



To: Gary Holloway, Vermont Agency for Commerce and Community Development (ACCD)
From: Amanda Witman & **Kathleen Devlin**, Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA)
Re: Interim report on the Vermont Everyone Eats (VEE) Program
Date: December 26, 2022

Note: New information since the last report is in boldface.

The Vermont Everyone Eats (VEE) Program was initially funded in July 2020 through a \$5M allocation from the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) with a subsequent allocation of \$1,400,000 in late December 2020. In March 2021, FEMA reimbursed 100% of all program costs and continued to reimburse costs at that level through June 30, 2022 based on monthly submissions through VT ACCD. As of July 1, 2022, FEMA switched to a 90/10 cost share model, with the VT state legislature allocating \$1.3M toward that 10% cost share beginning July 1, 2022. Specifically, the House and Senate passed an allocation of \$1.3M (reduced from VEE's \$1.8M request) in bill S.11, an economic and workforce development bill signed by Governor Scott on June 8, 2022.

Background

Since releasing a Request for Proposals on August 1, 2020 for Community Hubs to partner in VEE, 14 Hubs have delivered a total of **approximately 3.45 million meals through November 2022**.

Program partners working with SEVCA – the contracted program administrator – including the VEE Statewide Task Force (Appendix 1) and the Community Hubs (Appendix 2) have continued to operate the program successfully to date and are poised to extend it further as long as the need continues and FEMA continues to reimburse the costs. VT ACCD and SEVCA have worked closely to secure FEMA funding, manage contracting and cash flow needs, and ensure the greatest possible benefit to participating restaurants, food insecure Vermonters, and VT farmers and food producers.

In July 2020, SEVCA was contracted by VT ACCD to administer VEE with guidance from a Statewide Task Force including representatives from multiple state agencies as well as leaders of statewide economic development, restaurant industry, hunger relief, and food system community-based organizations. By August 1, 2020, program staff and the Task Force released a Request for Proposals to solicit proposals from entities interested in serving as Community Hubs to implement the program throughout Vermont.

The first hubs were operational in early August 2020. By October 2020, there were 14 Community Hubs providing meals in all 14 counties. As of July 2021, VEE Hubs decreased from 14 to 11 as some organizations returned to pre-pandemic work priorities, but VEE continues to offer meals in all 14 counties.

Funding and program administration have been a successful collaboration including SEVCA, VT ACCD, VT

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AHS, VAAFM, FEMA, VEM, Governor Scott's office, the VT Legislature, Guidehouse Consulting, the VEE Statewide Task Force, the VEE Community Hubs, 260+ participating restaurants, 300+ VT farmers and food producers, and many thousands of meal recipients (note: the number of unique individuals served by VEE is not tracked).

Meals continue to be distributed through diverse channels including public drive-up / walk-up distributions, client-based distributions (e.g., childcare centers and health clinics), home deliveries for homebound and transportation-limited individuals, and an innovative statewide digital voucher program that enables participants to order meals for pickup directly from participating restaurants.

With continued concern about viral transmission and pandemic related challenges, such as rising food costs and other ongoing economic challenges for households and businesses, program partners continue to report high demand for meals, increased demand from restaurants for the program's supplemental revenue, and concern from meal distribution partners who **continue to struggle** to fully relaunch pre-pandemic food access resources.

VEE was initially set to expire at the end of December 2020 with the anticipated expiration of CRF funds. On December 22, 2020, FEMA awarded reimbursement of 75% of program costs in recognition of VEE as a critical part of Vermont's emergency mass feeding strategy in response to COVID-19-related feeding needs. Subsequently, FEMA updated the reimbursement rate to 100% of program costs.

With funding support from FEMA and ongoing demand due to pandemic-related need, the program was extended from an original end date of late December 2020 to June 30, 2021; then to September 30, 2021; then to December 31, 2021; then to April 1, 2022; then to July 1, 2022; **then, with the addition of legislative funding as cited above, to September 30, 2022; and then to March 31, 2023.**

The specific wording of the legislative allocation is as follows: *"In fiscal year 2023, the amount of \$1,300,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to grant to Southeastern Vermont Community Action for the Restaurants and Farmers Feeding the Hungry Program, known as Everyone Eats, to provide State funds to match FEMA funds available for the program. The Agency and Southeastern Vermont Community Action shall take steps to ensure that program funds and benefits are targeted to food-insecure Vermonters."*

This action enabled VT AHS to proceed with executing a memo authorizing VT ACCD to extend the VEE contract to enable the continued provision of meals as part of the state's COVID emergency feeding plan. At the time of this report, FEMA continues its support of COVID relief programs at a 90/10 cost share and has not established an end date for that funding. **With careful management through a measured meal ramp-down, the funding allocated by the legislature will support the 10% cost share through the end of March 2023.**

Budget and Funding Highlights:

- As of the end of **November 2022**, VEE had distributed **approximately 3.45 million meals**, with reimbursement by FEMA to the State of Vermont to eventually amount to over **\$41.4M** for these meals. SEVCA continues to work with Guidehouse on the reconciliation process.
- As noted above, through **November 2022**, VEE Hubs have distributed **approximately 3.45 million meals** throughout all 14 VT counties, generating more than **\$34M** in revenue for participating restaurants.

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- 2020: August 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020: 528,281 meals distributed
 - 2021: January 1, 2021 – January 2, 2022: 1,522,569 meals distributed
 - 2022: January 3, 2022 – June 30, 2022: 782,585 meals distributed
 - Since July 1, 2022 (the start of the 90/10 split funding period) **an estimated 640,000 meals** have been distributed
- Participating restaurants are required to purchase at least 10% of their ingredients for VEE meals from Vermont farms and food producers. **Through July 2022, approximately \$3.5M worth of Vermont ingredients had been purchased for VEE meals, representing 35% of total ingredient costs.**

Program Highlights

- In February 2022, with Jean Hamilton (former VEE Program Coordinator) stepping back into an advisory role, SEVCA expanded the VEE team to include Amanda Witman (VEE Community & Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator) and Chris Meyer (VEE Special Projects Coordinator). The team also includes Kevin Brennan (SEVCA Executive Director) and Kathleen Devlin (SEVCA Special Projects Director).
- **In December 2022, Kevin Brennan went on short-term medical leave and Kathleen Devlin stepped in temporarily as SEVCA Interim Executive Director.**
- Ben Rose of Vermont Emergency Management is playing an important ongoing role in helping to build a potential link between VEE, FEMA, and USDA in order to create a lasting impact for VEE beyond the current FEMA incident. Most recently, in March 2022, the FEMA Region 1 COVID-19 Recovery Task Force Leader gave a brief presentation to FEMA and USDA leadership introducing them to VEE, proposing a possible path forward for the VEE model beyond COVID-19 emergency feeding and then transitioning toward pilot programming, which would test how restaurants can be engaged to provide supplemental food resources for individuals experiencing nutrition insecurity.
- As noted in our previous report, we continue to engage with USDA on potential pathways forward for the program. Most recently (September 7, 2022), Sarah Waring, State Director of NH/VT USDA Rural Development engaged with Sarah Bleich, Director of Nutrition Security and Health Equity within USDA's Food and Nutrition Service branch, about Vermont Everyone Eats, copying Kevin Brennan into the discussion. This discussion should be understood to be introductory, with a good deal of work needed and associated time taken to lift ideas into the realm of the supportable.
- The long economic tail of the COVID pandemic has brought and/or further impacted economic challenges, including rising food and fuel costs, ongoing COVID-related absences and closures, and loss of various other pandemic benefits. These challenges impact all three beneficiary groups of the program: restaurants, farmers/producers, and eaters.
- The Hubs continue to provide a flexible resource able to respond rapidly and effectively to requests from communities and state agencies with partnerships to deliver meals to vulnerable populations. VEE meals are currently being distributed to and through food shelves, homeless shelters, low-income housing units, senior centers, workforces with crisis and/or essential workers, schools and childcare centers, mental health clinics, veterans' organizations, new Americans, mutual aid organizations delivering to elders and shut-ins, residents in low-income housing, local organizations serving people of color, school/daycare staff and

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families impacted by COVID, and other vulnerable populations.

- VEE Hubs are also providing numerous meals weekly to residents housed through the motel voucher program, while recognizing that the quantity of meals VEE can provide is not enough to meet the full nutritional needs of most motel residents.
- Inquiries from restaurants interested in joining or rejoining VEE continue to increase. Restaurants continue to struggle with ongoing challenges related to COVID: illness-related closures, staffing shortages, rising costs (e.g., food, supplies, overhead), and trying to counter the sustained effect of loss of revenue from earlier in the pandemic.
- VEE continues to be actively engaged with the Mass Feeding Task Force and the Nutrition Security Statewide Plan. VEE also continues to serve as part of a coordinated network approach with ACCD, VAAFM, AHS, and non-governmental partners to effectively respond to and positively impact the acute economic issues facing food-insecure Vermonters, restaurants, farms, and other food businesses.
- In April 2022, VEE participated in coordinated legislative testimony with other Mass Feeding Task Force members to raise awareness in both House and Senate committees of the need for a legislative “home” (i.e., an entry point and/or designated committee) for requests and concerns related to multi-agency food security needs.
- VEE connects participating restaurants and farms with helpful associations, recognizing that restaurants that are networked with service providers and support associations have better access to resources. All restaurants that express interest in VEE have an opportunity to opt in to having their contact information shared with the VT Independent Restaurant Coalition (VTIR). VEE, in partnership with Vermont Fresh Network, is offering deeply discounted (25% of cost) annual membership for VEE restaurants and farms, which provides both restaurants and farms with connection and support around building and strengthening local supply chains.
- The Hubs continue to serve as a “community of practice,” developing strong relationships among hub managers throughout the state and bringing information about important economic development resources to their communities, including an improved understanding of the state’s definition of “local” products, and how restaurants can improve supply chain practices to increase purchases of ingredients produced by Vermont farms and food producers.
- The Hubs have received and shared [materials](#) created by VEE partners that promote additional food assistance and other services and resources available to meal recipients to increase their economic security.
- In summer 2022, participants and stakeholders from across the state were filmed for a comprehensive documentary project designed as a component of the VEE Toolkit. Filming has finished and editing is currently underway. Telling the story of VEE through this video documentary will allow us to compellingly and effectively share our experiences and the value of this program with an audience within and far beyond our state.

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Next Steps

1) *Managing the remaining funding opportunities to help meet the need **through at least March 31, 2023.***

Our goals continue to be:

- Meet continuing demand from COVID-impacted meal recipients as COVID continues to disrupt schools, childcare, and workplaces. These closures and absences impact families' economic stability and disrupt access to critical food resources (e.g., school meals, staff meals). These families are also facing the economic impacts of high food and fuel costs as well as the costs of winter heating and housing needs.
- Help bolster revenue for restaurants as they continue to face the substantial economic impacts of the pandemic's long recovery tail, and explore ways to proactively provide technical assistance in helping them prepare to move forward without this support when funding ends.
- Work with state agencies and stakeholders to envision and create a transition ramp to enable emergency food providers and planners to prepare adequately to get post-pandemic emergency food resources into place.

Because of the important role VEE plays in contributing to Vermont's COVID-19 emergency food response, the program has been extended multiple times as the pandemic has undergone new variant surges over the last 2 years. Prior to the Delta surge in the summer/fall of 2021, VEE was contracted to provide a 3-month ramp-down of programming (July-Sept) to help families, businesses, and emergency food access providers transition to post-pandemic normalcy. During those summer months, the Community Hubs did see declining participation from meal recipients and restaurants, and consequently transitioned from 46,000 meals/week (June 2021) to 25,000 meals/week (September 2021).

As **various COVID variants** have worked their way through Vermont, we have seen persistent and challenging effects on recovery as COVID cases continue to impact communities. Throughout the summer, Hubs continued to report very high levels of demand for meals, very high levels of demand from restaurants to contribute meals (and receive needed revenue), and high levels of concern from emergency food providers that do not have enough food or funding to meet this still-heightened need in their communities.

VEE is currently (December 2022) distributing an average of nearly ~29k meals/week across the state. Hubs continue to get requests for meal increases from eaters and community partner organizations, which is an on-the-ground indicator of continued high need from eaters, as well as continued requests from restaurants for increased meal orders (and thus revenue) to help offset ongoing financial challenges. Food insecure eaters are a high priority target for meal distribution.

VEE Hubs are providing numerous meals weekly to residents housed through the motel voucher program. Though we are unable to meet the full need, some hubs **continue to provide** up to 7+ meals/week to motel residents in their community as part of their Everyone Eats meal distribution.

Given the continued need present in these conditions, VEE program staff, statewide partners, and community partners continue to work together to discuss and strategize how best to apply VEE's capacity in conjunction with other programs to meet the economic and food security needs of Vermonters. We also

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continue to work on figuring out ways to take the innovative elements of this program and weave them into a lasting legacy at the state and federal level.

We anticipate that the need will continue longer than our funding will, and with this in mind, we are working with the hubs to prepare their communities for the inevitable end of this iteration of the program.

The VEE team continues to engage in dynamic conversation with the Task Force and other stakeholders about what an eventual second iteration of VEE (a.k.a. **VEE 2.0**) could look like. **This might be** a related program modeled on this successful first iteration (a.k.a. **VEE 1.0**) or **another pathway supporting the continuation of the fundamental VEE program concepts.**

In November 2022, a consultant (Stephanie Bonin) was hired through an open Request for Proposal process to assess various future operational post-pandemic model(s); examine streams of funding, political will, inter-entity collaboration, and other necessary factors; and make one or more recommendations that are innovative, sustainable, and can be initiated and maintained statewide. These recommendations are due by January 31, 2023.

Also in November 2022, a separate open Request for Proposal process resulted in four proposals being awarded funding for creative, grassroots project ideas for service delivery models that have the ability to be sustained and will duplicate or approximate prepared meals services within the applicant service areas and/or statewide. These projects will primarily be implemented between December 2022 and March 2023. Hubs in Rutland, Springfield/Chester, and Middlebury have been awarded funding along with the statewide Localvore team.

Both of the above RFPs require grantees to be mindful of Vermont Everyone Eats “lessons learned” throughout the pandemic and aim to fill the unique niche that is anticipated to continue as an area of need after FEMA funding of VEE is discontinued.

Funding for these projects has been provided by a grant to SEVCA from the Vermont Community Foundation.

2) *Leveraging VEE’s impacts and innovations for future resilience*

VEE received \$219,000 in philanthropic and community donations to support efforts to integrate the innovations, impacts, and lessons learned into ongoing strategies for hunger relief, emergency management, and community economic / food systems development.

SEVCA, the VEE Hubs, and VEE Task Force members are working together to develop initiatives that build on and contribute to broader statewide planning and programming around these issues. This work leverages the opportunities that this pandemic crisis has provided to innovate new best practices, which we are eager to identify and replicate moving forward. Some examples include:

- Working across economic development, social services, and local food system sectors to build systemic solutions to hunger.
- Using local purchasing mandates to strengthen local supply chains. The pandemic highlighted the importance of robust local supply chains as global supply chains for food, medical supplies (e.g.,

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sanitizer and masks), and other critical goods were at times critically threatened.

- Prepared meals are an essential component of our supplemental food services, and yet many Vermonters who need this kind of support were previously not well served because they fall through the eligibility and program gaps of the existing prepared meals programs (e.g., Meals on Wheels, School Meals, etc.). With broader awareness of the importance of supplemental prepared meals, Vermont has an opportunity to develop strategic and systemic improvements.

On September 29, 2022, VEE **hosted** a long-anticipated Prepared Meals Virtual Symposium to encourage ongoing widescale conversation about how prepared meals can play a continued role in statewide economic development, food systems resilience, and solutions to food insecurity. The **symposium provided an opportunity** to spotlight the potential value of prepared food within current programs, catalyze new possibilities for future program development and expansion, and inspire participants to think in new ways about the benefit of incorporating prepared foods into community resilience programs. The virtual nature of this event **allowed for** inclusive access for both in-state and out-of-state participants. Over 200 unique pre-registrations were received, and the symposium was recorded and has been made available for additional repeated viewing via the VEE website.

Looking toward the future, we are exploring possibilities for a second iteration (**VEE 2.0**) that is built on similar principles—combining hunger mitigation, economic development, and food supply resilience into a single program for a three-legged multiplier effect; prioritizing the participation of local restaurants and food producers to keep dollars in-state; empowering local hubs to directly assess and respond to local needs; providing an innovative way to help fill gaps that other statewide and local programs cannot—but at a scale developed for long-term fiscal and practical sustainability.

3) *Documenting VEE Development, Impact, and Lessons Learned*

VEE program staff and partners are working together to record and share documentation on how VEE was developed, how it operates, what impacts it has had, and lessons learned, to enable the program to be replicated or adapted by other states/regions, and/or for use in comparable future crises.

In September 2022, two economists (Elizabeth Schuster, Environmental Economist, and Michelle Klieger, Agricultural Economist) were hired to carry out a primarily quantitative investigation of the impact of VEE on Vermont’s local food economy and local food systems actors, to complement existing and forthcoming research. This investigation is still underway, with a final research report forthcoming by May 2023.

We continue to compile key information for a VEE Toolkit, which will include both written components and a video documentary to be shared widely within and outside of the state. The written elements of the Toolkit are in active development.

Filming for the video documentary has been completed **and good progress is being made in post-production**. This project has had the participation of every VEE hub, including footage of meal production and distribution sites, along with interviews with hub managers, restaurants, eaters, farmers, legislators, task force members, and others. A full-length documentary is in production.

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When complete, the Toolkit will include:

- The Vermont Everyone Eats Story
 - Grassroots Advocacy
 - The Task Force
 - The Community Hubs
 - The funding and timeline
 - The guiding principles: Collaboration, Successful Cross Agency/Cross Sector coordination, flexibility
 - **Multimedia documentary work**
 - **VEE Prepared Meals Symposium**
 - **RFPs: Four Local Hub Initiatives and a Feasibility/Strategic Planning Consultant**

- Program Impacts
 - Inputs and Outputs – how many meals, how many restaurants, farms & food producers, how much \$ / what % spent on local food, etc.
 - Survey Findings – Restaurant, Participant, Farmer / Food Producer, Distribution Site
 - Economic Impact Analysis – Kenneth Jones, ACCD Economic Research Analyst
 - Research – [JSI](#) reports (Dec 2020; March 2021); UVM Masters Thesis on Task Force Participants; UVM Masters class on VEE Impact on Community Hub Organization
 - **Impact of VEE on Vermont's Local Food Economy – Elizabeth Schuster, Environmental Economist, and Michelle Klieger, Agricultural Economist**

Please let us know if you have any questions, need additional information, or would like to discuss any other aspect of the program. We deeply appreciate ACCD's ongoing support.

Amanda Witman, VEE Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator, VEE@sevca.org

Kathleen Devlin, SEVCA Interim Executive Director kdevlin@sevca.org

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Appendix 1: Vermont Everyone Eats Statewide Task Force Members

SEVCA (Statewide Program Administrator) – Kevin Brennan, Kathleen Devlin, Christopher Meyer, Amanda Witman
VT Agency of Human Services (AHS) – Sue Graff
VT Agency of Commerce & Community Development (ACCD) – Gary Holloway
VT Emergency Mgmt / State Emergency Operations Ctr (VEM/SEOC) – Ben Rose, <i>Erica Bornemann*</i>
Hunger Free VT & Hunger Councils of VT – Anore Horton, <i>Faye Mack</i>
VT Association of Areas Agencies on Aging – <i>John Mandeville</i>
VT Dept of Disability, Aging, and Independent Living – Mary Woodruff
VT Foodbank – John Sayles
VT Independent Restaurants – <i>Amy Spear, Matt Birong</i>
VT Fresh Network – <i>Tara Pereira, Peggy Briggs</i>
VT Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAF) – <i>Abbey Willard, Trevor Lowell</i>
VT Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF) / Farm to Plate – <i>Ellen Kahler, Becka Warren</i>
VT Community Foundation (VCF) – <i>Bobby Lussier</i>
Bi-State Primary Care Association - <i>Helen Labun</i>
Capstone Community Action – Sue Minter, Casey Engels
Downtown Brattleboro Alliance (DBA) – Stephanie Bonin
<i>*italics indicate members who do not actively participate in weekly meetings, but receive meeting materials</i>

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Appendix 2: Vermont Everyone Eats Community Hubs

Vermont Everyone Eats Community Hubs		
Counties Served	Hub Partner Orgs	Notes
Addison	Charter House Coalition	
Addison	Vergennes Boys and Girls Club & Bar Antidote	Discontinued June 2021
Bennington	The Collaborative	
Caledonia, Essex, Orleans	Northeast Kingdom Community Action	Discontinued June 2021
Caledonia, Orange, Windsor, Essex	Vital Communities	
Caledonia, Orleans	Center for Ag Economy	
Caledonia, Orleans	Green Mountain Farm to School and Rural Edge	Rural Edge discontinued June 2021
Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, Orange, Washington	ShiftMeals and Intervale Center	
Franklin, Grand Isle	Healthy Roots and ShiftMeals	
Lamoille, Washington, Orange	Capstone Community Action and ShiftMeals	
Rutland	Vermont Farmers Food Center	
Statewide	Localvore - VEE Digital Vouchers	
Windham	Downtown Brattleboro Alliance	
Windham	Wilmington Works and The Shires	Discontinued June 2021
Windham, Windsor	Springfield Family Center and Chester Helping Hands	

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