Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance (VERTA)

VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
CENTER FOR
RURAL STUDIES

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https://accd.vermont.gov/VERTA

University of Vermont | Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships

VERTA Study Purpose

The Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance (VERTA) was launched pursuant to Act 181 (2024) to assess how Vermont supports its rural communities—and how that system can be strengthened to better deliver housing, infrastructure, climate resilience, and economic development.



Project Steering Committee

- Northeastern Vermont Development Association (representing RDCs)
- Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT)
- Preservation Trust of Vermont (PTV)
- Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD)
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)
- Vermont Community Foundation (VCF)
- Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (representing RPCs)
- Northern Boarder Regional Commission (NBRC)
- Vermont Land Access & Opportunity Board (LAOB)
- State Treasurer's Office
- Agency of Administration – Office of Disaster Recovery



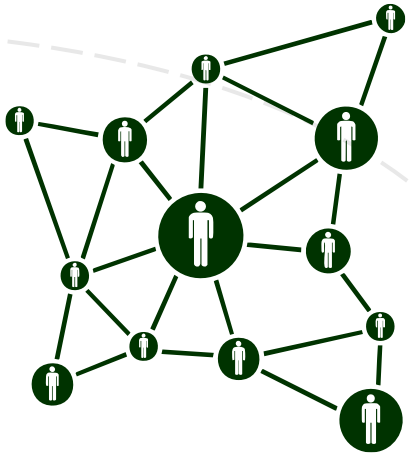
*Special thanks to **Rebecca Sandborn Stone** of **Community Workshop** for Facilitating the Steering Committee and Rural Capacity Summit*

Study Approach

Steering Committee
(12 Organization Represented)

Listening Sessions
190 participants

Surveys
195 responses



UVM Research in Vermont and Across the U.S.
(114 Municipalities Reached, Review of 13 States TA Systems and 5 States Interviewed)

VERTA Report and Recommendations

Research to SC to Summit Processes of Ideation and Selection of Implementation Advancement

Statewide Summit,
(125 Attendees from State/Local Gov, Non-Profit, Higher Ed.)

Summary of VERTA Research Findings

- Capacity is the binding constraint
- Administrative burden blocks access to resources
- Coordination failures are systemic
- Program design matters as much as funding levels
- Evidence from other states points to coordinated solutions



Four Actionable Priority Areas

1. Increase State Agency Participation in Solving Local Challenges

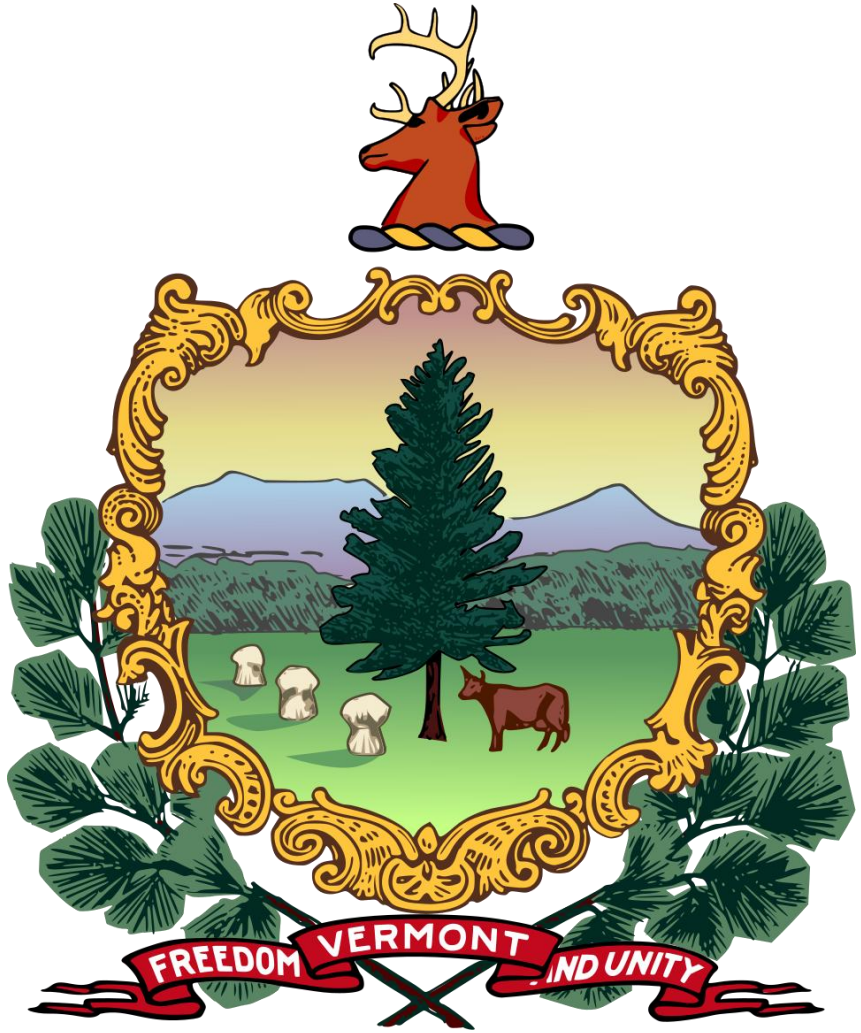
2. Municipal and Regional Shared Services Tools

3. Local Engagement and Leadership Development

4. Increasing Local Capacity and Flexible Resources

Priority Area 1: Increase State Agency Participation in Solving Local Challenges

Problem statement: Municipalities face fragmented state systems and inconsistent agency involvement. While relationships are strong, coordination remains informal, uneven, and difficult to sustain due to staffing constraints and frequent turnover among elected officials and volunteers. This can also result in state agencies producing resources, materials, and even technical assistance programs that are too siloed or restrictive to be helpful to municipalities, especially the smaller ones.



Priority Area 1:
Increase State Agency Participation in Solving Local Challenges

Effort: Lower

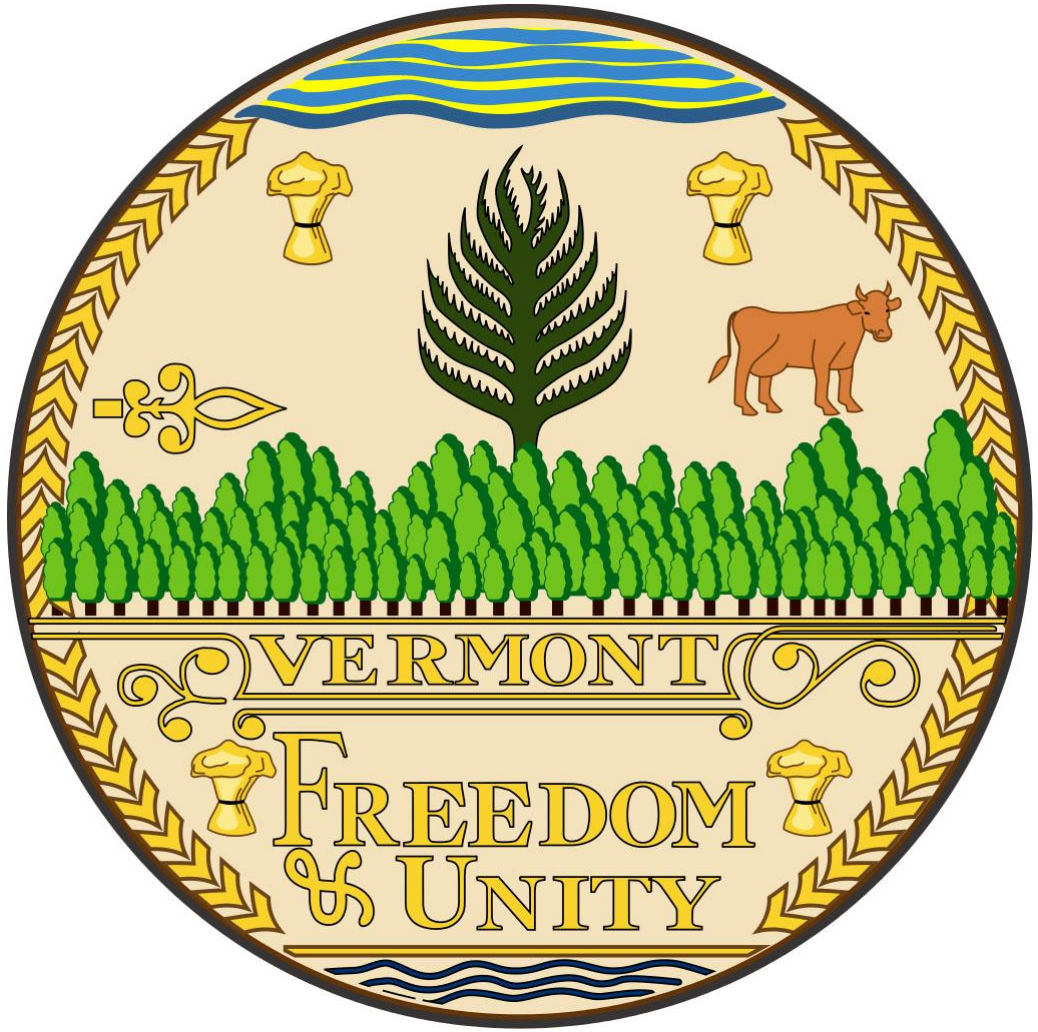
- Create regional, town-based problem-solving convenings to help municipalities move more efficiently from planning to implementation.

Effort: Medium

- Convene a statewide community of practice for state grant administrators.

Effort: High

- Establish a statewide municipal services coordination hub or office.



Priority Area 2:

Municipal and Regional Shared Services Tools

Problem statement: Many Vermont municipalities face similar challenges but lack the tools, incentives, and governance structures needed to share services, staff, and equipment across town and regional boundaries, as well as the capacity to engage in shared services conversations.



Priority Area 2:

Municipal and Regional Shared Services Tools

Effort: Lower

- Develop and disseminate shared services templates and toolkits.

Effort: Medium

- Create or expand a municipal shared services platform.

Effort: High

- Restart and complete a regional governance and shared services study.

Effort: High

- Modernize municipal planning requirements.



Priority Area 3:

Local Engagement and Leadership Development

Problem statement:
Vermont's reliance on volunteer governance is increasingly strained, with limited pipelines for new leaders and uneven access to training, education, and support for engagement.



Priority Area 3:

Local Engagement and Leadership Development

Effort: Lower

- Expand leadership training and toolkits for municipal officials and volunteers.

Effort: Medium

- Expand volunteer matchmaking and engagement infrastructure to better connect community needs with volunteer interest.

Effort: Medium

- Develop a study to pilot a reimagining of municipal planning as a place-based, grassroots, and community-driven process.

Effort: High

- Modernize municipal planning requirements.



Priority Area 4:

Increasing Local Capacity and Flexible Resources

Problem statement:
Municipalities lack sufficient staff capacity and flexible funding to move projects from concept to completion—particularly in small and rural communities.



Priority Area 4:

Increasing Local Capacity and Flexible Resources

Effort: Lower

- Restart and reimagine the Vermont Funders Collaborative to bring together state agencies, federal partners, and philanthropic organizations to align funding programs better.

Effort: Medium

- Continue and expand municipal technical assistance programs that provides direct funding to municipalities and TA providers for capacity-building activities.

Effort: Medium

- Create municipal or regional project management fellows or shared coordinators.

Effort: High

- Align and, where appropriate, merge state funding streams.



Next Steps

- Spread the word – Discuss findings with legislature, state agencies and TA providers.
- Identify “ready-now” actions.
- Maintain forward momentum through targeted pilots and collaboration.
- Identify longer term actions to support municipalities more sustainably with greater impact.



VCRD - Community Support Technical Assistance (CSTA) Grant $250,000

- **Flexible municipal support:** Meaningful, flexible grants for town-specific projects focused on community and economic development initiatives such as childcare, housing, water/wastewater, climate resilience or other community priorities
- **TA navigation and wraparound support:** TA providers and consultants will coordinate their services and provide navigation support to communities in the cohort
- **Evaluation and learning:** Ongoing assessment to refine program design, improve statewide TA service delivery, and implement recommendations in the VERTA report





Discussion

Learn more at: accd.vermont.gov/community-development/current-initiatives/VERTA