

# 2022

## VERMONT COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP SUMMIT AUGUST 10, 2022 REPORT

PRODUCED BY: VERMONT COUNCIL ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT



# INTRODUCTION

The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) was proud to welcome 500 leaders from across the State to the 2022 Vermont Community Leadership Summit to build their skills, share opportunities, network, and learn. Here at VCRD, our goal is to “unleash the power of Vermonters to create a better future,” and by bringing hundreds of leaders together for a day to share opportunities, ideas, and inspiration, we’re doing exactly this. As an organization that believes in local leadership, we are amazed by the work that you are doing in your communities as leaders each and every day.

The Summit is also a day to celebrate the successes of you and your communities. Each of you have shown resilience through various challenges – especially over the past two years – that through hard work and determination, have brought light into your communities to build a better future, and this deserves celebration. We must learn from one another and celebrate our small steps towards strengthening, repairing, or building anew the civic fabric that binds us and our communities together. We are constantly inspired and are honored to be working on behalf of rural communities – and their leaders – each and every day.

It was a pleasure to see you in-person at our 2022 Vermont Community Leadership Summit! As always, we thank you for the great work you are doing for your communities.

## A FEW SPECIAL THANKS

### 2022 STEERING COMMITTEE:

**Umesh Acharya**

Vermont Afterschool

**Ted Brady**

Vermont League of Cities & Towns

**Jen Carlo**

NEK Collaborative

**Simeon Chapin**

VSECU

**Susan Clark**

Slow Democracy

**Ben Doyle**

Preservation Trust of Vermont

**Christopher Kaufman-Ilstrup**

Vermont Humanities

**Sarah Lang**

Northern Borders Regional Commission

**Kate McCarthy**

Vermont Community Foundation

**Devon Neary**

Rutland Regional Planning Commission

**Thato Ratsebe**

Association of Africans Living in Vermont

**Lisa Ryan**

Vermont Law School

### PLENARY PERFORMER & SPARK STORY SPEAKERS:

**Rajnii Eddins**, Plenary Performer

*Poet, Emcee, Teaching Artist*

**Rich Holschuh**, Director,

Atowi Project

**Thato Ratsebe**, Deputy Director,

Association of Africans Living in Vermont

**Nic Stark**, Spark Story Speaker

*Goal Champion*, Poultney Rebranding Effort

**Kate Whitehead**, Danville Village to Village Initiative,

Danville Train Station Committee

### Remembering Marshall Webb

A pillar in Vermont, Marshall Webb will be remembered as an exceptional leader in his own community of Shelburne - and beyond.

Marshall was a member of VCRD's current Climate Catalysts Cohort and served on the *Developing and Implementing Community-Based Climate Solutions* panel at the 2022 Vermont Community Leadership Summit.

He will be greatly missed by his friends, family, and fellow leaders across Vermont.



# 2022 LEADERSHIP AWARDS

The **VT Community Leadership Award** is presented each year to 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. VCRD presents the award to highlight the work of community heroes who epitomize the best spirit of local community service, who volunteer their time, and who have made their community a better place. The **Vermont Lifetime Leadership Awards** are given less frequently, and celebrate a career dedicated to these same ideals.

The Lifetime Leadership Award is being presented to **Brenda Torpy**, the former CEO of Champlain Housing Trust (CHT), and **Sarah Carpenter**, the former Executive Director of the Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA). The 2022 Community Leadership Award will be given to **Pam Parsons** of Richford and the Executive Director of the Northern Tier Center for Health (the NOTCH).

**Brenda Torpy** was the founder and CEO of CHT from 1991-2021. Starting as a community organizer in rural Vermont, Brenda worked as Senator Bernie Sanders’ first Housing Director in Burlington, and at the VHFA on Policy and Program Development. She also formed and led Northgate Non-profit to acquire, preserve and improve 336 at-risk affordable rentals on behalf of the tenants who govern it now. Brenda was a Ford Foundation leader for a Changing World, and has served on the Advisory Committees of the region’s Home Loan and Federal Reserve Banks and the Boards of the National CLT Network and successor Grounded Solutions Network. She now leads CHT’s efforts in providing direct training and technical assistance on these models across the US and internationally. With a wonderful sense of humor and kindness, Brenda has touched many hundreds of lives through her work.



**Sarah Carpenter’s** service to Vermont has taken many forms. Sarah was elected Burlington City Councilor in 2020 and serves on the Community Development and Neighborhood Revitalization Committee, the Charter Change Committee and as Chair of the Human Resources Committee. She served as the Executive Director of the Vermont Housing Finance Agency from 1998 to 2018, an organization dedicated to “promoting affordable, safe and decent housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income Vermonters.” Sarah is also Chair of the Vermont Rental Housing Advisory Board, and served as the Executive Director of Cathedral Square Corporation from 1983 to 1998.

The 2022 Community Leadership Award was awarded to **Pam Parsons**. Pam was hired as the Executive Director of the NOTCH in 1999. She is actively involved in her community and has served on several Boards of Directors including those of: OneCare VT, Bi-State Primary Care Association, Vermont Rural Ventures, Richford Economic Advancement Corporation, Richford Renaissance Corporation, and Pharmacy Network, LLC. Pam has committed herself to improving the health and welfare of area residents. Her involvement with multiple community partners epitomizes Pam’s collaborative and innovative approach for taking care of people.

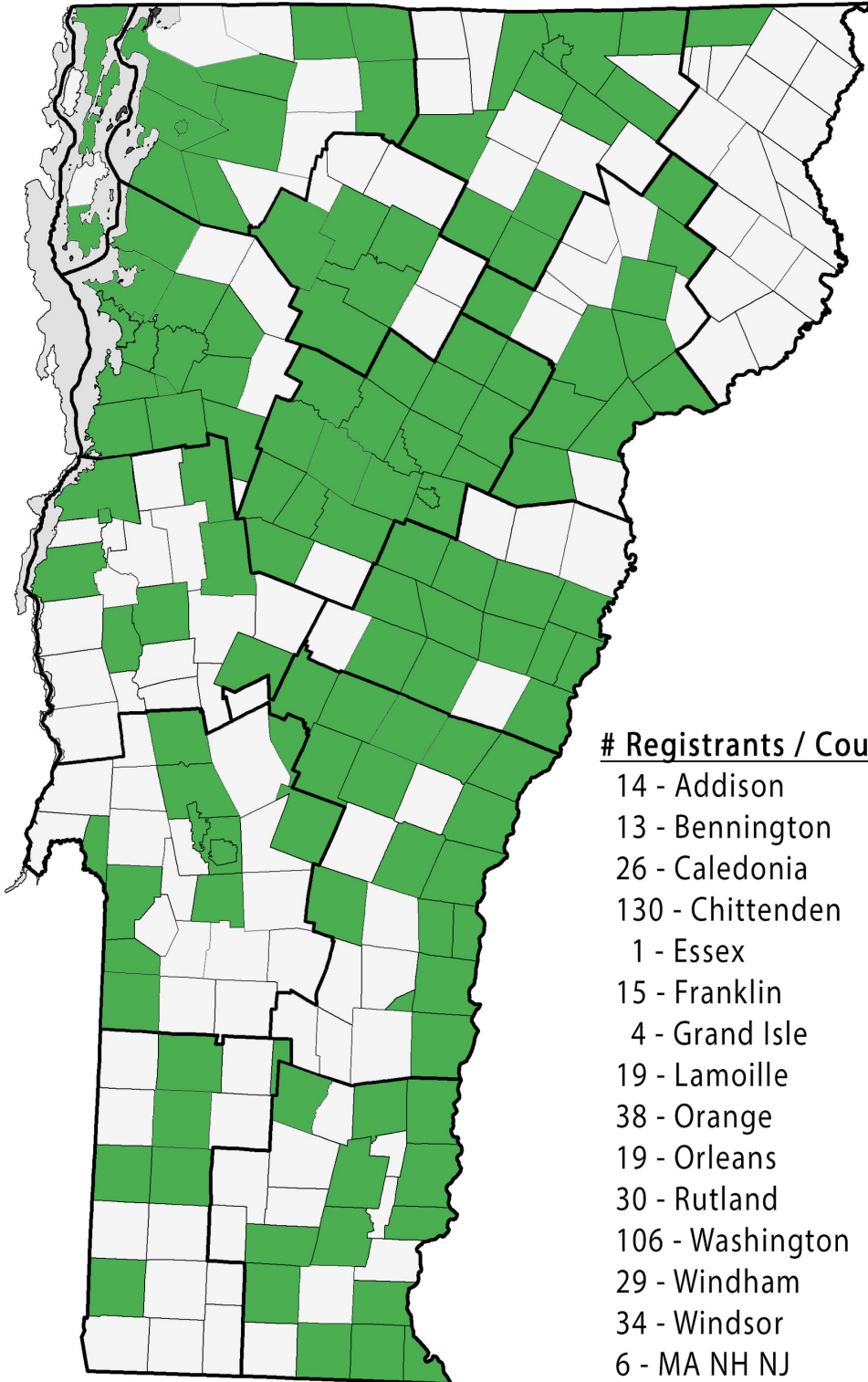


# SPEAKERS

- Belan Antensaye** *Public Policy and Research Analyst, City of Burlington Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Department*
- Alex Beck** *Initiative Director, Southern Vermont Working Communities Challenge*
- Jessica Brodie** *Executive Director, Vermont Recreation & Parks Association*
- Tayt Brooks** *Deputy Secretary, Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development*
- Katie Buckley** *Director, Federal Funding Assistance Program Vermont League of Cities and Towns*
- Carrie Caouette-DeLallo** *Founder and Director, Chelsea Arts Collective*
- Rae Carter** *Founding Co-Creator, EmpowR*
- John Castle** *Executive Director, Vermont Rural Education Collaborative*
- Michelle Caver** *Past Post Commander, VFW Post 782*
- Susan Clark** *Founder, Consultant Slow Democracy*
- Maura Collins** *Executive Director, Vermont Housing Finance Agency*
- Julia Connell** *Community Development Specialist, Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development*
- Adrianna Corbett** *Student*
- Liz Dallas** *Owner, Vital Leadership Coaching*
- Sarah Danly** *Initiative Director, White River Valley Consortium*
- Xusana Davis** *Executive Director, Vermont Office of Racial Equity*
- Johanna de Graffenreid** *Outreach Organizer, Vermont Creative Network*
- Sara Defilippi** *Director of Partnerships and Community Engagement, Vermont Dept. of Tourism and Marketing*
- Cindy Delano** *Barton Giving Garden*
- Megan Durling** *Head of School, East Burke School*
- Rajni Eddins** *Poet, Emcee, Teaching Artist*
- Jordyn Fitch** *Community Engagement Producer, CATV*
- Maisie Franke** *Student*
- Jeff Gephart** *Serial Enabler, Town of Rochester*
- Parwinder Grewal** *President, Vermont State University*
- Lindsey Halman** *Executive Director, Up For Learning*
- Meg Hammond** *Executive Director, Generator*
- Charlie Hancock** *Selectboard Chair, Town of Montgomery*
- Rich Holschuh** *Director, Atowi Project*
- Becky Holt** *Executive Director, Vermont Story Lab*
- Christie Howell** *Program Associate, Up For Learning*
- Mark Hughes** *Executive Director, Vermont Racial Justice Alliance*
- Jeannie Jenkins** *Bennington County*
- Alyssa Johnson** *Community Projects Associate, Vermont Council on Rural Development*
- Jenna Koloski** *Community Engagement and Policy Director, Vermont Council on Rural Development*
- Saudia Lamont** *Co-Creator, EmpowR*
- Danny Lang** *President, REclaimED*
- Seth Leonard** *Managing Director of Community Development, Vermont Housing Finance Agency*
- Jamison Lerner** *Program Officer, Johnson Family Foundation*
- Ana Lindert-Boyes** *Student*
- Brian Lowe** *Executive Director, Vermont Council on Rural Development*
- Keith Marks** *Director, Next Stage Arts*
- Geoff Martin** *Intermunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator, Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission*
- Maeve McBride** *CPG Enterprises*
- Kate McCarthy** *Program Officer, Vermont Community Foundation*
- King McMillan** *Executive Director and Founder, Fight For Kids Foundation Inc*
- Stephen Michon** *Working Cities Manager, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston*
- Julie Moore** *Chair, VCRD Board*
- Baird Morgan** *Pittsford Village Farm*
- Jon Michael Muise** *Area Director, USDA Rural Development*
- Devon Neary** *Executive Director, Rutland Regional Planning Commission*
- Auishma Pradhan** *Student*
- Monique Priestley** *Founder, The Space on Main | Vermont Leadership Institute*
- Thato Ratsebe** *Deputy Director, Association of Africans Living in Vermont*
- Curtis Reed, Jr.** *Executive Director, Vermont Partnership for Fairness and Diversity*
- Aly Richards** *Executive Director, Let's Grow Kids | VCRD Board*
- Emily Rosenbaum** *Initiative Director, Working Communities Challenge Lamoille County*
- Kim Rupe** *Development and Communications Associate, Vermont Council on Rural Development*
- Tino Charles Rutanhira** *Board Chair, Vermont Professionals of Color Network*
- Rebecca Sanborn Stone** *Community Workshop LLC*
- Jessica Savage** *Director of Community Collaboration, Vermont Council on Rural Development*
- Olivia Scharnberg** *Student*
- Gillian Sewake** *Director, Discover St. Johnsbury*
- Laura Sibia** *State Representative Wilmington-Dover, Vermont State Legislature*
- Katherine Sims** *State Representative Orleans-Caledonia District, Vermont State Legislature*
- Misty Sinsigalli** *Area Director, USDA Rural Development*
- Nic Stark** *Goal Champion, Poultney Rebranding Effort*
- Dawn and Greg Tatro** *Jenna's Promise*
- Eli Toohey** *Initiative Director, Greater Barre Working Communities Challenge*
- Paul Toth** *Chief Culture Strategist, Vital Leadership Coaching*
- Don Turner** *Town Manager, Town of Milton*
- Dora Urujeni** *Case Manager, Community Asylum Seekers Project*
- Jeannine Valcour** *Grant Proposal Developer, University of Vermont Gund Institute*
- Weiwei Wang** *Co-Founder & Director of Operations & Development, Vermont Professionals of Color Network*
- Sarah Waring** *State Director, USDA Rural Development*
- Becca Washburn** *Director of Lands Administration and Recreation, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation*
- Marshall Webb** *Carbon Drawdown Coordinator, Shelburne Farms*
- Nicol Whalen** *Arlington Common Ground*
- Kate Whitehead** *Danville Village to Village Initiative, Danville Train Station Committee*
- Sherry Winnie** *Grant Program Manager, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation*

# WHO JOINED US

OVER 500 REGISTRANTS FROM  
144 VERMONT CITIES & TOWNS.



## # Registrants / County

- 14 - Addison
- 13 - Bennington
- 26 - Caledonia
- 130 - Chittenden
- 1 - Essex
- 15 - Franklin
- 4 - Grand Isle
- 19 - Lamoille
- 38 - Orange
- 19 - Orleans
- 30 - Rutland
- 106 - Washington
- 29 - Windham
- 34 - Windsor
- 6 - MA NH NJ

# ACTION FORUM REPORTS

## F1- DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN VERMONT: CREATING DIALOGUE, ENGAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT

**Facilitator: Xusana Davis, Vermont Office of Racial Equity**

### Framing the Discussion: Data on Vermont demographics

- The 2020 Census data was significantly affected by “differential privacy” – in rural areas, the census tried to protect for privacy, but it meant that the data was less accurate.
- 2019 Census population data: median age by race
- 43 is median age, but largely representative by white population and indigenous population (47)
- People of color skew younger generally- 23-30 years old
- Population pyramid shows large working population/middle age, and large group nearing retirement. Education age grows, but drops off following higher education age
- Racial generation gap- in 2019, 3% of seniors in Vermont were People of Color (POC), and 11% of youth in Vermont were POC
- Relative to its size, Vermont has fewer young women than any other state. Generally, nationwide, women are a good indicator of future economic growth and promise.

### Participant Reflections on data or the morning presentation

- Chittenden is younger, has a greater share of POC and immigrants
- VCGI.gov has demographic mapping tools
- White people don't interrogate their own backgrounds the same way they consider the ethnic/national backgrounds of others
- Class differentials in conference attendance, what towns/areas are represented?
- Measuring wellbeing as indicator of societal progress rather than GDP, economic growth

### What's working? What are some assets/success stories in Vermont?

- Keep conversations about race actually focused on race
- The Office of Racial Equity as a state office is a huge asset
- Youth and adolescents are a beacon of hope- generationally, there seems to be more self-awareness and less prejudice
- Youth-led racial justice demonstrations
- Welcoming more immigrants and asylum seekers
- Youth racial dialogues organized in Vermont with a school in Mississippi at Harwood Union High School
- Legalizing non-citizen voting in Winooski, Montpelier, and potentially Burlington
- We are seeing increased conversations around land reparations
- Migrant Justice and their work towards fairness, humane treatment, and “milk with dignity”
- Moving towards fair and impartial policing strategies in some towns
- Universal School Meals
- Racial literacy consultants
- Prop 2- amending Vermont's constitution to abolish slavery and indentured servitude in all forms
- Talk early and often
- Vermont NAACP
- My Grandmother's Hands study groups/affinity groups in Montpelier
- Old Stone House programming
- Businesses are making commitments to more inclusive practices internally and externally
- Vermont Professionals of Color Network
- Cohort of Women of Color running for State office this election cycle
- 20 year commitment to equity in schools



## What challenges are you seeing? What are Vermont's/your community's needs in this arena?

- Racism in housing
- Transportation challenges
- Traditionalism
- Problem solving in vacuums instead of thinking intersectionally
- Lack of white acknowledgment on big racial issues and relying on POC to address and solve Lack of housing
- White saviorism
- There is a disconnect between local or state governance and the needs of the community
- Spiritual anemia
- Pushback in schools from parents on a more honest history curriculum that addresses racism and oppression
- Vermont exceptionalism
- Lack of affordable childcare
- Media sensationalism and dishonesty, unwillingness to showcase the work of racial activists
- Two-year terms for state legislators and a low compensation rate
- Vermont is not a welcoming atmosphere
- Food insecurity
- Subtle racism, microaggressions vs. apparent, in-your-face racism
- No county infrastructure, no way to address issues regionally or locally
- Policing, barriers in legal structure
- Treatment of prisoners incarcerated in Vermont
- Refugees and immigrants unable to access many federal or state resources
- Immigration disparity- VT welcoming Ukrainians, while deporting immigrants from countries like Haiti. There is Less empathy for conflict in nonwhite countries
- There is a lack of community for POC- voluntary and involuntary invisibility
- White supremacy culture, reliance on unpaid labor
- White progressives unwilling to talk about race

## What are your ideas to advance progress and improvement in this arena? How can we expand success and address challenges?

- Welcoming immigrants, who are typically younger. Vermont is a rapidly aging state, and working-age people are desperately needed
- Improve wage equity
- Affordable housing outside of section 8 systems- shared equity programs like Champlain Housing Trust as an example
- Making social safety net programs more inclusive and easier to access
- Universal comprehensive healthcare
- Legislators need to be willing to take more risks. So many systems need serious overhauls but we are too hesitant to make significant changes.
- Nontraditional financing for business startups
- Communities and workplaces figuring out how to have race-related conversations. Strong retention policies and trainings.
- Passing Prop 22 (reproductive freedom) in November
- Passing Prop 2 (abolishing slavery and indentured servitude)
- In 2020, when stimulus payments for 1200 dollars were authorized, Vermont recognized that many were excluded through SSN requirement. Vermont figured out a way to deliver payments to those who were excluded (without legal status, mixed-status households).
- We need more education on available services statewide and locally
- Getting the Education Quality Standards passed and getting comprehensive honest education in VT public schools around race and history
- Money for robust public transit, destigmatizing public transit
- Changing the way we market Vermont- what images do we use? Who are we hoping to attract?
- More noncitizen voting in municipalities
- "Vermont values" as a concept needs to be unpacked
- Addressing the attacks on school boards

## F2: BUILDING BRIDGES: BOOSTING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & BUILDING COMMUNITY CONNECTION AND UNITY

**Facilitator: Jessica Savage, Vermont Council on Rural Development**

### What is working today in this arena? What are Vermont's assets/bright spots/success stories?

- Free music in the NEK to bring communities together
- Contests with children (Green Up VT)- children love to be involved, compete, invent, share stories
- Community partners and agencies communicate well with each other
- Front Porch Forum
- Community conversations with civil disagreements
- There are a lot of active volunteers in North Hero
- When the ARPA money came in, community networks and existing systems helped Vermont act quickly and effectively
- Greater diversity in community members coming forward to share their experiences and help improve systems
- More inclusive hiring practices in city of Burlington- hired 7 New American community ambassadors to help increase engagement with that community
- Incorporating adaptive sports into Kingdom Trails
- Randolph's librarian Amy is an asset
- Women's group in NEK focused on getting women outdoors
- Recreation seems very strong post-pandemic



## What challenges are you seeing? What are Vermont's/your community's needs in this arena?

- We need to do better to engage the whole community and not just certain groups
- Re-engaging the community after bridges have been burnt
- Reaching rural populations who have limited Wi-Fi and phone service and limited transportation
- People are tired, and those who aren't tired are those who always speak up or involve themselves
- General low morale and burnout in town government (appointed and elected officials)
- Bad faith engagement in community processes- lack of desire to build anything, only there to stop progress or oppose change
- Age gap in volunteerism. Specifically less engagement among young parent age population
- Trying to get feedback before votes. No one will attend meetings until the very end of the process when there is little room for adjustment
- Spoken support doesn't materialize into actual action, volunteering, and voting
- Organizations need to collaborate in meaningful ways to prevent siloes
- Land access issues are causing fractures in community
- Incompatible desires from citizens for the future of their community
- Making people feel comfortable with gatherings and events after COVID
- Divide between newcomers and those with long time roots in their community
- The "old boys network"- people who have held power, done things the same way forever and don't feel open to any change
- Lack of positive engagement between town governance and citizens on tough issues

## What are your ideas to advance progress and improvement in this arena? How can we expand success and address challenges?

- Events designed for community newcomers
- We need to go slow as the transition from the pandemic has felt anxious and rushed. Going slow in building community and reintegrating.
- Using the schools to engage children in volunteerism early.
- Front Porch Forum is great for operating at local/neighborhood level. Using this resource to seek volunteers, warn public meetings, raise important issues, gather public comment
- Having fun and offering food to attract people to events
- Community art projects
- Celebrate successes and victories, build on that momentum
- Engaging newcomers through volunteer opportunities, helping them get to know their communities. Matching these people with task forces, committees, and projects based on their skills and interests
- Considering volunteer opportunities in terms of barriers: working hours, amount of commitment, etc
- Food is an excellent motivator- potlucks! Potlucks with guided community discussion
- Being mindful of burnout, thanking those that have led events or projects
- A "Calling Tree"- landline call system where those without internet or cell service receive calls on their landline notifying them about events or opportunities
- Online surveying tools, postcards with QR codes
- Education on online moderating- online communities can be a great tool, but can turn divisive and aggressive quickly. More knowledge on how to manage online groups as a tool, use them for good
- Daily interactions as a form of civic engagement- organic conversation, community bonds, building trust through getting to know your neighbors
- Asking community to vote or weigh in on priorities
- Town transfer stations are "the great equalizer"- huge gathering place in a lot of towns
- Proactively letting citizens know they are included and invited
- Centering job descriptions around engagement or outreach
- Current volunteers as mentors for those that want to get involved but maybe lack program awareness or technical knowledge on subject
- Selectboard and planning commission officials aren't thanked enough for what they do! They hear a lot of criticism but aren't thanked for their work
- Encouraging existing members of volunteer driven groups to bring people along, get their friends or family involved
- People should volunteer, but know their boundaries to avoid burnout
- Create literature and explanatory materials in "layman's terms" to lower barrier to engagement with city/town processes. Fewer acronyms and abbreviations
- Introducing newcomers to town personnel- where to find information, where to access town resources
- Resource document given out to real estate agents, who can pass along this information to people who move here
- Opportunities for BOTH newcomers and long-time residents – many long time residents might not know about their local government or resources
- Local access TV is a great resource
- Use mail to communicate- less divisiveness with mail than social media or online community forums
- More classes on civic engagement at middle and high school level
- Reaching youth early and continually providing civic engagement opportunities and education
- Using town clerk/town office as a resource. Town-wide mailings
- We should develop pairing programs that connect newcomers and long time residents, youth and retirees, sharing skills and taking on projects together. Building generational ties, connecting old and new faces in town
- Empowering youth through mentorship programs- high school students working with town officials
- Using community gathering spaces for advertising community events- gas stations, schools, cafes
- Using the library as a resource or starting place for new volunteers, people who are new to town. Can be easier to start with than selectboard or political work
- Boosting community comradery by including a monthly "nominate a neighbor"



# F3: INVITING AND ENGAGING NEW LEADERSHIP

## Facilitator: Jenna Koloski, Vermont Council on Rural Development

### What is working today in this arena? What are Vermont's assets/bright spots/success stories?

- People are engaging in a way that's not competitive
- There are people in leadership who have been serving in their role for a long time. This brings depth of knowledge, tenure (this can be a challenge if knowledge is lost when people leave, or if they are intimidating and stifle new ideas); also passion and commitment
- People with knowledge and history who have been long-time dynamic leaders could build succession plan to support new leaders
- In one organization, there is a group of people in their 20s and 30s who identify themselves as the next group of leaders
- Seeing courage and unabashedness of newer, younger voices in public conversations. There's a willingness to question the lore of Vermont. So impressed with fresh perspective!
- Half of the people in a previous session have just relocated – positions are getting filled in businesses and organizations, and hopefully that keeps happening.
- Although not enough people are stepping up, the people who are are unbelievable! Energy, passion! Being open to that happening is fabulous. Getting things done with energy, new ideas, move into new phases.
- One person signed up for a petition, then took off from there: brought others to an event, got petitions distributed, off and running! You can't have that fresh energy unless you go looking for it. But if someone comes to you, being ready to say "yes" to it is important.
- New energy from young people. Many young new faces running for the legislature.

### What challenges are you seeing? What are Vermont's/your community's needs in this arena?

- Taking the great knowledge and history and building succession planning around it.
- Depth of knowledge and tenure can be a challenge if knowledge is lost when people leave, or if they are intimidating and stifling new ideas.
- People are tired; that's combined with energy and enthusiasm, though.
- The word "leader" is loaded, because people think they need to be in charge of something. Sharing terminology, sharing power, encouraging people to make mistakes. How do you create the space and time to build skill sets with people who are new to whatever it is they're doing? How do you prioritize space?
- Sometimes people come in with tons of energy and new ideas, but collide with others in the group who may be stuck in their ways. It can deflate people who want to get involved because they don't feel welcomed – they'll go get involved in something else instead. How can long-time leaders be open to that newness?
- In some places the same names have been on the Selectboard for literally generations- in that place, a new person wanted to get involved but was turned off from doing so. In those cases, that person can take their energy and do something great, but it becomes standalone, and doesn't always get worked in to what the town as a whole can do.
- In some places (especially in municipal government), time... moves...slowly. That can be hard for people with new energy and leadership.
- Sometimes people say, "we tried that before..." and it's meant to be practical, but it's still discouraging. And just because ideas haven't worked before doesn't mean that they can't work now.
- Fewer younger people seem to have time, afford the time, or want to do it.
- Tension between leaders in place, who are focused on the "now," and new leaders coming in, who may be looking toward the future.
- Courage to risk and experiment – it can be scary to try something new. Look at where the pain is, and what the options are, and try something. Maybe it will work, maybe it won't.
- Younger people, to afford the cost of living, need another job, and that often happens during meeting times.
- There seem to be a smaller number of people moving into the leadership space. And the people who are moving into that space are people more comfortable drawing from the community – and engaging with only a small group of people - rather than leaning in and contributing to it. That drawing in and sticking with who you know could be a sign of depression. COVID has been a factor contributing to this, but among many.
- It could be that our structures have not evolved the way they need to, to accommodate to those who live their lives in different ways. Meetings during work days, for example.
- Board meetings could be less than monthly, and moved to the weekends instead. Looking at the way they are accommodating folks could be useful.
- People with children and covid migrants seem to be more attuned to climate urgency and issues. This means that the people who are working on an issue – long-time residents compared to new residents – is not very mixed.
- Maybe getting involved in certain things doesn't feel sufficiently relevant or interesting, and maybe people don't believe it will make a difference.
- "Nobody has asked." I'm in my mid-20s, moved to Vermont two years ago. I want to stay but it's hard to feel there's a place. Even going to vote was intimidating, and discouraged young people from voting.
- It can be hard to know how to get involved – what is the way in?
- Voting: not knowing what to expect when you walk in is a barrier. This can be hard for people who are neurodiverse or have anxiety.
- Our institutions do not support reaching out and getting people involved. People say "we welcome you to volunteer," but then also say "please do it the way it's always been structured." This means that there isn't room for creativity.
- We need to start being willing to pay for people to lead on some of the pain in the neck stuff in our community!
- We need to learn how to make space for new ideas and new people. Our current environment does not support that the way that it could. People want to contribute but we need to find a way to make it easier.

- Toxic social media environment really discourages people to step up. A local selectboard meeting may be fine, but then people get slammed on social media. People wonder why they should put themselves in that position. Hearing a lot of this across the state from school board members.
- Addressing wealthy and elderly communities – places where there's a high percentage of second homes; getting them to engage since COVID.
- A generational perspective: college 2008, moved to Vermont in 2011, and tried to get involved, but everything was competitive to volunteer places, because of where the economy was. So the resulting mindset is, "I need to be more senior before I have anything to offer. I guess I'll stop trying for now."

## What are your ideas to advance progress and improvement in this arena? How can we expand success and address challenges?

- Accommodate more people with better timing of meetings
- Need to provide babysitting so parents of younger kids could attend.
- State agencies should pay for people's time. So many state advisory councils expect people to do unpaid work. This seems like low hanging fruit! Investing in people's time.
- Let people know that that are indeed incentives and stipends available now to serve on some boards, committees, and commissions.
- Organizations that people work for could provide paid time off for volunteer service or to serve on other organizations Boards.
- Paying people for expertise is essential.
- Vermont Humanities created a policy to allow people to use their work time to do service that is related to their work. Willing to share the policy if interested.
- Open the door! Simplify the process to apply to be a board member. How might you be involved? What do you want to do to help? Invite people in.
- Word of mouth is great but you'll only reach a limited number of people. Instead, send out a mass email and ask.
- Make the invitation, but also demystify what it means to be a board member. Vermont Professionals of Color Network has not only a job posting board, but a Board position postings board.
- Teaching the "how to" of Robert's Rules so people feel more comfortable when they join more formal meetings
- Prepare our incoming volunteers on how meetings flow.
- Coffee talks with local officials.
- Expectations around board giving can be a real limit, even when it's "give yourself or get from somebody else." This can be a board policy, but also a funder expectations. Solution? Get rid of this. There needs to be a mindset shift, and clarity up front about what a Board's purpose is.
- Fewer acronyms per capita.
- Spell out acronyms!
- Post for volunteer positions, and positions on boards. If you rely on current board members, you'll get like-minded people.
- Sometimes we talk about leadership as "welcoming new people into existing organizations." Another element of leadership is paying attention and listening to organizations that have come into being outside of these – and are having a lot of success as a result! Respect that you're not going to be invited to the table with those groups, and also find ways to respectfully listen to and draw from those organization
- A lot of white people don't know any people of color – people haven't expanded their own personal networks to be inclusive. So how can an institution be inclusive, if the individuals on it are not inclusive? The solution involves doing individual work – cultivating more cards in your Rolodex (in an authentic way – have real conversations, not just conversations about race).
- Call people in when they bring up issues. Receive people's passion, concern, and energy. Create new platforms for engagement.



# F4: ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY COOPERATION: CONNECTING MUNICIPAL & COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS FOR LOCAL SUCCESS

**Facilitator: Katie Buckley, Vermont League of Cities & Towns**

## What is working today in this arena? What are Vermont's assets/bright spots/success stories?

- The childcare project in Alburgh has proven to be widely successful in providing affordable childcare while also allowing higher wages for staff. Also building a sense of community and belonging.
- The Declaration of Inclusion in local towns across Vermont. There is a new town committee for the next 3 years to provide recommendations to implement DEI efforts.
- Randolph was elected to be a Climate Economy community and recently hired an Economic Development Coordinator who is now working with 5 other towns for an Energy Coordinator.
- A bi-town committee approach to work towards additional efforts. This takes buy-in from the necessary Selectboards – building the power of partnership.
- Identifying a common problem or opportunity that will naturally bring people together
- Getting communities to work together on common issues and challenges.
- From a Town Manager position, providing as much support as you can for your committees and planning board to avoid fatigue.
- There are Rotary Clubs in almost every town of Vermont that are all trying to work on various projects and initiatives. The collaboration in some towns with their local Rotary Club is strong but often times they are underutilized.
- Individuals ability to think beyond the normal bounds and being creative about looking for partnerships.
- There are many people with great ideas in their communities – have seen most success when you find others that want to get involved and get started right away, rather than starting at local government level.
- Starting to think more regionally rather than by town or county.



## What challenges are you seeing? What are Vermont's/your community's needs in this arena?

- Individuals in communities that are not open to change.
- Finding a sense of belonging and feeling as though the system has failed them.
- Every town in Vermont is different and it can be challenging to find the equation that works best for your community.
- Board seats are often a lot of the same individuals with very limited turnover.
- The opposite problem in some communities with municipalities and a lot of turnover among staff.
- Individuals not wanting to give up the role of power and staying in these roles without opening them up to new leaders.
- Lack of communication within local villages (among each other as municipal leaders and among residents)
- Finding volunteers within the community.
- The difficulty in navigating ARPA funding.
- Lack of communication among the Selectboard.
- Many towns in Vermont aren't big enough to have a Town Manager and everything is reactionary (there is a road washed out, bridge needs repairs, etc.) and many of the other challenges in the community quickly become too overwhelming without the staff in place. The funding is also not available to do the things that many residents would like to see happen.

## What are your ideas to advance progress and improvement in this arena? How can we expand success and address challenges?

- The Northern Forest Center is a valuable resource.
- Find the balance in getting people intrigued about a project without pushing them – slowing down the invitation to participate.
- Making people feel like they are welcome to get involved in their community (ex: invite someone to sit in on a Selectboard meeting to listen and learn)
- Identify the low hanging fruit for communication efforts first (make sure your website is up to date, utilizing FPF, etc.)
- Find allies and build partnerships among the local schools to better engage with youth and hear what they have to say about their community.
- Form a standing committee of youth to hear what they are interested in and ensure the voices under the age of 35 are being heard.
- Making sure that there is food at all of your meetings and events to increase participation it has the necessary information at a central location.
- Provide regular communication
- Making sure you have a strong website for your town. It doesn't need to be too in-depth but ensuring that
- Make sure that people are being heard and listened to in meetings so they will want to continue showing up. Making Town Meeting Day a statewide day off from work and school
- Talking to community members and setting the reality – building trust with one another.
- Utilize your local Regional Planning Commission – these aren't government affiliated and are working with all the towns directly in their region.
- Do not make someone sign up to participate in something – simply getting their input and not undervaluing it. Their input may be the most they can contribute at the time.
- Providing compensation to individuals to join a meeting (especially those of lower income)
- Don't just ask someone to join your meetings, go to theirs and gather input.
- Identify and acknowledge existing barriers

# F5. LESSONS LEARNED IN COVID RESPONSE AND RECOVERY: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

**Facilitator: Sarah Waring, USDA Rural Development**

## What is working today in this arena? What are Vermont's assets/bright spots/success stories?

- People took up the places of institutions and created Mutual Aid networks, stepping up to meet people's needs which had been provided by institutions before. Loose affiliations which took it upon themselves to take up what orgs had been doing before.
- Many places created systems before people even realized there were gaps. There was "I need to do something energy" being directed towards proactive efforts.
- Loosening up in how we imagine housing models: example of pods, ability to think differently about housing. For example, hotel programs allowed people experiencing homelessness to have their own room and space.
- Rules around housing grant funding changed because we need all hands on deck: enough money now to make rules loosen up.
- Arts community: done an amazing job. Doing everything online and digitally that they couldn't have imagined before
- Doing things outdoors and socially distanced too, supporting people through the pandemic
- VT Vaudeville just did shows in the streets!
- Ability to shift to virtual center but also different way to think about place
- More Vermonters realized what it is to parent in this economy and society and that will have positive impacts
- Everyone Eats program: open eligibility and meeting people's needs
- Lots of programs opened up eligibility and level of service to give things away freely
- Grants program increased by 1000% and worked closely with Arts Council to get the grants out to all the small organizations who reached out for grants and now we have close relationships with them
- COVID broke down the stigma around food insecurity and reaching out for help: no barriers to getting help and it's ok to get help
- VCF started a spreadsheet so that there wasn't doubling up or gaps: level of trust between organizations
- Recognition that people need help paying for education: 2 years of community college in Vermont
- Commercial facilities were opening up spaces and now there is more access to them, so having lots of space, now connecting with other orgs with similar missions, physical resource to share. Having physical space to offer is important
- Recognition of the importance of the internet for schooling: giving internet access to homes, DPS other agencies stepping up to make access in homes happen. Some schools have put this in to their budgets permanently.
- COVID allowed us to think about meeting the needs instead of all the struggle happening, small business navigator program is an example bringing partners together in collaborative ways
- Everyone Eats program: food boxes were very helpful to many people, restaurants you could call making it easier and reducing stigma
- When grants began to flow, a lot of philanthropists removed the temporary restriction of funds, so you can use the money for the highest and best need, made it possible to pivot
- Education and health inequities were shone in a bright light in a very dark corner, identified gaps in continuity of care
- VT Program of Quality of Healthcare: statewide quality assurance agency, mission is to study the system and make it better: where gaps exist and be able to leverage our team of clinicians and analysts, facilitation, not a think tank but a "do tank"
- ED of organization who's main project couldn't happen in 2020 which made it very easy to build partnerships, restaurants and food donations, brought community together, pivoting and filling in gaps when needed has been great in VT
- "COVID was the worst thing and the best thing"



## What challenges are you seeing? What are Vermont's/your community's needs in this arena?

- There were positive moments in the ways schools were able to offer services (ie. keeping kids involved without expectations, outdoor classrooms, student pods) but the weight that people in education are feeling and number of students who were struggling is now greater, grade based evaluation vs. wholistic view are still there and so baked into society so hard to remove
- Still don't have high speed internet at my house
- Everyone is really tired, every volunteer, across the country, and the expectation is that we keep functioning
- After serving on school board for 7 years, the passionate worry I have is youth who are 19-26, BIPOC, folks from poverty, we are losing those kids. There are institutions making college free but when they do it they don't get the support they need and then they drop out and bad things happen. This is our workforce and we are just going to see white middle class kids get the jobs unless we listen and connect to these communities.
- Massive pivot we made at Food Bank turned our operating system upside down, but it's not going to work in the long run, can't just switch, need to transition, how do you make and fund that transition because it's going to cost more to change and offer what we do right now
- Ex. farmers to families food box program, federal program with 19 locations for distributions, started going away but now Veggie Van Go program, drive thru but not sustainable. How do we transition back to something more sustainable while we know that low/no barrier drive thru works for alot of people (have to figure out how to do both and we don't know what the balance is)
- Not ready for emergency and not a big enough effort by government to deal with. Volunteers are not getting paid, needing all these volunteers might mean we need more staff

- North Country has around 100 kids who disappeared and we don't know where they went. NEKLS Adult Learning lower funding for better services, childcare: when you have \$100 at the end of the month and it doesn't include clothes or diapers. Restaurants are overwhelmed, housing market is going crazy, this winter is not going to be pretty with fuel prices up, people are starting to freak.
- We are more aware of our neighbors who can't make ends meet and we can't lose that.
- We have 29 out of 42 positions filled for USDA which means money doesn't get out the door
- Federal government has to start the work, but even the state government still didn't step up (not enough capacity in hospital system for example).
- Education is being lost to so many people, sea of jobs where you can make \$20/hour so why would people go to college, worried it will come back to haunt them 10 years down the road.
- Handling emergencies: we're not ready for the next crisis because we're all still back on our heels, not ready for a protracted event/crisis again. We're not really sure what's going on or what will happen, at all levels of government, living in limbo and not ready to bounce back and prepare for the next crisis
- Post-COVID and we are seeing our inequities. We're losing health care workers, hospitals are not ready. Still analyzing how we can get services to places where they need to be (schools/libraries etc being places to get some baseline health care) integrated systems are needed
- Dependable childcare and childcare workers are still a problem: still creating problems for parents working.
- Elder care is also very challenging, a lot of us trying to balance caring for elderly parents and working with waiting lists at nursing homes.
- Retention is easier than getting new donors and volunteers: we tried to make an effort with virtual events but didn't work, and retention after a significant pause of donors/volunteers is challenging.
- Public health response to COVID is still challenging, how we get along with our neighbors (masks, vaccinations etc.)
- Workforce, lack of employees, one that we keep hearing is we have 1100 openings in public school system which means they won't open or close
- Healthcare system: lack of workers, going underwater paying for traveling nurses etc
- Civil, education, healthcare, institutional systems are suffering from lack of workforce which will have long term effects
- Women in these institutions and intersection with childcare and crisis with parenting and workforce. It's too hard to make it work in our communities\
- We have had racial and ethnic narrative in Vermont, shifted landscape for BIPOC Vermonters, but still not there and will still be a need. Municipal jobs with DEI but piecemeal and looking at darker side of our history
- Compassion fatigue that people are feeling: wildfires/floods, etc. people start to narrow their vision and view and dangerous to our democracy

## What are your ideas to advance progress and improvement in this arena? How can we expand success and address challenges?

- Saying that we're all tired, talking about it, giving grace to others, no one will die if an email doesn't get answered, everything that I can do to communicate that nothing is urgent in every room I'm in.
- Boundaries: taking a look at what I put my energy in and stepping away from those that didn't work. Staying involved but being clear about support needed.
- Recognize volunteers: stickers/snacks: finding out what is meaningful and doing that for people
- People want time off: easier on the bottom line to add sabbaticals and paid time off for volunteering for another nonprofits.
- Training for early education providers: providing stipends
- Women driven society: healthcare, teachers, banking, open up at 6:30 am at childcare center, for Adult Learning on weekends and we adapt if people can't do that
- Bringing new teachers onboard now will be even more challenging. Communities need to know more about what it takes to run a school under these conditions, how to be in relationship with people caring for your children.
- There are incredible resources in our communities so thinking more creatively about how to bring them to people, how can youth be more connected to adults in their community.
- Making communities whole: schools and communities together
- Racial justice: we have leaders of color, and we can step back and invite you to take space in the way that works for these leaders.
- Americorps program for Vermonters who might not see themselves in college: have to step back and see outside ourselves, how do you do on the job training, and look at past models and bring kids into the workforce in new ways
- Need housing to recruit for Americorps positions
- Need land for affordable housing
- Hold more workshops like this.
- Shift the model from who people expect to be an Americorps member: looks very different, building a model with a population in mind that the program might work for, lots of rules for this federal agency
- Recruit people who are 50-retirement (federal service example)



- Improve online meeting systems for all public boards. Hybrid should be required.
- Establish some pilot community schools. This is a growing movement of integrated student support, expanded and enriched learning time (beyond school) active family engagement, and collaborative leadership. There is infrastructure nationally to do this work and aligns with a lot of this work we're talking about: agency and belonging is integral to these schools.
- Create or expand a program that creates a plan with every student so that they know about their options and plan their future.
- Legislature needs to create a process so legislators can get their work done.
- Need to do a better job of telling our story. We should provide education so that our journalists are better story-tellers and represent the positive work going on in the state.
- Going to people who are involved with communities: selectboard and other committees and asking them what is important to them and what ideas they have from COVID and their experience
- Younger people have discovered jobs we don't know about: finding jobs that training won't happen for helping them facilitate their own lives, letting them design their own futures in ways we haven't thought about
- What would happen if sawmill and USDA both hire 30 hours a week and pay the same: 30 hour work week being possible at both blue and white collar jobs, shifting employer and society's expectations about work week hours
- Ask groups who are not involved in those institutions why they aren't involved and what they want to see.
- Offer 9-2 shifts or other adjusted hours so that we can have both full time and part time workers

# OUTREACH PARTNERS

- AARP
- Addison County Development Corp
- Bennington Regional Planning Commission
- Brattleboro Development Credit Corp
- Building a Local Economy
- Burlington Community Justice Center
- Burlington Young Professionals
- Capstone Community Action
- Center for an Agricultural Economy
- Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce
- Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation
- Central Vermont Young Professionals
- Chamber and Economic
- Development of the Rutland Region
- Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission
- Common Good VT
- Department of Housing and Community Development
- EmpowR
- Energy Action Network
- Franklin County Industrial Corporation
- Green Mountain Economic Development
- Hunger Free Vermont
- Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce
- Lake Champlain Islands Economic Development Corporation
- Lamoille Economic Development Corporation
- Leadership Champlain
- Milton Artists Guild
- Mount Ascutney Regional Commission
- NEK Collaborative
- North Country Hospital Community Health Team
- Northeastern Vermont Development Association
- Northern Forest Center
- Northwest Regional Planning Commission
- Preservation Trust of Vermont
- Rising Stars Alumni Facebook
- Rutland Young Professionals
- Southern Vermont Young Professionals
- Springfield Regional Development Corporation
- The Root Social Justice Center
- Two Rivers - Ottauquechee Regional Commission
- UVM Center for Rural Studies
- UVM Extension 4-H Program
- VBSR/Vermont Change Makers Table
- Vermont 211
- Vermont Arts Council
- Vermont Chamber of Commerce
- Vermont Commission on Women
- Vermont Community Development Association
- Vermont Community Justice Network
- Vermont Community Loan Fund
- Vermont Creative Network
- Vermont Future Project
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
- Vermont Leadership Institute at the Snelling Center for Government
- Vermont League of Cities and Towns
- Vermont Mountain Bike Association
- Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative
- Vermont State Colleges
- Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
- Vermont Youth Conservation Corps
- Vital Communities
- WCC Teams
- Windham Regional Planning Commission
- Women's Business Ownership Network

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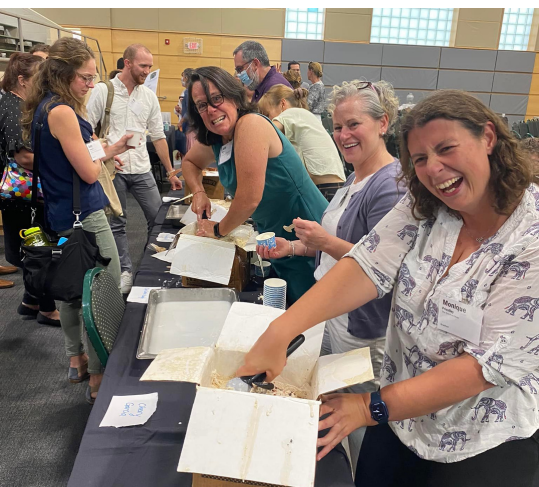
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