

# NEK Day @ the Statehouse

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Rural Innovations: What's Working &  
What's Next for the Northeast Kingdom





# Building vibrant rural communities.

For its bucolic charm, rich creative culture and killer food scene, the Northeast Kingdom is widely adored by residents and visitors alike. Last year, local organizations advanced a series of projects based critical to the region.

Together, we've made huge strides this year in marketing, community vibrancy, workforce development, broadband, and leadership. Our region's established and up-and-coming leaders continue their collaborative efforts to positively impact economic development in our communities. Our model for impacting change is adoptable in rural communities across the state, even nationwide.



## The Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk-Abenaki Nation

Our homeland is nestled among the lakes, rivers, and forests of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. Our connection to this land cannot be described in any language. It is our birthright and obligation to advocate for our ancestral territory so that its uniqueness and beauty will be protected for the generations to come.

## Leadership & Workforce Development

Local leadership is vital to the success of our state's rural areas. We're engaging new and established leaders through development initiatives designed to help people positively and effectively impact our region.



### #getNEKedVT

Since its launch in June 2019, this regional marketing & discovery campaign has reached over 100k people through digital advertising (Northern Forest Ctr).



### NEK Women Lead Network

This networking group for mission-driven women in the region features a learning circle format for rich, honest dialogue over dinner (NEK Collaborative).



### NEK Welcome Wagon

Since this fall, this program has been connecting new and returning Vermonters to local community hosts and resources (NEK Young Professionals).



### NEK Leadership Institute

This six-month intensive leadership development program is serving its first class of thirteen participants (Northwoods Stewardship Center).



### Stay-to-Stay Initiative

In 2019, this tourism program hosted four weekends in the region bringing 40 potential new residents to the NEK (Northern Community Investment Corp).



### NEK Leads Summit

Over 200 participants gathered for the first event of its kind to connect, build skills, share stories of success, and dig into challenges (NEK Collaborative).



# Food | Recreation | Creative Economy



**Albany General Store**  
With over \$600k raised, the renovation and reopening of this neighborhood hub is set for 2020.



**Biathlon Range**  
The new 15-pt range at the Cratsbury Outdoor Center is in-demand as a rare facility for training and races.



**Yellow Barn**  
Will strengthen economy by allowing establishments to grow and expand, develop new products, and improve.



**Vermont Vaudeville**  
Hardwick-based grassroots theater company performs live, sold-out shows statewide.



**Lamolle Valley Rail Trail**  
A new trail with amenity-rich trail head will bring travelers through the heart of St. Johnsbury in summer 2020.



**Old Stone House Museum**  
This year, OSHM celebrates Alexander Twilight, the first African American to serve in the VT legislature.



**Abenaki Seed Revival**  
Abenaki partner with Sterling College to cultivate long-lost crops to boost biodiversity in the modern world.



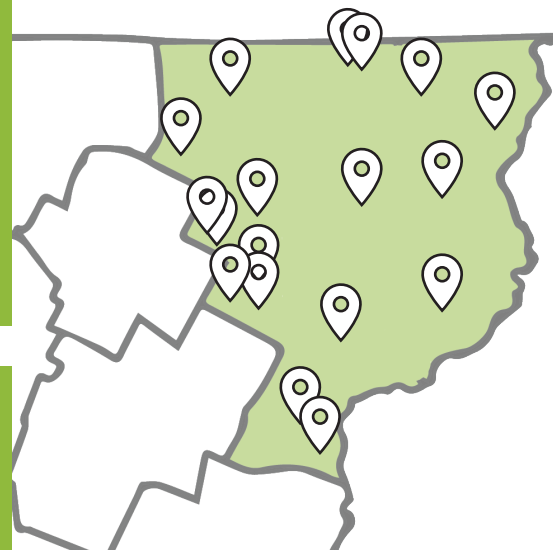
**Bluffside Farm**  
A trail across the farm will connect a seven-mile car-free recreation path connecting Newport to Canada.



**Gardner Park Playground**  
Health & well-being for families in our area, and significant opportunity for local commerce through visitation.



**Wed. Nights on the Waterfront**  
Nearly 1,000 people enjoy a sense of community and experience a multitude of diverse musical acts.



**Dog Mountain**  
This grant-funded weekly event in St. J brings hundreds to enjoy international music acts and local food and drinks.



**Gravel Trail Rides**  
Approx. 250 miles of curated gravel riding routes to attract riders to town centers and scenic areas of the NEK.



**Friday Night Live**  
Weekly event featuring live music, food vendors, and dancing during peak Summer season in Island Pond.



**New Avenue House**  
The restoration of an historic house in St. J creates jobs, generates revenue, adds residential & commercial space.



**142 Eastern**  
Community space offering inclusive pop-up opportunities for the St. J community to connect.



**DO North Co-Working Space**  
Resource hub featuring high-speed internet, a conference room, tech gear, mentors, and a built-in community.



**Northern Vermont University**  
This strong, innovative institution was named one of the top 20 schools in the U.S. for outdoor enthusiasts.



## Broadband Internet Access

### GOAL

Business and residential addresses in the NEK will have access to a minimum speed of 100 Mbps, symmetrical at an affordable price by 2025.

### PROGRESS

Implementing action plan built after two region-wide summits. 26 towns voting to join and form NEK Community Broadband communication union district at town meeting day 2020.



# ? What's next?

The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative recognizes the unique benefits and challenges of living in the NEK. We are working with partners across the region to develop innovative models for building vibrant rural communities. We are coming together across sectors to work with legislators on solutions for current and prospective residents and businesses. For the future of the region, we'd like to highlight:



## About the NEK Collaborative

### Regional convener with a uniquely effective process.

The meat & potatoes of our work is community engagement. From it, we develop clear strategies for positive change to present to people with power, like funders and legislators, to make it happen. We build connections: connections to common vision, connections between people, connections to resources.

We're dedicated to ensuring that everyone has a seat at the table. We believe in the wisdom of the group and strive to include a range of diverse voices in all the work that we do.

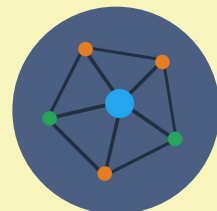
### Thank you, legislators.

Resources and focus from the state legislature allow the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative to continue its work developing strong, vibrant communities in the NEK. We appreciate legislators' dedication to engaging Vermont's population at large to help inform policy.



### 1 Northern Vermont University is vital to our region's economy.

NVU is a strong institution in our region actively unifying two colleges. NVU- Lyndon plays an critical role in the regional economy, providing not just education but jobs, community engagement, and a link to young people and prospective residents who can help ensure the long-term vitality of our area. We want to ensure that NVU - Lyndon has the resources and support it needs to thrive in our region.



### 2 Infrastructure needed to support workforce development.

With killer food, great schools, creative locals and endless opportunities for recreation, the NEK is an incredibly attractive place to live, work, and play. However, we lack some basic infrastructure required to realistically attract and retain residents: quality, affordable housing, high-speed internet access, transportation, and incentives to attract employees.



### 3 Policy should support working lands and vibrant downtowns.

Working lands are the core essence of the NEK, driving the economy through agriculture, forestry and recreation. And downtowns provide a needed social center in an otherwise isolating region. Our communities will thrive with easily navigable, common-sense regulation that balances environmental concerns with economic interests. Creative solutions and proactive planning can better support our communities.



## **NEKC Staff**

Katherine Sims, Director

## **NEKC Board of Directors**

Kathy Austin, President and CEO, Community National Bank

Dr. Elaine Collins, President, Northern Vermont University

Nick D'Agostino, Director, Rural Community Transit

Jon Freeman, President, Northern Community Investment Corp.

Jody Fried, Executive Director, Catamount Arts

Jeanne Gervais, President, Island Pond Chamber of Commerce

Joe Kasprzak, Asst. Town Manager, Town of St. Johnsbury

Jim Kisch, President and CEO, Passumpsic Bank

Julie Laforce, Owner, Built by Newport

Abigail Long, Executive Director, Kingdom Trails

Tom Lovett, Headmaster, St. Johnsbury Academy

Patrick Shattuck, CEO, RuralEdge

David Snedeker, Executive Director, Northeastern VT Dev. Assoc.

Shawn Tester, CEO, Northern Vermont Regional Hospital

Steve Wright, President and General Manager, Jay Peak Resort

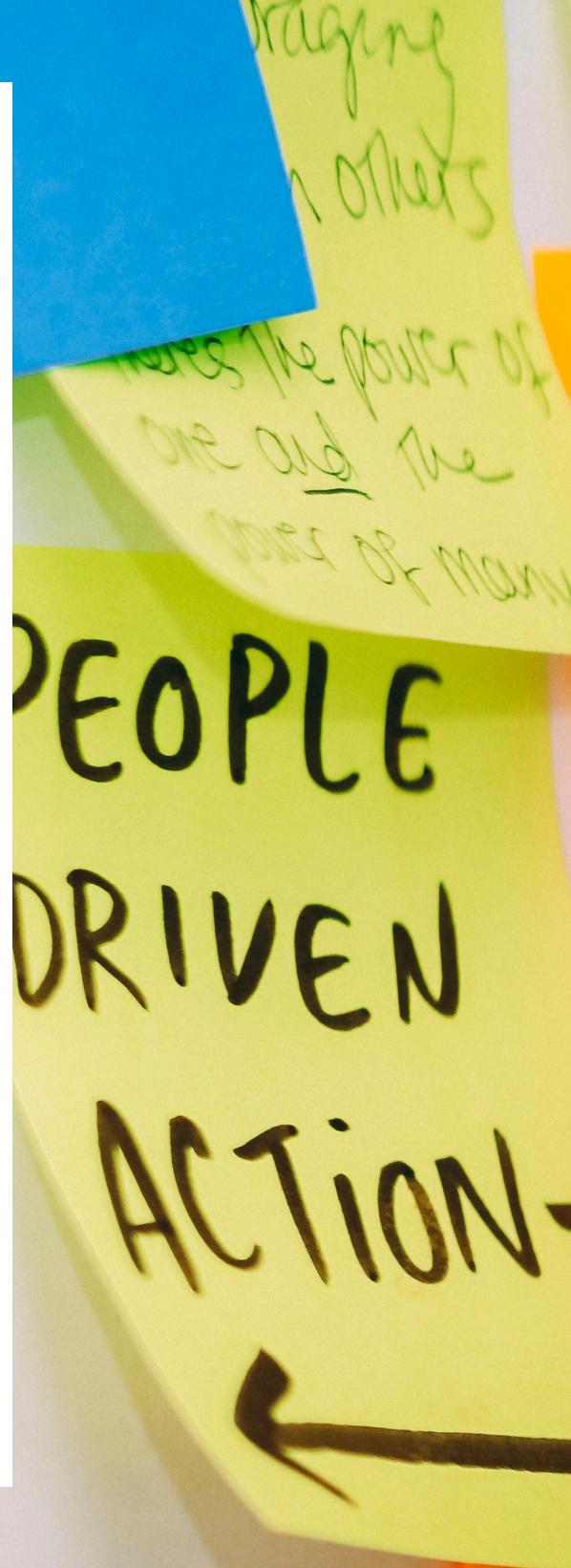
## **Advisory Members**

Suzanne Legare Belcher, Field Service Director, VT Agency of Human Services

Ben Doyle, As st. State Director VT/NH, USDA Rural Development

Tim Tierney, Director of Business Recruitment, VT Agency of Commerce

Sarah Waring, Vice President for Grants and Community Investments, VT Community Foundation



**Northeast Kingdom  
Collaborative**