



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Vermont Council on Rural Development



VERMONT COUNCIL ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Welcome Partners, Friends, Citizens and Vermonters!

After one of the most challenging and rewarding years in the history of VCRD, we are proud to share our annual report with all of you. So many of you have contributed, connected, led, funded, and empowered work with us. We are deeply grateful to you. In this time we have all been on the line; we have done our part; together, we turn from crisis toward a dynamic future!

As you'll read below, VCRD turned in to confront the Covid crisis and was a convener for the work of thousands of people, responding together, woven our work together. Never have we been more proud to be Vermonters.

In a time of exhaustion and care, we saw courage, clarity of purpose, commitment and reason prevail—from leadership at the highest levels of government, to volunteers on the line in small communities.

As we look to the future of Vermont, to new leaders, to a diverse and equitable future, to being in the front lines of answering climate change and optimizing the best of our communities and economy, we stand at a pivotal moment. In the middle of the Covid response we began to ask, "What does recovery look like?" "What do we need to do as Vermonters over the next three years to build a successful future for the next generation?"

After gathering ideas from almost 4,000 people we have drawn up a pragmatic set of ideas that add up positive directions for Vermont. The Proposition for the Future of Vermont can serve as a foil for dialogue on the architecture of our common future, and a set of ideas for dialogue among citizens and policy leaders toward progress on issues ranging from the digital economy and childcare to working lands, climate action and the future of our democracy.

We invite you to join in this dialogue, and this movement, by signing on as a member of the Partnership for the Future of Vermont, to engage in the work ahead at futureofvermont.org.

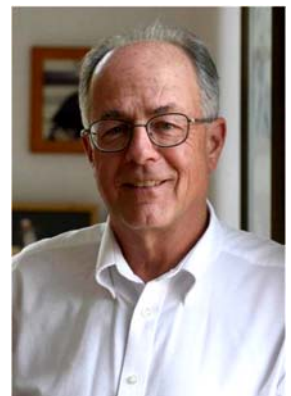
This annual report provides a snapshot of our programs supporting communities, local leaders and positive policies. Together, today, we have a generational opportunity to seize the day and galvanize a brighter and stronger future for Vermont. With you as partners, we look forward to the work ahead!

Paul Costello,
VCRD Executive Director

Julie Moore,
VCRD Board Chair

VCRD Executive Director, Paul Costello, to Step Down

After 21 years at the helm of VCRD, Paul Costello is stepping down from his role as Executive Director. Paul's work has and will continue to have a deep and lasting impact on Vermont. Over the last two decades, Paul has led dozens of community visits bringing community members together to establish a common vision and shared priorities that serve as a foundation for vibrant communities; convened policy councils to advance community and economic development; developed a score of statewide summits to build common purpose and spotlight key rural needs; and worked in myriad ways to bring people together for the greater good of their communities and for Vermont. Paul's work is the embodiment of servant leadership, helping create a more just and caring Vermont.



The VCRD Board wishes Paul all the best in his future endeavors. A new leader of VCRD will be appointed before the end of the year.

Community



Covid Relief and Recovery

2020 was an unprecedented year for Vermont. At VCRD, we pivoted early in the pandemic to serve by providing local support, regional coordination, and leadership at the state level to drive Covid-19 response and recovery efforts forward. To meet the urgent need for resources, information, and mutual support we convened local leaders who stepped up in communities throughout Vermont to deliver meals, check in on seniors, support social distancing in downtowns and public spaces, and make and distribute masks and other protective wear. In weekly sessions with people from over 190 towns, VCRD served as the backbone to help organize protocols, share best practices, connect as a statewide learning and response team, share VT Department of Health and other information, and gear up for mutual support and greater impact.

VCRD also brought together regional and statewide leaders of organizations providing response and recovery services through the crisis, from United Way leaders to Congressional Staff, CAP agency executives, food bank and food systems leaders, health experts,

FEMA, ACCD and other state and organizational teams to help organizations coordinate services, share best practices and identify potential points of synergy to spur response and recovery efforts.

Governor Scott asked VCRD to lead the Local Support and Action Team of his Covid-19 Recovery Task Force. VCRD chaired and staffed the process of surveying needs, reaching out to historically marginalized and low-income communities, and building reports to the Governor for priorities in recovery, all of which made it into key provisions of the Governor's action plan in the 2022 budget. VCRD convened a series of Recovery Visit discussions in every county that brought people together with state, federal, business and non-profit leaders to identify local and regional challenges and best practices, and brainstorm solutions. You can find a full report of these convenings here: <https://bit.ly/VT-Recovery>.

In a year that at times felt hopeless and dark, at VCRD we were inspired and invigorated by the communities we served and supported. By sharing, encouraging, and praising local leaders, VCRD helped them feel connected, impactful and contributing to make Vermont strong!

Community Visits

Neutral platform for communities to come together to identify goals and opportunities, select top priorities for action, foster and engage local leadership, and connect to resources to get things done.

In 2020, we redesigned our Community Visit program to offer the process safely to communities using digital tools and socially distanced methods each step of the way. VCRD offered virtual Community Visits to **Londonderry** and **Mendon**. In those communities, hundreds participated in community Zoom discussions to set priorities and now volunteer task forces are hard at work redeveloping highway corridors, revitalizing village centers, promoting outdoor recreation, addressing housing challenges, and more. In person Community Visits will reconvene in 2021 with

Bradford in June 2021, **Barre** in August, and then **Milton** in the fall. Throughout 2020 VCRD staff also continued to offer support and consultation to community leaders and task force volunteers in **Greensboro, Marlboro, Montgomery, Poultney, Rockingham, Wallingford, Wheelock** and **Westford**.

With the addition of new staff in 2021, VCRD is excited to provide even more support to community leaders working to advance priorities identified in Community Visits.

Climate Economy Model Communities

Helping Vermont communities rally citizens together to identify and implement actions that increase economic prosperity and reduce carbon emissions.

Ongoing support was provided in 2020 to towns that have participated in the Climate Economy Model Communities program including **Randolph, Marshfield/Plainfield, and Dorset**. Organizing efforts focused on the town of **Rochester** will start in September 2021.

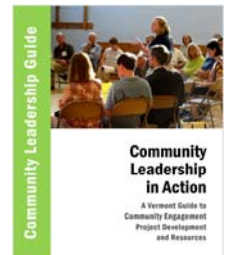
Leadership



Vermont Community Leadership Network

Local Leadership for the Future of Vermont Communities

In 2020, we launched the Vermont Community Leadership Network and published the Vermont Community Leadership Guide offering support to leaders throughout Vermont as they gear up recovery projects. The Network, which is made up of self-identifying Vermont leaders, offers new, emerging, and veteran community leaders mutual support, training and coaching, connections to resources, and support for advancing local projects through regular online workshops, networking “lunch breaks,” and action center groups. In 2020/2021, VCRD hosted 18 virtual workshops that engaged 61 presenters and 934 participants, and distributed over 750 guides. Join the Network and/or request a copy of the guide here: vtrural.org/leadership/join.



Climate Catalysts Program

Leaders Engaging to Drive Climate Economy Projects Forward

In 2020, VCRD launched the Climate Catalysts Program to provide leadership and project support to local leaders working on climate initiatives in their communities. An inaugural class of 12 came together for direct one-on-one training and support, peer connections, and consultative support as they develop and drive projects forward in their communities. A second class of 15 leaders came together in the fall of 2020 and will be supported through much of 2021.

Vermont Community Leadership Awards

Celebrate Vermonters who exemplify “dedication, integrity and honorable service to community and to rural Vermont,” and who have had a “transformational” effect on their communities.



Des Hertz

When VCRD kicked off the Community Visit work in Burke, Des immediately stood out as a strong leader with a passion for and dedication to the success of her hometown. Des has an incredible ability to bring people in to

community process and get them engaged and excited for the work, while also staying grounded, organized and practical as she guides community leaders towards next steps. Des represents the best of what Vermont has to offer. She cares deeply about her hometown and is willing to step forward to make it a better place. It’s been a pleasure to work with Des and has been inspiring to follow her continued leadership and the progress she has helped catalyze in Burke.



Mike Strait

Mike is a dedicated community leader—the kind of leader that always says yes. Whether it’s joining a local committee, helping to organize a regional leadership summit, or speaking at one of VCRD’s statewide

events, Mike is someone that you can count on—and someone that his community can always count on—to step up where leadership is needed. We all know Island Pond as a quiet corner of the kingdom that has faced serious economic challenges over the years. Today the town feels like it is on a roll with a strengthened downtown, new recreation opportunities and a great feeling of momentum and public spirit. Thanks to Mike for doing his part!

Policy

The Vermont Proposition

The challenges of our time call on us as Vermonters to unite to build a better future. The Vermont Proposition is an initiative to gather ideas from Vermonters about what we can do today to optimize the best of Vermont at mid-century—for our economy, environment, communities, and people—and propose bold priorities for action as foundations for progress. In the summer of 2020, we framed the first draft of the Vermont Proposition—a structured and non-partisan set of proposals toward action for Vermont's future—based on input gathered from Vermonters through policy councils, county-wide recovery convenings, personal interviews, and the tens of thousands of people who have engaged with us through the years in setting and advancing action to improve life in their communities.

Over the fall and winter, VCRD staff set about gathering feedback on the first draft by facilitating focus forums that engaged nearly 700 people across 35 stakeholder groups, publishing and promoting a survey that drew over 1,300 written responses totaling over 500 pages of detailed notes towards a refinement of the draft. In partnership with GNAT TV, the Rutland Herald and Times Argus, we gathered and published a diversity of Vermonters' perspectives in a 10-part series that explored each element of the draft Vermont Proposition: futureofvermont.org/explore. In April of 2021, staff worked to synthesize all of the above feedback into a second draft of the Proposition.

In May of 2021, we convened the **Summit on the Future of Vermont**, a virtual event that drew 700 participants and over 100 dynamic and diverse presenters, panelists and facilitators to discuss the elements of the proposition, review the second draft, and gather input towards its implementation. The summit marked the beginning of a years-long platform of work that will help Vermonters drive points of vision and long-term goals for Vermont's future. In the wake of the summit, we launched the **Partnership for the Future of Vermont**, a non-partisan, multi-sector alliance of organizations, businesses and individuals, open to any Vermonter interested in signing on to advance the elements of the Proposition. Convened and supported by VCRD, the Partnership will build and advocate for implementation strategies for each of the Proposition elements and be led by a VCRD-facilitated **Future of Vermont Action Team** that will be convened to develop strategies toward implementation. The first meeting of the Action Team is set for early August, 2021. Join the Partnership at futureofvermont.org.

Working Lands Initiative

VCRD's **Vermont Working Landscape Partnership** includes over 1,000 farm, forest, value-added businesses and individuals working together to support working lands enterprises that serve as a key foundation for the culture and economy of Vermont. VCRD continues to engage the Partnership and convene its leadership team, the **Working Lands Coalition (WLC)**, as the crucial promoter of Working Lands Enterprise Fund investments in farm and forest businesses. Since its inception, the program which VCRD helped launch in 2012, has funded agriculture and forestry projects in every county, created hundreds of jobs, and generated millions in additional sales for the Vermont economy. Working with leadership from legislative committees, the Rural Caucus, and the administration, the WLC helped build momentum to budget \$5,494,000 for working lands enterprises for the year ahead.

Climate Economy Action Team

Since 2017, VCRD has convened the **Climate Economy Action Team (CEAT)** dedicated to advancing initiatives to expand distributed energy generation and efficiency in Vermont, cultivating climate economy entrepreneurs and startup businesses, and reducing Vermont's carbon impact while creating jobs, and attracting youth and creative businesses to the state. For 2020, CEAT adopted a platform of support for an ambitious legislative agenda and convene regional conversations to highlight successful climate economy business strategies. While the pandemic resulted in a suspension of CEAT activities, the legislature took substantial steps forward in the last year, including the passage of the Global Warming Solutions Act and more recently an investment of \$250 million for a broad host of climate change related initiatives. Meanwhile, beginning in 2021 CEAT has returned to public engagement efforts including targeted meetings with Vermont business associations and regional forums that feature business leaders sharing their experience and plans in a time of climate change.

Members & Donors

Thanks to 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. Support us at: vtrural.org.

Individuals (\$50-\$499): Gail and Ken Albert | Roger and Ann Allbee | J. Riley Allen | Richard N Allman | Chris Anderson | Kristofer Anderson | Alice and Richard Angney | Anonymous (16) | Jill Arace | Katherine Ash | Sarita Austin | Diana and Charles Bain | William Barrette and Christine Lilyquist | Mary M. 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The Vermont Council on Rural Development helps Vermont citizens build prosperous and resilient communities through democratic engagement, marshalling resources, and collective action.

VCRD STANDS FOR

- ▶ Local Democracy
- ▶ Rural Voice
- ▶ Engagement
- ▶ Patriotism of Place
- ▶ Community Renewal
- ▶ Working Lands
- ▶ Innovation
- ▶ Climate Economy
- ▶ Youth
- ▶ Community

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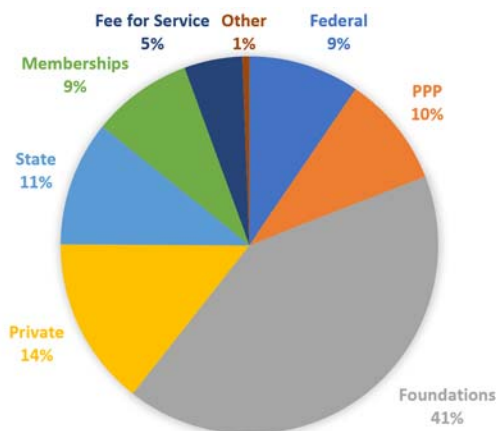
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VCRD Support by Type

- Federal: 79,520
- PPP: 80,000
- Foundations: 346,600
- Private: 121,050
- State: 89,320
- Memberships: 72,067
- Fee for Service: 41,660
- Other: 4,967
- Total: 835,184



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Vermont Council on Rural Development

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The Proposition for the Future of Vermont

Working together, Vermonters can advance strategies, policies, and investments to renew citizen engagement and advance justice, resilience, strong communities, and a sustainable economy that works for all.

- PART 1: Vermont must ensure affordable high-speed broadband and cellular access for all Vermonters, while using digital tools to promote community connection and democracy, and to advance local commerce and economic opportunity**
- PART 2: Vermont must combat racism, celebrate our diversity today, and welcome new Vermonters of Color**
- PART 3: Vermont must advance creative solutions to climate change**
- PART 4: Vermont must reduce economic disparities, address poverty, and promote opportunities for prosperity for all Vermonters**
- PART 5: Vermont must ensure all children have access to affordable, quality child care**
- PART 6: Vermont must ensure that students of all backgrounds and abilities learn and thrive in public schools that advance diverse opportunities for educational, civic and vocational success**
- PART 7: Vermont must strengthen local business, entrepreneurship, investment, workforce and rural innovation**
- PART 8: Vermont must advance efficiency and foresight through state planning and regional coordination**
- PART 9: Vermont must conserve our lands and waters and advance our working landscape**
- PART 10: Vermonters must renew civic engagement and strengthen trust, civility, community connection, democratic decision-making, and empower new leaders**