

The background features a scenic view of a river with autumn foliage in the foreground and a large brick building in the background. Three white gear icons are positioned to the right of the text.

working
communities
challenge

What is the Vermont Working Communities Challenge



A **partnership** between Vermont, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, private sector, philanthropy & communities



A 3.5-year funding competition to **strengthen Vermont's rural towns, regions and small cities**



Goal is to support **ambitious collaborative efforts** that build **strong economies and healthy communities** with focus on residents who have lower-incomes



What Changes Economic Futures For Small Places?

1

**Foundational
Research**



Boston Fed + Kodrzycki and Muñoz 2009

Rosenfeld 2019 Lit Review

2

**Drivers of
Resurgence**



- ❖ *Civic Leadership And Collaboration*
- ❖ *Sustained Focus On Economic Development Goals*

3

What Emerged?

working  **cities**
challenge

working  **communities**
challenge

The Competition – What WCC Supports

- We fund **cross-sector leadership teams** with **ambitious shared goal(s)** to advance strong economies, healthy communities (think: 10 year horizon)
- Emphasis on **collective action** to **change systems** that unlock opportunity or hold a problem in place
- Focus on improving lives of people w/ **low- and moderate incomes**
- Phase I: Small **planning grants** (\$15K) for 5 month planning phase (6 planning grants will be awarded in VT)
- Phase II: Larger multi-year **implementation grants** (\$300K each) to support at least 3 collaborative efforts in VT; merit based - chosen by independent jury

Examples: Past Working City Winners



Lawrence

10 year result

Increase parent income by **15 percent** in the Lawrence Public School system **over a 10 year period;**

Partners: Lawrence CommunityWorks, Lawrence Public Schools, City of Lawrence, Lawrence Partnership, Greater Lawrence Family Health, Merrimack Valley Career Center, Northern Essex Community College & more



Fitchburg

10 year result

Transform the **North of Main neighborhood** into a place where residents choose to live, work, and invest over the next 10 years.

Partners: Montachusett Opportunity Council, City of Fitchburg, Fitchburg State University, NuVue Communities, Enterprise Bank, Fitchburg Public Schools & more

What Makes WCC Different

- Flexible to local priority, vision
- Multi-year, major funds focused on:
 - systems change
 - community engagement
- Funding *and support* for collaborative teams (not one organization)
- Competition spurs urgency, big ideas
- Data and learning orientation
- Partnership with other states, national intermediaries, & national philanthropy
- Vermont-led Steering Committee guides design & implementation + stability and rigor of Fed



Leadership and Partners

Statewide Steering Committee

Becca Balint	Vermont State Senate
Ben Doyle	USDA Rural Development
Beth Rusnock	National Life Group/National Life Group Foundation
Betsy Bishop	Vermont Chamber of Commerce
Ellen McCulloch-Lovell	EML Consulting
Emma Marvin	Butternut Mountain Farm
Hal Colston	Vermont State House of Representatives
Joan Straussman Brandon	Neighborworks America
Katrina Badger	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Rebecca Foster	Vermont Energy Investment Corporation
Lola Adedokun	Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
Molly Lambert	Lambert Consulting and Mediation
Nicole Grant	Avangrid/Avangrid Foundation
Sarah Waring	Vermont Community Foundation
Steve Patterson	Northeastern Vermont Development Association
Ted Brady	Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development
Tom Donahue	BROC Community Action
Gary Halloway + Tim Tierney	Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development



Fed Role with Vermont



- Delivers management, staffing, and technical assistance
- Contributes in-kind costs to network meetings, Steering Committee, events
- Provides stability to initiative and rigor to process
- Does not select winners, maintains objectivity



The Competition – Core Principles



Team of leaders from private, public, nonprofit and community work toward an **ambitious shared goal** in rural Vermont



Engagement of **community residents** in setting direction and decision-making



Economic inclusion, racial equity, and **diversity** across age, gender and sexual orientation as important part of shared goal



System solutions, not just programs, to achieve team's shared goal



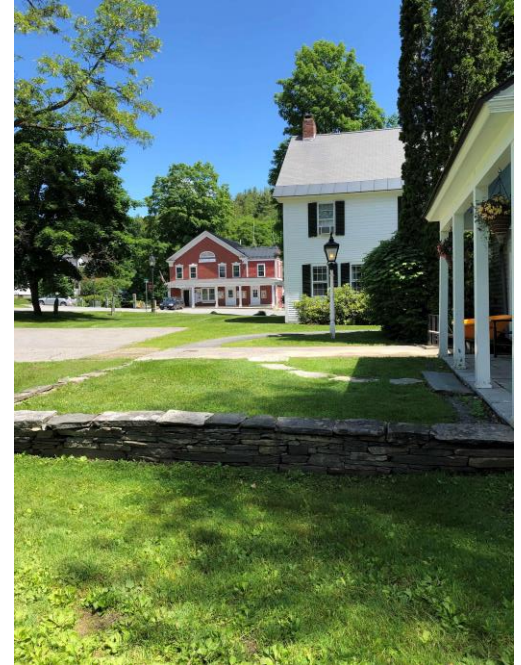
Learning and **adaptation** through research, data, and peer exchange



Connections to ideas, people, and markets within and across local economies and communities

The Competition – Who is Eligible

- Cross-sector **leadership teams** that represent rural towns, regions and smaller cities.
- **Every town in Vermont** can be part of an application.
- Every team's application must include at least one **priority community**.
- Every application must represent a region, city, or group of towns that reaches at **least 6,000 people**.



The Competition – Priority Communities

- (1) meet conditions of high economic need*
- (2) provide a likely opportunity for greater systems change* that benefit residents with lower incomes

Each of these priority communities has a total population above 6,000 and can submit an application independently or as part of multi-town or regional application

Barre City

Bennington

Brattleboro

Middlebury

Rutland City

Springfield

St. Albans City

St. Johnsbury

Winooski

Each of these priority communities has a total population below 6,000 and therefore must partner with other communities in their market/area/region to reach a total population of at least 6,000 people.

Barton

Bradford

Castleton

Enosburgh

Fair Haven

Hinesburg

Johnson

Lyndon

Morristown

Newport City

Pittsford

Poultney

Putney

Randolph

Rockingham

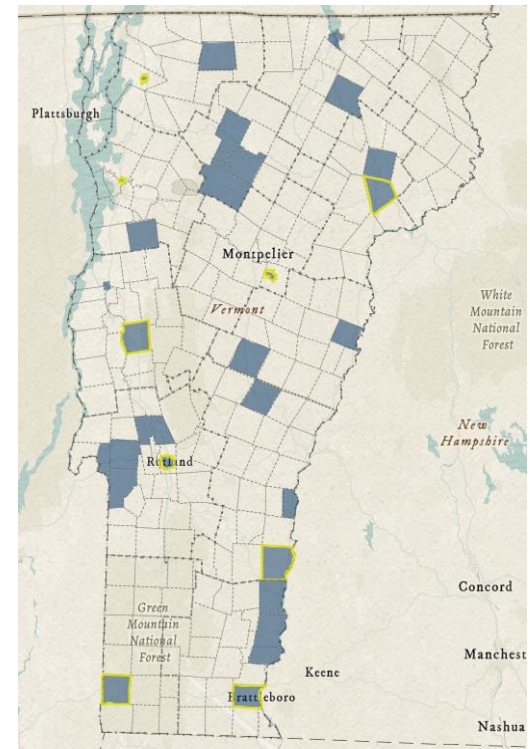
Royalton

Stowe

Vergennes

Westminster

Windsor



What We Have Learned

- Requirement of one application per community region can be challenging, but can lead to new partnerships + spark creative ideas
- Successful teams had:
 - Positive, forward-thinking vision shared by cross-sector team, including input and involvement of residents
 - Long-term goals that were ambitious enough that no partner could achieve alone
 - A clear focus on low-income residents and communities of color
 - Entrepreneurial spirit and enthusiasm for learning
- Pay to hire 'dedicated staffing' key to guide the work - required!
- WCC is not meant to replace or compete with an existing collaborative effort in town, but rather to deepen and broaden this work (where it exists)

What We Have Learned

- Focus on systems change (vs. running a program) can be challenging, but smaller communities have key advantages. (Systems Change: enduring changes to policies, procedures, resource flows, and decision-making)
- Try lots of different things, run pilots, learn about what works and doesn't. Strong teams can assess and change course. Working Communities welcomes flexibility.
- Having a partner on your team with experience and capacity to do sustained community engagement can be very helpful
- It is important that city teams carefully consider racial equity and diversity as part of a broader public participation strategy and overall effort – MORE than engagement:
 - how and who is involved in selecting and defining the community's challenge to address
 - how to inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower residents and diverse constituencies in a sustained, meaningful way over time

Application Process & Criteria

- Can build on existing initiatives or strengthen new ones
- Teams select their own vision and related 10-year goal (which can evolve and change during planning)
- Emphasis on 6 core principles
- Must include a priority community and benefit residents with low-incomes
- Two Phases
 - 1) Planning Phase: Grants for 6 community teams up to \$15K, 5 month planning period, includes 3 convenings to learn more about core principles
 - 2) 3-year Implementation Phase: Grants for 3 community teams up to \$300K with ongoing support, teams must win Planning Grant to apply for Implementation Grant

Planning Phase Work Sessions

- 3 work sessions over 5 months to support teams develop competitive initiatives
- All session work will tie directly to Implementation Grant application requirements
- Allow time for teams to work independently at each session
- Support teams understand CORE PRINCIPLES of WCC + how to integrate into team initiatives
- Learning opportunities from content experts from VT (and beyond)



Timeline

October 1-15, 2019

Regional Information Sessions

November 1, 2019

Letter of Interest Due

December 13, 2019

Planning Grant Application Due

January 31, 2019

Planning Grant Awards Announced

February – June 2020

Planning Phase

Week of Feb 24/Mar9

Meeting 1

Week of Apr 13

Meeting 2

Week of May 18

Meeting 3

June 15, 2020

Implementation Grant Application Due

August/September 2020

Implementation Grant Awards Announced

September 2020 - September 2023

Implementation Phase

Planning for Success

Leaders are encouraged to review the Working Communities website

Key starter questions to consider as you begin:

1. What are key long term opportunities or needs for your community that this resource could help address?
2. How will you identify and involve other public, private and nonprofit partners in your community interested in applying?
3. Are there existing efforts already going on that you should engage?
4. What is your plan for ensuring ongoing resident engagement that reflects the diversity of your area? (See WCC Principle)
5. What goal makes the most sense for your community and its diverse residents (and what process will you use to determine it)?

Start Up Advice from Past Winners

- “Get as many community partners as possible around the table early, even if it isn’t apparent how they will fit. That helps surface priorities faster.”
- “Identify a ‘lead’ for the initial phase who understands how to facilitate, not necessarily an org that might take the lead later. Good community facilitation is the most important skill in the beginning.”
- “Accept that partners may come and go, there may be no permanent partners only permanent issues. Let the issues bring your partners together – and those that want to make systemic change.”

Your Questions?

More Information

Go to website

<https://www.bostonfed.org/workingcities/vermont/index.htm>

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Thank
You
Partners!

