

NEK Collaborative - Strategic Vision and Workplan

April 19, 2017

This document represents the culmination of a strategic visioning process undertaken by the NEK Collaborative, with partners such as USDA Rural Development at the table. Utilizing regional planning documents, as well as a series of qualitative interviews and professional facilitators, the Collaborative will be sharing this vision broadly in the coming year.

WHAT: The mission of the NEK Collaborative is to improve the quality of life for all residents of the NEK through coordinated economic and community development.

WHY: The Northeast Kingdom of Vermont possess innumerable assets: engaged citizens, dynamic entrepreneurs, exceptional educational and healthcare institutions, natural and cultural treasures, and a vibrant non-profit sector. Despite these resources, the region continues to face persistent economic and social challenges. These challenges are exacerbated by a lack of coordination, a redundancy of services, limited funding, and the need for strong leadership to implement existing community and economic development strategies. The Collaborative, through its convening authority, possess a unique ability to foster conversation and engender strategic partnerships.

HOW: By convening dialogues and conversations about current and long term challenges, the NEK Collaborative mobilizes and spurs existing non-profits, organizations, businesses, and community groups to act on their own and together to address these issues. The Collaborative does not assume responsibility for administering Kingdom-wide initiatives; rather it serves as the catalyst for strategic conversations and organic collaborations to effect meaningful attention and investment in NEK communities.

WHO: Members include representatives of regional development entities, social service and employment agencies, nonprofit organizations, conservation organizations, businesses, and local government officials, educators, and health care providers.

STRATEGIC VISION: In order to become a sustainable organization and fulfill its mission, the NEK Collaborative needs to pursue several strategies simultaneously for the next few years. The Collaborative will meet regularly in order to pursue the following strategies:

- 1. Affiliate with a 'backbone' organization to provide the Collaborative with administrative staff support and strengthen structure and capacity to go beyond being solely REAP Zone screeners.**
 - a. To determine what the Collaborative is looking for in a backbone organization, develop an 'RFP'- like document to present to and discuss with potential backbone organizations.
 - b. Determine which organization appears to be the best fit with the Collaborative.
 - c. Determine specific roles and needs of both organizations.
 - d. Enter into an MOU or other mechanism to formalize the relationship going forward.

- 2. Secure funds to hire/pay for staff in order to have administrative capacity and to focus on reaching the Collaborative's strategic goals.**
 - a. The Collaborative's ability to bring financial resources into the relationship with a backbone organization will serve to strengthen the relationship and help to ensure sustainability.
 - b. Some funding opportunities are currently being explored, including one pending grant application.

- 3. Engage in an ongoing effort to make sure that the right people are at the table.**
 - a. Conduct a network analysis of organizations to assist in identifying the interconnections between local agencies.
 - b. Review the strategic plan to identify specific people and organizations that need to be at the table to pursue each strategic goal.
 - c. Identify and recruit the 'movers and shakers' who are facilitators of change.

- 4. Hold an NEK 'Summit' in 2017 with the topic of 'Funding in a Time of Uncertainty.'**
 - a. Bring a wide variety of funders to the table to discuss ways/strategies to work with them.
 - b. Be sure to include banks, community loan funds, investors, etc., as well as more 'traditional' funding sources