



The Creative Communities Program

Models for Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy

• • • Final Report • • •

Vermont Council on Rural Development
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This report is also on a free multimedia DVD available from VCRD. The DVD includes case study videos illustrating several CCP projects, documents to assist other towns in setting up a similar program, a complete guide to potential resources, detailed reports from the twelve towns in the program, audio from the State House Conference on the Creative Economy, and more.

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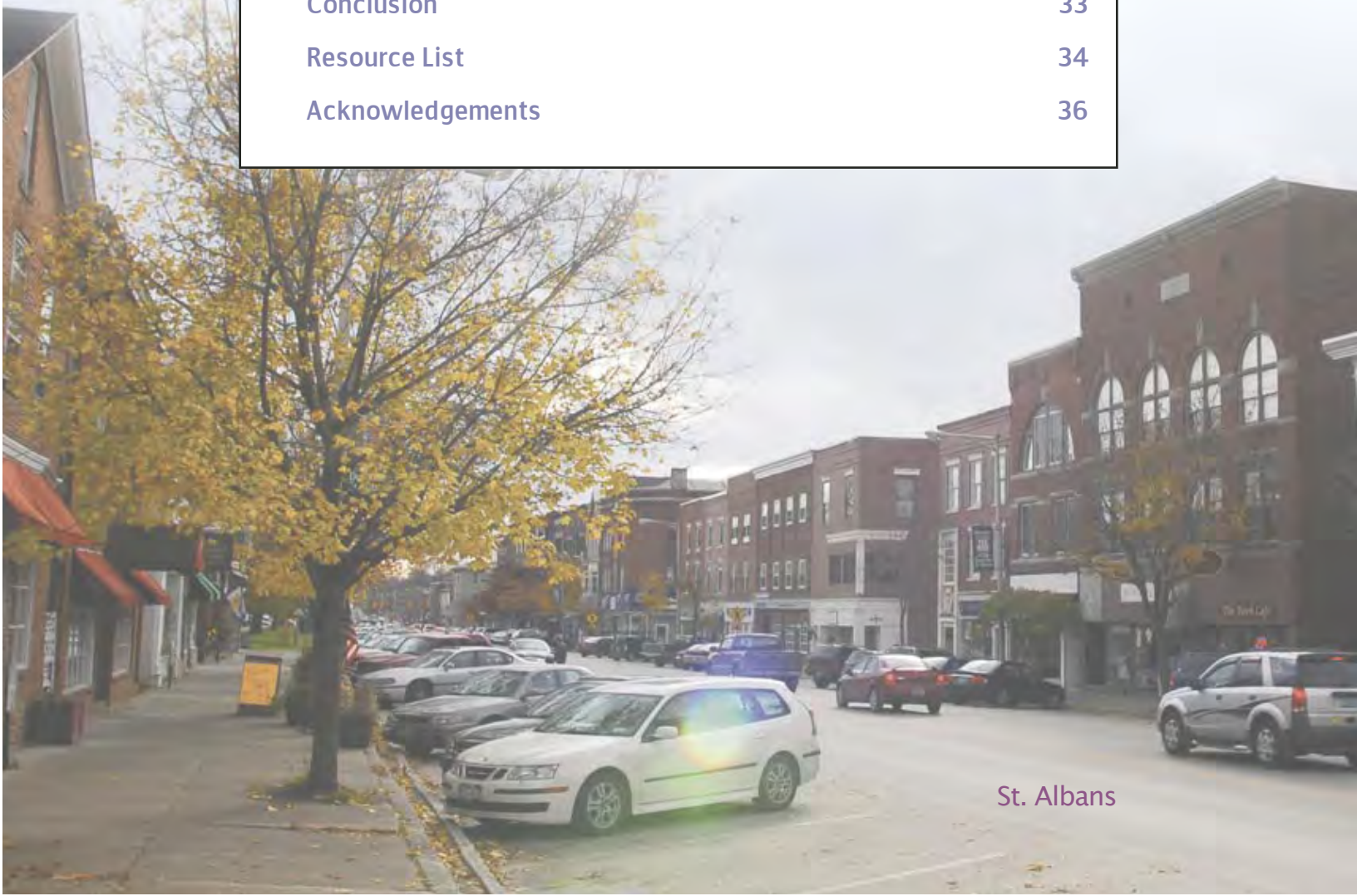
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The creative economy revitalizes communities by attracting visitors, capital improvements and jobs, as well as renewed pride and involvement from local residents.



Randolph

Introduction to the Creative Economy

During the past decade, the term Creative Economy has rapidly become a strategic focal-point in local, national, and international discussions that involve community development and global competitiveness. This phrase eludes a single definition. Instead, it serves as an umbrella concept that recognizes the value of celebrating creative thinkers, the leverage of the arts on community and economic development, the essential nature of innovation and imagination in business success, and the crucial role quality of life plays in attracting and retaining the workforce that today's businesses need to remain vibrant.

The Creative Economy encourages communities to strategically nurture their cultural attributes and incubate the economic activity that will provide future competitive advantages.

The key to developing and nourishing this growing sector (along with parallel terms such as “knowledge economy” and “design economy”) starts with strengthening community life. Regions with active social, political, and technical networks are way out in front in adapting to today's marketplace. They have the pieces in place to hold open discussions, solve problems, and compete for resources. They also recognize the importance of who they are in the world, and the vital connection between culture, heritage, the environment, education, and jobs.

The Creative Economy has been well documented in the U.S. and internationally. First across continental Europe, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, and now across the Americas and Asia, the term has evolved from an idea to a movement. Studies and reports, national policies, and

academic papers along with symposia and conferences have been organized under this banner. Statisticians have sliced and diced the numbers, policy makers have made lists of what they consider creative industries, and economists categorize various groupings of creative clusters.

The numbers are clearer than the definitions. Regardless of who or what is included in a particular creative economy study, the results are the same. Jobs in this sector are growing, and they are growing at a higher rate than the economy as a whole.

More significantly perhaps, stories emerge on a daily basis about cities and towns that are exploring what the creative economy means for them, and pursuing strategic partnerships that build on their assets and address the challenges they face. In a similar vein, there is anecdotal evidence from communities around the world that this approach is working. Investments in the cultural landscape are paying dividends from London to Brandon, Vermont. Through the creative economy, urban and rural areas are revitalized; attracting visitors, capital improvements, jobs, and renewed pride and involvement from local residents.

Googling “Creative Economy” today turns up more than 350,000 entries, a vastly different result than just a few years ago. But, of course, “Googling” wasn't even a common expression way back then. The world is always changing, but few will deny those changes are faster now than ever.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development saw the close fit between the Creative Economy and Vermont early on and has worked to unite state, federal, nonprofit and business sectors in support of local leaders interested in this approach. VCRD continues to nourish and promote the town-by-town efforts that are moving Vermont's creative economy forward today.

The Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation

By 2003 the idea of the creative economy had been percolating in Vermont, but few policy-makers and local leaders had an understanding of how to advance this opportunity in policy or in practice in towns throughout the state. The Vermont Arts Council, spurred by Executive Director Alex Aldrich, was gathering information on creative economy initiatives in other states. He brought this to the attention of the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD), and asked it to undertake a formal study in this area.

VCRD convened the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation (VCCI) to craft a practical and strategic plan that would coordinate the work of state and local leaders to move Vermont's creative economy forward. Its final product, *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy*, was formally issued at the beginning of the 2005 Vermont Legislative session.

Two key VCCI observations are worth repeating here. 1) Public and private investment in creative enterprises yields favorable economic and social returns, producing jobs and supporting communities. 2) The development of the creative economy in Vermont is not limited to geography, topography, demographics, or population density.

VCCI's report made specific recommendations for how to grow the State's creative economy as a vital and complementary part of the state's economy as a whole. It documents seventeen recommendations in four areas that the Governor's administration, Legislature, and public and private partners

were encouraged to undertake to expand innovation, enhance community life, attract and encourage entrepreneurs, build Vermont's market identity, and stimulate job growth. These recommendations encouraged collaboration among Vermont's private sector, cultural organizations, and local, state, and federal government to use Vermont's cultural resources to spark and leverage community and economic development.

The recommendation areas were:

- ④ **Support the Growth of Creative Enterprises** by expanding markets, unifying promotion, enhancing the Vermont brand, producing celebratory events, building a Vermont artists and artisans market identity, and providing technical support and access to capital for culturally-based businesses and creative entrepreneurs.
- ④ **Promote and Document the Roles that Creativity, Culture, and Innovation Play in Vermont's Economic Future** by tracking and reporting this economic sector, reinforcing arts and heritage education, and instituting a statewide public information campaign.
- ④ **Invest in Communities so They May Build on their Past while Adapting for a Vibrant Future** by making culture and heritage priority community investments, supporting historic town and village centers, expanding cultural facilities funding, and encouraging creative entrepreneurial development in vacant industrial space.
- ④ **Develop Vermont's Creative Economy through Community-Based Planning and Improved Statewide Collaboration** by facilitating locally designed creative economy projects, building a collaborative umbrella between statewide cultural organizations, and establishing a nonpartisan Governor's Commission to provide leadership for the growth of Vermont's creative economy.



The Creative Economy In Vermont Today

Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy generated an immediate and enthusiastic response across the state. The proposed strategies were seen as important elements for rural development and the subject of numerous legislative committee hearings, as well as discussions in chambers of commerce, downtown groups and selectboards throughout the state. Senate and House members, as well as Governor Douglas, introduced bills that echoed the ideas put forward in the report. The language that established the Commission on the Future of Economic Development in Vermont specifically included references to the creative economy. Editorials and radio commentators praised the concepts as right for Vermont, right now.

The report recognized some of the communities around the state already seeing revitalization and renewal through creative economy efforts. In Bellows Falls for example, a dying downtown was turned around—first by a theater company raising funds to renovate Town Hall, and soon after by a community mural project and the transformation of a derelict downtown block into affordable live-work space for artists.

Since then, creative leaders in Bellows Falls have forged public and private partnerships to take historic preservation around the square and along the river, and have built music and cultural programs to turn the village into a regional market center. Gallery spaces, new restaurants, hardware and other specialty shops, and an authentic Main Street not only attract visitors but local residents looking for interaction with their neighbors. The town's revitalized life has attracted entrepreneurs who have launched



Bellows Falls

Setting the Stage

successful, sustainable, and growing businesses such as SoVerNet, a statewide internet service provider, and Chroma Technology, a leading manufacturer of optical products.

In Vergennes, “Vermont’s smallest city”, the early 1990s witnessed empty storefronts, deteriorating buildings, and a steady stream of unsuccessful businesses. However, an unflappable community-based volunteer effort pieced together donated supplies, matching grants, and discounted services to reclaim its Opera House from the pigeons and reopen it to host a wide variety of community and cultural events. Within a few years local Vergennes investors had rehabbed several downtown buildings. Today, stores are full, award-winning restaurants are well established, and the Opera House serves as the civic center of this re-energized city.

Burlington, Vermont’s largest city, is truly set apart from urban centers with comparable or even larger populations by the quality and diversity of its cultural offerings. From the beautifully renovated Firehouse Gallery of Visual Arts and the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts downtown to the classic Fleming Museum on UVM’s campus, Burlington hosts world class artists and performers. Equally important, its galleries, bars, and coffeehouses provide venues for local talent to build audiences and exchange creative ideas. This creative climate continues to thrive, expanding to the South End businesses reshaping former industrial spaces and the North End, where artists and other emerging businesses are finding affordable space and a growing multicultural diversity to be the right ingredients for their ideas to blossom.



Flynn Center, Burlington

Vermont's story of the creative economy is led by town centers, but the nature of settlement in the state adds some distinct features to this economic sector and its role in community development. Vermont is home to artists, writers and artisans, designers and software developers, inventors and small-scale entrepreneurs—at business, at home, in the hills and valleys throughout the state. For Vermont, the creative economy movement celebrates this dispersed and diverse population as an essential part of the state's rural character, culture and commerce.

Throughout the state, Brattleboro, Morrisville, Troy, Newport, Bradford, Weston, Stowe, Milton, Enosburg and so many other small communities are advancing creative economy related efforts. Exciting performance spaces, innovative arts/business collaborations, and fresh strategies are emerging. Artists, artisans, and other creative thinkers are participating in community development conversations and adding a fresh perspective. Projects ranging from business incubators to cooperative art galleries are shining elements in local commerce and development, and parts of a statewide movement.

Brandon is a great example. Led by renowned local artist Warren Kimble, the arts community there stepped up to lend leadership to downtown projects, including the development of a new pocket park and new restaurants. Through cooperation they expanded public art and commercial exhibition space. They made news with pigs—ubiquitous fiberglass pigs painted in myriad colors and styles. First it was funny, but soon Vermont was abuzz at the pigs—what did they mean? What did this phenomenon say about Brandon? From being a bedroom town on the decline, Brandon came to be seen as a creative place with a funky, colorful side... a town worth watching. Subsequent artist collaborations and events built further momentum. Storefronts filled,



Brandon came to be seen as a creative place ... a town worth watching.

River Arts is transforming the former Lamoille Grange into a new arts center in Morrisville.



Setting the Stage

and today Brandon is a successful town on the move and a leader in community development in VT.

Clearly, the key ideas that have come together under the ‘creative economy’ umbrella have been germinating around the state for several years. Once the term came into wide use, following the release of the VCCI report, towns and cities across the state started asking, “How can we deliberately foster creative economy enterprises? How can we strategically advance our assets as a ‘center of culture and innovation?’”

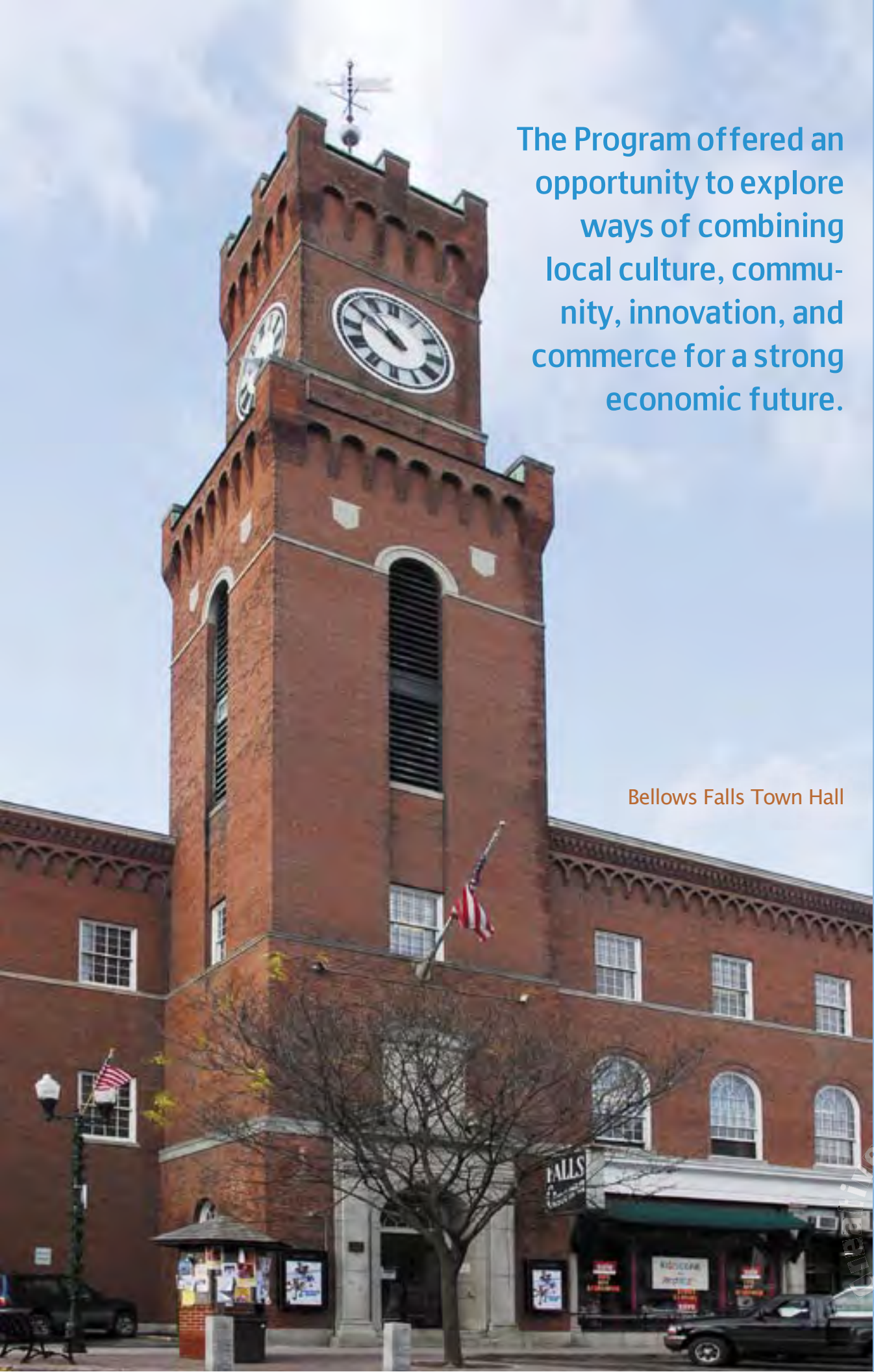
The Vermont Council on Rural Development sought ways to help more Vermont towns and regions tap their potential creative development. Following up on one of the VCCI recommendations, it worked with members of that group to outline a plan for a Creative Communities Program. With major support from Jane’s Trust, VCRD launched the program in the fall of 2005.



Vermont is home to artists, writers and artisans, designers and software developers, inventors and small-scale entrepreneurs.

Thistle Hill Pottery





The Program offered an opportunity to explore ways of combining local culture, community, innovation, and commerce for a strong economic future.

Bellows Falls Town Hall

The Creative Communities Program



Overview of the Creative Communities Program

The Program

The Creative Communities Program built on both the findings of the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation and the successful Community Visit program that VCRD has managed for many years. Community Visits offer a way for communities to identify important issue areas and construct work plans for addressing key priorities. CCP adapted the Visit model as a way to encourage selected communities to look at development through the lens of the Creative Economy. In this way, residents identified assets, needs, challenges, and goals that resonated locally. Using this information, groups of motivated citizens chose a few priority projects to pursue, developed action plans, and began working to achieve them.

The Creative Communities Program offered an opportunity for towns, villages, and cities around Vermont to use a public participation process to explore ways of combining local culture, community, and commerce for a strong economic future.

A healthy Vermont economy has traditionally relied on a strong sense of heritage, individuals' ingenuity, businesses that always retain their entrepreneurial spirit, and the distinct character of our rural communities. The Creative Communities Program helped translate these strengths into specific projects that emphasize three main components of the creative economy:

- Creative Partnerships:** "Place", includes the natural, physical and social environments. Securing a vibrant sense of place is key to sustainable economic vitality. The creative economy thrives in places where people *want* to work, live, and participate as active citizens.

- Creative Partnerships:** The creative economy brings voices to economic development discussions that have not traditionally been thought of as business partners; including arts, heritage, place-based, and other (usually) not-for-profit organizations. They offer essential perspectives in economic development discussions.

- Creative Assets:** The creative economy relies on innovative individuals to generate new ideas that give local businesses a competitive edge and build a larger culture of ingenuity. Leveraging cultural assets generates income for a region, while forming a community environment that inspires creative thinking in *everyone* and encourages people to explore diverse skills.

The Process

The Creative Communities Program did not offer monetary grants, but did provide a structured process.

APPLICATION

The CCP began with an Advisory Committee representing statewide leadership in the Creative Economy. This group hired a Director and together they developed a fairly simple application process. Their intent was to encourage interest and reduce any barriers to participation.

Applicants were asked to send a letter summarizing the local interest and groundwork for the creative economy. This was followed by discussions with the Creative Communities Director, a revised letter, and a final decision by the Advisory Committee.

The program received applications from throughout Vermont. Five were accepted in

the first round, and a total of 12 communities participated between 2006 and 2007. Overall, the towns met the criteria set by the Committee including a range in population, economic base, and location around the state. In addition, several applicants represented multiple towns interested in participating together as a region.

Selected communities provided:

- ⦿ Evidence of broad community support for a creative economy initiative, including diverse partnerships.
- ⦿ Ways that the creative economy framework can complement existing economic development work.
- ⦿ Links between the Creative Communities process and reaching community goals.
- ⦿ A unique town character.

OUTREACH GROUP

The Creative Communities Program began with a local Outreach Committee asked to engage a diverse group of local residents in the 3 forums that would follow. In several towns, members of the Outreach Group reorganized into a more permanent steering committee.

Town Meeting on the Creative Economy (Forum 1)

The initial forum opened the Creative Economy lens with comments from statewide leaders as well as local leaders visiting from other Vermont communities. A Vermont Council on Rural Development facilitator moved the discussion to what the creative economy means in the participating community, what's happening today, what challenges exist, and what projects might advance that creative economy activity.

Project Priorities (Forum 2) CCP prepared notes on the Town Meeting (Forum 1) and organized the project ideas that were presented into a comprehensive list of possible projects. Second forum participants reviewed, revised, and added to the list,

then selected 3-4 projects for initial focus. Selection was done by a combination of discussion, championing and voting. The goal was to establish which projects had momentum within the group so that a strong local Project Team would form to move them from ideas into action.

Project Development Meeting (Forum 3)

CCP invites a group of people representing possible state and federal partners to help project committees 1) build a basic work plan, 2) learn of any similar projects around Vermont, and 3) identify potential resources. The local Project Team leads this discussion, setting a basis for their ongoing work. The Resource Team helps keep the discussion on track, answer questions and, later, sends in recommendations for the Project Team.

FINAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

CCP prepares a final report for the community. This final report is complete approximately 6 months following the start of CCP work in the community and 4-6 weeks following the final public forum. These reports both record the process for the community's reference and also for sharing with potential partners.



Networking

The program linked the communities and encouraged peer support through conferences, list serves, and on-line reports.

LEADERS' SUMMIT 2006

In November, 2006—around the mid-point of the overall program—CCP and Bellows Falls hosted a summit addressing “Strategies for Community Creative Economy Projects.” The event brought together creative economy leaders from around the state who wanted to strengthen connections and form new ideas about next steps for projects. The morning sessions included an overview of projects already underway and a panel discussion on funding options. Afternoon workshops explored the experiences of participants in four project areas: incubators, arts and downtown revitalization, using natural assets, and town image.

CONFERENCE ON ADVANCING VERMONT'S CREATIVE ECONOMY

As work with the last of the twelve pilot communities was winding down, VCRD devoted its 2007 annual summer conference to “Celebrating Models of Community

Success.” The day gave voice and visibility to amazing creative economy success stories throughout Vermont, as well as a chance to share the challenges faced in communities both large and small. A diverse and engaged group of 250 participants packed the Vermont State House to meet and learn from each other, listen to supportive bipartisan leaders, and identify the next essential steps in keeping the state’s communities vital and competitive.

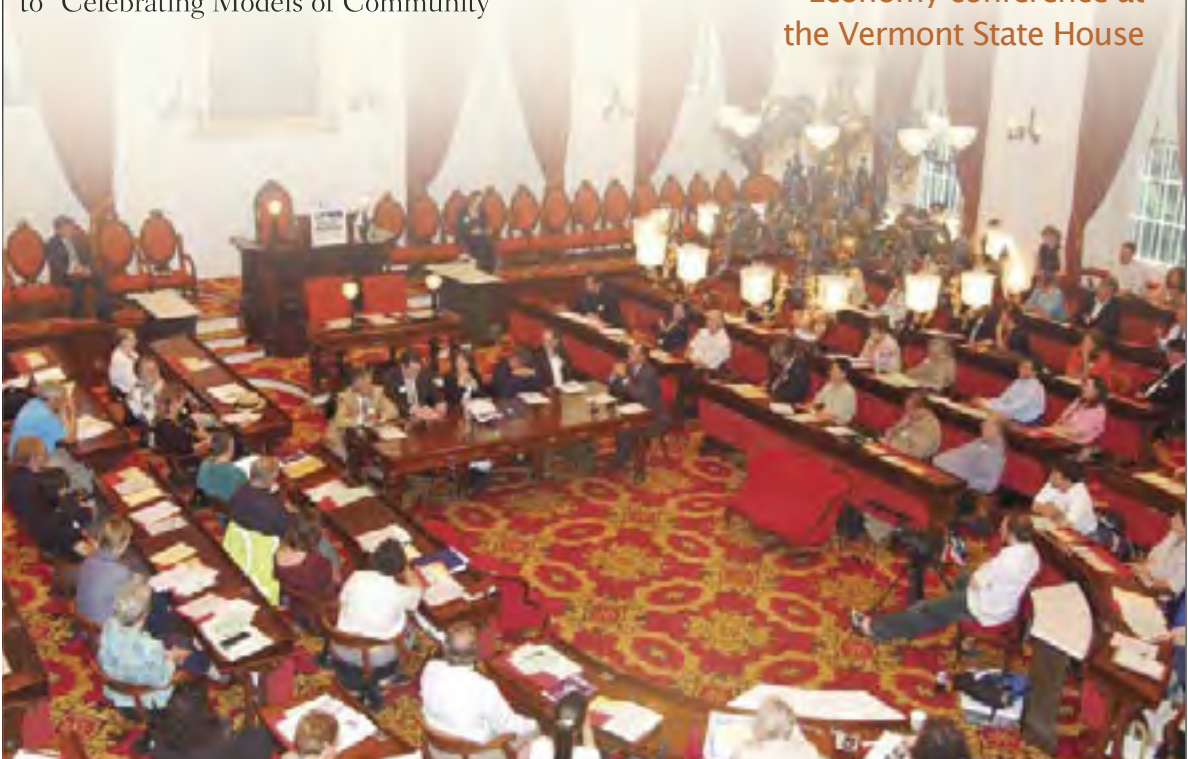
LIST SERVES

The CCP communicated effectively and efficiently by building an e-mail list of interested participants. Updates of local, regional, and national interest were sent periodically to about 500 names.

ON-LINE

The CCP posted documents on the VCRD web site throughout the process. This included guidelines, application forms, conference information, and the final reports from each of the twelve communities.

VCRD's 2007 Creative Economy conference at the Vermont State House



Creative Community Participants

Map created with tools at www.VCGI.org
 Dot sizes represent population



COMMUNITY	POPULATION
Hardwick	3,200
Lake Champlain Islands	7,700
Manchester	4,300
Middlebury	8,200
Plainfield	1,400
Randolph	5,100
Richmond	4,100
Rockingham / Bellows Falls	5,100
Rutland	17,000
St. Albans	7,500
St. Johnsbury	7,600
Windsor	3,700



Creative Community Programs Priority Projects ...

... By Community

Bellows Falls / Rockingham

- Provide Year-round Access to Local Foods
- Revitalize “The Island”
- Support a Strong Restaurant Culture

Grand Isle County (Lake Champlain Islands)

- Develop Trails to Tour Local Farms, Arts, and Other Highlights
- Expand Options for Indoor Community Space
- Form a Task Force on Increasing Off-Season Activity

Hardwick

- Create a Business Incubator and Arts Space
- Develop the Future of the Town House
- Expand Recreation in the Hardwick Lake Area
- Spruce Up Downtown Hardwick

Manchester

- Create the Infrastructure for State-of-the-Art Communications Technology
- Establish a Local Foods Retail Center
- Establish Manchester as a Leader in Sustainability and Green Business

Middlebury

- Establish a Business Incubator
- Establish Middlebury as a Pioneer in Alternative Energy Production and Management
- Found a Community Creative Economy Umbrella Association
- Make Better Use of the River

Plainfield

- Establish Plainfield as a Learning Community
- Form a Local Creative Economy Association
- Make Downtown Plainfield More Welcoming to Pedestrians

Randolph

- Create Stronger Collaborations Around the Creative Economy with an Ongoing Process to Support Creative Economy Projects
- Improve Internet Access
- Promote Environmental Initiatives that Define Randolph as a Green Community

Richmond

- Develop and Market a Richmond Trails System
- Form an Alliance for Creative Development of Existing Properties
- Hold a Harvest Festival to Celebrate Local Agriculture

Rutland

- Advance Rutland as a Recreation Center
- Build a Central Open Air Mall on Center Street
- Rutland as an Arts and Culture Destination
- “Sustainable Rutland” – A Model City

St. Albans

- Bring Arts and Community Projects to Taylor Park
- Organize Evening Events to Bring Activity Downtown after Dark
- Build an Arts Center
- Promote the Digital Culture through a St. Albans Technology Service Provider

St. Johnsbury

- Develop an Eastern Avenue Park (Including Farmers' Market Site)
- Highlight Local Cultural Organizations
- Improve St. Johnsbury's Web Presence

Windsor

- Begin a Public Relations Campaign
- Create an Arts Incubator
- Form a Local Leadership Group

... By Theme

All twelve towns in the CCP have worked diligently to brainstorm and then define their top priorities. A key component of the CCP involved assembling leadership teams representing state, federal, nonprofit, and private sector resources to visit each community. These Resource Team members participated in early forums, and/or helped the task forces that were developed to build initial work plans and resource lists. Once the community set its priorities, Resource Team members contributed their ideas to the list of final recommendations that each community received as part of their town's report.

Though each community found its own priorities, some common themes emerged and are outlined below. VCRD has aggregated the recommendations from Resource Team members to echo these headings in order to assist other communities who may undertake similar projects. This master resource and the twelve town reports are available on the CCP Report DVD.

Recreation/Parks/Environment

Includes goals from these Creative Communities Reports:

- Expand Recreation in the Hardwick Lake Area
- Bring Arts and Community Projects to Taylor Park (St. Albans)
- Develop an Eastern Avenue Park (St. Johnsbury)
- Make Better Use of the River (Middlebury)
- Develop and Market a Richmond Trails System
- Rutland as a Recreation Center
- Make Downtown Plainfield More Welcoming to Pedestrians

Community, Arts and Business Spaces

Includes goals from these Creative Communities Reports:

- Build an Arts Center (St. Albans)
- Create an Arts Incubator (Windsor)
- Create a Business Incubator and Arts Space (Hardwick)
- Develop the Future of the Hardwick Town House
- Establish a Business Incubator (Middlebury)
- Expand Options for Indoor Community Space (Grand Isle)

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
- Improve Internet Access (Randolph)
- Promote the Digital Culture through a St. Albans Technology Service Provider

Developing Collaborations

Includes goals from these Creative Communities Reports:

- Establish Strong Creative Economy Collaborations (Randolph)
- Form a Local Creative Economy Association (Plainfield)
- Form an Alliance for Creative Development of Existing Properties (Richmond)
- Found a Creative Economy Association (Middlebury)
- Begin a Public Relations Campaign (Windsor)
- Form a Local Leadership Group (Windsor)

Sustainability, Energy and Green Business

Includes goals from these Creative Communities Reports:

- Establish Manchester as a Leader in Sustainability and Green Business
- Establish Middlebury as a Pioneer in Alternative Energy Production and Management
- Promote Environmental Initiatives that Define Randolph as a Green Community
- Sustainable Rutland

Agriculture

Includes goals from these Creative Communities Reports:

- Hold a Harvest Festival to Celebrate Local Agriculture (Richmond)
- Establish a Local Foods Retail Center (Manchester)
- Provide Year-round Access to Local Foods (Bellows Falls)
- Develop Trails to Tour Local Farms, Arts, and Other Highlights (Grand Isle)

Cultural Connection

Includes goals from these Creative Communities Reports:

- Highlight Local Cultural Organizations (St. Johnsbury)
- Rutland as an Arts and Culture Destination

Downtown Improvements

Includes goals from these Creative Communities Reports:

- Open Air Mall on Center Street (Rutland)
- Organize Evening Events to Bring Activity Downtown after Dark (St. Albans)
- Support a Strong Restaurant Culture (Bellows Falls)
- Revitalize "The Island" (Bellows Falls)
- Spruce Up Downtown Hardwick

Establish Your Area as a Learning Community

- Establish Plainfield as a Learning Community

Increasing Off-Season Activity

- Task Force on Increasing Off-Season Activity (Grand Isle)



Community Profiles and Highlights

Complete reports from each of the twelve communities are included on a free multimedia DVD available from VCRD.

Bellows Falls

In the mid-1990s, the outlook in Bellows Falls – as in many downtowns in Vermont and across the country – was relatively bleak. Some major employers had left the town, buildings in the heart of downtown stood in disuse, young peoples’ interest in moving to rural areas had declined sharply since the 1970s and early 1980s, and national economic and cultural trends only seemed to intensify the problems. Responding to what seemed like a crisis, many individuals, groups, and municipal entities were galvanized into action and have remained active ever since.

Many of the projects initiated during this time fell under what we now think of as the creative economy. For example, downtown revitalization began with restoring a key historic building for use as affordable housing, artists’ studios and gallery space. Other projects included renovating more buildings for a mix of commercial and residential space, developing a lively music scene (including the annual Roots on the River festival) and using this exciting community life to attract innovative businesses. Bellows Falls quickly picked up on the emerging statewide interest in the creative economy. It hosted two forums as part of the statewide Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation study on the creative economy. In 2004, the Preservation Trust of Vermont held a statewide conference in Bellows Falls with a “creative community” theme. Robert McBride, founder of Rockingham Arts and Museum Project,

consults in Vermont and beyond our region on “creative economy” tools. With this background, the Creative Communities Program served as a way to consciously maintain a long-lasting creative economy effort.

The challenges of growing a creative economy and of maintaining the momentum in a rural community will always exist; there are no plateaus, even when a town has clear successes to demonstrate the usefulness of the creative economy perspective. Communities may never run out of issues to address, but they are also uncovering new opportunities to pursue. Robert McBride and Richard Ewald, who led the Creative Communities Program work in Bellows Falls, were determined to take full advantage of these to draw in new participants and harness their energy around new projects.

Robert and Richard built the Creative Communities Program in Bellows Falls around the theme of restoring the village to its former “Market Town” status. This view of a town’s character combines being a center for cultural and social activities with the need to provide basic goods and services from local, downtown stores. Three specific topics became the basis their work: **Beyond the Summer – Supporting Local Growers, Food Business Get-Together – Restaurant Marketing, and The Future of the Island**, a section of downtown separated from the rest of the village by a canal.

In 2006, Bellows Falls also hosted a **Leaders’ Summit** of approximately 70 creative economy organizers from around the state. The Creative Communities Program organized this as a way to develop a stronger peer network, while also giving attendees

a chance to explore what had happened in Bellows Falls. That day's workshops highlighted four issue areas: incubators, arts and downtown revitalization, town image and working with natural assets. It also established the precedent for mutual, creative learning that Bellows Falls had promoted for more than 15 years.

Grand Isle County (Lake Champlain Islands)



Grand Isle County consists of five towns (Alburgh, Isle La Motte, North Hero, Grand Isle, and South Hero) located on three islands in Lake Champlain.

While the Islands' geography makes this county unique, they also share many of the key issues facing other communities. Two prominent concerns that emerged in the preparations for this Creative Communities Program were (1) balancing an economy that is busy in one season and tremendously slow in another and (2) increasing cooperation between neighboring towns.

In summer, second homeowners and visitors increase the Islands' population by several thousand. Local businesses that serve this population see a wave of activity. Numerous events and performances take place around the Islands, often in outdoor venues or connected to outdoor recreation. Wintertime

and colder months, however, slow down considerably. This lull appears in both the business cycles and in activities available for full-time residents.

In addition to worries about the *slow* times of year, Islands residents have concerns about how to manage the busy times. One concern is the logistics of so many people entering the most popular regions of the county. Another is identifying best strategies for spreading the activity beyond those already-popular places. Perhaps the most important creative economy question is how to most effectively promote summertime activities that reflect the Islands' local culture. Many towns struggle with how much of a role tourism should play in their economy and whether appealing to visitors ultimately undermines their community's authenticity.

The Lake Champlain Islands also looked closely at how to increase cooperation between its five towns. All have distinct characteristics yet share the identity of being part of the Islands. Projects like offering hurricane relief in Louisiana or supporting county emergency services had started these towns on the path towards closer relations. The Creative Economy offered another umbrella for promoting this cooperation.

The final projects selected by Grand Isle County residents all have the potential for bringing greater unity. **Expanding Indoor Community Space** will help groups find places to hold events in inclement weather, including making space accessible and easy to find for every town. All towns will participate in building the community space database.

The idea of **Developing Trails to Tour Local Farms, Arts, and Other Highlights** can draw visitors to all towns in the Islands and to places off the common tourist routes. The trails also build from local talent and

character; these are not sites created simply to appeal to visitors. This project began with a weekend that brought out neighbors and travelers to explore the “Open Farm / Open Studio” tour in July, 2007.

Finally, the **Off-Season Activity** project team will build community activities at new times of year. This project generates activities for local residents as much as for visitors, while also boosting the reach of the tourist economy that makes up a significant part of the Islands’ economy. It began with a Nordic skating day in February, 2007.

Hardwick

The Hardwick area is “getting creative with its local economy”, as the title of May’s public forum pointed out. The emphasis is on “local.” The town is in an exciting phase of growing local business while at the same time ensuring that future growth won’t threaten Hardwick’s strong community character.

An early brainstorming with the area residents on the Creative Communities steering committee listed many creative economic assets already in place. For example, the Galaxy Bookshop is a local business that is also an established part of community life. Affordable space provides a point of entry for new businesses such as the Vermont Glass Workshop. Agricultural production builds a link to Vermont heritage while at the same time experimenting with new business models, such as marketing specialty cheeses or introducing new products like soy milk. Hardwick is also keeping pace with evolving technology, including VT Link, a local Internet provider. With the strong starting points already outlined, Hardwick could look for ways to support future success stories similar to those that have already occurred.

Everyone on the steering committee acknowledged that Hardwick serves as a center of activity for its neighboring towns. The steering committee used the Creative Communities process to ask how this role as a center could be enhanced through creative economy projects that benefit the region.



Hardwick Centennial House

Hardwick's unique economic and cultural history, as well as its neighborhood activities, are deep foundations for local pride and a strong sense of place. As one steering committee member pointed out, winter-time skating in a neighbor's backyard is more fun and creates a stronger connection to Hardwick than more common pastimes like watching TV. All types of positive, memorable experiences build a place where people want to live, work and locate businesses. The number of local entrepreneurs drawn from or attracted to Hardwick speaks to this fact.

Many Hardwick area residents are concerned that local activity and self sufficiency have been eroding and they want to do something to reverse it. From big issues like the fire in November, 2005, to the impression that fewer people walk from store to store meeting friends along the way, they are looking for ways to support a strong and traditional downtown.

Through almost two months of discussions, surveys, e-mails and knocking on local business owners' doors, the Hardwick Steering Committee found consensus on four projects that can advance creative economic development. **Sprucing Up Downtown** will provide a platform to unite businesses and residents, and reinvest everyone in downtown beautification. It will signal that Hardwick is a place with a growing economy and encourage people in the area to spend more time downtown. **Creating an Arts Center and Business Incubator** builds off of the existing entrepreneurial climate and makes small size an asset as individuals have room to explore their strong ideas, translating them into profitable business and building a signature renovation at the heart of downtown. Both **Developing the Future of the Town House** and **Expanding Recreation in the Hardwick Lake Area** contribute to quality of life in the area. These projects will enhance activities available to

the community, including venues that can bring neighbors together on a regular basis.

Manchester

Participants in the Manchester area Creative Communities forums had a clear sense of what was special about their community. Manchester is an original four-season destination, with activities all year round that cover recreation, the arts, shopping, culture and history. Its location close to multiple urban centers draws in both visitors and new residents. The local education system is one of the best in the state. Entrepreneurial actions in the past (such as building up the designer outlets, the start of major new businesses like Orvis, and early investment in Internet access) have paid off with economic strength today. Furthermore, today's successful businesses support community and cultural activities, which also receive support from a strong sense of local volunteerism. Manchester residents praise the wonderful quality of life available in the community as the town's key asset for developing the creative economy.

Alongside its numerous assets, Manchester faces serious challenges. For example, while Manchester draws businesspeople who work all over the world, the community worries about high housing prices and a local job pool in which earnings often can't meet these costs. This can lead to a situation where residents *need* to work elsewhere to afford to live locally. Some forum participants questioned whether the traditionally strong areas of retail sales and tourism had safeguards in place to weather problems such as the increase in Internet sales or rising fuel costs. Concerns over costs and job options tie into another broad challenge: the need to attract and retain young people. A further area of debate was the layout of downtown; forum participants discussed everything from

pedestrian-friendly access to the stores, to the unwelcome look of Routes 11 and 30, to whether town zoning policies required revision.

The three priority projects ultimately chosen to address existing concerns all share the common theme of staying one step ahead of national developments and trends.

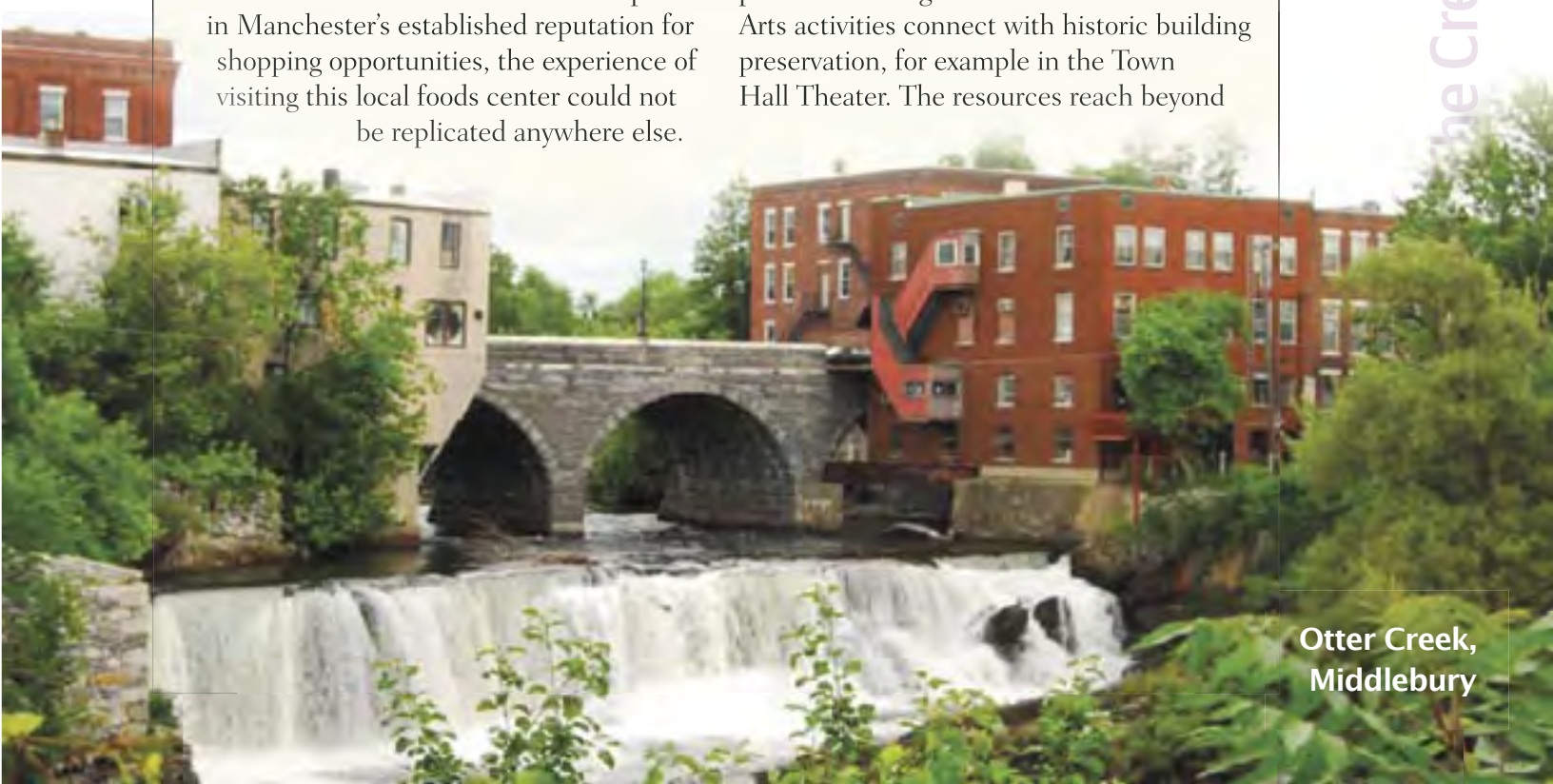
The project **Establish Manchester as a Leader in Sustainability and Green Business** builds on a growing business sector in Vermont and across the world. This action plan emphasizes the connection between a community's attitudes towards sustainability and its ability to attract innovative green businesses and the young people who are often at the forefront of environmental work.

A related initiative is to **Establish a Local Foods Center**. This is a project that plays off of a recognized Vermont brand attribute, highlights connections between community character and economic development, and builds from the link between environmental and business interests in the agricultural arena. Because of its local focus and its place in Manchester's established reputation for shopping opportunities, the experience of visiting this local foods center could not be replicated anywhere else.

Finally, Manchester wants to invest in **State of the Art Communications Technology**. Because the Manchester community connects so closely with major centers outside of Vermont, it is imperative that systems for communicating with distant locations remain at the highest quality. New technology and improved communications will also help more traditional businesses and organizations thrive, as regional, national, and international connections become standard practice. This initiative will help Manchester avoid problems communities around Vermont are facing today as their dial-up Internet connections become increasingly outdated.

Middlebury

The Middlebury area has all the components for being a center of culture and innovation. Cultural assets range from the long-running Festival on the Green music series, to the After Dark performances in the slow winter and spring months, to a professional opera company. Middlebury was an early site of Vermont crafts work, including the ongoing presence of Frog Hollow State Crafts Center. Arts activities connect with historic building preservation, for example in the Town Hall Theater. The resources reach beyond



Otter Creek,
Middlebury

Vermont with both national and international performers at Middlebury College's Center for the Arts.

Innovation within a rich cultural climate has always been a key to the success of Middlebury. The downtown continues to support locally-owned businesses that have devised strategies to remain competitive. Community initiatives, like the Addison County Relocalization Network (ACoRN) encourage new businesses in areas such as local foods and alternative energy. The agricultural community contains examples of innovation within a traditional field, such as dairy farms producing energy through anaerobic digesters (e.g. Foster Brothers, Blue Spruce).

Middlebury also has a talented group of community leaders interested in the creative economy as a development framework. Large turnouts with high energy characterized the local forums. Community members clearly feel that they have a strong foundation for the creative economy and that they need to build from that beginning.

One challenge is Middlebury's physical layout. The densely built downtown creates a hub of activity, but has limited areas for expansion. Traffic and parking can be a problem. The college is not in the downtown, creating a disconnect between the downtown businesses and the college campus community. The project **Make Better Use of the River** can address some of these challenges. It creates new space by developing an underutilized asset. Activities, events, or simply interesting space along the river can create a reason for people to visit downtown from other locations.

Another challenge is supporting new, entrepreneurial businesses. The Middlebury Business Association, Addison County Chamber of Commerce and Addison County

Economic Development Corporation all provide business assistance. At the same time, forum participants felt a piece was missing that could be filled by **Establishing a Business Incubator**.

The plan to become a **Pioneer in Alternative Energy** reinforces the idea of supporting entrepreneurial businesses. Developing local energy production capacity builds jobs and introduces new business avenues for farms, foresters, and others. At the same time, community-wide efforts to address energy concerns can establish Middlebury as a forward-thinking, creative place to locate.

Finally, Middlebury faces an issue shared by many towns with a wealth of creative economy activity: organizing local leaders to work collaboratively. The project to develop a **Creative Economy Umbrella Organization** tackles this. Furthermore, their starting concept of creating an "Open Middlebury" night clearly brings artists and businesspeople in close partnership with each other.

Plainfield

Plainfield joined the Creative Communities Program in early 2007. With a population of approximately 1,300, Plainfield was the smallest community to join the program. However, Plainfield and the Plainfield area clearly demonstrate the strong creative, entrepreneurial climate that we know exists in Vermont's villages, not just in larger towns.

Small villages present an important component of the creative economy. These locations often retain a traditional Vermont landscape of clustered residential and commercial areas, surrounded by relatively undeveloped (often agricultural) lands.

Home-based and start-up businesses may thrive with proprietors who seek a rural lifestyle. At the same time, both community and economic life face stresses from the number of residents who commute elsewhere for their work. Many villages worry that they will simply become bedroom communities for larger towns nearby, harming both cultural and economic life.

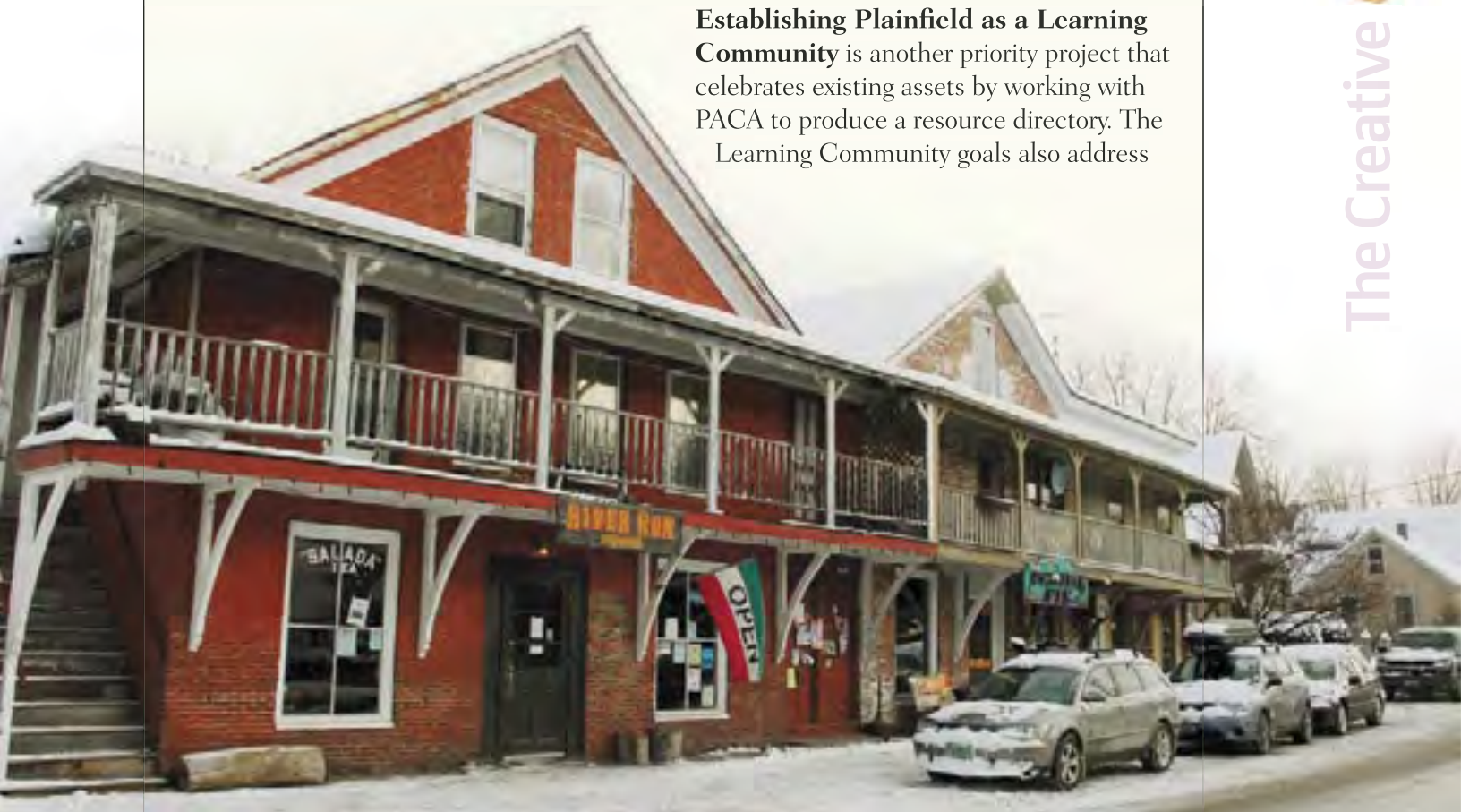
The Plainfield area has retained a unique personality. As the application to the Creative Communities Program stated: “How many other towns of just under 1,300 people can boast a Food Co-op, local dance troupe, monthly movie series, three quality restaurants, an art gallery (soon to be a second), a college, and a number of other establishments that already draw people from the region and even across the state?”

While Plainfield-area residents embrace the diversity, independence and free-thinking

quality of their home, they also have concerns about appropriate ways to continue these positive aspects. As with many other Vermont towns, Plainfield faces an ongoing challenge of balancing the perspectives of different generations of residents. They are bridging potential gaps between new arrivals, people who have been there for several decades, and those who have lived there for the better part of a lifetime.

Another question is how to establish systems for supporting creative developments without stifling that creativity through a formal structure. One priority project, the **Plainfield Area Community Association**, addresses this question by establishing an initial, cooperative platform for creative economy work. This group is starting with an inventory of resources to help area residents discover what *already* exists in their own backyard and make connections for future collaborations and projects.

Establishing Plainfield as a Learning Community is another priority project that celebrates existing assets by working with PACA to produce a resource directory. The Learning Community goals also address



multiple possible audiences – from those who have made Plainfield a permanent home to those who might visit for a single workshop or other learning experience.

A final project is **Making Downtown Plainfield More Welcoming to Pedestrians**. The initial project planning meeting for this group established that many possible projects exist, including traffic calming measures, pathways connecting different areas of town, and conveniences for those on foot or bike. The group moved quickly on applying for grants to begin work.

Randolph

One theme that captures many of Randolph's local assets is the concept of the Randolph area as a true center, both literally and figuratively. The town's central location in the state, easy access from interstates and public transportation, and meeting facilities at places like Vermont Technical College make Randolph an ideal gathering place. The Randolph area also has a critical mass of activities that engage local citizens in community life. One forum speaker described this as all the legs on the stool for self-sufficiency, including cultural activities, necessary goods and services, a strong and walkable downtown, and recreation.

The Creative Communities Program offered one way to bring together, and enhance, the components that define Randolph as a center of activity. A key part of this process was to bring individuals into new partnerships. Randolph strategically set the stage for these partnerships by pulling together diverse groups to write the application. The Randolph Area Economic Development Corporation, Randolph Area Chamber of Commerce, Chandler Center for the Arts, White River Craft Center, and Rural

School & Community Trust prepared the application, lending economic, cultural and educational perspectives to the work. The Outreach Committee continued this targeted effort by directly inviting leaders of diverse organizations to come together in attending the Creative Communities forums.

Participants in the public forums clearly echoed the idea that creative collaborations lay at the heart of future creative economy success. Community members therefore set developing this new network of partnerships, dubbed the **Heart of Vermont Collaborative**, as an initial priority. This project team chose inventorying and advertising existing creative economy assets as their first task.

The goal of **Promoting Environmental Initiatives that Define Randolph as a Green Community** not only invites new



partnerships, it also clearly builds from the existing projects that establish Randolph as a center of activity. An initial brainstorm of existing efforts ranged from sustainability education at Vermont Technical College to the new Fiddlehead festival celebrating local agriculture, to Randolph's position as a public transportation hub. The Environmental Initiatives group will begin to establish Randolph's "green" reputation with an early focus on solid waste management and the local food system, two hot topics with measurable outcomes.

The effort to **Improve Internet Access** will provide residents in the Randolph area with a tool to connect with each other, develop businesses, and access information about what is happening in their region. The Internet is becoming increasingly vital to economic development. It also has a key role to play in community strengthening. The **Heart of Vermont Collaborative**

project team recognizes this second aspect through an early focus on placing community information online and providing schools with the equipment needed to access that online information.

Richmond

Richmond is in many ways a classic Vermont village, with a vibrant downtown surrounded by rural and agricultural lands. However, this traditional town arrangement is becoming less common as a variety of pressures reduce the vitality of downtowns and convert rural and agricultural lands to more a suburban setting. Richmond in particular feels these pressures, as it sits only a few minutes' drive away from Burlington and Williston. Richmond wishes to celebrate its traditional character while also preserving that character for the future.



This restaurant preserves a piece of Richmond's heritage.

Participants in the creative economy forums noted several times that their village center sits precariously close to the “one stop shopping” of nearby Williston. Nevertheless, the heart of their village remains quite active. It houses many small businesses, from a popular bakery to a shoe shop that draws customers from around the region. The local restaurants have gained a statewide reputation for quality. Historic structures, such as the Round Church and Richmond Free Library, add to the sense of heritage. Richmond serves as a commercial center for smaller, nearby towns such as Huntington, Bolton and parts of Jericho.

In addition to its downtown, Richmond is an important agricultural community for Vermont. Viable farms surround the densely built center. New farms continue to take root in the area. Furthermore, key agricultural organizations have headquarters in Richmond, including the Northeast Organic Farmers’ Association (VT division), Vermont Fresh Network, and the Vermont Farm Bureau. Other organizations that support farmlands as part of their mission, such as the Vermont Land Trust and Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, also have local offices. The recently restored Monitor Barn provides a highly visible reminder of the region’s agricultural heritage.

As with many other towns that have strong components of a creative economy, Richmond also has concerns about the future for this base. Plans for development have already caused divisions within the community. It has been difficult to balance an open space and conservation ethic, interest in a compact village center, and need to support new business opportunities. One priority project, **Form an Alliance for Creative Development of Existing Properties**, directly tackles some of the difficult decisions associated with development.

A second priority project, **Develop and Market a Richmond Trails System**, approaches both infrastructure and quality of life issues. A clear trail system can provide a way for area residents to reach downtown without using individual cars. At the same time, trails provide a great recreational opportunity in keeping with the outdoors interests of many Richmond residents and potential visitors.

The final priority celebrates Richmond’s agricultural heritage through **Holding a Harvest Festival**. The festival will show off Richmond’s traditions and appeal to both local residents and visitors. Careful planning for the festival can ensure that it provides an economic boon to Richmond, both through direct sales that day and developing relationships that bring customers back to Richmond and the businesses highlighted in the festival.

Rutland

Rutland was one of five pilot communities in the Creative Communities Program. The city had already invested in local creative economy planning for several months before applying to it. A high profile forum presented in conjunction with the Vermont Council on Rural Development in June, 2005, drew 165 people. Following that initial meeting, more than 200 people became involved in discussions about moving the creative economy concept forward in Rutland. A main group of about 40 evolved to consider long-term objectives along with short-term action items.

One message came through clearly in the Creative Communities Program: Rutland City has a strong, unique role in Vermont’s state identity. Participants used “authentic”, “honest”, and “hard working” to describe their community. Analogies were drawn to cities



like Chicago and Milan. Speakers agreed that “cute” should never describe Rutland.

A sign of Rutland’s longstanding, authentic assets is its nearly intact downtown with a true Main Street flanked by historic 19th and early 20th century architecture. One Creative Communities project team is seeking to maintain the vibrancy of this core section through an **Open Air Market**. The goal is to encourage everyone to explore downtown and the businesses there by creating an engaging pedestrian environment. This project team tested their theory by first launching a series of Friday Night Live street closings to bring entertainment to Center Street throughout the summer in 2007.

Rutland also possesses strong recreational assets. While much outside attention goes to nearby Okemo and Killington resorts, Rutland area residents can enjoy their own recreation in places like Pine Hill Park and through a strong town recreation department. A Project Team to establish **Rutland as a Recreation Center** will enhance those opportunities through an extensive bike and pedestrian trail system.

The Project Team to **Establish Rutland as an Arts Destination** highlights two of Rutland’s key assets: strong arts and culture and a tradition of business involved in the community. This group has partnered with the Rutland Herald to start a regular arts and culture section in the paper, which includes a biweekly creative economy update, and to launch an integrated website with arts and cultural information for the Rutland area. The team continues to build links between local organizations, and to promote Rutland’s arts scene.

A fourth Project Team chose to focus on Rutland as a **Model Sustainable City**. This project built from statewide interest in sustainability as well as Rutland’s connection to sustainability-minded people through proximity to places like Green Mountain College and the Appalachian and Long Trails.

A hallmark of Rutland’s creative economy work has been a strong, diverse steering committee that has kept momentum going since the original infusion of energy at the Creative Communities forums. This strong organization has left Rutland well positioned to seek investment for its creative economy endeavors.

St. Albans City

St. Albans is building its reputation as a key cultural and economic center for northern Vermont. From hosting the Maple Festival to creating the world's largest artist's palette (as part of the Palettes of Vermont project), St. Albans is drawing attention. One Canadian visitor described St. Albans as "The Gem Across the Border" and many of the participants in St. Albans' Creative Communities process shared a belief that the city sat on the verge of being "discovered"—as a destination for visitors and as an attractive place to locate strong, entrepreneurial businesses that could count on St. Albans' quality of life to help retain local workers.

The ideas put forward in community forums suggest the ingredients already in place for a booming creative economy. For example, there is the historic architecture. Many buildings have been kept in good condition or restored, others could be restored, and all

Taylor Park



might become spaces for creative economy business. Taylor Park already provides a commanding centerpiece for the city and is increasingly used for community events. The St. Albans area enjoys a robust agricultural heritage, recognized statewide in institutions like the St. Albans Dairy Cooperative and the Maple Festival. This city possesses excellent restaurants. St. Albans has easy access to Montreal – providing an urban connection for area residents and a retreat to a more rural environment for visitors from Montreal.

The challenge for this group was how to put all of the existing ingredients together to move from "up-and-coming" to "established."

One approach was to think several years out – designing a project for **High Speed Internet Access** that could set St. Albans on the path for the best available Internet connections. The applications go beyond simply satisfying residents' need for a good Internet connection. This will make significant innovations possible for existing businesses, for example tele-medicine at the medical center or expansion of high tech industries like Mylan Technologies.

Another project focuses on bringing people together who hadn't necessarily cooperated in the past through **Building an Arts Center**. This would provide an outlet for local artists as well as a way to enjoy arts and arts education without traveling to a larger center like Burlington. The concept also encouraged St. Albans organizers to tour other cultural centers in the state and hear about what they do while sharing what St. Albans has.

St. Albans also benefited from the strong leadership of their downtown group, Saint Albans For the Future (SAFF). SAFF supported creative economy work from its earliest stages. Two project concepts ultimately came under the auspices of their own downtown work: **Arts and Community**

Events in Taylor Park and Organizing Evening Events. Taylor Park, in particular, has become a focus for activity as a recent branding study identified it as the signature asset for the city.

St. Johnsbury

St. Johnsbury has a host of creative economy assets, which combine to make the city a regional leader for the creative economy. For example, it is a gateway to the Northeast Kingdom, a region recently chosen as a top destination by National Geographic. A new Welcome Center enhances this gateway position. St. Johnsbury recently earned a top rating for small town adventure by National Geographic Adventure magazine. The downtown offers magnificent historic buildings with strong cultural components, such as the Fairbanks Museum and the Athenaeum. It is also a center of cultural activity and that cultural component is expanding. One ambitious project is Catamount Film & Arts' planned renovations for the historic Masonic Temple building, which will become the organization's permanent home.

In addition to having many strong starting assets, St. Johnsbury has consciously nurtured its creative economy development. The downtown program, St. Johnsbury WORKS!, joined statewide creative economy work early in the concept's evolution and has continued to take a lead in local planning efforts. The 2006 Town Plan highlighted the creative economy in many areas of potential development. Furthermore, St. Johnsbury has shown strong community interest in actively shaping the town's future. Over 100 people attended an initial creative economy summit (one that predated the Creative Communities Program) in April, 2005. St. Johnsbury modified its

Creative Communities process to reflect the foundational work already completed. The discussions began with the ideas already presented in earlier plans.

The projects chosen through the Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative reflect investment in St. Johnsbury as a regional leader that plans for both immediate action and longer-term goals around the local creative economy.

Developing an Eastern Avenue Park demonstrates public interest in a vital downtown. The project goal described for Eastern Avenue includes both local agriculture and local arts, highlighting the many facets of Vermont's cultural heritage. Eastern Avenue work strengthens downtown vitality by connecting the two streets (Main and Railroad Street). Ultimately, a unified downtown can offer extensive shopping, entertainment, social, and cultural opportunities for both local residents and visitors.

Improving St. Johnsbury's Web Presence responds to a need recognized by many towns as the Internet becomes a primary source of information. St. Johnsbury WORKS! took a lead in this project alongside a group of businesspeople who had simultaneously formed with the same goal. The new website



sets a model for providing useful information to residents, visitors, and potential residents. The website is at: discoverstjvt.com.

As with many Creative Communities participants, St. Johnsbury also identified a need to pull together the cultural organizations. The project **Highlighting Local Cultural Organizations** focuses on collaboration between cultural organizations. This project team sets a firm foundation for ongoing cultural activity in St. Johnsbury.

Windsor

Windsor is a community that prides itself on being “first.” It is the birthplace of Vermont and home to the first Vermont constitution (the first constitution to ban slavery, provide for a public education system, and grant universal voting rights to all males). Windsor was where manufacturers first demonstrated the effectiveness of interchangeable parts. These parts, made with highly precise cutting tools, were a major engineering advance that became known as the American System. The Vermont state prison system first began in Windsor. Artists of the Cornish Colony, closely affiliated with Windsor, developed new styles and generated cultural “firsts.” The first seal of Vermont was designed and struck in Windsor.

Today, Windsor is attempting to celebrate its history of firsts while also ensuring that it captures the same innovative, dynamic spirit for the future. One step in that direction has been to promote what already exists as part of the local creative economy. The Project Team to **Begin a PR Campaign** addressed this concern. The PR campaign concept dovetailed well with other initiatives underway, particularly Windsor’s participation in the Connecticut River Byways program, plans to build a Welcome Center, and receipt

of a grant for signage through the Preserve America program. This Project Team also brought in facilitators to help set the stage for planning the annual Windsor Days festival that celebrates the birth of the Republic of Vermont.

A second project team addressed a common concern: **Building Leadership Capacity** to complete community projects. While great leaders existed in every Creative Communities Program location, there are limits to how many tasks one person can assume. Windsor addressed this issue directly by forming a committee to look for ways to build a strong volunteer base for community projects.

A third project team chose to undertake an **Arts Incubator**. The Project Team began with setting up an e-mail list to reach a common understanding of what an arts incubator would accomplish. An incubator could harness creative energy, engage residents of all ages, and make use of Windsor’s many resources in the arts. These include a professional quality high school theater space, a cluster of museums and galleries, the nearby St. Gaudens National Historic Site and easy access to Dartmouth College.

Windsor’s original application to the Creative Communities Program noted that a “creative economy” title had not been explicitly applied to economic development plans for the town. Nonetheless, as both the application and subsequent public forums demonstrated, the local desire to support commerce, community and culture as part of economic development fits well with a creative economy perspective. This organizing framework provides a chance to systematically advance the shared goals of Windsor area residents.

Conclusion

While this report draws the Creative Communities Program (CCP) to a formal close, we know that many of the ideas and plans it hatched are just beginning.

Some of the results of this effort are visible in a new sense of participation and momentum, new partnerships, and the energy of more than 40 work teams addressing priorities in the 12 towns and cities in the program. The long-term outcomes are quantitatively incalculable. We can't know today which of these ideas will incubate into foundations of future economic development in their communities—but we know that many will and others are likely to adapt in new directions. Because of the CCP, community members are part of creative new collaborations, and have organized their power to advance innovative community development projects.

After hundreds of meetings and thousands of miles, what have we observed?

We've been reminded that Creative Economy is an elastic term that stretches and bends in ways that make it a perfect umbrella for grassroots community development incorporating culture and innovation. No two towns defined it the same way, and some didn't even try to define it at all except in practice. Yet every selected community understood the usefulness of the 'creative economy' in bringing people together to think about moving their community forward and creatively identifying specific ways to do it. As a lens, the Creative Economy crossed and broke down boundaries, freeing participants to find their shared vision and build plans to achieve them.

One thing the local efforts had in common was a strong sense of building on the character and tradition of the community, and using it to develop or improve a unique brand identity, better the quality of life,

enhance amenities, celebrate and support art and cultural resources, support job growth, and expand the sustainability and diversity of the local economy.

We also found the CE umbrella opened much further than we originally thought. For example, agriculture and recreation were fairly minor topics in the 2004 VCCI report, *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy*. Yet, both emerged as major themes during the life of the CCP. Participants inherently understood the connections between cultural and recreational amenities and developed plans that began to tie the two together. In a similar vein, many towns saw how important it is to preserve their built heritage, and at the same time recognized the value of nearby

As a lens, the Creative Economy crossed and broke down boundaries, freeing participants to find their shared vision and build plans to achieve them.

open land and agricultural viability. The conceptual silos that sometimes keep people from seeing their common goals opened at the seams, and the seeds of ideas began cross pollinating and germinating.

Some priorities that have surfaced in multiple communities include:

- ⦿ Establishing arts and business spaces
- ⦿ Expanding internet access and technology applications
- ⦿ Developing collaborations
- ⦿ Advancing sustainability and green business
- ⦿ Initiating new improvements in downtowns

We also learned the importance of keeping our framework flexible. One rigid approach would not have fit each of the diverse communities we worked with. At each step of the way, we learned what works and modified our process when it didn't.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development has been proud to help communities advance the creative economy in Vermont. We've enjoyed coordinating the efforts of so many state, federal, nonprofit and business resources who have participated as facilitators and advisors for all twelve communities. We recognize the leaders who set the mould in Vermont and continue to provide a vision for other communities' efforts. We understand though, that the real and most crucial work has been local, and we feel honored to have participated in this process with the many volunteers and leaders who have put themselves on the line to better their communities. Their work will outlast us all.

Resource List

At right is a partial alphabetical list of links to resources for communities thinking about creative economy projects. Some offer grants or loans, but many offer services useful in planning and developing ideas.

A complete list, by project topic, is available on the CCP resource DVD, available from the Vermont Council on Rural Development.



WOOL-FM, a low power community station serving the Greater Falls area of Vermont and New Hampshire

Organization	Contact
Association of VT Recyclers	vtrecyclers.org
Connecticut River Byways	byways.org
Foundation Library Directory	foundationcenter.org
Invent VT	inventvermont.com
Lake Champlain Bikeways	champlainbikeways.org/
Localvores	localvoreproject.org
National Main Street Program	mainstreet.org/
National Park Service Rivers & Trails Program	802 457-3368
Natural Resources Conservation Service	vt.nrcs.usda.gov
Preservation Trust of VT	ptvermont.org
Project for Public Spaces	pps.org
Tourism Data Center (UVM)	uvm.edu/~snrvtdc/
Trust for Public Lands	tpl.org
USDA Rural Development	USDA Rural Development
USDA VT/NH	rurdev.usda.gov/VT/vtnhcf.htm
UVM Center for Rural Studies	crs.uvm.edu
VT Agency of Agriculture	vermontagriculture.com
VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development	dca.state.vt.us
Dept of Economic Development	thinkvermont.com
Downtown Program	802 828-5212
Dept of Tourism and Marketing	vermontpartners.org
VT Travel Planner	vermontvacation.com
VT Agency of Natural Resources	anr.state.vt.us
Dept of Forests, Parks & Recreation	vtfpr.org/recgrant/trgrant.cfm
VT Trails & Greenways Council	vermonttrailsandgreenways.org
VT Agency of Transportation	aot.state.vt.us
VT Arts Council	vermontartscouncil.org/
VT Bike and Pedestrian Coalition	www.vtbikeped.org
VT Business Incubator Network	vtbusinessincubatornetwork.com
VT Center for Emerging Technologies	vermonttechnologies.com
VT Center for Geographic Information	www.vcgi.org
VT Community Development Association	229-9111
VT Community Foundation	vermontcf.org
VT Community Loan Fund	vclf.org
VT Conservation Youth Corp	vycc.org
VT Council on Rural Development	vtrural.org
VT Crafts Council	vermontcrafts.com
VT Department of Public Service	publicservice.vermont.gov/
VT Directory of Foundations	cpgfundraising.com
VT Division for Historic Preservation	historicvermont.org
VT Economic Development Authority	veda.org
VT Environmental Consortium	vecgreenvalley.org/
VT Farm Bureau	vtfb.org
VT Fresh Network	vermontfresh.net
VT Housing and Conservation Board	vhcb.org
VT Humanities Council	vermonthumanities.org
VT Land Trust	vlt.org
VT Museum and Gallery Alliance	vmga.org
VT Recreation Trails Grants Program	241-3690
VT River Conservancy	vermontriverconservancy.org/
VT Rural Broadband Project	VTRuralBroadband.org
VT Small Business Development Center	sbdcvt.org
VT Workforce Development Council	828-4156

Acknowledgements

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VCRD appreciates **USDA Rural Development's** donation of space and materials in support of the Creative Communities Program; their partnership has been a key factor in all our efforts.

VCRD is also indebted to all our **federal, state, and local partners** who joined us as members of teams that visited each community, facilitated discussions, and identified potential resources that specifically related to each of the towns' priorities. Their knowledge and clarity saved countless hours of research, and their presence helped jump start longer term relationships with each community. You can find their names and contact information in the twelve community reports.

At each step along the way, the **CCP Advisory Committee** was extremely valuable in setting direction and keeping the program focused on meeting the initial goals it established. VCRD thanks Alex Aldrich, Joss Besse, Paul Bruhn, Chip Evans, David Lane, and Pat Menduni for their ideas, their commitment and their service to the communities.

We appreciate the careful eye of photographer **Wayne Fawbush** who captured wonderful images of both places and people during the CCP.

Of course without the energy and dedication of CCP Project Director **Helen Labun Jordan**, the CCP would never have accomplished so much; we deeply appreciate her leadership.

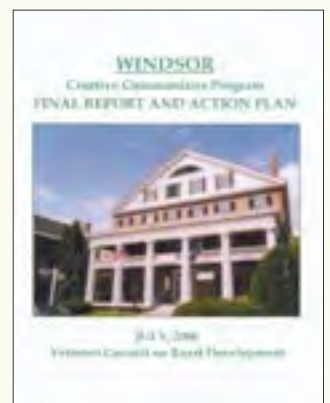
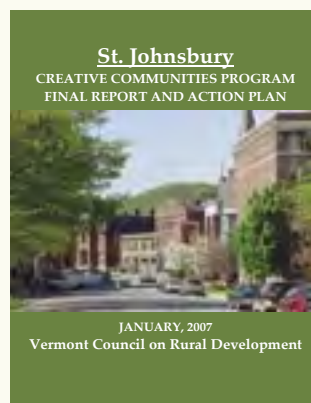
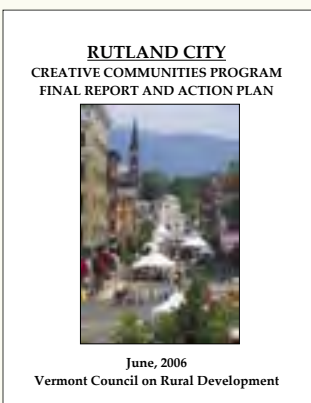
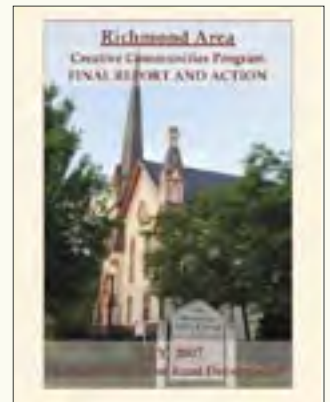
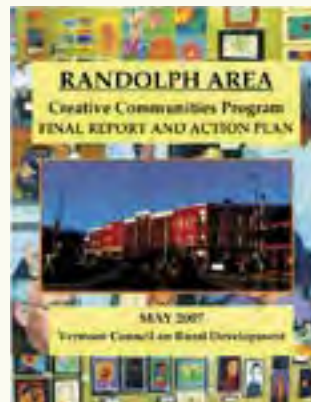
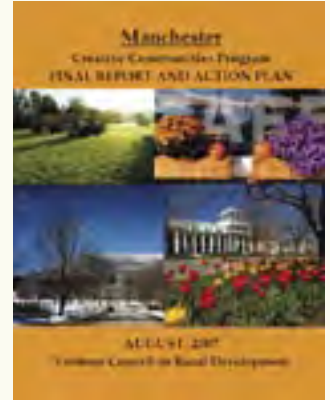
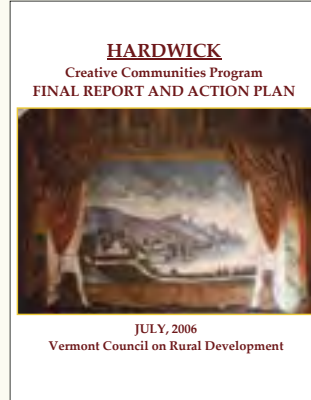
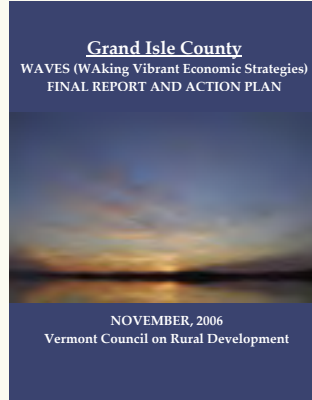
Bonnie Smoren also deserves significant credit for all her assistance and contributions to the program.

Members of the **Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation** were instrumental in providing the early vision for advancing the creative economy in Vermont. We are grateful to **Liz Stedman** for the managerial and communications expertise she brought to the initial phase of our creative economy initiative.

VCRD recognizes the tremendous skills **Michael Levine** brought to expand the visibility and strength of the entire process, including his work on this Final Report.

Finally, **Alex Aldrich**, Executive Director of the Vermont Arts Council, merits special mention for being the early leader and inspirer of the creative economy movement in Vermont.

VCRD established a framework and vision for this Creative Communities Program, but we know nothing moves forward without grassroots, **community leadership**. This was incredibly evident throughout the CCP, where community teams formed almost overnight, brainstormed ideas, applied to participate in the program, and worked hard to build momentum once selected. As the process unfolded, more people stepped up to join and lead committees, flesh out details, define priorities, and broaden support for the common goals. The time and energy contributed by each of them was essential to the success of the program; they are heroes for their towns and for Vermont.



Credits:

Paul Costello, VCRD Executive Director
 Helen Labun Jordan, Director, Creative Communities Program
 Michael Levine, Producer, final report
 Brian P Graphic Arts, Design, www.brianpgraphics.com

All photographs courtesy of Wayne Fawbush except:

Bread and Puppet pageant: Rockingham Arts and Music Project (RAMP)
 Flynn Center for the Performing Arts: Jim Westphalen
 Brandon parade: Brandon Area Chamber of Commerce
 Lamoille County Grange: River Arts
 Thistle Hill Pottery: Jessica Klein
 State House conference: Maria Blais
 Manchester farm: Lee Krohn
 Paramount Theatre: The Paramount
 Rutland Friday Night Live: Jerry LeBlond, Photiques, LTD and the Rutland Downtown Partnership



The Creative Communities Program



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