



## Community Visit Program

Vermonters know that local action makes our communities vibrant. But local action often needs support from regional, state, and even federal resources to achieve goals for prosperity. The Vermont Council on Rural Development's (VCRD) **Community Visit program** is a way for towns to engage and bring together their residents, set common goals and directions in a neutral and facilitated structure, and access resources that will help them take action on those goals. The program gets citizens engaged in working for their communities and connects them to the resources they need to be successful.

### How It Works

The Community Visit program is a three month series of public meetings, bringing together a broad mix of community members with a **Visiting Team**, made up of state, federal, non-profit, and philanthropic experts, to create intensive partnerships and tailored work plans for long-term local success. VCRD provides the structure and neutral facilitation each step of the way. The Visit begins with a series of focus forums (STEP 1) followed by a community wide discussion where residents champion their ideas for the future of their town and choose their priorities (STEP 2). Then, interested citizens join local task forces to work forward on the community goals set through the process (STEP 3). Each task force has a *chairperson* who will manage meetings and keep work moving forward. A local *Community Visit chairperson* ("chair of the chairs") will help to keep the community informed and involved as the program progresses. While the program is provided to towns for free, residents are expected to assist with logistics, outreach, and community meals; and the Town is expected to cover the costs of a community meal and mailed invitation to residents.

*"VCRD hosted its first community visit to Bellows Falls, at a time when the community was really at a loss on how to move forward. Ten years later we have an active main street, a strong arts community and a great integration between our industrial park and downtown."*

~ Robert McBride, RAMP,  
Bellows Falls

*"I have been involved in dozens of planning sessions and community forums here in St. Johnsbury over the last 15 years and I can truly say that this event was, by far, the best – and will, without a doubt, result in productive outcomes for St. Johnsbury."*

~ Mike Welch, St. Johnsbury  
Community Visit Chair

*"It is genuinely thrilling to see the different constituencies come together and do good things for our community. The most significant results of the process are the lasting effects in the town around community engagement. The town has been transformed."*

~ April Tuck, Cambridge Community  
Visit Chair



ROLES

**Planning Committee:** Community members representing diverse interests of the community meet once – a month before Community Visit Day – to brainstorm Forum topics, logistics and outreach strategies.

**Community Members:** All decisions rest in the hands of the community. Community members participate each step of the way and have the opportunity to join Task Forces to take action on selected priorities.

**Community Visit Chair:** A community member serves as the local point person and helps to keep the community informed and involved as the program progresses.

**Visiting Resource Team:** a Visiting Team of state, federal, business, non-profit, and philanthropic leaders attend Community Visit Day and Resource Day and act as listeners, advisors, and resources for the Community. They help Task Forces develop action plans for the best chance of success and are available as resources as the work moves forward.

**Vermont Council on Rural Development:** VCRD provides the overall structure and neutral facilitation of each meeting, and manages an extensive invitation process to ensure that all members of the community are welcome, encouraged to attend, and are heard.

## What Does a Community Visit Produce?

The Community Visit program is built from the priorities that a community decides together, so results vary from town to town. Overall, towns report energized volunteers, better community engagement, and new connections to state, federal, and regional resources. For some towns, the Visit creates community goodwill and celebrations, such as *Rutland's Friday Night Live* series; outdoor each summer week with live music, food and shopping opportunities. For others, it is used to leverage funds or planning resources, such as *Pownal's affordable housing project* or *Johnson's downtown redesign*. For some towns, the Visit provides a mechanism to talk about important issues and begin long term work for the future, as in *Killington's 4-season tourism planning*, or *Vernon's village revitalization*. And for still others, it is a chance to help the community get healthier; *Troy, Westfield, Jay, and Woodstock* built and advertised new walking trails and *Brighton* started a recreation program.

Find out more about the Community Visit program:

<http://vtrural.org/programs/Community-Visits>.

*"I have never seen as much activity, excitement, and accomplishment in our town. VCRD is doing meaningful work that will improve the quality of life in Vermont towns for generations to come. I will always be grateful."*

~ Sandy Kilburn, Swanton Resident

*"I have been hearing such a great buzz today after all of the fun yesterday. Thanks again for helping our community get reinvigorated. I really believe in the task forces that have been formed and their determination and ability to better serve our community."*

~ Emily Maclure, Craftsbury Community Visit Chair