

# Better Places COVID-19 Mitigation and Recovery

Better Places will advance local recovery efforts by providing the necessary supplies, grants, and resources to restore consumer confidence, rebuild local economies, boost local capacity, and reconnect Vermonters to one another – critical elements that help communities recover quickly.

**WHY:** Vibrant downtowns and villages with their mix of stores and restaurants are the foundation to Vermont's economy, brand, and community life. Small businesses, retail stores, and restaurants in downtowns and villages are one of the most impacted sectors and they need help to adapt, re-open, and thrive in the 'new normal.' Communities need materials, capacity, and guidance to reimagine their streets, parking areas, and public spaces as places for stores, markets, restaurants, schools, libraries, and civic buildings to continue safe operations during the pandemic.

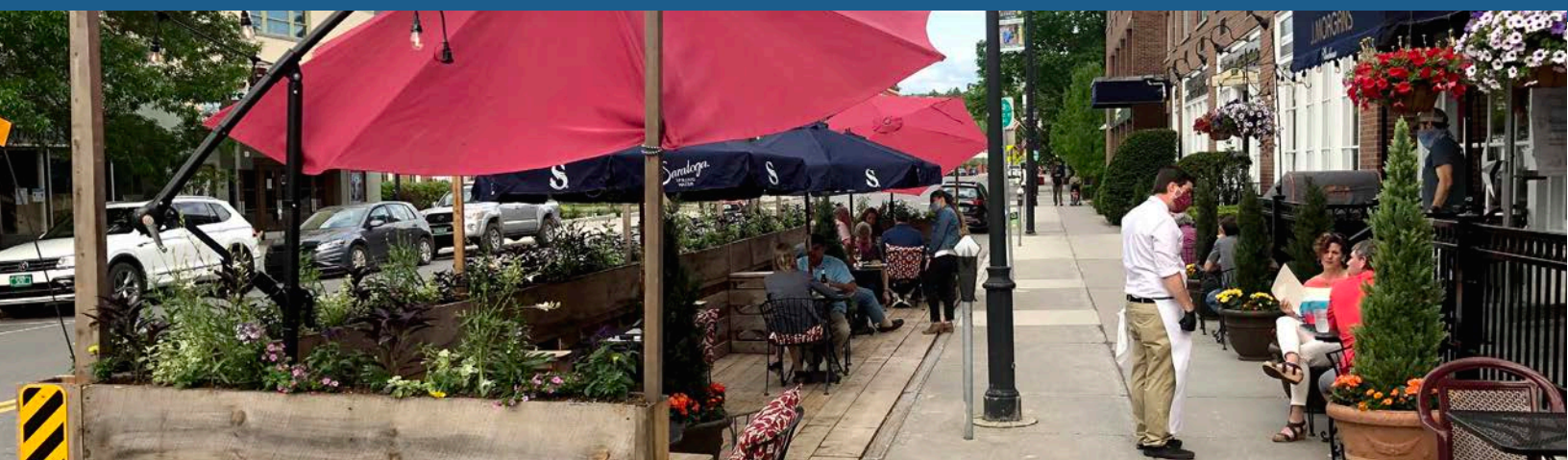
**WHO:** Better Places empowers local leaders to play an active role in rebuilding their communities, strengthening the economy, and instilling consumer confidence; by creating safe and healthy public spaces needed to restart local businesses and rebuild community life.

**WHAT:** Better Places provides capacity support, necessary equipment, and targeted funding for projects that temporarily adapt streets and public spaces to support healthier, safe, and resilient communities. These COVID mitigation measures will support immediate community needs and also test and build the case for more permanent changes in the future.

**WHEN:** ACCD is partnering with a fiscal agent and is working with potential administrative partners to provide technical assistance and funding as quickly as possible, upon approval of the General Assembly.

**HOW:** The Better Places funding request provides local or regional grants for recovery and mitigation costs that meet the United States Treasury (UST) COVID Relief Fund (CRF) Guidance. This funding request would distribute:

- **Capacity Grants (No Match Required) – \$1.5 million to 23 downtown organizations and \$1 million for villages** to provide organizational capacity to support local business recovery by providing assistance to businesses to plan, permit, and organize safe outdoor events, retail sales, and dining opportunities this summer and fall and into the future.
- **Equipment Grants (No Match Required) – \$1.5 million for the purchase and or rental of items necessary to operate safely outside** in compliance with public safety standards and may include items such as tents, outdoor tables and chairs, temporary gates, parklets and barriers, personal protective equipment, sanitizing stations, hands free door pulls, signage, and other items to support local economic mitigation and recovery efforts.
- **Better Places Crowdgranting Program (Match Required) – \$1 million to stand up a crowdgranting program** to ensure local groups, nonprofits, and municipalities can continue to address local needs that improve public spaces, rebuild community life, and support Main Street recovery.



For more information, please contact:

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Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development

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## Sample Project Funding Scenarios

### Downtown Example

**\$65,000 grant to the Downtown Organization** – providing additional staffing support to provide technical assistance, marketing, grant/funding assistance to support downtown recovery efforts.

- \$40,000 – to organize and implement safe public events and promotional campaigns to spur consumer spending, grants to support modernization of businesses to create or improve online presence
- \$25,000 – for targeted efforts to help business reopen safely, support new businesses opening in vacant storefronts through a business competition and pop up stores

**\$35,000 grant to the Municipality** – to support the municipality in acquiring or leasing rental of tents, outdoor tables and chairs, temporary gates, parklets and barriers, PPE, masks, sanitizing stations, hands free door pulls, signage, etc. to ensure local businesses have the necessary public safety measures to reopen.

- \$5,000 – for sanitizing equipment, PPE, masks, and signage to support public hygiene during reopening the economy
- \$10,000 – for moveable chairs, tables, umbrellas
- \$5,000 – for safety barriers, signage, and temporary gates
- \$10,000 – for four parklets to expand dining options
- \$5,000 – for tent rental for main street event to announce the reopening of downtown

**\$100,000 Total Grant to Municipality and Downtown Organization**

### Village Example

**\$150,000 grant to Regional Partner** to provide business support, marketing assistance, grant/funding technical assistance to support village business recovery efforts in the region.

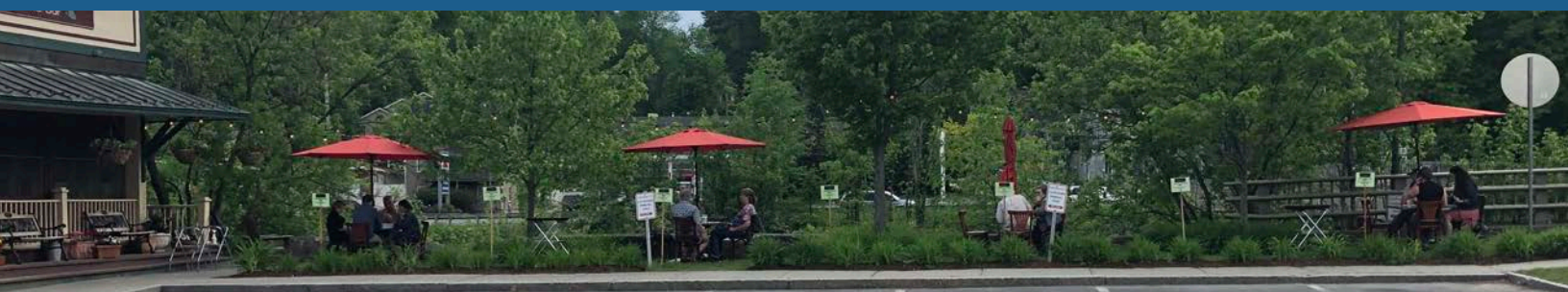
- \$60,000 – for business support by providing capacity and technical assistance
- \$15,000 – for targeted marketing efforts to help businesses reopen
- \$25,000 – subgranted to CDFI/RDC to support business financing and grant technical assistance
- \$50,000 – to provide communities and local businesses in the region with PPE, hand sanitizing equipment, masks, and other public safety measures to safely reopen local economies

### Better Places “Placemaking” Example

**\$20,000 grant to local nonprofit** – to repurpose a downtown alley to provide outdoor seating, public art, and landscaping with music events on Fridays throughout the summer and fall.

**\$10,000 grant to municipality** – to provide the necessary barriers, safety measures, signs, and lighting for a weekend road closure downtown throughout the summer to provide ample space for outdoor dining, pedestrians, and shoppers to support local business recovery.

**\$5,000 grant to local nonprofit** – to provide funding to purchase outdoor tables and chairs, lighting, and shade structures at the village general store.



For more information, please contact:

[Chris Cochran](#), Community Planning + Revitalization

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## Create “Capacity” Grant Program to Support Downtown and Village Recovery Efforts

**WHAT:** The Better Places Capacity Grants would ensure downtowns and villages have the organizational capacity necessary to help the community and main street businesses plan, permit, organize, and market safe outdoor events, retail sales, services, and dining opportunities this summer/fall and into the future.

**WHY:** Small business, hospitality, and performing arts venues underpin Vermont’s quality of life and brand, but they are critically affected and most at-risk due to the pandemic. Restaurants, stores and lodging facilities are carefully reopening, but to survive the new normal of reduced occupancies, mandated safety protocols, and hesitant consumers – businesses will have to quickly adapt. **Expert staff capacity is needed to ensure physical changes are rapidly implemented to draw more Vermonters and visitors to downtowns and village businesses.**

**WHO:** The state’s 23 downtown organizations rely on memberships, municipal funding, sponsorships, and events to pay staff and deliver economic development and community services. Downtown organizations are working tirelessly to support local businesses and their communities, but their funding is in jeopardy and their capacity to take on more work is limited. They need additional resources to help support the critical work necessary to save Vermont downtowns in tandem with new support for village center businesses.

**HOW:** ACCD proposes to subgrant funds to a state-wide fiscal agent who will offer grants to the 23 downtown organizations and regional block grants to support the villages. Grants will be awarded upon the submission of a workplan that meets Community Recovery Fund requirements. State, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations are currently working together to develop the grant applications, guidance materials, training, and community engagement needed to help local leaders transform outdoor areas to boost commerce and community life. The Local Support and Community Action Team recommends implementation of this recovery strategy in their report to the Governor. **Active partnerships include:**

- Guidance to enable the safe use of streets for restaurants and retail by ACCD and VTrans.
- Trainings and best practices on transforming streets in into COVID safe public gathering places by ACCD, VCRD, Regional Planning Commissions, and Cities and Towns.

**FUNDING:** \$2.5 million of CRF funds (\$1.5 million for downtowns; \$1 million for villages).



For more information, please contact:

[Chris Cochran](#), Community Planning + Revitalization

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## Create “Equipment” Grant Program to Safely Restart the Economy and Support Local Recovery

**WHAT:** The Better Places Equipment Grant is one of the lowest-cost, highest-impact investment the State can make to safely restart the economy. These grants will support cities and towns by providing the materials needed to temporarily move indoor operations to local streets, parking areas, and public spaces like parks and greens. These quick investments will transform Vermont’s downtowns and villages into COVID-safe places to shop, dine, and participate in public life and are critical to ensure Vermont can survive and bounce back from COVID. Providing hand sanitizing stations, adding physical spacing decals, or installing secure outdoor dining areas could be the difference between downtowns that rebound and those that don’t.

**WHY:** Successful marketing efforts to encourage Vermonters and visitors to spend time and money in Vermont’s downtowns and village centers must be linked to on-the-ground changes that give people the confidence they need to return to Vermont’s traditional centers of commerce and community life. Public health experts believe the virus will be active for several years and these equipment grants will help communities recover safely and find new and creative ways to continue safe operations while the COVID-19 persists.

**WHO:** The Better Places equipment grants will provide municipalities the framework and funding needed to adapt their economy and rebuild the quality of life in their communities.

**HOW:** A partnership between state, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations will use existing state procurement contracts to help municipalities quickly purchase materials. To the extent possible, bulk purchases will be cost-effective and prioritize Vermont suppliers and manufacturers.

**FUNDING:** \$1.5 million of CRF funds



For more information, please contact:

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Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development

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## Create “Placemaking” Grant Program to Spark Economic Recovery and Rebuild Community Life

**WHAT:** The Better Places Placemaking Grant establishes a flexible community grant program that strategically coordinates the efforts of several funders who already support COVID-19 place-based economic development projects to create vibrant places for people, whether that’s a new walking or cycling path, turning pavements into plazas or asphalt into art, providing pop-up parklets, expanding outdoor dining opportunities, or testing a street closure to make more room for pedestrians, retailers or farmers markets that meet social distancing requirements.

**WHY:** The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated our economy through business closures and job loss, while also impacting our communities through physical distancing requirements that further social isolation and loss of community life. More people are walking and biking than ever before and hungry to connect with friends and co-workers. Staying home has revealed ways we can make Vermont places better for people of all ages. Vermonters are re-thinking how we use streets, parking areas, and public spaces in downtowns and villages to make streets safer, help rebuild the economy, revive community life, and create a better place for all of us.

**WHO:** The Better Places program supports local leaders across the state working on projects to improve the economy and quality of life in their communities during the pandemic. The new funding platform is aimed at smaller ‘quick build’ projects, that creates a shared community focus, builds social capital, and empowers local leaders to step up. Tackling small projects together can restore confidence, rebuild capacity, and renew local pride of place – critical outcomes proven to spark larger community transformations that help communities recover faster and become better places to live, visit, and work.

**HOW:** The Better Places Placemaking Grants will be issued through a partnership between state, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations. Better Places will provide a nimble, flexible source to quickly fund, and launch local placemaking projects that meet social distancing requirements while advancing economic recovery efforts that:

- Support physical distancing and public safety requirements
- Contribute to Vermont’s economic recovery in downtowns and villages by creating vibrant streets and additional safe public spaces
- Support our community’s wellbeing, public health, and ability to recreate and exercise
- Empower local leaders to play an active role in rebuilding their communities, strengthening the economy, instilling confidence, and advancing local recovery efforts.

**FUNDING:** \$1 million in CRF funds



Photo Credit: Downtown Brattleboro Alliance and AARP-VT

For more information, please contact:

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Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development

# Better Places COVID-19 Mitigation and Recovery

Locally-Driven Placemaking Projects to Rebuild Community Life and Support Economic Recovery



Public Art



Demonstration Projects



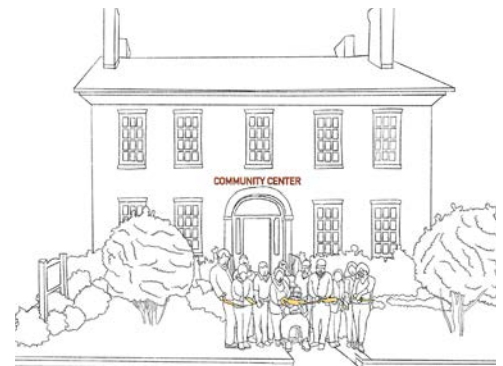
Pop-Up Galleries



Farmers Markets



Pocket Parks



Community Centers



Walking and Biking Trails



Downtown and Village Events



Parklets

