

Climate Catalyst Innovation Fund

2024-25 Report



Photo courtesy of ACORN



Produced by:

Vermont Council on Rural Development

Unleashing the power of Vermonters to create a better future



The Climate Catalyst Innovation Fund supports projects that make a meaningful, community-scale impact with solutions that expand community resilience, reduce energy use, and/or create new approaches to challenging problems.

To date, this fund has awarded 92 local innovators with over \$285,000 in collective support for community-led climate and energy projects.





Climate Catalysts Innovation Fund

2023-2024 Report of Awardees

In late fall 2024, VCRD implemented the forth round of the Climate Catalysts Innovation Fund – a small, catalytic grant program for local innovative climate projects. In this round, \$85,000 in small grants of \$500 to \$4,000 were awarded to 24 local projects developing solutions that move Vermont closer to its climate and energy goals. Funded projects were chosen by a team of VCRD staff and the Climate Economy Initiative Advisory Committee including member representatives from EastRise Credit Union, Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (VECAN), the Regional Planning Commissions, and Efficiency Vermont. In making award decisions, we look for projects that are innovative, equitable, collaborative, replicable, and have positive climate/energy impacts.

Thanks to the generous support of Vermont Low Income Trust for Electricity (VLITE), EastRise Credit Union, Ruth H. Brown Foundation, Ben and Jerry's Foundation, and the Vermont Community Foundation including the Sunflower Fund who together provided funding for this fourth round.

A fifth grant round was awarded at the end of 2025 and we plan to continue this fund annually. Join the VCRD email list at vtrural.org to stay informed of this annual opportunity.

This report describes outcomes of projects completed in 2024-2025 in the words of the awardees. We appreciate the dedication and efforts of each team and the collective impact of the work for Vermont's future.

All the best,

Laura Cavin Bailey

Climate Economy Program Director



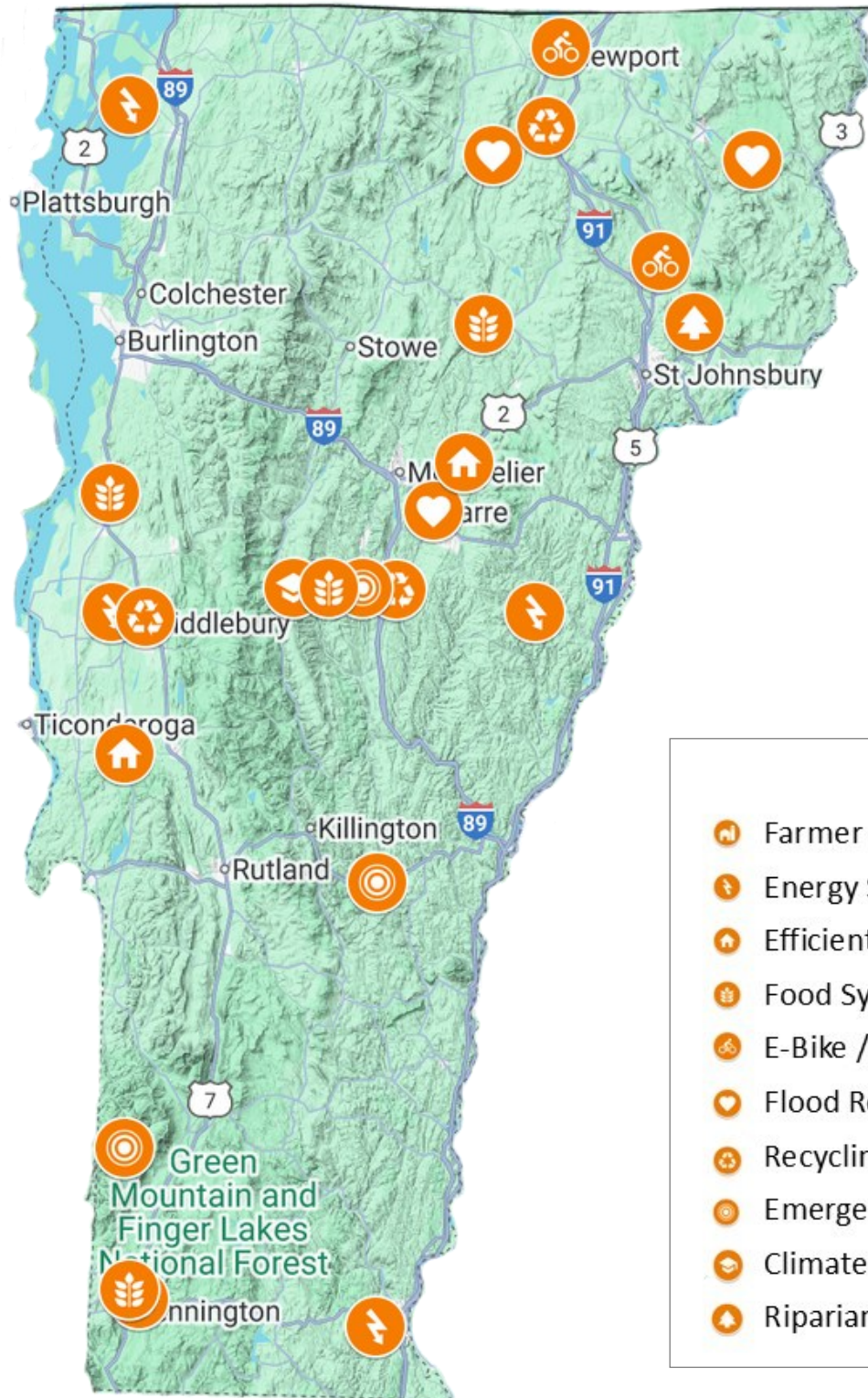


Location of Funded Projects

For an Interactive map of project locations, types, and descriptions:

[https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1hYZMYKaTsamvUUwgpPXVJFiPSsR1eHM&ll=43.916991502026995%2C-72.5948967&z=8)

[mid=1hYZMYKaTsamvUUwgpPXVJFiPSsR1eHM&ll=43.916991502026995%2C-72.5948967&z=8](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1hYZMYKaTsamvUUwgpPXVJFiPSsR1eHM&ll=43.916991502026995%2C-72.5948967&z=8)



KEY

- Farmer Climate Network
- Energy Systems
- Efficient Housing
- Food Systems
- E-Bike / E-tools
- Flood Recovery
- Recycling
- Emergency Preparedness
- Climate Workforce
- Riparian Improvements



Climate Catalysts Innovation Fund

2024-25 Awardees

Here's a snapshot of outcomes of each project in the words of the awardees.

Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN) | acornvt.org



Project: \$4,000 to support a farmer-led network for climate resilience.

Outcome: With this funding, we continued building a community of climate-aware farmers to support them with mental health and wellness events, which had not been done before in the Champlain Valley. In November 2024, we co-hosted an event with Rural Vermont in Orwell at Tup's Crossing Farm where 30 people gathered to work on an agroforestry maintenance project. Working bees in 2025 included: Mitigating invasive species sprawl (Valley Clayplain Forest Farm in New Haven), planting hundreds of trees as part of a silviculture project (Harrison's Homegrown in Addison), and weeding greenhouses and building trellises (Singing Cedars Farmstead in Orwell). Farmer wellness events are inspired by individuals in the Cultivemos network and are requested by the farmers we work with. In December 2025,

we will host a Farmer Wellness Day in Middlebury in collaboration with Rural Vermont. This will include restorative yoga, massage, sauna and cold plunge, herbalism consultations, and opportunities to connect over tea, lunch and snacks.

Addison County Economic Development Corporation | addisoncountyedc.org

Project: \$4,000 to support the expertise and community organizing to advance several Thermal Energy Network projects in Middlebury.

Outcome: The grant allowed the Middlebury Thermal Energy Network working group to advance exploration of Thermal Energy Network (TEN) opportunities. Having identified three potential areas earlier in 2024, the TENs group was able to create connections which include Exchange Street and Washington Street. A discussion with the Middlebury Energy Committee yielded greater action in working with the Town of Middlebury to integrate TENs into town planning and to ensure that progress on the wastewater treatment plant upgrade will include consideration of TEN connections. Additionally, we created a handout that the TENs Working Group and Energy Committee members can use to support discussions with the new Town Manager and other local leaders. We have begun sharing this resource widely with other Vermont towns and groups working to develop TENs as part of the Middlebury work continues to provide a model for the rest of the state. We are now using this resource as a springboard to develop a more comprehensive guide to municipal TENs ownership.



Architend LLC | architend.com

Project: \$3,500 to develop three high performance home prototypes to be constructed utilizing a locally manufactured straw panel wall system.

Outcome: Architend developed three high performance, low carbon home prototypes based on the New Frameworks straw insulated panel wall system. The prototypes are designed to be affordable for middle class homeowners, both in terms of upfront and operational costs. This is accomplished by keeping the footprints small and simple, by utilizing a panelized wall system, and by designing the envelope and systems for high performance. The homes are designed in Vermont vernacular styles for universal appeal. The “Cape” is 1,200 square feet, the “Cottage” is 1,500 square feet, and the “Farmhouse” can either be a 1,500 square foot single family home or a duplex with two 750 square foot units.



The Farmhouse
Elevation
Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"
architend

Bennington Community Cafe | facebook.com/BenningtonCommunityCafe

Project: \$4,000 to connect, learn and grow food for the Bennington Community Cafe.

Bennington Community Farmers Market | benningtonmarket.com



Project: \$4,000 to increase the supply of local produce from area farmers to be sold at a downtown market that accepts SNAP.

Outcome: These funds were instrumental in the growth and establishment of the Bennington Community Farmers Market. They helped facilitate the acquisition and transfer of produce from local farms to be sold at the farmers market, an essential component of the larger objective of re-establishing a farmers market in Bennington. The Bennington Community Market (BCM) Farmers Market plays a crucial role in strengthening community cohesion and resilience.

Through our efforts, we have supported over ten local farmers and provided fresh, healthy produce to people of all income levels by participating in state and regional programs such as Crop Cash and Farm to Family. We believe there is something uniquely exceptional about knowing where your food is coming from and who is dedicating themselves to producing it.

Blake Memorial Library Association | blakememorial.org

Project: \$4,000 to build a solar powered shed available to community members after hours and during power outages.

Outcome: Our solar shed construction is still in progress. Our Buildings and Grounds committee decided to build a shed by hand rather than purchase a pre-constructed kit so it is taking a little longer than anticipated but is coming along nicely. It is largely complete but needs a door, staining, and for the solar panels to be installed. When completed,



this shed will be available for the community to charge cordless lawn tools and devices for outdoor programs. Additionally, we are planning for exterior outlets on the shed to be available to the community for charging of laptops, phones, and other devices during power outages, or when people are working outdoors outside of library hours.

Bridgewater Area Community Foundation | bacfdn.org

Project: \$4,000 to add solar electricity generation and storage to the Bridgewater Community Center and Childcare Center.

Outcome: The project includes adding solar energy, maximizing heat pumps, and installing two highly efficient furnaces and electric water heaters. Resiliency and critical emergency preparedness will be achieved by installing a backup generator and battery storage capability for electricity. This includes installing two electric hot water heaters that will run primarily on renewable energy from the on-site solar array. Catamount Solar recently completed installation of the solar array on the Bridgewater Fire Station roof, which will provide 80% of the electricity needs for the Fire Station and nearby Bridgewater Community and Childcare Center. The childcare center, which started with 14 children in 2022, now has 45 children and has since added a room for afterschool programming as well as community program areas and rental space. The center will also function as an emergency shelter to provide heat, water, shelter and food for residents.



Center for an Agricultural Economy | hardwickagriculture.org



Project: \$4,000 to move existing community garden beds from CAE-owned, flood-prone, public greenspace to higher ground at the Hazen Union High School.

Outcome: The Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE) successfully moved ten raised-bed community garden beds from their former location at Atkins Field in downtown Hardwick, which experienced historic flooding in 2023 and 2024, up to higher ground at Hazen Union High School. We purchased new compost and soil to fill the beds and repaired the wooden frames as

needed when we reconstructed them at Hazen. Seven community gardeners used these beds this summer and Hazen students also tended crops in these beds. All seven community gardeners and several additional community members have expressed their intention to use the beds again next year and in following years. We consider this project to have been a complete success. Thank you so much for helping make these gardeners' crops safe from future flooding events!

City of Barre | barrecity.org

Project: \$3,050 to collect and map citizen-led neighborhood flood knowledge and resident education to make small scale flood mitigation improvements to their own properties.

Outcome: Barre City hosted a series of engagement activities with residents designed to promote greater resident knowledge about flood resiliency. The program was named as priorities in the City's official Flood Resiliency Plan, which guides the City toward strategic actions and a more flood-resilient future. Organizers hosted four workshops at the Aldrich Library: how to make a rain barrel, how to plant a rain garden, understanding the permitting process, and how to analyze stormwater movement on your property.



City of Newport Police Department | newportvermont.org/city-information/police-department

Project: \$3,000 to purchase a Trikke police e-scooter.

Outcome: With this grant funding Newport Police Department was able to purchase an E-Bike. This purchase has allowed us to interact with the community in a way we have not been able to in the past. It has been a great asset to our department and the feedback from the community has been positive.

Community Resilience Organizations (CROs) | gocros.org

Project: \$4,000 to adapt existing CROs tools like the Community Resilience Assessment into curriculum to better support community-led resilience efforts and deepen their work toward creating a decentralized resilience network.

Outcome: We utilized these funds to advance work on our Resilience Hub Toolkit, which draws on over a decade of CROs community resilience work. The creation of this toolkit happened in deep collaboration with grassroots flood responders. The need for this tool was in response to stated community need for best practices around flood preparedness and recovery. As of Fall 2025, we are building out an online interface for this wealth of information to live and we have met with countless partners and colleagues in the resilience field in the public, private, and community sectors. In the coming months we are excited to share the completed first version of this toolkit and know that folks are already putting it to work.



Elderly Services, Inc | elderlyservices.org

Project: \$3,500 to make a model composting site at our adult day center.

Outcome: Our composting initiative has been welcomed with open arms by our participants at Project Independence. The goal of this effort was not only to produce rich compost for our horticulture therapy program but to help foster a sense of place and belonging to meet the needs of participants who report that they feel a sense of loss because they can no longer contribute in ways they were once able to. For many of our participants, genuine community is created when all parties are contributing to the overall good of the group. The compost program at Elderly Services has given our participants a meaningful way to give back to their community, building on the sense of belonging. They are active leaders in the compost program as they fill the composters with food scraps, turn the tumblers, manage proper carbon to nitrogen ratios, and monitor food scrap size. Participants have reported that they have enjoyed learning more about the science of compost and how it helps our community reduce our carbon footprint.



Healthy Roots Collaborative/Feeding Champlain Valley | healthyrootsvt.org



Project: \$3,899 to purchase an EcoFlow DELTA Pro Portable Power Station to expand access to fresh local food.

Outcome: Healthy Roots Collaborative was able to purchase an EcoFlow Delta Pro portable power station to operate our refrigerated trailer during gleaning and

produce distribution. This investment allowed us to take a step toward maintaining the cold chain for fresh, local food destined for our community food access programs. During this first season, we focused on learning how to best store, charge, and deploy the EcoFlow and its accompanying solar panels. While still a work in progress, we successfully used the EcoFlow to power the refrigerated trailer for a couple of our gleans. We are hoping that this winter we can spend even more time creating a good system for using this new system more regularly!

Kingdom Trail Association | kingdomtrails.org

Project: \$4,000 to support the transition to battery-powered trail maintenance and building equipment.

Outcome: Kingdom Trails purchased battery-powered chainsaws, a leaf blower, battery chargers, spare batteries, and spare parts for the equipment. This equipment is our most frequently used types. This grant came at the perfect time, coinciding with the retirement of a gas-powered chainsaw that we replaced with a battery-powered saw. This equipment has been used in Kingdom Trails daily trail crew maintenance



projects, public volunteer work days, and sponsored industry volunteer work days. We are able to put these tools not only in the hands of our trail crew but also into the hands of the public who volunteer their time helping with trail maintenance projects.

Northeast Kingdom Organizing (NEKO) | nekorganizing.org

Project: \$4,000 to work in partnership with Community Resilience Organizations to create a toolkit and framework for a disaster resilience hub network culminating in a Working Communities Challenge funded summit for people to build skills around disaster recovery to prepare for a precarious climate future.



Out in the Open | weareoutintheopen.org

Project: \$4,000 to purchase solar generators for use on our new 3.1 acre property in West Brattleboro.

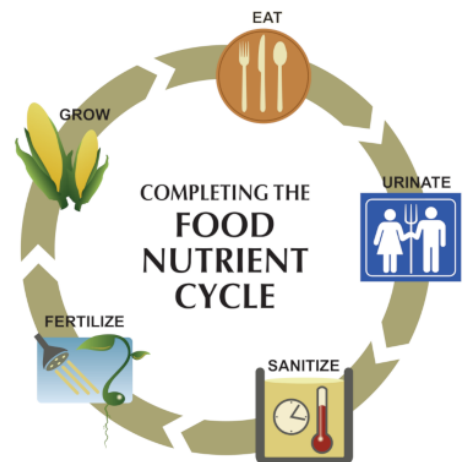
Outcome: We purchased a solar generator for our new organizational property and created educational signage with instructions on how to use the generator and the benefits of solar energy. This means we have been able to expand access at our rustic community property, offering critical services like cell phone charging and lighting using solar power. It is presently the only electricity at our land and as a result our rural

LGBTQ+ space is 100% solar-powered! In addition to offering power during community programming, we also used the generator to charge and operate power tools in support of building other infrastructure, an accessible bathroom in collaboration with the Rich Earth Institute, and a timber frame pavilion which would also not have been possible without this generator.

Rich Earth Institute | richearthinstitute.org

Project: \$3,000 to develop and implement a site planning tool for establishing urine collection depots across Vermont, and streamlining Rich Earth’s ability to foster and support this work.

Outcome: Rich Earth created the first draft of a urine collection depot site assessment tool for facilities interested in hosting collection depots. The content of this tool was compiled by our team’s Operations Director, who has been instrumental in designing and building Rich Earth’s existing collection depots in the towns of Brattleboro and Rockingham. Our work on this project over the past year included discussions to plan depots with organizations in the towns of Brandon and Williston. The grant also allowed us to plan for future drafts of the site assessment tool to include adding pictures to demonstrate specific components, gathering information about a simplified pump design and formatting the document to include a FAQ section. Our ultimate goal is for this tool to be comprehensive and user friendly as it creates value by providing important and streamlined information for planning and construction purposes.





Project: \$4,000 to expand year-round gleaning services to the communities of the Lamoille Valley and Northeast Kingdom.

Outcome: Salvation Farms has successfully expanded gleaning efforts in the Lamoille Valley and Northeast Kingdom, supporting farm viability, food access, and climate resiliency across Vermont. This year, our impact has grown significantly compared to 2024. We worked with 29 farms (+12%), distributed food to 69 community sites (+33%), engaged 70 volunteers (+59%) for 308 hours (+33%), and gleaned 35,882 pounds of food (+20%). These efforts not only reduce food waste on farms but also help relocalize the food system, cutting food miles by distributing locally grown produce instead of out-of-state food.

Town of Kirby Knotweed Action Committee

Project: \$1,000 to continue the community led efforts to control the highly invasive plant, Japanese Knotweed, along town roads and on private land adjoining town roads.

Outcome: The town of Kirby and a group of volunteers are working to treat existing knotweed infestations on town roads and to prevent further spread of this invasive plant. We have been working together for five years and have seen a significant reduction in existing patches. The grant allowed us to continue the work this summer. Long term commitment to treating knotweed is required as the plant is tenacious. We fully intend to continue until all existing patches are eradicated and then to monitor carefully for new infestations. In this way, we can protect native flora and fauna, watershed habitats thereby improving bank stability, and property values. From the Troop 007 Scoutmaster: "Helping the State of Vermont and the Northwoods Stewardship Center control invasive species in our local community is a great way for our Scouts to learn about local ecosystems, careers in conservation science and also earn community service hours toward their next rank."



Chip Paglin, 9th grade Kirby resident and member of Scout Troop 007, cutting knotweed last summer. Photo courtesy of Town of Kirby Knotweed Action Committee



Town of Sandgate | sandgatevermont.org

Project: \$1,500 to support the effort to retrofit the Sandgate town hall to function as a temporary emergency shelter during a local disaster.

Outcome: The town is trying to become better prepared for emergencies, particularly those that would lead people to congregate at town hall or the town garage. So far, we bought basic first-aid supplies to be stored at town hall and an AED to be kept on hand at the town garage.

Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL) | vcil.org

Project: \$4,000 to support a three-week training series for Vermonters with disabilities and provide home preparedness kits for 16 households.

Outcome: We hosted a three-week training with a follow-up day of community gathering. There were 21 participants from 15 towns, with 20 receiving emergency kit items of their choosing. We continue to have a waitlist of people wanting to participate after three rounds of training and hope to be able to identify funds moving forward to support people in building up their kits. Currently we are offering monthly meetings for members of all three cohorts to come together on an ongoing basis and a virtual community space has also been created. Additionally, we will be offering DIY emergency food bucket workshops in Bennington and Lyndonville for our participants later this month thanks to a private donation we recently secured which will enable those who would like to come together in person as well. These will be combined events with our accessible garden club seed swap gatherings.



Vermont Energy Education Program | veep.org

Project: \$4,000 to support youth teams as they plan and implement climate action projects.

Outcome: VEPP disbursed funds to student-led teams and to classroom teachers across Vermont working on climate action projects. These funds supported the creation of a school garden at the Northeast Primary School in Rutland, collaboration with a local artist and creation of a mural about healthy rivers at Rochester Elementary School, the ongoing efforts of the VT Youth Lobby to train young people to advocate on climate issues, the planting of seven shade and fruit trees on the South Burlington High School campus, and the repair and bike swap event hosted by Brattleboro High School's PeaceJam Club. Each of these projects improved climate education and resilience in the schools and communities

where they took place and served to connect students with their communities. Students report learning a lot about the particular topics (food systems, wetlands and rivers, clean transportation) as well as important transferrable skills about organizing groups of people to take action and how to manage a project to completion.

Vermont Garden Network | vtgardens.org

Project: \$3,500 to support the 6-month long Food, Housing & Land Access program: Gardening Education at Affordable Housing Sites.

Outcome: Our Gardening Education at Affordable Housing educator was able to take de-escalation training; a series of three workshops and activities to better communicate with the housing residents. Communication and better understanding your audience is key to any program success. This training was invaluable to better manage responses to residents with a multitude of social, health, environmental and economic issues.







Climate Catalysts Innovation Fund Press

Some media and news articles of funded projects:

Growing strong: Bennington Community Market expands staff, access programs, and winter offerings – Bennington Banner 9/26/25

benningtonbanner.com/local-news/growing-strong-bennington-community-market-expands-staff-access-programs-and-winter-offerings/article_b46c9511-9677-46db-bf93-1d8fce95126d.html

Middlebury explores increased geothermal energy for downtown—Addison Independent (paywall) 10/31/24

addisonindependent.com/2024/10/31/middlebury-explores-increased-geothermal-energy-for-downtown/

Gleaning operations help meet rising need in a stretched Vermont food assistance network – VT Digger 5/30/24

vtdigger.org/2025/07/23/gleaning-operations-help-meet-rising-need-in-a-stretched-vermont-food-assistance-network/

Bridgewater Area Community Center, Childcare was awarded a two-year \$200K grant – Mountain Times 11/13/24

mountaintimes.info/2024/11/13/bridgewater-area-community-center-childcare-was-awarded-a-two-year-200k-grant/

Barre City Flood Resiliency Plan— Resident-led neighborhood flood knowledge, page 7

barrecity.org/client_media/files/Flood%20Resiliency%20Plan%20-%20WEBSITE.pdf

Rain barrel workshop — Instagram 4/12/25

instagram.com/p/DIWx7orPVFb/

ACORN farmer wellness events and worker bees — ACORN website

www.acornvt.org/climate?rq=VCRD

Bridgewater Community Center nets \$200K+ grant for sustainable energy projects—Vermont Standard 10/3/24





Thanks to the Generous Funders

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