

# Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance (VERTA)

Gary Holloway

Downtown Program Manager

Department of Housing and Community Development

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



# VERTA Study Purpose

The Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance (VERTA) was launched pursuant to Act 181 (2024) to assess how Vermont supports its rural communities—and how that system can be strengthened to better deliver housing, infrastructure, climate resilience, and economic development.



# VERTA Study Purpose

*The task...*

**1**

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

**2**

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

**3**

**Recommend**  
Practical  
Improvements

# 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



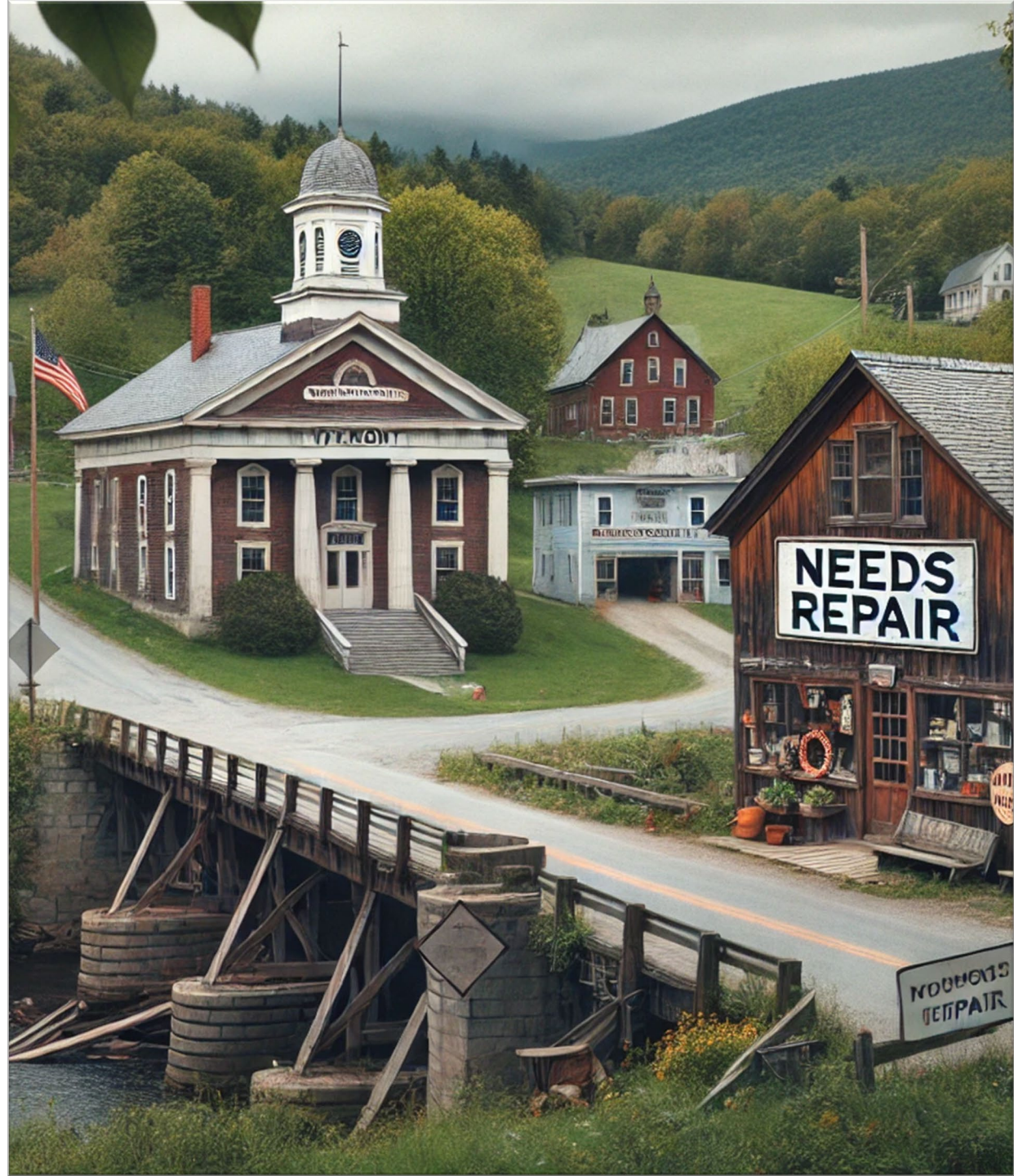
*Special thanks to **Rebecca Sandborn Stone** of **Community Workshop** for Facilitating the Steering Committee and Rural Capacity Summit*

# Rural Vermont faces a growing implementation gap

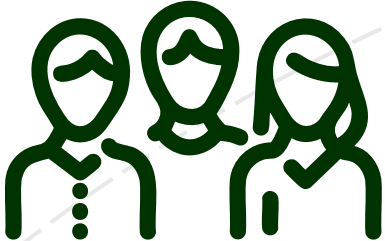
- Communities are **expected to deliver** housing, infrastructure, climate resilience, and economic development
- Many towns operate with **part-time or volunteer-only staff**
- The **complexity of** funding and TA programs are challenging for municipalities to navigate

## *The result?*

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



# Study Approach



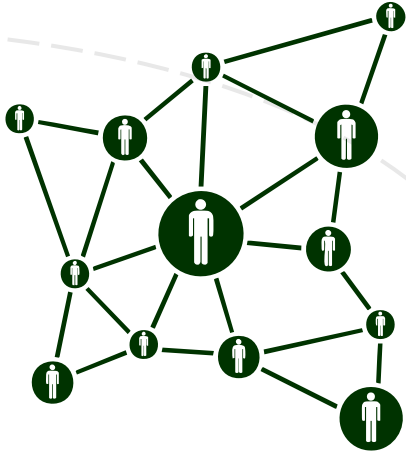
Steering  
Committee  
*(12 Organization  
Represented)*



Listening  
Sessions  
190 participants

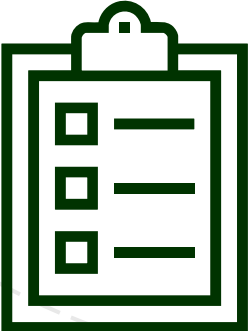


Surveys  
195 responses

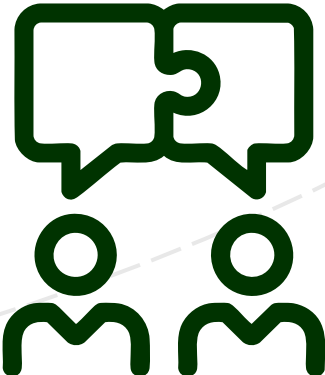


UVM Research in Vermont  
and Across the U.S.  
*(114 Municipalities Reached,  
Review of 13 States TA Systems and 5  
States Interviewed)*

**VERTA  
Report and  
Recommendations**



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.)*

# 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**

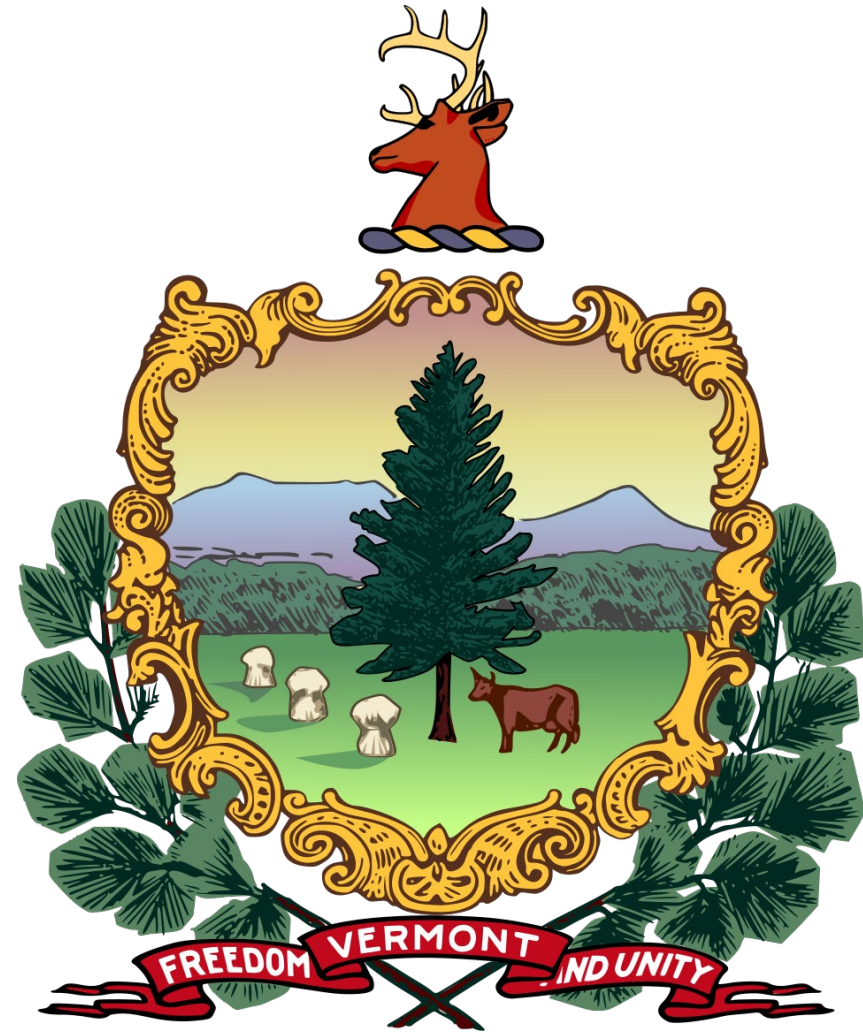
**2. Municipal and Regional Shared Services Tools**

**3. Local Engagement and Leadership Development**

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

## 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 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 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 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.



# 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



# Next Steps for the Steering Committee

- Spread the word – Discuss findings with legislature, state agencies and TA providers.
- Continue steering committee meetings to identify “ready-now” actions.
- Maintain forward momentum through targeted pilots.
- Identify longer term actions to support municipalities more sustainably with greater impact.





# Questions?

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