



Northeast Kingdom Collaborative
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Rural Economic Action Partnership (REAP)

Strategic Plan

For

**The Northeast Kingdom of Vermont
(Essex, Orleans, and Caledonia Counties)**

Prepared by: The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative

Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country.
President John F. Kennedy



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History:

In 1996, Jan Eastman, with a small grant from the Snelling Center, took the initiative to bring organizations in the Northeast Kingdom together for a monthly meeting to share what was going on in their organizations and to interconnect and crosslink the work that was going on; this effort was designed to eliminate duplication of energy and resources. In 1998, this loosely associated group held a community-wide visioning day in March—there were well over 100 participants from the community representing all walks of life. The result of that day was a vision statement and the identification of eight areas of focus around which to build a strategic plan for the community. Again, the loosely affiliated participants in the monthly meetings went forward and created a strategic plan attaching to those eight areas specific goals to advance the communities effort in those eight critical areas. Subsequent to that, the group requested from Senator Patrick Leahy his support in us obtaining Rural Economic Action Partnership (REAP) zone designation. Senator Leahy was influential in getting us REAP status—we are one of four other REAP zones in the United States. The REAP designation allows organizations and individuals in the Northeast Kingdom to apply for federal monies with extra points toward approving those grants. In that regard, since 1998, this REAP zone status has enabled revenue of over \$190 million dollars to flow into the Northeast Kingdom. Following Senator Leahy's help in establishing the Northeast Kingdom as a REAP zone, he was able to funnel our way a small amount of funds to keep the work of the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative going. At that point in time, the Collaborative formally organized itself with a board of directors and by-law, which were approved at an open meeting of the community and the board of directors advanced with the mission of "Implementing the Strategic Plan that had been developed through a community effort and keeping organizations in communication with each other, again such as not to duplicate effort." In 2008, the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative Board of Directors decided that a new strategic plan would be timely, and to that end, the Board established a series of public forums on each of the major areas of importance to the Northeast Kingdom. The forums were created to solicit community input on key areas for the community. The forums culminated in a day-long Summit in which community members were invited to come and discuss topics of their choosing. Information was gathered from the forums, and ultimately the Summit, to use in the development of a new strategic plan. The purpose of the plan is, of course, to enhance life in the Northeast Kingdom.

Background on Summit:

In March 2010, the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative completed a year-long series of public forums on key issues facing the Northeast Kingdom (**economic development, education, housing, water/wastewater infrastructure, telecommunications, tourism, arts and culture, health and wellness, human services, energy and weatherization, and community leadership**); more than 500 people in the Northeast Kingdom came together in conversation at these monthly forums. The expertise shared by the panelists, matched with the enthusiastic interest of the audience members, has produced the foundational draft of key action steps and priorities within each sector for the region's new Regional Economic Development Plan. The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative is now charged with helping to produce a detailed, actionable work plan and identifying the key players and organizations that will begin and sustain the work required to ensure that these action items and priorities are acted upon for the betterment of our region, our towns, our businesses, and our residents.

To complete this monumental task, the all-volunteer Northeast Kingdom Collaborative Board of Directors created, with community input from the forums and the Summit, a new Regional Economic Strategic Plan.



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The Summit held March 13, 2010, offered breakout sessions on each of the key areas and culminated with a general session to collect everyone's input and define the next steps toward action. The resulting strategic plan is available for the public to see on the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative web site: www.nekcollaborative.org. Please visit the web site to learn more about the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative.

We thank you for joining the conversation and adding your voice to the discussion outcomes.

NEK Collaborative Board of Directors, 2009-2010:

Carol A. Moore, Chair; President, Lyndon State College
Kenn Stransky, Vice Chair; Elected Official, Essex County Town of Norton
Sigurd Andersen, Partner, Solbakken Technology
Gloria Bruce, Executive Director, Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association
Steven Campbell, Ex Officio; Area Director, USDA Rural Development
Jon Freeman, President, Northern Community Investment Corporation
Ken Gordon, Executive Director, Area Agency on Aging for Northeastern Vermont
Andy Kehler, Co-Owner, Jasper Hill Cheese
George Mathias, Chief Operating Officer, Gilman Housing Trust, Inc.
Gregory MacDonald, Field Director, State of Vermont Agency of Human Services
David Snedeker, Ex Officio; Planning Director, Northeastern Vermont Development Association
Bob Whittaker, Dean of Institutional Advancement, Lyndon State College
Steve Patterson, Ex Officio; Executive Director, Northeastern Vermont Development Association



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Strategic Plan **Northeast Kingdom Collaborative**

Arts and Culture (lead: Gloria Bruce/Jody Fried):

Goal:

To employ our artistic and cultural offerings to the benefit of the Northeast Kingdom (NEK) economy via the enhancement of efforts surrounding the creation, organization, awareness, marketing, and execution of artistic and cultural offerings within Vermont's Northeast Kingdom.

Action Steps:

1. Create a written, executable strategy for the development of arts and culture as an economic sector within the NEK.
2. Organize arts and culture community within the NEK. Create and employ communication and organizational tools.
3. Create a master "inventory" of all artistic/cultural assets and resources.
4. Create and employ strategies that will leverage current efforts of all assets to the fullest of their potential.
5. Enhance internal NEK awareness of arts and culture through educational programs, media awareness, and marketing.
6. Develop ways to enhance marketing of artistic and cultural offerings externally, to include strategic effort with regard to product development, event creation, organization, and advertising.
7. Engage regional and state organizations, to include chambers, NEKTTA, Vermont Arts, etc., to enhance their efforts to market artistic and cultural offerings within the NEK.
8. Create a working board for arts and culture.

We invite the following organizations to be involved:

- Northeast Kingdom Travel & Tourism Association
- Regional and community chambers of commerce
- Vermont Arts Council
- Catamount Arts
- Other regional and community art and culture related organizations

Community Leadership (lead: Bob Whittaker):

Goal:

Achieve significantly increased and sustained interaction, communication, and involvement in regional development by a demographically diverse group of community members, business leaders, and youth.

Action Steps:

1. Establish consistent social events that will celebrate successes and will build cohesiveness through inclusiveness.



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2. Connect with schools and youth organizations to build community involvement and identify and nurture new leaders.
3. Create a forum for select boards and other regional leaders.
4. Organizing four events over the coming year that promotes greater involvement in and ownership of development and implementation of the regional plan.
5. Develop a regional leadership academy offered annually to continuously expand the core of potential leaders who are advancing regional goals.

We invite the following individuals and organizations to be involved:

- Current committee members: Howard Crawford, Lisa Daigle Farney, Ken Linsley, Bill Morrison, Carla Watson, Bob Whittaker
- Area chambers of commerce
- Civic organizations (Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions)
- NEK Collaborative forum participants
- Funders
- Business leaders and owners
- Local governments and non-governmental organizations

Economic Development (lead: Steve Patterson/David Snedeker):

Goal:

The economy of the Northeast Kingdom region will be improved through better economic planning, coordination, collaboration, and by focusing on new, higher paying opportunities and building upon existing assets including key business sectors, entrepreneurs, and the region's workforce.

Action Steps:

1. Develop and garner support for a unifying regional economic development plan with clear goals and strategies for action.
2. Encourage collaboration and the formation of partnerships between organizations working for the economic development of the region.
3. Educate businesses and entrepreneurs on the business resources available in the region.
4. Support infrastructure improvement efforts that are necessary for business and community development, e.g., broadband, utilities, and energy.
5. Facilitate the coordination of workforce education efforts in the region.

We invite the following organizations to be involved:

- Northeastern Vermont Development Association
- Northern Community Investment Corporation
- Regional technical centers
- Lyndon State College
- Business and Industry leaders



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Education (lead: Carol A. Moore):

Goal:

Develop cost-effective means to meet the professional development needs of our schools, health care system, and businesses and enhance the learning experience and aspirations of our children.

Action Steps:

1. Identify and convene the appropriate partners and facilitate the development of a plan to provide enhanced training for adults over a broad spectrum of fields.
2. Convene the appropriate partners to develop a strategy to raise the educational aspirations and educational preparation of our community.
3. Workforce Education – connect with business need.
4. Connect student learning and business.
5. Facilitate K-16 partnerships.
6. Connect education and business; develop 21st century work skills.

We invite the following organizations to be involved:

- Eleven supervisory unions
- Lyndon State College
- Community College of Vermont
- Regional technical centers
- Department of Education
- Northeast Kingdom School Development Center

Energy and Weatherization (lead: David Snedeker/Ben Luce):

Goal:

The residents and communities of the Northeast Kingdom will plan, advocate for, and support: energy efficiency and conservation; the development of appropriate renewable energy sources; access to diverse, reliable, affordable, and environmentally responsible energy supplies.

Action Steps:

1. Energy efficiency will be promoted; efficiency is the least expensive way to save money and “generate” power.
2. Educational efforts will focus on: energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy technologies. Educational efforts will demonstrate economic development opportunities.
3. Communities will be educated about their electric utilities and the utilities will plan for upgrades that bring increased capacity.

We invite the following organizations to be involved:

- Regional planning and economic development organizations
 - Northern Community Investment Corporation, Northeastern Vermont Development Association, Lyndon State College
- Northeast Employment and Training Organization/HEAT



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- Business and Industry
- Local communities and energy committees

Health and Wellness (lead: Ken Gordon):

Goal:

To encourage the development of collaborative, community-based strategies designed to enhance the health and well-being of area residents.

Action Steps:

1. Identify the major health care issues facing our region; communicate these findings to area residents.
2. Support current and future efforts to address health care issues affecting the region.
3. Encourage collaboration between health care providers, community groups and individuals interested in improving the health and well-being of the area residents.
4. Encourage efforts to expand access to primary care services.
5. Encourage use of a “high-tech/high-touch” approach to health care delivery in a rural environment that makes use of emerging technology and the strengths of our small communities.
6. Encourage wellness and preventive care initiatives.

We invite the following organizations to be involved:

- Regional hospitals
- Rural health centers
- Health care providers
- Mental health providers
- Health and social service agencies
- Home and community-based long-term care providers
- Skilled nursing facilities
- Schools
- Employers
- Faith-based organizations
- Community groups

Housing (lead: Merten Bangemann-Johnson):

Goal:

The communities and businesses of the Northeast Kingdom will be made aware of the need to create affordable, efficient, and safe housing for people of all age groups and income levels.

Action Steps:

1. Facilitate the development of housing partnerships that include communities to achieve the above goal.
2. Promote educational efforts on housing costs and consumer credit for renters and potential homebuyers.



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3. Support the efforts of organizations aimed at creating efficient and affordable housing.
4. Educate communities regarding elements of sustaining living space.
5. NEKC foster partnerships.

We invite the following organizations to be involved:

- Gilman Housing Trust
- Northeast Employment and Training
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
- Vermont Community Development program
- Municipalities, zoning administrators, and commissions
- Local banks

Human Services (lead: Greg MacDonald):

Goal:

To work collaboratively with various human services agencies and community partners in order to lessen the impact of poverty on the families of the Northeast Kingdom.

Action Steps:

1. Encourage people impacted by reductions in social services to advocate for themselves. Encourage people with common needs to organize themselves, to advocate for themselves with policymakers and legislators.
2. Address the transportation needs of people to achieve self-sufficiency, employment, access to schools/training, and to maintain normal life needs.
3. Identify opportunities to lessen the duplication of services: triage available grant money to serve a variety of populations, and strengthen relationships with business partners, landlords, service providers, educators, etc.
4. Provide training opportunities to families in order to enhance employment opportunities, fiscal stability, accessibility to resources, etc.
5. Develop opportunities for human services agencies to collaborate on a more consistent basis.

We invite the following organizations to be involved:

- Regional human services agencies
- Rural Community Transportation (RCT)
- Gilman Housing Trust, Inc.
- Technical education centers

Telecommunications (lead: Kenn Stransky):

Goal:

Identify, develop, and implement plans and initiatives to improve telecommunications infrastructure in the region to serve schools, businesses, health care, libraries, families, and other users.



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Action Steps:

1. Convene appropriate partners and facilitate the development of a strategy to bring affordable broadband access to the Northeast Kingdom.
2. Convene appropriate partners and facilitate the development of a plan to educate a broad variety of users as to the application of broadband to users.
3. Improve cellular phone communication.
4. Enhanced WiFi access.

We invite the following organizations to be involved:

- Verizon Wireless
- FairPoint Communications
- Comcast
- AT&T
- Northern Community Investment Corporation
- NCDC
- Northeastern Vermont Development Association
- Great Auk Wireless and the Vermont Telecommunications Authority

Tourism (lead: Gloria Bruce):

Goal:

To employ tourism to the benefit of the Northeast Kingdom economy via the creation, enhancement, marketing, and execution of experiential tourism products that will both honor and sustain that which we, as residents of the Northeast Kingdom, value most about our home.

Action Steps:

1. Build consensus for the Northeast Kingdom brand identity.
2. Communicate the brand identity through all distribution channels.
3. Enhance internal communication and awareness of the capabilities of tourism to favorably impact the regional economy.
4. Establish clear target markets to include the drive markets in Vermont, Massachusetts, and Canada to name a few.
5. Enhance the relationship between businesses and support organizations such as chambers of commerce, downtown organizations, and the regional destination marketing organization.
6. Devote resources to improve the capabilities of the Regional Destination Marketing Organization.
7. Enhance tourism product organization. Capture information about current tourism offerings and share this information internally and externally.
8. Evaluate print collateral to determine what printed materials should be provided to potential or current visitors.
9. Enhance the skills of the existing hospitality workforce through training, ongoing education, and experiential learning.
10. Encourage youth to consider hospitality as a future career option and provide educational opportunities to ensure they can obtain the required skills.



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11. Provide services to travelers in a competitive fashion to include addition of central reservations technology and the competitive distribution of tangible goods.
12. Engage in the process of ensuring high-speed Internet access to allow properties to engage in yield revenue practices to maximize occupancy.

We invite the following organizations to be involved:

- Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association
- Regional and community chambers of commerce
- Newport City Renaissance Corporation
- Lyndon State College
- North Country Career Center

Water and Wastewater Infrastructure (lead: Mark Koprowski):

Goal:

Municipal water and wastewater infrastructure will be upgraded or made available to effectively serve new and existing development and the region's communities. Existing water and wastewater systems will be maintained through community capital budget planning assuring highest potential performance and reducing risk of failure and injury to public health.

Action Steps:

1. Promote existing job opportunities available in the municipal water and wastewater treatment fields.
2. Promote capital planning and budgeting for municipal infrastructure to local communities.
3. Encourage communities to address infrastructure capacity issues to allow for new growth, and encourage the development of infrastructure in communities lacking infrastructure.
4. Educate people and communities on available USDA resources for infrastructure planning, maintenance, and construction.

We invite the following organizations to be involved:

- USDA Rural Development
- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources
- Vermont Rural Water Association
- Northeastern Vermont Development Association (regional planners)
- Local community planning commissions, select boards, and community managers
- North Country Career Center (training resource)