

e-Vermont Partners

Vermont Council on Rural
Development
www.vtrural.org

Digital Wish
www.digitalwish.org

Front Porch Forum
www.frontporchforum.com

Vermont Small Business
Development Center
www.vtsbdc.org

Vermont Department of
Libraries
libraries.vermont.gov

Vermont State Colleges
www.vsc.edu

Snelling Center for
Government
www.snellingcenter.org

e-Vermont Funders

U.S. Dept of Commerce
Dell

Comcast
Evslin Family Foundation
Jan and David Blittersdorf
Foundation
Microsoft

Center for Rural Studies
VT Community Foundation
VT Rural Partnership

e-Vermont Communities



e-Vermont Community Broadband Project Year One Accomplishments

In spring of 2010, the Vermont Council on Rural Development, in partnership with nine organizations around the state, launched an ambitious project to help rural towns realize the full potential of the Internet by working locally to ensure best use of online resources to strengthen everything from education to government to business to community connections. It is funded through a federal program for Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) and the matching support of local funders. We were one of only two projects nationwide to receive funding in the first round of NTIA Sustainable Broadband Adoption grants for a **community** based approach to adoption.

The e-Vermont Community Broadband Project recognizes that online tools can offer significant resources and new opportunities in almost every aspect of our lives. However, many people lack the knowledge or awareness to use these tools to their best advantage. In 2010, the Pew Research Center found that 21% of adults nationally do not use the Internet and half of these non-users say the primary reason is that they don't see online content as relevant to their lives. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) also finds that the primary reason why adults do not use the Internet is that they don't see a reason to do so, ranking above all other reasons (2011 data). This skills and knowledge gap is one reason why digital divides remain even after broadband infrastructure is built.

The work of e-Vermont demonstrates the value of the Internet by engaging community members from a range of backgrounds in applying broadband resources to reach local goals more effectively and efficiently. Every e-Vermont community receives the assistance of seven partners working on the ground, coordinated by one of two Community Directors from the Vermont Council on Rural Development. This work provides a comprehensive approach to building the value of Internet across multiple facets of rural life.

Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD)

In every e-Vermont town, a VCRD Community Director coordinates community efforts by providing on-the-ground leadership in communications, building local community teams and implementing priority projects. Among the myriad unique projects designed by e-Vermont towns and implemented with the help of VCRD Community Directors have been actions to:

- Launch public access wireless Internet zones in Bristol, Poultney, Ludlow, West Rutland, and downtown Newport; launch of new hotspots with computer equipment available in Middlesex.
- Provide equipment to expand online video streaming and assist in developing online videos at community access television stations in Ludlow and Bristol.
- Create a community led e-training center at the Martha Canfield Library in Arlington, VT.
- Publish a digital collection of historical Vermont papers, records, and photographs housed in the Russell Collection in Arlington.
- Develop a local network of organizations with Internet access that can help Bristol area residents navigate new online platforms for receiving state benefits.
- Publish a framework for sharing public documents and procedural information in state permitting processes for Pownal's Southern Vermont Energy Park.
- Fund start up of the Artists and Entrepreneurs online guide to community resources in Cambridge.
- Broadband subscriptions in households with access to broadband infrastructure have increased an average of 10% in e-Vermont towns in our first year of work.



Digital Wish

Digital Wish leads school-based digital literacy training, administration and teacher training, curricular development and implementation, and oversees the distribution of netbook computers to selected classrooms within the 4th, 5th and 6th grade levels. In the first year, Digital Wish reported:

- 665 students enrolled in e-Vermont Digital Wish classrooms (first round communities only).
- 1,204 netbooks distributed in 12 participating schools.
- 548 in-school educator trainings for integrating technology tools into class work.
- Survey results that find 73% of students report schoolwork is more enjoyable; 85% say they are producing better work.
- Pilot program of collaboration with local businesses to learn math and statistics, social media, creative presentations and other applications of technology tools; these forms of collaboration will serve as a basis for second year mentoring work.
- 6 curriculum units developed for use in e-Vermont schools: Digital Citizenship, Oral Newsgathering & Research, Business Exploration, Media Creation & Presentation, "I've Got a Problem; I'm Solving It!", Creativity & Innovation.



Front Porch Forum

Front Porch Forum (FPF) hosts an online town-wide forum that allows neighbors to connect and share items of local interest. Front Porch Forum is now launched in every e-Vermont community. Results in the first year show:

- Some towns enjoy almost immediate high subscription rates to the forum. A few months after start: Middlesex exceeded 50% of households subscribed (now at 72%), Middletown Springs reached 37% households subscribed, Moretown reached 25%.
- Some towns have tipping points when they go from low subscriptions to high traffic. When Bristol residents began to discuss their schools, participation reached 46% of households with over 200 postings per month – and conversation quickly moved to a broad range of topics.
- FPF was an important community tool during the spring flooding in 2011; the Lake Champlain Islands jumped from 200 postings per month to 568 as residents tracked where the water reached for buildings and roads.
- Individuals use FPF to generate support for projects that have a positive impact on the entire community. For example, one Bristol resident posted a request for support in starting a local theater company and within 48 hours had 11 donors at \$500 each and 48 local volunteers.
- Front Porch Forum is a national model for community building and communications; after expanding into 24 e-Vermont towns, it was awarded a \$220,000 Knight foundation loan to rebuild its software and expand to more of the state (one of 12 recipients selected out of 2,400 global candidates).



Vermont Small Business Development Center (VtSBDC)

The VtSBDC e-Vermont business advisor provides workshops and one-on-one advising to small businesses. VtSBDC assists in identifying Internet uses that address business needs, improve efficiencies and expand innovation and profitability. In the quarter ending March 31st, 2011, VtSBDC reported:

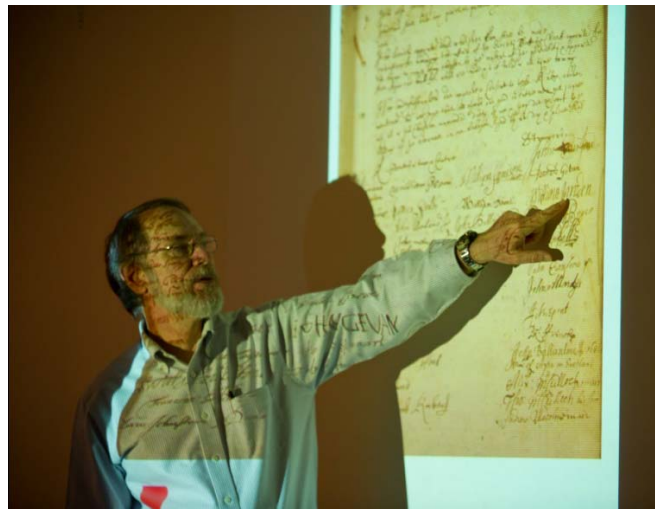
- 23 workshops hosted across the state. The most popular topics were Getting Your Business Online, Social Media Marketing and Google Tools For Small Business.
- 214 business owners participated in these workshops in the first round e-Vermont towns.
- VtSBDC presentations at regional workshops covered Google Applications and Advanced Social Media for up to 50 participants (full capacity) at each session.
- Official surveys for business impact will be conducted after a full year of VtSBDC work with clients, but anecdotal evidence shows immediate results from both workshops and advising. For example, Vermont Honey Pumps (specialized manufacturing equipment) opened in Cambridge, VT, and sold 12 units in their first year of operation. After advising on site design, search engine optimization, and social media they sold 15 units in just one quarter.
- While advising occurs on a 1:1 business basis, some of these businesses exist in support of the broader local economy. For example, VtSBDC recently worked with a new business incubator space in Poultney to develop an online presence to attract small businesses to the town <http://www.poultneysmallbusinesscenter.com/>.



Vermont State Department of Libraries

The Vermont State Department of Libraries coordinates e-Vermont's efforts to respond to local library needs; including equipment (e.g. computers, scanners, printers), software, tech support, staff training or other new digital services.

- Regional consultants from the Vermont Department of Libraries have worked with 13 local public libraries to purchase \$48,000 in equipment and services in first round communities.
- After first year consulting with local librarians, the Department of Libraries developed a specifications sheet for commonly requested equipment (e.g. desktop computers, laptops) that best suits libraries' needs.
- Libraries are positioned to become digital literacy & learning centers for their rural communities, using e-Vermont support for equipment to increase public Internet access, subscriptions to online resources, and volunteer training.
- Many libraries have designed unique projects. For example, the Lawrence Memorial Library in Bristol will be using an e-Vermont funded mobile computer lab in collaboration with local community centers to help residents get online to access state human service benefits.
- In another example, the Martha Canfield Library in Arlington has developed an entire online training center where local residents teach their peers new skills.
- Libraries are serving as critical anchors and fiscal sponsors for local Wi-Fi networks that help local businesses, residents without broadband at home, tourists and visitors.



Vermont State Colleges (VSC)

Instructors from VSC provide workshops on basic Internet skills and train the trainer sessions in e-Vermont communities. The Vermont State Colleges also presents periodic webinars on commonly requested topics, such as Internet safety.

- The Vermont State Colleges have provided three workshops in each of the first round e-Vermont communities and started planning for round two. Topics include: Basic Internet Skills, Social Media & Communication Tools for Beginners, Internet Safety Basics, Finding Health Information on the Web, Learning to Go, Evaluating Information on the Web, Free Stuff on the Internet!
- Train-the-Trainer sessions will be piloted in second round communities. These sessions help build local capacity to promote digital literacy by providing training to community members who work with Internet beginners.
- Vermont State Colleges are providing material and review for online toolkits from e-Vermont, beginning with "Internet Basics."

- Vermont State Colleges have developed a series of short “Welcome to the Internet” instructional video clips.
- In the second year, webinars will be offered on a monthly basis by both VSC instructors and outside presenters, using an Adobe Connect platform provided by VSC.
- 173 people have participated in VSC workshops.



Snelling Center for Government

The Snelling Center for Government brings expertise in municipal governments' use of online resources, and designs workshops and conferences to share models and best practices learned through e-Vermont work in communities. Activities in the first year include:

- Development of a comprehensive, online guide to designing a municipal government website that meets best practices standards with a blog for sharing information.
- Collection of online resource links for business, government, health care, individual computer users and other audiences.
- Assistance to all interested e-Vermont community municipal governments in launching new sites or redesigning existing ones, using either current site templates or the template commissioned by the Snelling Center to match its best practices guide.
- Presentation of two regional workshop days that covered a range of commonly requested skills areas at an intermediate level.
- Presentation of a statewide conference that featured Matt Dunne, Google's Manager of Community Affairs, as keynote speaker; Karen Marshall, chief of Connect VT; twelve sessions of panels, workshops and presenters in tracks of community, education, non-profits / social service and business; final World Café style ideas sharing session.
- 185 people have participated in trainings organized by the Snelling Center.

Conclusion: Advancing Keys to Community Success in the Digital Age

May, 2011, marked the end of the first full year of the e-Vermont Community Broadband Project. By that time we had completed eleven months of intensive services in 12 rural communities, brought another 12 on board for 2011, and engaged a broad constituency beyond the 24 e-Vermont communities through workshops, newsletters, media appearances, and a statewide conference.

The diverse projects of e-Vermont all add up to transforming rural Vermonters' approach to using the Internet for community and economic development. Our work begins community by community, and in the next year the e-Vermont partners will continue to provide high quality services to participating communities and continue to improve these services based on lessons learned in all of our towns. But this engagement at the local level carries much larger implications for models that can benefit *all* Vermont towns and serve as an example for rural regions nationwide. The Vermont Council on Rural Development and our e-Vermont partners will play a leadership role in bringing together stakeholders over the next year to answer the question of how we will ensure that no Vermonter is left behind as online tools become key to success in a digital age. We are bringing lessons learned to local, regional, and national audiences and helping organizations act on those lessons to implement essential programs for closing the digital divide.

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