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Executive Summary:

Throughout the past year, the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative (henceforth referred to as The Collaborative) remained very engaged in numerous community and regional activities. While maintaining a focus on current endeavors, The Collaborative is in the process of updating its Strategic and Work Plans, a project which will provide update-to-date guidance for all future activities. Combined with close involvement in many community and regional projects, activities and partnerships, the Collaborative identifies goals and objectives that are both achievable and realistic. An ongoing and continual process, strategic planning and visioning remain the underlying driving forces for the Collaborative.

As of December 2004, the REAP designation for the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont (NEK) was extended five years through the end of FY2010. Our soon-to-be modernized Strategic Plan has the potential to become even more pivotal in the overall betterment of the Northeast Kingdom.

The Collaborative remained committed to many different partnering sources throughout 2004. The Collaborative's main partnership is with the partners at the Regional USDA-Rural Development Office. This relationship is advisory in nature and has successfully resulted in smoother funding coordination for all. Another, the fiscal agent for the Collaborative, is the Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA), which assists the Collaborative with managing its administrative HUD-EDI special grant funds (see Audit Report below). Most importantly, Collaborative members constitute the membership of numerous other agencies, committees, panels, forums, working groups, collaboratives and foundations. A list of NEK Collaborative partners is found below in the "Partnerships and Alliances" section of this report.

The Collaborative is working to enhance its existing web site with a view on making it a communication center for the Northeast Kingdom. We don't intend to be the marketing agent for the NEK, that is the role of the various community chambers of commerce, planning commissions and development agencies, but we do hope to provide a system to enable collaboration (hence our name) within the NEK and beyond.

The Collaborative's recent benchmarks demonstrate a steadfast focus on goals laid out in our Strategic Plan. Some projects receiving the support of the Collaborative in 2004 were as follows:

<u>Community</u>	<u>Amount Awarded</u>	<u>Project Overview</u>
Village of Lyndonville	\$180,000	Replacement of water lines
Town of Brighton	\$25,000	Renovations to town library
VT Maple Sugar Maker's Assn	\$195,000	Development of Marketing Plan
NEK Travel and Tourism Assn	\$88,300	Hire marketing help/develop marketing
VT Business Education Corp	\$76,500	Implement business mentoring program
Town of Wheelock	\$5,430	Construct addition to fire station
Barton Village	\$144,700	Construct required wastewater lagoon
Town of Norton	\$62,625	Construct a town hall/clerk's office
Gilman Housing Trust (Newport)	\$88,500	Provide funding to low income families
Town of Lunenburg (School)	\$13,470	Purchase/install playground equipment

This is a partial list, the entire list of projects funded through the REAP designation since 2001 totals over \$34 million.

The Collaborative realizes that continuing to plan and fund projects of this magnitude will take a vast amount of resources and coordination to obtain partners when ever possible. The Collaborative plans to be a leading partner in realizing opportunities for increased high quality economic and community development within the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont.

Most Significant Accomplishments:

- For several years, due to lack of financial resources, the Collaborative functioned solely on the volunteer time, effort and in-kind contributions from its members, especially its Board of Directors. With the realization of \$89,415 HUD set-aside grant, a contracted administrative position, entitled Coordinator, was established allowing the Board to focus more on operational rather than functional issues.

John Watson, a U.S. Navy Veteran Retiree with over 20 years of active service, was contracted in February 2004 to act on the behalf of the Collaborative's interests. Mr. Watson has been tasked to provide the essential administrative support covering all facets of the Collaborative's functions, from generating minutes, agendas, and handouts for all meetings to actively leading, participating and coordinating with Collaborative Committees in pursuance of their goals and objectives. He is also responsible for maintaining communications with all members and the community-at-large, including updating the Collaborative Website, submitting REAP benchmark progress reports to the regional USDA administration, coordinating updates to the Collaborative's Work Plan. In addition to establishing the Collaborative's new office in the Incubator Building Newport, next to the Northeastern Vermont Development Association and Small Business Development Center's offices, John has enhanced the branding of the Collaborative in the NEK community through his outreach efforts, including his attendance and commitment to numerous area forums, panels and committees.
- The Collaborative's IT Committee hosted the March Collaborative Quarterly. Connections made there among interested parties have led to more rapid deployment of broadband services in selected areas of the NEK than would have otherwise taken place.
- As a result of this meeting, The Collaborative agreed to act as a sponsor of the NEK Broadband Project, which is tracking interest in broadband connectivity across the region. Members of The Collaborative's IT Committee produced and conducted surveys that identify potential broadband clients, which is necessary for independent internet service providers as they plan to establish last-mile broadband service to rural Vermont customers. Consequently, various local vendors are providing services now that were not available a year ago. Committee members have been working in various towns to work towards getting services including assisting community leaders by writing grant proposals for state and federal grants.
- The Collaborative has been instrumental in facilitating the inauguration of a new project in the Northeast Kingdom that is based on a project developed in Montana and implemented in Utah that provides funding and technical support for at-risk and disabled persons in rural areas so they may adequately prepare for and establish a new small business. This project was brought to the attention of the Collaborative's Board President and Coordinator and through time and effort to bring critical potential partners together the project has been established and funds raised to sustain its work in two of the three counties of the Northeast Kingdom.
- The Collaborative's Board President worked substantially on a proposal to the Kellogg Foundation for the establishment of economic and community development systems through a collaborative. In the end, the proposal was written to create this collaborative for the benefit of the entire State of Vermont. It was not chosen as a finalist for the grant, this year.

Significant outreach efforts of the Collaborative's Board members and Coordinator have resulted in establishing new partnerships with area banks, legislators and other community leaders. This has led to more applications taking advantage of the benefits of being one of only five REAP Zones in the nation, resulting in funding for new and improved projects that produce value-added impact on the communities the Collaborative serves.

Community Participation:

The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative serves three counties in the most rural northeastern Vermont. These three counties, Orleans, Essex and Caledonia, are all represented on the Collaborative board. These Counties also have continued input in the development of the Collaborative's Strategic and Work plans. New to 2004, NEK Collaborative meeting locations are dispersed throughout the NEK in order to gain citizen leadership insight at the source. The sixteen NEK Collaborative meetings in 2004 (four quarterly membership and twelve monthly board meetings) were conducted in ten different locations, evenly distributed geographically throughout the Northeast Kingdom. Represented at these meetings were town/village/city managers, planning commission members, state legislators, representatives of federal legislators, state agency managers, members of the local media, and, most importantly, citizens concerned for their community's needs.

Partnerships and Alliances:

Collaborative has been pursuing partnerships since its inception. As per its namesake, the Collaborative finds ways to collaborate on economic and community development issues. Recognized as a leading partner, the Collaborative works with local development entities within the REAP Zone and has been an active contributor and developer of many projects.

A partial list of current partnerships established by Collaborative members includes:

The Vermont Women's Fund	Orleans-Northern Essex Domestic Violence Task Force
NEK's Workforce Investment Board	Nulhegan Gateway Association
After-School Program Coordination (Several)	University of Vermont Extension System
Various Planning Commissions	Upper Connecticut River Working Group
Northeast Kingdom Offender Reentry Panels	Girls Scouts of America
Connecticut River Watershed Council	NEK Waste Management Board
Northwoods Stewardship Center	Lyndon State College
Orleans-Northern Essex Community Partnership	Economic Development Council of N.VT
VLTC Health Trust Board	NEK Travel and Tourism Association
Essex County Business Advisory Board	Chambers of Commerce (All)
Small Business Development Center	Northern Forest Alliance/Center
Northern Community Investment Corporation	New Directions Steering Committee
Vermont Council on Rural Development	Health and Traffic Safety Coalition
NEK Long Term Care Committee	NEK Palliative Care Committee
North Country Crisis Response Team	

Problems/Obstacles:

Problem #1: Developing and strengthening partnerships with the leaders of the local municipalities so they are more aware of opportunities for funding economic and community development projects that will enhance the quality of life for their constituents.

Problem #2: Funding currently allows for only one part-time staff person, currently the Coordinator, which limits the capacity of the Collaborative's programs, projects and activities.

Solutions:

Solution for Problem #1: Establishing a systematic approach for meeting with towns' Select Boards and City Council and enriching consistent communication with them so they have the opportunity to be more involved with the Collaborative and recognize the value of what's in it for them as partners with the Collaborative and beneficiaries of the area's designation as a REAP Zone.

Solution for Problem #2: Completing the 501 C3 application process that will allow the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative to seek funds that will be applied to capacity-building enabling the Collaborative to be sustainable and function more fully as the community-based non-governmental organization that facilitates communication for REAP Zone initiatives and funding opportunities.

Best Practices:

- ❑ Limiting focus to four economic and community development issues each year results in more vigorous participation in the four committees that address those issues and more robust participation in the Quarterly issue-oriented membership meetings.
- ❑ Having the Board and Quarterly meetings rotate to different towns throughout the Northeast Kingdom provides the Collaborative more visibility and allows for important dialogue resulting in high quality partnerships and projects.
- ❑ Collaborative staff and board participation in other Northeast Kingdom initiatives enhances communication with potential and current partners.
- ❑ Establishing consistent systems for project review and letters of support engages potential applicants more easily and affords better follow-up.

Plans/Prospects for the Future:

Using the current HUD-EDI grant funds to establish and manage operations and administrative systems will allow the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative to grow as an organization so it may better serve the communities of the Northeast Kingdom REAP Zone. Some projects scheduled for this year include:

- Establishing the Collaborative's 501 C3 status
- Revising and updating the Collaborative's Strategic Plan and Work Plan to reflect accomplishments and plan for challenges through the REAP Zone extension through 2010
- Raise unrestricted funds that will support the Collaborative's sustainable capacity to serve the community
- Move the Collaborative's Coordinator position to the next level with the ability to function at an executive as well as operations level, using interns interested in learning and experiencing community-level economic development to assist with administrative tasks
- Develop and implement an outreach campaign that will raise the level of recognition of the Collaborative as a source for expertise and information on resources for community and economic development in the Northeast Kingdom

- Develop Quarterly Membership meetings that will be attractive to community members and enhance their participation
- Establishing and maintaining systematic functional updates to the Collaborative web site

Audited Financial Report:

- Audit completed by Northeastern Vermont Development Association 03 Jan 2005. A copy of this report was forwarded to the St. Johnsbury USDA office on 11 Jan 2005.
- In-kind donations made by NEK Collaborative members are listed in the table below:

**In-kind Donations to the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative
2004**

Donor Name	Time			Mileage			Total	
	Hours	Rate	Extension	Miles	@ .375	Other		
Andersen, Sigurd	75	\$40	\$3,000	800	\$292		\$3,292	
Burnham, Bob	130	\$50	\$6,500	2014	\$735		\$7,235	
Cope, Joel	55	\$25	\$1,375	950	\$347		\$1,722	
Denton, Paul	40	\$65	\$2,600	1250	\$456		\$3,056	
Duey, Al	21	\$35	\$735	180	\$66		\$801	
Fedele, Joanne	24	\$30	\$720	530	\$193		\$913	
McMaster, Bill	60	\$37	\$2,220	600	\$219		\$2,439	
Moore, Carol	26	\$85	\$2,210	420	\$153		\$2,363	
Nash, Bonnie	55	\$35	\$1,925	350	\$128		\$2,053	
Paull, Mary	20	\$25	\$500	240	\$88		\$588	
Patterson, Steve	12	\$30	\$360	300	\$110		\$470	
Rose, Rene	20	\$20	\$400	300	\$110		\$510	
Sears, Patricia	240	\$65	\$15,600	816	\$298		\$15,898	
Stretch, Ed	35	\$27	\$945	200	\$73		\$1,018	
Watson, John	175	\$20	\$3,500	0	\$0		\$3,500	
Gilman Housing Trust--Meeting Space							\$150	\$150
S. Andersen: Laptop Donation							\$250	\$250
J. Watson (Coordinator): Coffee Machine							\$50	\$50
Lyndon State College--Facilities/Food Service							\$225	\$225
Bob Burnham/Nulhegan Gateway Assn (software for NEKC office)							\$140	\$140
N. Troy Town Conference Room							\$100	\$100
							Total	<u>\$46,772</u>