter.” In 2015 we began building the “FoodED” video series for each school to use for national promotion and have been working with Cabot Creamery to promote the VT food systems education experience on butter cartons nationally. VCRD continues to facilitate ways schools can build student pathways, articulation agreements, and partnerships to share VT’s educational resources and enrich student experiences in creative ways. Visit [vermontfoodeducation.org](http://vermontfoodeducation.org) for more information.



## Climate Economy Initiative

In February 2015, VCRD led the Vermont Summit on **Creating Prosperity and Opportunity Confronting Climate Change**. The Summit brought together over 400 participants from a variety of backgrounds to think about how Vermont can systematically advance economically successful solutions and prosper while confronting climate change. The Summit also served as a founding point for the **Vermont Climate Change Economy Council (VCCEC)**. The Council, a broad-based non-partisan group of business, economic development, and environmental leaders, met over the course of 2015 to develop a set of pro-active recommendations and action steps to build Vermont’s prosperity and to grow and attract creative entrepreneurs to model climate economy solutions.

**The VCCEC Final Report and Action Plan, “Progress for Vermont,”** was released in February 2016 outlining a bold vision and strategy for economic development statewide. It highlights ways to make Vermont a desirable location for creative small businesses and innovative entrepreneurs that advance clean energy generation, improve efficiencies, transform transportation and revitalize communities. To read the platform, visit: <http://vtrural.org/programs/climate-economy/report/progress-for-vermont>.



**The Second Climate Economy Summit: Ideas to Action** was held in February 2016 to release the platform of action and bring together nearly 450 business, policy, and community leaders frame next steps toward action.

After the Summit, VCRD formed its work plan to implement the VCCEC platform and, in partnership with many other organizations and individuals working together as the **Vermont Climate Economy Partnership**, will advance climate economy development through practical projects, education, promotion and advocacy.

Work is already underway to: produce the Vermont Climate Economy Model Communities Program; market Vermont as a national climate economy leader and small business destination; and plan a national Climate Economy Summit for 2017.

**Join the Climate Economy Partnership!** [vtrural.org/programs/climate-economy](http://vtrural.org/programs/climate-economy).

# MEMBERS AND DONORS

VCRD would like to thank the many contributors who support our work in service to Vermont's rural communities. Annual membership dues contribute to fund all of VCRD's programmatic activities.

**Individuals:** Kristofer Anderson, Alice and Richard Angney, Anonymous (7), George Bellerose, Ted Bermingham, Joss Besse, Kathy Beyer, Julia Blake, Putnam Blodgett, Bill & Ruth Botzow, Jeff & Michelle Bower, Darby Bradley, Greg & Carolyn Mayo-Brown, Megan Camp & Alexander Webb, Scott Campbell, Jeff Carr & Patricia Bunt, Sandal & Paul Cate, Hal & Shelley Cohen, Vaughn T. Collins, Peter Condraxis, Paul Costello, Alexander DePillis, Matthew Derr, Matthew Dodds, Sally Dodge & Dale Gulbrandsen, Sen. Bill & Olene Doyle, Jared Duval, John Ewing, Peter Falion & Elizabeth Tannenbaum, Margaret Farabaugh, Don Faulkner, Monty & Cheryl Fischer, Peter & Caroline Fritzinger, Paul & Ingrid Gallo, Ernest & Charlotte Gibson, Peter Gilbert & Cindy Char, Steven M. Gold, Wayne & Deborah Granquist, George Hall, Charles & Catherine Miles Grant, Rosanne Greco & Higley Harmon, Barbara Grimes, Shannon & Melissa Hagggett, William Haines, Roberta Harold & Wayne Fawbush, Nate Hausman, Cheryl & Ward Heneveld, Marie Houghton, Susan Houston, Bob & Cora May Howe, Nancy Wayne Jaffe, Brian & Leanne Jewett, Nancy Jones, Michael Katzenberg & Linda Prescott, Kathleen C. Keenan, Rob & Sandy Kilburn, Rep. Warren Kitzmiller, Tony Klein, Candy Koenemann, Kathleen Kolb, Ryan Koloski, Stephanie Lahar, Hank & Molly Lambert, Peter & Joann Langrock, Marian Lawlor, Christine Lilyquist, Robert A. Lloyd, John Malcolm, Anne Margolis, William Marks, Kimberly & Jon Mathewson, Dave Mayette, Bob McDonald, Christy & Marc Mihaly, Rob Miller, Ron Miller, Sue Minter, Brett Morrison, Susan Murray, Jenny Nelson, Lori Neiderer, Robert & Theresa Paquin, Scudder Parker & Susan Sussman, Albert & Marcia Perry, Stephen Pilcher, Andrew & Jilda Pomerantz, Robert & Nancy Pope, Dave Potter, Carl Powden & Dorigen Keeney, Will Raap, Doug Racine, Patricia Rainville, Janet Ressler, Shirley Richardson, Patrick Robins & Lisa Schamberg, Andy Robinson, Chuck Ross, Eric & Suzanne Sakai, Fritz Schmidt, Bill Schmidt, Bill & Kate Schubart, Brian R. Searles, Leigh Seddon & Ann Aspell, William & Abigail Sessions, Gregory L. Sharrow, Michael & Nancy Sherman, John D. Shullenberger, Rep. Laura Sibilia, Katherine Sims, Gabrielle Stebbins, Greg & Jennifer Stefanski, Will & Judy Stevens, Caro Thompson, William Throop, Susan & Bob Titterton, Maida F. Townsend, April Tuck & Ron Carter, Johannes Von Trapp, Frederick Wackernagel, Emily Wadhams, Ruth Wallman, Sarah Waring, Richard White, Jenna Whitson, Jeff Wilson, Christopher Wing, Sanford & Margaret Camara/Witherell, the Wolcott/MacCausland Family

**Organizations:** Addison County Regional Planning Commission, American Flatbread Co., Anonymous, Town of Arlington, Bradford Community Development Corporation, the Jack and Dorothy Byrne Foundation, Capstone Community Action, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, Town of Fairfax, Flywheel Communications, Franklin County Industrial Development Corp., Front Porch Forum, Goodridge Lumber, Inc., Green Mountain College, Harlow Farm/Paul M. Harlow, Harry Hunt Architects, High Mowing Organic Seeds, Housing Vermont, Hunger Mountain Cooperative, Lamoille Economic Development Corporation, Landworks/David Raphael, Local Motion, Inc., PW McCoy Corp., Meadowsend Timberlands LTD, Jeremy Turner, Northeastern Vermont Development Association, Northfield Savings Bank, Northshire Bookstore, Northwest Regional Planning Commission, Onion River Sports, Vermonters for a Sustainable US Population, Preservation Trust of Vermont, Putney Food Coop, Richford Economic Advancement Corp., Rutland Regional Planning Commission, Ryegate Associates, Conservation Collaborative, Society of American Foresters - Green Mountain Division, Springfield Housing Authority, Springfield Regional Development Corp., Stark Mountain Woodworking, Vicky Tebbetts, VT Marketing & Communications, The Vermont Standard, Town of Hardwick, Town of Johnson, Two Rivers - Ottauquechee Regional Planning Commission, Union Bank, US Small Business Administration, Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition, Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, Vermont Community Loan Fund, Vermont Department of Labor, Vermont Environmental Consortium, Vermont Gas Systems, Vermont Performance Lab, Vermont Realtors, Vermont Woodworking School, Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, Washington Electric Cooperative Community Fund

**Leadership Donors (\$500-\$999):** Bob Ackland, Billings Farm & Museum, Chroma Technology Corp., Concept2, Inc., BJ Costello, Housing Vermont, Sydney Lea & Robin Barone, Main Street Landing, Passumpsic Savings Bank, Smugglers' Notch Resort, St. Albans Cooperative Creamery, Town of Killington, Vermont Economic Development Authority, Vermont State Employees Credit Union

**Rural Champions (\$1,000+):** Anonymous, Mateo & Andy Kehler/Cellars at Jasper Hill, Co-operative Insurance Companies, Merchant's Bank, Northfield Savings Bank, Pomerleau Properties, Smith Foundation, Union Mutual of Vermont, Waitsfield & Champlain Valley Telecom, Yankee Farm Credit

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## 2015 VCRD Summary Budget

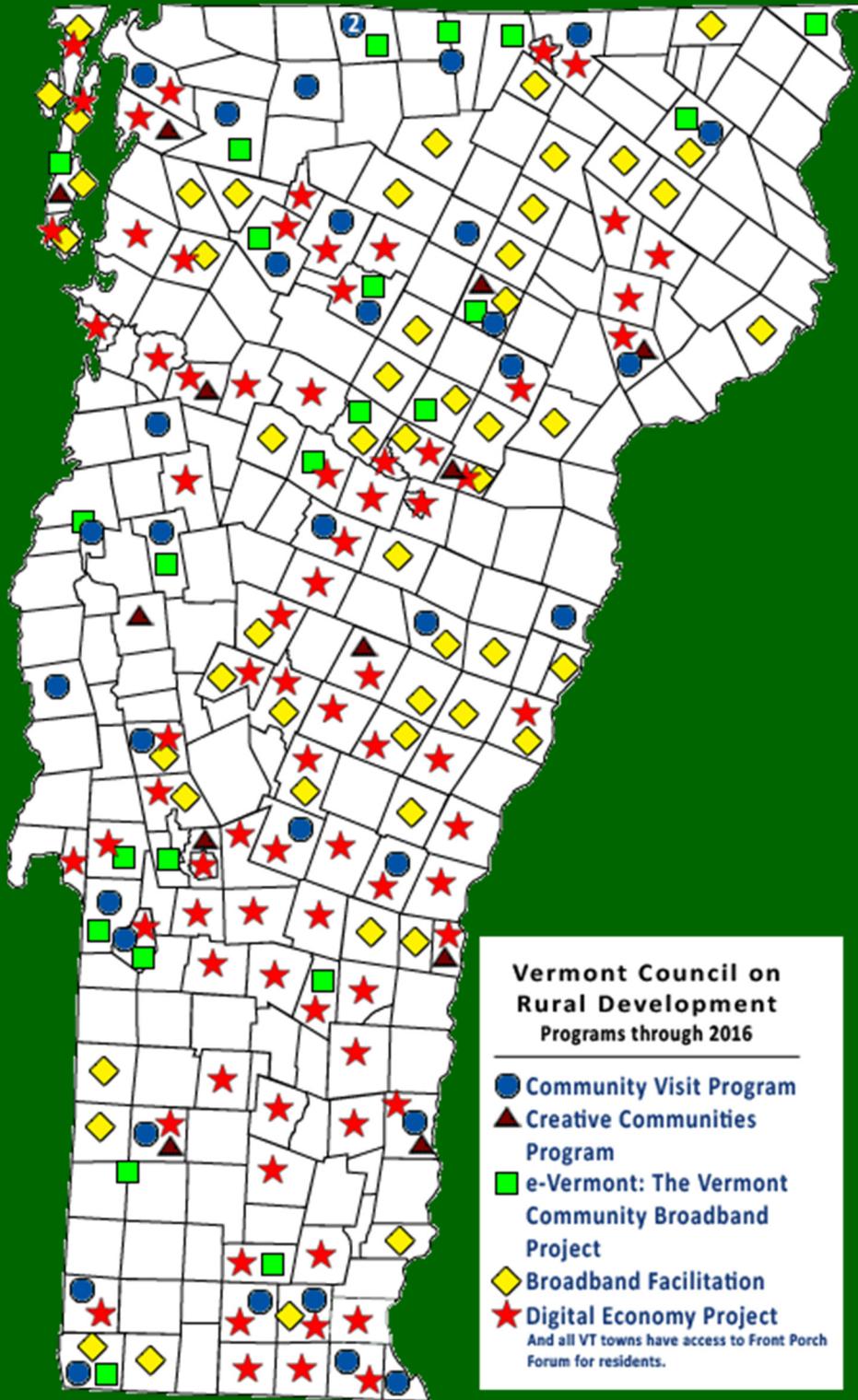
### Revenue:

Federal Grants	51,877
Foundation Grants	185,000
Private Contributions	104,400
State Support	45,320
Membership Dues	35,076
Fee for Service	700
Registration Fees	14,064
In-Kind Contributions	6,000
Other Income and Interest	463
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>442,900</b>

### Expenses:

Personnel	272,638
Contract Services	98,237
Board of Directors	1,344
Supplies	17,253
Facility and Equipment	15,099
Travel and Meetings	22,134
Other	2,372
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>429,077</b>

Find us online: <http://vtrural.org>



**VCRD works toward a future for Vermont in which its:**

- ◆ **communities** are healthy and resilient;
- ◆ **economy** is innovative and vibrant;
- ◆ **citizens** are engaged in community-building and governance, working closely with their neighbors;
- ◆ **communities** attract youth, entrepreneurs, and healthy diversity;
- ◆ **youngest citizens** are fully prepared to contribute to their communities and participate successfully in a changing economy;
- ◆ **rural character and open lands** are conserved and managed productively and profitably;
- ◆ **communities, businesses and citizens** prosper by designing and building economic solutions to climate change; and
- ◆ **communities** serve as a models for other communities throughout rural America.



Vermont Council on Rural Development  
PO Box 1384, Montpelier VT 05601-1384  
802-223-6091 | [info@vtrural.org](mailto:info@vtrural.org) | [vtrural.org](http://vtrural.org)

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