

THE COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT

SUMMARY STATEMENT

A project of the Vermont Council on Rural Development

Vermont Council on Rural Development
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Introduction

About once a generation Vermonters have paused from their daily concerns and seasonal politics to take part in statewide conversation that consider where we are, where we are going, and the realities and trends that will influence our common future. Such studies have often resulted in major findings about who we are as a people and the evolving assumptions and goals we share. They also have led us, as a state, to articulate a set of values that are embedded now in our special Vermont sense of place, dedication to community, and brand identity. From the study by the Vermont Commission on Country Life in 1928 to the Commission on Vermont's Future in 1988, these studies have engaged and united Vermonters, inspired leaders, and initiated practical gubernatorial and legislative initiatives.

Over the past few years, Vermont Council on Rural Development has facilitated public processes where citizens across the state have expressed concerns about challenges that Vermont faces. These challenges, such as global trade patterns, climate change, erosion of cultural traditions, and changes in traditional land use patterns, have been compounded by Vermont's demographic pressures, an aging population, social, economic and cultural divisions and the need for affordable housing, government services, public safety and transportation. The Council on Rural Development has also heard about positive trends in education, mobility, and the technology-driven access to broader communities and trade that offer future opportunities. These concerns have lead the Council to ask: What do these challenges and opportunities mean to Vermonters and what do they believe we will need to do to meet the future with confidence?

The Vermont Council on Rural Development charged the Council on the Future of Vermont (CFV) to produce a statewide public dialogue on the topic from 2007 to the end of 2008. CFV will serve as a leadership council for over one year to take public input throughout Vermont, research trends, and, based on its findings, articulate a comprehensive picture of the values, concerns, and aspirations of Vermonters as they consider the future of our state.

Organizational history

VCRD has developed a portfolio of community and policy action that includes:

- 15 years of town by town community development strategic planning,
- 7 Governor's Summits retreats, and 4 statewide Rural Summit conferences,
- Policy council initiatives on agricultural viability, value added forest products development, the creative economy, the structure of the planning system, and in-state energy development,
- Strategic planning guidance to initiate creative economy plans in 12 cities and towns,
- Facilitated development of 32 town-wide assessment and aggregation projects to acquire broadband access.

VCRD has built a reputation for integrity as a neutral, non-partisan mediator of public processes, setting the framework for decisions by communities—and by policy leaders—

that lead to direct and practical results in addressing fundamental challenges at the local and state level.

Project description

The Council on the Future of Vermont is funded by the generous support of National Life Group, the High Meadows Fund, the New Castle Fund, Vermont Mutual Insurance, Union Mutual of Vermont, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, the McClure Foundation , NRG Systems, Casella Waste Systems, the Ben and Jerry's Foundation and a special partnership with the Vermont Community Foundation. Vermont Public Television is also a community partner in this project.

The Council on the Future of Vermont initiative has the following major project elements in the implementation of the project: *Council development, strategic media campaign, community forums, website/online components, stakeholder forums, survey and statistical analysis, and data analysis and research.*

1. ***Council development:*** The Council on the Future of Vermont board was developed by VCRD to include leaders representing Vermonters from throughout the state, with a range of demographic backgrounds and professional expertise. Members were identified for inclusion from a variety of age groups and a diversity of backgrounds and roles. VCRD founded the process and will manage, staff and facilitate CFV sessions; but all content decisions will be based on the feedback gathered from Vermonters and will be made by the CFV board. The CFV process will last just under two calendar years and the CFV will complete its work in March 2009.
2. ***Strategic media campaign:*** A media campaign will be developed to share the questions of CFV, build a ubiquitous statewide dialogue, and to prepare the ground to build participation in regional and community based dialogues. Print, electronic, television, video, online and radio media will all be used to reach out to Vermonters and to capture the ongoing conversations across the state.
3. ***Community forums:*** A series of Community Forums will be conducted across the state in small and large communities with partnership from local and regional sponsors. In these towns and cities the CFV will set a day-long format of meetings, ending with a widely advertised public meeting in the evening. The evening meeting is meant to draw interested citizens from other parts of the region as well – all local media will be coordinated so that this public invitation is extended as widely as possible. As part of each community forum day, representatives of the Council on the Future, VCRD and partnering organizations will break up to form 'listening teams'. These teams will gather information from individuals and small groups of residents in sites throughout the community, from mobile home parks, to diners, barber shops, businesses, garages, post offices, teen centers, churches and other key places where people gather. Over the course of time between November 2007 and August 2008 community-wide forums will be held in towns and cities in each of the 14 Vermont counties.

4. ***Data analysis and research:*** A compendium of VCRD findings derived from its 15-year history of Summits, Community Visits, and Policy Councils will be developed and will inform the CFV as it deliberates and develops its Findings report. In addition, CFV will compile an existing 'state of knowledge' report in the form of an annotated bibliography. An analysis on the status of life in Vermont and a quantitative and qualitative description of significant demographic, economic, and cultural trends faced by the state will be published to build common points of information for the start of the dialogue in each community. The final research project may include new areas of research, and a GAP analysis.
5. ***Stakeholder forums:*** The CFV will also manage an extensive set of Public Interest Forums and listening sessions with stakeholder groups throughout the state. These will range from very small group sessions with veterans, disabled Vermonters, or Community High School students (in care of the corrections system) to major presentations and discussions with groups like the Vermont State Employees Association or the Vermont School Boards Association. VCRD staff will schedule between 20 and 40 of these sessions to take place between December 2007 and the completion of the project. In some cases, these sessions will be scheduled to fit into regular organizational get-togethers; for example, a discussion could take place as part of a Community Action Council Annual Meeting, a VT League of Cities and Towns Annual Conference, a VT Farm Bureau meeting, or an Economic Development Partnership session with Regional Developers and Planners.
6. ***Survey and statistical analysis:*** CFV will complete a statistically significant survey for Vermont residents. The Council is partnering with the Center for Rural Studies at UVM to complete a phone survey that will delve deeper into some of the important topics and issues that the public forums processes have uncovered. The Center for Rural Studies will provide cross tabulation analysis of the survey and will host the same survey on the CFV website (see below).
7. ***Website/Online CFV components:*** The CFV will set up means to take inputs from Vermonters through online polling, discussion boards and electronic, music, art, photography or video submissions on the future of Vermont. CFV will partner with the Center for Rural Studies to compile and analyze the online survey and work with partnering organizations, such as the Vermont Arts Council, to enable submission of creative visions for Vermont's future.

The CFV will issue its Findings on the Future of Vermont as final report that will include a substantive written text (on paper), a video, and interactive CD/Web document including data, photos, video, and text.

Council on the Future Members

- Sue Allen, Barre-Montpelier Times Argus
- Paul Bruhn, Preservation Trust of Vermont

- Tom Debevoise, Woodstock Dairy Farmer (Chair)
- Kara DeLeonardis, RU12? Community Center
- Steve Gold, VT Agency of Human Services, retired
- Chris Graff, National Life Group
- Cheryl Hanna, VT Law School
- Wanda Hines, Burlington Community and Economic Development Office
- Brian Keefe, Central Vermont Public Service
- Ellen Lovell, Marlboro College
- Richard Mallary, US Congressman, VT Legislator, retired
- William McMeekin, TD Banknorth, retired
- Donna Rader, Vermont Community Foundation
- Charlie Smith, The Snelling Center
- Emily Stebbins, UVM VP Office
- Greg Stefanski, Laraway Youth and Family Center
- Fran Voigt, New England Culinary School
- Laurie Zilbauer, Northeastern Vermont Development Agency

Staff

Paul Costello, VCRD, Executive Director
 Sarah Waring, VCRD, Program Manager

VCRD's Steering Committee

The VCRD Steering Committee built the charge for the Council on the Future of Vermont, including a time-line and work plan, and selected the members to lead the process. The Steering Committee will oversee VCRD's project management, forum structure and deliverables. Committee Members include:

- Jeff Francis, VT Superintendents Association
- Jonathan Wood, Department of Forests Parks & Recreation
- Tony Elliott, Woodstone Company
- Christine Hart, Brattleboro Housing Authority
- Chip Evans, Workforce Development Council
- Catherine Dimitruk, Northwest Regional Planning Commission

Schedule of Community Forums

Randolph	November 19, 2007
Rutland	December 4 th , 2007
Bennington	January 3 rd , 2008
St. Albans	January 24 th , 2008
Hyde Park	February 13 th , 2008
North Hero	March 6 th , 2008
Newport	March 27 th , 2008

Island Pond/Brighton	April 17th, 2008
St. Johnsbury	May 8th, 2008
Middlebury	May 29th, 2008
Burlington	June 19th, 2008
Barre	July 10th, 2008
Hartford	July 31st, 2008
Brattleboro	August 21st, 2008

Outcomes

1. A description of Vermont values in our time.
2. A review of the differences in values and goals of different age cohorts.
3. A summary data set and analysis of current conditions and trends in Vermont.
4. An enhanced unity in communities and as a state to Vermont's common future.
5. An educational process that will inform decision makers (Governor, Legislature, Congressional Delegation, state, federal, regional and local officials, planners and regulators, non-profit, business and community leaders, and the general public) on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of Vermonters concerning the state and its future.



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