

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Better Places

Empowering Vermonters to Create Vibrant Public Places





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About Better Places

Better Places supports community-led projects that create, revitalize, or activate public spaces, bringing people together together to build welcoming and thriving communities across Vermont.

Better Places is a community matching grant program empowering Vermonters to create inclusive and vibrant public

places serving Vermont's designated downtowns, village centers, new town centers, and neighborhood development areas. The program is led by the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in partnership with the Vermont Community Foundation and Patronicity.

How It Works

Better Places crowdfunding campaigns are eligible for a 2:1 matching grant ranging from \$5,000 to \$40,000 to advance community-led placemaking efforts that create, revitalize, or activate public spaces. Municipalities, local community groups, and nonprofit entities with municipal support may apply.

Better Places uses a method of grantmaking called "crowdgranting." Crowdgranting combines crowdfunding – the practice of funding a project with small donations from a large number of people – with a matching grant from the State. Crowdgranting builds local awareness, excitement, and shared investment in community-led placemaking projects.

The Better Places program provides one-on-one project coaching and local fundraising support to community leaders to help them develop and run successful crowdfunding campaigns that the State matches with a 2:1 grant.

Do you have an idea to improve a public space in your community?

Learn more at patronicity.com/BetterPlacesVT

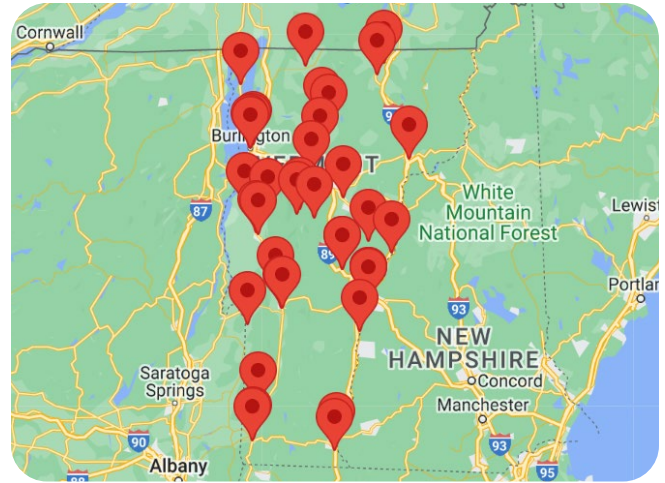


Funding

The Better Places program is funded through state dollars allocated by the Vermont Legislature during the passage of Act 74 in 2021, with the intent to support community-led projects that create, revitalize, or activate public spaces, bringing people together to build welcoming and thriving communities across Vermont. This includes \$1,275,000 in total grant funds.

Better Places is a place-based economic development program that:

- Activates and revitalizes public spaces to build vibrant communities
- Empowers residents to play an active role in shaping their community
- Advances “quick build” projects which boost community confidence and local pride
- Builds inclusive and welcoming spaces for social connection, health, and recreation
- Increases integrity of and equitable access to green spaces
- Stimulates the creative economy and provides equitable access to the arts
- Spurs entrepreneurship, partnerships, and public and private investment
- Connects viable projects to individual contributors and matching funds



Since the spring of 2022, the Better Places program has supported 38 community-led projects, including:

- 18 parks and green spaces (playgrounds, pavilions, village parks, recreation)
- 8 community driven public art/mural projects in parks, streets, and along rail trails
- 5 programming/events (downtown events, music, movies, food, youth engagement)
- 5 community building improvements (libraries, community centers, maritime center, etc.)
- 2 downtown beautification projects (streetscape improvements)



Small Towns, Healthy Places Podcast

Healthy and vibrant communities require safe streets and sidewalks, inclusive gathering places and green spaces for everyone to enjoy, and easy access to services, fresh food, and local amenities. Join Suzanne Kelley from the Vermont Department of Health and Richard Amore from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development in *Small Towns, Healthy Places*, the podcast that explores the intersection between health equity and community design in the State of Vermont. They interview state partners, local leaders, and community members about creating vibrant places that support health and wellness. If you're passionate about public health, improving the built environment, and placemaking, this podcast is for you.

[Listen now!](#)



Better Places Impact by the Numbers

This is a snapshot of Better Places projects from February 1, 2022 – January 3, 2024.

**Total
Matched**



\$850,100

LIFETIME

**Total
Crowdfunded**



\$473,290

LIFETIME

**Total
Projects**



38

LIFETIME

**Total
Patrons**



3,207

LIFETIME

100% Success Rate

CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGN SUCCESS

111% Funded

AVERAGE OF SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS

\$5,506,943

LEVERAGED FUNDING

\$5,980,233
Total Private Investment

CROWDFUNDING AND LEVERAGED FUNDING

**7.03:1 Total Private
Investment Ratio**

For every \$1 invested by Better Places,
\$7.03 was invested privately.



\$22,371

AVERAGE PROJECT GOAL

\$12,455

AVERAGE RAISE

84

AVERAGE PATRONS

HIGHEST RAISE

The Hartford WW1 and WW2 Monument had the highest crowdfunding campaign raise of \$28,605.

SMALLEST CAMPAIGN GOAL

Poultney Downtown Mural Initiative had the smallest crowdfunding campaign goal of \$3,250.

LARGEST NUMBER OF PATRONS

Bring a Community Playground to Enosburgh had the largest number of patrons with 605 contributing to the campaign's success.

VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED

600+

SQUARE FEET OF PUBLIC SPACE CREATED OR REDEVELOPED

134,304

TEMPORARY JOBS CREATED

51

NUMBER OF PROJECTS BY NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, MUNICIPALITIES, OR OTHER ENTITY TYPES

**Community Groups: 5 (13%)
Nonprofits: 26 (68%) | Municipality: 7 (19%)**

38 Projects in Thirteen Counties

FROM SMALL RURAL COMMUNITIES (VERSHIRE, ROXBURY, COVENTRY, AND NORTH HERO) TO LARGER COMMUNITIES (BARRE, BRATTLEBORO, BENNINGTON, RUTLAND, AND NEWPORT)

Over 180+ preflight consultations from communities across the state





Patrons in the City: Reimagine Roxbury, Vermont

In spring 2023, the community of Roxbury, Vermont came together to envision a better place for their community to gather, exercise, and entertain. The Roxbury Park Development Committee, a passionate group of individuals, had a vision to strengthen their community. The committee—including Ed Carney, Elizabeth Carney, Craig Sullivan, Jim Rogler, and Dotti Guiffre—launched the crowdfunding campaign Roxbury Village Park Needs Your Support! The grassroots crowdfunding campaign raised \$8,615 from 51 patrons. The campaign exceeded its goal of \$7,500, showcasing the deep desire for the community to invest in its future by developing the new park.

Dotti: “The enthusiasm and support we received, as the plan took shape, from the residents of Roxbury, supporters from Patronicity and the State of Vermont Better Places Grant has encouraged the members of our Park Development Committee to keep going and give it our best. This project holds a key location in revitalizing the entire community.”

Ed: “The Better Places Grant accelerated the Roxbury Village Park Project, motivating us to reconnect with friends, neighbors and families that recently moved to Roxbury. It demonstrated with leadership and volunteers how a community can improve its appearance and provide a space for all its members to enjoy and be proud of the effort they put into making Roxbury Village Park a reality. It demonstrated that with conviction and cooperation, we can effect positive change for the betterment of our town and community.”

We spoke in-depth with Dotti & Ed about how they reimaged Roxbury.

Read more at resources.patronicity.com



Patron in the City: Gillian Sewake

Gillian Sewake, the Director of [Discover St. Johnsbury](#), has a love for her community that has been the driving force behind many initiatives in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. In May 2022, Gillian launched a successful crowdfunding campaign for a free outdoor music event series. One of the first Better Places projects to launch a crowdfunding campaign through Patronicity, [#GetDowntown St. J](#) raised over \$4,000 to fill the downtown with art, community, and fun. By reaching their crowdfunding goal, the project unlocked a 2:1 matching grant from the Better Places program.

Patronicity: What could other towns learn from your community or project?

Gillian: “Make sure you remove as many barriers as possible to ensure that all community members can participate. Look at whether some activities at your free event cost money, and try to cover those costs. Look at what transportation barriers exist, and try to make sure your event lines up with a time that everyone can get there, whether or not they have a car. Look at cultural barriers that keep people from different racial, ethnic, or political backgrounds from feeling safe and welcomed at your event, and try to remove as many of them as possible.”

“In a time with increasing polarization and inequality, it's imperative that everyone who works in community and economic development work as hard as we can to create reasons for people of different backgrounds and experiences to share space and share joy.”

We spoke with Gillian to learn more about her passion for community.

Read more at resources.patronicity.com

Groundbreaking Public Spaces

Explore a few of Vermont's community-led Better Places projects.

Coventry Playground Renovation

COVENTRY, VERMONT | ORLEANS COUNTY

CROWDFUNDED: \$23,746 CROWDGRANTING MATCH: \$40,000

POPULATION: 1,100 PATRONS: 39

In September 2023, Coventry School Partnership Inspiring Community Engagement (SPICE), Coventry Village School's Parent Teacher Organization, launched a crowdfunding campaign to raise funds to help rebuild the school's playground. A year earlier, the playground was inspected and the majority of the equipment was deemed unsafe and required repair or replacement. With the support of the community, Coventry SPICE was able to build a safe, entertaining, quality playground for children to enjoy for years to come. Funding from the campaign was used to purchase new playground equipment, including a giant sit-and-spin, monkey bars, and a standing seesaw, just to name a few!

[Learn More](#)



Guilford Community Park

GUILFORD, VERMONT | WINDHAM COUNTY

CROWDFUNDED: \$20,250 CROWDGRANTING MATCH: \$40,000

POPULATION: 2,120 PATRONS: 120

The Community Collaborative for Guilford was formed to develop a comprehensive plan for a vacant lot. The group created the plan for a park with public amenities, including a 24' by 48' timber frame pavilion. The pavilion was built in spring 2022 by Vermont Natural Homes in West Townsend with wood harvested from Vermont and Massachusetts.

Guilford Community Park is now open to residents. The pavilion is welcome for public use and has hosted many community events. The park features a stone fire pit, a children's play area, and a classic seven-circuit Labyrinth. More is in the works for the park, including a half-court basketball court, disc golf course, soccer nets, corn hole boards, swings, and a two-person swing glider.

[Learn More](#)



Groundbreaking Public Spaces

Hyde Park Views

HYDE PARK, VERMONT | LAMOILLE COUNTY

CROWDFUNDED: \$22,070 CROWDGRANTING MATCH: \$40,000

POPULATION: 3,020 PATRONS: 93

Hyde Park has a new piece of public art welcoming residents and visitors alike to the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail. *Hyde Park Views* by Vermont artist Dan Gottsegen includes a series of colorful glass panels in the playful shape of a bending railroad. The glass panels feature depictions of the community's history and landscape, gathered through community research. The sculpture acts as an anchor for the Village and a community gateway, creating connections through shared history and giving rise to community pride. The piece totaled \$70,000 to fabricate and install. In addition to funding from the Better Places program, the project received a \$10,000 grant from the Vermont Arts Council.

[Learn More](#)



Vershire Town Center Pavilion

VERSHIRE, VERMONT | ORANGE COUNTY

CROWDFUNDED: \$20,036 CROWDGRANTING MATCH: \$40,000

POPULATION: 672 PATRONS: 108

The community of Vershire desired a covered outdoor gathering space to accommodate events in inclement weather. The Town of Vershire created a plan to build a pavilion thoughtfully incorporated into the Town Center's public facilities and grounds. The 30' by 42' timber frame pavilion is located behind the Town Center Building and next to the playground. The pavilion is an invaluable asset to the community, providing a public space where residents can gather, host cultural events, and more.

The project offered community members many opportunities to get involved, from a kick-off at the skating rink to a spaghetti dinner, a Snowshoe-a-thon, and the pavilion raising. The town celebrated the new pavilion with a dedication event in September featuring music and oven-baked pizza.

[Learn More](#)



Better Places

patronicity.com/BetterPlacesVT



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