

RURAL ECONOMIC ACTION PARTNERSHIP (REAP)

STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR

THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM OF VERMONT:

ESSEX, ORLEANS AND CALEDONIA COUNTIES

PREPARED BY:

THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM ENTERPRISE COLLABORATIVE

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**Rural Economic Action Partnership Strategic Plan  
for Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom**

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<b><u>PART I - OVERVIEW OF NORTHEAST KINGDOM’S REAP STRATEGIC PLAN.</u></b>	

**A. History of Collaboration in the Northeast Kingdom and the Northeast Kingdom Enterprise Collaborative.**

The Northeast Kingdom Enterprise Collaborative was formed in 1996 to find ways to collaborate on economic development and community development issues in Orleans, Essex and Caledonia Counties of Vermont, an area known as the Northeast Kingdom. Members include regional development organizations, educators, social service and employment agencies, local government officials, business people, nonprofit organizations, health care providers and conservation organizations. Support for the Collaborative has been provided by the Snelling Center for Government through grants from the Ford Foundation and subsequently the United States Department of Agriculture--Rural Development.



**B. Mission Statement.**

The Northeast Kingdom Enterprise Collaborative is committed to the economic and social well being of the Northeast Kingdom and the highest possible quality of life for its people and communities

**C. Why the Northeast Kingdom was Invited to Become a REAP Zone.**

The Northeast Kingdom Enterprise Collaborative has been actively working with Vermont's Congressional Delegation to secure support for rural development activities in the Northeast Kingdom. The Collaborative began a long range planning process in March of 1999 when it hosted a visioning conference to articulate what economic and community development in the Northeast Kingdom should be like twenty years from now. (For a copy of visioning report, see the Collaborative's web site at [www.lsc.vsc.edu/nekcoll](http://www.lsc.vsc.edu/nekcoll))

In November of 1999, United States Senator Patrick Leahy's office identified an opportunity within USDA--Rural Development to have the Northeast Kingdom apply for Rural Economic Action Plan (REAP) designation. REAP designation requires creation of a comprehensive, long term economic and community development plan. In return, designated REAP areas receive special access to Rural Development and other federal funding opportunities.

**D. REAP Plan Task Forces.**

At a meeting in December, 1999, the Northeast Kingdom Enterprise Collaborative decided to pursue REAP designation. To do so, the Collaborative committed to developing a comprehensive, long term economic and community development plan, to be submitted to Rural Development by May 15, 2000. To guide the plan, Task Force committees were formed to look at Economic Development, Education, Healthcare, Housing, Transportation, Recreation, Parks and Conservation, Community Leadership, and Arts and Culture.

**E. Public Input.**

The REAP program is also very interested in public input, especially from low income residents of the Northeast Kingdom. To adequately obtain public input on the plan, three public forums were scheduled for the last week of March:

**Newport.** Vermont State Office Building. Monday, March 27. 7-9 PM

**Lyndonville.** Burke Mt. Room, Lyndon State College. Wednesday, March 29. 7-9PM.

**Island Pond.** Brighton Elementary School. Thursday. March 30. 7-9 PM

Additionally, Northeast Kingdom Community Action, working with Lyndon State College, mailed a comprehensive survey to 750 low income residents in the Northeast Kingdom to ascertain their views on the region's economic and community development needs. *A summary of survey findings is found in Part IV, and the low income survey is referenced throughout the "challenges" section of this plan.* A focus forum for senior citizens was held at the Lyndonville meal site on April 12.

With this feedback, the Collaborative will complete the REAP plan and send it to USDA-RD by May 15, 2000. Northeast Kingdom Community Action will also hold a series of eleven focus forums around the region to further ascertain the views of the low income population and test the validity of the strategic approach put forward in this plan. The plan is a living document, and will be evaluated and refined by the Collaborative membership as appropriate.

**F. Benefits of the REAP Process.**

REAP designation will give the Northeast Kingdom special access to USDA Rural Development programs for Business and Industry Loan Guarantees; Business Intermediary Loan Funds; Rural Business Enterprise Grants; Grants, Loans, and Loan Guarantees for Community Facilities; Rural Waste Water Treatment Grants and Loans; Rural Rental Housing Loans, and Rural Housing Rehabilitation. REAP designation also gives special preference for federal Enterprise Community and Empowerment Zone programs.

The REAP planning process also marks the first time all three counties of the Northeast Kingdom are talking together specifically about economic development. The plan will be comprehensive, integrated and holistic in scope. The members of the Collaborative believe that the goal of enhancing our communities is reachable. When these groups share ideas and focus on common goals, their synergy helps maximize all their resources. The Enterprise Collaborative is also conducting extensive outreach to municipalities, businesses and our low income populations.

It is important to note the REAP plan is being developed by people who live and work in the Northeast Kingdom. We best know our unique challenges and the unique assets we have to meet those challenges. The plan will build our capacity to work together and jointly commit our resources to make good things happen. The plan will also help maintain the parts of our culture

and environment that we care so much about.

**G. Priorities for Implementation.**

Virtually all of the strategies listed in this plan are dependent on the partners who will implement projects related to the strategies. The projects are detailed in a two year “work plan” which will be updated as needed. Prioritization of projects in the work plan is based on the ability of partners to move the project forward, which will in part be based on their ability to demonstrate need for the project, and hence raise funds. However, by taking this strategic look at the needs of the Northeast Kingdom and clearly articulating projects and activities to address those needs, partners will also be able to coordinate with other projects, improve their collaboration abilities, and in some cases refine and modify their projects based on the good work that someone else is doing.

## **PART II -- APPROACH OF THIS PLAN.**

The members of the Northeast Kingdom Enterprise Collaborative acknowledge that the Northeast Kingdom has many economic development challenges stemming from isolation and persistent poverty. However, the Collaborative wishes to take an *Assets* approach to formulating a strategic plan.

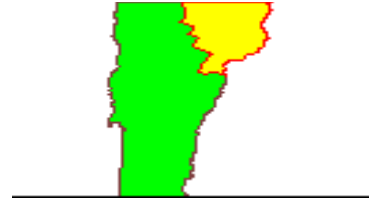
The Northeast Kingdom has many people, organizations and agencies who every day do the best they can with the limited resources available to improve community well being in the region. We believe this “*human capital*” is one of the most important resources in the region. Therefore, each section of the plan begins with a brief summary statement followed by:

- **ASSETS:** a comprehensive list of the organizations and other assets we have in place to work in this area;
- **VISION:** the way we would like to see the Northeast Kingdom twenty years from now, developed from a region wide visioning conference held at Lyndon Institute on March 27, 1999;
- **CHALLENGES:** The key problems we need to work on; and
- **STRATEGIES:** The methods and types of activities we will undertake to meet the challenges and attain our vision.

Finally, the plan articulates a set of **indicators of success** to measure if we have indeed had an impact on the lives of the individuals and families who live and work in the Northeast Kingdom. Progress on any of these individual indicators may not necessarily be attributable to the benefits of REAP designation. However, when taken as a whole, these indicators will tell us over time if the people of the Northeast Kingdom are better off than they were before the REAP designation took place.

### **PART III – GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM.**

The Northeast Kingdom is made up of Essex, Orleans and Caledonia Counties in the northeastern corner of Vermont. The region is the most sparsely populated in Vermont.



#### **A. Essex County.**

Essex County is in the Northeast Corner, bordering Quebec and New Hampshire. The region is heavily forested, and some of its townships are completely unpopulated. The total projected population for the county in 1998 was 6,182. Population centers include Canaan, Lunenburg and Island Pond. Canaan and Lunenburg are on the Connecticut River bordering New Hampshire. Canaan is home to a large Ethan Allen Furniture manufacturing plant, and Lunenburg has a dormant paper mill and publishing company. Island Pond is inland and surrounded by forest. Historically, the town was the railroad hub for a line running from Montreal to Portland, Maine.



#### **B. Orleans County.**

Orleans County is in the northern part of the region bordering Quebec on the north and the spine of the Green Mountains to the west. The county is a mix of forest and agriculture lands. The total population is 25,862. Newport and Derby in the north are the market centers. Orleans village in Barton is home to another Ethan Allen manufacturing plant. The major rivers in the county flow north towards Lake Memphremagog on the Quebec border. Other important lakes include Lake Willoughby in Westmore and Crystal Lake in Barton.

#### **C. Caledonia County.**

Caledonia County sits primarily in the Passumpsic River watershed of the Connecticut River. The county is also a mix of forest and agricultural lands. The total population is 28,812. The major market and industrial centers are in St. Johnsbury and Lyndon. The town of Hardwick sits over a mountain ridge and is actually in the Lake Champlain watershed. Hardwick was originally a granite manufacturing town but now has limited industry.

The three counties are comprised of 55 individual towns or cities. As in all of New England, local government is primarily carried out at the town and city level. With the exception of law enforcement and the court system, there is virtually no form of county government. However, there are region wide non-profit organizations serving economic and community development, social services, housing, and the arts. Regional offices of state agencies are based in Newport and St. Johnsbury, and these offices are in regular communication. State agencies and social service networks participate in two collaborative “Community Partnerships” that serve the

northern and southern halves of the region.

All three counties have a strong identity with the name for their region, the “Northeast Kingdom.” The three counties also share a common isolation from the rest of Vermont. However, it should be noted that there are geographic barriers between the counties. A significant ridge at Sheffield Heights separates Orleans and Caledonia Counties. Orleans County is in the St. Lawrence River Watershed, while most of Caledonia County is in the Passumpsic/Connecticut River Watershed. The Essex County towns along the Connecticut River are isolated to the west by a vast expanse of the Northern Forest. Residents of these Essex County towns generally interact with their neighboring communities in New Hampshire.

**PART IV – THE CHALLENGES–A SUMMARY.**

The Northeast Kingdom of Vermont offers a paradox of being one of the most appealing yet toughest places to live in the state. For many Northeast Kingdom residents, strong family ties mean there is no other place they can call home. The Northeast Kingdom’s small towns offer a strong sense of community. Attachment to the land is high, both through land ownership and appreciation for the wide open beauty. People move to the Northeast Kingdom for the same reasons. They love the great outdoors and the odd combination of a sense of community coupled with rural privacy. They can do what they want yet rely on their neighbors when the need arises. It is a region that truly has a sense of place, a place people want to belong to.

The toughest part about living in the Northeast Kingdom comes from the difficulty to earn a living. The three county region is the most isolated and sparsely populated corner of the state. As a result, it has consistently been the most economically depressed. The countryside is dotted with picturesque villages that have lost their economic foundation, leaving behind poverty and a community infrastructure with no means of support. The former railroad yards of Island Pond, water-powered mills of Barton and granite sheds of Hardwick have long since disappeared. In recent years, St. Johnsbury Trucking and Vermont American Corporation, two large employers in the St. Johnsbury/Lyndon area, either closed their doors or moved south. In the natural resource sector, the forest was clear cut at the turn of the century, and it is once again ripe for the same exploitative cycle.

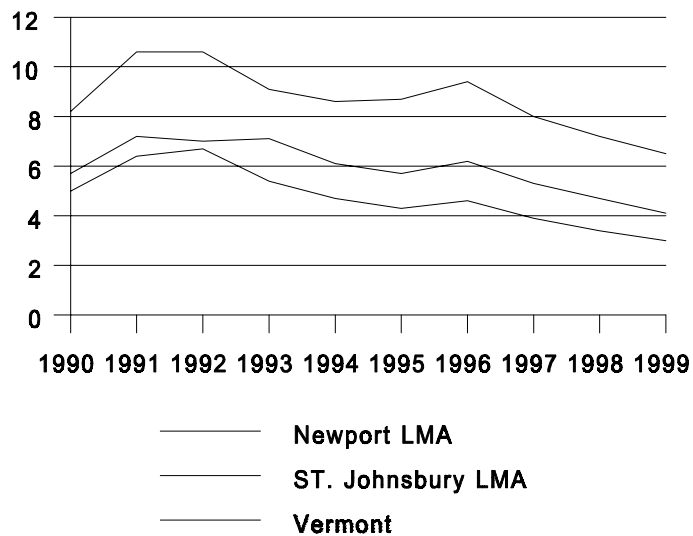
**A. Employment and Income.**

The Northeast Kingdom consistently has the highest unemployment rates and lowest wages in Vermont. As Figure 1 shows, the unemployment rate remains proportionally higher than the statewide average, even in times of statewide and national prosperity.

Wages and income are also significantly behind the statewide average. Of the approximately 20,000 persons employed in the Northeast Kingdom in 1998, average wages in the Newport Labor Market Area (Orleans/Essex Counties) were only \$21,198; and \$22,539 in the St. Johnsbury LMA (Caledonia/Essex Counties). This is approximately 80% of the average wage for Vermont.

These low wages are despite the fact that the Northeast Kingdom has proportionally

**Unemployment Rate, 1990 - 1999**



more of its residents employed in the manufacturing sector than the statewide average.

Industry	Newport LMA		Saint Johnsbury LMA		Vermont	
	% of Workforce	Average Wage	% of Workforce	Average Wage	% of Workforce	Average Wage
Public - Private Total	100.0%	\$21,298	100.0%	\$22,539	100%	\$26,624
Agriculture	1.6%	\$18,929	1.0%	\$16,000*	1.2%	\$18,094
Contract Construction	5.8%	\$22,022	5.5%	\$25,257	5.0%	\$27,875
Manufacturing	27.0%	\$25,495	23.0%	\$28,677	16.9%	\$35,924
Transportation and Public Utilities	4.4%	\$27,189	4.4%	\$26,366	4.3%	\$33,887
Wholesale Trade	3.0%	\$26,700	2.9%	\$30,471	4.4%	\$32,996
Retail Trade	17.2%	\$13,502	19.2%	\$13,234	18.9%	\$15,187
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	2.6%	\$20,996	3.8%	\$22,992	4.2%	\$35,855
Health Services	11.9%	\$23,082	10.0%	\$22,220	9.7%	\$27,629*
Educational Services	12.0%	\$22,371*	13.9%	\$19,650 - \$28,136*	11.2%	\$25,282*
Other Services	8.2%	****	10.8%	****	17.5%	****
Public Administration	4.8%	\$15,395 - \$49,873	4.4%	\$17,838 - \$35,887	5.0%	\$21,645 - \$44,544
Other	1.5%	****	1.1%	****	1.7%	****

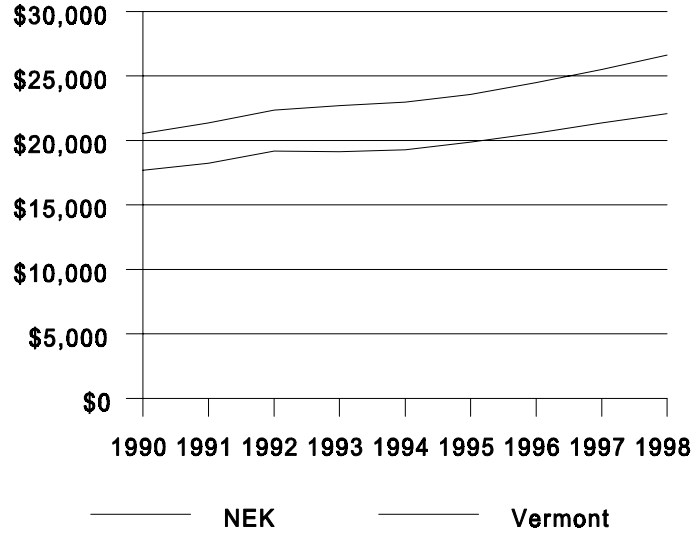
\* varies depending on federal, state, local, or private employer

\*\*\*\* varies greatly

Source: Vermont Department of Employment and Training.

(Note: see section H. Agriculture and Forestry for more information on agricultural wages.)

### Average Wages, 1990-1998



The wage gap between the Northeast Kingdom and the rest of Vermont has been consistent over the last ten years.

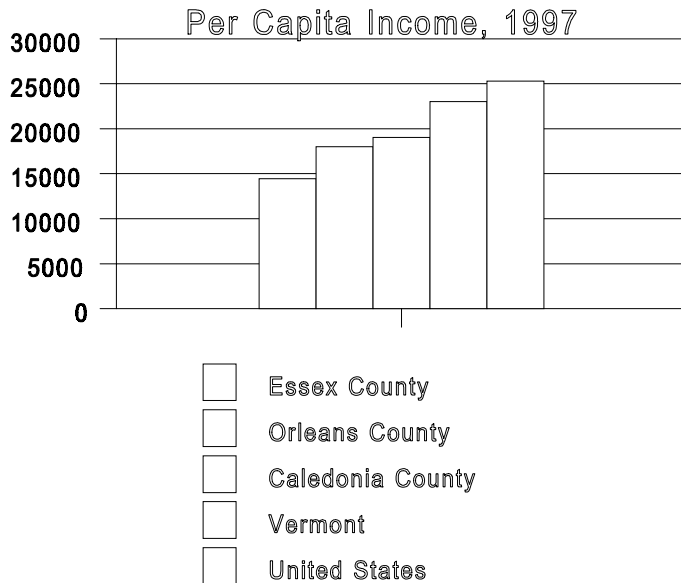
Similarly, per capita income for the Northeast Kingdom is well below the Vermont average, which in turn is well below the national average.

### B. Poverty Rates.

The Northeast Kingdom's counties are the state's three poorest (1990 Census).

The collective poverty rate of 13.5% compares to a statewide average of 9.5%. Fully 16% of all children live in poverty.

Unlike urban centers, poverty is spread throughout the Kingdom. Caledonia County is the most prosperous of the three counties, yet it has 4 towns with poverty rates over 15%. In Orleans county, 8 of the 19 towns had poverty rates over 15%, and the poverty rate in every one of the county's towns was higher than the state average (<http://crs.uvm.edu>). It should be noted that many of the towns with the lowest poverty rates depicted in Figure 7 are actually heavily forested communities with little to no population.



### C. Educational Attainment.

The Northeast Kingdom has the lowest educational attainment rates in Vermont.

Only 68% of the adults in Essex county (population 6,400) have high school diplomas, and only 8.5% of adults have a bachelor's degree or higher. Orleans County is a close second. Caledonia County is still substantially behind the statewide average of 80.8% with high school diplomas and 24% with bachelors degrees.

### D. Population.

The land itself is sparsely populated. The Northeast Kingdom comprises 21% of the state's land area (2027 square miles) yet only 10% of the population. The largest town, St. Johnsbury, has

only 7,900 residents. The 50,000 other residents are spread out between 54 cities, towns, grants, gores, and unincorporated towns. Of the 49 incorporated towns, 42 have a population under 2,000. The population is almost entirely of European descent. A sizeable number trace their heritage to French Canada. (Center for Rural Studies, from U.S. Census, 1990)

Population Range of Northeast Kingdom Municipalities, 1998				
Population Range	Number of Towns/Cities within this Population Range			
	NEK Total (60,862)	Caledonia (28,812)	Orleans (25,862)	Essex (6,182)
0	3	0	0	3
1 - 100	5	0	0	5
101 - 300	8	1	0	7
301 - 1000	20	8	12	0
1,001 - 3,000	15	6	5	4
3,001 - 5,000	2	0	2	0
5,001 - 7,740	2	2	0	0
Total	55	17	19	19

Source: Vermont Department of Health Vital Statistics, 1998 projections

*Population Trends.* The result of the poor economy is that people need to leave this extraordinarily beautiful part of the state they call home in order to find work. Essex and Orleans Counties are actually expected to loose population over the next 20 years, while Caledonia County will grow at substantially less than the state average. The region has an above average number of residents age 35 to 55, indicating an aging population. (Vermont Population Projections: 1990-2015, Vermont Health Care Authority, Center for Rural Studies, June, 1993.) (<http://crs.uvm.edu/databank.htm>)

### **E. Housing.**

Curiously, the rate of home ownership in the Northeast Kingdom is slightly higher than the rest of the state. However, county wide median values for these homes ranged from \$56,000 to \$72,000, compared to a statewide median value of \$95,600. The housing stock in Caledonia County is the oldest in the state, with half of the homes constructed before 1940. The older housing stock also tends to have more environmental hazards such as lead paint and is substantially more inefficient to heat. Multiplying this problem are harsh winters that can average five degrees colder than the Champlain Valley of western Vermont.

### **F. The Elderly.**

The elderly population in the Northeast Kingdom suffers from isolation and limited public transportation. As a result of isolation, the elderly often do not have the choices and information available to more urban counterparts. Housing owned by the elderly tends to be old and in need of maintenance. There is only one assisted care facility, in the far southwestern corner of the region. The elderly may depend on home health services to stay out of nursing homes, but recent federal legislation to contain medicare costs threatens to penalize Vermont's already efficient system (the most efficient in the country) by cutting existing per capita benefits.

### **G. Social Risks.**

Recent trends show remarkable drops in the rates of child abuse and new families at risk (births to single mothers under age 20 with fewer than 12 years education), but these rates have only dropped to the statewide average. The three counties had the highest percentage of adults who smoke cigarettes. Teenagers use marijuana and alcohol at rates equal to or greater than the state average. Alcohol and other substance abuse for adults is comparable to the rest of the state as a whole. ([www.ahs.state.vt/98compro](http://www.ahs.state.vt/98compro)).

### **H. Agriculture and Forestry.**

The Northeast Kingdom is traditionally an agricultural area. However, the total number of farms has declined significantly over the last 30 years. Some of these farms have been consolidated into larger farms, but the overall trend has been a loss of agricultural land to development or non-productive uses. The Vermont Forest Roundtable estimates half of the forest clear cuts taking place in Vermont since 1972 occurred in the Northeast Kingdom, with much of that timber exported as raw material. Recent changes have included conservation of significant tracts of industrial forest formerly owned by Champion International in Essex County, and a new forestry practices law that prohibits clear cuts of over 40 acres that are not part of a forest management plan.

*A note on agricultural wages:* Vermont Department of Employment and Training data have been used to estimate the percentage of the workforce engaged in various industries. While DET data is useful for certain industries that utilize steady, waged employees, the data is not very accurate when considering unwaged, informal, or contract employment in sectors such as agriculture or forestry. DET states that 1.6% of Newport LMA residents have jobs in agriculture, while the

census states that 10.3% of Orleans County residents work on farms. According to Rural Vermont, a Vermont farm advocacy group, "The wide discrepancy reflects the fact that Census information is gathered from individuals and households, DET data from businesses. . . . The DET surveys business establishments quarterly on employment and wages, but only those whose employees are covered by unemployment insurance. Since only farms with \$20,000 or more in wages per quarter pay unemployment insurance, DET figures for that industry will be substantially lower than actual employment." These discrepancies in data sets are noted not to cast aspersions on research methods but simply to note that some indicators of economic health may not be as accurate as others. One of the best ways to judge people's economic security is to ask them how they are doing -- in agriculture, virtually every farmer will tell a surveyor that the current costs of farming in the Northeast Kingdom are higher than the monetary rewards.

### **I. Geography.**

The Northeast Kingdom has two distinct borders that effect economic development. The "no tax" state of New Hampshire draws retail sales away from the Northeast Kingdom and competes with Vermont for manufacturing and other job expansions. The drop in value of the Canadian dollar has discouraged people from Quebec from spending money in the region. The Canadian government subsidizes saw mills along the Vermont border which purchase their raw timber resource from Vermont. In some cases, Canadian saw mills then re-export finished products back to Vermont. While language differences also pose a barrier to trade, there may be an opportunity to attract Canadian investment from businesses worried about potential political instability in Quebec. An additional geographic barrier is the mountains. The Green Mountains block the region to the west, and a hilly piedmont borders the south.

### **J. Transportation and Infrastructure.**

The public transportation system in the Northeast Kingdom is very limited. Rural Community Transportation is a private, non-profit organization that coordinates medical trips for income eligible residents, shuttles between St. Johnsbury-Lyndonville and Newport-Derby, a senior shopping shuttle once a week, and coordinates ride share and van pool programs. Car ownership is a necessity for the rural population for transportation to most jobs, access to health care and other vital services. Transportation links in the region are remote. The north-south interstate system is strong, but it ends in rural Quebec to the north and is a substantial distance to population centers in the south. The east-west corridor connecting the region to Montpelier and Burlington snakes over mountain ridges. Driving conditions on both of these roads can be problematic in winter and with the real threat of moose and other wild animals at night. The region is also two hours drive from the nearest full-service airport. Telephone lines run out to rural areas in a spoked-wheel fashion, making loss of telecommunication services for those areas more frequent.

### **K. Cultural Opportunities.**

Geographic isolation leads to a lack of cultural opportunities. The Northeast Kingdom has always provided its own cultural infrastructure, yet many of the village opera and meeting houses are in need of repair and restoration. Limited philanthropic resources maintain the Fairbanks

Museum and Planetarium, St. Johnsbury Atheneum, Old Stone House Museum, Haskell Opera House and Catamount Arts at levels that require constant innovation by staff and board members. As much as performances and cultural visits are enjoyed by the people of the Northeast Kingdom, attendance drawn solely from Northeast Kingdom residents will never be enough to pay for first class events. The immensely popular Bread and Puppet Theater in Glover formerly drew thousands its annual Domestic Resurrection Circus, yet the annual weekend has been discontinued since 1999 due to overwhelming crowds and an isolated and unfortunate incident of violence in neighboring camp sites. Bread and Puppet Theater continues to hold smaller performances each weekend through the summer.

## **PART V -- SURVEY OF LOW INCOME RESIDENTS.**

### **Highlights of Preliminary Descriptive Data Analysis, April 18, 2000**

#### **A. Survey Population/Sample**

Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA) provided a list of 747 individuals classified as within 125% of the federal poverty level which comprised the sampling frame for this needs assessment of low-income Northeast Kingdom residents. On February 27, 2000, all individuals were mailed a cover letter, an initial survey instrument (questionnaire), and a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the questionnaire. Forty-nine questionnaires were returned from the initial mailing because of a lack of forwarding address, insufficient address, resident unknown, or resident deceased. Addresses were obtained for eight of the forty-nine returns and a new survey was mailed to each of the eight; four of these were subsequently returned as undeliverable. Approximately 10 days after the initial mailing, each non-respondent to the initial questionnaire was sent a postcard reminder, requesting that they fill out the survey and return it to Lyndon State College. On March 16<sup>th</sup>, a second survey instrument was sent to all non-respondents; a third survey was sent approximately two weeks later.

The results presented in these highlights reflect descriptive analysis of the 312 respondents (48% of the deliverable sample) who responded after three mailing of the survey instrument. This sample is representative at the 95% confidence level,  $\pm 5\%$  error. Readers should be cautioned about drawing conclusions from the data until a sample of non-respondents is taken to check for non-response bias.

#### **B. Preliminary Highlights:**

- *Jobs.* There was overwhelming support for access to more jobs, more on the job training opportunities, and more adult vocational opportunities. Many are unwilling to move to find a job due to connectedness to family and the region.
- *Day Care.* More affordable day care is needed, as well as after school programs.
- *Housing.* There is an overwhelming interest in rental housing that is more affordable, and in assistance to help the elderly remain in their homes.
- *Prescription Drugs and Health Care.* Assistance with prescription drugs was cited as a need by almost all respondents. There is also a strong need for transportation to health care, pregnancy prevention services, services for the disabled, and dental services.
- *Computers.* Computer access and telecommunications was a strong interest of 80% of respondents.

- *Recreation and Conservation.* Organized recreation for youth and the general public was a strong interest. The respondents report that they fish and hunt far more than the general population. About three-fourths of the sample believed that development along lakes and ponds, lack of public access to water bodies, and loss of Vermont's scenic landscape are problems in the Kingdom.
- *Satisfaction with Services.* Banking (79.5%), churches (71.8%), libraries (74.3%), and restaurants (70.2%) provided the most satisfactory services. Respondents were more dissatisfied than satisfied with youth employment opportunities, adult employment, health care costs, homeless family services, and elder care.
- *Car and Phone.* Only 74.7% of the respondents report having reliable transportation; 78.2% have a telephone, substantially less than the 98% subscriber rate in the state as a whole.
- *Influence over Community.* Roughly half of the respondents believe they have a little to moderate influence over their community, with only 8.3% feeling they have a high degree of influence. The rest thought they had no influence or didn't know. Almost half were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their community, and 37.5% said they "fit" into their community "well" or somewhat well.
- *Livable Wage.* Respondents indicated that they considered a living wage for themselves and their family to be an average of \$10.03 per hour.

## **PART VI -- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.**

The Northeast Kingdom has a rich manufacturing heritage, and the region continues to have a greater percentage of the workforce employed in the manufacturing sector than the rest of Vermont. Much of the manufacturing is tied to the local wood products industry. **However, wages in the Northeast Kingdom are lower than state averages, in part because of geographic isolation and the absence of sufficient high skill jobs.** In addition, unemployment rates in the Northeast Kingdom are consistently above the statewide average. Economic Development efforts are closely linked to education efforts, including access to telecommunications and skills training. Telecommunications and skills training are addressed more thoroughly in the Education section of this plan.

### **A. ASSETS.**

#### **1. Wood Products Manufacturing.**

**Ethan Allen** has furniture manufacturing facilities in Canaan, Orleans and Island Pond. **Lyndon Woodworking** and **Newport Furniture Parts** are other wood manufacturers. **Columbia Forest Products** manufactures plywood in Newport. There are several saw mills throughout the region.

A paper mill in Gilman is currently in ownership transition.

#### **2. Other Manufacturing.**

Precision metal industries include **NSA, Vermont Aerospace** and **Greenfield Industries** in Lyndonville and **Tivoly** in Derby Line. **Weidman Systems International** manufactures industrial insulators. **Fairbanks Scales** in St. Johnsbury has manufactured platform scales since the mid 1800's. **Stinehour Press** in Lunenburg prints high quality glossy picture books and catalogues.

#### **3. Tourism.**

The Northeast Kingdom is a destination for winter sports, snow mobiling, fall foliage, outdoor recreation, water sports, and scenic villages and landscapes. Alpine ski areas are located at **Jay Peak** and **Burke Mountain**. Agri-tourism, including farm stays, tours and marketing of agricultural products to tourists, is a growing sector of the wider tourism industry in the Northeast Kingdom. **Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association** is focusing its efforts on cultural heritage and natural resource based tourism which utilizes the benefits of rural, open space, strong farms and healthy village centers.

#### **4. Agriculture.**

Dairy is the primary form of agriculture in the region. Dairy farms are an important component of the Northeast Kingdom landscape. **The University of Vermont Extension System** has regional offices in Newport and St. Johnsbury serving the farm community. **Rural Vermont**, a farm advocacy non-profit organization, has been organizing farmers in the region to explore opportunities for cooperative efforts. The **Vermont Land Trust** has been active in the region

conserving farm land through the purchase of development rights. While dairy farming has dominated the agricultural landscape for a number of generations, economic restructuring is pushing farmers to diversify and add value to their traditional operations.

#### **5. Small Business.**

The Northeast Kingdom has a strong entrepreneurial streak, with retail businesses, tourism businesses, construction trades, specialty foods, and a variety of services.

#### **6. Healthcare.**

The Healthcare industry employs 11% of the Northeast Kingdom workforce. Facilities include two regional hospitals, two visiting nurse associations, eight nursing homes and several primary care providers.

#### **7. Educational Services.**

Educational institutions employ 12% of the workforce. There are three vocational technical centers, a state college, community college and two small private colleges in the region. Grades K-12 are served by approximately 45 different public schools and seven private schools.

#### **8. Business Assistance and Financing.**

The **Economic Development Council of Northern Vermont** provides technical assistance for its clients to put a business plan in place, develop quarterly financial reports, and provide assistance in marketing, advertising, management, and inventory control. EDCNV writes grant proposals to the Economic Development Administration for funds to be used for infrastructure improvements and feasibility studies. EDCNV manages THE FUND for loans up to \$100,000 and a micro business program for loans under \$25,000. **Northern Community Investment Corporation** offers Small Business Administration loans, lines of credit, direct loans up to \$100,000; loan guarantees; an equipment leasing program; equity investments; arranges Eximbank loans, and SBA 504 Fixed Asset Financing. The **Northeastern Vermont Development Association** is the primary contact for the Vermont Department of Economic Development for businesses considering locating in the Northeast Kingdom. NVDA is in touch with and prospecting for in-state and out-of-state clients that will fit the region, including participating in recruitment efforts in Quebec province. NVDA provides technical assistance for reviewing business plans and puts businesses in touch with appropriate state agencies for marketing assistance. NVDA writes grant proposals for the Vermont Community Development Block Grant Program and the Economic Development Administration for community infrastructure projects and developing industrial sites. NVDA has an intermediary re-lending program ranging from \$20,000 to \$50,000. The **St. Johnsbury Area Economic Development Office** writes planning and implementation grant proposals for specific economic development projects. The St. Johnsbury Area Economic Development Office manages the St. Johnsbury/Lyndon Revolving Loan Fund. The towns of St. Johnsbury, Lyndon, Barton, Hardwick, Brighton, Newport and Canaan also have revolving loan funds. The **Small Business Development Center** provides assistance to any for-profit business to develop business plans for internal use or for loan proposals. The SBDC also provides management, marketing,

financial, and production assistance. **Northeast Kingdom Community Action's Micro Business Development Program** provides assistance for how to start a business, creating marketing and financial plans, and general trouble shooting for micro businesses. The **Senior Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)** has a local chapter with 22 members who offer free assistance and counseling in a wide range of business areas. There are four private **local banks** and three private **state wide banks** serving the region. The **Vermont Community Loan Fund** also provides capital for businesses and non-profit organizations.

#### **9. Economic Development Planning.**

The University of Vermont Extension Service leads communities through a strategic planning process called TAKE CHARGE to look at economic development and community development opportunities. Hardwick, Newport/Derby, Island Pond, Kirby, Concord, and Barton have gone through the TAKE CHARGE program. The Extension Service has also used a modified TAKE CHARGE program with **Rural Vermont** and the **Farms to Communities Forum** to promote better economic development planning for local farmers. The **Northeastern Vermont Development Association** and **Economic Development Council of Northern Vermont** both have active plans that address economic development in the region.

#### **10. Chambers of Commerce and other Tourism Services.**

The Northeast Kingdom has eight local chambers of commerce or local business associations who answer many business assistance questions and make appropriate referrals. The chambers are often the first call for a business looking to relocate to the area. Chambers include: **Barton Area Chamber of Commerce; Burke Business Association; Hardwick Chamber of Commerce; Island Pond Chamber of Commerce; Jay Peak Area Association; Lyndon Area Chamber of Commerce; North Country Chamber of Commerce; and the Northeast Kingdom Chamber of Commerce.** The **Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association** promotes tourism opportunities region wide. The **Vermont Outdoor Guide Association (VOGA)** promotes the services of its members and encourages the responsible marketing of recreational activities, taking into account ethical use of the natural resources, safety issues and consideration for locals and other multiple use of outdoor resources.

#### **11. Workforce Education and Training.**

Technical and adult education providers in the region include **Lyndon Institute Technical Center, Lyndon State College, North Country Career Center, Northeast Kingdom Education Services, and the St. Johnsbury Academy Applied Technologies Center.** These education providers are members of the regional **Northeast Kingdom Workforce Investment Board** which also includes other agencies and businesses interested in cost effective access to education and training. The **Vermont Department of Employment and Training, the Department of Social Welfare** and the **Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and Employee Assistance Services** are active members of the Workforce Investment Board. The **Community College of Vermont** has offices in St. Johnsbury and Newport. The **Northeastern**

**Vermont Area Health Education Center** provides annual surveys of health care resources in the region, assesses workforce shortages and works with educational institutions to develop programs that address those shortages.

### **12. Cooperation/networking.**

The **Northeast Kingdom Enterprise Collaborative** was formed in 1996 to find ways to collaborate on economic development and community development issues in the Northeast Kingdom. Members include regional development organizations, educators, social service and employment agencies, local government officials, business people, nonprofit organizations, health care providers and conservation organizations.

### **13. Industrial Parks.**

There are industrial parks in St. Johnsbury, Lyndon, Barton, Newport and Hardwick.

## **B. VISION.**

The workforce skills of the population will be enhanced to meet all workplace needs. Jobs at a livable wage are available for everyone willing to work. There are synergies between large and small industries, with small industries supplying larger ones. Businesses do not have an adverse effect on the environment. Home businesses and entrepreneurship flourishes. Agricultural niche marketing and value added forest products are important economic sectors, and farmers can earn above their cost of production. Information technology provides opportunities for marketing and creating other businesses. Young people have employment options to “stay.” Sound financial and personnel management, marketing, and communication within the workplace leads to a high productivity work environment. Quality daycare is available.

## **C. CHALLENGES.**

### **1. Historically High Unemployment.**

The Northeast Kingdom consistently has significant long term higher unemployment than the rest of Vermont. The unemployment rate for the Newport District for January, 2000 was 8.3%, and 5.8% in the St. Johnsbury District. This compares to a statewide unemployment rate of 3.5%. This disparity remains constant even as the overall unemployment rates go up or down. A high percentage of young people do not remain in the Kingdom because of lack of job opportunities. *A need for more jobs in the region was identified by 93% of the low income population surveyed.*

### **2. Low Wages.**

Wages in the region lag behind the statewide average. The average wage in 1998 was \$21,298 for the Newport Labor Market Area, \$22,539 for the St. Johnsbury LMA, and \$26,624 for the statewide average. The Northeast Kingdom has a higher percentage of the workforce in the manufacturing and health care sectors than the rest of the state, yet wages in these sectors fall well below the statewide average. *Lack of adequate income was identified as a critical problem*

*by 92% of the low income population. A median wage of \$10.03 was identified as a livable wage for members of the low income community and their families.*

### **3. Low Skills.**

Lack of employees with specific skills was identified by 56% of Northeast Kingdom businesses responding to a survey of their greatest barriers to continued success or expansion. Despite educational services available, the Northeast Kingdom's educational attainment rates are lower than the rest of the state. Only 68% of the adults in Essex county (population 6,400) have high school diplomas, and only 8.5% of adults have a bachelor's degree or higher. Orleans County is a close second. Caledonia County is still substantially behind the statewide average of 80.8% with high school diplomas and 24% with bachelors degrees. *The need for more adult vocational/technical education programs and a need for more adult literacy programs were identified by 85% and 82% of the low income population, respectively. However, only half of the low income population expressed an interest to invest time or money in skills that would lead to increased income or finding more interesting work.*

### **4. Tax Competitiveness.**

The Northeast Kingdom is at a competitive tax disadvantage to its neighboring region in New Hampshire, which does not have a sales tax or income tax and has lower workmen's compensation rates.

### **5. Isolation.**

Geographically, the Northeast Kingdom is well removed from markets. The region is at the end of Interstate 91 and 93. Route 2 crosses the southern portion of the region. The closest commercial air service is over two hours drive away. Rural location and limited population are other challenges to stimulate growth.

### **6. Limited Infrastructure.**

Rural towns have limited capacity to develop and maintain water, sewer, and other community infrastructure, as well as "infrastructure ready" industrial sites. The typical life cycle for a wastewater treatment plan is 20-30 years, and virtually all wastewater treatment plants in the Northeast Kingdom have not been upgraded in at least 19 years.

### **7. Telecommunications.**

High speed telecommunications access is not highly developed in the region. *A need for training with computers and information technology was cited by 85% of the low income population.*

### **8. Maintaining Village Vitality.**

Downtown centers face increasing stress to remain vital community economic, residential and cultural centers. Historical buildings require maintenance and preservation strategies. Municipal infrastructure, such as water and sewer, are also aging and in need of repair. Underutilized town and village center areas are in need of being re-developed. Fire is a constant threat in historic

areas—a fire in downtown St. Johnsbury in January, 2000 left a gap in the main business district and damaged several businesses.

### **9. Child Care.**

Child care is a challenge due to the dispersed population and low wages in the region. There will be additional child care burdens as individuals on public assistance enter the workforce and require daycare for their children. Child care providers are often paid below a livable wage. *A need for affordable childcare was identified by 85% of the low income residents surveyed.*

### **10. Agriculture.**

High production costs and low commodity prices keep many farmers from earning enough to support a family. The Commission on Small Farms estimates that over 80% of gross sales are eaten up by farm expenses. This results in many farmers having a significantly lower per capita income than the average in the region. Farms with net losses were 40% of the total in 1997. The average age of farmers continues to rise as fewer young people enter the profession or take over their family farms from aging parents. An aging farm population is but one symptom of a continuing crisis in agriculture.

### **11. Natural Resource Stewardship.**

The wood products industry, recreation industry and tourism industry rely on a healthy forest to supply wood, fibre, and a scenic landscape for the benefit of all Northeast Kingdom residents. Inappropriate use of forest resource leads to a poor quality forest and less enjoyable recreation and tourism experiences.

## **D. STRATEGIES.**

### **High Unemployment, Low Wages and Low Skills**

1. Increase the availability of equity capital and affordable debt financing for small businesses.
2. Provide access to workplace skills training.
3. Develop programs and initiatives to raise productivity through improving workplace management and communication skills.
4. Provide technical assistance for businesses in the fields of marketing, financial management, and workplace communications.
5. Promote cooperation between businesses within the same business sector or in complimentary sectors when cooperation can lead to more than what individual businesses can achieve on their own.
6. Connect youth to workplace opportunities.
7. Promote the recruitment of industries paying a livable wage and that do not have an adverse effect on the environment.
8. Promote career ladders with educational opportunities within the region.

### **Limited Infrastructure**

9. Develop, maintain and support the physical infrastructure needed to support economic development, including industrial sites in each labor market area with access to adequate water/sewer and transportation (Hardwick, St. Johnsbury-Lyndon, Newport-Derby, and Barton.)

### **Telecommunications**

10. Develop telecommunications infrastructure and knowledge capabilities. (*see Education and Healthcare sections*)

### **Maintaining Village Vitality**

11. Maintain and upgrade existing water, sewer, and other community infrastructure serving the region's downtowns and village centers.
12. Coordinate new infrastructure improvements where they will be most effective.
13. Undertake redevelopment projects for underutilized sections of existing town and village centers.

### **Child Care**

14. Provide technical assistance and other support for child care providers.
15. Develop additional site-based child care centers offering high quality educational-based care.
16. Expand existing Head Start Centers to full day, full year model.

### **Agriculture**

17. Support activities for commodity producer associations to enable collective processing and marketing efforts.

### **Natural Resource Stewardship**

18. Support activities that help landowners and loggers manage and harvest timber in an environmentally sound manner that also maximizes income for landowners and loggers.

## **PART VII - EDUCATION.**

Education is a primary means to raise skill levels and increase opportunities to high skill jobs. Education is a life long process. The earliest educational experiences, primary and secondary education, post secondary education and other adult training are all equally important for residents to succeed in the workplace and the community. Geographic isolation and sparsely populated communities present special challenges for the delivery of education services and professional development for educators. Telecommunications provide new opportunities for distance learning as well as employment opportunities in the information economy and the application of the information economy to the Northeast Kingdom's traditional industries and occupations.

### **A. ASSETS.**

#### **1. Pre-school Programs.**

**Success by Six** is a community based but state sponsored program active in many communities and designed to make sure all children are ready to learn by the time they enter Kindergarten.

**Head Start** is a federal program that provides early education services for lower income populations. Other early education initiatives include the **Caledonia Rural Early Education Program** and **Early Head Start**.

#### **2. Libraries.**

The Northeast Kingdom has many community based libraries that promote reading and literacy initiatives for children and families.

#### **3. Primary Schools.**

The Kingdom has approximately 40 public schools serving Kindergarten through eighth grade, and one private school. The **Vermont Rural Partnership** is a network of rural schools primarily in the Northeast Kingdom who are defining ways to develop place based education and to share resources and knowledge through the network. The Vermont Rural Partnership is also developing a teen leadership program, and is exploring the possibility of linking with Lyndon State College to provide professional development linked to place based education.

#### **4. Secondary Schools.**

**North Country Union High School** in Newport is one of the largest high schools in Vermont with over 1,000 students, in part because the school serves the largest geographic area of any school in Vermont. **St. Johnsbury Academy** (900 students) and **Lyndon Institute** (646 students) are both private high schools that serve their local populace. Other smaller union high schools include **Lake Region** in Barton, **Blue Mountain** in Wells River, and **Hazen** in Hardwick. Small community high schools include **Craftsbury Academy**, **Danville High School**, **Concord High School**, and **Canaan Memorial School**. Towns without a local high school or not in a union high school district generally tuition students to neighboring

communities. Two School To Work initiatives have covered the entire region to promote application in instruction, career exposure and exploration, and community/work-based learning.

### **5. Technical Education.**

Technical Education Centers serving the Northeast Kingdom are the **North Country Career Center** in Newport, **Applied Technology Center** in St. Johnsbury, and the **Lyndon Institute Technology Center**.

### **6. Post Secondary**

**Lyndon State College** and **Community College of Vermont** are part of the Vermont State College System. Lyndon State offers bachelor and master's degree programs in liberal arts. Lyndon State College also supports an **Upward Bound** program to help at risk secondary students seriously think about attending college. Community College of Vermont offers continuing education, associates and bachelors degrees, with offices in Newport and St. Johnsbury. **Sterling College** in Craftsbury is a private school offering associates and bachelor's degrees in natural resources and outdoor education. St. Johnsbury is home to a branch of **Springfield College**, a private college offering degrees in human services.

### **7. Interactive Television.**

Vermont Interactive Television sites are in Newport, Canaan and St. Johnsbury.

### **7. Extension.**

The **University of Vermont Extension System** has offices in Newport, St. Johnsbury Guildhall. UVM Extension provides connections to the University in the fields of agriculture, community development and applied economics, forestry, nutrition, and youth development.

### **8. Education Services for Adults.**

**Northeast Kingdom Learning Services** provides basic literacy skills and other skills necessary to acquire a General Equivalency Diploma. NEKLS also has a Drop Out Recovery Program to help individuals re-enter high school. The VT Department of Social Welfare has a program called **Reach Up** and the Department of Employment and Training has a program called **Welfare to Work** to help recipients of Temporary Aid to Needy Families achieve the skills to find employment. Even Start is a program in Hardwick to assist at risk families with literacy needs.

### **9. Corrections.**

The VT Department of Corrections has a program called **ReStart** to assist inmates with attaining skills to find employment. The Department of Corrections operates a medium security facility in Newport and a minimum security facility in St. Johnsbury.

### **10. Collaboration.**

The **Workforce Investment Board** is made up providers of adult education and skills training and the other business service providers to insure business and individual training needs are met.

The **Northeastern Vermont Area Health Education Center** supports collaboration amongst health care providers and educational institutions for workforce education in the health and allied health fields in the region.

## **B. VISION.**

All individuals in the Northeast Kingdom will be able to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to successfully compete in today's economy and the economy of the future. Schools will provide opportunities for life long learning and be available to the public year round. Distance learning and other technologies will broaden educational opportunities. Education will take place in and outside of schools, and people will be empowered to be teachers and learners. Schools will be available to the public year round. Curriculum in schools will reflect on the community as well as the outside world. Young people will have meaningful ways to interact with their community and feel valued by their community.

## **C. CHALLENGES.**

### **1. Isolation.**

Geographic isolation limits opportunities for professional development related to education. The northern part of the region is especially isolated from higher education opportunities.

### **2. Skills Training.**

The Northeast Kingdom does not have enough employers providing high skilled jobs. There are also not enough highly skilled employees that would help attract a great number of high skills employers to the region. Post-secondary, technical and adult providers all do a good job at what they provide, but there has not been a concerted effort to coordinate programs of all educational providers with the needs of all learners and industry sectors. Low family incomes limit the ability of many adults to forgo work while attending training. A lack of continuing education opportunities impacts on the ability Northeast Kingdom employers to provide career ladders.

### **3. Telecommunications.**

Information Technology offers immense opportunities for economic development. Many residents and businesses in the Northeast Kingdom do not have the training and access to infrastructure necessary to take full advantage of telecommunications opportunities. Effective instruction in telecommunications also needs to be mindful of gender-based learning preferences and differences to ensure women have the same access to telecommunications opportunities as men.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>(American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, "Tech-Savvy: Educating Girls in the New Computer Age," , 2000)

#### **4. School/Community Connections.**

Schools can be an important resource for the whole community, providing education for adults and meaningful involvement in the community for youth. Many times, however, schools are not connected to their communities as strongly as they could be. Libraries are also underutilized as educational resources.

#### **D. STRATEGIES.**

##### **Isolation**

1. Develop cost effective means to meet the professional development needs of our schools to deliver excellent educational programs.

##### **Skills Training**

2. Develop plans, initiatives and facilities to improve the provision of training in post secondary degree, trades occupation skills, and high tech computer related skills. The provision of training should be market driven according to the needs of traditional age students, mature students, employees, employers, and entrepreneurs.

##### **Telecommunications**

3. Develop and implement plans and initiatives to improve Telecommunications infrastructure in the region to serve schools, businesses, health care systems, libraries, families, and other users.
4. Develop plans and initiatives to use distance learning to increase access to educational opportunities for all learners.
5. Develop plans and initiatives to improve the telecommunications knowledge and capabilities of all residents of all ages in the Northeast Kingdom.

##### **School/Community Connections**

6. Develop curriculum and activities that connect schools to the community, recognize youth as an important asset in the Northeast Kingdom, and support youth to take leadership roles in their communities.
7. Promote the use of community libraries as important educational and community resources.

## **PART VIII – LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND LEADERSHIP.**

Local government and local governance of community and non-profit organizations gives residents of the Northeast Kingdom numerous opportunities to leadership positions in their communities. Communities are small, and residents have easy access to the local decision making process. Governance succeeds in part because of heroic efforts of numerous individuals who become involved in these organizations. However, with these positions often comes a great deal of stress related to resolving conflicts within a town.

### **A. ASSETS.**

#### **1. Strong Local Governance.**

Nearly all populated towns in the Northeast Kingdom hold an annual town meeting the first week of March, where citizens approve local budgets and elect municipal officers. Towns with an Australian ballot system of voting still hold informational meetings prior to the voting. Local residents govern their communities through participation on select boards, school boards, planning commissions and other municipal offices. The region's many non-profit organizations are also governed by volunteer boards of directors.

#### **2. Local Planning.**

Formal town plans have been adopted by 24 of the 51 populated towns and cities in the region.

#### **3. Community Facilities.**

Most communities have historic community buildings and town halls that serve as gathering places and are key to "sense of community."

#### **4. Leadership Programs.**

The **University of Vermont Extension System** provides training for municipal officers and leadership training related to forestry issues. UVM Extension and the **Vermont League of Cities and Towns** host an annual municipal officer training in Lyndon. The **Lyndon State College Educational Leadership Program** provides leadership skills for educators. **UVM Extension's TAKE CHARGE program** has lead strategic planning sessions for six Northeast Kingdom communities. The **Vermont Children's Forum** runs a Parent and Community Leadership Training to help adults advocate for the needs of children. The **Business and Professional Women's Association** sponsors a Women's Leadership Program at Lyndon State College. The Department of Social Welfare's **Reach Up Program** helps recipients of Temporary Aid to Needy Families with Children to make career choices and decisions. The **Vermont Rural Partnership** has developed a leadership program for high school teens. The **Vermont Leadership Center** in East Charleston works with students, school faculty and other groups to do team building skills and problem solving. **Rural Vermont** and the **Farms to Communities Forum** works with Extension and the Vermont Leadership Center to offer

leadership development programs focused on farmers and agriculture. The **Community Justice Center** in St. Johnsbury works on conflict resolution. Every year, at least two Northeast Kingdom residents participate in the **Snelling Center for Government's Vermont Leadership Institute**.

#### **5. Volunteers.**

Local government is run by volunteer selectboards, schoolboards, planning commissions, and other local boards. Much of the fire and emergency services are provided by volunteers. The **Retired Senior Volunteer Program** (R.S.V.P.) assists senior citizens to find volunteer opportunities in their communities.

#### **6. Civic Associations.**

Active civic associations in the Northeast Kingdom include the Business and Professional Women's Association; Rotary, and Kiwanis.

#### **7. Faith Community.**

Towns have a number of churches belonging to a variety of Christian faiths. Jewish and Buddhist faiths also have places of worship.

#### **8. Small Size.**

The Northeast Kingdom's communities are small enough so individuals can interact. Schools are small and socio-economically diverse.

#### **9. Americorps.**

The Northeast Kingdom has an Americorps program that places volunteers with non profit organizations in the region.

### **B. VISION.**

Decisions are made at the local level with a high degree of citizen involvement. Leaders lead by values, and citizens are involved in a number of community activities. A high level of communication exists between community members, and between communities and outside government agencies. Civility is the norm. Communities are linked by goals and mutual assistance.

### **C. CHALLENGES.**

#### **1. Maintain our form of citizen governance.**

Each year the task of local governance becomes more and more complex. It is increasingly difficult to find volunteers with the time and commitment to fill all leadership roles. Of the populated towns in the region, thirty three have populations of less than 1,000 residents.

**2. Lack of land use planning.**

More than half (twenty seven) of the populated towns do not have formal town plans.

**3. Aging historic community buildings.**

The regions historic meeting houses and other historic community buildings are in need of restoration.

**4. Preserve our sense of community.**

Centralization of services and information sources present new challenges on how to maintain local decision making and the ability to think and act on a community level.

**5. Service providing agencies are in transition.**

Local service providers are constantly under pressure to provide more services with fewer resources, and they will need support as they go through these changes.

**6. Fragmentation around community process.**

Community decision making can cause conflicts. Communities need to be able to resolve conflicts and acknowledge the interests of all stakeholders.

**D. STRATEGIES.**

**Maintain our Citizen Form of Government; Lack of land use planning.**

**Preserve our Sense of Community; Service Providing Agencies are in Transition; and Fragmentation around Community Process.**

1. Implement Leadership Development Programs.
2. Provide expertise to communities of place and communities of interest to assist them in techniques for citizen involvement.
3. Provide support services for volunteers.
4. Provide expertise in conflict resolution to increase civility in community interactions.
5. Provide technical assistance for grant writing and fundraising to local governments and organizations

**Aging historic community buildings.**

6. Provide financial and technical resources to maintain, restore, upgrade and make accessible historic community buildings.

## **PART IX – HEALTH AND WELLNESS.**

The tri-county area of Northeastern Vermont is the most rural sector of the state with a population of 60,000 people, living for the most part in small communities and on rural farms. The overall population density is less than 6 people per square mile. Isolation is exacerbated by long, severe winters, mountainous terrain and large areas of unpaved roads. Approximately 29% of residents receive some benefits through state and/or Medicaid health insurance programs and an additional 21% through Medicare. With these conditions in mind, the following summarizes both the assets and challenges to the Northeast Kingdom in assuring access to quality, affordable health care for all.

### **A. ASSETS.**

#### **1. Hospitals.**

The Northeast Kingdom supports two community hospitals, **North Country Hospital** in Newport and **Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital** in St. Johnsbury. Each provides inpatient and emergency care as well as specialty clinics. Annual discharges for each of the hospitals are approximately 1600 and 1700 respectively. Tertiary hospitals in New Hampshire and Vermont are approximately one to two hour drives away.

#### **2. Primary Care.**

There are a total of seventeen primary care practice sites throughout the region as well as a Women's Wellness Clinic and a walk-in clinic at one hospital. The two major towns of St. Johnsbury and Newport are home to 59% of the practices although only 23% of the region's population reside in these communities. Of the seventeen practices, nine are federally designated Rural Health Clinics. In addition, **Northern Counties Health Care** operates four rural clinics as part of a Federally Qualified Health Center network. There are also several alternative medicine practitioners and chiropractors providing services in the region.

#### **3. Dental Care.**

There are eighteen primary care dentists in the region with thirteen of them located in Caledonia County. The only dental practice in Essex county is part of the Federally Qualified Health Center Clinic in Island Pond.

#### **4. Home Health.**

**Caledonia Home Health Care and Hospice** and **Orleans-Essex VNA and Hospice** provide home health services to home bound patients in the region. Approximately 2400 patients are served annually by these organizations.

#### **5. Mental Health Services.**

**Northeast Kingdom Human Services (NKHS)** is the non-profit community mental health

agency serving the region and having primary responsibility for serving adults with severe and persistent mental illness, children who are seriously emotionally disturbed and their families, and children and adults with developmental delays or disabilities. The agency also provides alcohol and substance abuse treatment. Through contracts with many schools in the Northeast Kingdom, the agency provides case managers and counselors to address the mental health needs of students. The NKHS has offices in St. Johnsbury, Newport and Hardwick and provides services to approximately 3300 Northeast Kingdom residents. Mental health services are extended to elders through the Area Agency on Aging network for individuals 60 and over, including those with organic brain disorders.

#### **6. Nursing Homes.**

There are seven nursing homes and seventeen residential care homes in the region.

#### **7. Public Health Agencies.**

There are two district offices of the **Vermont Department of Health** in the region. These offices provide maternal and child health services, operate WIC clinics and participate in community health initiatives.

#### **8. Health Education Resources.**

Consumer health education programs are provided by the local Health Department District Offices, by hospital and community-based wellness programs and annual Wellness Fairs sponsored by community groups in St. Johnsbury and Newport. **The Northeastern Vermont Area Health Education Center** works with local agencies throughout the region to develop consumer health education programs and Health Education and Resource Centers.

#### **9. Community Resource Centers.**

There is one community center in the region, **the Hardwick Area PATCH**, that brings to one location multiple public and private agency services, provides information and referral services, offers health education and information resources and works with the community to develop its resources and support community-wide problem solving. A second PATCH resource center is being considered for development in the community of Wells River that would provide services and resources to residents in Southern Caledonia county.

#### **10. Services for the Elderly.**

**Northeastern Vermont Area Agency on Aging** supports people sixty and older in their efforts to remain active, healthy and in control of their lives. Services include health benefits counseling, senior companions, case management for long term care services, senior congregate and home delivered meals, transportation and referrals to legal services.

#### **11. Adult Day Services.**

There are two adult day service programs in the region: **The New Move Adult Day Services**

in St. Johnsbury and **Adult Day Services of Orleans County** in Newport. These programs provide medical, social and nutrition services for elders and adults with disabilities.

**12. Women's Services.**

**Umbrella** in St. Johnsbury, **Step One** in Newport and **Aware** in Hardwick provide services to women and children who have been victims of domestic violence.

**13. Family Planning.**

**Planned Parenthood for Vermont** operates two sites in the tri-county area: in St. Johnsbury and in Newport.

**14. School Nurses.**

There are 24 school nurses in elementary, middle and high schools throughout the region who provide screenings and medical referral for students

**15. Consortiums.**

**Northeast Kingdom Consortium of Health Care** is an affiliation of non-profit health care related organizations that seeks to improve health care services for residents of the region by working together.

**B. VISION.**

The Northeast Kingdom Vision for Health and Wellness is that all citizens in the region have access to high quality affordable physical and mental health care through local providers; that communities, employers and individuals support healthy lifestyles and environments, that the well-being of children is a central focus; that prevention, personal wellness and freedom from pain are strong areas of focus from birth to death; that domestic violence and substance abuse are rare and unacceptable in our families and communities and that our elderly and disabled citizens have adequate health and wellness supports to remain in their homes and remain integrated in their communities.

**C. CHALLENGES.**

The rural isolation of Northeastern Vermont communities, the lack of public transportation systems and an economy that engenders the highest poverty rate in the state limit the strategies for improving access to health care. In addition, the publicly financed medical reimbursement systems (Medicaid and Medicare) continue to be inadequate and are eroding the ability of health care providers to meet the health care needs of the region or to recruit an adequate health care workforce.

**1. Health Provider Shortages.**

Significant parts of the region are designated as Medically Underserved Populations (MUP),

Medically Underserved Area (MUA) or a Health Professions Shortage Area (HPSA) for primary care. All three counties have been federally designated as a Mental Health HPSA. In addition, only 5.2% of Vermont dentists practice in the region even though the population is 10% of the state's. Accessing specialty care often requires patients to travel to tertiary centers. Approximately 29% of the population is enrolled in Medicaid or state supported health insurance programs (including VHAP, Dr. Dynasaur and V-Script) and 21% in Medicare. Another 8.8% of the population remain uninsured.<sup>2</sup> Attracting health, mental health and dental providers to the region is therefore difficult.

## **2. Professional Development.**

Developing a health care workforce locally is further challenged by the lack of educational programs in the Northeast Kingdom that would enable young people as well as working people to participate in career ladders leading to health professions. For example, there are currently no nursing degree programs available in the region although this is one of the greatest areas of workforce need.

## **3. Transportation Difficulties.**

With limited public transportation systems reaching the outlying communities beyond St. Johnsbury and Newport, people have great difficulty in accessing their health care providers.

A more critical problem is that of having to travel to tertiary centers for treatments such as dialysis and chemotherapy and radiation. In some cases, individuals must travel a minimum of 1 ½ hours one way and as much as 3 hours to receive radiation, dialysis or chemotherapy treatments. Often this involves daily trips. *About 85% of the low income population surveyed agreed there was a need for transportation services to medical services*

## **4. Health Improvement and Education.**

There is limited access to health education in the communities of the Northeast Kingdom. As important as promoting healthy lifestyles is to citizens in their vision for the region, most programs and health information resources are centralized in hospitals and to some extent in schools. Expanding access to health information and education resources remains a challenge for our most isolated citizens.

## **5. Capital Improvements.**

There is a continuing need to upgrade hospital, community health and mental health facilities throughout the region. Existing commercial building stock is old and generally inaccessible. Modernization costs are prohibitive. In addition, there is limited access to financial capital and

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<sup>2</sup>1997 Survey of Uninsured (Vermont Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities and Health Care Administration) and 1998 Medicaid Database.

organizations in the region have insufficient reserves to support major capital improvements. The region's philanthropic wealth is very limited and in great demand.

#### **6. Availability and Sustainability of Services.**

Limitations of existing funding and medical reimbursement sources have severely limited ability of our health providers to offer needed services. Inadequate funding for mental health services is eroding community-based systems of care and creating significant barriers to recruiting and retaining mental health professionals. The challenges are to identify ways to maximize financial resources and coordination to achieve greater efficiencies that will enable expansion of needed services.

#### **7. Technology and Telecommunications.**

The provision of health care services and the delivery of the most current health information to providers has undergone dramatic changes during the past decade as the result of the availability of new technologies and telecommunication systems. Increasingly, the quality and accessibility of health care in rural areas will depend on efficient and effective use of new technologies and methods for transmitting information. The limited telecommunication infrastructures within the region to support these technologies, as well as the high acquisition costs of the technologies, will limit the ability of health providers to provide high quality health care in the future.

### **D. STRATEGIES.**

#### **Increase the Numbers of Health Care Providers**

1. Support recruitment and retention of health care providers in the region.

#### **Professional Development for Health Care Providers**

2. Develop health professions education programs within the region.
3. Use telecommunication technology to provide local access to medical specialties and diagnostic services that can not be sustained on a full-time basis within the region.

#### **Transportation Difficulties**

4. Identify services that could be delivered regionally rather than at tertiary centers.
5. Evaluate feasibility of establishing satellite clinic sites in remote communities.

#### **Health Improvement and Education**

6. Promote local resource centers that support community health and wellness.
7. Develop comprehensive education and wellness strategy for the Northeast Kingdom.

### **Capital Improvements**

- 8 Upgrade hospitals' and other health care facility's infrastructures

### **Availability and Sustainability of Services**

9. Redirect services of hospitals to meet new and emerging community needs.

### **Technology and Telecommunications**

10. Develop more integrated health care networks supported by information technology across health and mental health service delivery systems.

### **Improve the Availability of Health Services**

11. Maximize funding and reimbursement opportunities to increase health, dental and mental health services in the region.
12. Develop family oriented mental health and case management services linked to and coordinated with primary care health services through Medicaid reimbursement opportunities.
13. Improve Efficiency and Accessibility of Services Through Improved Coordination of Services and Through Information and Referral Services.

## **PART X -- HOUSING.**

The Northeast Kingdom has a well preserved assortment of towns and villages unspoiled by contemporary sub-divisions, commercial strip developments and high traffic roads. Add to this a large inventory of older (pre-1940) homes that still remain affordable to working Vermonters. The village and town centers are distinguished by an array of historic landmark buildings dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. These landmarks are still in use and help the area to preserve its sense of place and community life. However, high unemployment and low wages continue to make it difficult for many Northeast Kingdom residents to meet their housing needs.

Additionally, landmark buildings pose a challenge for upkeep and meeting code requirements, including the American's with Disabilities Act. Heating expenses, especially for older homes and poorly insulated manufactured housing, can be beyond the means of low income residents, forcing utility cut offs.

### **A. ASSETS.**

#### **1. Housing Organizations.**

**Gilman Housing Trust** is a 15-year old private non-profit housing corporation based in Newport and serving all three counties with the development of multi-family housing, management of affordable housing, and expansion & retention of affordable home ownership. **NeighborWorks HomeOwnership Center of Vermont - Northeast Kingdom** is a wholly owned subsidiary of Gilman Housing Trust that provides home buyer education, housing counseling, technical support, financial assistance, and foreclosure intervention to home buyers. **Habitat for Humanity** is a non-profit volunteer organization based in Greensboro that performs housing rehabilitation in the summer in the Northeast Kingdom. **Northern Community Management Corporation (NCMC)** is a property management company specializing in management of affordable housing for seniors, families and persons with special needs in northern Vermont and New Hampshire. NCMC is based in St. Johnsbury and is jointly owned by Gilman Housing Trust, A.H.E.A.D.,Inc. of Littleton, N.H., and by Housing Vermont of Burlington.

#### **2. Home Construction Training.**

The Vocational Technical Programs at **Canaan Memorial High School, North Country Career Center**, and the **Applied Technology Center** in St. Johnsbury build projects for non-profit developers like Gilman Housing Trust for resale to low and moderate-income home buyers. The **Lyndon Institute Technology Center** also has a home construction program.

#### **3. Public Transportation.**

Rural Community Transportation works with Gilman Housing and other housing providers to identify transportation access issues and help find solutions.

### **B. VISION.**

Our towns and villages are places populated with a diverse community of mixed income families, citizens of all ages with expanding opportunity for safe, decent, affordable housing, with goods and services close at hand as well as social, cultural, educational and economic opportunities. Our communities retain the historic features lending a sense of place unmistakable from all others. Our public buildings, housing, streets, commercial establishments and public spaces are cared for, used, and indicate a vital, desirable community. Our housing options include affordable, well maintained rental apartments, single family homes that remain within economic reach of working families, senior housing that meets the social and mobility needs of our aging population, and barrier free housing for those of us with restricted mobility. No person needs to be without shelter.

### **C. CHALLENGES.**

#### **1. Preservation of Village and Town Centers as Center of Community Life.**

Vibrant village centers, with schools, stores, cultural, social and residential uses make ideal places to live, shop, work and function as a residential community. The community must also have room for all residents with housing opportunities for low and moderate income families, for senior citizens and for our residents with special needs. *About 81% of the low income residents surveyed agreed that the lack of safe, decent, affordable housing was a critical problem in the area; and 85.5% believed there was a need for programs to assist in the rehabilitation of existing housing.*

#### **2. Housing for Senior Citizens and Residents with Special Needs.**

Senior Citizens and others with special needs would like the option to live in the general community, with access to shopping, entertainment, medical services and transportation. According to the 1990 census, the region had 1,312 mobility impaired persons, 997 of whom were over the age of 65. *Approximately 86.8% of the low income residents surveyed felt there was a need for programs which help the elderly remain in their own homes for as long as possible.*

#### **3. Home Ownership**

The most common barriers to homeownership are credit problems, high debt, and lack of savings for down payment and closing costs. Nearly all of the homes located in the Northeast Kingdom's 23 mobile home parks are owned by leaseholders (85% in Caledonia and Essex Counties and more than 95% in Orleans County). (Gilman Housing.)

#### **4. Repair and Rehabilitation of Single Family Homes.**

Gilman Housing Trust has experienced a consistent stream of inquiry from families located

throughout the Northeast Kingdom in need of funds to repair or rehabilitate their single-family homes. Most of these inquiries are from households with incomes below 80% of median, with no equity in their homes and unable to obtain affordable financing from area lenders. Gilman Housing Trust has insufficient resources to provide the loans necessary. Alternative financing from credit cards, finance companies, and home improvement companies have left many households saddled with high interest debt, jeopardizing continued home ownership. A windshield survey of housing needs was conducted by Gilman Housing's Rehab Specialist during the month of February, 2000. Forty-five percent of the homes viewed received a "poor" rating, meaning they had three or more substandard conditions.

### **5. Meeting Housing Expenses.**

Many low income residents have difficulty heating their homes and paying for electricity. The predominant heating source is fuel oil, followed by wood heat.

### **6. Rehabilitation of Mobile Home Parks.**

Affordable home ownership is often a mobile home on a rented lot in a private park. Many of these parks were built prior to developed standards for water quality, sewer & septic design standards, and have jury-rigged electric systems. Public attention and resources will be necessary to maintain this type of home ownership opportunity for low and moderate-income residents.

### **7. Homelessness.**

There are no designated homeless shelters in the Northeast Kingdom. Families and individuals currently stay in hotel units.

### **8. Lead Based Paint.**

The presence of lead paint in units occupied by very low and other low-income households is significantly higher in the Northeast Kingdom (41.4%) than in any other region in Vermont. (VT Department of Housing and Community Affairs, estimate based on 1990 Census). In 1999, the Department of Health tested 765 Northeast Kingdom children of whom 52 had elevated blood lead levels of 10 ug/dL or above.

## **D. STRATEGIES.**

### **Preservation of Village and Town Centers as Center of Community Life**

1. Preserve Landmark Historic Structures as Affordable Housing through continued or adaptive reuse as multi-family housing.

### **Housing for Senior Citizens and Residents with Special Needs**

2. Expand Housing Opportunity for Seniors and Persons with Special Needs.

### **Home Ownership**

3. Support activities and programs that assist individuals in the affordable ownership of their own homes.

### **Repair and Rehabilitation of Single Family Homes.**

4. Expand programs that rehabilitate existing housing and teach home repair, maintenance and construction rehabilitations skills.

### **Meeting Housing Expenses**

5. Support programs for fuel assistance, weatherization, and other activities that will help low income people reduce energy consumption and meet household utility bills.

### **Rehabilitation of Mobile Home Parks.**

6. Expand affordable programs and resources to upgrade water, sewer, electrical and other systems in the many older parks throughout the Northeast Kingdom.
7. Promote affordable home replacement programs to replace 30 - 50 year old failing mobile homes.

### **Homelessness**

8. Provide housing opportunities combined with service support for homeless families, individuals, and youth.
9. Expand transitional housing that matches housing opportunity with independent living skill development through transitional housing.

### **Lead Based Paint**

10. Support programs to eliminate exposure to lead based paint and increase understanding of essential maintenance practices.

## **PART XI – TRANSPORTATION.**

The Northeast Kingdom's population is dispersed throughout a broad geographic area. Private cars are the primary means of transportation. However, the demographics of the Northeast Kingdom indicate a high number of low income people who cannot afford their own care, and a significant elderly population and persons with disabilities who are not physically able to drive for medical care and other essential needs.

### **A. ASSETS.**

#### **1. Transportation Infrastructure and Planning.**

Transportation planning in the Northeast Kingdom is part of an ongoing effort of diverse stakeholders including: the Vermont Agency of Transportation (Vtrans), **Northeastern Vermont Development Association** (NVDA), the regional **Transportation Advisory Committee** (TAC), several non-profit organizations, social agencies and departments, and participation from members of the public. The different transportation modes are described in the "Northeast Kingdom Regional Transportation Plan: Guidelines to Short and Long Range Planning of the Region's Transportation Infrastructure" (1996). The Regional Transportation Plan is in the process of being updated during the year 2000. It outlines details of the region's transportation infrastructure and movement patterns including: roads, bridges, railroads, aviation, trail systems, pipeline, and public transportation services. The Transportation Plan inventories the regions assets of transportation infrastructure and services. The Regional Transportation Plan will act as a guide for the REAP regarding regional trends, improvement strategies, and recommended policy. The Regional Transportation Plan along with the broader scope of the Northeast Kingdom Regional Plan provide guidelines for development activities and outlining regional priorities to be assisted under REAP zone designation.

#### **2. Fixed Route Service.**

**Rural Community Transportation** runs local fixed route bus service in Derby-Newport and St. Johnsbury-Lyndonville. A proposed route is between St. Johnsbury to Littleton, New Hampshire. **Vermont Transit Lines** runs one bus per day from Newport to White River Junction, where connections can be made to Boston, Burlington, or Montreal. This service may be discontinued by Vermont Transit and potentially served by the RCT. Four private bus companies offer charter service in the region.

#### **3. Paratransit and Personal Transport.**

Rural Community Transportation (RCT) is a transportation broker that organizes door to door service using volunteer drivers who are reimbursed for mileage expenses paid by the rider or from a specific funding agency (i.e. Medicaid, non-profit organizations with grants serving the elderly and persons with disabilities). The service is open to the general public. St. Johnsbury has two taxi services, while Newport and Lyndonville are each served by one taxi service.

#### **4. Car Ownership Assistance.**

Low income residents can receive assistance to acquire low cost private automobiles, make repairs, and pay for liability insurance through programs sponsored by the **Department of Social Welfare, Welfare to Work program of the Department of Employment and Training,** and **Northeast Kingdom Community Action's Good News Garage** program.

#### **5. Car/Van Pooling.**

**Vermont Rideshare** provides no interest loans to lease 7-15 person vans. A Carpool rideshare database is funded by Vermont Rideshare and coordinated by Rural Community Transportation for commuters or people seeking regular rides to share.

#### **6. Interstate Highways and U.S. Routes.**

Interstate 91 runs North/South through the region, roughly following old U.S. Route 5 and connecting the population centers of Newport/Derby, Orleans, Barton, Lyndon and St. Johnsbury. From St. Johnsbury, Interstate 91 runs south through Vermont to Massachusetts and Connecticut. Interstate 93 runs south through New Hampshire to Boston. U.S. Route 2 is the primary east west route, connecting the southern part of the Kingdom to Montpelier and Northern New Hampshire.

#### **7. Airports.**

Three state owned county airports serve the region: (**Newport, John H. Boylan in Island Pond, and Caledonia County Airport** in Lyndon).

#### **8. Rail.**

Rail lines run north-south from Richford to Wells River (**Northern Vermont Rail Road**), east-west from West Danville to St. Johnsbury (**Lamoille Valley Railroad**) and to New Hampshire (**Twin State**), and a partial loop through Essex county continuing into Canada (**St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad**). Rail lines currently only carry freight.

### **B. VISION.**

All residents will be able to go where they need to go in an efficient, affordable manner. Air and rail transportation are options for the region for freight and people.

### **C. CHALLENGES.**

#### **1. Geography and Weather.**

The Northeast Kingdom's population is dispersed throughout a broad geographic area. The road network was created from horse and carriage tracks to link an historic settlement pattern along river valleys. Of the 2,546 miles of roads in the Northeast Kingdom, only

approximately 44% are paved (1996). The region's mountainous topography and resulting road network pattern creates challenges to mobility for remote towns due to high maintenance expense, winter hazards and "mud seasons".

## **2. Reliance on Private Vehicles.**

Private cars are the primary means of personal transportation but a significant portion of the population do not have access to a vehicle. Reasons include the expense of car ownership and maintenance is too great for low income individuals, people with disabilities, and elderly who do not drive. In many cases, a car is a necessity for transportation to work, daycare, school, shopping, health care and medical services. The Good News Garage Program to assist low income individuals to own their own cars has very limited resources to continue.

## **3. Specialty Medical Services.**

Residents must travel outside the region to access specialty medical services, such as kidney dialysis (offered at the Dartmouth Hitchcock hospital in Hanover, New Hampshire or Fletcher Allen hospital in Burlington).

## **4. Public Transportation.**

Public transportation in the Northeast Kingdom is particularly challenging due to the large rural geography and low population density. Two fixed route bus services are geographically limited, covering only the most densely populated areas. *Over 84% of low income residents surveyed agreed there was a need for more transportation programs.*

## **5. Brokered Ride Services.**

Brokered rides are coordinated by RCT to service people who need to travel beyond public transportation routes or at hours without scheduled service. Recruiting volunteer drivers for these brokered rides is an ongoing challenge. The need for volunteer drivers will increase in the next decade according to the projections of medical services and looking at the general aging of our population.

## **6. Integration of Transportation Services.**

The region does not have an integrated transportation system with a variety of choices that are accessible, affordable and efficient. There are not facilities to link different modes of transportation to provide for efficient travel within the region and to surrounding regions.

## **7. Marketing of Options Open to the Public.**

The public is not aware of transportation options available. Passenger transportation opportunities for public fixed route bus services, brokered rides, and charter services require greater promotion.

### **8. Rail Infrastructure.**

Rail infrastructure is currently not adequate for the efficient movement of goods and services and potential passenger services. There is no train service connecting the region to the south.

### **9. Airport Capabilities.**

County airports are not updated to current Federal Air and Aviation (FAA) safety standards for nighttime and adverse weather flying. Airports are basic requirements for "just-in-time" delivery, attracting new businesses, skilled workers, and rapid access to and from this relatively isolated region of the country.

## **D. STRATEGIES.**

### **Geography and Weather; Reliance on Private Vehicles**

1. Upgrade infrastructure facilities of roads and bridges, bicycle, pedestrian and trail networks.
2. Support programs that assist low income residents to own their own vehicles.

### **Speciality Medical Services; Public Transportation; Brokered Ride Services; Integration of Transportation Services**

3. Expand and support efforts to recruit volunteer drivers.
4. Improve inter-modal linkage by creating functional transportation hubs or facilities that combine as many modes as possible (i.e. public transportation services, rail, taxi, park and ride, and airports).
5. When appropriate, encourage the integration of public transportation and school bus transportation.
6. Improve collaboration among organizations and individuals with shared and interdependent service or economic needs for transportation.

### **Marketing of Options Open to the Public**

7. Public awareness campaign to promote a variety of transportation options to make transportation more accessible, lower personal transportation costs, and increase efficient use of energy and fossil fuels.
8. Increase alternatives for non-provider transportation options. For example, (a) a regular or web-based ride-board (realtime ride-match); (b) car share program; (c) community

transportation initiatives.

### **Airports**

9. Bring county airports up to accepted Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) safety standards. Project improvements might enable an airport to operate during non-daylight hours, during inclement weather, or up to fifteen hours per day in the middle of the winter.

### **Railroads**

10. Revitalization of the Northern Vermont Railroad as a through route for freight and passenger service connecting to the rest of the U.S. rail system, by connecting rail service from Wells River to White River Junction.

## **PART XII – ARTS AND CULTURE.**

The Northeast Kingdom has a rich historical heritage and is a very attractive place for artists to live and work. The region's lack of wealth, however, makes the Northeast Kingdom a very difficult place to maintain its cultural resources or support the arts. Artistic and cultural organizations sustain themselves by financial means which require constant innovation. Facilities created by philanthropists and community efforts 100 plus years ago are now in need of renovation, yet the philanthropic families are no longer present and municipal budgets are only sufficient to provide basic necessities. Arts programs in schools are often the last to be funded when local budgets are tight. The population is dispersed and the region does not have the critical mass of people to pay for unsubsidized artistic performances. Artists in all genres have no choice but to market their work outside the Kingdom.

### **A. ASSETS.**

#### **1. Cultural Facilities.**

The **Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium** in St. Johnsbury is a natural and cultural history museum created by the Fairbanks family in the late 1800's. Actually a museum of Victorian era natural history museums, the Fairbanks also provides natural sciences curricula for area elementary schools.

The **Old Stone House Museum** in Brownington is the restored dormitory of a private school built by Alexander Twilight in the early 1800's. The collection houses cultural history exhibits of life in the Northeast Kingdom. The museum also works with area schools to build place based curricula documenting the culture and folkways of the Northeast Kingdom.

The **St. Johnsbury Athenaeum** is a public library and art gallery built by Horace Fairbanks in 1871 to provide a public library for his townspeople and share his art collection, numbering over 100 paintings representing the best of the Hudson River School of Art. The Athenaeum currently has plans to expand possibly into the neighboring municipal building next door where it hopes to develop much needed gallery space for regional artists to exhibit their work.

The **Haskell Library and Opera House** in Derby Line was built on the U.S.-Canada border in the early 1900's. The border literally runs through the stage and audience. The Opera House offers musical and theatrical arts programming in the warmer months. QNEK is the resident professional community theater company at the Haskell Opera House. QNEK performs three major shows a season with several showcase events with smaller casts interspersed. QNEK also has an apprenticeship program which allows teens to experience theater from many different aspects, such as acting, technical production and stage managing.

Other performing arts spaces include the South Congregational Church in St. Johnsbury, Alexander Twilight Theater at Lyndon State College, theaters at Lyndon Institute, St. Johnsbury Academy, and North County Union High School, the Orleans Village Opera House, Irasburg

Meeting House, and Barton Municipal Theater.

## **2. Regional Arts Organizations.**

**Catamount Arts** is a regional arts agency serving the Northeast Kingdom. Catamount produces a performing arts series, links artists with schools and Head Start Programs, and runs an arts film house in St. Johnsbury. Towns can define themselves as a locus for arts activities supported by the Vermont Arts Council Municipal Planning Initiatives in partnership with Catamount Arts.

The **Burklyn Arts Council**, provides arts funding to the schools and communities of the seven towns in Caledonia North Supervisory Union and maintains a local Artists Register to promote in-school residencies and artist involvement in other programs. To support these activities, Burklyn sponsors two juried craft fairs each year.

## **3. Notable Arts Programs.**

The **Dance Program at North Country Union High School** has trained several individuals who have gone on to dance professionally. The program has also widened exposure to dance by incorporating dance in the NCUHS physical education curriculum. Program participants have performed around Vermont and in New York City.

**Bread and Puppet Theater** is renowned for linking art and social causes. Regular summer performances take place at the farm/amphitheater in Glover, where there is also a museum of the history of Bread and Puppet. The theater also is a fixture at community parades and gatherings in Vermont, the nation and around the globe.

Grass Roots Arts and Community Effort (**G.R.A.C.E.**) enables the elderly, residents of nursing homes, clients of mental health agencies, and youth to express themselves artistically and show their work. GRACE has or has had workshops in Greensboro, Hardwick, St. Johnsbury, Newport and Barton.

**Kingdom County Productions** in Barnet produces regional feature films, documentaries, film making workshops for teenagers, and other film and theater projects.

**Circus Smirkus** in Greensboro offers apprenticeship opportunities for youth to learn circus related performance and entertainment skills. Youth involved in Circus Smirkus perform throughout Vermont.

**Vermont Children's Theater** serves up to 200 local children, ages 8 to 18, who are invited to act in one of two productions each summer. The show for younger children is usually created especially for them and features as many children as possible in a full-costume show of singing and dancing. The show for the older children is always a Broadway musical.

For summer music programs, the **Craftsbury Chamber Players** perform weekly chamber music

at the Hardwick Town Hall. **Summer Music from Greensboro** performs weekly classical music at the United Church in Greensboro. The **Warebrook Contemporary Music Festival** features contemporary music at its site in Irasburg.

Community bands include the **Northeast Kingdom International Wind Symphony** based in Newport and the **Newport Area Volunteer Band**.

#### **4. Historical Societies.**

The Vermont Museum and Gallery Alliance lists 35 local museums, historical societies and historic districts in the Northeast Kingdom.

#### **5. Other Historical Resources:**

The **St. Johnsbury Archives Collaboration** is a partnership among the Fairbanks Museum, the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, the Town of St. Johnsbury, St. Johnsbury Academy, and the St. Johnsbury Historical Society to ensure the retention and accessibility of the documentary history of St. Johnsbury. The Archives Collaboration will arrange and describe the current holdings of the partner institutions, to current professional archival standards and create and develop professional management strategies for each archive, including collecting policies, processing procedures and other core documents.

### **B. VISION.**

Residents of the Northeast Kingdom and visitors have access to quality artistic and cultural experiences. The Northeast Kingdom can support a vibrant arts community. Artistic and cultural venues are strong centers of community life and on sound financial footing. Children are able to express themselves artistically. They are exposed to and have interest in quality music, theater, dance, and visual art experiences

### **C. CHALLENGES.**

The primary challenges for the arts and culture in the Northeast Kingdom are directly related to a lack of financial resources and a critical mass of people to pay for the arts.

#### **1. Support through Sales.**

The Kingdom simply does not have the critical mass of people needed to adequately support the arts through the sale of tickets or the purchase of individual works. In most cases, visual artists must market their work outside the area. Artistic performances and showings must be subsidized through other fundraising. This is despite the fact that the Northeast Kingdom's beauty and rural character make it a very desirable place for artists to work and live.

#### **2. Maintenance of Artistic and Cultural Venues.**

The Northeast Kingdom is home to several significant historical and cultural resources that remain underutilized. Due to the limited number of visitors to these institutions, financial maintenance of the facilities and programs requires constant innovation. The area does not have significant space to exhibit visual art.

### **3. Children's Limited Connection to the Arts.**

School budgets in the Northeast Kingdom tend to be limited, and the arts are often the first item to be cut from school budgets. Although there are heroic efforts by parents and community groups to provide opportunities and transportation for artistic experiences, most children do not have sufficient access to the arts.

## **D. STRATEGIES.**

### **Support through Sales; Maintain Artistic and Cultural Venues**

1. Support and improve existing facilities and new facilities for performance and visual arts.
2. Improve communication and marketing for artistic and cultural events and opportunities.
3. Build philanthropy to support the arts in the Northeast Kingdom.

### **Children's Limited Connection to the Arts**

4. Increase programs for children to participate in the arts, including linking artists with schools and youth programs.
5. Provide programs that honor and support the history and culture of region.

## **PART XIII – RECREATION, PARKS AND CONSERVATION.**

The Northeast Kingdom is rich with outdoor recreational opportunities that take place on public and private land, but which often require special equipment. Indoor recreation opportunities are limited to community facilities associated with local schools, Lyndon State College, and a non-profit skating rink in Lyndon Center. Almost all Northeast Kingdom communities provide some form of recreation and leisure programs that are important focal points for community interaction. Community participation in these recreation programs helps strengthen the social capital of the community to address other community needs.

### **A. ASSETS.**

#### **1. Community Recreation Programs.**

Newport and Saint Johnsbury provide year round, professionally staffed recreation programs. Other communities rely heavily on volunteer programs with some summer paid assistance. Supervised summer programs in many communities may include swimming, sports, nature exploring, drama, arts and crafts, games and contests., usually for school age children. Many programs are short length and do not fill in the entire vacation period.

#### **2. Trail Networks.**

**Kingdom Trails** in the Burke Region has constructed and maintains an extensive trail network for spring/summer/fall walking, bicycling, horseback riding, and hiking, as well as for winter cross country skiing and snowshoe hiking. The **Catamount Trail** runs through several Orleans County towns and is part of a cross country ski trail running the length of Vermont and linking to several ski touring centers. Newport and Derby have created a bicycle path on an old railroad bed adjacent to Lake Memphremagog that links to 30 miles of bicycle trails in Quebec. The **Vermont Leadership Center** maintains a trail network for muscle-powered recreation in East Charleston. The **Craftsbury Outdoor Center** maintains marked trails.

#### **3. Snowmobiling.**

The **Vermont Association of Snow Travelers** maintains extensive snow mobile trails on private and public holdings.

#### **4. Lakes and Water Recreation.**

Developed beaches include **Crystal Lake State Park** in Barton, **Lake Willoughby** in Westmore, **Newport Municipal Beach** on Lake Memphremagog, the **Hardwick Municipal Beach** on Caspian Lake in Geensboro, **West Danville Beach** on Joe's Pond, **Brighton State Park**, **Maidstone Lake State Park**, **Groton State Park**, and the **Municipal Beach on Shadow Lake** in Glover. **UVM Extension** operates a 4-H camp on Salem Lake in Derby, next to the Derby Center Beach. Outdoor pools are available to the public in St. Johnsbury and Lyndonville.

### **5. Cross Country Ski Touring.**

Groomed and developed cross country ski touring can be found at the **Craftsbury Touring Center**, **Highland Lodge** in Greensboro, **Jay Peak**, **Burke Mountain**, **Lyndon Outing Club**, **Kingdom Trails** in Lyndon and Burke, and the **Vermont Leadership Center** in East Charleston. There is extensive back country skiing on private and public land.

### **6. Alpine Skiing.**

**Jay Peak** and **Burke Mountain** are premier alpine ski mountains. The **Lyndon Outing Club** also operates a modest alpine ski facility in Lyndonville that is lighted for night skiing.

### **7. Hiking.**

There are hiking trails on many Northeast Kingdom mountains, including Jay Peak; Mt. Pisgah, Wheeler Mountain and Bald Mountain Westmore; Mt. Monadnock in Lemington; and Owl's Head in Groton/Peacham. The Long Trail runs along the spine of the Green Mountains on the western edge of the region.

### **8. Bicycling.**

The Northeast Kingdom has miles of paved and unpaved scenic roads with low to moderate amounts of car traffic that are ideal for bicycling.

### **9. Canoeing.**

Navigable rivers for canoeing include the Connecticut, Clyde, Barton, Black and Passumpsic Rivers. The **Passumpsic Valley Riverway Project** is a project of the Passumpsic Valley Land Trust that has established a twenty mile water trail from East Burke to Barnet. The **Upper Valley Land Trust** is expanding plans for a water trail all along the Connecticut River in Essex County.

### **10. Outdoor Education.**

Ropes courses have been set up at **Lyndon State College**, the **Cheney House** in Westmore, **4-H Camp Coutts Moriarty** in Derby, and the **Vermont Leadership Center** in East Charleston. The Vermont Leadership Center is establishing a **Center for Ecosystem Management** to demonstrate sound principals of natural resource management. The Vermont Leadership Center also runs the **Northeast Kingdom Conservation Service Corps** that provides employment on conservation based projects.

### **11. Golf.**

Public and Private golf courses are in Greensboro, Derby, Orleans and St. Johnsbury.

### **12. Indoor Recreation.**

The Fenton W. Chester Arena in Lyndon Center maintains an ice rink in the winter months. There are indoor swimming facilities at Lyndon State College and Saint Johnsbury Academy. Most communities have basketball courts/ gyms at their local schools. There are private fitness

centers in Newport/Derby, St. Johnsbury and Hardwick, and a racquet ball club in St. Johnsbury.

### **13. Hunting and Fishing.**

Hunting and fishing are traditional activities throughout the region. Hundreds of deer camps are located throughout the Northeast Kingdom. In winter, hundreds of fishing shanties appear on area lakes.

### **14. Conservation Organizations.**

Conservation organizations active in the Northeast Kingdom include the **Vermont Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy, Passumpsic Valley Land Trust, and Peacham Land Trust.** Trout Unlimited and Ducks Unlimited are active in stream and wetlands protection. There are municipal **conservation commissions** in eight Northeast Kingdom Communities. The **Northern Forest Alliance** advocates for environmental protection in the region. The federal **Conte Wildlife Refuge** is active in the Connecticut River Watershed.

## **B. VISION.**

All residents of the Northeast Kingdom, including children, have access to quality outdoor and indoor recreation opportunities. Recreational programs and opportunities remain an important part of the culture and community life of the Northeast Kingdom. Residents are able to utilize and conserve natural resources in a way that provides economic opportunity and promotes community well being.

## **C. CHALLENGES.**

### **1. Recreation Programs.**

Local recreation programs are highly dependent on volunteers and operate on very limited funding. *Organized recreation was seen as a critical need by 79% of the low income population, with 89.5% seeing a specific need for youth programs.*

### **2. Indoor Recreation.**

Recreation opportunities are limited by weather extremes. There are not enough indoor recreation opportunities that are available regardless of weather conditions. *While only 36.9% of the low income population disagreed that there is adequate access to outdoor recreation in their town, 62% disagreed that there is adequate indoor recreation facilities in their town.*

### **3. Accessibility.**

The many outdoor recreation options in the Northeast Kingdom are not accessible to all families, especially low income families who cannot afford necessary equipment and fees. A need for affordable and available recreation activities for the general public was identified by 91% of the low income population surveyed.

#### **4. Recreation Impacts.**

Improper outdoor recreation use on private and public land can have detrimental impacts on the land. Some recreational uses can also be incompatible with other recreational uses and detract from the recreationists' experience. There is intense recreational interest in a newly conserved 132,000 acre tract of forest land in Essex County which has three different private and public land owners.

#### **5. Planning and Coordination.**

Expansion of outdoor recreation opportunities, including the integration of trail networks, cannot happen without substantial planning and coordination among private landowners and with public landowners. Unmanaged or unplanned outdoor recreation on private and public land can have detrimental impacts on the land, on the activities of the landowner, and on the experience of other recreational users, especially when two recreational uses are not complimentary.

#### **6. Water Quality.**

Summer water quality in some areas is inadequate to support swimming and other water-based recreation.

### **D. STRATEGIES.**

#### **Recreation Programs and Accessibility**

1. Provide support for local recreational programs.

#### **Indoor Recreation**

2. Develop facilities for increased access to indoor recreation

#### **Recreation Impacts; Planning and Coordination**

3. Create recreational use plans for newly conserved areas and other trail networks
4. Manage recreational use on trails corridors.

#### **Water Quality**

5. Promote community involvement to improve water quality and conserve key natural resources.

**PART XIV – EVALUATION AND INDICATORS.**

The ultimate goal of the REAP plan is to improve outcomes for wellbeing for residents of the Northeast Kingdom, especially low income residents. To measure improved outcomes, the Northeast Kingdom Enterprise Collaborative has selected a set of indicators to measure different aspects of income, employment, family well being and community involvement. The criteria used in selecting these indicators is that they are:

- 1) relevant to community wellbeing;
- 2) in some way connected to the strategies proposed in the REAP plan;
- 3) collected on a region wide, labor market area wide, or county wide basis;
- 4) easily attainable and trackable over time.

Tracking of indicators will benefit from an effort of the Vermont Agency of Human Services to track indicators of community well being for all of Vermont’s supervisory unions, called *Community Profiles*. These indicators are updated annually and will be easily tracked over time. Not all of the Agency of Human Services *Community Profile* indicators are listed here, in part because some of the indicators are measured at a specific school or community level. Participants in the Northeast Kingdom Enterprise Collaborative are also encouraged to use the other indicators in the Community Profiles as appropriate.

Progress on any of these individual indicators may not necessarily be attributable to the benefits of REAP designation. However, when taken as a whole, these indicators will tell us over time if the people of the Northeast Kingdom are better off than the were before the REAP designation took place.

It should also be noted that individual projects that become part of the REAP Work Plan will also have their own sets of evaluation criteria, including benchmarks of accomplishment and indicators of success.

The indicators chosen for the REAP plan, with their most current measured values, are as follows:

NORTHEAST KINGDOM INDICATORS OF ECONOMIC WELLBEING					
Indicator	Year	Vermont	Essex	Orleans	Caledonia
Average Wages, Public and Private	1998	\$26,624	**	\$21,298	\$22,539
Rate of Employment	1998	96.6	94.1	93.1	95.3

NORTHEAST KINGDOM INDICATORS OF ECONOMIC WELLBEING					
Indicator	Year	Vermont	Essex	Orleans	Caledonia
Rate of Job Creation (percent change)	1998	2.4	2.8	1.6	1.1
Percent of children (ages 0-4) in families receiving welfare	1998	13.9	18.2	17.5	16.1
Percent of children (ages 5-17) in families receiving welfare	1998	7.9	11.4	12.8	9.6
Percent of adults receiving welfare (ANFC)	1998	1.8	2.8	2.6	2.3
Percent of children in families receiving food stamps	1998	14.6	26.9	24.4	19.7
Percent of children in poverty	1989	11.5	15.9	18.7	15.7
Percent of people above poverty	1989	90.1	86.1	85.1	87.9
Percent of population aged 65+ in poverty	1989	12.4	16.8	17.8	12.4
Percent occupied housing units with telephone	1989	95.5	92.0	94.1	93.8
Percent housing units with plumbing facilities	1989	97.7	89.0	97.4	97.6
Percent of High School Seniors Aspiring to Go on to Higher Education.	1999	71.8	63.4 (Region Wide)		
Childcare--Estimated percent need met	1999	56.5	---	48.4	44.8*
Child abuse and neglect	1998	66.9	49.5	54.4	71.7

NORTHEAST KINGDOM INDICATORS OF ECONOMIC WELLBEING					
Indicator	Year	Vermont	Essex	Orleans	Caledonia
(substantiated victims per 10,000 children ages 0-17)					
New families at risk (percent of first births that are to unmarried women younger than 20 with less than 12 years education)	1997	8.3	14.2	13.4	13.3
Percent of eligible population voting	1998	53.7	55	51.4	54.7

*Sources:*

**Average annual wage:** Includes private-sector jobs covered by unemployment compensation (does not include self-employment). Figure covers hourly workers, salaried workers, and those paid on commission; includes part-time, full-time, and overtime wages. Source: Vermont Department of Employment & Training.

**Rate of employment:** 100 minus the annual average unemployment rate (percent). Source: Vermont Department of Employment & Training.

**Rate of job creation:** The percent change from the previous year in the total number of private sector jobs covered by unemployment compensation (does not include self-employment). Source: Vermont Department of Employment & Training.

**Percent of people receiving welfare (ANFC):** Caseloads as of January, as a percent of the estimated population in each age-group. Sources: Vermont Department of Social Welfare; Vermont Department of Health, Population Estimates.

**Percent children in families receiving Food Stamps:** There is currently no reliable measure of child poverty at a sub-state level. Families eligible for Food Stamps are those with incomes 130% of federal poverty level, or less. Not all eligible families receive Food Stamps. Enrollments may be sensitive to differences in public awareness of the program. Caseload data are for January of the year named. Source: Vermont Department of Social Welfare.

**Percent children in poverty:** Related children (ages 0-17) in households earning less than the federal poverty threshold in 1989 (this averaged \$12,674 for a family of four in 1989). Source:

U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census, Tape STF3.

**Percent of population aged 65+ in poverty:** Individuals ages 65 years and older with 1989 income below the federal poverty level, as a proportion of all individuals in that age-group for whom poverty status is determined. Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census, Tape STF3.

**Percent occupied housing units with telephone.** U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census, Tape STF3.

**Percent housing units with plumbing facilities.** U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census, Tape STF3.

**Percent of High School Seniors Aspiring to Go on to Higher Education.** Vermont Student Assistance Corporation annual survey.

**Percent met need for child care:** Number of regulated child care slots as a percent of need for child care. For 1994, based on estimates of the number of two-earner households, need was estimated at 50 percent of the population aged 0-12; for 1998-99, need was estimated at 55 percent. Sources: Ad Hoc Task Force on Child Care, Investing in Vermont's Future: Strategies for Strengthening Vermont's Child Care Infrastructure, 1995; Vermont Department of Social & Rehabilitation Services, Division of Child Care Services.

**Child abuse and neglect:** Substantiated victims of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect, aged 0 through 17, per 10,000 population. Because the substantiation status of abuse/neglect reports may change over time, data here are adjusted to reflect reported state totals of substantiated victims, as of March for the preceding year. Sources: Vermont Department of Social & Rehabilitation Services; Vermont Department of Health, Population Estimates.

**"New Families at Risk":** Defined as the percent of first births that are to unmarried women younger than 20, with less than 12 years education. According to national statistics, families with all 3 "risk factors" (unmarried status, teenage, little education) are 10 times more likely to live in poverty than those with none of the 3 factors. Source: Vermont Department of Health, Vital Statistics System.

**Percent of eligible population voting in general elections:** Eligible population is considered to be residents aged 18 and older. Sources: Vermont Office of the Secretary of State; Vermont Department of Health, Population Estimates.