

FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH:

Advancing Economic Development through the
Intersection of the Creative, Recreational and Food Sectors in the

 **NORTHEAST KINGDOM**

The ACTION PLAN of the

Trisector Task Force 

December 2018



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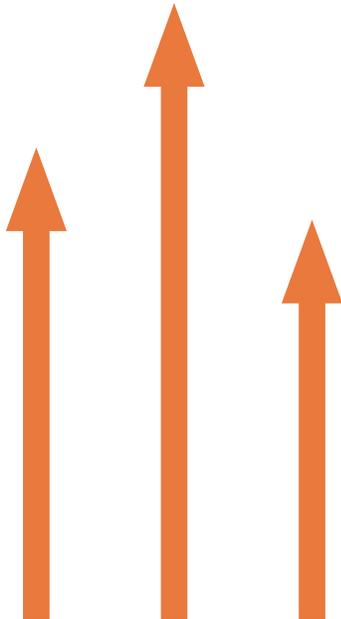


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Advancing Economic Development
through the Intersection of the Creative,
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The Action Plan of the Trisector Task Force



Produced by the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative

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The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative's mission is to develop, promote, and implement economic and community development strategies to improve the quality of life for residents of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018, the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative (NEKC) launched a new “Task Force” framework for using collective action to promote economic and community development in the region. The NEKC convened representatives from relevant organizations to form a 14-member **Task Force on Advancing Economic Development through the Intersection of the Creative, Recreational and Food Sectors** (the “Trisector Task Force”). The Task Force met to discuss and strategize through the year about how these three dynamic sectors might support each other in driving sustainable growth.

The result is this platform for action, a regional strategy for **supporting economic development in the Northeast Kingdom** by leveraging the potential for overlapping audiences and user groups in the creative, recreational and food sectors. It represents a blueprint for how conversation among nonprofit and private groups to align their work can result in the development of projects capable of transforming communities.

Backed by this diverse array of partners, these five initiatives can be launched in 2019 and will have a measurable impact on building a stronger and more diverse Northeast Kingdom economic future.

1 COORDINATE AND EXPAND MARKETING THE REGION ←
by establishing an **NEK Regional Marketing Partnership Advisory Group**. This group will help support efforts to (a) market the region to visitors, (b) retain and attract workers, (c) assist businesses with expanding their digital footprint, (d) market businesses to residents through a Locals Passport, and (e) map assets online and in print.

2 SUSTAIN AND GROW HIGH-QUALITY PLACE-BASED EVENTS ←
through an **NEK Event Backbone** program that will increase the capacity of municipalities, local chambers of commerce, and nonprofits to host them through a new regional event assistance provider.

3 ENHANCE ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH RURAL COMMUNITY HUBS ←
by investing in infrastructure improvements to create “**Outdoor Recreation Friendly Communities**” that would connect outdoor recreation assets to other parts of their economy, including the creative and food sector.

4 EXPAND ACCESS TO TRISECTOR EXPERIENCES FOR KIDS ←
with a new **NEK Kids Program Fund**, which would centralize fundraising for local recreational, creative and agricultural/culinary programming for youth.

5 INCREASE BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY ←
in the region by building stakeholder consensus around an **NEK Broadband Action Plan** to improve the quality and speed of the internet available to businesses and residents, particularly in rural community hubs.



II. INTRODUCTION

The platform in this report is designed to advance leadership development in the Northeast Kingdom. We believe that local leadership is vital to the success of our state's rural areas, and that there is a need to strengthen the region's pipeline of emerging leaders and to encourage young people to take leadership roles in their communities. Expanding leadership programs will help more people become engaged with the civic life of their communities and provide opportunities for citizen empowerment. To do this, we must act together now.

The Northeast Kingdom's natural assets, along with its creative culture and farms, offer top-notch experiences for everyone from wilderness adventurers, to foodies looking for a farm to table experience, to artists seeking a creative community. Given these strengths, we believe there is a great opportunity to use existing assets and form new partnerships that will create jobs and grow the region's skilled workforce. To do this, we must act together now.

A) THE ROLE OF THE TRISECTOR TASK FORCE

In 2018, the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative founded and charged a "Task Force on Advancing Economic Development through the Intersection of the Creative, Recreation, and Food Sectors in the Northeast Kingdom." The goal of the Trisector Task Force was to bring together key leaders and experts who together would evaluate opportunities for taking advantage of the intersection of these three sectors and frame strategies for supporting growth at these points of overlap.

Task Force members (listed on the inside cover of this report) worked together over six months to listen to guest panels from each sector and discuss their own experiences. They used these findings to articulate a comprehensive action plan for advancing this work in the region.

B) THE ROLE OF THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM COLLABORATIVE

The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative (NEKC) is a convener and leader of collective action for the benefit of the communities of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom.

The NEKC has founded, managed, staffed, and facilitated the deliberations of the Leadership Development Task Force. The NEKC selected members of the Task Force to listen, learn, and capture ideas for advancing leadership in the Northeast Kingdom. The content in this report arose out of these conversations and was closely reviewed and approved by members of the Task Force.

Following this report, the NEKC will work with partners and funders to bring the projects in this plan to life. We expect this work will advance development in the region and help address this significant challenge to our future.

KEY GOALS

This report is designed to address the key goals in the charge to this Task Force to:

1 Identify existing barriers that must be overcome to increase collaboration between creative, recreation, and food sectors in the region

2 Identify what is achievable to systemically advance economic development through the creative, recreation, and food sectors in the region.

3 Identify strategic state policies and economic development tools to promote the creative, recreation, and food sectors.

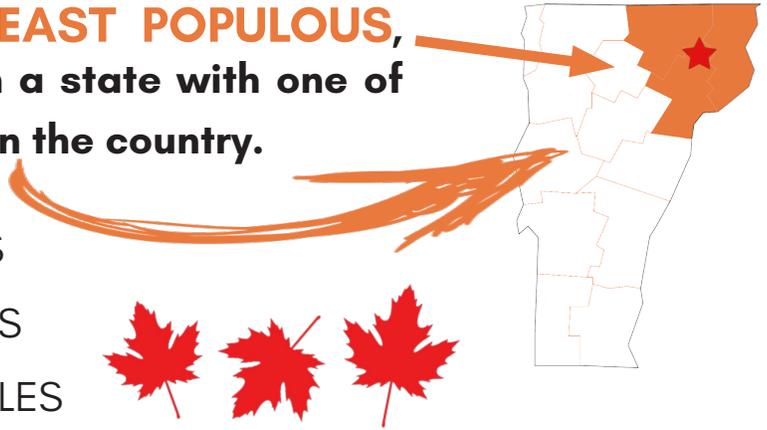
4 Develop an action plan to advance economic development through the creative, recreation, and food sectors in the Northeast Kingdom.

III. ABOUT THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM

The Northeast Kingdom (NEK) of Vermont possesses innumerable assets: engaged citizens, dynamic entrepreneurs, exceptional educational and healthcare institutions, natural and cultural treasures, and thriving local food system. Despite these resources, the region continues to face persistent economic and social challenges.

The NEK is comprised of the **LEAST POPULOUS**, least densely-settled counties in a state with one of the **MOST RURAL** populations in the country.

NEK STATS
55 TOWNS & GORES
64,108 RESIDENTS
2,027 SQUARE MILES



DID YOU KNOW?

The name Northeast Kingdom (NEK) was coined by former Vermont governor George Aiken in a 1949 speech.

2.4% REGIONAL POPULATION DECLINE BETWEEN 2010 & 2017

82% OF THE WORKFORCE LEAVES THE COUNTY FOR WORK (ESSEX COUNTY)

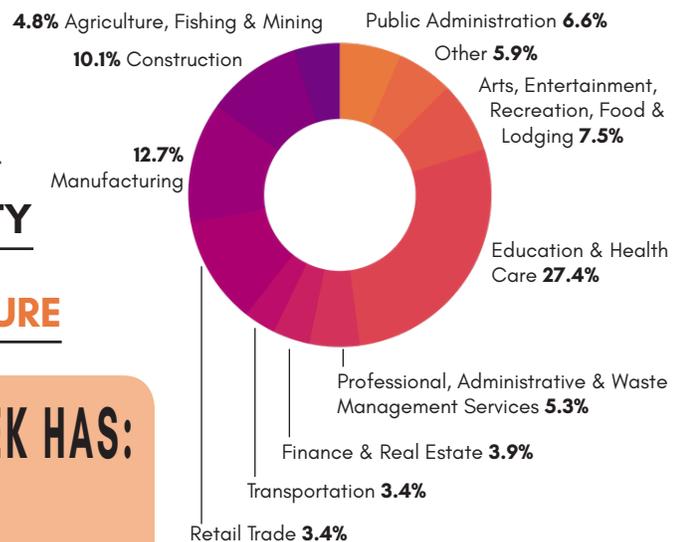
14% OF RESIDENTS LIVE IN POVERTY

1 IN 4 CHILDREN ARE FOOD INSECURE

COMPARED TO THE REST OF STATE, THE NEK HAS:

- **LOWER** High School **DEGREE ATTAINMENT**
- **LOWEST** Labor Force **PARTICIPATION**
- **LOWEST** median Household **INCOME**
- **HIGHER** median **AGE**

NEK INDUSTRY SECTORS BY JOBS



*Data prepared by the Vermont State Data Center at UVM's Center for Rural Studies

IV. CREATIVE, RECREATIONAL & FOOD SECTORS

VERMONT:

The creative, recreational and food sectors are strong drivers of Vermont's economy, and growing. They also exemplify the Vermont brand and lifestyle and provide experiences that are attractive to working-age individuals and families.



VERMONT CREATIVE SECTOR

- ➔ 37,000 Jobs (approx. 9% of total)
- ➔ **JOB NUMBERS INCREASED ↑ BY 8 %**
(2010 to 2017)

(Sources: Vermont Arts Council, 2015; Vermont Creative Network, 2018)



NEK CREATIVE SECTOR

- ➔ 2,991 jobs (approx. 8% of total)
- ➔ **JOB NUMBERS INCREASED ↑ BY 4%**
(2010 to 2017)

(Vermont Creative Network, 2018)



VERMONT FOOD & FARM SECTOR

- ➔ 64,000 Jobs (approx. 15% of total)
- ➔ **JOB NUMBERS INCREASED ↑ BY 11%**
(2009 to 2016)

(Source: Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, 2017)



NEK FOOD, FARM [AND FOREST] SECTOR

- ➔ Comprise 8.6% of all business establishments in the NEK
- ➔ **FOOD MANUFACTURING JOBS ↑ INCREASED BY ~18%**
(2010 to 2014)

(NEK Regional Food System Plan, Center for an Agricultural Economy)



VERMONT RECREATION SECTOR

- ➔ 51,000 Jobs (approx. 12% of total)
- (Source: Outdoor Industry Association, 2017)



NEK RECREATION SECTOR

- ➔ **VISITS TO KINGDOM TRAILS IN EAST BURKE HAVE INCREASED ↑ 20+%**
(2016-2018)
- ➔ 75% of these visitors were not Vermont residents

(Kingdom Trails, 2018; Vermont Trails and Greenways Council, 2016)



V. CHALLENGE STATEMENT

The Northeast Kingdom (NEK), like many rural areas across the country, faces related systemic problems: declining school enrollments, failing infrastructure and an aging population, partially due to the outflux of young workers and families. Fortunately, the region also has many of the natural and cultural resources sought out by this demographic group: outdoor recreation, small schools, affordable real estate, abundant locally-grown food and walkable town centers. Tourists and vacationers are drawn here by the same assets.

There is a great opportunity to support, market and expand on these strengths, particularly where the creative, recreational and agricultural (or culinary) resources of the area overlap or might enhance each other. But there are also several challenges to overcome: the geographic isolation of our communities, limited capacity for coordination among organizations and the need to bring resiliency to these three sectors, which can be among the first to suffer during slow economic times, through local patronage and support.

—————▶ the region has many natural and cultural resources ◀—————

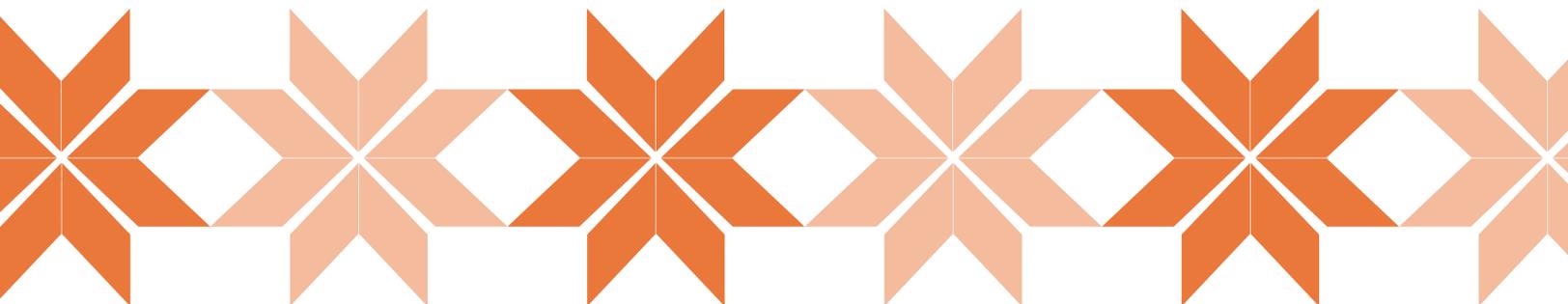
VI. VISION STATEMENT

OVERARCHING VISION STATEMENT:

The Northeast Kingdom's rich natural and cultural assets are the bedrock of the region's economy. Growth that respects and celebrates these assets will lead to economic vitality for all in the Northeast Kingdom by 2025.

ELABORATED VISION STATEMENT:

Young people want to live and work and start new businesses in the Northeast Kingdom. Young families have access to the high quality support services (child care, health care, schools) they need to be successful. Businesses and communities have the infrastructure (parking, signage, broadband) they need to be successful. There is a critical mass of high-quality jobs that pay a livable wage. Growth is authentic to the region and on a scale that is compatible with the local landscape, ecology and community life. Residents have a strong sense of place and land stewardship. They are proud of their communities. There is strong cooperation between older and younger generations. There is a formal means by which the three sectors (creative, recreational and food) and their component entities are connected and mutually supported.





VI. PLATFORM FOR ACTION

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- Projects will focus on strengthening the intersection of all three sectors - creative, recreational and food, particularly taking advantage of the potential for overlapping users, audiences, and customers.
- Projects will make improvements that benefit both visitors to the region and residents.
- Projects will incorporate an ethic of sustainability and stewardship of our natural and cultural heritage.

BUSINESS SERVICES HUB

The Trisector Task Force identified a need to coordinate and streamline access by business and social entrepreneurs to existing technical assistance providers. There are several different providers of such assistance but their specific offerings and how they overlap or complement each other is largely opaque. The Trisector Task Force sees opportunity for these organizations to work together to develop a 'one-stop' hub where different available services could be described and shared. While this was not included in the Action Steps because it is not Trisector focused, the Task Force sees this work benefiting Trisector businesses and encourages the NEKC and regional TA providers to take on this effort in the coming year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 COORDINATE & EXPAND MARKETING OF THE NEK REGION

PROJECT: NEK Regional Marketing Partnership Advisory Group

ACTION: Establish an entity that will support ongoing and future efforts at marketing the region to visitors and residents. Members will represent a diversity of stakeholders including businesses, non-profit organizations, and local chambers of commerce. Immediate priorities include:

- Regional marketing to visitors: Hire a marketing firm to develop an NEK branding & marketing plan and develop recommendation for how this work is sustained over time and the impact is tracked. (Northern Forest Center; cost: \$85,000)
- Retaining and attracting workers: Implement strategies to retain and attract workers to the NEK in partnership with Vermont's ThinkVermont initiative. (Northern Community Investment Corporation; cost: \$220,000)
- Business assistance: Provide on-site outreach to businesses with training and assistance in expanding their digital footprint, with the goal of ensuring that they have a strong presence on apps, online maps and ratings services that are increasingly essential for success. (Northern Forest Center; cost: \$25,000)
- Regional marketing to residents: Hire a consultant to develop a Locals Passport that would market and promote a diverse array of local businesses. Support the distribution of the passport through the marketplace and employers. (Who: NVDA; cost: \$30,000)
- Mapping assets: Create an updatable digital and print map that provides visitors and residents location and other basic information about creative, recreational and food and farm attractions and allows for the creation of customizable suggested itineraries for touring (NVDA; cost: \$50,000)

Metrics: (Deliverable) Advisory Board Established; (Achieves Result) survey participating organizations on value of collaborative effort



2 SUSTAIN & GROW HIGH-QUALITY PLACE-BASED EVENTS

PROJECT: NEK Event Backbone

ACTION: Increase the capacity of municipalities, local chambers and nonprofits to host regular high-quality place-based events through a regional event assistance provider. The activities would involve both on-the-ground physical and technical assistance for specific events (booking, staging, sound, ticketing, marketing) and tri-ector strategic planning on how such events can support economic development and job creation. Possible pilots: City of Newport Events Committee; expanded Kingdom Farm & Food Days

Who: Catamount Arts

Cost: \$30,000 or \$10,000 per pilot project

Metric: (Meets Demand) No. of applicants for pilot projects; (Achieves Result) Survey of clients to gauge value of support and ongoing interest in relationship with CA

3 ENHANCE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITY HUBS

PROJECT: NEK "Outdoor Recreation Friendly Community" Hubs

ACTION: Invest in infrastructure improvements that support communities in leveraging their outdoor recreation assets to grow other parts of their local economy including the creative and food sectors. Investments would develop a "community hub" around a recreational asset, including building renovations, trail development or signage and other forms of wayfinding. The model hub should include critical elements of stewardship and sustainability, of collaborative local leadership, and of creative uses for existing infrastructure.

Who: NEK Collaborative with subgrants to individual communities

Cost: \$450,000

Metric: (Deliverable) projects completed; (Meets Demand) No. of applicants for funding; (Achieves Result) Survey of successful applicants on value of sub-grant opportunity

4 EXPAND ACCESS TO TRISECTOR EXPERIENCES FOR KIDS

PROJECT: NEK Kids Program Fund

ACTION: Launch a fund that would provide funding and backbone support for recreation, creative, and agricultural/culinary programming for youth. Partner with an existing nonprofit or fund to establish a mechanism to increase fundraising efforts through such activities as applying regional or national grants, business sponsorship, and/or public campaigns.

Who: NEK Collaborative

Cost: \$40,000

Metric: (Deliverable) Create a sustainable fund housed within a stable organization; (Meets Demand); No. of applicants for sub-grant funding; (Achieves Result) Survey of successful applicants on value of sub-grant opportunity

5 INCREASE BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY IN THE REGION

PROJECT: NEK Broadband Action Plan

ACTION: Create consensus among stakeholders around a specific detailed action plan and next steps. This will be kicked off with a broadband summit convening businesses, legislators, nonprofits, etc. to identify opportunities to increase access to 1) business-class high-speed broadband (guaranteed 100 mbs symmetrical service) in town centers, particularly co-working and community spaces; 2) true high-speed broadband (25/3 mps min) to residences.

Who: NEK Collaborative, NVDA, and Northern Vermont Economic Development District

Cost: \$1,500 staff time & food

Metric: (Deliverables) Action Plan and Next Steps

ADVANCING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE INTERSECTION OF THE CREATIVE, RECREATION, AND FOOD SECTORS

SUMMARY OF PLATFORM FOR ACTION

#	PROJECT TITLE	DESCRIPTION	LEAD ORG.	KEY ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME	EST. COSTS
1	NEK Regional Marketing Partnership Advisory Group	Establish an entity to guide and support regional marketing efforts	NEK Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop framework • Convene group 	Ongoing	In-kind staff hours
1a	NEK Brand & Marketing Plan	Develop a plan to broadly market the NEK as a region	Northern Forest Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire consultant • Build marketing plan • Develop sustainability plan 	2018-2019	\$85,000
1b	“Think Vermont” in the NEK	Implement strategies to retain and attract workers to the NEK	NCIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay-to-Stay Weekends • Utilize the ThinkVT brand and website • Hyper targeted marketing • Concierge service • Convert visitors to residents 	2018-2020	\$220,000
1c	Business Assistance	Assist businesses with expanding their digital footprint in alignment with regional marketing efforts	Northern Forest Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire consultant • Conduct assessments • Make recommendations • Track results 	2019-2020	\$25,000
1d	Marketing to Residents	Develop a Locals Passport	NVDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire consultant • Distribute widely 	2019-2020	\$30,000
1e	Mapping Regional Assets	Create an online and downloadable printed map	NVDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire consultant • Develop sustainability plan 	2019-2021	\$50,000
2	NEK Event Backbone Pilot	Support local hosts of high-quality place-based eventst	Catamount Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop materials • Choose pilot locations 	2019-2020	\$30,000
3	NEK “Outdoor Recreation Friendly Community” Hubs	Invest in infrastructure improvements to connect outdoor recreation to creative and food sectors	NEK Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop framework • Build Fund • Support awarded projects 	2019-2022	\$450,000
4	NEK Kids Program Fund	Launch fund to provide backbone support and funding for tri-sector youth programming	NEK Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with existing non-profit • Develop framework 	2019-2020	\$40,000
5	NEK Broadband Action Plan	Action steps for improving high-speed connectivity	NEKC, NVDA, NVEDD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene stakeholders • Draft action plan • Build consensus 	2019	\$1,500
Comprehensive series of recommendations to advance economic development through the intersection of the creative, recreational and food sectors						~\$920,000

More detailed plans for these projects, as well as scopes of work and budgets, are available from the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative upon request.



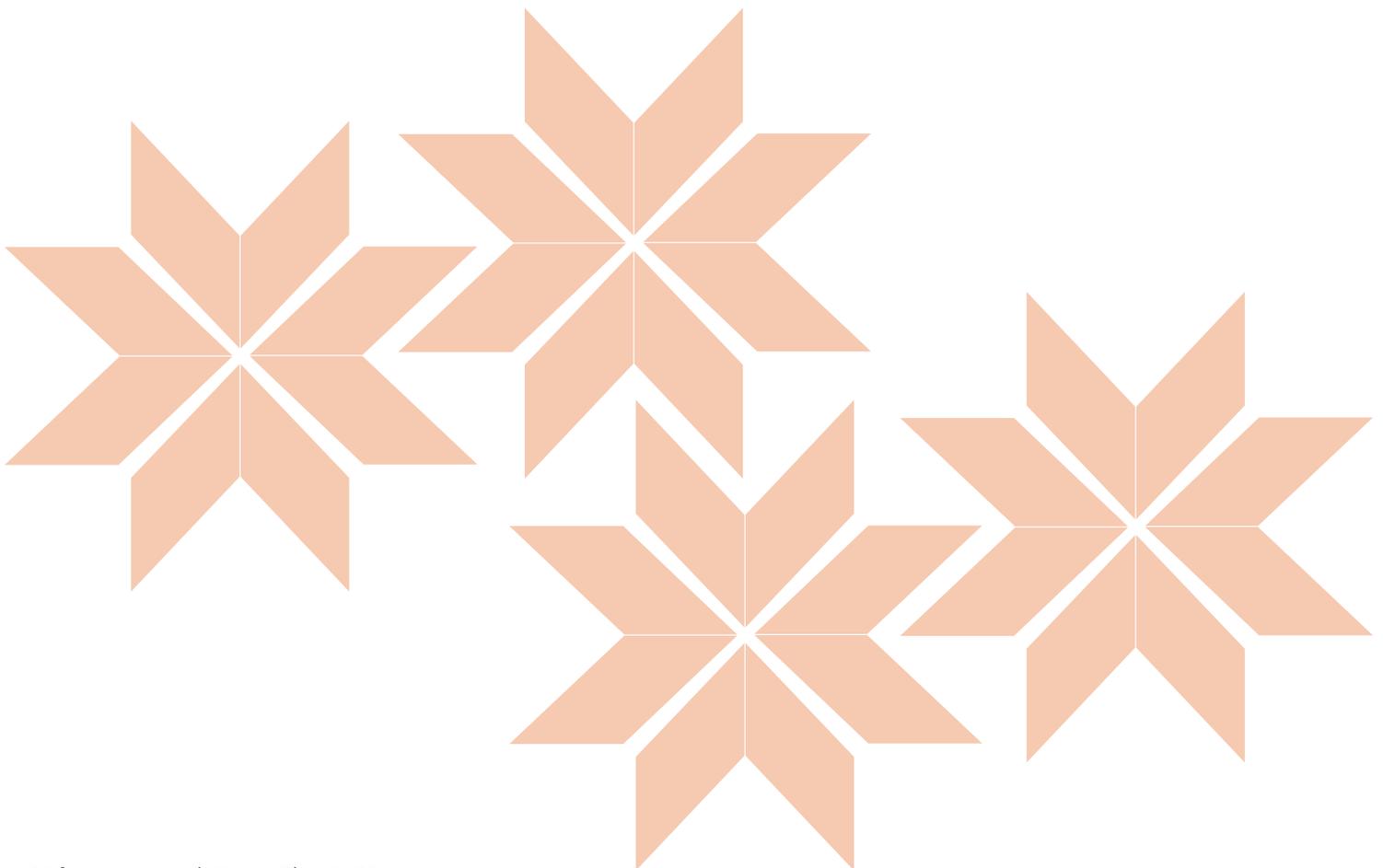
VII. NEXT STEPS

The Northeast Kingdom Trisector Task Force is excited to be able to present this Action Plan. There will be both short-term and long-term work underway to bring these recommended projects to life.

In the coming months, the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative and partners will be promoting the recommendations in this plan and building additional partnerships to advance the work. As the lead organizations begin implementing the projects over the course of 2019, the Collaborative will serve as advisor to the projects, support the ongoing efforts, and track project development. The Collaborative will produce a mid-year progress report providing an update on the projects.

WE NEED YOUR HELP:

- **SPREAD THE WORD** and invite others to join us in building support for the plan.
- **VOLUNTEER** to help us with the next steps. Let us know if you or your organization would like to assist with a specific project in the report
- **INVEST** in this work. Let us know if you or your organization would like to contribute to a specific project in the report.
- **STAY TUNED** and sign up for future opportunities as we move forward with implementing the recommendations.





VIII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative would like to express our deepest appreciation to all of the dedicated partners, contributors, expert presenters, wonderful colleagues, and committed Vermonters who helped make this Trisector Report a reality.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

The members of the Trisector Task Force are some of the most knowledgeable and driven leaders in advancing economic growth and community development through the creative, recreational or food sectors in the Northeast Kingdom. We appreciate their hard work and dedication to moving this effort forward. The inside cover of this report includes a list of Task Force members.

TASK FORCE PRESENTERS

We are grateful for the input from enthusiastic and knowledgeable experts around the state who joined the Task Force's monthly meetings to share their perspectives and ideas to advance creative, recreational and food sectors:

Kit Basom from the Craftsbury General Store

Judy Geer from the Craftsbury Outdoor Center

Jean Haigh from the Green Mountain Club NEK Section and Friends of Willoughby State Forest

Melissa Levy from the NEK Creative Economy Study

Paul Lisai from Sweet Rowan Farmstead

Emily Maclure from the Craftsbury General Store

Hannah Pearce from Pearce's Pastured Poultry

Tim Tierney from the Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development

JJ Toland from Jay Peak Resort

FUNDING PARTNERS

The NEKC deeply appreciates the leadership and investment of our generous philanthropic partners in the work of the Trisector Task Force including the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont Community Foundation, and USDA Rural Development.





IX. MISSION & PRIORITIES

THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM COLLABORATIVE is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a vibrant, thriving Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. The NEKC has been working for more than 20 years with the mission of promoting economic and community development and improving quality of life for residents in the region. We do this by:



DEVELOPING STRATEGY



BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY



GUIDING INVESTMENT

REGIONAL PRIORITY AREAS:

- 1 Leadership Development
- 2 Advancing Economic Development through the Intersection of the Creative, Recreation and Food Sectors.

NEK Collaborative Board of Directors

Sarah Waring (Chair)

Executive Director, Center for an Agricultural Economy

Jody Fried (Vice-Chair)

Executive Director, Catamount Arts

Susan Ohlidal (Secretary)

Interfaith Partners NEK

David Snedeker (Treasurer)

Executive Director, Northeastern Vermont Development Association

Kathy Austin

President & CEO, Community National Bank

Paul Bengtson

CEO, Northern Vermont Regional Hospital

Elaine Collins

President, Northern Vermont University

Patrick Flood

Interim CEO, Rural Edge

Jon Freeman

President & CEO, Northern Community Investment Corp.

Jeanne Gervais

President, Island Pond Chamber of Commerce

Joe Kasprzak

Asst. Town Manager, St. Johnsbury

Jim Kisch

President & CEO, Passumpsic Savings Bank

Julie Laforce

Co-owner, Built by Newport

Tom Lovett

Headmaster, St. Johnsbury Academy

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General Manager, Jay Peak Resort

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Emilye Pelow Corbett

Philanthropic & Planned Giving Advisor, Vermont Community Foundation

Tim Tierney

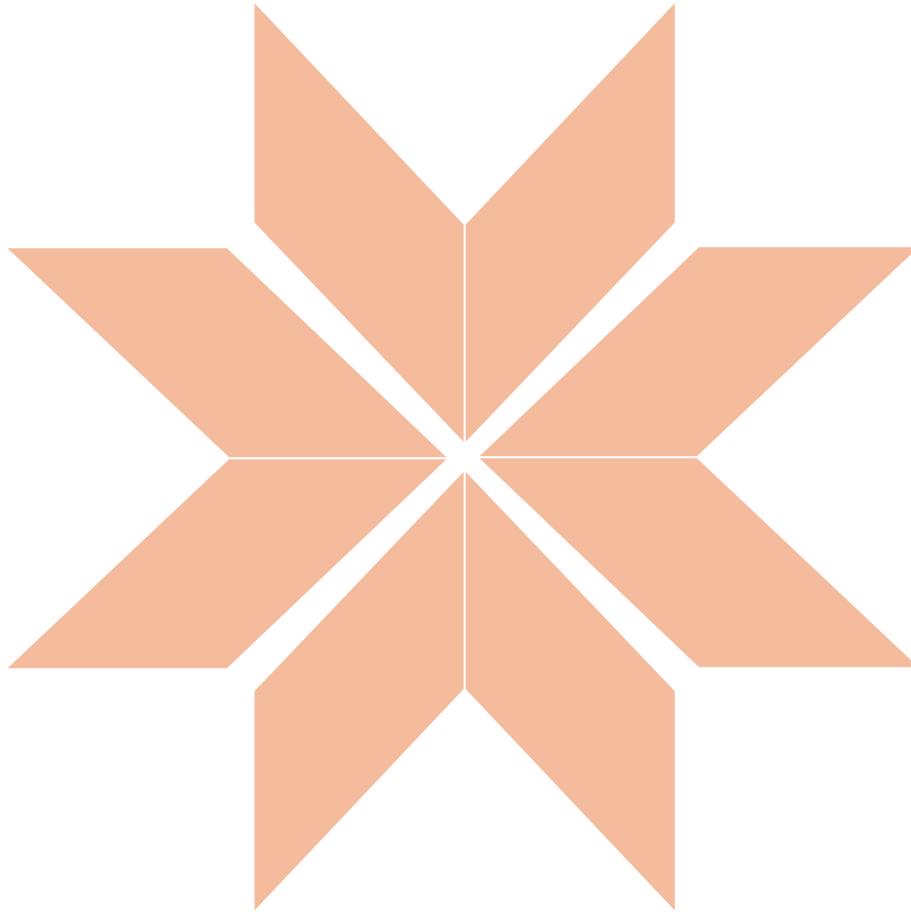
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Katherine Sims

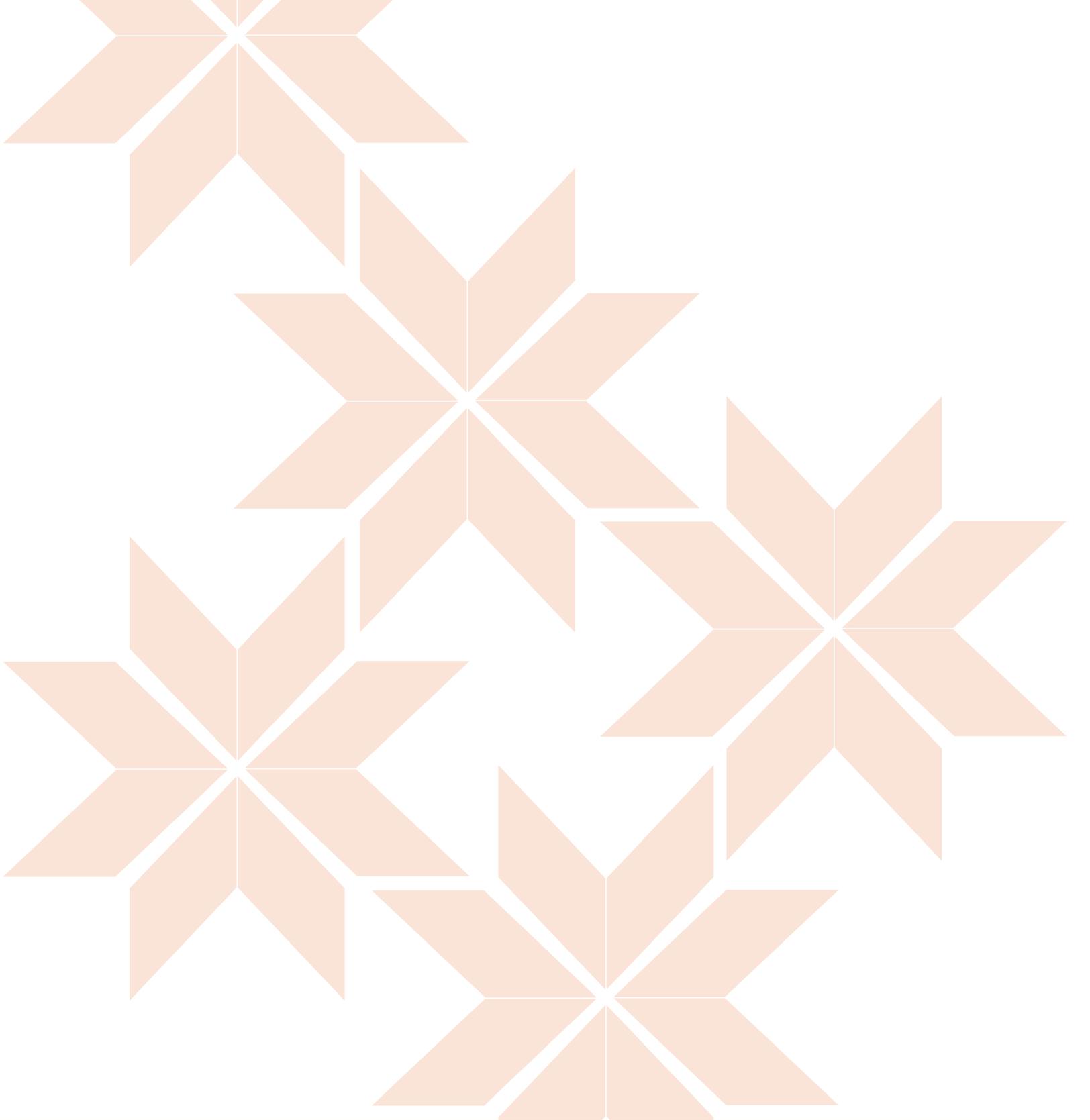
Director

www.NekCollaborative.org



The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative

The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative's mission is to develop, promote, and implement economic and community development strategies to improve the quality of life for residents of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom.



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