

# Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance (VERTA)

## Core Team Members:

**UVM** – Michael Moser, Andrew Brown, Luka Joffray (student), Miranda Degreenia (student)

**DHCD** – Chris Cochran, Gary Holloway, Jeff Dube

<https://accd.vermont.gov/VERTA>



# Project Steering Committee

- Northeastern Vermont Development Association (representing RDCs)
- Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT)
- Preservation Trust of Vermont (PTV)
- Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD)
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)
- Vermont Community Foundation (VCF)
- Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (representing RPCs )
- Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC)
- Vermont Land Access & Opportunity Board (LAOB)
- State Treasurer's Office
- Agency of Administration – Office of Disaster Recovery



*Special thanks to **Rebecca Sandborn Stone** of **Community Workshop** for Facilitating the Steering Committee and Rural Capacity Summit*

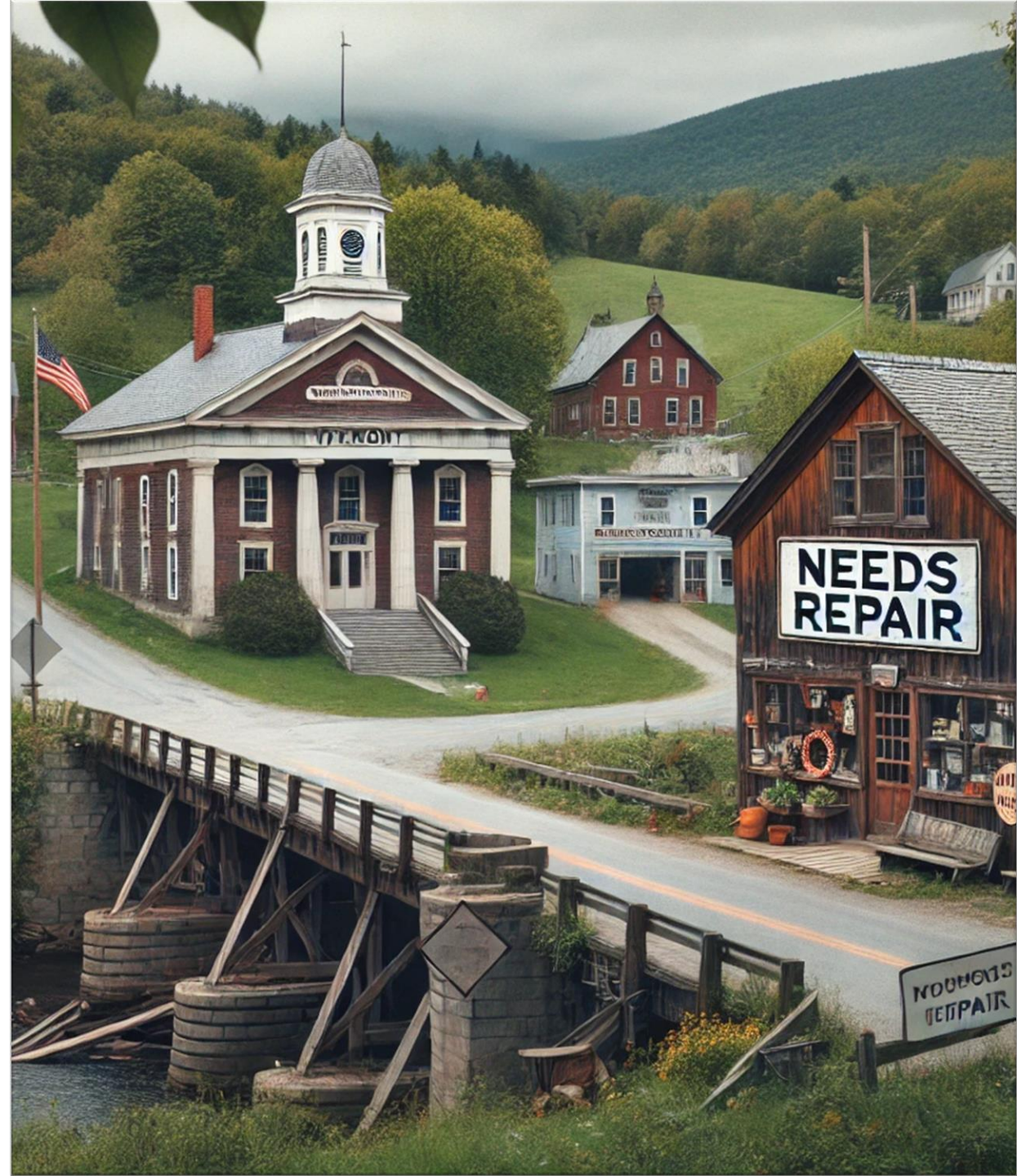


# Rural Vermont faces a growing implementation gap

- Communities are **expected to deliver** housing, infrastructure, climate resilience, and economic development
- Many towns operate with **part-time or volunteer-only staff**
- The **complexity of** funding and TA **programs** are challenging for municipalities to navigate

## ***The result?***

*Missed opportunities, delayed projects, higher costs, and inequitable outcomes.*



# VERTA and Act 181

*The task...*

**1**

**Assess**  
Vermont's Rural  
Technical  
Assistance  
System

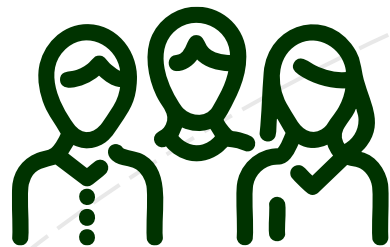
**2**

**Identify**  
Challenges,  
Barriers, Gaps and  
Strengths

**3**

**Recommend**  
Practical  
Improvements

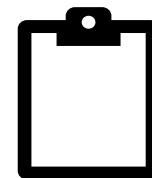
# Study Approach



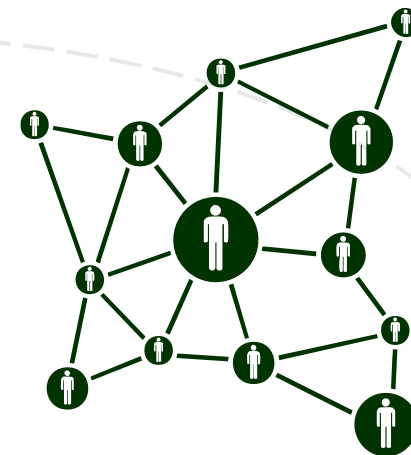
Steering  
Committee  
*(12 Organization  
Represented)*



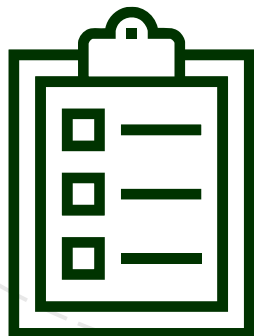
Listening  
Sessions  
190 participants



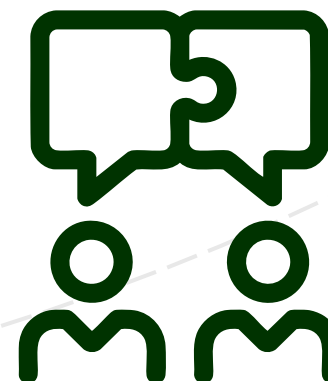
Surveys  
*195 responses*



UVM Research in Vermont  
and Across the U.S.  
*(114 Municipalities Reached,  
Review of 13 States TA Systems and 5  
States Interviewed)*



Research to SC to Summit  
Processes of Ideation and  
Selection of Implementation  
Advancement



Statewide Summit,  
*(125 Attendees from  
State/Local Gov, Non-Profit,  
Higher Ed.)*

**VERTA**  
Report and  
Recommendations

# Findings were consistent across regions



Technical assistance exists but is fragmented



Hard for small towns to navigate



Short-term and project-specific

Local leaders need **people** and **continuity**—and **simpler programs**.



# Summary of VERTA Research Findings

- Capacity is the binding constraint
- Administrative burden blocks access to resources
- Coordination failures are systemic
- Program design matters as much as funding levels
- Evidence from other states points to coordinated solutions



# Four Actionable Priority Areas

**1. Increase State Agency Participation in Solving Local Challenges**

**2. Municipal and Regional Shared Services Tools**

**3. Local Engagement and Leadership Development**

**4. Increasing Local Capacity and Flexible Resources**



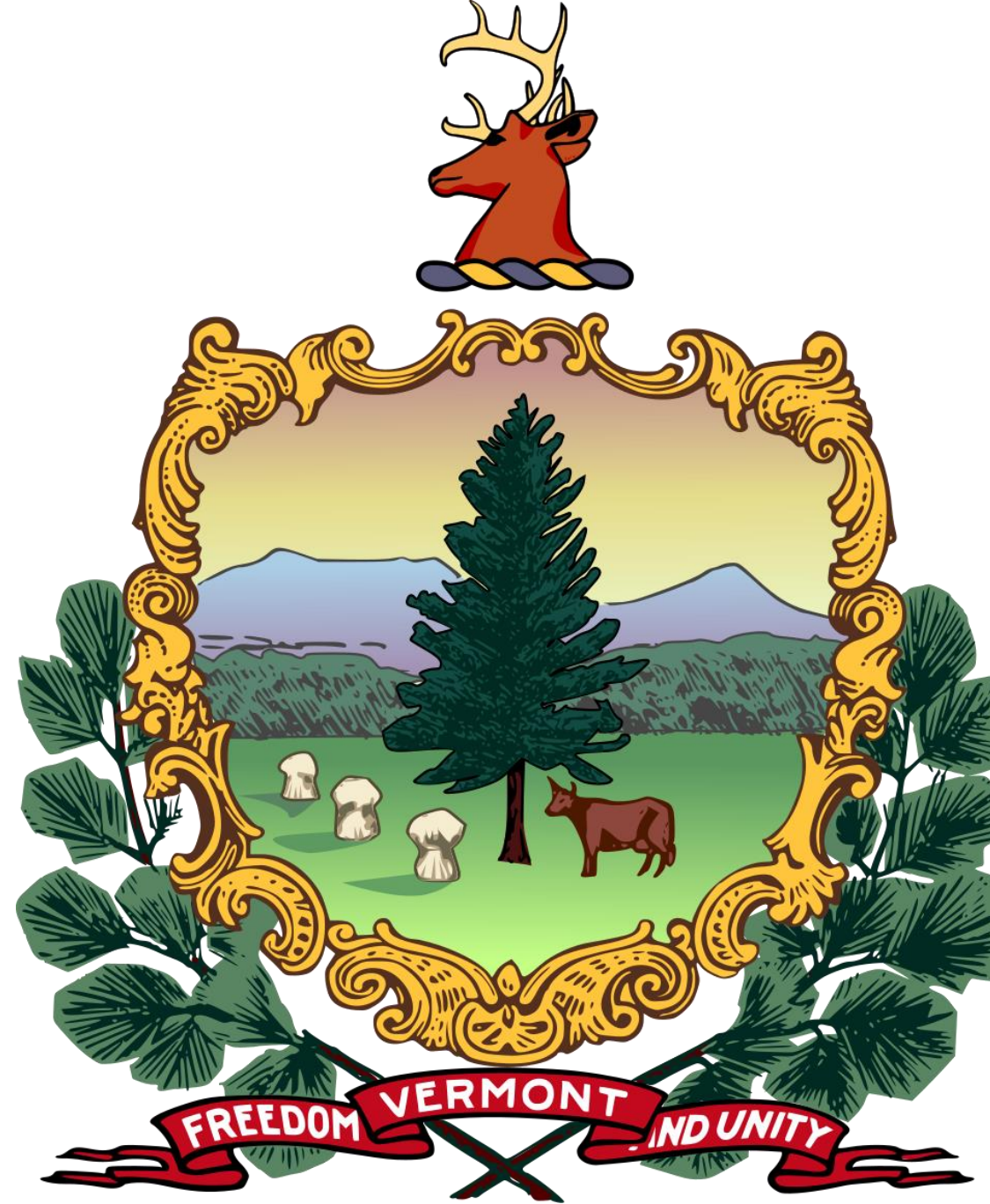
# VERTA recommendations coordinated together can:

- Improve coordination across state government
- Reduce administrative burden on municipalities
- Expand capacity in low-staffed and volunteer-run towns
- Promote equitable access to state and federal resources
- Better align public, private, and philanthropic investments



# Priority Area 1: Increase State Agency Participation in Solving Local Challenges

**Problem statement:** Municipalities face fragmented state systems and inconsistent agency involvement. While relationships are strong, coordination remains informal, uneven, and difficult to sustain due to staffing constraints and frequent turnover among elected officials and volunteers. This can also result in state agencies producing resources, materials, and even technical assistance programs that are too siloed or restrictive to be helpful to municipalities, especially the smaller ones.



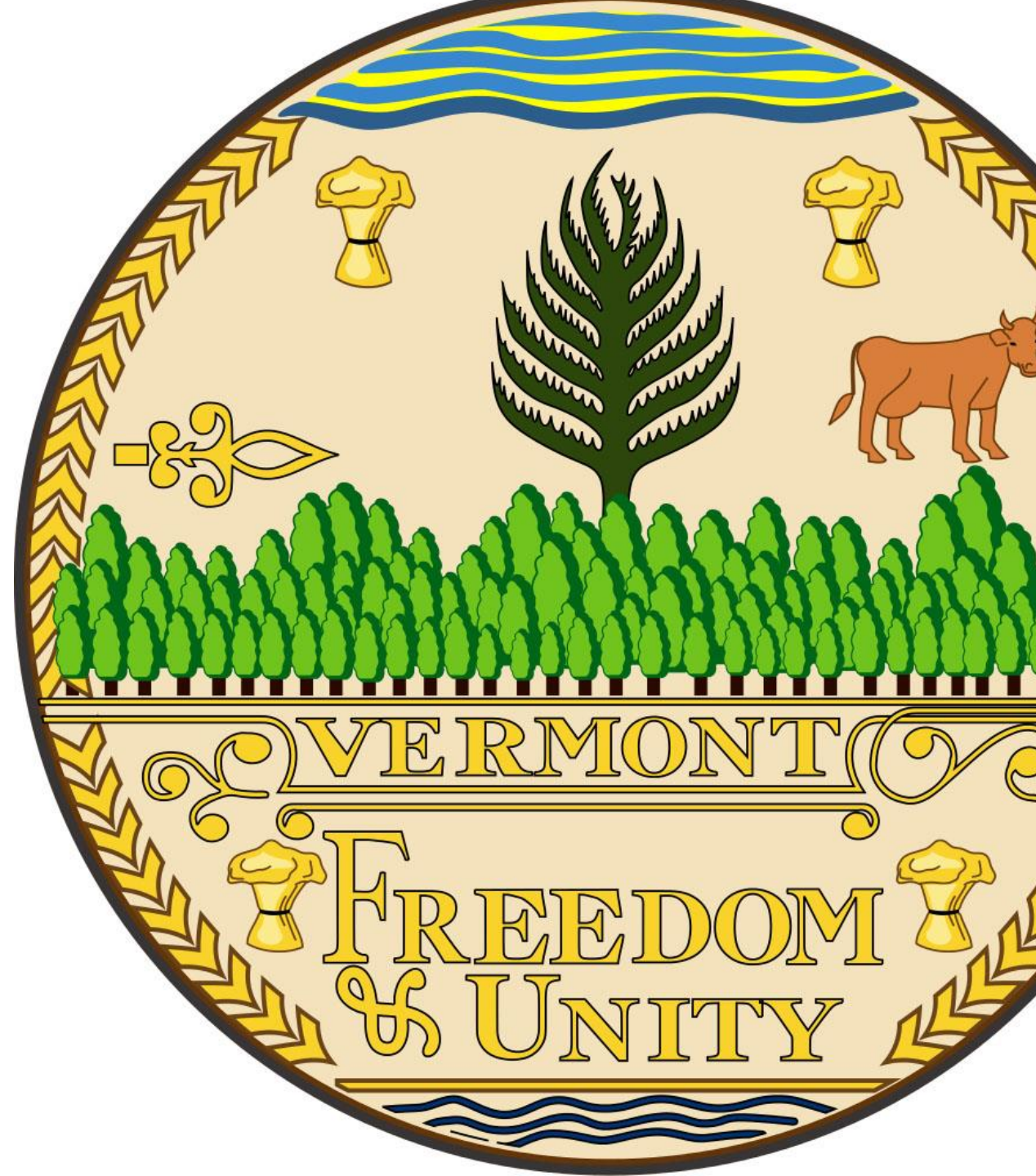


# Priority Area 1:

## Increase State Agency Participation in Solving Local Challenges

Effort: Lower

Create regional, town-based problem-solving convenings with state agency participation to improve coordination and help municipalities move more efficiently from planning to implementation.





# Priority Area 1:

## Increase State Agency Participation in Solving Local Challenges

Effort: Medium

AOA convenes a statewide community of practice for state grant administrators and program staff twice annually to:

- share best practices;
- align grant timelines and requirements where feasible; and
- receive direct feedback from municipal grantees.





# Priority Area 1:

## Increase State Agency Participation in Solving Local Challenges

Effort: High

Establish a statewide municipal services coordination hub or office that serves as the front door to municipalities.

- a centralized portal for grants and programs;
- coordinated intake and referral across agencies; and
- back-end coordination with non-state TA providers.



## Priority Area 2:

### Municipal and Regional Shared Services Tools

**Problem statement:** Many Vermont municipalities face similar challenges but lack the tools, incentives, and governance structures needed to share services, staff, and equipment across town and regional boundaries, as well as the capacity to engage in shared services conversations.





# Priority Area 2:

## Municipal and Regional Shared Services Tools

Effort: Low

Develop and disseminate shared services templates and toolkits. Direct the State, RPCs, and VLCT to compile and create standardized templates (MOUs, contracts, procurement guidance) and step-by-step guides to support shared services, shared staffing, and cooperative purchasing.



# Priority Area 2:

## Municipal and Regional Shared Services Tools

Effort: Medium

Create or expand a municipal shared services platform. Support partnerships with the State and TA providers to expand an online platform where municipalities can:

- identify shared service opportunities;
- engage with communities;
- access templates and guides;
- connect with peer communities





## Priority Area 2:

### Municipal and Regional Shared Services Tools

Effort: High

Restart and complete a regional governance and shared services study. Reauthorize the paused regional governance study to evaluate viable models for shared municipal services, staffing, and administration, based on the VERTA research report and examples from other states.



## Priority Area 3:

### Local Engagement and Leadership Development

**Problem statement:** Vermont's reliance on volunteer governance is increasingly strained, with limited pipelines for new leaders and uneven access to training, education, and support for engagement.



# Priority Area 3:

## Local Engagement and Leadership Development

Effort: Low

Expand leadership training and toolkits for municipal volunteers. Support the development and delivery of standardized leadership curricula, toolkits, and cohort-based trainings for municipal officials, volunteers, and emerging leaders.





# Priority Area 3:

## Local Engagement and Leadership Development

Effort: Medium

Expand volunteer matchmaking and engagement infrastructure. Support the development of statewide and regional tools—including online platforms and in-person convenings—to better connect community needs with volunteer interest and build practical skills in volunteer recruitment, engagement, and management.



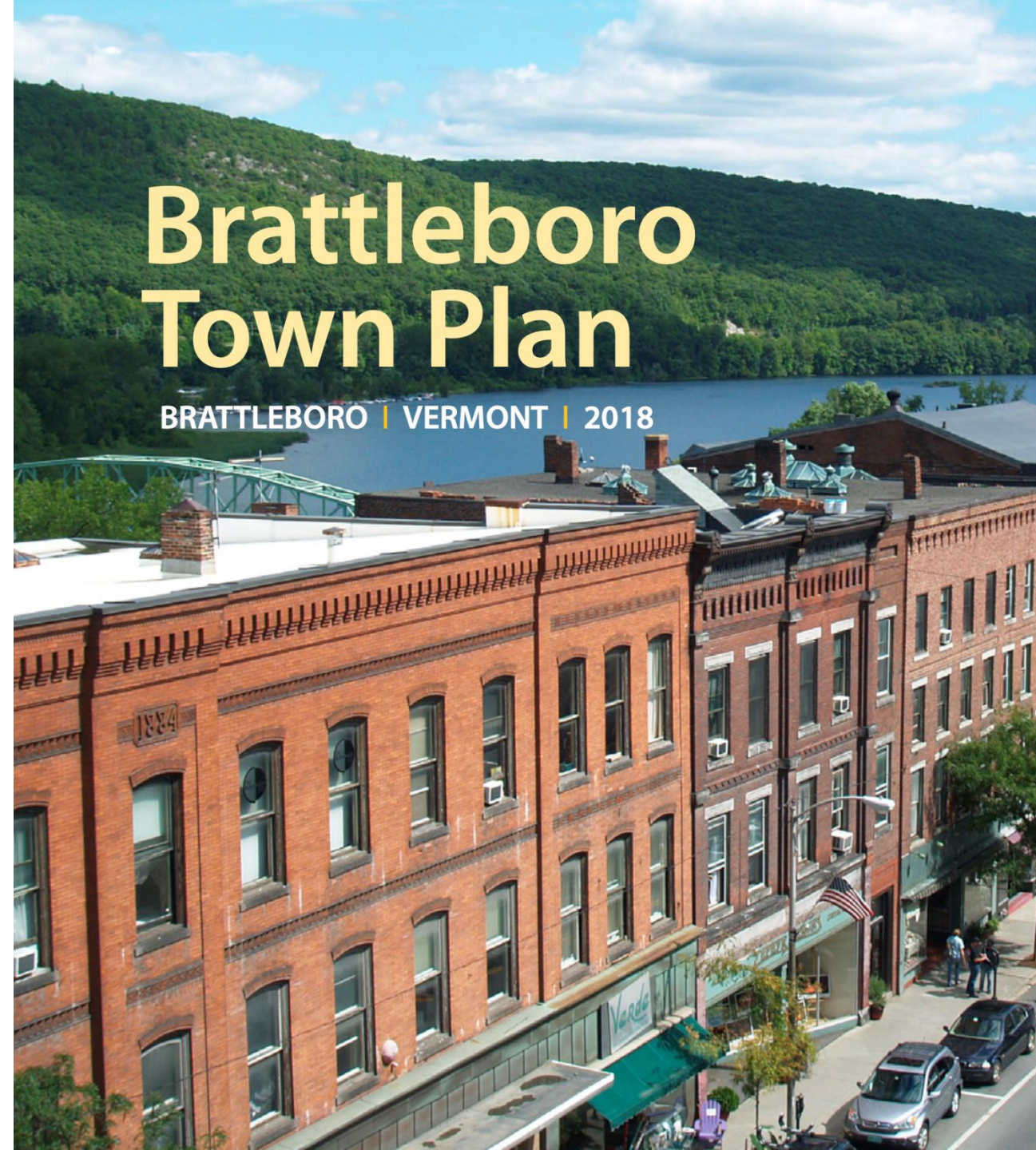


# Priority Area 3:

## Local Engagement and Leadership Development

Effort: High

Modernize municipal planning requirements. Direct DHCD, RPCs, and municipalities to assess which state planning requirements could be made optional or more flexible, and propose statutory changes as appropriate.



## Priority Area 4:

### Increasing Local Capacity and Flexible Resources

**Problem statement:**

Municipalities lack sufficient staff capacity and flexible funding to move projects from concept to completion—particularly in small and rural communities.





# Priority Area 4:

## Increasing Local Capacity and Flexible Resources

Effort: Low

Restart and reimagine the Vermont Collaborative Funders Group that brings together state agencies, federal partners, and philanthropic organizations to align funding programs to better coordinate investments to support high priority community driven projects.





# Priority Area 4:

## Increasing Local Capacity and Flexible Resources

Effort: Medium

Continue and expand municipal technical assistance building on existing programs such as MTAP, REDI, MPG and RIVERS. The State could design and support a coordinated technical assistance approach that provides direct funding to municipalities, funding to TA providers for capacity-building activities, and flexible resources to support consultants and other professional services.





# Priority Area 4:

## Increasing Local Capacity and Flexible Resources

Effort: Medium

Create municipal or regional project management fellows or shared coordinators. Fund state-level, shared project management positions, including University of Vermont– based fellows, housed locally or regionally to support multiple municipalities with project management, particularly for complex housing, infrastructure, and climate adaptation projects.



## Priority Area 4:

### Increasing Local Capacity and Flexible Resources

Effort: High

Align and, where appropriate, merge state funding streams. Direct state agencies to explore back-end alignment or pooling of compatible funding programs to simplify applications, reduce duplication, and support coordinated TA delivery.



# Next Steps for the Steering Committee

- Spread the word – Brief key legislative committees and frame the work around near-term wins and implementation.
- Continue monthly steering committee meetings to identify “ready-now” actions.
- Maintain forward momentum through targeted pilots.
- Identify longer term actions and funding to support municipalities more sustainably with greater impact.





# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

June 10<sup>th</sup> (Tues) · Grafton Elementary School 6<sup>th</sup> grade graduation · 6pm

June 11<sup>th</sup> (Wed) · "How Safe Are You On-Line?" · 11am-12pm · Grafton Library

June 14<sup>th</sup> (Sat) · Music Phelps Barn · Josh Maiocco · 8:30pm-10:30pm · no cover

June 14<sup>th</sup> (Sat) · "Drug Take-Back Day" 10am-3pm Town Hall

June 17<sup>th</sup> (Tues) Grafton Selectboard is having a public forum on

Drug Abuse at Grafton Elementary School 6pm-7:30pm

Mountain Mind: Movement Yoga classes downstairs of Windham Bldg.  
Tues. 8am-9:15am Gentle Yoga, Wed. 8am-9:15am all levels

## Questions?

Learn more at: [accd.vermont.gov/community-development/current-initiatives/VERTA](http://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/current-initiatives/VERTA)

The Scoop open Sat · Sun 11-12pm

Phelps Barn 8/10