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Executive Summary:

The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative seeks to encourage exchange of information and opportunities through conversations about strategic planning and community action during of Collaborative public informational forums in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont (comprised of three of the most remote rural counties, located in the northeast corner of Vermont). With the direction of the Collaborative's strategic plan, millions of dollars in state, federal, private and non-profit assistance can be induced to flow into the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont by:

- Improving economic viability, diversity, and competitiveness of the local economy and enhancing its participation in state, national and global markets;
- Assisting local communities to develop cooperative strategies that will maintain and expand essential community functions, basic infrastructure, education, health care, housing, and telecommunications;
- Assisting families with crises resulting from displaced employees and joblessness; and
- Providing financial and technical assistance to implement a citizen-built strategic plan.

The Collaborative is not a "service provider" but rather a service enabler. An abundance of local, state and federal providers exist but their efforts are not always coordinated between and among each agency. State-directed community partnerships also exist but sometimes they, too, do not communicate their strategies and opportunities. What the Collaborative does best is offer a neutral ground for exploration, expansion and leveraging of ideas. It provides only the meeting space and facilitates the appreciation of the most important resource we have in the Kingdom: its people.

A representative sampling of the USDA-funded projects receiving a letter of support from the Collaborative in 2005 were:

Community	Amount Awarded	Project Overview
Northeast VT Development Assn	\$116,250	Economic Development Specialist
VT Women's Business Center	\$34,455	Business Training and portfolio program
Nulhegan Gateway Association	\$99,000	Geotourism Project
Northern Community Invest Corp.	\$200,000	Revolving Loan Fund
Town of Newport	\$139,000	Waste Water Disposal System
Sheffield-Wheelock Fire Dept.	\$15,750	New Fire Engine/Rescue Truck
Town of Lowell	\$114,000	New bucket loader for Road Department.

The total amount of USDA dollars provided to projects in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont (since CY2000) funded through the USDA REAP set-aside programs currently exceeds \$34 million. Of significant note, most projects funded through the USDA (including those listed above) also have numerous other matching funding sources. For example, The Nulhegan Gateway Association \$99,000 RBEG listed above was matched by \$10,000 from the University of Vermont Extension and \$5000 from the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund. In the case of the VT Women's Business Center \$34,455 RBEG, their grant was matched by \$8986 from the Central Vermont Community Action Council. Matching funding from non-USDA-RD sources and the countless in-kind contributions of money and, most importantly, time from private individuals helped these projects rise off the planning tables and come to fruition. This is successful leveraging of funds.

Most Significant Accomplishments:

- Through an \$89,415 HUD set-aside grant, the Collaborative's contracted part-time (20 hrs/wk) administrative position, Coordinator, has allowed the Board to focus more on strategic rather than operational issues.
- During CY2005, the Coordinator was a proactive outreach representative of the Collaborative through attendance at 95 meetings throughout the tri-county area of 2,000 square miles. Considering this position is only funded for 20 hours/week, his attendance equates to approximately two meetings per week with organizations and agencies outside of his obligated attendance at events hosted by The Collaborative. An abridged list of meetings representative of the meeting diversity for just the last half of CY2005 are as follows:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Type Meeting/Subject</u>
06 June 05	Newport	Orleans N. Essex Community Partnership
22 June 05	St. Johnsbury	Community Coordinating Council
22 June 05	Newport	Orleans Essex North 21c Coordination Mtg
27 June 05	Newport	Offender Reentry Community Advisory Panel
29 June 05	Guildhall	Nulhegan Gateway Assn. GeoTourism Working Group
19 July 05	Hardwick	USDA-RD/NEKC Leadership Coordination Meeting
26 July 05	St. Johnsbury	Nulhegan Gateway Assn. GeoTourism Working Group
27 July 05	Newport	Community Coordinating Council
01 Aug 05	Newport	Orleans N. Essex Community Partnership
02 Aug 05	Newport	Incarcerated Women Project Working Group
04 Aug 05	St. Johnsbury	NVDA Annual Meeting
09 Aug 05	Montpelier	VCRD Roundtable
11 Aug 05	Newport	Workforce Investment Board
18 Aug 05	Newport	Economic Dev. Luncheon w/ UVM President
24 Aug 05	St. Johnsbury	Community Coordinating Council
26 Aug 05	Newport	Arts in the NEK Arts Council Meeting
31 Aug 05	St. Johnsbury	Community Coordinating Council Housing Meeting
07 Sept 05	Derby	Route 5 Corridor Planning Meeting
12 Sept 05	Newport	Orleans N. Essex Community Partnership
14 Sept 05	Derby	Substance Abuse Forum at IROC
15 Sept 05	Derby	Indoor Recreation of Orleans County Board Meeting
26 Sept 05	Newport	Offender Reentry Community Advisory Panel
28 Sept 05	Newport	Offender Reentry Community Advisory Panel training
28 Sept 05	St. Johnsbury	Community Coordinating Council
30 Sept 05	Newport	Hunger Network Meeting
03 Oct 05	Newport	Orleans N. Essex Community Partnership
06-07 Oct 05	Killington	OENSU Representative at Statewide 21C Conference
17 Oct 05	Newport	Offender Reentry Community Advisory Panel
18 Oct 05	Newport	Nulhegan Gateway Association GeoTourism Working Group
18 Oct 05	Newport	Working Lunch/Planning Session with ONECP Coordinator
19 Oct 05	Barton	NEK Fuel Forum
20 Oct 05	E.Charleston	Nulhegan Gateway Assn Board Meeting
26 Oct 05	St. Johnsbury	Community Coordinating Council
09 Nov 05	Island Pond	NEK Collaborative Board Meeting
16 Nov 05	Newport	Working Lunch with ONECP Coordinator
17 Nov 05	E. Burke	Nulhegan Gateway Association Board Meeting
22 Nov 05	St. Johnsbury	NVDA Forum on Affordable Housing

- Additionally, The Collaborative provided several informational forums throughout 2005. In fact, more public forums were hosted during 2005 (five) than in the previous year. This trend will continue into CY2006 where plans have already been prepared to host at least five public, informational forums with the potential for even more forums. In CY2005 forums were conducted as follows:
 - 11 March 2005 Healthcare in the Northeast Kingdom, Barton, VT
 - 09 June 2005 Housing Concerns in the Northeast Kingdom, Newport, VT
 - 16 September 2005 Economic Development, East Charleston, VT
 - 02 November 2005 Big Box Stores: Attributes and Challenges, Orleans, VT
 - 09 December 2005 Affordable Housing Revisited, Newport, VT
- Of significant note: Outreach efforts of the Collaborative's Board members and Coordinator are a considerable portion of its purpose and focus. It is through the establishment of and maintenance of partnerships with local and regional businesses and business organizations, local legislators and other community leaders and members that the information flows through the NEK. The success or impact of The Collaborative cannot be measured by or through utilization rates of any one grant or loan program or through a quantitative summary or comparison of the number of grants applied for or received in 2005. It is only through a thorough comprehension of the incredible participation of The Collaborative's members in absolutely every facet of community planning, chamber of commerce, planning commission and public/private organization or agency. Practically impossible to completely map or define, this immense involvement qualitatively displays the determination of our membership to one end: to find ways to collaborate on economic development and community development issues
- The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative membership is open to private citizens, business people, educators, and members of nonprofit organizations, regional development organizations, social service and employment agencies, local government officials, health care providers, conservation organizations and other concerned citizens of the Northeast Kingdom.

Community Participation:

The Collaborative's board has representatives from each of its three counties (Caledonia, Essex and Orleans). Representatives from each of the three counties attended every meeting of the Collaborative during CY2005. Continuing a board policy set in CY2004, NEK Collaborative meeting locations rotates throughout the NEK in order to gain citizen leadership insight at the source. The Collaborative sought to conduct its board meetings and quarterly membership/forums in communities throughout the Northeast Kingdom. With the purpose of being a voice for the entire NEK not just the north or south portions divided physically by a height of land at Sheffield, The Collaborative held its ten gatherings in CY2005 at eight different locations: Derby, Danville, Lyndonville, Newport, Brighton (Island Pond), Barton, East Charleston and Orleans. This trend will also continue into CY2006 with its meetings scheduled again in eight different locations geographically distributed throughout the vast area comprising the Northeast Kingdom.

Partnerships and Alliances:

Collaborative continued to enhance and expand its relationships throughout the Northeast Kingdom and beyond. Again, improving upon the trend set in previous years, organizations directly involved in the planning of our informational forums was impressive. A short-list is as follows:

Vermont Women's Fund	New Directions Steering Committee
After-school Program Coordination (Several)	Northern Forest Alliance/Center
Vermont Trails and Greenway Council	Chambers of Commerce (All)
Various Planning Commissions	NEK Travel and Tourism Association
Local Offender Reentry Panels	Nulhegan Gateway Association
Connecticut River Watershed Council	Upper Connecticut River Working Group
Northwoods Stewardship Center	Girl Scouts of America
Regional Community Partnership	University of Vermont Extension System
VLTC Health Trust Board	NEK Waste Management Board
Essex County Business Advisory Board	NEK Workforce Investment Board
Small Business Development Center	Lyndon State College
Northern Community Investment Corporation	Economic Development Council of N.VT
Vermont Council on Rural Development	Health and Traffic Safety Coalition
NEK Long Term Care Committee	NEK Palliative Care Committee
North Country Crisis Response Team	Vermont Council on Rural Development
Indoor Recreation of Orleans County	Various Local School Unions
VT Legislative Rural Development Working Group	Northeastern Vermont Development Assn.
Vermont Natural Resources Council	Preservation Trust of Vermont
Littleton (NH) Mainstreet Program	St. Albans Downtown Development Assn.
Institute for Local Self Reliance	UVM Center for Rural Studies
Northeast Vermont Regional Hospital	North Country Hospital
NEK Area Agency on Aging	NEK Human Services
Tri-County Visiting Nurses Association	Efficiency Vermont
Gilman Housing trust	Northeastern Vermont Development Assn
VT Agency for Natural Resources	Vermont Economic Development Authority
VT Department of Tourism and Marketing	Vermont Community Development Program

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: Seek 501(C)3 status that will allow the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative to seek funds that will enable capacity-building. This will allow The Collaborative to be sustainable and function as the community-based non-governmental organization that facilitates communication for REAP Zone initiatives and funding opportunities. An alternative solution would be to contract a coordinator position for additional hours per week-possibly 30 hours per week. This would enable the Coordinator to devote more time and get even more involved in the community affairs of the NEK.

Best Practices:

The volunteer-based nature of The Collaborative combined with but a part-time, funded administrative position does not permit a wide scope of operations or focus of activities. Consequently, The Collaborative has narrowed its focus to several essential practices that have proved effective throughout the past calendar year by:

- ❑ Limiting focus to two or three economic and community development issues each year for discussion at public informational forums;
- ❑ Conducting Board and Quarterly meetings in different towns throughout the Northeast Kingdom;
- ❑ Emphasizing Collaborative staff, member and board participation/contribution in other Northeast Kingdom organizations and agencies.
- ❑ Answering the questions through the enabling of a conversation with the objective of hopefully spurring action.
- ❑ During a Board Retreat conducted in May 2005, with the assistance of Mr. Richard Knowles, the board created a "process Enneagram" which can allow the board and the organization to better identify and focus its internal processes and objectives. This tool has become a fixed agenda item for review at every NEK Collaborative Board meeting.

Our best practice is not necessarily a single practice: it's an orchestrated effort of the entire Collaborative.

Plans/Prospects for the Future:

The current HUD-EDI grant funds expire at the end of CY2006. The Collaborative has begun to actively pursue administrative funding for subsequent years. Through the comprehensive attendance and involvement of The NEK Collaborative Coordinator position and the Collaborative members, the word has been heard that the NEK Collaborative is hear to participate in activities that have the potential to be of benefit to all in the NEK. Projects scheduled or considered for CY 2006 include:

- Establishing and maintaining systematic functional updates to the Collaborative web site
- Pursue funding for the Coordinator position beyond Dec 2006
- Review the Process Enneagram created at the NEK Collaborative Retreat and monitor changes and goals set by an understanding of our processes
- Recruit new board members for new points of view in the Kingdom-especially focus on getting a representative from Human Services Provider
- Continue to provide letters of support for USDA-RD REAP-funded projects. Provide feedback throughout the year via the NEK Collaborative's "NEK town clerks" University of Vermont listserv address regarding USDA-RD (and other) funding opportunities relevant to their needs

Audited Financial Report:

The fiscal manager for the Northeast Kingdom Collaborative, the Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) conducted an audit during December 2005 covering the period 01 July 2004 through 30 June 2005 (the NVDA fiscal year 2005). The results of that audit will be available in the first half of January 2006. The previous NVDA audit, for FY2004 (the period ending 30 June 2004), was referenced in the previous NEK Collaborative Annual REAP Report and was forwarded with that report. A copy of all audits completed or being done will be or have been forwarded to the USDA office in St. Johnsbury, Vermont.