The Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance

A Research Report

Contents

Introduction and Context

Vermont's towns are the backbone of the state's identity, economy, and quality of life. And yet they are vulnerable to the changing demographic, economic, climate and political challenges that increase year after year. Vermont towns work to meet these challenges through initiatives, programs and projects that contribute to their individual and our state's collective community and economic development goals. To do this vital work our towns rely on a mix of local and external resources, including dedicated civic volunteers and paid municipal staff who constitute the local backbone infrastructure of every town in the state, and external financial resources that play an essential role in leveraging local revenue to get projects done. But these are just two simplified examples of the interconnected local, state and federal, human, organizational and financial resources that constitute what we generally refer to as Vermont's municipal technical assistance (TA) system. A system that has evolved organically over time to meet the growing needs of our communities. A system characterized by the inherent strengths of its small scale and community-focused tradition. And a system that is faced with the increasing challenge of ensuring that all of Vermont's towns have equal access to, and the ability to put to work, the resources they need to ensure their future vitality.

Act 181

In 2024, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 181, a bill designed to help strengthen the ability of all Vermont towns to do the community and economic development work they want to do. Act 181 addresses several aspects of planning for development in Vermont, including updates to Act 250, Vermont's land use and development law, and increasing access to resources for designated community centers. The Act also specified the development of recommendations for providing coordinated State agency technical assistance to municipalities, including for the strategic priorities of housing development and economic growth, climate resilience, public infrastructure investment, local administrative capacity, equity, diversity, and access, livability and social services, and historic preservation. The desire for robust research to support the development of these recommendations provided the impetus for the Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance (VERTA) study.

The Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance (VERTA)

In the fall of 2024, Vermont's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) within the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) partnered with the Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont (UVM) to apply for funding for the VERTA research project through the Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships at UVM. The Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships leverages funding through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other sources to support its mission to build collaborations between the University of Vermont and state partners for the benefit of our rural places, and so that all Vermont communities have an opportunity to thrive. The proposed research was well-aligned with the Leahy Institute's mission and was successfully funded for the 2025 calendar year.

Executive Summary

The Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance (VERTA), conducted by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont, brings together the experiences of Vermont municipal representatives, technical assistance providers and funders from for-profit, non-profit and state and federal government entities, legislators and representatives from other states' municipal technical assistance programs. The research builds a rich picture of the strengths and challenges in Vermont's municipal technical assistance system and identifies ideas to build on strengths and address barriers and challenges.

The research design utilizes a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and focus groups, meta-analysis of other states' TA systems, feedback from an expert Steering Committee, and applied idea-generation exercises conducted during the November 13th, 2025 Reimaging Rural Capacity Summit.

The VERTA project incorporates the findings of 155 survey responses from 114 Vermont municipalities and 130 municipal focus group participants from 97 municipalities across all eleven of Vermont's Regional Planning Districts; 37 survey responses and over 60 focus group participants representing TA providers and funders; three survey responses from, and two interviews with legislators; informed reviews of 13 states' TA systems and subsequent interviews with representatives from five of these states; and ideas generated by over 125 participants in the Reimagining Rural Capacity Summit.

Strengths in Vermont's Municipal Technical Assistance System

A variety of strengths emerged from discussions in focus groups and interviews, many of which spanned the entire system, with some others focused on a particular aspect of the system, organization, or program. These existing strengths are the foundation of Vermont's TA system and should be considered when implementing ideas to improve the system.

System Wide Strengths

Coordination and collaboration are seen as vital to the success of technical assistance work across the state. Municipalities value opportunities to spend time learning from and discussing shared challenges with other municipalities, and state agencies note the importance of formal collaborations that leverage skills across agencies to support overlapping goals. Collaboration among the same types of entities is beneficial for addressing shared challenges and building on shared strengths. Collaboration across different entity types facilitates systemic learning and contributes to shared visioning to meet the various needs across all parts of the system.

Each entity in the system brings strengths to their work. **Municipalities** are represented by dedicated individuals who often volunteer their time and regularly take on large challenges to build stronger communities. Despite facing barriers, they work through complex systems to find the right resource for their municipality. **Regional Planning Commissions** are frontline support for municipalities, providing information, funding, technical expertise and on-the-ground project management support to resource-constrained towns. **State agencies** leverage their resources to meet municipalities where they are by working to streamline complex processes, communicate effectively, and share their technical expertise. **Federal agencies** are an essential funding source when municipalities' needs cannot be met by state or nonprofit funding. **Nonprofit TA providers and other consultants** fill gaps across a variety of capacities and subject areas.

Despite the complexity of the TA system and the barriers and challenges they face, the people carrying out this work are committed to providing high-quality support, even going beyond their job requirements to help municipalities when they can. TA providers are responsive to municipalities' needs, work to provide accurate information, and connect them with the right resources. Providers have noted instances of assisting municipalities with completing grant applications, conducting site visits in communities, and helping build stronger connections within the system. Fortunately, Vermont's small relative size fosters strong interpersonal support within the technical assistance system.

State Specific Strengths

Interviews with leadership and staff across Vermont's state agencies reveal meaningful strengths that the government can leverage internally to support municipal technical assistance. These strengths emerge across agencies with different missions, statutory authorities and organizational cultures, and reflect a system that—despite known barriers and challenges—contains significant assets that can be leveraged and aligned to build a more coordinated, effective statewide support structure. The strong alignment of recurring themes across agencies lends credibility to these findings and suggests that these strengths are widely recognized within Vermont state government.

A consistent strength described across agencies is Vermont's **relationship-driven culture**, which enables frequent, direct, and trust-based coordination across departments. State staff noted that Vermont's small scale allows them to "pick up the phone and talk directly to someone from another agency," reducing barriers and enabling rapid problem-solving. These relationship networks are longstanding in many cases, reinforced by shared experiences and overlapping missions. Agencies described a high degree of mutual respect, responsiveness, and goodwill—elements that support flexible, informal coordination even in the absence of formal structures. This embedded relational infrastructure was repeatedly described as a major advantage for Vermont's interagency work.

In addition to informal collaboration, Vermont also benefits from **formal interagency structures and statutory mandates** that require or institutionalize coordination. Numerous examples—including the Climate Action Plan's interagency advisory structures, joint project review committees, cross-agency working groups, and legislatively required consultation processes—help align agencies around shared responsibilities. Agency staff emphasized that these mandated venues create predictable points of connection, provide opportunities for coordinated decision-making and establish clear expectations around shared work. Together, these structures form a backbone that supports more systematic and consistent interagency engagement.

Another often mentioned strength is the **effectiveness of cross-agency coordination during crises**. Agencies consistently noted that emergencies—such as the pandemic and flooding—brought state entities together, strengthening collaboration, creating fast communication channels, and increasing clarity around roles. Many interviewees observed that these crisis-driven coordination practices often continued beyond the immediate emergency, suggesting that Vermont's state government has the capacity to work in integrated ways when conditions require it.

State agencies also highlighted the advantage of **complementary strengths across departments**, noting that agencies bring unique and valuable expertise to shared work. Environmental, transportation, economic development, housing, public health, and emergency management entities each provide specialized knowledge—technical, regulatory, community-facing, and analytics that agencies rely on when navigating complex multi-jurisdictional challenges. These reciprocal strengths were described as essential to moving projects forward and making well-informed decisions.

Across interviews, agencies also noted the **commitment and accessibility of leadership** as strengths that enable effective coordination. Vermont's scale allows for relatively direct communication among commissioners, secretaries, and program directors, enabling quick escalation when needed and fostering a shared leadership environment that supports collaboration. Many noted that consistent leadership-level engagement, particularly during recovery efforts, created clarity and momentum for interagency work.

Finally, state agencies emphasized that **regional partners extend state capacity and strengthen interagency coordination**. Regional Planning Commissions, Regional Development Corporations, municipal networks, and nonprofit partners function as connective tissue between agencies and local communities. These partners enable agencies to reach small or rural municipalities, support public engagement, help make state programs more accessible and coordinated on the ground, and provide administrative support for project implementation. Their presence provides a crucial regional layer in a state without county government—an operational strength that multiple agencies rely upon.

Barriers and Challenges in Vermont's Municipal Technical Assistance System

The research identified many specific operational and systemic barriers and challenges identified by representatives from across the different types of entities operating within Vermont's municipal technical assistance system. Seeing these barriers and challenges expressed across entity types lends significant validity to the findings synopsized below and detailed further along in this research report.

System Wide Barriers and Challenges

Municipalities, and those they collaborate with, express significant internal **Municipal Capacity** challenges that impact their ability to undertake projects to advance their community and economic development goals. Vermont's relatively small municipalities are challenged by the amount of time their paid and volunteer staff have to dedicate to project activities, especially on top of their ongoing duties. Paid and volunteer staff are not subject-matter experts for all municipal functions and project areas and paid and volunteer staff may not have the administrative and management skills matched to complex project processes that can last years, often involving numerous funding, technical and regulatory entities.

Vermont municipalities are designed to function with a heavy reliance on "citizen volunteers" which contributes to the municipal internal capacity challenge. Volunteers are difficult to source and keep and must be trained up. Volunteers with matching subject matter knowledge and skills sets are even more challenging to source- especially within Vermont's relatively small population communities. Additionally, limited availability of, and access to, contracted technical experts further limits municipalities' ability to build capacity. These many factors all contribute to Vermont municipalities' ability to take on the substantial additional work involved in community and economic development project identification, resource development, implementation, administration and reporting. Increased frequency of disasters has further aggravated these challenges as municipalities find themselves assuming response and recovery responsibilities while also trying to perform their regular business.

Exacerbating the internal municipal capacity challenges are external **Administrative Burden** challenges associated with project and resources identification, development, implementation, administration and reporting required by both state and federal programs. Municipalities and those they work with describe significant challenges navigating disparate resources, complex application forms and processes, duplicative reporting frameworks and substantial and shifting regulations among other factors.

Challenges with **Communication and Collaboration** is a recurring theme surfaced by representatives from across all parts of Vermont's municipal technical assistance system. These challenges are grouped into pragmatic, operational communication challenges and more systemic challenges in communication and collaboration. Operational challenges include knowledge of, keeping up to date with, and navigating the multitude of resources and opportunities that exist across the system. Systemic challenges reference missed opportunities to both develop increased capacity through peer-to-peer learning, and to build greater system cohesion, representativeness and efficiency through cross-sector collaboration.

Municipal community and economic development projects and initiatives face significant internal barriers and external, systemic challenges related to **Finance and Funding**. These are also grouped into pragmatic, operational, and systemic barriers and challenges. The research surfaced internal barriers related to municipalities' ability to raise local funds for projects and for project development activities like grant-writing, which may not result in successful funding and recouping of those expenses, especially in a competitive resource environment. The relatively small size of Vermont towns translates into relatively small budgets that often cannot meet the fiscal scale of even the most straightforward projects. This inherent scale barrier is in turn exacerbated by external factors like rapidly inflating costs of business and recent reductions in federal spending that leave local leaders scrambling to prioritize taxpayer impacts in a resource-constrained environment. Finally, towns may not have the expertise or capacity to meet complex financial reporting requirements, should they be awarded funding.

The researchers also heard concerns about a **disconnect between community needs and priorities and the resource and opportunity priorities set by TA funders and providers**. Municipalities express a desire for greater funding flexibility and municipal autonomy to develop projects that fit their needs and priorities, particularly at scales appropriate to their size.

Vermont's small scale, while often an asset, also contributes to systemic challenges. Vermont's municipal landscape is defined by its **relatively small scale**: most towns have fewer than 5,000 residents. Many towns can support only part-time staff and rely heavily on volunteer boards to conduct required statutory work. This scale shapes not only municipal capacity, but also how towns relate to one another. Small towns often face similar challenges like limited fiscal resources, volunteer

turnover, limited numbers of volunteers, limited administrative capacity, a rapidly aging volunteer base, and the difficulty of sustaining specialized expertise—and these shared constraints create interdependence among municipalities. Yet this small scale also means that towns vary widely in their internal organization, staffing, and local norms, leading to **uneven municipal capacity across the state**. In practice, this leads to neighboring towns having different abilities to pursue projects, respond to opportunities, or engage with state programs. As a result, collaboration among municipalities is both necessary and difficult: while towns benefit from shared learning, regional partnerships, and pooled expertise, their disparate scales and internal structures can hinder alignment. This municipal heterogeneity, rooted in Vermont's small-town governance traditions, shapes how communities engage with one another, regional partners, and state government.

State Government Barriers and Challenges

In our inquiries with the State of Vermont agency, department, and program leadership and staff, we specifically asked about the challenges they experience in their interactions within state government units. As in the broader municipal technical assistance system, challenges with communication and collaboration surfaced strongly in their responses. Many **state agencies describe themselves as siloed or operating independently**. This characteristic is not intentional but a predictable byproduct of deep subject-area specialization, distinct statutory mandates, and the unique missions of each department. This siloing effect extends to the "quasi-governmental" regional planning commissions, whose funding through these agencies has significant influence over what work they are enabled to do. Yet across all those with whom we spoke, there was clear recognition that improving communication and collaboration both horizontally across state entities and vertically within agency hierarchies would substantially strengthen Vermont's ability to provide high-quality technical assistance to municipalities.

Another central theme is the persistent challenge posed by **state agency human capacity constraints**. Agencies operate with small teams, limited staffing depth, and frequent turnover, which together can result in the loss of institutional knowledge, inconsistent handoffs, and challenges maintaining continuity in interagency relationships. Many staff described being stretched thin across multiple initiatives or serving as the sole point of contact for critical functions, creating bottlenecks when individuals leave or shift roles. These constraints make it difficult to proactively coordinate, respond to inquiries in a timely way, or participate consistently in interagency working groups—conditions that weaken the continuity and effectiveness of whole-of-government municipal support.

In addition to staffing constraints, agencies describe **resource limitations**, including insufficient funding to support coordination responsibilities, outdated or inadequate IT systems, and fragmented funding streams that complicate joint planning. Agencies report a scarcity mindset across government, in which even core interagency functions—such as translation services, shared planning, and regional coordination—lack stable funding. These resource constraints can end up reducing flexibility and inhibiting the ability to design proactive, cross-agency strategies that effectively support municipalities.

A third major barrier identified by state entities is **administrative burden and procedural misalignment** across agencies. Agencies operate under different statutory authorities, federal requirements, timelines, grant criteria, and review processes, creating a complex and often confusing environment for both state staff and municipalities. Interviewees described duplicative environmental reviews, conflicting interpretations of state statutes, siloed grant programs, variable reimbursement requirements, and legacy processes that have persisted without alignment. These procedural misalignments create delays,

force workarounds and result in inconsistent or even contradictory guidance being given to municipalities.

Beyond administrative barriers, agencies identified widespread **gaps in interagency communication**. These include inconsistent communication channels, limited awareness of each other's programs, the absence of formal handoff processes, and challenges in ensuring the right staff are included in conversations at the right time. Agencies reported that critical information is sometimes shared only among small groups, that work occurring in one unit may not be visible to others, and that frontline staff may be left out of decision-making processes that deeply affect their work. These communication gaps can contribute to duplication of effort, misinterpretation of priorities, and inefficiencies that ultimately impact municipal outcomes.

Interviewees also described **misalignment of priorities and goals** as a recurring barrier. Agencies bring different missions, cultures, and mandates to collaborative work, and these differences can create friction when timelines, policy goals, or programmatic approaches diverge. Examples include tensions between conservation and development priorities, differences in risk tolerance across units, challenges in aligning long-term resilience goals with immediate emergency response needs, and conflicting expectations across political leadership changes. These differences can create confusion and slow down collaborative processes.

State entity representatives also identified **inadequate funding for cross-agency coordination** as an important barrier. Even when agencies share goals, they often lack the resources necessary to support joint initiatives meaningfully or to dedicate staff time to interagency work. Intermediary organizations such as Regional Planning Commissions and Regional Development Corporations lack general-purpose funding to fully perform coordination roles that the state relies on. The absence of stable, sustained funding mechanisms reduces agencies' ability to maintain shared planning, long-term coordination structures, and joint technical assistance efforts.

Finally, agencies identified significant constraints posed by the **systematized lack of fully authorized regional entities**. Vermont's lack of county governments prevents an intermediate regional governance layer that would aggregate processes between towns and the state and otherwise facilitate coordination across agencies. And while Vermont's regional planning commissions are statutorily enabled to act on behalf of towns in some ways, they lack the full authority of a regional governance structure, like county governments.

Ideas for Change in Vermont's Municipal Technical Assistance System

One of the most enjoyable inquiries in this research was asking participants to tell us- "*What is something you would do to change Vermont's municipal technical assistance system to make it better?*" The breadth and depth of ideas generated by folks representing every aspect of the system provide a rich repository of imaginative and practicable ideas spanning short-term to long-term implementation timelines and ranging from low to high-cost resource requirements. Many ideas may seem simple on their face- "*Increase resource sharing between towns.*" but do not fully capture the detailed challenges of implementation. This research report includes both the initial ideas generated from the research and the results of an "Ideas Hackathon" implementation workshop developed by the Reimagining Rural Capacity Summit consultant Community Workshop.

Ideas to address the municipal capacity challenges

The breadth of ideas expressed range from those that seek to **reduce the administrative burdens** that exacerbate municipalities' limited resources, to ideas that **shift municipal roles** away from the municipality to ideas that seek to **directly increase municipal capacity**. These represent very different models for addressing these challenges and are not exclusive to each other.

Ideas to address communication and collaboration challenges

Ideas to address communication and collaboration challenges include those that seek to **aggregate, simplify, and standardize** access to, and outreach modes for information about resources and opportunities. As of the writing of this report, some work in these areas is already ongoing. Additional ideas focused on **increasing opportunities and incentives for communication and collaboration** among TA system peer groups and across all TA system entities.

Ideas to address finance and funding challenges

Ideas to address finance and funding are perhaps the most straightforward, from the most obvious, yet perhaps least feasible, like generally **increasing funding**, to perhaps more practicable solutions like **increasing funding flexibility, reducing eligibility requirements, and addressing disparities in access** to funding.

Ideas to address disconnect between community needs and system design challenges

Research participants also generated ideas that seek to address the challenge of system disconnect with community needs and priorities. These ideas are grouped into distinct systemic approaches, including **increasing municipal input** into legislative and other program and resource development processes and **exploring regionalization of resources and services**.

Municipal Technical Assistance System Self-Recommendations

The research team worked to aggregate every idea generated through the surveys, focus groups, and interviews, and during the Reimagining Rural Capacity Summit, and developed a consolidated list of categorized recommendations based on these ideas. These recommendations are presented below for both the system overall and for within state government. The VERTA Steering Committee spent significant time reviewing and prioritizing the large list of recommendations, and the result of their work is presented below as well. The report section that follows these recommendations provides a synopsis of many of the resources and models identified in the research that may prove valuable for designing implementation strategies for the recommendations.

Communication

Municipalities navigate a breadth of diverse funding opportunities and educational, training and project technical assistance resources that are provided by federal, state, and local entities in both the non-profit and for-profit sectors. Communication modes are disparate and often change across outreach modes and timing. Municipalities express confusion and frustration related to knowing where to go to find opportunities and resources and receiving information at different times and in a timely fashion for

responding. Addressing these communication challenges will reduce the administrative burden on municipalities and facilitate more equitable access to resources for all municipalities.

The research identified many excellent ideas and models to consolidate and standardize information flows within Vermont's technical assistance system ranging from more passive and lower-cost solutions to those requiring more engagement over longer periods of time with greater associated costs. Some lower cost, more passive solutions include the development of consolidated resource lists, clearinghouses or portals, increasing opportunities for interactions between all parts of the system, and developing intake forms that filter resources based on selections. More active and higher cost solutions involve the development of organizational and human infrastructure providing direct service to partner with, and guide municipalities to the funding, educational, training and project technical assistance resources they seek.

- **Develop standardized, accessible information aggregator technology**
    - o Create a centralized statewide clearinghouse or portal for state and non-state providers and funders
    - o Integrate funding, training, and resource lists into a single platform
- **Increase opportunities for direct, interpersonal communication**
    - o Host more, regular convenings and workshops
    - o Hold regional forums connecting municipalities, providers, and agencies
    - o Facilitate networking events among TA providers and municipalities
    - o Support peer-to-peer learning and topic-focused communities of practice
- **Standardize communication processes**
    - o Develop shared templates for grants, updates, compliance and guidance
    - o Use predictable schedules for grant releases
- **Develop infrastructure to facilitate access to information and resources**
    - o Fund navigator or concierge-style positions to guide municipalities
    - o Support regional organizations' staff to serve multiple municipalities
    - o Create a multi-agency help desk

Collaboration

All entities within Vermont's technical assistance system express a strong desire to work together more closely, more often to avoid duplication of effort and to achieve more efficient outcomes through increased resource sharing. Collaborative processes take more time, require systemic thinking, and intentional sharing of responsibilities and resources. Collaboration occurs most often when resources or activities are intentionally designed to engage multiple parts of the system, like with some funding opportunities, or as we have seen most pronouncedly, during times of high need like with response to natural events like floods or pandemics that force a shift in the way technical assistance entities interact.

There is an expressed desire to shift the kind of disaster response collaboration that occurs in a more reactive model employed in times of need, to a more proactive, standardized practice. Policies that incentivize or mandate collaboration, such as municipalities applying together to access larger grant resources collectively or agencies being statutorily required to collaboratively undertake wrap-around municipal service provision, are options to achieve this shift from reactive to proactive collaboration. Increasing collaboration can be among peer groups and across system sectors.

- **Create a state entity with the mandate to bring agencies together around municipal services.**
  - o A model similar to Maine's Office of Community Affairs
- **Create a systemwide infrastructure organization, commission, or process composed of representatives from all parts of the TA system with a specific collaboration mission.**
  - o Establish a clear mandate, possibly legislative, to coordinate TA delivery, identify gaps, and align priorities
  - o Maintain a statewide map of TA resources, roles, and points of contact
  - o Provide neutral convening and facilitation for cross-agency and cross-provider collaboration

o   Serve as a clearinghouse for best practices, model tools, and shared learning
● **Incentivize collaboration by providing additional resources to peer entities that are beginning or already engaged in collaborative processes.**
    o   Offer bonus points or scoring incentives for collaborative grant applications
    o   Provide seed funding for cross-entity partnerships and shared initiatives
    o   Support regional or multi-organization staffing models through targeted grants
    o   Fund facilitation and coordination support for multi-partner projects – especially for low-staff municipalities
    o   Allow pooled or braided funding with organizations that collaborate on shared outcomes

Municipal Capacity

Municipalities are challenged by the time their paid and volunteer staff must dedicate to project activities in addition to their ongoing roles. Paid and volunteer staff may not be subject-matter experts for all municipal functions and project areas and may not have the breadth of administrative and management skill sets matched to those required to implement often complex project processes. These factors limit municipalities' ability to take on the substantial additional work involved in project identification, resource development, implementation, administration, and reporting- especially over long periods of time.

Three general approaches have been identified for addressing municipal capacity. One approach is to reduce existing administrative burdens for municipal officials. Another approach is to directly increase municipal capacity through training and development of municipal officials or by adding municipal staff positions like town administrators, etc. Another approach is to shift work away from burdened municipal staff. The research has yielded many excellent, specific ideas for addressing these general approaches. It is likely that a variety of these ideas should be employed.

● **Reduce municipal administrative burdens**
    o   Simplify and standardize application, reporting, and reimbursement processes

- o Develop templates, best practices, guides, and toolkits
- o Reduce requirements and regulations
- o Develop standardized, accessible information sources
- o Standardize communication processes
- o Coordinate technical assistance service provision and funding processes.
- o Make project timelines and funding requirements more flexible
- **Develop internal municipal capacity**
  - o Increase municipal training and educational resources, programs, and related initiatives.
  - o Increase peer-to-peer learning and relationship building
  - o Reduce staff turnover by increasing pay and benefits, and by creating full-time positions
  - o Develop volunteer pipelines to increase participation
  - o Add municipal staff positions, like town managers
  - o Share municipal positions and activities
- **Shift municipal roles**
  - o Increase TA provider resources and staffing to directly assist municipalities
  - o Regionalize municipal activities
  - o Increase the number of and accessibility to technical consultants
  - o Build project management assistance into project funding, models

Finance and Funding

Funding remains one of the most persistent and structural barriers to effective implementation across Vermont's municipal technical assistance ecosystem. Municipalities, especially small and rural towns—face increasing responsibilities without corresponding increases in financial resources, staff capacity, or long-term predictability in program support. These challenges become more pronounced as the costs of doing business increase exponentially, federal funding streams fluctuate, and state program budgets face growing constraints. Vermont's local governments are caught between increasingly scarce resources and the growing scope of regulatory, planning, infrastructure, and community development demands.

The research surfaced a range of strategies that acknowledge funding constraints while also identifying opportunities to deploy existing resources more effectively. Stakeholders emphasized that financial challenges are not limited to the absolute amount of available funding; they also stem from how funding is structured, administered, coordinated, and accessed. Communities often experience misalignment between their scale and priorities and the design of available funding programs, struggle with rigid eligibility requirements, or compete with one another for limited external funds. These dynamics place additional administrative burden on municipal staff and can exacerbate inequities between well-resourced towns and those with more limited capacity.

Improving the funding landscape, therefore, requires both increasing resources where possible and making the system more predictable, flexible, and responsive to local needs. Ideas generated through interviews, focus groups, and participatory activities point to solutions that would strengthen stability, reduce unnecessary competition, and better align funding programs with the diverse priorities of Vermont's communities.

- **Increase funding to any part of the municipal technical assistance system.**
  - o Expand base funding for RPCs, TA providers, and regional partners
  - o Create dedicated capacity-building grants for small and rural towns
  - o Support shared staffing or circuit-rider positions through sustained funding
  - o Allocate resources for long-term program staffing, not only short-term projects
  - o Increase funding generally
- **Increase funding flexibility to meet individual community needs & priorities.**
  - o Allow broader eligible uses within grant programs
  - o Provide multi-year or rolling deadlines instead of fixed cycles
  - o Permit funds to support planning, administration, and compliance activities
  - o Enable reallocation within grant budgets as local needs evolve
- **Increase alignment of funding with community priorities.**
  - o Use community priority data to inform grant targeting
  - o Tie funding calls to locally identified needs and regional plans
  - o Incorporate municipal input into program criteria and scoring
  - o Prioritize projects demonstrating strong local support or readiness
- **More direct funding for municipalities.**
  - o Offer formula-based or per-capita allocations to towns
  - o Reduce reliance on competitive grant programs
  - o Use simple application processes for small awards
  - o Disburse funds directly rather than through multiple intermediaries
- **Ensure long-term funding stability for programs.**
  - o Establish recurring or baseline appropriations for TA-related work
  - o Create multi-year funding commitments for municipalities and providers
  - o Align state budget cycles with program implementation timelines
  - o Reduce reliance on one-time federal or emergency funds
- **Address competition for limited funds.**
  - o Expand non-competitive funding pathways

- Coordinate funding cycles across agencies to minimize overlap
- Use regional prioritization processes to reduce duplication
- Encourage collaborative applications among municipalities
- **Relax eligibility requirements.**
  - Allow small towns or low-capacity communities to apply with modified requirements
  - Accept regional or multi-town applications when individual towns cannot meet criteria
  - Simplify documentation and match requirements
  - Streamline reporting obligations for small-scale grants

Disconnect Between Community Needs and System Priorities

Municipalities across Vermont differ widely in size, capacity and individual priorities. While local governments are best positioned to identify their needs, the statewide technical assistance and funding landscape often struggles to surface, interpret, and respond to these local distinctions. As a result, municipalities report that programs and policies sometimes feel misaligned with their lived realities—either too prescriptive, insufficiently flexible, or designed without adequate understanding of local conditions.

Strengthening the connection between statewide systems and the unique needs of individual communities can help ensure that programs are more effective, equitable, and feasible to implement. Addressing these gaps requires both structural improvements to engagement processes and sustained investment in mechanisms that gather, synthesize, and respond to local priorities.

The research identified several models and approaches—ranging from low-cost, data-driven enhancements to more robust regional governance structures—that could improve alignment between local needs and statewide action.

- **Increase direct input from towns for policy and program development.**
  - Use structured municipal listening sessions during program design
  - Establish standing municipal advisory groups
  - Conduct pre-rulemaking consultations with diverse towns
  - Implement feedback loops showing how input shaped decisions
- **Design a bottom-up approach.**
  - Begin planning cycles with municipal needs assessments
  - Co-develop program guidelines with pilot communities
  - Prioritize flexibility in requirements to reflect local context
  - Integrate local plans directly into state program planning
- **Increase local knowledge base for TA providers to meet municipal needs.**
  - Create municipal profiles summarizing capacity and priorities
  - Maintain shared provider access to updated community information
  - Standardize intake questions to capture local needs consistently
  - Conduct periodic field visits to strengthen provider–municipal relationships
- **Create a database of communities' priorities.**
  - Aggregate municipal plans, capital needs, and priority lists
  - Include searchable filters for topic, region, and capacity
  - Require periodic updating from municipalities or RPCs
  - Allow funders to identify alignment opportunities quickly

- **Develop regional forums to address local issues.**
  - o Convene recurring regional meetings with municipalities and providers
  - o Coordinate multi-agency participation to streamline engagement
  - o Use forums to surface shared challenges and regional priorities
  - o Leverage RPCs as conveners and facilitators
- **Explore regional administration and services models.**
  - o Develop shared staffing and service administration
  - o Pilot regionalized models with willing clusters of towns
  - o Align funding incentives to support regional collaboration
- **Ensure that TA programs and TA structures are responsive to municipal variability.**
  - o Adjust funding requirements based on municipal size/capacity
  - o Offer tiered pathways or alternative compliance options
  - o Tailor TA intensity to municipal readiness and staffing

State Government Self-Recommendations

In our inquiries with the State of Vermont agency, department, and program leadership and staff, participants identified a rich array of ideas for strengthening interagency coordination. These ideas for change reflect a deep awareness of the administrative, statutory, cultural, and resource-based conditions that shape the state's system, as well as a shared desire for improved collaboration that ultimately enhances the support offered to Vermont's municipalities. While the barriers identified in the research reveal the complexity and fragmentation that characterizes much of Vermont's state-level infrastructure, the proposed solutions demonstrate a strong appetite for system modernization, structural clarity, and more effective operational relationships across agencies. These ideas for change can be grouped into several cross-cutting themes: strengthening state agency human and technical capacity, aligning and coordinating funding and resource allocation, improving administrative processes, enhancing communication and information-sharing pathways, addressing misalignment of priorities across agencies, investing in structural frameworks to enable cross-agency accountability, and establishing greater consistency and coherence in service delivery.

Strengthening State Agency Human Capacity and Expertise

A dominant theme across interviews with state government representatives was a desire to stabilize and strengthen the human-capacity foundation required for effective interagency collaboration. Agencies expressed a need for **more predictable and structured onboarding**, noting that transitions often disrupt cross-agency work when institutional knowledge is held by only one or two individuals. Interviewees proposed establishing **intentional overlap periods**, stronger **cross-agency orientation processes**, and clearer **documentation systems** to prevent the potential loss of project information when staff leave. Participants also stressed the importance of **expanding staff diversity and skill sets**, particularly among staff with lived experience, technical expertise, or grounding in equity, resilience, and municipal operations. Many argued that agencies need people "who can push back and speak with authority" and staff who understand how equity and accessibility apply in practice—not solely in policy language. These ideas reflect a recognition that stronger staffing models can reduce fragmentation, improve mutual understanding, and support more consistent coordination across units.

Beyond staffing, interviewees emphasized the need for **shared capacity**, that is, mechanisms through which agencies can rely on one another rather than each attempting to do everything independently.

Suggestions included strengthening regional "anchor points," expanding cross-agency staff resource groups, and building shared staffing or pooled coordination roles. These approaches acknowledge that Vermont's small scale makes redundant staffing impractical and that coordinated models can build collective capacity more effectively than agency-specific solutions.

Expanding Funding and Resource Infrastructure for Coordination

Ideas for change within state government also focused heavily on the need for **reliable, sustainable funding streams** that support interagency collaboration. Many agencies reported that coordinating across state government is often underfunded, leading to unrealistic expectations about what can be accomplished. Participants described repeatedly having to "find money under couch cushions," repurposing staff funded through temporary grants, or working without dedicated IT, translation, or administrative support.

Interviewees proposed a set of solutions, including:
- Establishing long-term, stable funding for interagency coordination roles
- Dedicating funding for language access, translation, and accessibility services across agencies
- Creating pooled or braided funding for cross-agency initiatives
- Protecting regional planning and technical roles that support multiple agencies
- Improving legislative alignment around funding mechanisms to avoid one-off or crisis-dependent appropriations

These ideas acknowledge that coordination is not a cost-neutral activity and that without stable resources, even well-designed cross-agency systems cannot function effectively. Participants emphasized that sustained funding is essential not only for staffing but also for maintaining the technology, training, and shared infrastructure needed to make interagency collaboration efficient.

Reducing Administrative Burden and Aligning Processes

A significant number of ideas for change within state government focused on improving administrative efficiency by aligning processes, workflows, and procedural expectations across agencies. Many interviewees described frustration with inconsistent or conflicting requirements—such as different grant criteria, misaligned timelines, duplicative environmental reviews, and divergent statutory interpretations.

To address these challenges, participants recommended:
- Aligning grant criteria, timelines, and documentation requirements across state programs
- Producing shared interpretations of statutes to reduce conflicting guidance
- Developing joint procedural sequences or "order of operations" for multi-agency projects
- Creating cross-agency workflow diagrams to help stakeholders navigate processes
- Improving interagency permitting coordination
- Updating or eliminating outdated administrative requirements
- Designing systems that are proactive rather than reactive, reducing last-minute pressure driven by legislative or regulatory deadlines.

These suggestions reflect a shared recognition that Vermont's government systems are complex in ways that can result in both municipalities and agency staff working less efficiently. Aligning administrative

processes would reduce confusion, increase consistency, and improve agencies' ability to act coherently as a system rather than as disconnected units.

Improving Interagency Communication and Information Sharing

Communication surfaced repeatedly as both a barrier and a priority for improvement. Interviewees emphasized the need for clearer, more consistent communication pathways within and across agencies. Much of Vermont's cross-agency communication is described as informal, interpersonal, or dependent on longstanding relationships rather than built on predictable structural pathways.

Ideas for strengthening communication include:
- Developing formalized handoff processes between agencies
- Creating shared contact lists, role directories, and program inventories
- Establishing regular cross-agency updates or standing meetings
- Improving communication between central offices and regional/local staff
- Expanding use of shared platforms for document and information exchange
- Reducing unnecessary handoffs by clarifying referral pathways
- Improving interagency messaging consistency so that municipalities receive aligned guidance.

Beyond logistical improvements, interviewees pointed to a need for **cultural shifts** toward open, safe, and honest communication—even when conversations involve disagreement or critique. Some agencies noted that discussions about race, equity, or long-term resilience can feel risky or politically sensitive, suggesting the need for cross-agency norms that normalize accountability-focused dialogue.

Aligning Interagency Priorities and Goals

Many interviewees described moments when agencies worked toward similar ends but approached them from different regulatory perspectives, timelines, or philosophical frameworks. Differences in mission, leadership priorities, or statutory mandates often result in conflicting expectations for municipalities or misaligned approaches to long-term planning.

Ideas for improving alignment include:
- Requiring early-stage interagency involvement in project scoping
- Establishing shared cross-agency goals that transcend leadership changes
- Embedding equity, health, and resilience considerations consistently across agency processes
- Reconciling competing priorities between environmental, economic, and community development goals
- Aligning state and federal requirements when possible
- Using regional approaches or shared problem-solving sessions to identify common solutions

These ideas reflect an understanding that alignment is not about eliminating agency differences but about establishing structures through which competing priorities can be negotiated transparently and constructively.

Creating Structural Supports and Authority for Effective Coordination

Interviewees acknowledged that many coordination challenges stem from structural constraints, including unclear authority, fragmented statutory mandates, lack of formal cross-agency frameworks,

and Vermont's absence of county government. These structural realities often limit agencies' ability to collaborate, share responsibility, or compel participation when necessary.

Ideas for strengthening structural support include:
- Developing formal cross-agency coordination structures, rather than ad hoc arrangements
- Establishing clear authority or authorship roles in multi-agency projects
- Creating shared project-tracking systems or information dashboards
- Clarifying expectations for participation in cross-agency efforts
- Revisiting statutory barriers that prevent alignment
- Strengthening regional governance frameworks to compensate for the absence of county systems
- Building statewide structures modeled on unified command systems used during emergencies

These changes would create durable, predictable scaffolding that supports collaboration regardless of turnover, political shifts, or administrative reorganizations.

Increasing Consistency Across Agencies

Finally, many interviewees proposed ideas to improve consistency across agencies in guidance, requirements, workflows, and expectations. Inconsistency was described as a major driver of confusion for both municipalities and agency staff, particularly when different programs interpret statutes differently or require different documentation for similar activities.

Suggested solutions include:
- Harmonizing grant and reimbursement processes
- Creating shared definitions and interpretations of statutes and key terminology
- Establishing baseline training on equity, accessibility, and municipal support
- Modernizing and aligning internal workflows across agencies
- Reducing variability in how agencies communicate with municipalities
- Institutionalizing processes so that consistency does not depend on individual personalities or relationships

These ideas reflect a desire for a more coherent state system—one that still honors agency-specific missions but presents a unified approach to municipal-facing work.

The ideas for change identified by representatives from across Vermont's state agencies reflect a shared vision for a more coordinated, consistent, and supportive state government. While agencies differ in mission, statutory authority, culture, and operational realities, their individual recommendations reveal considerable consensus about what is needed: clearer structures, stronger communication, more aligned processes, sustainable resources, and a coordinated approach to supporting Vermont communities. Taken together, these ideas form a roadmap for improving the state's internal systems to strengthen municipal technical assistance delivery and enhance Vermont's capacity to address complex, cross-cutting community and economic development needs.

Resources for Implementing Recommended Changes

National Scan of Municipal Technical Assistance Models

The purpose of the National Scan of municipal technical assistance systems was to conduct a surface-level overview of the local governance structures, technical assistance models, and relevant organizations involved in municipal TA across twelve states. The states researched are as follows: Wisconsin, Alabama, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Texas, Kentucky, Michigan, Iowa, Utah, and Texas. To understand how technical assistance was provided in each state, the research team identified key characteristics like collaboration across state agencies, collaboration across municipalities, and top-down or bottom-up leadership.

A synopsis of the national scan results is provided below as a simplified resource for easy review. These results focus on different resource-delivery and development models. The complete results of the national scan comprise about 68 pages of detailed findings at the national level and for all thirteen states, including Vermont, and is provided in appendix A.

Some states, such as New York, Maine, Wisconsin, and Alabama, showed evidence of intentional collaboration among state agencies, nonprofits, and municipalities, as well as across these levels of governance. Several states showed no evidence of collaboration, though it is unclear whether there may be collaboration that is not visible in public-facing documents.

Throughout this research, several top-down models of technical assistance emerged. These models are outlined below and may be valuable for identifying areas of improvement for Vermont's technical assistance model. Though most states had some form of centralized TA model, Texas and Michigan took an unstructured approach, relying mostly on non-governmental organizations (both public and private) to carry out this work.

Rural Technical Assistance Delivery Models

Councils of Government Model
Councils of Government (COGs) serve as bridges between local government and state agencies. They may employ regional councils as a method for providing necessary services, increasing local capacity, and carrying out various programs. Still, these councils can operate independently of COGs, as discussed in the next section. An important distinction between the regional council model and the COG model is that COGs can perform any action a municipal official can, thereby strengthening local government capacity. States that use the COG model are Maine, Iowa, New York, and Alabama (Alabama's regional councils work both independently and within the state's COG model).

Regional Planning Commission Model
Regional Planning Commission (RPC) models combine multiple jurisdictions to support municipalities in their planning and community development efforts. RPCs help communities prepare local documents, provide technical assistance, secure funding sources, aid with grant writing, and promote overall regional collaboration and cooperation. States using the RPC model are Wisconsin, Vermont, Kansas, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts (Massachusetts uses a Regional Planning Agencies Model, which acts like an RPC). Because Vermont lacks county-level government, RPCs here also serve as a bridge between municipalities and state government.

Area Development District Model

The Area Development District (ADD) Model is used in Kentucky as a centralized mechanism for distributing federal funding and resources to each community in the state. In a similar manner to COGs, ADDs act as a bridge between local, regional, and state levels of government. There are fifteen ADDs in Kentucky led by the Kentucky Council of Area Development Districts. Each ADD also works with the Kentucky Regional Planning and Development Agency & the Kentucky Infrastructure Authority to develop and maintain their regional and county water management councils.

Associations of Government Model

In our 13-state research, the Associations of Government (AOG) Model was present only in Utah. Utah's seven AOGs serve as multi-county regions that facilitate funding distribution and encourage cross-county collaboration for economic development. This model is used to centralize funding and resources from the state and federal governments and distribute them to each region of the state, where they are then redistributed by the region's AOG to counties and municipalities. Each AOG facilitates six main technical assistance programs/services, funded by several state government offices, with their efforts directed by Executive Boards at the state level. AOGs also work with area public, private, and nonprofit partners to address local issues and leverage resources.

Rural Technical Assistance Resource Development Models

Besides different models for technical assistance, we discovered other technical assistance services that may be of interest to technical assistance processes in Vermont.

Centralized Grant Applications

Several organizations, such as One Stop for Growth in Massachusetts, have compiled lists of funding opportunities relevant to the TA work they do. Rather than submit multiple grant applications, municipalities can submit a single application for multiple grants. This gives municipalities with limited capacity a better chance of accessing the funding they need while competing with much larger communities.

Municipal Official Training Programs

To support municipal officials in navigating the complicated processes that come with managing a community, several states have "academies" in place to train individuals working in local government. One example of this is the Elected Officials Academy in New York, which provides tracks for municipal officials to receive credits for taking educational classes, attending conferences, and engaging in advocacy work. This type of structured training is beneficial for states with low capacity that want to train a new generation of public servants.

Charrette Programs

The charrette process involves an intensive brainstorming session between professionals engaged in this work to solve pressing problems. New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Alabama are all using these types of exercises to address technical assistance challenges and promote community engagement. The Community Design Charrette Program addresses issues like safety, traffic, connectivity, quality of life, economic growth, downtown area improvements, and more.

Out of State TA System Interviews & Case Studies

Interviews were conducted with five of the twelve states other than Vermont that were reviewed in the comparative meta-analysis phase. These states were selected by the VERTA core team and steering committee with their knowledge of existing programs, projects and models implemented in those places that could be of value for Vermont. The five states interviewed were Alabama, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Wisconsin. The case studies presented below provide a synopsis of lessons learned from meta-analysis and system representative interviews. Detailed findings from the national scan are available in appendix A.

Overview	
Lessons and Common Themes	**Examples**
Implementation - Balance between state set priorities and standards and having people on the ground who understand local context - Know what "only the state can do" (e.g. providing centralized coordination and resources) - Be flexible; meet communities where they are and provide "steppingstones" - Set TA recipients up for success by working with them to "optimize the ask"	MassDevelopment TDI Fellowship program Wisconsin Thrive Rural Program
Partnerships - Grow TA provider and recipient capacity - Provide opportunities for building and maintaining relationships among TA organizations - Understand work across organizations and what matters to your partners - Simplify and consolidate information - Allow small communities to submit collaborative applications for TA	Community One Stop Shop for Growth Policy Academy Wisconsin Office of Rural Prosperity Resource Directory Maine's Development Ready Advisory Committee Keene Area Manufacturers Consortium
Sustainability - Determine project readiness at the start of TA - Set recipients up for success after TA ends - Invest in "leadership development", find the "doers", provide "sustained support" - Collect program outcome data and success stories - Illustrate ROI over time with robust data analysis	Main Street Alabama Ten-Year Economic Impact Study

Alabama

Total Population: 5,024,279

42% | 58%

■ Urban ■ Rural

Regional Governance

Alabama is a non-home rule state. Counties are mostly governed under Dillon's rule, wherein they only have the powers and structures that have been granted to them by the Alabama Legislature. Regional Councils serve as bridges between local government and state agencies.

The median town population size in AL is 1,275 people.
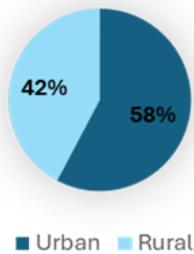
Main Street Alabama

We're not in state government; we are a private non-profit. I love the nonprofit process that we have here that allows us to pivot rather quickly"

This case study focuses on one AL TA provider, Main Street Alabama. Main Street Alabama began in 2009 and serves as the state coordinating program for Main Street America. They are a non-profit with a focus on "public-private partnerships, broad community engagement, and strategies that create jobs, spark new investment, attract visitors, and spur growth." Main Street Alabama provides TA to communities over a three-year period.

Year 1: Project Readiness

"You know, you have a community reach out to you and go, I would love a grant to do an art project. Well, do you have any public-private partnerships? Is anybody engaged in what's going on? Does anybody know about this project? You know, have you done the community connectivity piece? Well, no, we just want the money. No, it doesn't work that way. So, we do that level setting and really, we pull them back when they want the sun, the moon and the stars."

Main Street Alabama describes project readiness as the foundation for a successful TA engagement. The first year working with a community is spent gaging project readiness and setting a community up for success to ensure that they are prepared to receive TA and have the capacity to implement and sustain a project. Before going after grant funding or putting the wheels in motion on an economic development project, Main Street Alabama works with a community to determine whether they have the necessary municipal infrastructure such as bylaws or appropriate zoning regulations in place to succeed in funding and implementing their vision. One tool Main Street Alabama describes for setting communities up for success is a code and zoning review facilitated by an attorney. This review helps municipal officials identify barriers and blind spots in their code enforcement and zoning strategies.

Years 2 and 3: Market Analysis and Branding

"We had lots of vacancy, we just tried to recruit anybody and everybody and we didn't know what the heck we were doing and we were […] try[ing] to recruit high end businesses to our very blue-collar town, not realizing we don't have the economy to support the business we're trying to recruit. So yeah, I say it all the time, we were trying to recruit champagne and caviar and we're beer and burger. […] But once we understood who we were when it came from the market perspective, it was so much easier to fill those slots."

Once the foundational municipal infrastructure is in place, years two and three in the Main Street Alabama program are about understanding the local context so that projects match community needs and local identity. A Main Street Alabama TA provider describes this in terms of market analysis: "so we try very hard to before we get into the branding and before we get into how to recruit businesses, you have to understand your market." Once communities and TA providers understand and are grounded in their market, year three is focused on branding.

Resources

State
- Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs

University
- Rural Studio
- Small Town Design Initiative
- Government & Economic Development Institute
- Alabama Transportation Assistance Program and Local Technical Assistance Program
- University of Alabama Center for Economic Development

Programs and Coalitions
- Your Town Alabama
- Consortium for Alabama Rural Water and Wastewater Management
- Alabama Association of Regional Councils
- Black Belt Community Foundation
- Association of County Commissions of Alabama
- Alabama League of Municipalities
- Alabama Communities of Excellence
- Alabama Rural Water Association

Tools
- Mainstreet Alabama Decoding Downtown

Partnerships

"Know who you're talking to and who your partners are and what matters to them."

As an established organization part of a national network and with a board of that represents diverse actors from across state government, state agencies, private businesses, utilities, and financing agencies, Main Street Alabama can leverage a community of partners that can connect TA recipients to resources and expertise. However, they note that it is important to understand your partners and their priorities. For instance, they give an example of connecting with a bank to support a community project: "don't ask your bank to support you philanthropically, ask your bank to support you because they['re] … required to meet the Community Reinvestment Act."

In addition, Main Street Alabama leverages partnerships that can support the design and implementation of projects. This helps them fill capacity gaps within their own organization. For instance, Main Street Alabama does not have a budget to have a staff architect. To fill this gap, they partner with Design Alabama. Main Street Alabama also described an emerging partnership with Alabama's Community College system to fill workforce gaps and needs across the state through this partnership they are "focused more on how do we work with communities on skill sets."

Storytelling and Having the Numbers

"You want to story tell, of course, because that's what Main Street's good at, but you want to have the numbers to back it up"

To sustain its system of TA, Main Street Alabama must not only leverage its network of partnerships but demonstrate the success of its TA programs to communities and to potential funders. Main Street Alabama is able to do this through "numbers and storytelling." But they note that the quantitative data that shows impacts on local economies is really what has helped them show the value of and fund their programs. A Main Street Alabama TA provider notes that it took about 3 to 4 years for the state to notice the program's impact but once they noticed it was clear that the program was "actually doing economic development because we had numbers to back it up." The Main Street Alabama program documents their impact in reports like their Ten-Year Economic Impact Study and track program indicators such as new businesses created, new jobs, amount of public and private investment in participating communities, and program volunteer hours.

Maine

Total Population: 1,362,359

39%
61%

■ Urban ■ Rural

Regional Governance

Maine's governance structure combines municipal and county governments. Counties provide coordinated services which can include law enforcement and emergency management. Maine's Regional Councils assist municipalities through the Municipal Planning Assistance Program.

The median town population size in ME is 1,127 people.

Setting up a One-Stop-Shop

"People were having a really hard time with all these programs in different state agencies and then all the external players, people were having a really hard time figuring out. Who's doing what? Who do I collaborate with? Am I duplicating effort? If you're a community with no paid staff, how do you even find where you're supposed to start?"

The interview with Maine TA providers focused on the newly formed Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA). This interview provided insight into how a standalone State office focused on technical assistance can be conceptualized and put into practice.

MOCA was formed in response to a reduction in "coordination inside state government between the entities that serve communities." Over time, Maine's state functions were reduced or distributed across agencies and a "robust ecosystem of external organizations" emerged to fill the gaps at the state level. Some municipalities, especially those that had smaller populations and were mostly run by volunteers, struggled to navigate this growing but uncoordinated system.

MOCA was formed based on a study and recommendations to the State Legislature to Improve the *Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine*. The legislature created the office with an appointed director and passed a budget funding MOCA in June 2025. MOCA is in the process of hiring staff and setting priorities with the goal of officially launching in mid-November 2025.

Connecting with the Existing Ecosystem

"I'm learning that a key point of MOCA is [to] … identify what only the state can do and then just do those things."

MOCA is grappling with their role in an established and robust, although at times disconnected, ecosystem of State agencies and organizations. Their approach is to honor the existing work and have regular conversations with partner organizations to understand and identify what "only the state can do". MOCA's signature programs will focus on technical assistance and funding for communities, including a centralized phone line that will connect callers to relevant programs and resources and a funding portal which will consolidate all state agency funding opportunities that are relevant to communities. These centralized coordinating resources well let Maine's TA system run more smoothly while established groups working on TA resources continue to develop materials and focus on hands on TA.

"We'd really love it if you did work on X and here's some standards in state policy for how the state is thinking about topic X."

Maine Office of Community Affairs

Resources

State
- Maine Office of Community Affairs

Programs and Coalitions
- Build Maine
- Grow Smart Maine
- Maine Connectivity Authority
- Maine Community Foundation
- Maine Downtown Center
- Maine Municipal Association

Relevant Reports and Publications
- *Report on the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine*
- *Maine Office of Community Affairs – Brief Summary*
- *Maine Revised Statute Title 5, Chapter 310-B. Maine Office of Community Affairs*

In addition to developing coordinating resources MOCA envisions their role as directing priorities and setting performance standards. Focusing on a coordinating and regulatory role will help MOCA ensure that communities seeking technical assistance can get to the resources they need while organizations doing work with communities have a clear set of policy standards that can guide their work and leave room for "innovative ways to do things."

Supporting Work on the Ground

"There's so much good work going on out in the world in Maine, like so many innovative service providers. If I try to tell them what to do, I'm just gonna squash all that creativity."

While MOCA will take a top-down approach to coordinating TA, the work with municipalities will continue to be the focus of local groups and organizations, this will provide some flexibility to tailor the implementation of set policies and standards to the needs of local communities. We heard two examples of how this will be accomplished in the interview.

First, the state has a "contract to each Regional Council to employ a coordinator who helps communities enroll in the partnership, understand what the opportunities are, and provide additional kinds of information." In addition to these established positions, the state will hire a "certified floodplain manager in each region." These locally embedded state supported positions will ensure that the state is helping grow local capacity and support regional coordination and that there is a local point person who understands state regulations and standards.

"When the agencies are all sitting there listening to the community say we've got a problem … it's a lot harder to ignore."

The second approach is being developed through MOCA called the "Development Ready Advisory Committee." This committee will provide an opportunity for MOCA departments and stakeholders to meet periodically and be a place where stakeholders can receive "coordinated technical assistance." The presence of state officials and community stakeholders on this committee will provide a bottom-up check to MOCA's top-down approach, allowing communities to define and communicate their problems and needs directly to state agencies.

Massachusetts

Total Population: 7,029,917

9%

91%

■ Urban ■ Rural
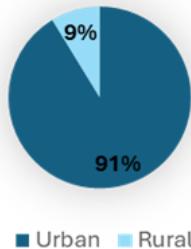
Regional Governance

Most county governments in MA were abolished. Regional Planning Agencies have direct ties to local and state governments and work to build partnerships within the communities that they serve.

The median town population size in MA is 10,639 people

Successful Programs Incorporate Local Context

"We have some structure but we don't have an overarching very tightly managed system of TA. And actually, I wouldn't want one."

MA TA providers prioritize building trust and being flexible to the on the ground specifics of local communities over a top-down structured TA system. Rather than a centrally planned and managed TA system, they have "a variety of technical assistance tools" administered by hybrid agencies that act as both public and private entities. This hybrid status gives TA agencies flexibility to respond to emergent community needs. For instance, one TA provider described their ability to hire on-call consultants who can connect with communities as needed when they have a scope of work or task order.

"We have to anchor it in what is the value proposition of this place?"

Massachusetts TA providers are also guided by flexibility when working with local communities. Rather than taking a one-size fits all approach they aim to anchor technical assistance in understanding the existing strengths in a community, what one TA provider described as "the value proposition" of the place.

Partnerships are Technical Assistance Products

"[A]ny transactional [technical assistance] program that operates in a silo suffers from one downside, which is in order for the transaction to be good. The person asking for help has to know what they're asking for."

Massachusetts TA providers describe two types of technical assistance. The first is **transactional technical assistance** which provides communities with grant funds or consulting services to address issues municipalities don't know how to solve. "Optimization of the ask" is a key component of transactional technical assistance identified by MA TA providers. Without an optimized ask, it is difficult to identify the TA needed and evaluate whether it is working.

"I mean trust is the first thing …. the first six months is all about trust building actually being a partner and a part of the community is key"

The second type of TA identified by MA TA providers is *relational technical assistance.* In the relational model, the product of TA is a commitment to work with a community on a problem over a set time period. In this model, the TA partnership can persist through changing goals and outputs. MA TA providers gave the Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) as an example of a relational TA program. The TDI program builds on an observation that "cross sector [partnerships] between government, nonprofit business and other entities at the local level" are critical for community economic resilience. TA providers in the TDI program ask participating communities to demonstrate the existence of a partnership and they use the "partnership as the vehicle for transformation and work on [the] partnership as a deliverable."

COMMUNITY ONE STOP for GROWTH
mass.gov/onestop

Resources

Social Capital Encourages Program Sustainability

"It's still a challenge and it's gonna look very different and there's different types of sustainability. Sometimes I think it is a dedicated funding stream or district management, but. You know, there's also elements of like, … did you leave more trained, experienced people on the ground?"

28

State
- Rural Development Fund
- Rural Policy Advisory Commission

University
- The Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management
- UMass Amherst Sustainable Community Development
- UMass Design Center

Programs and Coalitions
- Abundance Housing MA
- MassDevelopment
- Transformative Development Initiative (TDI)
- Mass Cultural Council
- 1 Berkshire and Ben Lamb
- Massachusetts Municipal Association

Tools
- Rural Municipalities Toolkit
- Community One Stop for Growth

Relational technical assistance programs like TDI have an expiration date. Communities participating in the TDI program receive a fellow whose role is to provide additional capacity and facilitate the community partnership over a three-year period. A goal of the TDI program is "ecosystem building," creating an "infrastructure that will be sustainable when the fellows leave." A key aspect of this is "an early win project that [can be] started before the fellow even hits the ground." These early wins build community trust and demonstrate the value of TA initiatives to local communities and can help communities decide to allocate resources to partnerships and projects after their participation in the TDI program concludes.

Another aspect of sustainable program development identified by MA TA providers is identifying the "doers" – "the people who are very passionate about their community and carry on the work." MA TA providers observe that program sustainability can be facilitated by leveraging pre-existing relationships to the community and a commitment to consistency. The relational TA approach treats social infrastructure as equally important to financial resources, as one TDI program fellow explains "I like to say like we are strong on the social capital, not only financial capital."

Scaling Technical Assistance Across Cohorts and Borders

"Cross-border collaboration can also be a really powerful thing."

Another strategy for program sustainability identified by MA TA providers is connecting places, practitioners, or industries "that have similarities so that [they] can learn from each other." Working with different TA recipients allows MA TA providers to "see … patterns" and make connections that recipients might not always seek out on their own. TA providers also try to encourage collaborative over individualistic approaches to limited resources like funding but acknowledge that this is a challenge.

Seeing the importance of connections throughout their work has led MA TA providers to think even more broadly about the future of their TA ecosystem. "It's a lesson learned for us. I like to think of like there's no such thing as a Massachusetts economy. There are like several regional economies surrounded by geopolitical border." Moving forward MA TA providers are asking how they can work within their own state and with other neighboring states to support regional economies and facilitate doing "business across borders."

29

New Hampshire

Total Population: 1,377,529

- Urban (58%)
- Rural (42%)

Regional Governance

New Hampshire primarily consists of municipal governments. While county governments exist across the state, they provide very few services to municipalities. New Hampshire has nine Regional Planning Commissions which provide technical assistance to municipalities.

The median town population size in NH is 2,377 people.
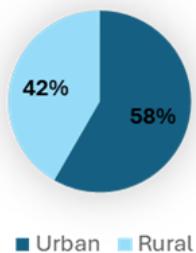
Trust and Responsiveness

"Responsive partners is really important … being viewed as a valuable resource and people trusting that I'll get them in the right hands."

The interview with NH TA providers focused on the New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs (BEA). BEA supports workforce development and municipal planning through their mission to "keep the state's economy strong and competitive." BEA invested capacity building support from the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) into technical assistance infrastructure which they outsourced through a "bidding process to a third party."

Primarily, BEA serves as a "gatekeeper and a navigator" working with "community leader[s], municipal leader[s], nonprofit leader[s], government leader[s], [and] business leader[s]" to understand "what they're trying to accomplish and then match them up with the best assistance." This system has been in place since before 2021 and program monitoring indicates that TA recipients have higher success rate of receiving NBRC and other grant funding. In addition, having an established office that supports navigating TA support has created a bedrock where community leaders trust BEA to be responsive to their needs and direct them to resources that will support their goals.

Overcoming Capacity Limitations through Community Building

"Despite these systems being in place, I'm still greatly concerned about the lack of capacity."

Despite an established infrastructure, the interviewed TA provider reported concern about "lack of capacity." At the municipal level, there are very small towns whose municipal governments are staffed by volunteers with full-time jobs who may not take advantage of TA opportunities. At the state level, the interviewed TA provider reported being a department of one, which for them means "thinking and working more collaboratively."

There are informal groups that help build community and capacity beyond "departments of one" at BEA. One example is the Keene Area Manufacturers Consortium, a "group of people that gets together on a quarterly basis in person and monthly virtually." This informal gathering lets group members identify "shared opportunities and challenges" and collaborate on solutions. For instance, this group has sparked conversations on collaborating on recycling centers which were formerly run independently by neighboring towns. In addition to sparking collaboration, these informal communities can be an opportunity for technical assistance provided through peer learning.

Resources

State	Programs and Coalitions	University
• New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs	• NH Association of RPCs • Plan NH • NH Municipal Association	• UNH Extension

Wisconsin

33%

67%

■ Urban ■ Rural

Regional Governance

Wisconsin Counties are an "administrative arm" of the state and carry out state laws and programs. Wisconsin is organized into nine Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs). RPCs provide planning assistance and help municipalities connect to state and federal programs.

The median town population size in WI is 957 people[2]
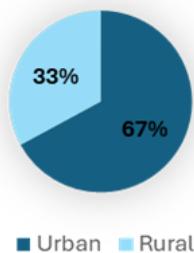
Partnerships and Redundancy can Create Resilience

"We have multiple intersecting partners with assets and strengths to lend, but I do not know that we have a coordinated system."

The interviewed WI TA providers represent a range of state, private and university partners. Forming a coordinated TA system has been difficult in WI due to different governance structures, funding streams, and organizational structures. Rather than a coordinated TA system, TA providers describe "relying on [their] strong relationships and collaboration to navigate people through … existing resources." While the lack of structure can be a challenge, WI TA providers point out that what some might view as "redundancy" in their system, they would describe it as "resiliency."

"The chaos is actually some resilience built in because it's not like we have one provider and one system and if one funding source gets cut, we're screwed, right."

The WI TA system has formed through "organic organization development that has happened over the years to meet some of the various needs across the state." The formation of WI's "organic" TA system has been facilitated by having coordinated events and workshops and informal gatherings where TA providers can be in the same place, get to know each other, and learn about the work of different organizations.

Organizational Partnerships Need Opportunities to Build and Maintain a "Spirit of Cooperation"

A critical program described by WI TA providers was the Policy Academy, a program through the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness. Wisconsin was one of six states selected to participate in the program at a critical time for TA in the state, when the Office of Rural Prosperity was newly formed. Participants in the Academy met through in-person and virtual workshops and worked with a consultant to identify potential projects and collaborations. The Policy Academy provided an opportunity to build relationships and get to know the work being done across organizations, it also built a strong foundation for TA providers to work together after the Academy concluded.

The work started in the Policy Academy has continued at the Wisconsin Economic Summit where regional partners and Academy participants organize a session each year to "have a conversation about strategy and relevant current topics." Regularly coming together at regional summits and other professional meetings helps WI TA providers build on the foundations they developed at the Policy Academy and nurture a "culture that encourages genuine engagement and collaboration."

Ultimately the strong foundation of the Policy Academy and ongoing relationship building opportunities have led to a general "spirit of cooperation" among TA providers in WI and an understanding that if TA organizations across the state are working together, they are "strengthening … the field … as a whole, rather than fighting over pieces of a pie." This understanding has created a "feedback loop" where organizations collaborate on projects and funding opportunities.

Resources

State
- Wisconsin Office of Rural Prosperity

University
- Design Wisconsin (Extension)
- Energy On Wisconsin (Extension)
- UW-Madison Clean Energy Community Initiative
- Community Development Institute (Extension)
- Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP)
- University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Center for Economic Development

Programs and Coalitions
- Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP)
- Wisconsin Counties Association
- Wisconsin Downtown Action Council (WDAC)
- League of Wisconsin Municipalities
- Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC)
- Wisconsin Main Street Program and Connect Communities Program

Successful TA Needs People to do the Work

"I think also to add on to that is the fact that there's just some human capacity issues, right? So it's sort of like we can build the best programs in the world, but if folks literally do not have the time in the day to absorb information and then make those changes, that's not helpful to them."

A Strong foundation of partnerships and understanding of assets and strengths has allowed WI TA providers to work together to identify and respond to community needs. One response to community needs is "prioritized well-funded professional positions" that are in close proximity to the communities they serve. One TA provider described people doing the work as a critical component of successful TA.

"TA is not a magic bullet that solves everything. If you have no one to do the actual work, you can give all of the assistance in the world, but someone has to do the work and [you need to] fund and support people to actually do the work."

Another response of WI TA providers to community needs is the Thrive Rural program. This program is administered through the Office of Rural Prosperity and provides pre-development support to 10 communities. The goal of the support is to guide communities through the process of packaging "a project in a way where it can attract state or federal funding and lots of different partners." WI TA providers note that the support provided in the Thrive Rural program is nothing that participating communities don't know how to do already, but the program provides the structure and staff to do it faster. WI's approach to the Thrive Rural program highlights that TA is only part of the puzzle of rural community development "it's that combination of that technical assistance and then the dollars to actually hire a consultant to do some of the work."

Sustained Support Systems Help Communities Maintain Momentum

"So, you know, I think my magic wand is not necessarily capacity, but I do think it's just support for folks who are in those isolated roles"

The funding and positions provided by TA programs often have a time limit, the duration of community participation in the Thrive Rural program is 2 years. WI TA providers identify "leadership development" and "organizational capacity building" as the long-term foundations for sustaining the momentum of TA projects in rural towns. However, they indicate that building capacity is complicated and doesn't always look like more people. Solutions to building capacity can be sustained support for "folks who are in those isolated roles" trying to move forward complicated projects in small towns. Some strategies for sustained support identified by WI TA providers are sustained funding streams, formal professional development, or more informal strategies like knowing who they can call to talk through issues and roadblocks. WI TA providers predict that these sustained "wrap around support" systems can help leaders in rural communities follow through on complicated projects which can often get deprioritized because there is always something smaller, more immediate to do.

Reimagining Rural Capacity Summit- Hackathon Implementation Ideas

VERTA findings from across all components of Vermont's municipal technical assistance system were modified and condensed into a succinct set of categories for the purpose of conducting table-top implementation exercises during the Reimagining Rural Capacity Summit on November 13th, 2025. The summit brought together representatives from all parts of Vermont's technical assistance ecosystem for a day of table-top exercises designed to solicit additional ideas and generate implementation strategies for ideas for change. The following are summarized results of those exercises. Detailed results describing specific implementation ideas are available in the Reimagining Rural Capacity Summit section of this report.

Summarized Results

- **Portals, Hubs or Clearing Houses.** Four ideas, two of which are designed to increase municipal capacity and two of which are designed to reduce TA process burdens for municipalities.
  - o **VT Municipal Combine** access to service, staff and equipment sharing opportunities.
  - o **Maple Hollow Community Café** volunteer options by level of engagement and more.
  - o **One Stop Grant Shop** funding opportunities at each agency and a portal like "Grants.Gov".
  - o **Vermont Funding Hub** database for financing, TA services, shared resources, etc.
- **Toolkits or Guides.** Three ideas, two of which guide municipalities through projects, and one guides shared services development.
  - o **Choose Your (fill in the blank) Adventure** best practices, templates, guides, toolkits and more, a place to house these materials and outreach and training.
  - o **One Stop Shop for TA** a flow chart that guides municipalities through project processes.
  - o **Vermont Shared Services Toolkit** helps municipalities explore what shared services might look like and provides assistance and funding for implementation.
- **New Infrastructure.** Six ideas, two of which are entities to bring state government together, one entity brings TA providers together, another entity brings all Vermont's TA system together, one is an event to bring the TA system together in person, and one builds the TA workforce.
  - o **Agency of Municipal Services** a state government internal entity bringing agencies together around municipal service.
  - o **Vermont Office of Prosperity, Efficiency and Navigation (OPEN)** a state government program & portal with lists of TA contractors and funding sources, and with regional navigators to assist municipalities.
  - o **Vermont Technical Assistance Providers Hub (TAP Hub)** a program or entity that hosts a portal directory of TA providers with associated listserv, forums, resources and events.
  - o **Small Towns, Big Voices** a collaborative of municipal, regional, state agency, administration and legislative representatives providing infrastructure for ongoing implementation of new/VERTA ideas.
  - o **Vermont Community Capacity Fair** a TA fair held annually supporting interactive learning, resource connections, problem identification and solution ideation.
  - o **Rural Capacity Fellowship** a workforce development network framework that utilizes peer-to-peer, mentorship and higher education engagement.
- **Conceptual and Study.** Two ideas.
  - o **Planning for the People** a study leading to a pilot reimagining planning and the Town Plan as grassroots processes addressing community need through direct engagement.
  - o **Resilient Funding Frameworks** utilizes Vermonters' shared visions to tell stories that build cohesion around funding and investment in our communities.

VERTA Research Methods and Outcomes

Municipalities

- Survey
  - A municipal technical assistance survey generated **155 unique responses from 114 municipalities** around Vermont. The full survey report is provided in Appendix B.
- Focus Groups
  - **All eleven Regional Planning Commissions** in Vermont assisted the VERTA research team with bringing together municipal representatives from their service areas. Focus groups were provided in person and virtually. A total of **20 municipal focus groups** were conducted around Vermont with participation from **130 municipal representatives** from **97 municipalities.**
  - Municipalities we heard from- 35% with populations under 1,500, 37% with populations between 1,500 to 4,000, and 28% with populations over 4,000. The focus group protocol is available in appendix C.

Technical Assistance Providers & Funders

- Survey
  - The VERTA team crowd-sourced a list of technical assistance providers and funders working with Vermont communities. These included federal and state government entities, quasi-governmental entities like Regional Planning Corporations (RPCs) and Regional Development Corporations (RDCs), non-government nonprofits and other private, for-profit consultants. Survey outreach generated **37** responses. The complete survey report is provided in appendix D.
- Focus Groups & Interviews
  - Selected representatives from **6** RPCs
  - **Eight** representatives from RDCs
  - Representatives of **14** State Government Agencies and Departments
  - **Four** representatives of Federal Agencies working with Vermonters.
  - **Six** private municipal consultants
  - **Five** representatives of (Pres Trust, VLCT) non-profit municipal service organizations
  - **20** participants from the Vermont Community Leadership Network. Full focus group interview protocol is available in appendix E.

Legislators

- Survey
  - A survey sent to specific Vermont legislators generated **just 3 responses**. The survey report is provided in appendix F.
- Interviews
  - The VERTA research team conducted **two interviews with legislators** identified by the DHCD core team. The interview protocol is available in appendix G.

Comparative Municipal Technical Assistance Research

- Scan of Out-of-State Municipal Technical Assistance Models
  - **Thirteen states**, including Vermont, were identified through the VERTA core team and steering committee members as having existing rural technical assistance programs,

projects and models to explore. The detailed out-of-state municipal technical assistance research results are available in appendix A.

- Interviews
  - Interviews were conducted with **five states** that had been reviewed in the comparative meta-analysis phase. These states were selected by the VERTA core team and steering committee with their knowledge of existing programs, projects and models implemented in those places that were deemed to be of value for Vermont to learn more from. The five states interviewed were Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Alabama and Wisconsin. Full interview protocol is available in appendix H.
- Case Studies
  - The VERTA team developed case study synopses of the **five states** that were interviewed using information from the out-of-state meta-analyses and the interviews.

Reimagining Rural Capacity Summit

- This one-day event took place November 13, 2025. High-level research findings were presented and participants worked through a series of exercises to identify their "To Do" lists, their "Wish Lists" and to develop implementable ideas based on the research findings "Ideas for Change".
- Approximately **125 participants** representing municipalities, for-profit TA providers, non-profit TA organization representatives and state and federal TA agency representatives took part in the summit. These were generated through multiple outreach methods including through the RPC networks, the Steering Committee members' listservs, newsletters and personal invitations and social media. A press release about the event was distributed to local media. Detailed ideas for change posters and results are available below in the Summit section of the report.

Vermont TA System Strengths

To effectively improve the existing technical assistance system in Vermont, it is important to analyze the existing strengths within the current system. These findings surfaced from municipal, state agency, and non-governmental entities interviews and focus groups. The strengths listed below are the most notable from the research findings, though in no way does this list exhaust all the strengths of Vermont's technical assistance system. Rather than reimagining the entire system, this list of strengths can be used to inform ideas for change across the TA system.

Technical Assistance Entities and Organizations

Technical Assistance organizations are the core of the municipal technical assistance system in Vermont, whether they are government or quasi-government entities, nonprofits, private consultants, or other structured resources. These entities are celebrated for their deep passion, responsiveness, and dependability, which supports municipalities in carrying out community and economic development projects.

Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) are vital resources to municipalities, especially smaller towns which often have less capacity. Many municipal staff have described their respective RPC as an invaluable resource that is always there for municipalities to lean on. As intermediary government entities, they help municipalities find funding, support projects on the ground, and connect staff to the correct individual or information. Additionally, municipal staff are often focused on day-to-day

operations, so RPCs can support towns with strategic thinking and long-term visioning. In certain cases, they can support project management responsibilities to continue a project's forward progress. RPCs maintain strong relationships within their regions, so municipalities trust that they can rely on them as a first line of support.

Various state agencies and programs have also been noted as strengths within the TA system and operate as effective supports for municipalities. Generally, state agency staff are very responsive to questions about funding, reporting, or other concerns. Though it can be difficult to find the right person to talk to, many have a strong knowledge of their subject area and are committed to supporting municipal staff carrying out projects in need of technical assistance.

Federal programs are valued for their funding and technical assistance support. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, also called the COVID-19 Stimulus Package or American Rescue Plan (ARPA) is referenced as an excellent funding resource with individuals noting that they received an influx of flexible funding that allowed their municipality to purchase necessary equipment. There have also been several mentions of federal staff going beyond their roles to support municipalities in moving their projects forward.

Consultants and nonprofit organizations help to fill gaps in the TA system or build upon existing resources. Though these entities span a wide range of goals and areas of expertise, municipal officials value their support in receiving funding, information, or technical assistance.

Some valuable programs and organizations often named by research participants:
- Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLTC)
- Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD)
- Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)
- Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA)
- Vermont Community Foundation (VCF)
- Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO)
- Regional Development Corporations (RDCs)
- The Village Trust Initiative
- Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP)
- Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Action, Leadership Collaborative Model (IDEAL)
- Agency of Natural Resources- Municipal Day
- And many more!

High Commitment Level

Regardless of organizational affiliation, individuals throughout Vermont's TA system have a high level of commitment and consistently put extra effort into the work they do. Many organizations, agencies, individuals, and providers value high responsiveness, effective communication, and strong leadership. Providers understand the complexity of their organizations or the system as a whole, so they are willing to take the extra step to help municipalities succeed.

Grant and reporting portals can be particularly confusing, especially because they tend to be different. State agency staff have noted that they will help a municipal official by walking them through these processes or even filling out this information for them. Though this is not in their job description, they want to support the people they serve in the best way possible. Multiple municipalities have also shared

experiences of state agency staff and other providers coming into their community to support work on the ground. This dedication is invaluable to municipalities, especially those who rely on outside support to complete larger projects.

Accessible, Helpful People

The technical assistance system is complex and understanding who to contact or where to look for information can be confusing. It takes time to build connections and relationships across the system, but there are many people who are willing to help you or help to find someone who can. For example, municipalities use the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) as a resource for getting connected to other organizations, participating in discussions, sharing expertise, and even doing site visits. Having a resource like this makes it easier to "break in" to the system and build more personal relationships with relevant individuals in other municipalities, nonprofit organizations, and at the state or federal level.

Many individuals also discussed that one of the benefits of Vermont being a small state is that leaders, state officials, and legislators are very accessible. For example, a municipal official shared that they had connected with their legislative representative several times and received the support they needed. Additionally, Vermont's legislative session is part time, meaning that you, or someone you know, could run for office, while still engaging in this work. These relationships across the system support high collaboration and increase responsiveness at the legislative level.

Collaborative Services and Programs

Municipalities across the state are resource constrained, so it is difficult to complete certain work to move a project forward. For example, most towns do not have the financial resources to fully support a grant writer, zoning administrator, or other professional staff positions. However, municipal staff or volunteers may not have the time or expertise to do this work. To combat this, municipalities have begun to team up with neighboring towns to share a zoning administrator, regionalize trash collection efforts, or collaborate on other efforts. This helps municipalities combat low staff capacity without depleting their financial resources. Additionally, municipalities do not need to be concerned about losing vital institutional knowledge if staff members turnover.

At the state level, formalized collaborations across agencies help to leverage complementary strengths while coordinating overlapping issues. For example, one agency expressed positive remarks about one of their formal partners, noting that they combine money and planning with expertise to complete meaningful work. Instead of tackling these issues separately, through slightly different lenses, they work to add value to this work together.

Along with formalized collaboration and shared services, it is important for individuals working within the TA system to have opportunities to connect with and learn from each other. Municipalities view each other as key resources because they face similar challenges. So, they appreciate time to discuss new ideas, learn from each other, and build strong relationships. One RPC hosts monthly meetings that bring all municipalities in that region together to collaborate and brainstorm ways to pool limited resources. At the same time, the RPC staff support these municipalities to think strategically and see the bigger picture.

State agencies also operate in similar ways with informal relationships and coordination. Certain agencies hold meetings regularly with the sole purpose of staying informed about each other's work.

These meetings strengthen relationships, support systems thinking mentalities, and encourage more formalized collaborations.

Though it does not occur as often, collaborations across the system are also extremely valuable. For example, state agency staff attending municipal brainstorming sessions can be beneficial in aligning priorities across the whole system. State collaboratives or municipal meetings can build up one part of the system, but putting all the pieces together will strengthen the entire system.

State Agency Specific Strengths

Though state agency staff shared many similar strengths with municipal officials and nongovernmental providers (see above), their unique position in the TA system results in specific strengths.

- **Cross agency coordination embedded in planning processes**
  - Multi-agency input built into statewide plans and strategies
  - Cross-agency collaboration leveraged to influence durable policy
    - Collaboration through governor's cabinet and legislative mandates
  - Senior officials participate directly in cross-agency discussions
    - Example – The State Hazard Mitigation Plan steering committee
- **Shared mission alignment**
  - Agencies align around common resilience and mitigation goals
  - Common statewide objectives strengthen coordination
    - Example – The Recovery Leadership Team
- **Adaptive collaboration during crises**
  - Crisis strengthen coordination and cross-agency responsiveness
  - Using interagency connections to quicken recovery processes
  - Agencies have learned to operate more flexibility following the pandemic
- **Feedback loops with municipalities**
  - Ongoing two-way communication for program improvement
  - Focus on relationships, trust, and responsiveness
- **Collaborative grants management model**
  - Interagency review improves efficiency and outcomes
    - Example – Vermont Emergency Management's interagency grant review model
- **Recognition of local dedication**
  - Acknowledging municipal commitment strengthens collaboration
  - Local staff and boards care deeply about solving complex problems
- **Holistic rural development vision**
  - Technical assistance extends beyond municipalities
  - Using technical assistance to support agriculture, housing, and local entrepreneurship
- **Subject matter expertise across agencies**
  - Agencies providing technical expertise or skills to complement each other's work
- **Improving accessibility of services**
  - Using plain language communication
  - Streamlining application processes to reduce administrative burden put on municipalities
  - Proactive municipal engagement
  - Visible presence in rural areas
- **Leveraging relationships with RPCs**
  - RPCs act as trusted intermediaries and are used for message delivery

- RPCs can funnel information from municipalities to the state
  - Example – The Transportation Planning Initiative is a 33-year relationship with RPCs

Vermont TA System Barriers and Challenges

Synopsis Across TA System Stakeholders

Barriers/Challenges ● Focus Groups & Interviews	Municipalities	TA Providers & Funders	State Government
Administrative Burdens ● Cumbersome applications, reimbursement, regulations, reporting, etc.	29%	33%	6%
Municipal Capacity ● Time, knowledge, skills	23%	33%	28%
Funding ● Criteria, availability, eligibility, mismatch to municipal needs	11%	8%	1%
Communication ● Access to information about resources, etc.	10%	0%	9%
Disconnect with Community Needs ● Priorities mismatch and more.	8%	8%	16%
Financial Capacity ● Lack of funds or interest in funding	6%	4%	7%

Focus Group Data

Municipal Focus Groups Detailed Barriers and Challenges

Administrative Burdens
Duplicative permitting, auditing, and reporting processes slow down projects and funding, which constrains human and financial resources at the municipal level. This causes municipal staff to focus their time and energy on administrative work, rather than other work.

- Regulations are known to change part-way through projects, resulting in new requirements that municipal staff must complete to continue projects.
- Project portals use out-of-date software that makes applying for grants and reporting particularly difficult.
- Typically, projects do not specify a list of requirements needed to apply for or report on.
- Grant timelines are too short for municipal officials to prepare an application.

Municipal Capacity
Many municipalities across Vermont, particularly small towns, struggle with low human capacity, as they are constrained on time, expertise, and resources.

- Municipal staff are primarily part-time or volunteers that wear many hats; there are very few professional or specialized positions.
- It is difficult to manage multiple projects at once, stay informed about funding opportunities, and stay on top of day-to-day tasks.

- Municipal staff may not have the knowledge or skills to complete certain tasks required for projects, but there are not many training resources available to them.
- There is a high turnover rate within municipal positions.

Funding

While municipalities rely on outside funding to complete community and economic development projects, applying for and getting funding is often confusing, competitive, restrictive, and slow-moving.

- Grants typically have very strict eligibility, but application guidelines are loosely written and unclear.
- Municipalities use lots of human and financial resources to apply for funding, but there is not always much payout if they are not selected to receive funding, or the grant does not cover the entire project.
- Grants are competitive, as all communities (large and small) are all vying for the same funding.
- There is a mismatch between the types of funding available and the types of projects that communities want to fund.
- Restrictions on how to use funding may deter municipalities from applying or cause them to alter their projects to fit within grant guidelines.
- It can take years to receive funding for a project, and projects often get put on hold or are cancelled without warning.

Communication

Municipalities often need technical expertise or assistance to complete projects; however, communication channels are not centralized, meaning that municipal staff can have trouble finding the right information or support that they are looking for.

- Municipal officials are unsure whether certain services exist or if they just have not heard about it.
- It can take a long time to build relationships with the right people or get on the right communication lists.
- It is difficult to get work done when providers do not respond in a timely manner.
- Municipal officials may only hear about opportunities (funding and other) days before application deadlines or not at all.
- Providers and agencies communicate about information differently and through different channels, meaning that there is not one easily accessible place to find information about technical assistance.

Inconsistency

Though Vermont is a small state with a fairly interconnected TA system, providers, services, and individuals carry out work differently. This impacts service provision across municipalities across the state.

- COVID had a large impact on services, as many were discontinued or are not the same as they used to be.
- Turnover within provider organizations and all levels of government have affected service provision.
- There is a perception that large towns get their needs met, while small towns are left behind, particularly in regard to funding allocation.
- Communication channels, information, and reporting differ across state agencies.
- Training events and municipal meetings are not well spread across the state, so some municipal officials must travel far or miss out on skill building opportunities.
- There are data inconsistencies across the state that are left to the municipalities to handle.

Disconnect with Community Needs

There is not a comprehensive strategy across the TA system to align priorities from municipalities up to the state government. The state usually sets funding priorities, but municipalities do not feel that these always represent the types of services that they are seeking.

- Municipalities must alter their projects to fit within grant guidelines, rather than being able to apply for flexible funding.
- There is no way for municipalities to hold the state accountable to be responsive to their needs.
- The state does not always understand the intricacies of how municipal government operates.

Financial Capacity

Though municipal officials have lofty goals for their town, many municipalities have low financial capacity. This means that they operate with limited funds and do not always have the ability to take on a large-scale project.

- Small communities may not be able to afford consultants or professional positions.
- It is difficult for small towns to meet funding matches required to receive grant funding.
- Municipalities may spend a large amount of money on the beginning stages of a project, only for it to get delayed or stopped.
- Small towns may have a difficult time raising capital, even through raised taxes.

Technical Expertise

Lack of proper guidance, low capacity, and insufficient knowledge can make navigating the TA system overwhelming and confusing for municipal staff.

- State partners have been known to be hands-off during projects or unresponsive when asked about technical assistance questions.
- Providers at various levels of government do not have the capacity to provide enough technical support to municipalities.
- Certain points of contact at the state level may have insufficient knowledge about programs and agency information.

Municipal Survey Barriers and Challenges

How much of a barrier are the following to doing community and economic development projects in your community?

Barrier	Value
Knowing where to find information, training or guides for a project	4.1
Limited municipal interest for doing a project	4.4
Knowing where to find technical assistance providers to…	4.5
Limited public interest for doing a project	4.6
Technical assistance options do not meet our project needs	4.9
Knowing which technical assistance providers are best suited…	4.9
Knowing where to find funding for a project	4.9
Knowing which funding sources are best suited for a project	5.0
Coordinating with multiple project technical assistance…	5.5
Coordinating with multiple project funding sources	5.7
Limited municipal staff time to seek out or manage a project	7.1
Limited municipal funds for a project	7.9

Municipal Technical Assistance Survey

TA Providers and Funders Focus Group Barriers and Challenges

Municipal Capacity
- Small towns often don't have the staffing capacity to be able to learn about and access all the grants that they can.
- Volunteers in towns may not have the time or skillsets that are needed.

Fiscal Capacity
- Small towns struggle to come up with the revenue to hire staff to apply for and manage grants.

Administrative Burden
- Grant applications are burdensome.
- Discovery of resources to match eligibility and needs is burdensome.
- Program requirements are often not aligned to the funding amounts.

Communication
- Silos
    - As communication moves from the top level down, information gets lost.
    - Providers lack awareness of other providers' work and may not understand the whole system.
- Relationships
    - Big programs have a lot of employees with a lot of different roles that can be confusing to navigate.
- Lack of timely responsiveness.

Disconnect with Community Needs and Priorities
- TA provider/funder staff get caught up in their individual roles which can lead to the bigger picture being forgotten.
- Resources do not always meet the needs of individual communities.

Funding
- Lack of funding for state agencies, federal partners, and non-profits.
    - Makes it difficult to focus on economic development.
- Staffing
    - Lack of funding makes it impossible to hire enough staff.
- Scale
    - Funding requirements and amounts do not always meet municipal needs.
    - Unfunded mandates disproportionately impact communities by size.

Inconsistency
- Time
    - There is a mismatch between expected and actual timing of projects.
    - Grants get lost or changed over long time periods.
- Staffing
    - Skills and relationships can get lost in staff turnovers.

- o Work might overlap with other Providers which can be redundant and confusing.
- Equity
  - o Combat the tendency to serve communities that are the most vocal.
  - o Some towns have more capacity to reach out to the right people.
- Funding
 - o Inconsistent long-term funding increases project risk for municipalities.

TA Providers and Funders Survey Barriers and Challenges

How much of a barrier are each of the following to doing community and economic development projects with communities?

Barrier	Value
Knowing where to find information, training or guides for a project	3.5
Knowing where to find additional technical assistance providers...	3.9
Municipal interest in doing projects	4.1
Coordinating with multiple project technical assistance...	4.2
Knowing which funding sources are best suited for a project	5.2
Knowing where to find funding for a project	5.4
Funding a municipal TA project	6.3
Coordinating with multiple project funding sources (Stacking)	6.6
Municipal skills to apply for or administer a project	7.4
Municipal staff time to collaborate on projects	7.8
Municipal funds for projects	8.0

Technical Assistance Providers and Funders Survey

How challenging is it <u>to collaborate with</u> each of the following on community and economic development projects?

"Very Challenging" to collaborate with by Municipal and TA Provider/Funder respondents

Category	Municipalities	TA Providers/Funders
Large municipalities		3%
VT Regional Planning or Development Corporations	7%	3%
VT non-government community development…	9%	3%
VT non-government business organizations	12%	7%
VT non-government foundations or funders	14%	14%
State of VT agencies, programs, etc.	13%	22%
Small municipalities		38%
Federal agencies, programs, etc.	58%	49%

(0% – 70% scale)

■ Municipalities ■ TA Providers/Funders

Briefly, why is it very challenging for <u>your municipality</u> to collaborate with Federal agencies, programs, etc.?

1) So many programs, 2) each program even very similar programs have different rules, 3) Federal Register has many different programs and it is difficult to cull out the relevant sections as they are often dependent on the current federal presidential administration and agency head, some do a good job of outreach and public facing activity and some don't and it changes based on above dependencies, and 4) Cost-Benefit formulas are challenging for small rural community even though the events can be catastrophic for the community 5) Challenging for small rural community to meet the criteria AND BE COMPETETIVE for a federal highway project like rebuilding a major connecting route with the once in 40-year total rebuild.
Amorphous and very technical
Bureaucracy
Because the money is drying up and the staff is disappearing (no joke, the USDA RD staff our community has been working with all took a buy out and left last week - this will be the third staffing transition since the beginning of our project, which slows things down and is incredibly inefficient). Also, programs change ALL THE TIME making it hard to keep up with what standards, focal areas, criteria, eligibility, etc. all apply to any given agency, program, etc. This has always been a challenge, but the current administration has poured gasoline on the fire.
bureaucratic nightmare; jump through hoops; make things more complicated than they need to be
changing rules; opacity of regulations; delays in responding to inquiries
Complex rules and regulations, legal and reporting issues beyond the capacity of elected officials, slow process--often not completed while elected officials are in their terms, HUGE amount of administrative work that the town cannot undertake
Complex rules, lack of follow-up, uncertainty of funding
Complexity of applications, requirements- difficult to decipher, time consuming

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Complexity of navigating requirements, applications, etc.
Confusing or dense info, long wait times to get responses or answers
Currently: completely schizophrenic. Generally: huge burden for compliance.
Difficult to find appropriate person with decision making authority to collaborate on a project with. Bureaucracy.
Diversity of funding sources, differing applications, environmental review, slow approval process, Lack of administrative transparency
Do not know contacts.
Dysfunctional reporting portals and moving deadlines.
Excessively particular application and follow-up requirements, limited direct staff guidance.
FEMA - for disaster relief and other buy-out projects - their staffing and timing challenges make it difficult to know how to deal with very technical requirements.
FEMA is an absolute pain to work with.
FEMA PDMG all have different processes and perspectives and do not stay through the project
For large projects we have heard that many funders would like to be the 'last money in' which can make moving forward with a project challenging.
Getting a response
Hard to find what is available for resources etc. before its needed
hard to get a call back.   They are understaffed.
Hard to know where to turn and challenging to get to the most relevant info.
Hard to know which agency to talk with, very long hold time to ask questions just to be told you need to contact another department.
Hard to reach. Lots of red tape.
Information isn't provided.
It is difficult for a small community and minimal municipal staff to meet the requirements of federal programs
Lack of funding, funding takes a long time to be paid back, lots of red tape it can be difficult for small Towns to foot big bills until federal funds come through
Lack of local staff and outreach to understand what they need.
Limited federal staff capacity, although rarely relevant
Monty since Trump became President which has resulted uncertainty, less staffing, changes in funding.
Navigating the requirements and budget cycle.
Never know the right people or places to call
Opaque process, lack of good guidance, scaling issues
People lack the experience and knowledge regarding everything from whom to contact, what questions to ask, and so much more. Additionally, every Agency or Department has different processes and procedures, often confusing people even more.
Pre-Trump: hard to know where to look for fit to our need and Now-Trump: massive cuts mean federal money is probably gone for everything that matters.
Programs are opaque. Can't ferret information out from websites, can't get people to speak to, forms are needlessly complicated....
Regulatory and administrative burdens. Our municipal government is largely volunteer. No one is willing to devote the time necessary to get anything done at the federal level. The federal government has also proven to be capricious in revising their 'oversight' policies.
same as the state - finding info, getting answers from folks, etc.
The amount of repetitive red tape, the length of time it takes to get answers (FEMA etc.) The length of time it takes to get funding. The length of time it takes to get answers. The length of time it takes for return messages & emails. The length of time it takes for assessment of a situation and how to resolve it.
The current landscape in Washington makes it very difficult to obtain reliable information or rely on funded programs. I was on a webinar yesterday where it was noted that federally approved grant funding for a project

could be taken away in the current climate. In addition, the applications for Federal grants and programs is mind-boggling at times. Each entity has a different means of applying. Honestly, it would be almost impossible for our municipality to write a federal grant application without hiring a consultant or working with our local RDC
The process/rules/procedures are often set up for Omaha, Dallas, and Bakersfield, CA -- in other words, it's overwrought and often inaccessible for our needs.
the unknown future of all programs from federal agencies
Requirements often don't align with the State's.
They don't demonstrate interest in collaborating, even working with them on reporting requirements for funding we receive is a whole process. They seem very disconnected from the reality of the work on the ground. With the administration change I would also say they are unlikely to be a partner.
They don't talk to the other hands
They have created such a complicated system, the people they have tasked with running it are just as confused on how to administer it. So cumbersome to navigate.
too cumbersome
Too many agencies, it is tough to get perspective for a village our size.
Too many rules, regulations, and wasted time trying to comply
Trump fired everyone
Uncertainty and long communication timelines
unreasonable 'one-size-fits-all' paperwork for a very small town with part-time officials
Very little live technical help, if any. Detailed processes that require a lot of time and experience to navigate. Unclear how to put together the most compelling application.
We are less familiar with individuals within these Federal agencies and who to contact for a specific activity. It is much more effective to work through the state agencies which already have the connections.
We have no idea where to start.
We really only see fed agencies offering programs or grants that you have to apply for. It's challenging to do so b/c 1) applications are extremely burdensome; 2) grant management and reporting with fed agencies is extremely burdensome; 3) it's sooooo much work, often with little chance of getting the grant, so we don't even bother; 4) our town and/or projects are often too small to even really work for fed opportunities. I think the Town gov has had good success with FEMA and some major grants, but not small volunteer committees or projects.
We simply do not have the staff to deal with the excessive back and forth, questions and answers, the incredibly long application processes, meetings, etc. No one has the time to commit fully to this so a group of us do so. The application, agreement process, reporting, and other related processes take so much time that we are discouraged to even consider applying. These grants were set up under the assumption that all towns have staff to manage these grants. WE DON'T. So the towns with staff and resources and residents with deep pockets get funding while poorer communities with limited municipal staff just pass on these opportunities.

Municipal Technical Assistance Survey

Briefly, why is it very challenging for <u>TA Providers and Funders</u> to collaborate with Federal agencies, programs, etc.?

1) Clarity as to whom and what qualifies; 2) Clarity as to probability of funding (selection criteria, intensity of competition, changing priorities within the program); 3) scale of administrative burden; 4) reimbursement criteria (i.e., will funds cover indirect rate); 5) non-federal match requirements
Convoluted grant/program requirements; delayed communications; unstable funding levels/decisions;
different interpretations of federal regulations by funding source, different set of rules for each source along with different timelines
Difficult to navigate who the appropriate contact is. Long response times. Limited federal agency staff in Vermont.

Federal programs have many requirements and complicated structures that smaller organizations are not familiar with. It takes time even for experienced organizations and can be over whelming for inexperienced orgs.
In our current climate, there are very few staffers left at federal agencies. This makes all the work harder, if not impossible!
lack of knowledge if program will continue, too much red tape
Lack of understanding of scale of Vermont communities.
Multiple layers of bureaucracy. Bound by process; agencies are not rewarded for results
Municipalities often need to stack funding for large-scale projects. Federal funders do not play well together -- duplicative efforts as far as environmental reviews, appraisals, reporting, etc., where each funder requires their own forms and materials
Response time is sometimes very long, technical requirements for funding sources may conflict with other grants/funding in a stack
Staff availability
Staff turnover and different levels of support from different people in the same positions.
The administrative requirements for many funding streams are extensive and require great administrative capacity on the part of our small organization
The uncertainty and unreliability of federal programs, staffing turnover and loss, and lack of funding makes federal partners difficult to partner and rely on for projects, funding, or technical assistance.
With staffing cuts, knowing who to call from the USDA (as an example) is nearly impossible.

Technical Assistance Providers and Funders Survey

Briefly, why is it very challenging for <u>TA Providers and Funders</u> to collaborate with small municipalities?

capacity
Lack of money and time
lacking leadership (including staff capacity) and/or well defined projects and/or prioritization of projects
Limited staff capacity
limited staff time to dedicate to projects, competing priorities/attentions, and limited knowledge and/or buy-in of stakeholders
Most simply do not have the resources needed to deal with the complex state and federal agencies.
Small municipalities are run by either part-time staff or volunteers who have very limited capacity and may have no experience with the skills required to be successful (e.g. managing a grant project, overseeing a budget, facilitating community conversations)
small municipalities do not have the resources or the staffing capacity. Most are volunteer positions and do not have the knowledge, skill set, or time to devote to complex, long term projects. In order for municipalities to have the ability to compete for grants, or other financing programs, they need to have capacity to do so.
Small municipalities often lack paid staff and don't have the time, energy or capacity for collaboration
Small municipalities often have below staff capacity and rely on volunteers to manage projects. All municipalities need paid project management staff...outside assistance does not build capacity.
Small towns have extremely limited capacity which can make it difficult to plan for projects, apply for funding, and implement the project
Their lack of capacity (admin, financial, timely decision-making, etc.) is the greatest challenge.
they don't have capacity to manage or pay for projects;

Technical Assistance Providers and Funders Survey

State Government Detailed Barriers and Challenges

Administrative Burden

There are a wide variety of technical assistance resources within state government; however, the vastness of these resources can be confusing and difficult for municipal staff to navigate.

- There are many different people and agencies within the technical assistance sphere, and municipalities may not know where to start or who to contact for support.
- Each grant application at the state level requires different information, which makes this process more complicated and time-consuming.

Municipal Capacity

- Resources are constrained at all levels of Vermont's technical assistance system. Municipal officials, nonprofit organizations, and state agencies only have so much time, resources, and skills to carry out their work.
- Small municipalities struggle to fill employee and volunteer positions. Municipal staff's plates are full, and they often wear multiple hats.
- Navigating bureaucracy, as a municipal or state official, takes time and effort.
- State agencies also struggle with human capacity, which constrains their ability to carry out more projects with municipalities.

Funding

There is a lack of adequate funding for state agencies to carry out their work. These resources have been increasingly constrained and unstable in the last year.

Communication

- Politics, silos, and miscommunications can all impact effective communication between state agencies and down to the municipal level.
- People with better connections tend to have better luck at getting in touch with agencies. Without these connections, it can be difficult to determine who the right person to be in contact with is.
- As communication moves across agencies or down from the top level, information can get lost. Agencies may assume that municipalities know more about state policies and procedures than they do.
- Citizens outside of municipal government struggle with finding the information that they need.
- It can be difficult to rekindle connections as administration changes.

Inconsistency

- Though Vermont is a small, well-connected state, there are still inconsistencies in how individual towns operate, service provision, and institutional knowledge across the system.
- Each town has slightly different dynamics and politics that state agencies need to navigate when supporting municipalities on projects.
- Action from the state can take much longer than expected, which can result in a loss of trust between communities and service providers.
- Each agency, provider, and individual has a different way of carrying out their work, so there is no clear path to success on a project.
- Institutional knowledge can get lost in the transition when one staff member leaves and a new individual is onboarded.
- Projects can get lost or delayed in turnover of staff members.

Disconnect with Community Needs

Priorities are not always aligned between municipalities and the state level, and this disconnect makes it difficult for municipalities to fully meet their needs.

- Miscommunications act as a barrier to communities not getting what they want out of a program or project.
- Community needs and priorities may shift.
- Regional governance infrastructure is not strong enough to fully bridge gaps and communicate community needs up to the state.

Financial Capacity

Similarly to municipalities, state agencies are financially constrained, making it hard to carry out their work. Oftentimes, they must be creative and use limited resources to meet goals.

- The Legislature typically does not enable flexible funding models that municipalities can use to shape a project to their needs.
- Staff are underpaid for their work. This barrier may exclude some people from working in state or local government.
- State agencies typically do not have enough funding to provide full monetary support for municipalities; though, they try to do this when they can.

Technical Expertise

- Technical expertise is vital at all levels of the technical assistance system. A lack of expertise harms project progress, information sharing, and capacity efforts.
- State level staff expertise is typically limited to the agency that an employee works for, which perpetuates siloing across agencies.
- Municipal projects take a long time, but this process can take even longer for communities with fewer resources.
- Consultants can help to free up human capacity at the municipal level, but there are not enough within the system to fully support municipal needs.

Vermont TA System Ideas for Change

Synopsis Across TA System Stakeholders

Ideas for Change ● **Focus Groups & Interviews**	Municipalities	TA Providers & Funders	State Government
Increase Collaboration ● Regional, peer-to-peer, between municipalities and agencies, etc.	21%	30%	30%
Increase Communication ● Responsiveness, simplified access to resources, information, clearinghouse	16%	11%	20%
Increase Technical Expertise ● Training and professionalization for municipalities and providers.	16%	13%	6%
Simplify Technical Assistance Admin.	14%	9%	23%

● Standardization, simplification, streamlining			
Funding ● Flexible and More	13%	9%	4%
Regional Governance ● Formalized structures and service agreements, etc.	10%	17%	12%
Increase Administrative Capacity ● More training and resources	6%	7%	4%
Increase Municipal Autonomy ● Ability to use resources to meet local needs versus fitting local needs to resources.	5%	4%	1%

Municipal Focus Groups Detailed Ideas for Change

Collaboration

Increased collaboration can help to address a variety of issues that municipalities face, including information gaps, human capacity, and financial capacity.

- Municipal staff appreciate opportunities to talk through shared issues together, engage in peer-to-peer learning, and build relationships.
- Municipalities hope that breaking down siloes between towns will help to save money and allow for more opportunities for community and economic development.
- Many municipalities are in support of sharing and/or regionalizing various services that are typically carried out by each town, like economic development efforts, emergency services, equipment, large capital purchases, highway departments, and more.
- Despite the hope to increase shared resources, municipalities still want to maintain autonomy and their town identity.

Communication

Municipalities wish for more effective communication across the technical assistance system to support project organization, planning processes, and relationship building between municipalities and the state.

- Clear communication is necessary for municipal staff to predict grant schedules, evaluate their town's funding capacity, and understand who they should be seeking technical support from.
- An information clearinghouse would be a useful tool for municipalities to have a clear direction to find resources or a person to support them. This may be structured as a person or system that acts as a first stop for municipalities to find information about technical assistance or funding.
  o This resource would include an aggregated list of technical assistance providers, resources, grants or funding opportunities, and town managers across the state.
- There is support for more opportunities for the state to listen to problems that towns face to improve two-way communication between towns and the state, as well as overall responsiveness.

Technical Expertise

Increased technical expertise will aid municipalities' ability to carry out projects in a timely manner and combat a lack of municipal capacity.

- Municipal staff want more training and guidance opportunities from the state, specifically targeting ways to structure municipal staff, implement a town plan effectively, and more.

- Project management assistance would be beneficial for towns who have little municipal capacity. Several municipalities expressed interest in administrative support throughout a project's lifecycle and toolkits to guide all aspects of the project process.
- Towns need access to knowledgeable administrators and providers who can give them answers about grant questions, state mandates, and more.

Simplify Technical Assistance Administration

Processes differ across the TA system and are often complicated, which perpetuates issues of administrative burden at the municipal level. Simplified resources and processes will make it easier for municipalities to access community and economic development opportunities.

- Application, reporting, and reimbursement processes should be shorter and simplified.
- It would be helpful for the state to provide templates and best practices for applying for grants for various project scopes and funding opportunities.
- Reporting forms should be standardized so that municipalities do not have to redo these processes several times with slightly different information.
- Pulling back on some state mandates and regulations would reduce barriers to entry in the TA system.
- A "ticket system" like the disaster response model should be implemented at the state.
- Information should be aggregated in one place, rather than dispersed in many places.

Funding

While it may be difficult to alter the amount of funding available to municipalities, providers should implement solutions to improve the accessibility and availability of funding.

- Municipalities have expressed interest in funds available for the planning processes before the implementation stage of a project.
- Towns need access to flexible funding with fewer regulations that can be used to develop projects based on town needs, rather than state priorities.
- Though there is a competitive nature to grant funding, there should be more reasonable access to funding with relaxed eligibility and less competition between towns.

Regional Governance

Regional governance, whether formal or informal, would support centralization across the technical assistance system by increasing collaboration, supporting regular communication, and addressing municipal capacity issues.

- County-wide planning would save time and resources for municipalities, particularly small communities with few resources.
- Sharing or regionalizing services like fire departments, zoning, and grant management would support municipality's ability to take on more complex work, without constraining their resources greatly.
- Though they are already providing some of this work, it would be beneficial for RPCs to step into a more formalized regional governance role. For example, the RPCs could adopt a Council of Governments model.

Administrative Capacity

Capacity is a consistent barrier for municipalities to access new opportunities and complete large projects. Therefore, they need resources and tools to complete work more efficiently, fill employment gaps, and access support from consultants or providers.

- Municipalities value comprehensive tools from the state that emphasize skill development and training.
- Municipalities need more technical assistance and staff power to apply for, manage, and administer grants.
- With an aging workforce, incorporating local youth into local government may help to fill in gaps at the municipal level.

More Municipal Autonomy

Municipalities often feel that they must adapt their needs and project aspirations to meet state priorities and the funding opportunities available to them. The technical assistance system should prioritize municipal input and priorities to fully meet their needs.

- The TA system should employ a bottom-up approach to local planning, rather than a top-down approach. Therefore, local needs should also be considered in combination with federal requirements.
- There should be more opportunities for small town representation at the state level.
- Municipalities value opportunities to use funding flexibly and focus projects how they see fit.
- Increased trust between the state and municipalities will support towns' ability to act how they see fit.

Municipal Survey Ideas for Change

If you could change one thing about the community and economic development technical assistance system in Vermont, what would it be?

Have a focus on working with Act 250 and permitting with fire safety and wastewater. Our projects get pounded by inspectors changing the requirements even after a project is finished. It can be very punitive.	Build Capacity
Have town volunteers on Planning Commission and Zoning Board trained by State personnel to offer a standardized training that will take municipalities out of the politics of local regional planning commissions and better expose individual municipalities to ideas and techniques used successfully in other communities.	Build Capacity
Honestly it's not the system in VT, it's my municipality's lack of capacity and funding to take it on. We don't have economic development staff, so we can't have a committee. It's a priority for the city council but we can't act on it. We are letting opportunities pass us by, most importantly, opportunities to collaborate more with developers on the large projects happening or coming to our community.	Build Capacity
Improve facilitation skills as conversations get hostile, ugly, for example, about affordable housing. As the amount of uncertainty increases in multiple aspects of life, how will TA adapt to keep projects moving along?	Build Capacity
It is not clear to our town officials how to help with economic development.	Build Capacity
More training about the steps municipal employees/officials should take when beginning projects or seeking grants.	Build Capacity
The state (or someone) should provide in-person training for development review boards, zoning boards, planning commissions and zoning administrators, and attendance should be required for people being appointed to these positions. The whole statutory process is extremely difficult for towns without paid staff, and new appointees don't realize how important these positions are.	Build Capacity

VLCT orientation for new Selectboard members provides many useful perspectives in a single, half-day session. Something similar that presents and unifies information about community and economic development would be a useful change.	Build Capacity
Access to a digital guide by specialty or topic.	Communication
Accessible state government employees. Project guide to how to seek funding A-Z.	Communication
better websites and outreach	Communication
Ensure that information is available to smaller municipalities that don't have staff with the time to do research.	Communication
Greater public exposure.	Communication
Have local visits to municipalities to educate what there is available	Communication
I think infrastructure and transportation is well funded & advertised. Everything else is opaque, not funded, or not a priority.	Communication
Identifying easy to access funding sources.	Communication
More in person regional informational meetings.	Communication
transparency	Communication
Visibility of opportunities- and help	Communication
I am serious about reducing regulation	Deregulate
Less ACT 250	Deregulate
Be more proactive. Look at your lists of who has received grants and funding in the past and find out which towns have never applied or received any funding. Reach out to those towns and offer assistance, soup to nuts assistance, not just 'here's where grants are... apply for them.	Direct Assist
Fewer consultants, more full-time staff embedded in communities. They are lovely people but we have four different consulting agencies on one small-to-medium sized project this summer.	Direct Assist
greater help from VTrans in initial design of projects	Direct Assist
Lots of information is available, and that is great for small projects with a cost estimate. But more often what volunteers need is project development help.	Direct Assist
More user friendly, increased staff to better able to help municipalities work through the issues and applications	Direct Assist
Provide more financial resources to the state RDC's to hire more staff to support municipalities and businesses in their regions.	Direct Assist
Someone available to help communities put together a package or figure out a workable plan to access the TA/resources they need -- not just to refer you to a website that has incomplete info or resources that don't actually work.	Direct Assist
More resources and guidance at RPC level. This is the most sensible place to deliver services that we have to shop all over the place for. Make the RPCs the main point of contact and support staff for Towns.	Direct Assist
Burn it down and start from scratch? Very little that is offered seems to match the needs of our very rural town. Everything seems to assume a town with professional staff and more existing infrastructure than we have. Generally, VTrans seems to work well for us, while almost everything else is totally missing our needs.	Equity
Communities across Vermont have different capabilities to work with community and economic development technical assistance. Rural communities are extremely challenged to seek out, fund and manage this work. Rural communities	Equity

are the backbone of the State of Vermont, but are often left out in the cold. You cannot treat a city like Burlington's ability to access community and economic development technical assistance the same as a rural community in Essex County.	
make it more equitable for small towns	Equity
Right size it, somehow, for small towns. This survey is taking longer than you expected, for example. Local elected leaders are largely volunteers, and we don't have time to manage multiple grants for the small amount we get in return.	Equity
Try to prevent towns in VT from becoming monocultures of the wealthy like Norwich has become	Equity
A central hub for TA with a user friendly website that makes good use of AI tools to guide people to resources. For a small state, there are way too many different players and it is confusing. The state hasn't done a good job of being the convenor. We need to all work together, especially as we enter times with limited federal resources.	Hub, Centralize
A more interconnected system.	Hub, Centralize
central knowledge base, right now it is more like "have you tried x,, y or z?"	Hub, Centralize
Create a single online hub to connect with all the resources.	Hub, Centralize
Employ a team at the ACCD level, instead of having RPC's do it.	Hub, Centralize
Have a one-stop shop "portal" or the ability to work with a seasoned project manager.	Hub, Centralize
Having a single source of information and assistance.	Hub, Centralize
I wish there was one central location that entrepreneurs and business support organizations could go to see all the available assistance in one place.	Hub, Centralize
It would be great if we had a single location that could direct us to the various resources available	Hub, Centralize
More administrative lift from the state. The state seems to silo information into departments/divisions, and appears to make no effort to share internally what they know. Relying on a strapped municipality to relay/regurgitate info the state is asking of another branch of the government is taxing.	Hub, Centralize
Need one-stop shopping	Hub, Centralize
One place for all resources and opportunities. We don't have staff or time to keep up with multiple agencies, commissions, etc.	Hub, Centralize
Put it all in one place. Have all parties talking and working together instead of changing things that affect other agencies.	Hub, Centralize
Streamline communication and support. Make it easy to find and use resources all in one place	Hub, Centralize
Stronger state office with clearer goals and more coordinated leadership to bring towns along.	Hub, Centralize
Synchronize the variety of resources. What funds work well together? If you are seeking funds for X type of project, which resources are the best fits? Create a search engine that prioritizes options based on the type of project.	Hub, Centralize
We need to enable county or regional powers. A town of 800 can't keep up.	Hub, Centralize
Create an actual system.	Intentionality
Define it. And build community buy-in.	Intentionality
Consistent state funding	Funding

Make rich people pay taxes, so we're not all fighting over pennies and jumping over massive oversight hurdles to account for those pennies.	Funding
Money. We need more of it. Programs like MTAP, etc. are game changer. Small, rural communities with little or no staff depend on this capacity.	Funding
More financial resources needed.	Funding
more funding	Funding
more funding and quicker accessibility	Funding
More funding for infrastructure like Wastewater. It is such a complicated puzzle, both logistically and economically. I don't think the general population understands how important it is to a community as well, which makes it a hard type of project to gain public excitement about.	Funding
non-competitive grants for technical assistance on all reports and plans that have regular update cycles	Funding
While each project is different, the upfront costs for the following services can kill a potentially successful project in the early stages: Technical expertise on pre-development costs including - NEPA requirements, Historic preservation and Section 106 costs	Funding
lack of resources	Resources
hire more staff.	Resources
more development providers in southern Vermont	Resources
enable grant stacking by having standardized application, administration and reporting requirements	Simplify
Get rid of it and go back to the simple zoning we had before	Simplify
Good news: Many providers. Bad news: Many providers. Hard to navigate, choose, focus, coordinate, prioritize.	Simplify
It feels loose, providing per project allotment would direct the TA evenly vs all on one project.	Simplify
Less planning money, shift to doing money	Simplify
Make the path of project development clearer and less cumbersome	Simplify
More accessible and funneled for use - for municipalities, for organizations, for nonprofits, etc.	Simplify
More convenience and alacrity.	Simplify
Non-municipal funding comes with too many restrictions and caveats.	Simplify
simplify it.	Simplify
streamline data	Simplify
Streamline information sources, streamline application processes. reduce the regulations (Act 250) that upend so much of what the town would like to do	Simplify
Streamline it. Easy cooperation between entities.	Simplify
There are too many organizations involved in technical assistance, Regional Planning Commissions are always a good place to start	Simplify
It needs to be easier for development consultants to provide assistance to communities. Especially when it comes to getting access to resources such as administrative systems.	Simplify
more private company involvement	Other
Often the assistance programs and mechanisms are built from the perspective of the other entity -- even VLCT struggles to provide assistance that matches a local perspective and needs. I need help navigating actual conditions, not theoretical	Other

ones. The Feds often give non-answers to direct questions about their own rules (this has been a constant of the FEMA experience, for example).	

Municipal Technical Assistance Survey

TA Providers and Funders Focus Group Ideas for Change

Collaboration
- Collaboration within organizations
    - o Organize mandatory meetings within organizations
- Collaboration with other organizations
    - o Create streamlined pipelines for communication
    - o Include regional organizations in the state policy creation process
    - o Enable resource-sharing across municipal lines
- Collaboration with the state
    - o The state might not know what every individual organization does and how to work with them, it should be required
    - o Create a streamlined pipeline for communication
- Collaboration with funders
    - o Create "all funders'" meetings to understand how to refer towns to appropriate programs

Communication
- Teaching
    - o A conference or meeting to teach intermediate levels how to work with TA providers and funders
    - o Legislators need to better understand individual TA provider and funder roles
    - o More guidance for municipalities to identify funding sources to match project needs
- Community
    - o In-person networking can strengthen relationships with communities
    - o Increase physical presence in communities to help identify the needs

Funding
- Lack of Funding = Lack of Capacity
    - o Additional funding would help organizations recruit and retain capable staff
- Concentrate funding from one source
    - o Avoid the need for municipalities to balance multiple, complex funding stacks

Municipal Autonomy
- Strengthen capacity within communities, not for communities
- Avoid one-size-fits-all approaches to address the diverse needs of the many municipalities in Vermont

Administrative Capacity
- Staffing

- Multidisciplinary teams could come in and help with community projects
- Prioritize building capacity in municipalities, rather than for them.
- Support local leadership development
- Match program requirements with the reality of small-town staff capacity
- Consolidate Funding Sources
  - Supply funding for municipal projects through one agency, instead of several
  - Avoid altering program requirements, when possible, to allow small towns to catch up on their requirements

Regionalization
- Big projects
  - Projects like waste and water are so big they are more effectively done with multiple communities
  - REDI has been effective in other states
- Avoid hyper localism
  - Aggregate broader municipal work to the RPCs, leaving the immediate needs to the municipalities
  - RPCs could transform into Regional Councils of Government to enable them to do more work for the municipalities
  - Advocate for a shared-services model among smaller towns

Administrative Burdens
- Communication
  - Create a streamlined funnel of communication, not a web or silo
  - Hire more people with agnostic attitudes toward projects
  - More communication regarding which state agency staff are available to assist with programs
- Redundancy
  - Make grants and reports one document that can be sent to everyone, rather than tailoring it
  - Pay RPCs directly for services, rather than fund towns to pay RPCs for the same services
  - Simplify and align program requirements across state agencies
- Consolidation
  - A central grants management system for all the state agencies
  - A toolkit of solutions available to municipalities to match to their needs

Technical Expertise
- Tactical skills
  - Teams should have mixed skill sets, including project management and labor management
- Small communities
  - A devoted project manager to help municipalities

TA Providers and Funders Survey Ideas for Change

If you could change one thing about the community and economic development technical assistance system in Vermont, what would it be?

A more accessible list of organizations and what they provide
Add well-paid and well-trained/supported staff to the smallest municipalities.
Better coordination between providers so hopefully there are fewer touch points.
celebrate the successes more
Clear structure of support and a central place to find information that helps people understand the roles / responsibilities of the various technical assistance providers and what they can assist with.
Continued resources and coordination through programs like MTAP.
Coordinated approach! Input of a project into one place and a review of the project by all potential partners/funders. Rather than VT projects competing against each other, they should be backed in a coordinated way to ensure they cross the finish line in a timely manner. Then the next round of projects can be supported and then then next.
Develop a central clearing house for all TA and Funding opportunities.
Develop an ombudsman organization that would spearhead the assistance in-step with a municipality
Earlier communication and coordination. More funding for early planning to get projects on the right track.
easy to follow information and resources
Funding
Funding allocated to municipality, proportional to population, that residents could engage with via participatory budgeting to allocate to technical assistance
have more regional support that are more well versed in funding programs available.
I would create more programs like the REDI program to assist with grant applications for planning activities that are not covered by REDI.
I would do a thorough business process redesign of the state government and eliminate unnecessary steps and hand-offs.
It is decentralized, everyone wants to help, and recipients may not have the time to receive all that help.
Lack of capacity, particularly in smaller communities, for follow up on recommended actions
Make it easier to navigate for communities and allow all TA providers to participate equally.
More money to RDCs for technical assistance.
More opportunities to access startup capital and less focus on technical assistance.
More paid staff to help with statewide collaborative efforts
More programmatic coordination between State agencies
Providing fully packaged services to our municipalities, where they are not required to apply for or manage the project. The select board provides input, guidance and decision-making authority, but a team shows up with the service and the administrative capacity to run the program with no additional municipal effort.
recognizing there are parts of the reviews required under state and federal laws that could add time to the schedule and costs to the overall project. Thus, identifying those reviews should have an initial consultation immediately will help keep a better schedule and ensure costs are covered.
Reduced duplicative permitting and reviews by agencies for infrastructure investment.
RPCs are currently funded by the legislature on a project-by-project basis which limits the type of service we can provide and often does not align with actual municipal needs. Looking ahead to FY2027 the RPCs are at risk of losing much of the capacity we've built over the last 5-6 years at a time when the state and municipalities are relying upon us more. As a state we need to develop an RPC funding rubric

that is predictable and reliable, reflects state and local needs, and the necessary sustained RPC capacity to meet those needs.
Run more through the RPCs rather than piecemeal efforts, particularly for projects in towns without town manager/administrators
State programs should use consistent application and reporting forms
Stop reinventing the wheel, and stop thinking that new models and frameworks and tools are what is needed.
The lack of one place to find the information. Vermont has many opportunities but it's a needle in the haystack to find the ones that best suit the program or project you are looking to help. In addition, it would be nice to have staffing and resources to house this service at one location, managed by the State Economic Development Office
To have a streamlined system of providing TA across the board with all organizations/entities.
Vermont needs an intention and strategic focus on rural development with direct leadership from the state. I'd propose a 10-year intentional focus and committed funding to support rural VT communities with a 10 year commitment for funding and staffing to support small town community and economic development. Many other states have successfully created an Office of Rural Partnership at the cabinet level with intentional and dedicated focus on rural communities. Vermont could do the same - with Governor leadership and focus on improving the lives, businesses, and vitality of Vermont rural communities. Imagine - a $100 million, 10 year investment, with a cabinet level Office of Rural Prosperity (with a small team of 5-10) that would guide, collaborate, and leverage state, federal, and philanthropic investments to improve the vitality and economic opportunity for Rural Vermonters.

Technical Assistance Providers and Funders Survey

State Government Focus Groups Detailed Ideas for Change

Collaboration
Regular formal or informal opportunities for collaboration will support system-level thinking at the state level to reduce blind spots and siloes between agencies.
- More collaboration will make projects with municipalities or other agencies go smoother.
- Building relationships and regularly interacting with other agency staff will help to break down siloes across state governments.
- Individuals at the state can find ways to reduce or clarify unclear interagency connections.
- Staff turnover at the State is common, so agencies may need to employ strategies to address connections lost when staff step down or retire.

Communication
Regular and effective communication is vital to the sustainability of Vermont's municipal technical assistance system. Not only will this break down silos across agencies, it will also help to inform individuals about the support that a given agency can provide.
- State agencies should find ways to improve their communication channels between agencies and down to local governments to ensure that information does not get lost across silos.
- Use plain language when possible or inform individuals about unique language used within state agencies.
- Properly communicate the types of services and support that agencies can provide for municipalities.

Technical Expertise
State agencies should prioritize building up technical expertise within their departments to provide accurate, detailed support to municipalities looking for information.
- Provide municipalities with more technical expertise development opportunities.
- Increase availability of technical consultants or send out communications more regularly.
- Utilize technology to make it easier for municipalities to access town-specific data.

Simplify TA Administration
TA providers and administrators should evaluate their programs/processes for redundancy or confusing language. Simplifying applications or reporting requirements will take some burden off municipal staff trying to access funding opportunities.
- Internal systems and processes should be simplified wherever possible.
- Ideally, agencies should use one source for information sharing, rather than several differing sources.
- Agencies may develop guidance for municipal staff to talk to agency staff, funders, and other administrators.
- Streamlining communication will help to free up capacity within state agencies.
- Clarify and train agency staff on the actual meaning and application of vague statutes.
- State TA should be coordinated so as not to inundate municipal staff with various programs and support from multiple state agencies.

Funding
The state must think creatively to use limited funding to get the highest impact.
- It would be beneficial for the Legislature to allow for more flexible programs and funding opportunities.
- When possible, state agency staff should be paid more competitively to reduce turnover.
- Increase direct financial resources for municipalities to increase municipal autonomy and overall impact.

Regional Infrastructure
Increasing regionalized infrastructure and practices across the state will improve regular collaboration and engagement across entities of the TA system.
- Implementing county government is a formal option to regionalize the governance structure in Vermont.
- Developing regional forums to address specific issues affecting small downs will support peer-to-peer learning and make RPCs and the state aware of municipal barriers to accessing technical assistance.
- Find ways to increase direct state government engagement with municipalities.

Administrative Capacity
Administrative capacity impacts municipalities' ability to work effectively with state agencies. Alleviating some of this burden will help to reduce the time it takes to complete projects.
- Increase staffing at the municipal level (both volunteer and professional positions).
- Develop volunteer opportunities and pipelines to increase local government participation.

Municipal Autonomy

State agencies understand that municipalities value their autonomy, though it is still important to increase collaboration and coordination across municipalities and with the state. So, when this work happens, the state should implement strategies to preserve municipal autonomy.

VERTA Steering Committee Ideas for Change in Vermont's Municipal TA System

- SOV collects, organizes, aggregates and maintains data on municipalities that both apply for and receive public funding (grants, tax credits, incentives, etc.) and makes it available to TA providers (doesn't have to be public). If providers know what the pipeline is and who is in it, then we can help prioritize and target assistance in the right places at the right moments to move local initiatives along more quickly.
- There are two things that kill a promising project - time and money. TA providers can help advance timelines if funders can become better at targeting larger amounts of funds (vs. sprinkling small grants across many communities). We all spend A LOT of time chasing around the same information. **Give it to us in one place that we can all access.**
- TA providers are funded annually by SOV to provide services in their specific area of expertise(similar to the RPC model). This would ensure strength, sustainability, quality and predictability to a currently vulnerable, scattered, informal network that often duplicates efforts and is confusing for municipalities to navigate. It would help to organize providers and give everyone a clear understanding of who is doing what so that the appropriate assistance can be plugged in at the right place by the right entity.
- TA providers have a centralized way to share information by municipality.
- SOV uses the organized, funded TA provider network to refer their applicants and grantees to when they need assistance.
- Technical Assistance Navigators and more capacity/Town Administrators at the local level.
- Create a state-level Office of Rural Prosperity with regional boots on the ground.
- Have a single, state-wide, non-profit community and community economic development entity that is field based, operated independently of state or federal political disruption and that provides TA and funding soup to nuts (all aspects of the project cycle).
- Creating more of a "one stop shopping" environment where there is a clear intake path, a liaison to guide the community to the correct programs at the correct time, and staff available to work with a community throughout their project and navigate funding stack development, project management, and reporting/close out. Projects either don't happen or stretch on and become increasingly complex when as a system I think we could approach these projects with an agency lens and move them through to completion more efficiently.
- Put all TA folks on the same agenda (collective impact model) and create a coordinated platform to pass communities from one level of expertise to another. Create a system similar to VHCB's FFVP program, in which cohorts of TA providers are brought together regularly to learn about each other and learn new things. Engage with funders to support this structure
- Connected and well-resourced TA providers who have time and staff to build relationships and capacity/skills for community leaders/members.
- Utilize a direct technical service model similar to that of the RIVERS project when possible, especially in the areas of design (including landscape architecture/architecture) and engineering. I would also have a landscape architect on staff at every RPC so we can provide more in-house conceptual design and physical master planning support for our towns.

Vermont Technical Assistance Ecosystem Map

The VERTA research team engaged the steering committee, core team and independent research to identify a list of municipal technical assistance entities by typology. The network map below illustrates the structure of Vermont's municipal technical assistance (TA) ecosystem, based on the interconnected relationships among state agencies, regional organizations, nonprofits, academic partners, funders, and municipal-facing technical service providers. Each node represents an organization, and the lines represent known partnerships, funding flows, programmatic relationships, or functional collaborations identified through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and document review. The map highlights how Vermont's TA system operates as a **dense, interdependent network rather than a linear service pathway**.

Several patterns emerge from the visualization:
1. The ecosystem is highly interconnected but not coordinated.
The map shows many relationships across organizations, reflecting the strong culture of collaboration in Vermont. However, the density of lines also demonstrates the **complexity municipalities must navigate** when seeking assistance. Instead of a single entry point, towns interact with dozens of organizations depending on the project type, funding source, or regulatory requirement.
2. State agencies and regional organizations serve as central hubs.
Certain nodes—particularly state agencies and Regional Planning Commissions—occupy central positions, indicating their pivotal role in supporting municipalities and coordinating resources. Their centrality reflects both their statutory responsibilities and the degree to which other organizations rely on them for guidance, permitting, funding, and project development.
3. The system relies heavily on relational, not structural, connectivity.
While connections exist across the ecosystem, they are not supported by shared tools, aligned processes, or common communication systems. Instead, the network functions through **individual relationships, informal coordination, and ad-hoc linkages**, which reinforces the uneven experiences that municipalities report. This aligns with the study's findings that system performance depends heavily on who a town knows rather than on a standardized, predictable structure.
4. Municipalities appear at the center of the network, but their centrality reflects burden rather than coordinated support.
In the visualization, municipalities sit at the center of the map, connected to a wide range of state agencies, regional partners, and nonprofit organizations. This central position highlights the extent to which towns must interact with—and often stitch together—multiple sources of assistance to complete even routine projects. Rather than indicating that municipalities are well-supported, their centrality demonstrates that **the system places the coordination load on local governments themselves**, requiring them to navigate numerous programs, requirements, and relationships without a unified entry point or consistent guidance. The map makes visible a key finding of the VERTA project: **municipalities are structurally central, but not functionally supported**.
5. Clusters reflect functional specialization, not coordinated service pathways.
Distinct groupings of nodes appear around separate functions—economic development, permitting, natural resources, transportation, housing, and community development—but these clusters are not tightly integrated. Municipalities working on cross-cutting issues (e.g., housing development requiring environmental permits, infrastructure financing, and community planning) must weave together relationships across multiple clusters themselves, increasing administrative burden.
6. Missing connections matter as much as the ones that exist.
Gaps in the network—visible as unconnected or lightly connected nodes—reflect areas where organizations operate in isolation or where municipalities lack clarity about how to access services.

These structural gaps mirror stakeholder reports of fragmented processes, inconsistent communication, and uncertainty about where to begin when seeking support.

Interpretation for Policy and System Design

This visualization reinforces the report's central conclusion: **Vermont has a rich technical assistance ecosystem, but it lacks a coherent, coordinated structure that makes it easy for municipalities to access the support they need.** The complexity shown here is not inherently negative—Vermont's collaborative culture is an asset—but without shared systems, standardized processes, or clear entry points, the burden of navigating the network falls disproportionately on local officials.
In particular:

- Municipal capacity limitations compound the challenge of engaging with such a complex system.
- State agency fragmentation creates multiple, parallel points of interaction rather than streamlined pathways.
- Regional and nonprofit partners play a crucial bridging role but cannot fully compensate for statewide system gaps.
- A more coherent structure—such as a shared municipal intake system, coordinated cross-agency teams, or regionalized service models—would help convert connection density into **effective, accessible, and equitable support**.

This map provides a visual summary of why strategic coordination, system alignment, and investment in municipal capacity are essential to achieving the aims of Act 181 and strengthening technical assistance statewide.
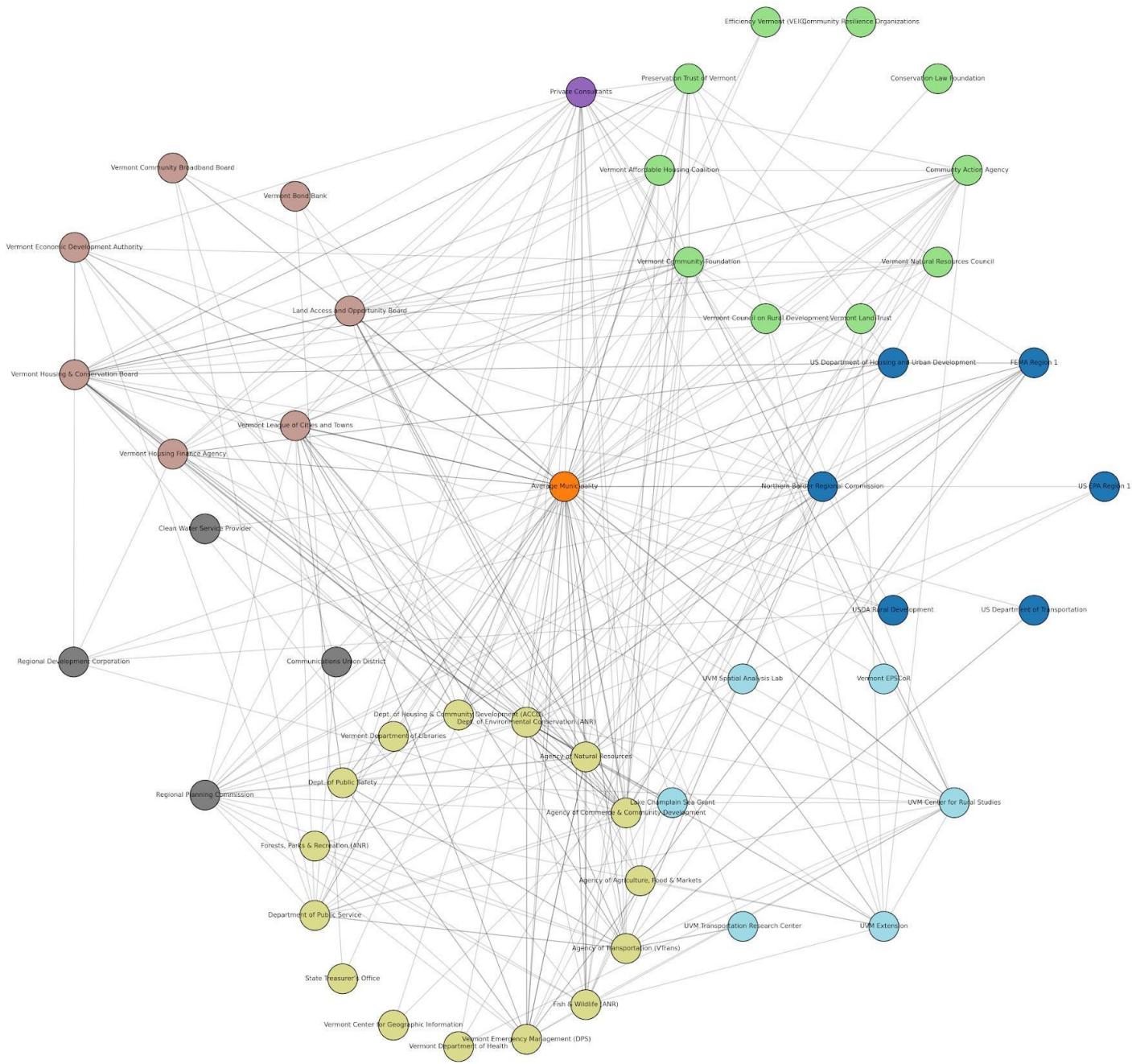
Legislative Perspectives on Municipal Capacity and State Coordination

To complement the perspectives of municipal officials, state agency staff, and technical assistance providers, the VERTA project included interviews with members of the Vermont Legislature to understand how state-level policymakers view municipal capacity, permitting processes, and statewide coordination. These insights reinforce the project's central findings and highlight policy considerations relevant to both Act 181 and the broader TA system assessment.

Legislators emphasized the **significant capacity challenges** facing municipalities, particularly smaller towns that rely heavily on a limited pool of volunteers and long-serving local officials. One legislator

noted that many communities "lack the people to serve," resulting in volunteers or part-time staff performing duties that would normally fall to full-time professionals. They described situations where "too many tasks are asked of staff and not enough hours," and where local officials struggle to navigate state systems, find the right contacts, or manage the volume of communication required to keep up with programs and mandates.

Both interviews highlighted concerns around **the complexity and fragmentation of permitting and regulatory processes**. One legislator characterized the system as burdensome and inconsistent, describing how multiple permit requirements, unclear triggers, overlapping processes, and varying fees can overwhelm communities. They raised concerns about "too many permits," "too much required," and the lack of coordination across regulatory entities. This legislator noted that community members often perceive "the left hand and right-hand [as] not knowing what is happening," and questioned why expert reports commissioned by applicants cannot be more directly relied upon in state decision-making . Another legislator pointed to uncertainty created by changing maps and conservation designations, such as Tier 3 land classifications, which make it difficult for municipalities and landowners to plan for development or conservation.

Legislators also expressed concern about **equity and variation in municipal capacity across the state**. One interviewee questioned how the state determines relative need among towns and noted the perception that some communities with greater wealth or capacity receive more assistance. They suggested the value of a consistent and trusted "municipal capacity index" to inform state decisions and resource allocation.

Across interviews, policymakers stressed the need for **greater coordination, clarity, and accessibility in state systems**. Suggestions included a "one-stop shop" for information, a unified grant application portal, reduced email burden on local officials, and stronger regional approaches such as shared planners, shared grant writers, and neutral facilitation for regional initiatives such as emergency services. Legislators emphasized that "regionalization is a good thing" when implemented thoughtfully and supported appropriately.

One legislator urged state agencies to be more proactive and transparent about how processes should work, distinguishing between improvements achievable administratively and those requiring statutory change. They noted that agencies themselves often need additional staffing and clearer mandates to meet expectations effectively, citing the example that "[Agency A] needs X number of staff" to manage its workload.

Overall, these legislative perspectives reinforce major themes across the VERTA project:
- Municipal capacity constraints are widespread and structurally rooted.
- The regulatory system is perceived as fragmented, burdensome, and difficult for towns to navigate.
- State agencies need improved coordination, communication tools, and staffing stability to better support municipalities.
- Regional collaboration and shared staffing models hold significant promise for improving local governance.
- Both legislative and administrative actions will be necessary to meaningfully strengthen Vermont's municipal technical assistance system.

The Reimaging Rural Capacity Summit

This one-day event took place November 13, 2025. High-level research findings were presented and participants worked through a series of exercises to identify their "To Do" lists, their "Wish Lists" and to develop implementable ideas based on the research findings "Ideas for Change".
Approximately **125 participants** representing municipalities, for-profit TA providers, non-profit TA organization representatives and state and federal TA agency representatives took part in the summit. These were generated through multiple outreach methods including through the RPC networks, the Steering Committee members' listservs, newsletters and personal invitations and social media. A press release about the event was distributed to local media.
The summit was recorded by ORCA media with a link to watch [available here](#).

Summit Participant-Generated Hackathon Ideas

Methodology

The research team asked three simple and foundational questions across all the qualitative research. These were: What's working in the system? / What are its strengths? What are barriers or challenges faced by municipalities and/or others in the system and during TA processes?; and if you could change one thing to make the TA system better, what would it be? For the purposes of the summit, the research team worked closely with the summit event planner to merge the primary findings from this latter research question into a series of hackathon table ideas. These ideas for changes to the system were presented to the audience from the podium with presentation slides that included each theme and accompanying examples. Information sheets were also made available at the working tables. The ideas were subject to a group implementation exercise utilizing the following poster to guide their process for about an hour. Table working groups were self-selected.

Hackathon idea implementation poster

Summary

- **Portals, Hubs or Clearing Houses.** Four ideas, two of which are designed to increase municipal capacity and two of which are designed to reduce TA process burdens for municipalities.
    - **VT Municipal Combine** access to service, staff and equipment sharing opportunities.
    - **Maple Hollow Community Café** volunteer options by level of engagement and more.
    - **One Stop Grant Shop** funding opportunities at each agency and a portal like "Grants.Gov".
    - **Vermont Funding Hub** database for financing, TA services, shared resources, etc.
- **Toolkits or Guides.** Three ideas, two of which guide municipalities through projects and one guides shared services development.
    - **Choose Your (fill in the blank) Adventure** best practices, templates, guides, toolkits and more, a place to house these materials and outreach and training.
    - **One Stop Shop for TA** a flow chart that guides municipalities through project processes.
    - **Vermont Shared Services Toolkit** helps municipalities explore what shared services might look like and provides assistance and funding for implementation.
- **New Infrastructure.** Six ideas, two of which are entities to bring state government together, one entity brings TA providers together, another entity brings all Vermont's TA system together, one is an event to bring the TA system together in person, and one builds the TA workforce.
    - **Agency of Municipal Services** a state government internal entity bringing agencies together around municipal service.
    - **Vermont Office of Prosperity, Efficiency and Navigation (OPEN)** a state government program & portal with lists of TA contractors and funding sources, and with regional navigators to assist municipalities.
    - **Vermont Technical Assistance Providers Hub (TAP Hub)** a program or entity that hosts a portal directory of TA providers with associated listserv, forums, resources and events.

- o **Small Towns, Big Voices** a collaborative of municipal, regional, state agency, administration and legislative representatives providing infrastructure for ongoing implementation of new/VERTA ideas.
  - o **Vermont Community Capacity Fair** a TA fair held annually supporting interactive learning, resource connections, problem identification and solution ideation.
  - o **Rural Capacity Fellowship** a workforce development network framework that utilizes peer-to-peer, mentorship and higher education engagement.
- ● **Conceptual and Study.** Two ideas.
  - o **Planning for the People** a study leading to a pilot reimagining planning and the Town Plan as grassroots processes addressing community need through direct engagement.
  - o **Resilient Funding Frameworks** utilizes Vermonters' shared visions to tell stories that build cohesion around funding and investment in our communities.

Portals, Hubs or Clearing Houses

Vermont Municipal Combine- "Sharing Locally, Thriving Together"
- ● A clearinghouse/portal where municipalities go to access service, staff and equipment sharing opportunities.
  - o Will address wages and benefits challenges.
  - o Will help towns share needs with other towns.
  - o Key Partners- VLCT as a host and the Legislature to incentivize.
  - o Implementation will include a 3-year install process with under $1 million.
  - o Group- Municipal Staff Retention and Training
  - o VERTA Bucks- $38,000
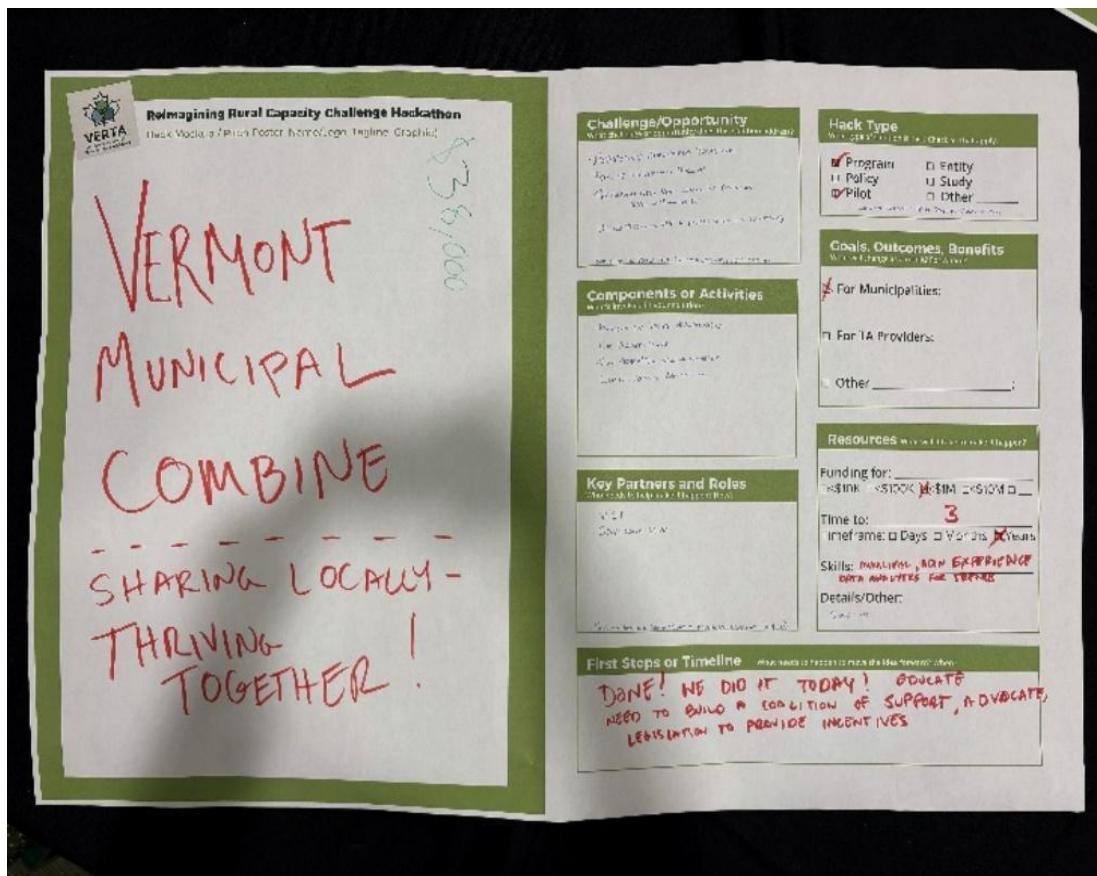
Maple Hollow Community Café- "A menu of municipal volunteer opportunities"
- A menu of volunteer options by level of engagement and other characteristics (appetizers, entrees, desserts and a kids menu). Volunteer match-making.
  - o Every town creates a menu and gets the information to their community.
  - o Potential volunteers can readily view options and match their interests, skills and engagement level to those.
- Implementation is low cost and infrastructure.
- Key partners include outreach venues like schools, libraries, senior centers, parks schools, etc.
- Group- Volunteer and Leadership Pipeline
- VERTA Bucks- $80,000
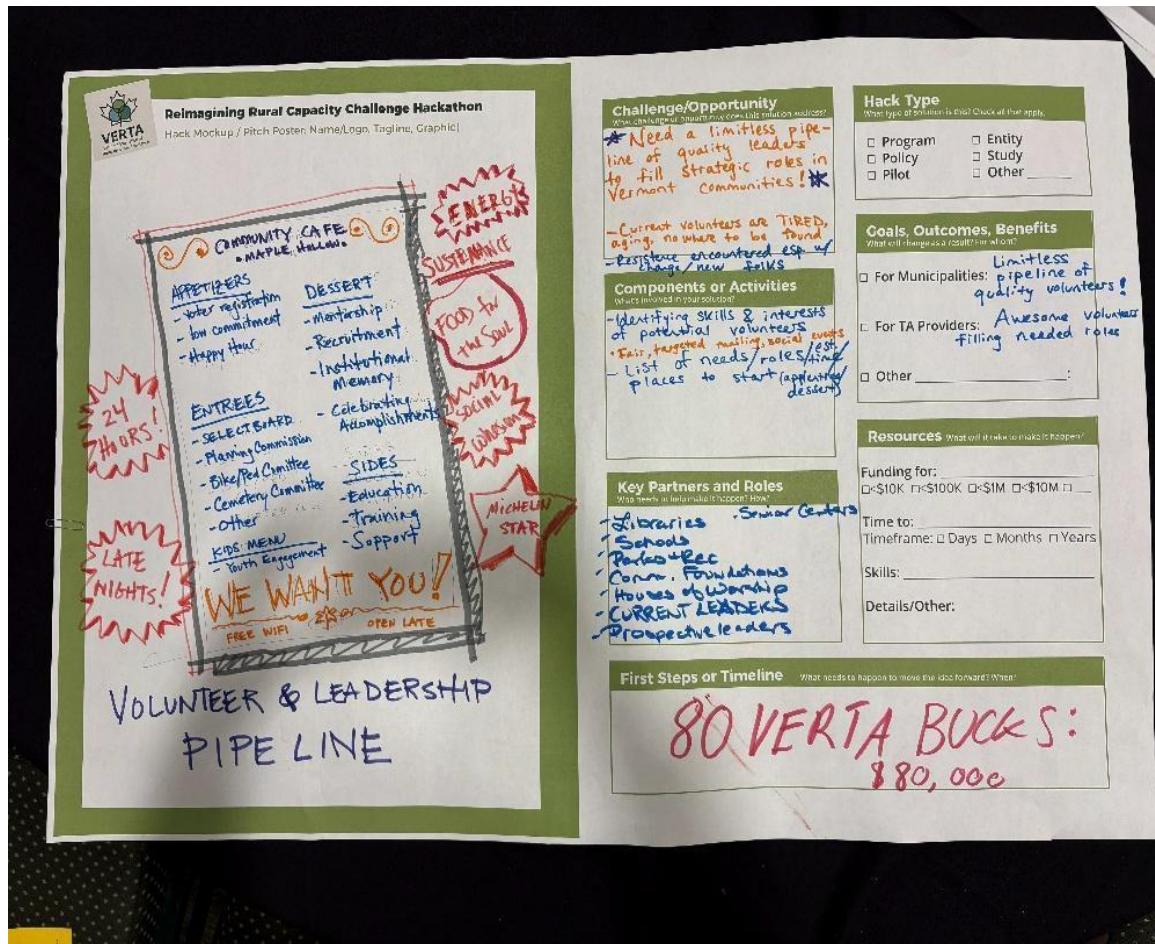
One Stop Grant Shop- "All your funding resources in one place!"
- Development of grant funding landing pages for each agency and a single VT grants portal like "Grants.Gov".
  - o Each agency lists all grant opportunities on their website with grant name, amount available, eligibility requirements and deadlines.
  - o A portal with fillable forms that you log into and information auto-populates.
  - o Sends applications to different agencies that you would like to apply to.
  - o Implementation will be ongoing and will require less than $1 million. Interagency communication and planning with stakeholders to develop and implement.
  - o Key partners include state agency IT, program, data and regulatory staff, end-users.
  - o Group-
  - o VERTA Bucks- $30,000
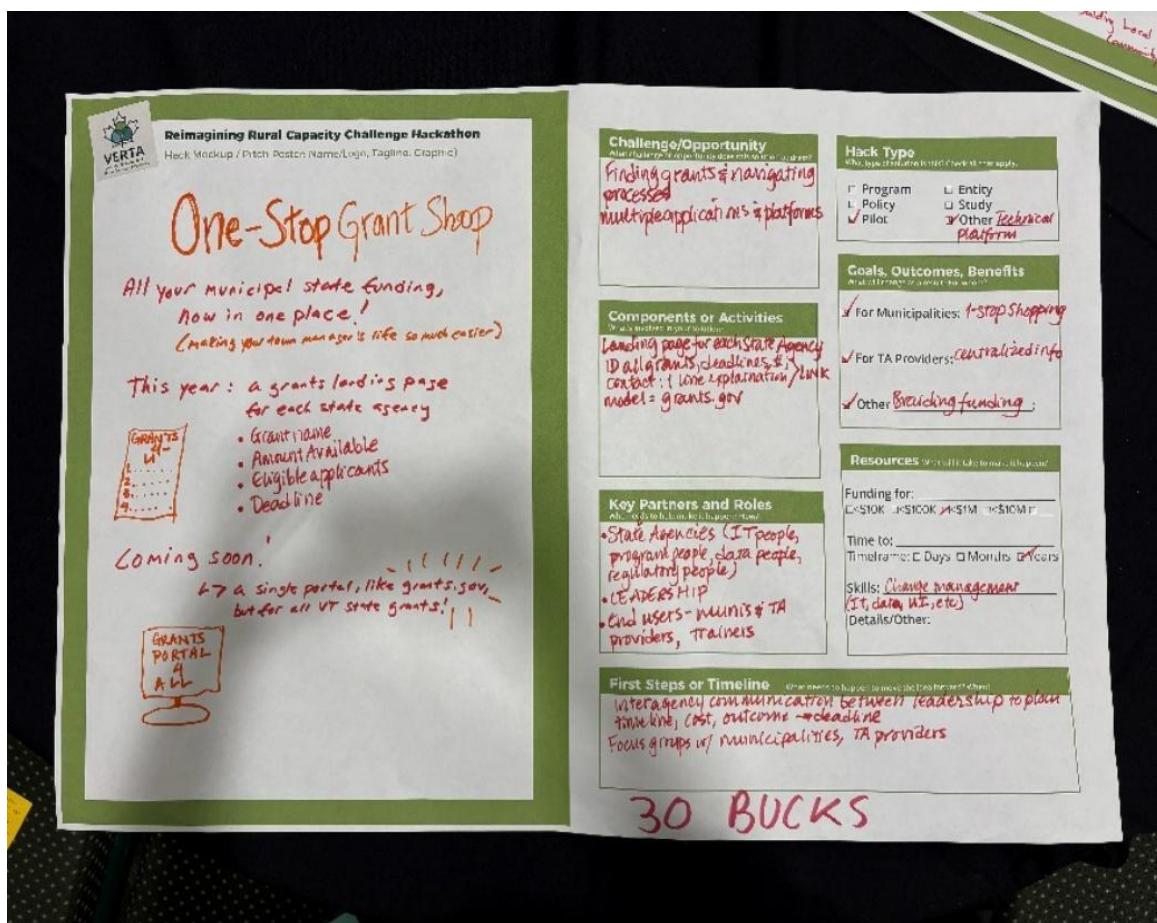
Vermont Funding Hub- "Your one stop source for locating funding, TA services and other assistance"
● An online platform/portal that is a database of resources with filtered searches for financing, TA services, shared resources, etc.
  ○ A one stop shop style resource.
  ○ Can be a platform for community of practice.
  ○ Will improve and equalize access to funding and TA services and reduce info seeking burdens.
  ○ Will improve connections between TA clients and providers.
  ○ Implementation will take up to a year to set up with not more than $1 million for the platform and staffing. Make the case that there are benefits (including financial) to centralization of information.
  ○ Group-
  ○ VERTA Bucks- $36,000
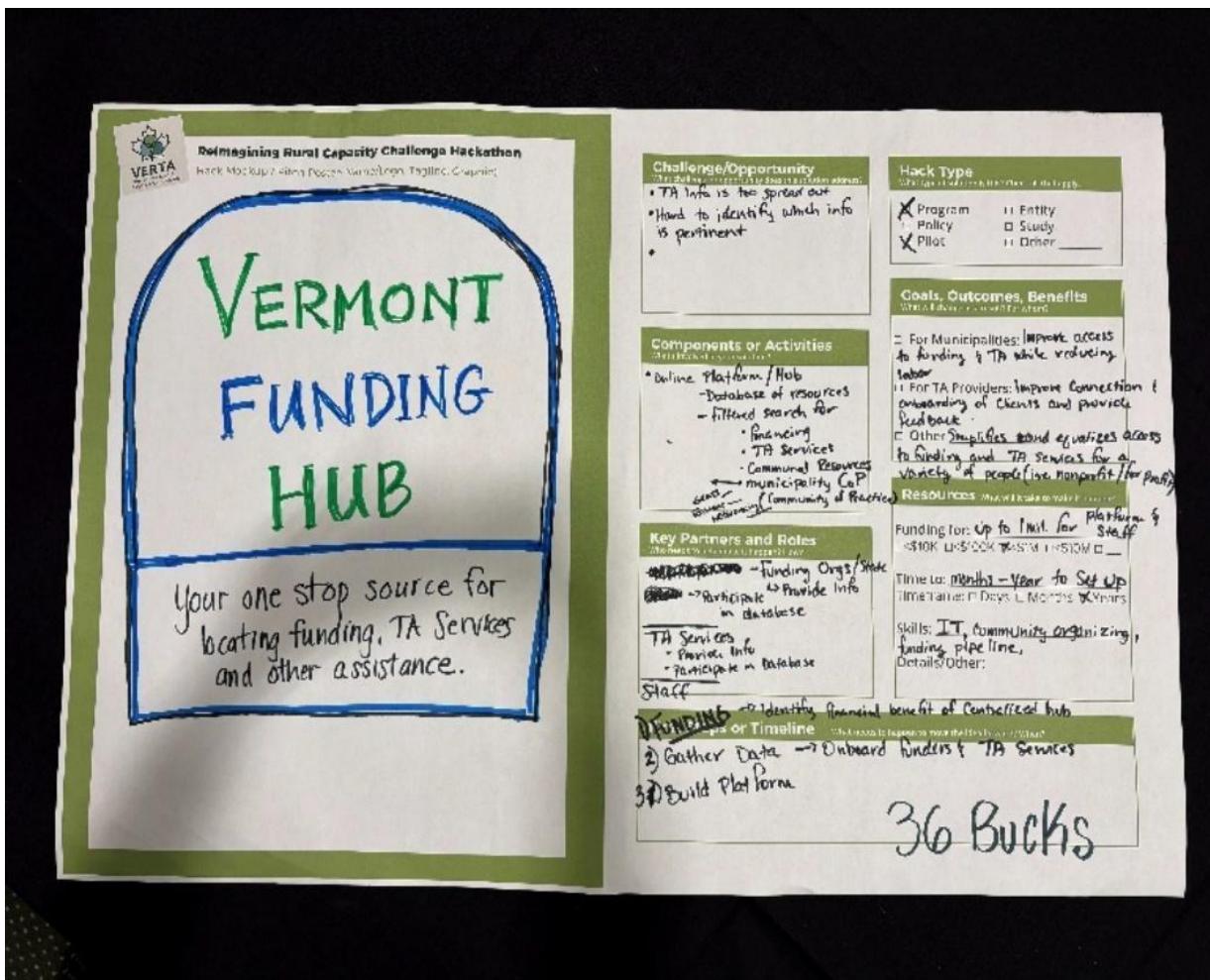
Toolkits or Guides

Choose your (fill in the blank) Adventure- "Best practices, templates, guides and toolkits"
- Development of best practices, templates, guides, toolkits and more and infrastructure to house these materials, do outreach and training.
    - Implementation will require less than $100,000
    - Key partners include subject matter experts, educators, outreach professionals and more.
    - Group- Program Guides and Admin Tools
    - VERTA Bucks- $10,000
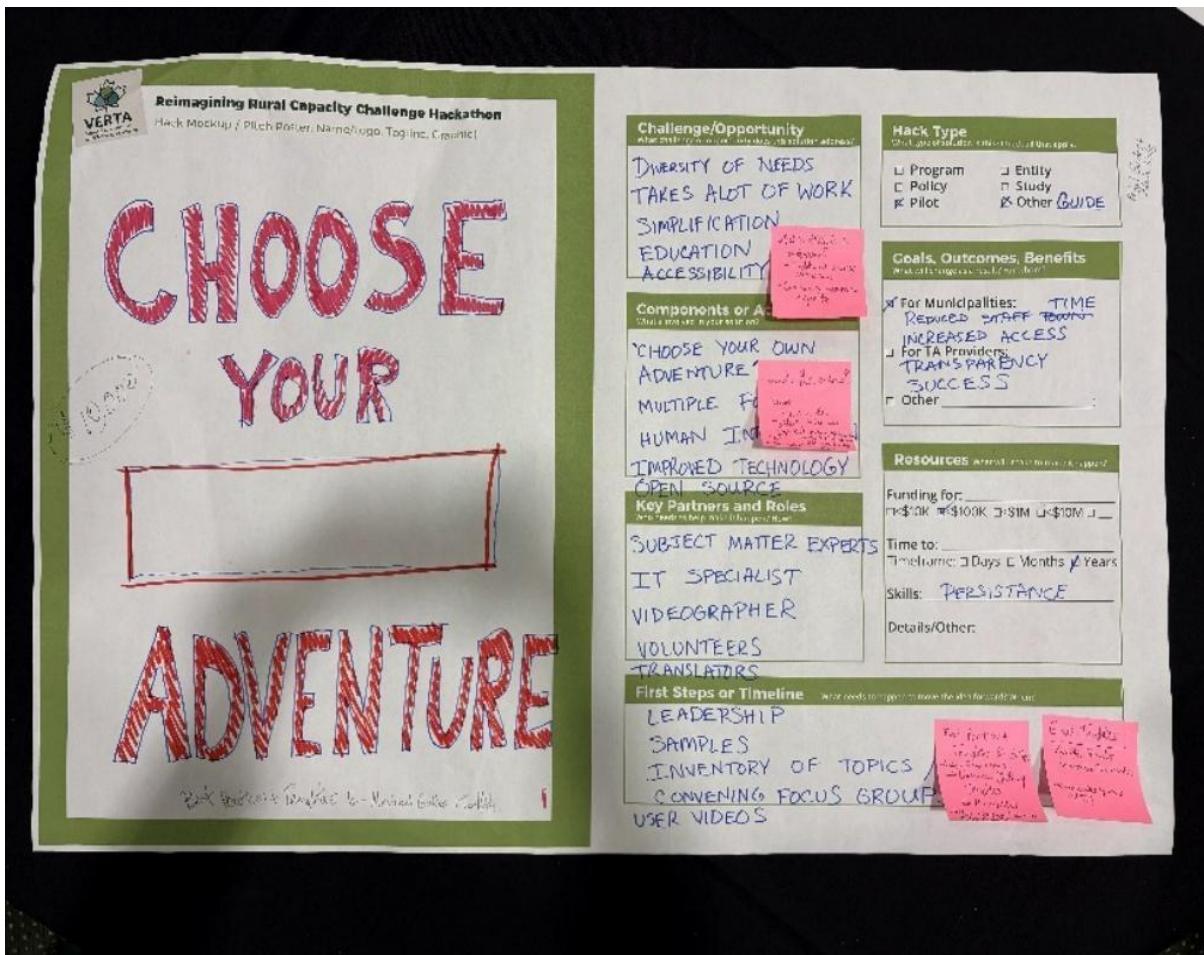
One Stop Shop for TA-
- A TA flow chart type process that guides municipalities through the project process from beginning to end.
- Will reduce municipal administrative burden through streamlined processes and increased assistance from regional planning and/or state government.
- Implementation will be over 2 years and for less than $100,000
- Key partners are Regional Planning commissions, Municipalities and State Government.
- Group-
- VERTA Bucks- $6,000
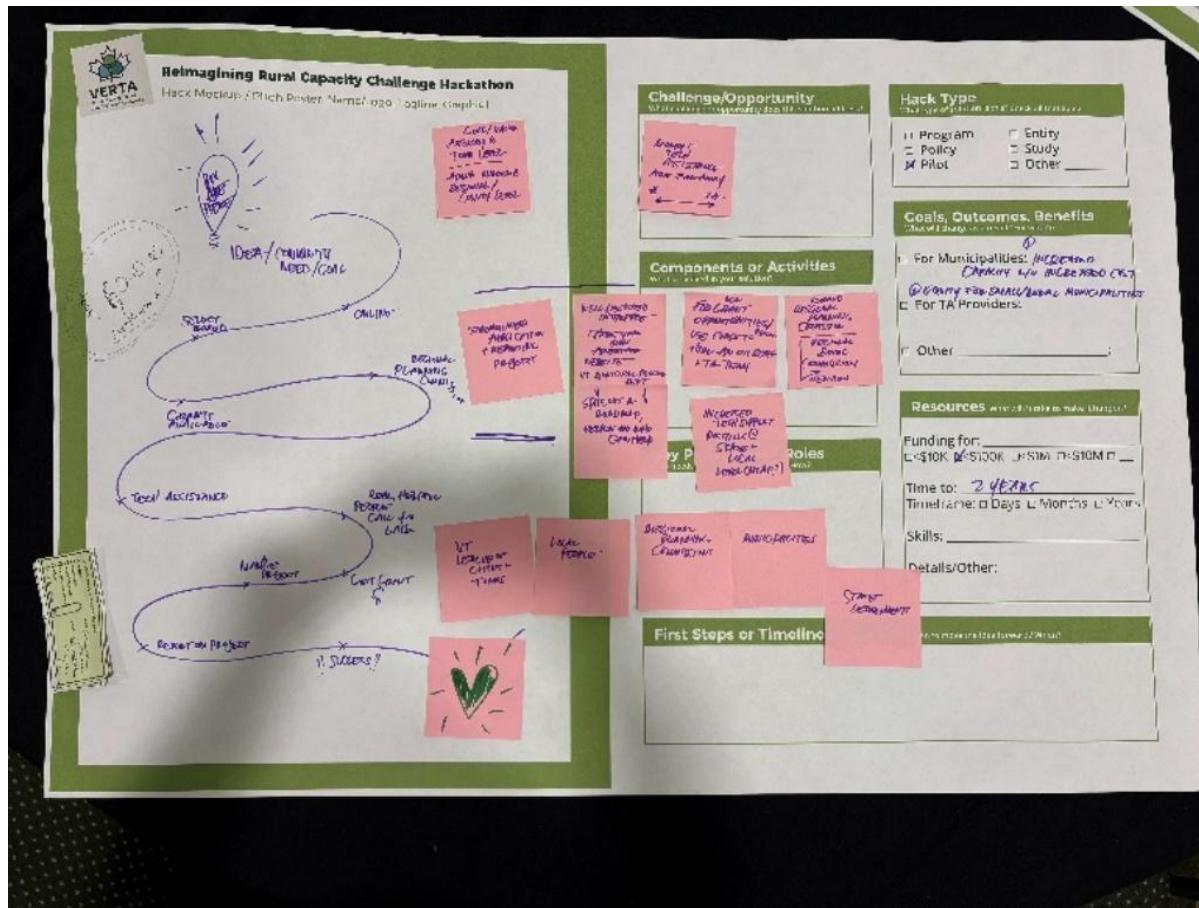
Vermont shared Services Toolkit- "Fix it Together"
- Development of toolkits that help municipalities explore what shared services might look like and provide assistance and funding for implementation when they are ready to initiate.
  - Will include mini grants to facilitate development of shared resources agreements and processes.
  - Will include coordinator staff to guide sharing implementation.
  - Implementation will require $300,000 over 3 years.
  - Key partners include VLCT, UVM, Leahy Inst., RPCs and the legislature.
  - Group- Shared Municipal Services & Resources
  - VERTA Bucks- $29,000
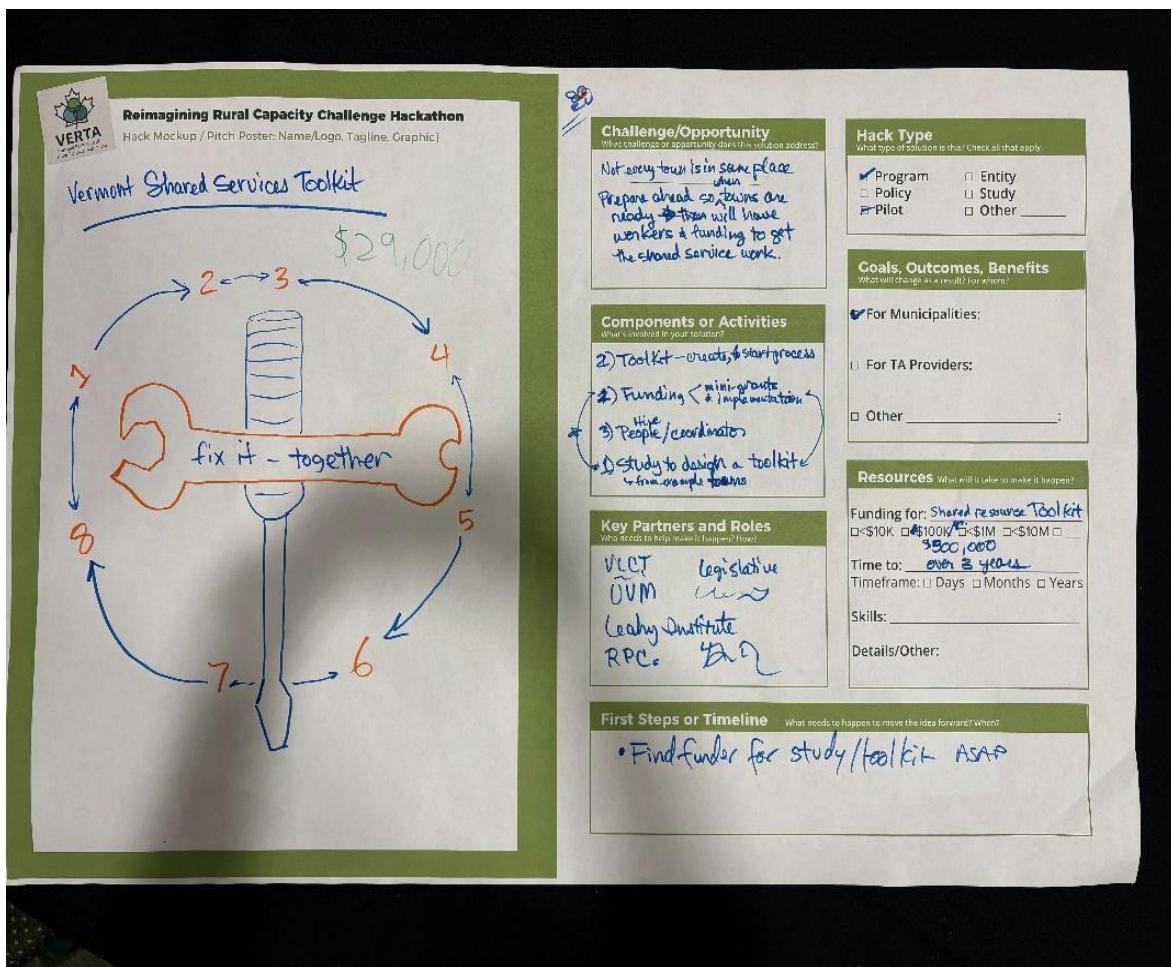
New Infrastructure

Agency of Municipal Services- "Collaboration for a better Vermont"
- Development of a new Agency of Municipal Services that will bring together State agencies, departments and programs around shared municipal engagement and service provision.
  - o Regional navigators will help municipalities and providers access State government agencies, departments, programs and services and assist through project implementation.
  - o Will provide a space for flexible and creative problem-solving.
  - o Will build trust between municipalities, TA providers and State government.
  - o Will push an abundance mindset and entrepreneurial approaches to problem-solving.
  - o Will provide leadership consistency.
  - o Implementation can be a pilot that begins with a proposal, achieves leadership buy-in and money and hires staff to do the work.
  - o Group- State Agency Collaboration
  - o VERTA Bucks- $17,000
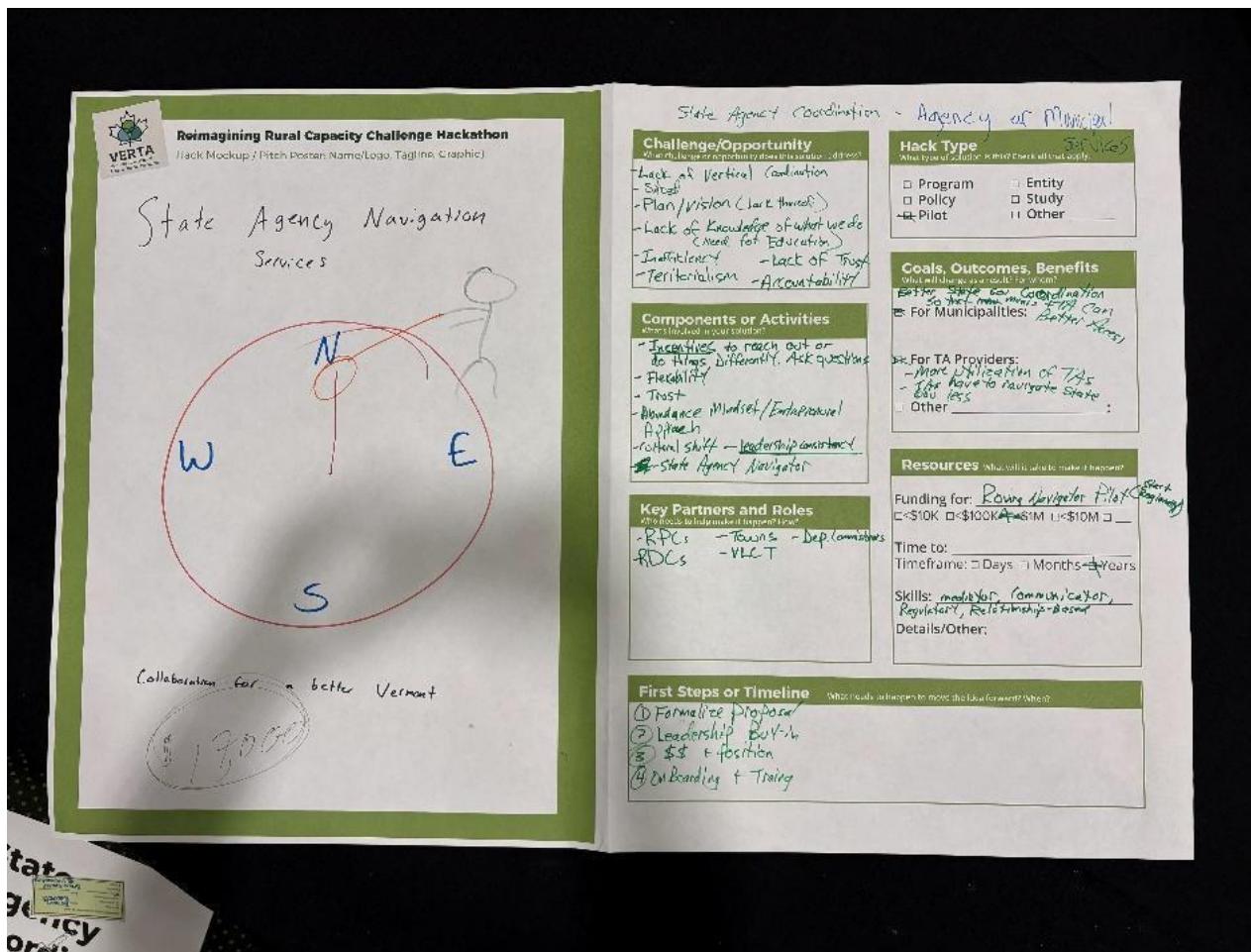
Vermont Office of Prosperity, Efficiency and Navigation (OPEN)- "Opening Doors to Community Vitality"

- A State of Vermont program & portal with lists of TA contractors and funding sources and including regional navigators to assist municipalities.
  - Will make access to TA providers and funding opportunities more efficient and equitable.
  - Enables tracking to improve the system.
  - Key Partners- Hosted by the SoV. TA provider orgs. and private contractors.
  - Implementation- 2 years to design and build with an advisory committee, fundraising, staffing and outreach.
  - Group- TA Navigation/Intake
  - Cost- Less than $10 million
  - VERTA Bucks- $34,000
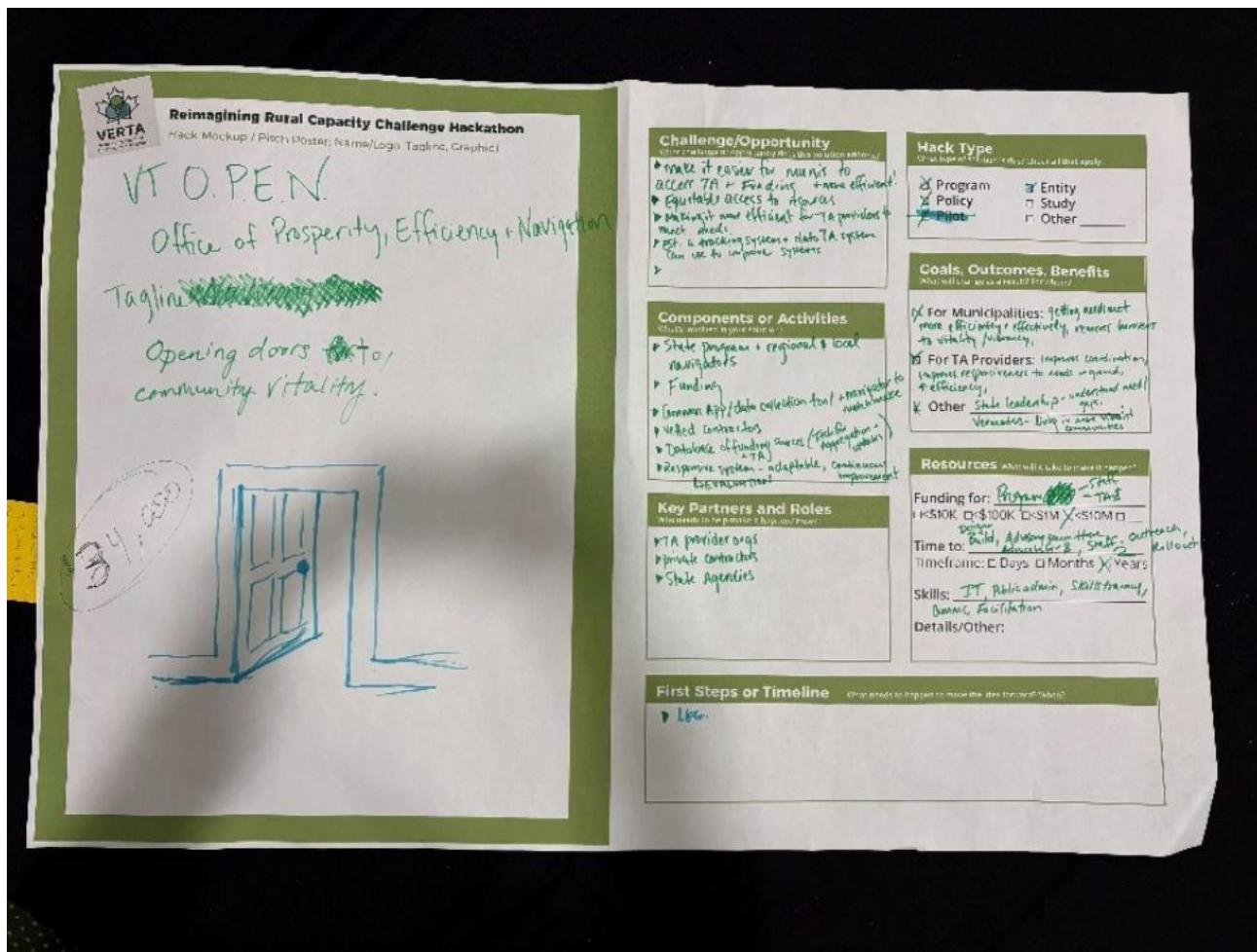
Vermont Technical Assistance Providers Hub (TAP Hub)- "Connect and Grow"
- A program or entity that hosts a searchable portal directory of TA providers and their attributes with an associated listserv, forums and discussion boards, resources and events.
  - Will assist municipalities and TA providers to find each other and coordinate.
  - Implementation will take 2 years and less than $100,000 to form a planning group, design, build and do outreach.
  - Key partners include NP and FP TA providers and orgs.
  - Group-
  - VERTA Bucks- $22,000
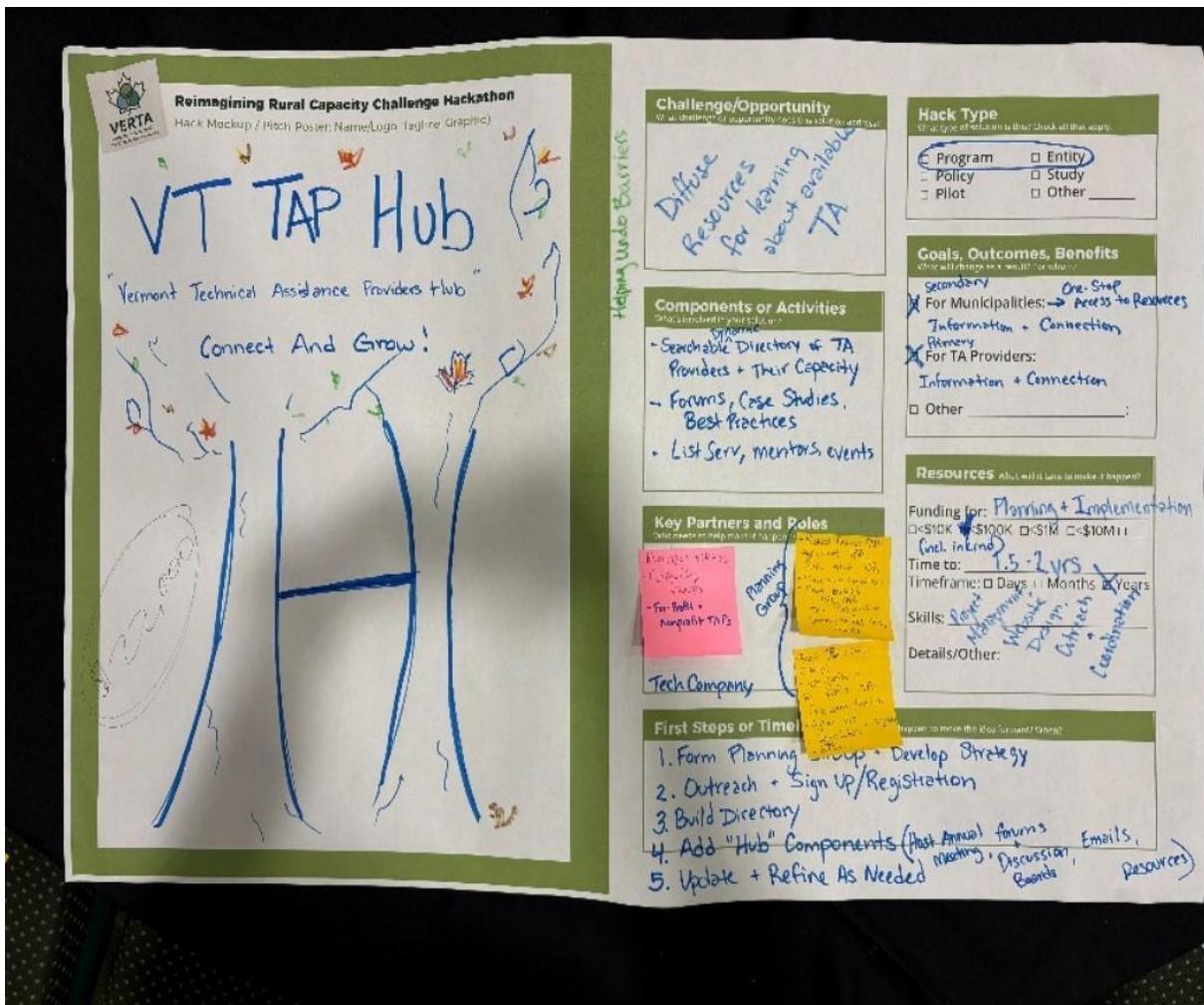
Small Towns, Big Voices- "Creating a model for regional efficiency and effectiveness"
- A collaborative of municipal, regional, state agency, administration and legislative representatives that provides the infrastructure for ongoing implementation of new/VERTA ideas.
  - Can conduct studies around identified themes like regional governance options, creative revenue generation, RPC empowerment and municipal incentivization.
  - Can assist with implementation of ideas like shared services and equipment, etc.
  - Provides a forum for municipal empowerment and voice.
  - Can hold regional convenings.
  - Key partners include VLCT to coordinate.
  - Implementation will be ongoing.
  - Group-
  - VERTA Bucks- $58,000
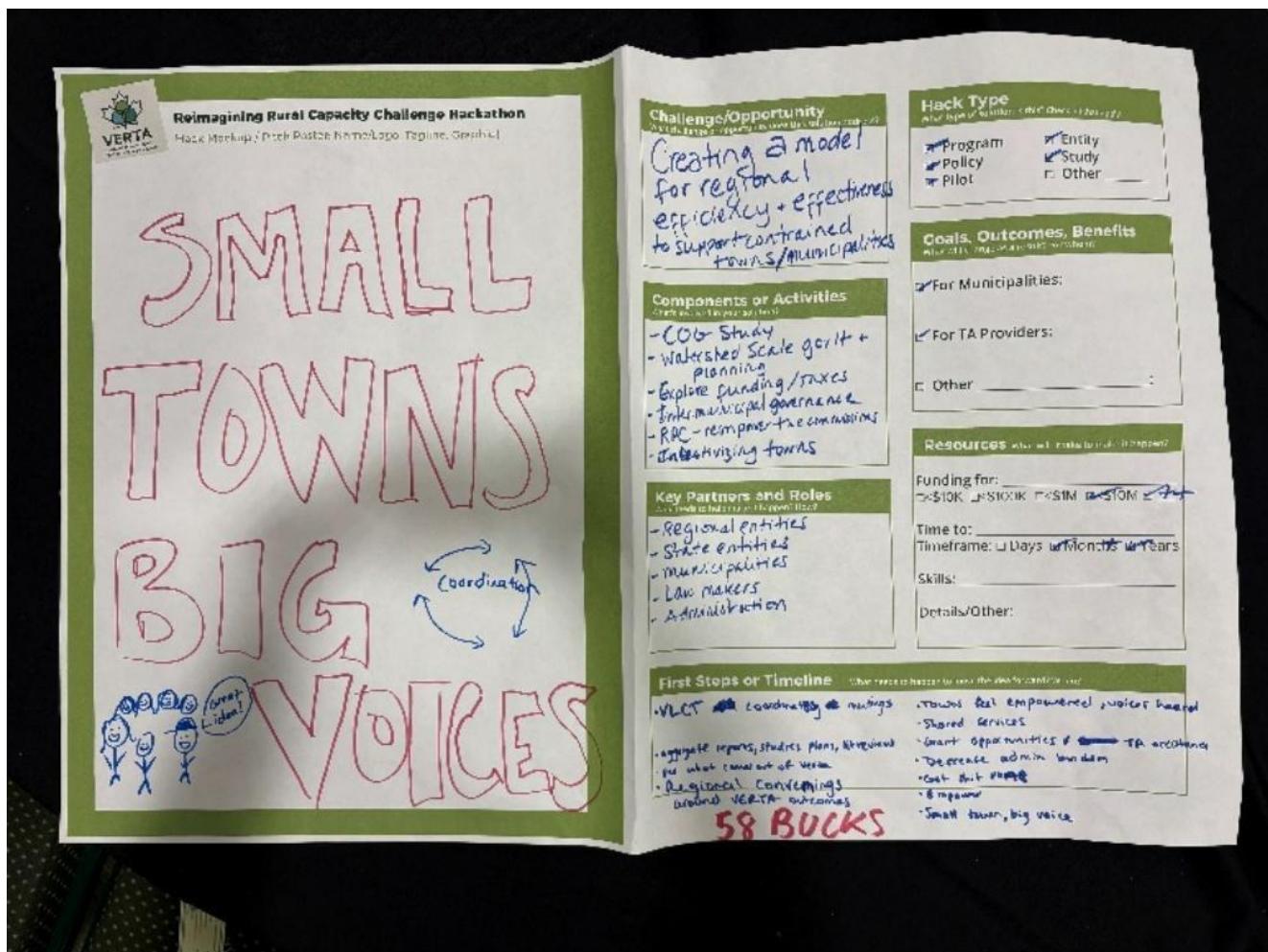
Vermont Community Capacity Fair- "Find your Technical Assistance fairy. There may be goats!"
- A (two day) technical assistance fair held annually that supports interactive learning, resource connections, problem identification and solution ideation.
    o Will enable peer groups to share knowledge, learnings, etc.
    o Will connect resource seekers with resource providers.
    o Will enable cross connection between TA system sectors.
    o Provides continuity and grassroots community development function.
    o Will enable needs identification and workshopping in the moment.
    o Themed meetings to bring people together around subjects.
    o Implementation- $100,000 per year to hold the event and provide full expense reimbursement to TA providers, municipalities, etc.
    o Key partners include Leahy Inst., UVM Extension, VLCT, VCRD, etc.
    o Group-
    o VERTA Bucks- $31,000
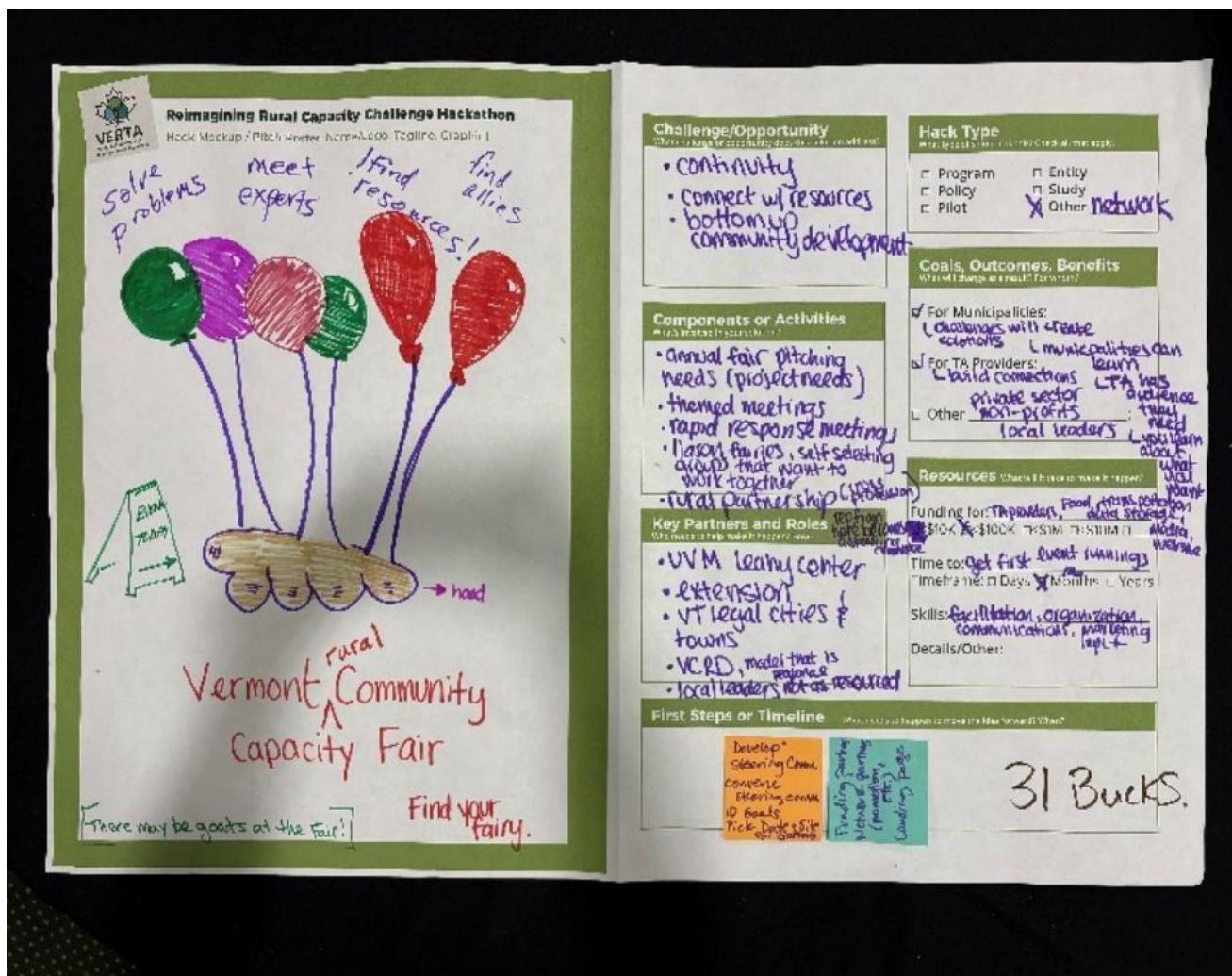
Rural Capacity Fellowship- "Building local leaders for community success"
- A network that will cultivate the future TA workforce through deliberate and specific educational processes using peer-to-peer, mentorship and higher education WF development models.
  - o Will provide fellowships for learners and teachers.
  - o Will develop alumni, peer-to-peer networks.
  - o Will communicate about professional opportunities.
  - o Key partners include higher education entities.
  - o Implementation will require program coordinators and stipends for all learners and teachers.
  - o Group- Provider Staffing Retention and Training.
  - o VERTA Bucks- $13,000
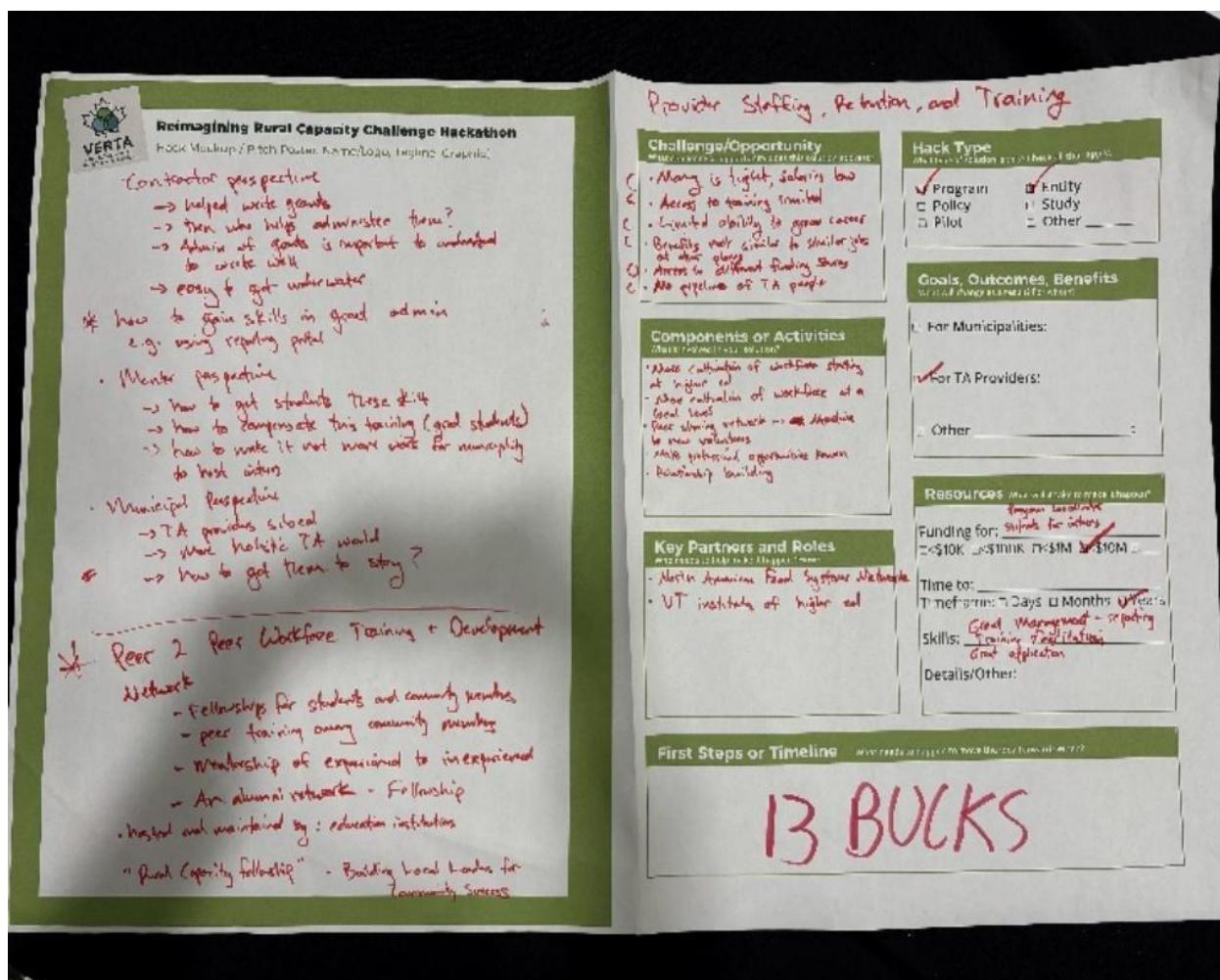
Conceptual and Study

Planning for the People- "A study to find ways to align plans to people and not people to plans."
- A study that leads to a pilot. It seeks to reimagine planning and the Town Plan as grassroots processes and documents that address community needs identified through community engagement at the local level.
  - o Will enable community-based discovery through local facilitated meetings and engagement.
  - o Will align community planning processes to how people work and think.
  - o Will increase community trust in local government.
  - o Will bring grassroots input to legislative action.
  - o Implementation- cost less than $100,000 to do the study.
  - o Key partners include municipal leadership, private sector, staff, advocates, funders and state government.
  - o Group-
  - o VERTA Bucks- $43,000
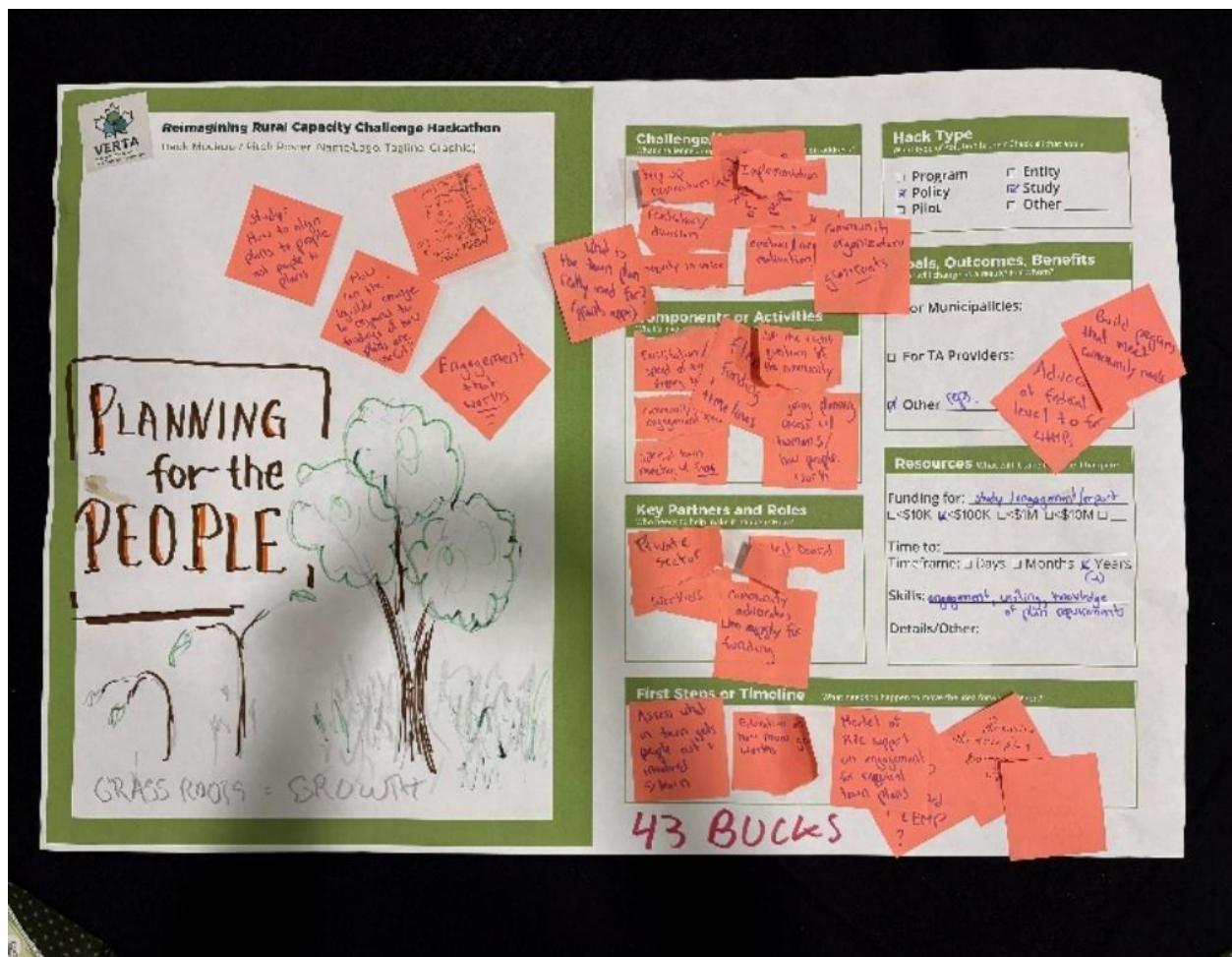
Resilient Funding Frameworks- "Capitalizing on our shared vision of a thriving Vermont"
- Utilize Vermonters' shared visions to tell stories that build cohesion around funding and investment in our communities.
    - Develop advocacy campaigns around our shared visions that help us to engage with philanthropy in processes that address equity, land use, inefficiencies, etc.
    - Key partners include youth, entrepreneurs, leadership, communities, NPs and more.
    - Implementation- This is a philosophy to bring us forward together.
    - Group- Resilient Funding Frameworks
    - VERTA Bucks- $5,000
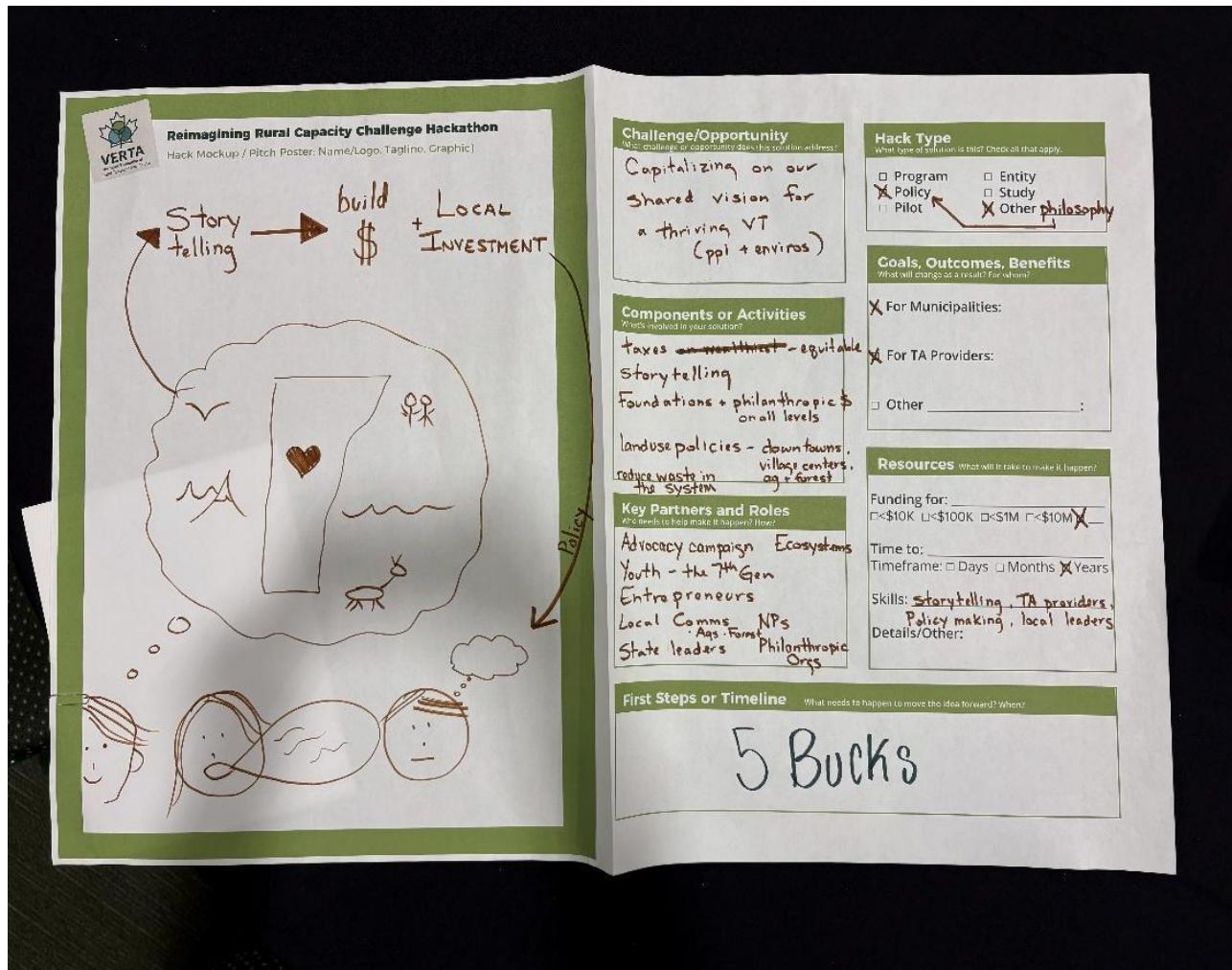
Summit participant "To Dos" and "Wish Lists"

Methodology

Summit participants were asked to complete exercises in small groups where they would list both the individual actions they could take, their "To Do" lists, that would help contribute to making positive system change, and list their individual "wish Lists" for TA system change. The results did not vary from the data collected through the VERTA research processes conducted earlier in 2025 and leading up to the summit. The fact that there was no variability between these summit "day of" activities and the previous research further validates the findings. The full, unedited and uncategorized results of those exercises are provided below.

Summit-generated "To Do" List.

Stakeholder group to identify priorities to streamline grant requirements
Increase flexibility of statutory reserves use
Monitor COAD pilot + assess transferability to non-disaster times/functions
Capacity to support statewide coordinated non-profit efforts
Establish common application questions, statewide repository of resources
Compile existing data + lists of TA providing + funding sources.
Create data sharing agreement built of existing models
Combine funding streams to support common goals + shared funding to incentivize shared outcomes
Disseminate research + case studies on regionalization "wins" and best practices
Pro-Bono "ready model" for local assistance.
Dictionary of acronyms & terms.
Creative online training for opportunities at the community level
Others who will help w/ the chip investments (public/private partnerships).
 Community septic initiatives.
Cross-TA expertise training to expand capacity.
Communication & networking to identify opportunities.
Mapping to show potential open space connections, watershed connectivity.
Facilitate regional gatherings of local communities.
TA Focus on accessibility; meeting clients where they are.
Help our client communities "see it through" to success.
Use A.I. to comb local agendas for front porch forum postings about items of particular local interest.
Make it fascinating for young people to get involved, participate in town meetings (child care, food, etc.)

Create maps & case study databases for project precedents: parks, community septic, flood risk management

TA "skill swap" for expertise training, such as for marketing, real estate, financial expertise

Municipal collaboration & regionalize & share services

"Opt in" to share apps for funding --> notifications to applicants when new opportunities post

Central hub/database/clearing house/list --> dedicated & trained staff to manage

Progressive & equitable tax reform generating revenue for the public sector & supporting critical town & regional needs

Paid staff that are competent

Collaboration between towns

Higher taxes on 2nd homes & str. options tax

Reach out to other towns

build enhanced relations with TA partners

VLCT model ordinances and services

identify available trainings

increase municipal wages to a livable wage

increase communication between the selectboard & community

Forum/working group of higher ed to support rural capacity building

TA Working group-- simple research needs, websites

Incentives to collaborate- assessment of current/potential collaborations

Universities facilitate TA from private sector, foundations, etc.

Expansion of community engaged service learning opportunities

Reinvigorate VCDA, esp. to create/facilitate TA provider network/mentorship

Assist w/ scoping for development or adoption of new data tools & technology to streamline pre-development admin

Create a few CED issue toolkits to use as examples ("what to expect")

Creation of marketing & communication strategies for underutilized resources

Building community/municipal fluency in procurement

Identify unique need list per town

Utilize our town plan

Find a TA champion for our town's needs

Seek technical assistance in how to transform needs into actionable items

Ask for consolidation & release to us all these ideas

Create a list of county-divided watersheds across the state; collect stories about impact of divided watersheds; Create listerv/collaborate communication for watersheds; Collect stories about impact of divided watersheds to share with legislators

Distill VLCT info into "one-pagers" (rather than massive binders or web pages)

Topic-focused trainings (in-person or online) for town staff/selectboard

Request training hours each year for town staff/SB/committees

Town meeting for town staff to collab & train together

Request CCRPC to ask towns for workplans to share

UVM mentorship program for town leadership

Transition to COGs

Study on which services belong at which level of government

Which service at which level study.

Case studies & templates & educational circuit on shared services

More and better access to webinars on best practices

Standard state application and reporting contracts

Regular networking in program areas

Funding for RCP increase technical assistant capacity staff.

Building volunteer capacity (social capital) . Fill municipal positions

Permit reform

Unified grant portal in state

No more unfunded mandates

Regional town administrative services

Local fundraising centers investing into infrastructure.

Database at funding sources, foundations, donors (former GuideStar) & foundation directory.

Classes on civic education.

Orientation to service orgs & connection between communities & orgs.

Sharing resources between towns

Pilot coordination among TA providers for a single town to ultimately serve town-identified needs

Make applications easier & look for alignment across funders

Find out if there are functioning database systems - of contacts, of funding opportunities - to make information more accessible to towns / TA providers

Better internal communication within orgs around TA

Research what is needed to launch a TA navigate tool/service,

Build capacity for regional support - Inventory, enhance with stipends, training outcomes, child support during meetings

Build and enhance information/ data bases for TA info

Training for TA and municipalities; idea of office hours

Civic engagement opportunities and systems for students and young people. Succession planning support for organizations/communities.

Centralized database of funding opportunities and TA resources, equipment, etc.

Free course for prepping for municipal/community/NP work (grant course)

Align/embed community organizations, equity work, and facilitation with in community process.

Database of community organizing groups

Funding for implementation/pre-development, less complicated, more sources

Tell the honest story about ourselves through data, analysis, inventory

develop self-reliance strategies and structures to reflect changes in federal funding/priorities

Database of successful engagement processes.

Create a regular training calendar and/or platforms, and collaborate with RPCs + RDCs + VCLT.

Conduct capacity studies.

Identify what towns need or want/have.

Pool regional resources (licenses, IT, seats).

Develop an annual report from towns and RDA groups.

Host recruiting events and develop strategies with public engagement forums.

Activate town resources like hiring to encourage development, as long as certain steps are met.

Budget awareness: Big picture instead of year-to-year.

Contact neighboring towns.

shared services such as salt, chloride, tires, and oil. Group purchasing increases buying power.

Contact legislators about the needs of municipalities.

Emphasize the importance of more funding for RPCs.

Towns pay per-capita fees to RPCs.

RPCs for managing shared services — can they take this on?

How can Vermonters afford to buy a home? Banks, more flexible lenders.

Share information out.

Simplify tools.
Attend the state's community of practice (grants/contracts).
Establish relationships with the League to be involved and share.
Teams meeting with everyone at the table. Share what we know; larger group of funders.
Share cross-cutting training across providers.
Fund, what already works/is happening in VT.
Find examples of self-organizing activities across multiple towns (watershed, economic, transportation, flood resistance)
For grant programs, ask if/how the guarantee is engaged regionally and/or create opportunities (incentivize?) engaging with other towns.
Determine what capacity is needed at which level (ex. small communities, medium-sized, large)
Continue, increase education, information, encourage / facilitate civic dialogue about community needs. Get neighbors listening to neighbors.
Build coalition, Develop clear ask, Develop (or recruit) entity that will house the new TA Infrastructure (RPC?)
Data — "Turbo Tax" for funding & TA
Data about rural towns
Long-term planning vision
Meetings / conf of TA, towns, RPCs
Funders approach towns regionally Not town by town
Legal TA to understand federal, state, local laws + legislation — Fair housing, land use, not resources
Keep funding small, flexible, unrestricted $
Keep providing TA
Checkbox to share affordable housing
Identify more convenient meeting times
Menu of direct services + prices that can be provided by RPCs/RDCs
Facilitate regional meetings with multiple stakeholders (munis, school districts, etc.)
Provide access to existing info by cross-linking resources (VLCT funding database)
Serve as a host of a funded position
Advocate / lobby to State Legislature to fund at least 1 recommendation from this work.
Training for PM, GM, municipal leadership, Build new leaders
Grants & supports built in cheat sheet / grant guides.
Increase community engagement to help w/ projects / programs
Organize the organizations, ongoing mtgs, systems, conferences / task forces

Summit-generated "Wish List" ideas.
Deep learning on other TA Services
Improve listening
one-stop directory/ TA navigator to direct folks to resources
Regular meetings w/ TA providers with towns for collaboration -State Agencies bringing TAs together to support large town projects -Leverage funding capacity through partnerships
TAs coming together a few times a year to evaluate impacts (reaching state goals, community needs)
Make it easier to give out money/receive money
Intermunicipal resource sharing -TAs coming together to learn about each other and not duplicate efforts
More centralized/organized TA resources and better or more simplified communications
Greater funding flexibility
Hire goats to clear invasives
Regional thought processes and collaboration w/ intact local identities/independence

Ideas for great public engagement

More local volunteers stepping up and recruiting

Accommodate creative solutions enabled by the state sparked locally

Simplification all around

Revolving funds

Expertise to provide education/support for social housing

staffing in various roles in rural communities -Rural planning, affordable housing

Orientation packets and on boarding for town officials

Local Control, Less Bureaucracy

Put small towns on a different platform than large towns

Open source funding, ie. Grants and aid

Master grant database list, Federal and state

Funding for FT or PT Town Admin, $50k annually (recognizing need and lack of volunteers.)

Communication- better data, better tools, w/ outreach and "1 stop shop"

Build more "whole picture" TA providers- more skills building, appreciate local leaders, transferable skills

Flexible and alternative funding opportunities. To keep TA providers in business

Flexible funds for municipal decisions/projects

Shared services and capacity among communities (ex: MOU, annual check-in, incentives to make it happen)

Systems approaches

Refine goals at the state, regional and local levels to find clarity of needs versus wants

More regional or multi-town resources (ex. Staff, funding, other capacity)

Add capacity for TA providers to provide support

Regional state staffing

TA hub including IT and Apps

New regional governance

Standardization of grants, education

funding collaboration, matchmaking, address gaps, needs, connecting providers, community members.

Funding for RPC's

Shared resources services/joint purchasing

Research/ funding for a grant portal

TA for housing. Affordable. Possible for young families to live. Repair old homes.

Wrap around support when new rules and regulations become law

Wish USDA & Incentives to encourage collaborative roundtables on different issues for rural clusters, FFA providers & Visionary.

Create Stability @ local level by offering Staffing Grant funding & Volunteers

Standardized entry points.

More transparency of applicable processes, where / how is the application now.

Reassess what is statutorily required and what are regulations we made up. Which rules can we change to make things easier?

Can state agencies communicate and collaborate better to reduce admin burden

Train-the-trainer, Peer learning, mentorship, events/bootcamp: all for municipal training

Community and Economic development issue toolkits (guides, best practices) (e.g. brownfields, tax ase, recreation economy, etc.)

Standardize Data + Technology database for funding applications. Use data and tech to strengthen pre-development across agencies/organizations!

TA Mentorship Network

More funding for capacity and pre development

Life cycle capital planning w/support

Shared resources: staff, infrastructure, administration, MOU not a new gov. structure common management of shared service

Statewide agencies scale management and design practices to places and settings

Regional scale funding for regional scale project implementation

improved customer service

"Unlimited wishes"

State funding for a municipal specialist (or 2) at every RPC/RDC to help towns identify and prioritize needs and implement projects

centralized project needs that is accessible to TA providers, funders. Also, complementary list of $ opportunities

Align service district boundaries to reduce complexity. (Ex. watershed, SU's. health districts)

Incentivizing bottom-up model for shared services and intermunicipal collaboration

embedded admin at high-need towns

Money

Model websites like at UVM

Improved community - university partnerships

holistic integration across community needs. How can universities support?

Regionalization for certain supports

IT/Comms simplification/support by universities

greater role of extension

Better representation at regional/state level for small town priorities and culture

Better tools for sharing solutions between towns

funding for each town's distinct needs

more capacity to render needs actionable

Any town website template, generic dept/role email addresses at state level

Robust shared resources - library and training for elected, volunteer, and paid town staff

coordination by watershed (rather than region or county) and watershed agency rules of working together

Municipality shared workplan coordination

more RPC resources/hours per town

Statewide grant wiki

Build trust with, and knowledge of town needs

Rural prosperity office- centralized clearinghouse of TA, set priorities, provide TA training

Data analysis by town based on your town profile needs. Database of TA/$$ w/filters like "bridge".

Flexible funding. General operation pre- application. Operating funds. $ for TA programming

More coordination and collaboration among TA providers assisting a municipality/region/watershed

stable, accessible, more consistent funding for the relationship building work and full project cycle for TA providers

municipal connection forum - connects funders to possible project needs

clear ways to encourage multi-town/watershed-wide funding applications

explore how to address capacity challenges long-term

On-ramps for recruiting New, diverse people

Civic education and Participation. regional ecosystem orientation

having a more regional - focused approach. Cross-border collaboration as well.

consolidation of services; economies of scale

more money

Create a community of resources - spread sheets, job description, applications. Find place to house data base

write interlocal agreements

network and collaborate

Shared committees, increase the huma resource pool

Training (Boards, Volunteers, and Staff)

Shared infrastructure (Support, resources, equipment)

Private Partners

Increase volunteer pool

Standards for best practices and formats

Shared Services

Capacity funding

training/education esp. for capital planning.

consistent reporting to funders

succession planning

Summit Table Topics

Municipal and Local Capacity

Shared Municipal Services & Resources
- Formal agreements or models for sharing staff positions, services, equipment, or other resources across multiple municipalities

Expanded Municipal Services
- Shifting project development, admin, and management, and other services from municipalities to TA providers, government, consultants or other entities

Municipal Staff Retention & Training
- Support to create, fund, hire and train staff positions in municipalities and local organizations

Volunteer & Leadership Pipeline
- Stronger systems to engage, recruit, train, support, and retain community leaders and volunteers

Provider Capacity and Offerings

Provider Staffing, Retention & Training
- Strategies to fill positions and retain well-trained state agency, RPC/RDC, and private sector TA providers and funding staff

Project Guides & Admin Tools
- Simple project implementation and administrative tools such as guides, checklists, toolkits, and data hubs to help local leaders plan and manager projects

Provider Network & Directory
- Systems and processes enabling statewide TA funders and providers to communicate, coordinate, collaborate, and understand others' roles and offerings

State Agency Coordination
- Systems and processes enabling state agencies, departments, initiatives and programs to communicate, coordinate and collaborate on TA services, regulations, and program alignment

Coordination & Collaboration

Program Standardization & Simplification
- Standardization and streamlining of funding and TA program information and processes including information, outreach formats, timelines, application and reporting platforms and systems

TA Navigator or Intake System
- Person, entity, or tech-based system serving as one-stop shop for project intake, referrals, permit and process information, and advice

Info Hub & Centralized Communications
- One-stop-shop for state government and private sector funding and program information, project resources, and TA access

Gathering & Networking Opportunities
- Expanded opportunities for municipalities, agencies, providers and funders to meet across and within their peer groups and sectors, in person and remotely at regional, statewide levels

Systems Change

Regionalized Assistance or Governance
- Regionalized assistance and governance models such as county government or Councils of Governments or expansion of current regional entities and services

Locally-Driven Programs & Priorities
- New models for increasing involvement of municipalities and local leaders in setting statewide priorities, or designing programs or allocating funding locally

Resource Generation Models
- Exploration of new statewide and local funding sources, models for generating new revenue, and harnessing untapped community development resources

Resilient Funding Frameworks
- Policies, philosophies, and philanthropic initiatives to address statewide funding equity and local competition, increase return on investment, and weather political or resource shifts

The VERTA Team

- State of Vermont
  - DHCD team
- Steering Committee
  - Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA)
  - Northern Borders Regional Commission (NBRC)
  - Preservation Trust of Vermont (PTV)
  - Vermont Association of Planning and Dev. Agencies (VAPDA)
  - Vermont Community Foundation (VCF)
  - Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD)
  - Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB)
  - Vermont Land Access & Opportunity Board (VT LAOB)
  - Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT)
  - Vermont State Treasurer's Office
- UVM
  - The Center for Rural Studies
  - Extension
  - The Department of Community Development and Applied Economics
  - The Master of Public Administration program

- o Nine UVM students
  - ▪ Three students from the Master of Public Administration program.
  - ▪ One student from the Department of Community Development and Applied Economics
  - ▪ Five students from the Department of Community and Economic Development's Public Communications program.

Appendix A – National Scan of Municipal Technical Assistance Systems

Technical Assistance National Scan

Contents

National Level Aggregators

- National Association of Development Organizations

- The Daily Yonder
  The Daily Yonder is a news source that produces written commentary and podcast series that focuses on the experiences in rural America. Their news and analysis span a variety of topics, including government and policy, economy, infrastructure, agriculture, health, education, environment, and more. They also use this platform to educate people about the arts, history, food, and recreation that flourishes in rural areas around the country. The Daily Yonder has several podcasts, one of which is titled "Everywhere Radio" and highlights leaders in rural areas doing work to build stronger, more inclusive communities.

- Partners for Rural Transformation
  The Partners for Rural Transformation is an organization that "works collaboratively across geographies and cultures to collectively influence policy and simultaneously lead, advocate, innovate, and finance individual and community solutions to poverty so that our neighbors can build sustainable and promising futures." Their key objectives are to unlock and influence resources, improve and innovate systems, and deliver community impact. They execute this

strategic plan by utilizing community development financial institutes who "meet local people's and places' needs, address regional strengths and challenges, and uplift programs, policies, and products that work nationally." PRT also has an extensive list of resources, including case studies, guides, blogs, policy papers, and more to support rural communities.

- Communities Unlimited
Communities Unlimited is a nonprofit organization that "connects rural Americans to solutions that sustain healthy businesses, healthy communities, and healthy lives." They do this work within four programmatic areas: Community Sustainability, Entrepreneurship, Environmental Services, and Healthy Foods. They also have a podcast titled "Small Talk with Communities Unlimited" that discusses issues faced by communities in rural areas and ways to overcome these barriers. Additionally, they have a calendar of training sessions for communities to learn together and a loan application portal where communities can request funding. Communities Unlimited operates in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee.

- FAHE
Fahe is a network organization comprised of over 50 nonprofits working to serve the Appalachian region. They tend to focus their efforts on leadership, housing, education, health and social services, and economic opportunity by "empowering the people and communities of Appalachia with the resources, opportunities, and tools needed to build a better life." They work locally, regionally, and nationally to provide both specialized services for communities and widespread solutions to decades long problems. Fahe engages in state and federal advocacy work to support policy solutions that will uplift Appalachia. Additionally, they offer other services like financial lending and resiliency and recovery support.

- U.S. EDA Research and National Technical Assistance (RNTA) Program
The National Technical Assistance Program works under the federal Economic Development Administration to "fund research, evaluation, and national technical assistance projects that promote competitiveness and innovation in distressed rural and urban regions throughout the United States and its territories." According to the website, it does not seem like this program is currently active.

- U.S. EPA Technical Assistance Services for Communities Program (TASC) and Technical Assistance Grant Program
The Technical Assistance Services for Communities Program "provides independent assistance through an EPA contract to help communities better understand the science, regulations and policies of environmental issues and EPA actions." This program directly engages community members by educating them about the environment, with the goal of increasing civic participation throughout projects that address environmental issues. This program is strictly modeled around direct technical assistance and does not include any grant or financial award.

The Technical Assistance Grant Program supports a community's ability to engage in Superfund Cleanup work. Their main purpose is to "provide funding to community groups to contract their own technical advisor to interpret and explain technical reports, site conditions, and EPA's proposed cleanup proposals and decisions." These grants (up to $50,000 initially) are allocated to community groups that seek to engage in this work.

- U.S. HUD Distressed Cities Technical Assistance Program (DCTA)
  The Distressed Cities Technical Assistance Program works under HUD to "improve fiscal health and build capacity of relatively small units of general local government (UGLGs) and their nonprofit partners in places experiencing persistent poverty and economic distress." In order to provide specialized services to communities, DTCA offers several technical assistance services, including a toolbox, a resource library, and a discussion board. The toolbox and resource library offer educational tools, training opportunities, and reports that span many topics. Additionally, the resource library has a list of upcoming federal funding opportunities that could be useful to municipalities. The discussion boards offer a unique opportunity for municipalities across regions to connect and collaborate with one another about various strategies and challenges that they face.

- U.S. EPA Water Technical Assistance Programs and Small and Rural Wastewater Systems
  The EPA has dedicated resources towards Water Technical Assistance Programs, which are funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Water TA Initiatives. "These initiatives have been launched in collaboration with states, territories, Tribes, and community partners." Some of these initiatives include Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap, Engineering Support, and the Water Infrastructure and Resiliency Finance Center.

  Another one of the initiatives led by the EPA that may be relevant to VERTA work is Rural, Small, and Tribal (RST) Technical Assistance for Wastewater Systems. The main purpose of this program is to "support rural, small municipalities, and Tribal governments to access finance/funding and support rural, small, and Tribal centralized and decentralized wastewater systems to build capacity to protect water quality and comply with the Clean Water Act." These funds for this grant program are allocated based on four priority areas: acquisition of funding and financing, protection of water quality and compliance assistance, tribal wastewater systems, and decentralized wastewater systems.

- U.S. Federal Transit Administration
  The Federal Transit Administration is dedicated to supporting public transit systems across the country through funding and technical assistance. They provide some funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, but they also have a list of current grant opportunities that state and municipalities can apply for. They also offer direct technical assistance to communities through the Technical Assistance and Workforce Development Program and the Public Transportation Innovation Program by "funding technical assistance, training, and research resource programs through national nonprofit organizations across a number of areas to improve public transportation." Some of these nonprofits include the National Center for Mobility Management, the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility Technical Assistance Center, the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center, National Rural Transportation Assistance Program, and many more. The National Rural Transit Assistance Program works under the FTA to "address the training and technical assistance needs of rural, and tribal transit operators across the nation, and to support the state RTAP programs."

- U.S. DOE Technical Assistance Programs
  The Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy is a branch of the US Department of Energy that "is working to ensure that all Americans benefit from energy innovation." They center this work in funding, technical assistance, research and development, and innovation. There is an extensive list of funding opportunities that support projects focused on economic development

and environmental sustainability. They also provide technical assistance to states and communities in the following areas: cross-technology, bioenergy, buildings, solar, vehicles, and wind. One notable technical assistance resource is the Energy to Communities (E2C) program, which provides "tailored, knowledge-based assistance across the renewable power, grid, transportation, and buildings sectors."

- Federal Brownfields Program
  The Federal Brownfields Program provides funding and direct technical assistance to communities to revitalize contaminated and abandoned land into community assets. This program operates nationally within the EPA, but regional EPA offices make service provision to communities simpler. In terms of Funding, they provide several grants like Job Training Grants, Revolving Loan Fund Grants, and other opportunities. In terms of technical assistance, there are several different resources that the EPA provides to support communities throughout the brownfield revitalization process. The Technical Assistance for Brownfield Communities Program consists of experts funded by the EPA to support communities across their designated regions. Targeted Brownfields Assessment is a service that provides contractors to help evaluate and plan with communities for revitalization projects. Other technical assistance resources include Nationwide Brownfields Technical Assistance Providers, Land Revitalization Technical Assistance, and CERCLA Section 128(a) Technical Assistance Grants ("TAG").

- HUD's Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Program
  The Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Program operates under HUD to "program will help local governments ensure housing needs are considered as part of their larger infrastructure investment." They provide funding for state, tribal, and local communities to strengthen projects related to transportation, water systems, internet accessibility, and more. Their four focus areas consist of leveraging underutilized land to create housing near jobs, transit, and amenities; preserving affordable housing; improving coordination among key project stakeholders; and removing regulatory barriers to creating and preserving housing near jobs, transit, and amenities. In addition to direct technical assistance and funding assistance, TCTA provides resources to help strengthen communities through guides and toolkits and other resources to assist municipal leaders in accessing project funding and support.

- Partners for Rural America
  Partners for Rural America is the governing body for Rural Development Councils and supports the National Rural Development Council. They engage in advocacy work and host regular meetings (board meetings, national conferences, annual meetings, etc.). It is unclear what their exact role in governing/leading the State RDCs is and what this looks like on a daily basis.

- Rural Partners Network Programs
  The Rural Partners Network works within the federal government as an "all-of-government program that helps rural communities find resources and funding to create jobs, build infrastructure, and support long-term economic stability on their own terms." They have aggregated an extensive list of programs that work within areas like broadband and telecommunications, community development, disaster relief, economic development, transportation, and more. These projects include both direct technical assistance work and funding opportunities.

Vermont

Vermont municipalities are governed under Dillon's Rule, given that Vermont's constitution does not include any discussion that establishes home rule. Given this, municipalities only have the powers and functions granted to them by the legislature, though they have some authority within their municipal boundaries. However, one must consider that there is statute, and then there is practice. Vermont has no county government system, which means that most governmental decisions are made at the state-level and filter down to municipalities, with the Vermont Planning and Development Act governing municipal planning and land use regulations.

Vermont has a top-down approach to technical assistance wherein 11 Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs), which work with municipalities on planning efforts, land use, transportation, housing, and community and economic development. RPCs act as a link between municipal affairs and state government given the absence of county government in Vermont. There are many other technical assistance providers in Vermont, many of which show evidence of internal partnerships and collaboration, though there is little formal collaboration on a system-wide level. Some organizations such as the Vermont Natural Resources Council and Vermont Healthy Communities operate in close partnership with state agencies. There are a handful of governmental and non-governmental agencies who offer municipal technical assistance around the state, primarily focusing on rural revitalization through business and job development, protection of natural resources, and increasing capacity in local government.

STATE OF VERMONT
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS
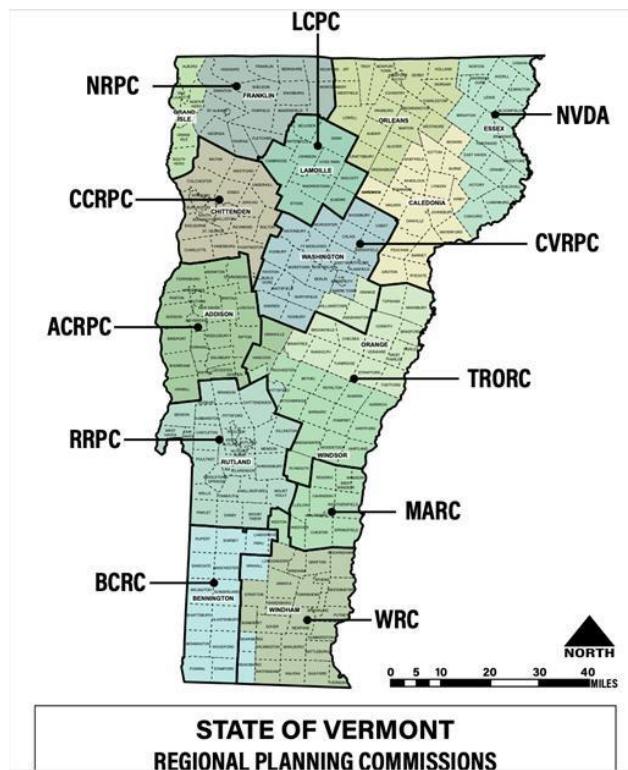
● Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

The Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB) is an organization that works to "endure affordable housing, farmland, jobs, and recreational assets for every generation of Vermonters" through their programs and initiatives. VHCB provides guidance, grants, and loans to municipalities, residents, and businesses to revitalize their communities and support sustainable community and economic development. VHCB's Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI),

which provides funding and grant writing assistance for rural communities of 5,000 people or less who are conducting community and business development projects in community-based economic development, outdoor recreation, and working lands development. VHCB also provides funding and technical assistance for affordable housing, historic preservation, conservation, and farm and forest viability, collaborating closely with a statewide network of partners in doing so.

● State of Vermont Agency of Administration Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP)

The State of Vermont Agency of Administration offers a Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP) to municipalities with high need for funding but limited governmental capacity through Vermont's 11 RPCs. MTAP helps municipalities increase capacity through free technical assistance in a broad range of areas pertaining to community and economic development. MTAP can help municipalities conduct community assessments, opportunity assessments, funding application & permit assistance, and project management & implementation assistance, and funds projects that target water infrastructure, sewer infrastructure, housing, community recovery, workforce development, business support, and climate change mitigation & resilience. Municipalities can access MTAP funds through their RPCs.

● Vermont League of Cities and Towns

The Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) is a non-profit organization that seeks to strengthen and serve Vermont's municipal governments. VLCT helps municipal governments build capacity through many forms of technical assistance including education, training, funding guidance, legal guidance, professional services, and access to their Municipal Assistance Center (MAC). Within VLCT's MAC, municipal governments have access to attorneys who can answer questions regarding municipal law, government administration, and management. Additionally, VLCT has Public Policy Advocates who advocate on behalf of municipal interests before the Vermont Legislature, state agencies, members of Congress, and federal agencies.

● Vermont Healthy Communities

Vermont Healthy Communities (Health Equity and Community Design Technical Assistance Program) operates in partnership with the Vermont Department of Health (VDH), the Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development (ACCD) Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This program offers many forms of technical assistance for communities. One of which is their TA Pilot program, wherein communities can access on-demand designers, landscape architects, planners, outreach specialists, public health officials, and more to develop ideas to create community-driven neighborhoods and make public spaces more "inclusive, healthy, welcoming, and connected." This program helps communities build capacity and leadership, improve their built environment, conduct outreach, engage their residents, and create plans for management and sustainable development. Current participating communities and their projects can be viewed here. Vermont Healthy Communities also has extensive resources, examples, and guides for communities to access in their funding, communication, and design efforts.

● Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA)

The Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA) is the statewide association for Vermont's 11 Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs). Vermont's RPCs provide technical assistance to municipalities and serve as the bridge between municipal and state government, considering that Vermont does not have county government. VAPDA guides the RPCs in their efforts to serve Vermont's municipalities, primarily focusing on environmental and economic planning strategies that preserve Vermont's natural environment and provide for current and future generations of Vermonters.

- Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF)

  The Vermont Sustainable Job Fund (VSJF) is a non-profit organization that promotes sustainable economic development and improved quality of life in Vermont and Vermont communities through specialized technical assistance primarily to businesses that focus on agriculture, food systems, forests, waste management, renewable energy, and environmental technology. VSJF provides business management coaching services to help companies create and retain jobs as an economic development strategy, supply chain coordination services to help identify supply chain gaps and areas for growth, network development services to help organizations develop strategic plans, and financial services with grants and sponsorship. VSJF works with clients from other U.S. states and regions to help replicate their approach elsewhere for sustainable development.

- Northern Vermont Economic Development District (NVEDD)

  The Northern Vermont Economic Development District (NVEDD) is a Congress-designated district that comprises Grand Isle, Franklin, Lamoille, Orleans, Caledonia, and Essex counties. NVEDD has a board of directors who are municipal leaders, RPC/RDC employees, or employees of an organization in the district. NVEDD seeks to understand and improve the regional economy through outreach and work with businesses, communities, and community leaders across both public and private sectors. Collectively, NVEDD seeks to cultivate relationships within northern Vermont to identify problems, create solutions for economic development, and promote collaboration between stakeholders for mutual benefit. NVEDD focuses on six interconnected goals that contribute to a thriving and sustainable economy: building economic resilience, cultivating business growth, improving and expanding infrastructure, developing the workforce, investing in quality of life, and disaster preparedness and recovery. Board members conduct outreach in communities and businesses, creating strategies and action plans to increase capacity for growth.

- Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program (VT UCF)

  The Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program (VT UCF) offers both technical and financial assistance to municipalities through an array of programs, helping communities plant and maintain trees. VT UCF operates collaboratively between the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation, UVM Extension, and the USDA Forest Service. Some of VT UCF's popular technical assistance programs include their Community Canopy Program which provides free trees to community members for planting on private property, Emerald Ash Borer Management to assist communities with the loss of ash trees the Emerald ash borer, Tree Maintenance and Removal Grants. and Community Tree Planting Grants.

The Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) is a non-profit organization that seeks to protect and enhance Vermont's natural environment, communities, and working landscapes. VNRC hosts many programs, education, and technical assistance for landowners, municipalities, and businesses focused on clean energy, clean water and environments, smart growth, and healthy forests. VNRC helps communities across Vermont develop strategies and municipal plans that address wildlife and natural resource conservation. VNRC also provides municipalities with their "Guide for Local Action", which provides town officials and residents with information about how to sustain forests and wildlife in their communities. They also offer trainings on land use and development for real estate agents and engineers, technical assistance for landowners to help them make "informed stewardship decisions about their forests", and Small Grants for Smart Growth, which provides base fuds for community-based smart growth initiatives. VNRC collaborates closely with Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, and many Vermont environmental non-profits in their service delivery, and has a constant presence in the Vermont Legislature to advocate for sustainability.

- Vermont Council on Rural Development

The Vermont Council on Rural Development is a non-profit organization that is "dedicated to support the support of the locally defined progress of Vermont's rural communities" and "develop their capacity to create a prosperous and sustainable future through coordination, collaboration, and the effective use of public and private resources." VCRD operates in partnership with federal, state, local, non-profit, and private partners, coordinating and sponsoring collaborative events, programs, networks, and initiatives for the development of rural Vermont. VCRD's Community Visits Program engages residents in rural communities and provides a facilitated structure for the community to set common development priorities, then connects local leaders with the resources and funding they need to build capacity and meet their goals. VCRD hosts many other programs for communities and local leaders, such as the Vermont Community Leadership Network, the Village Trust Initiative, and the Climate Economy Initiative.

- USDA-Rural Development Vermont

USDA-Rural Development's Vermont Office offers many grants and loans for municipalities and federally recognized tribes to conduct community development projects, many of which focus on water and sewage, though only a few have an open application window. Some of these include the 2022 Disaster Water Grants, which help communities pay for damages to rural water systems in 2022, Special Evaluation Assistance for very small and financially distressed communities to design studies and conduct water projects, and the Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program, which provides funding for clean drinking water systems, sanitary solid waste and sewage disposal, and stormwater systems in rural communities.

- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD)

The Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) provides funding and several technical assistance programs to Vermont municipalities, aiming to "help Vermonters improve their quality of life and build strong communities" with a focus on collaboration. ACCD Houses the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Department of Economic Development (DED). ACCD hosts the Vermont Downtown Program, which is a Main Street America Program, preserving and revitalizing Vermont's downtowns through funding,

training, and specialized technical assistance. ACCD also offers Building Communities Grants to municipalities and non-profits, which are available for projects in cultural development, community facilities, and historic preservation, and the Vermont Community Development Program and Community Development Block Grants.

Wisconsin

In Wisconsin, counties and municipalities are creatures of the state, therefore the State Legislature determines most of their duties and powers, yet cities and villages (but not towns) are granted home rule authority, within which they can determine their local affairs and government, and counties are granted administrative home rule, within which they may organize their own departments. Counties typically have the power to control property taxes, maintain county roads, participate in land use planning, and maintain parks and recreation. Counties are also an "administrative arm" of Wisconsin, given that they must carry out state laws and programs.

Wisconsin is organized into nine Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) and several Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) within these RPCs. RPCs provide planning assistance, help municipalities connect to state and federal programs, coordinate programs, and provide planning and development assistance for governments within each region. The presence of RPCs demonstrates regional collaboration in a top-down approach to technical assistance.

Wisconsin has an extensive amount of technical assistance programs, with most of the service being provided by the University of Wisconsin network, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), and a handful of non-profit organizations. Many of these providers receive funding from the state and federal governments and work directly with communities to provide technical assistance, demonstrating significant collaboration among one another. Several of these providers work to connect communities and counties to one another and to various funding sources, aiming to make technical assistance easier to access and mutually beneficial for regions. However, there does not appear to be much collaboration between funders and municipalities. Much of the technical assistance available seems to be directed towards business development and rural revitalization.

Wisconsin RPCs and MPOs
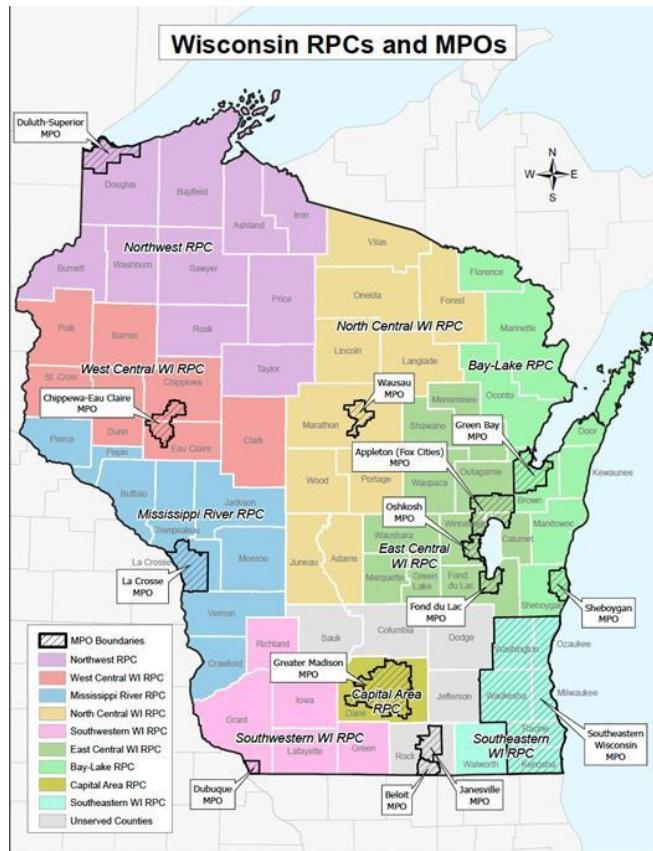
- University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension

  The University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) provides an array of technical assistance programs through the Community and Economic Development Division of their Extension Office. UW-Madison Extension hosts the Community Vitality and Placemaking Effort, which is a larger framework and team, not necessarily a TA program, that shapes all of their other programs for communities. This framework outlines how to build community capacity through different approaches with an asset-based approach to community development. This central effort serves as a sort of guidebook to communicate to communities how UW-Madison Extension can help them and provides tools for communities to address their local needs and seek assistance. Some of Extension's programs are as follows:

  o Design Wisconsin (Extension)

    Design Wisconsin is a program that assembles volunteers to work with communities in ½-day, 1.5-day, and 3-day charrettes, wherein these volunteers with a wide array of professional expertise collaborate with communities to help them develop short, medium, and long-term visions and ideas for development projects. These "Community Design Charrettes" incorporate interactive activities and community engagement to generate energy and idea-exchange as a mechanism for strategic planning. If selected, Extension will assemble a design team of design professionals, engineers, UW-Madison faculty and students, and volunteer planning professionals to create a multi-disciplinary volunteer team of experts in architecture, landscape design, planning, economic development, and more, to provide one-on-one guidance to the community.

- o   Energy On Wisconsin (Extension)

  Energy On Wisconsin is a program that works with communities, tribes, businesses, and organizations to help Wisconsin in its transition to a clean energy economy. This program is operated by UW-Madison Extension, connecting groups to funding, facilitating education programs about renewable energy, and promoting information sharing among public, private, educational, and governmental groups. Energy On Wisconsin works to connect organizations, municipalities, tribes, and businesses to federal and state funding opportunities and technical assistance, serving as a resource hub.
  - ♣   UW-Madison is a member of Great Lakes Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center (TCTAC), hosted by the University of Minnesota, which Energy On Wisconsin helps facilitate for Wisconsin. Great Lakes TCTAC helps support community organizations navigate and secure funding sources to transition to clean energy, however services for this program were recently suspended in February due to the termination of their federal EPA grant. UW-Madison Extension collaborates closely with the UW-Madison Clean Energy Community Initiative, the Midwest Tribal Energy Resources Association, and other statewide partners to expand beyond the current TCTAC network and provide resources and technical expertise to Wisconsin's rural and tribal communities.

- o   Community Development Institute (Extension)

  UW-Madison Extension's Community Development Institute hosts a multitude of educational programs that help leaders, communities, and organizations build capacity and increase quality of life in several key areas. The Institute offers programs, information, research, and technical assistance through one-on-one consulting in Community Economic Development, Community Food Systems, Local Government, and Organizational & Leadership Development. Notably, the Local Government Program hosts in-person and online workshops and webinars to support local governments and newly elected officials in serving their residents. Similarly, the Organizational & Leadership Development Program hosts webinars and leadership academies to support leadership development as a "foundation for effective organizations and thriving communities."

- o   Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP)

  UW-Madison (seemingly not Extension) operates a Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) which provides training and technical assistance to help local officials across Wisconsin maintain safe roads. Wisconsin LTAP offers training and education opportunities statewide for a fee, including Work Zone Safety and Flagger Training and a Equipment Use and Workplace Safety course. Local officials and highway maintenance staff may call with technical questions and resource referrals, considering that this program was established in 1983 to help Wisconsin municipalities build transportation capacity and manage their road systems. Though it is unclear how other direct technical services are provided by LTAP, the program sponsors or assists with over 70 workshops every year, connecting municipalities with government and industry experts and promoting collaboration among municipalities, the state government, and the federal government.

- **USDA Rural Development - Wisconsin**

  USDA Rural Development's Wisconsin Office offers many grants and loans for rural municipalities, counties, and federally recognized tribes to conduct community development projects, many of which focus on water and sewage, though only a few have an open application window. Some of these include Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants, which help communities prepare or recover from an emergency that threatens/threatened their drinking water, the Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program, which provides funding for clean drinking water systems, sanitary solid waste and sewage disposal, and stormwater systems in rural communities; and Water & Waste Disposal Predevelopment Planning Grants, which helps low-income communities develop applications for USDA-Rural Development water/waste disposal projects.

- **Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP)**

  Wisconsin Rural Partners (WRP) is a non-profit network hub for government agencies, businesses, residents, and organizations who are working on rural development in Wisconsin. WRP unites partners from across the state through conferences including an Annual Summit; community forums in collaboration with WEDC, the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, USDA-RD Wisconsin, and Wisconsin Downtown Action Council; and a State of Rural Wisconsin program, which provides a compendium of data about rural Wisconsin. WRP was founded in 1992 under the National Rural Development Partnership Initiative which "established a state-by-state network to improve the coordination of rural development programs and serve as a catalyst for future initiatives. WRP serves as Wisconsin's federally designated State Rural Development Council (SRDC), collaborating with local, state, and tribal governments, and non-profit and for-profit businesses. WRP advocates for rural community interest within these partnerships, including community infrastructure, natural resource conservation, transportation, and more.

- **University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Center for Economic Development**

  The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center for Economic Development offers fee-for-service university-based research technical assistance to organizations and governments in the Milwaukee region. The Center's team conducts research tailored to clients' needs and can include economic impact studies, GIS and data analysis, market analysis, program evaluation, community planning, and labor market research. Center staff help governments and organizations build capacity and meet their own objectives, thus leading to a stronger community.

- **Wisconsin Counties Association** (WCA)

  The Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) is an association of county governments which provides insurance programs, education, research, grant development, and consulting services to county officials and other government entities. WCA aims to help the voices of all 72 Wisconsin counties be heard in the executive and legislative branches of Wisconsin's government and serves as an organization through which this dialogue can take place. WCA has a Legislative Team that acts as the voice of county officials at the Capitol, legislative exchanges and an annual conference, and year-round training and educational opportunities for members.

- **Wisconsin Downtown Action Council (WDAC)**

The Wisconsin Downtown Action Council (WDAC) was established in 1982 to preserve and promote downtown prosperity. Today, WDAC offers workshops, seminars, and conferences hosted by state and national experts that help members manage, market, and revitalize their downtown areas. A few notable programs are WDAC's Basic Economic Development Course which provides professionals with the foundations needed for a career in economic development, and WDAC's Downtown Summit which unites nonprofits, municipalities, and other stakeholders to discuss strategies for supporting downtowns. WDAC collaborates closely with Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) and was instrumental in creating WEDC's successful Main Street Program.

- League of Wisconsin Municipalities

  The League of Wisconsin Municipalities connects Wisconsin's cities and villages to one another, promoting idea sharing and collective learning. In addition to providing a network for municipalities, the League provides training to local leaders for effective governance and advocacy on behalf of municipalities in the state Legislature and other agencies. As a member of the National League of Cities (NLC), the League gives Wisconsin municipalities access to a larger network of federal advocates, research, education, and information. The League aims to "advocate for state laws and policies that support local government and local control" by offering webinars, institutes, and meetings for members, all of which aim to build government capacity and connect municipalities to one another and state leaders.

- Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC)

  Created in the 2011 Legislative Session, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) is a semi-public corporate entity that replaced Wisconsin's former Department of Commerce and facilitates much of the economic development in Wisconsin. WEDC provides resources, operational support, and financial assistance to businesses, organizations, municipalities, and tribes in Wisconsin with the goal of growing and strengthening the economy. Some of their primary programs are detailed below:

  o Wisconsin Main Street Program and Connect Communities Program

     WEDC's Wisconsin Main Street Program provides communities with individualized technical assistance from WEDC's downtown development staff and consultants to help communities identify initiatives, stakeholders, and resources for downtown revitalization projects. This program offers design assistance, event impact assistance, access to demographic data, strategic planning, and downtown board and committee training. Applications are accepted annually in spring, and each year, Wisconsin Main Street selects up to three new communities to join the program. Wisconsin Main Street is part of Main Street America and aims to build community engagement and investment in downtown areas, leading to higher quality of life and economic development in the larger community.

     WEDC's Connect Communities Program connects local leaders and stakeholders across Wisconsin with access to the Connect Communities network of over 90 communities around the state. This program encourages networking, resource sharing, and training to

help communities in their revitalization and redevelopment efforts as a companion program to Wisconsin Main Street. In FY19, this program added 91 new businesses and attracted $1.5 billion in investment.

- o Wisconsin Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP)

  WEDC houses the Wisconsin Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP), which "aims to be a one-stop shop to help rural stakeholders navigate programs and resources serving rural communities and businesses." ORP is relatively new to Wisconsin's TA landscape, having only been established in 2020. ORP focuses on strategic priorities including housing, capacity building, small business development, and broadband access, all of which were determined by public input gathered through Governor Tony Evers' Blue Ribbon Commission of Rural Prosperity. ORP operates with an emphasis on capacity building support, the development of toolkits and trainings, and collaboration with state and regional partners to make it easier for businesses, tribes, and communities to access the funds and programs they need to promote rural prosperity and development.
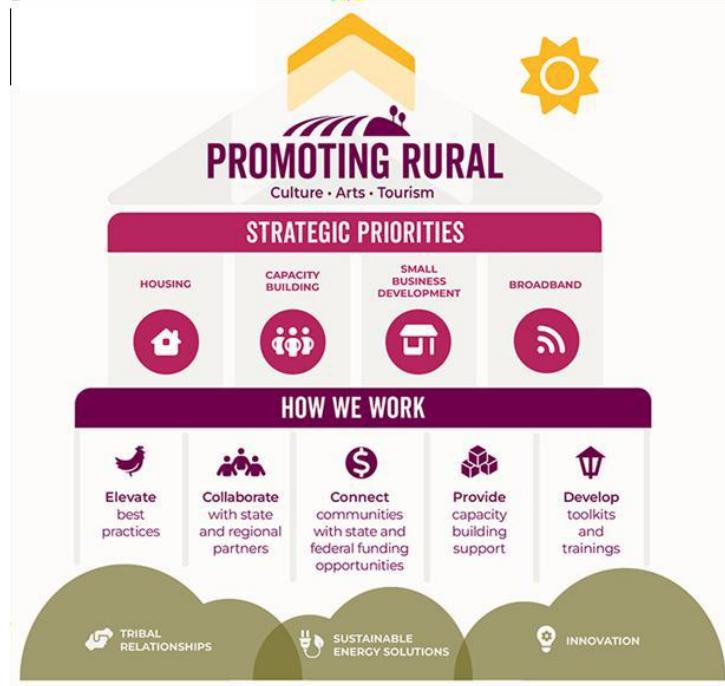
- Wisconsin Economic Development Association (WEDA)

  Founded in 1975, the Wisconsin Economic Development Association (WEDA) is a non-profit organization that aims to strengthen and expand Wisconsin's economy in the private and public sectors. WEDA offers advocacy, networking opportunities, and education to members through their programs for an annual fee, building capacity and encouraging collaboration among organizations and local governments who are working to grow their economies.

Alabama

Alabama follows a top-down approach to technical assistance with its twelve regional councils. Each region has the power to provide specialized services at the request of the regional council's Board of Directors, provided that such services address specific local or regional needs. These regional councils

function similarly to councils of government (COGs), as they serve as bridges between local government and state agencies and represent local interests. Alabama's regional councils conduct numerous administrative services, a few of which include managing regional solid waste disposal authorities, conducting studies on voter identification and government consolidation, and numbering and naming streets.

Alabama has an extensive network of technical assistance providers, whether it be through funding, consulting, or education. Alabama's universities, particularly Auburn University and the University of Alabama system, offer many technical assistance programs to municipalities and state agencies, demonstrating high levels of collaboration among Alabama's technical assistance providers and municipalities themselves. Alabama universities imbed themselves into the communities they provide services to- one to note is Auburn University's Rural Studio Program. Outside of the university providers, there are numerous non-profit and state agencies that collaborate closely in Alabama's technical assistance landscape, mainly focusing on issues of water and wastewater systems, downtown economic development and job creation, municipal government capacity, and city design. While most of the collaboration occurs between providers and municipalities, and among networks of municipalities connected by providers, there is some evidence of direct collaboration between state funders and municipalities through the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs.

Alabama is a non-home rule state. Counties are mostly governed under Dillon's rule, wherein they only have the powers and structures that have been granted to them by the Alabama Legislature. Two counties (Shelby and Baldwin) do not follow this rule, though it is unclear why. Counties must provide boards of health and maintain public roads, and may establish mental health facilities, promote industry and trade, and operate ambulance services. Alabama municipalities use a mayor-council form of government and, like most counties, operate under Dillon's rule and therefore have little autonomy in their governance structure.
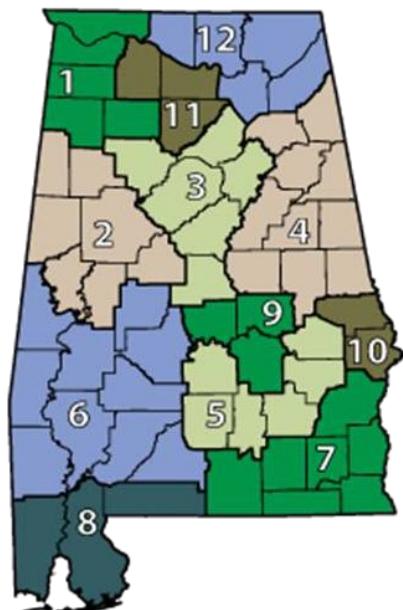
- Your Town Alabama

Your Town Alabama (YTA) is an organization that hosts an annual workshop for community leaders, providing them with organizing tools, recruiting strategies, and strategic development processes for community and economic development projects. YTA has been assisting communities with their workshop since 1998, seeking to revitalize communities while maintaining small and rural town character. Their workshop is led by community planners, architects, engineers, and other professionals to help community leaders adopt asset-based community development techniques. This organization fosters collaboration among local leaders and municipalities through idea sharing and group problem solving, aiming to increase planning capacity and professional assistance for small communities.

- Consortium for Alabama Rural Water and Wastewater Management (CARWW)

The Consortium for Alabama Rural Water and Wastewater Management (CARWW) is a syndicate of organizations that was founded in 2018 to address the lack of adequate wastewater infrastructure in rural Alabama, particularly the Black Belt. CARWW works to "facilitate communication and collaboration between the Alabama regulatory community, academic institutions, elected officials, community groups and representatives from the water and wastewater industry for the purpose of finding effective and sustainable solutions together." CARWW serves as a hub that compiles technical assistance opportunities, information, and funding resources in one place so that communities can access what they need to address their unique water challenges. While CARWW seems to be hosted by the University of South Alabama, consortium members include the University of Alabama system, Auburn University, the University of West Alabama, the Alabama Rural Water Association, the Alabama Association of Regional Councils, USDA-Rural Development, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, and many other state agencies and non-profit organizations.

- Alabama Association of Regional Councils (AARC)

The Alabama Association of Regional Councils (AARC) is an umbrella association of Alabama's twelve Regional Councils, aiming "to expand and strengthen the capabilities of Regional Councils to serve local governments and the citizens of Alabama." The AARC blends the twelve Regional Councils together to strengthen the voice of all Alabama municipalities and counties. The AARC, led by a board of representatives from each Regional Council, allows Regional Councils to collaborate on statewide planning and economic development initiatives, like the Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan, and share information at statewide conferences to generate regional solutions for shared issues.

- Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) is an Alabama state agency that directly collaborates with local leaders to provide them with federal and state grants, water resource management, and surplus property. ADECA works to promote community and economic development around Alabama to enhance quality of life and increase capacity within local governments. Grants from ADECA help communities improve critical infrastructure (water and broadband), strengthen law enforcement, improve parks and recreation, and implement efficient energy sources. Each of these priorities is split up into a separate division of the organization, with a designated staff team to assist communities with each respective topic.

- Auburn University

A Leahy NIFA Awardee, Auburn University administers many technical assistance programs. As Alabama's land-grant institution, Auburn University has an obligation to provide higher education, conduct research for the benefit of society, and share their knowledge and expertise with all of Alabama through outreach programs. Some of their primary technical assistance programs are detailed as follows:

o Rural Studio

Housed within Auburn University's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture, Rural Studio is a design-build program that educates students about design through context-based service learning. Students in this unique program work directly and live in the communities where they are aiming to build accessible, affordable, and timber-efficient housing. Rural Studio collaborates with partners in Alabama's Black Belt region and West Alabama to promote sustainable architecture that simultaneously addresses community needs, long-term wellbeing, and regional sustainability. Rural Studio hosts numerous research projects that address their overall mission of promoting sustainable rural living, as well as the Front Porch Initiative, which is an ongoing research project to better understand the barriers to housing access and affordability. Rural Studio has built over 220 projects to date in the Black Belt, while also educating the next generation of architects.

o Urban Studio Small Town Design Initiative

Like Rural Studio, Urban Studio is hosted by Auburn University's Center for Architecture and Urban Studies. Urban Studio is an immersive program within which students live in downtown Birmingham, attend professional seminars, and work on design projects that incorporate community development and urban planning in Birmingham's downtown. Students will create master plans, design public-use buildings, and conduct projects that "can benefit Alabama and offer real-world investigations." Urban Studio created The Small Town Design Institute, which outlines the asset-based approach to community development that students should use while delivering their services to rural areas of the state.

o Government & Economic Development Institute (Outreach)

Auburn University operates its Government & Economic Development Institute (GEDI) through its Outreach (Extension) Program. GEDI aims to "promote effective government policy and management, civic engagement, economic prosperity, and improved quality of life for the State of Alabama and its communities." In GEDI, economic development professionals, elected officials, and community leaders can learn about the key issues in community and economic development. The Institute serves as a resource to help communities, local leaders, and governments build capacity and promote economic growth.

- o [Alabama Transportation Assistance Program (ATAP) and Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP)](#)

  Auburn University operates the Alabama Transportation Assistance Program (ATAP), which also houses Alabama's Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP). These programs provide training and technical assistance to Alabama's state and local transportation and public works agencies. These programs mainly focus on road safety, infrastructure management, workforce development, and organizational capacity and excellence. ATAP operates in partnership with the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Alabama Department of Transportation. ATAP offers workshops and training opportunities to all Alabama Department of Transportation employees, and seeks to solve the transportation challenges that Alabama is facing. ATAP and LTAP connects municipalities and workers around the state with government and industry experts, promoting collaboration among municipalities, the state government, and the federal government.

- [University of Alabama Center for Economic Development](#)

  The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development (UACED) has been an outreach/extension organization since 1989 that aims to grow rural Alabama's economy through an asset-based approach to technical assistance. UACED works with rural elected officials, and regional, state, and federal agencies with individualized project teams, aiming to build capacity, respond to community needs, and "capitalize on economic development opportunities." While UACED helps communities in many areas, their primary focuses are on outdoor recreation, tourism development, and rural workforce development. In partnership with the Alabama Power Company and Auburn University as a whole, UACED also works with towns, counties, and regions to help them develop strategic plans for their community development goals.

- [DesignAlabama](#)

  DesignAlabama is a citizen-operated non-profit organization that works in partnership with the [Alabama State Council on the Arts.](#) DesignAlabama has been helping communities in their placemaking efforts since 1987, addressing design issues and making communities more desirable, which therefore leads to higher quality of life and economic development. DesignAlabama promotes collaboration and engagement between local leaders, citizens, and design professionals through their annual and special programs. One notable program is [DesignPlace,](#) wherein design professionals meet with the community over a three-day charrette, develop recommendations for design, and create a strategic plan for implementation. Additionally, DesignAlabama hosts an annual [Mayors Design Summit](#), bringing together five mayors from one Alabama region to address a common design issue over a two-day charrette.

- [Black Belt Community Foundation](#)

  The Black Belt Community Foundation (BBCF) serves twelve counties in Alabama's Black Belt region (located in southern Alabama), aiming to deliver resources that support community development and regional transformation. BBCF builds leadership capacity in the Black Belt by implementing over 150 Community Associates across the twelve counties, collecting feedback and information from residents that shape their programming and service delivery. BBCF offers

grants and programs for the arts; health, outreach, promotion, and education (HOPE); head start; storm recovery; and academic and community leadership.

- Main Street Alabama

  As a member of Main Street America, Main Street Alabama is a non-profit organization that emphasizes community engagement, job creation, and investment in Alabama communities. Main Street Alabama utilizes the Main Street Four-Point Approach, which leverages local assets in communities as a starting point to sustainable and all-encompassing community revitalization. Main Street Alabama works with communities to help them develop relationships with public and private partners that are involved in the commercial district, therefore promoting collaboration as a community and economic development strategy.

- Association of County Commissions of Alabama

  Founded in 1929, the Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA) is an "educational, technical, legal, legislative, and public policy resource for Alabama's sixty-seven counties." ACCA represents the interests of county governments in front of the Alabama Legislature, advocating on their behalf for policies that will support their development and vitality. ACCA offers legal/policy advice and assistance, information on issues that impact counties, webinars and educational programming, and conventions and conferences to county government officials and staff, aiming to increase capacity and improve county governance through education, guidance, and advocacy.

- Alabama League of Municipalities

  The Alabama League of Municipalities (ALM) is a statewide nonpartisan organization that represents over 450 municipalities. ALM strived to strengthen Alabama's municipal governments through advocacy at the Alabama Legislature, information sharing, legal and management guidance, and training programs and conferences for members. One notable training is the Certified Municipal Official (CMO) training program, which provides education to mayors and council members who want to be formally trained in the foundations of municipal government. In addition to these services, ALM offers funding through AMFund to assist Alabama municipalities in funding local development projects and refinancing existing debt. As a member of the National League of Cities (NLC), ALM members have access to NLC's national events. ALMis governed by a Board of Directors of municipal officials from each of the state's congressional districts and therefore is run by municipal leaders for municipal leaders.

- Alabama Communities of Excellence

  Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) provides asset-based technical assistance and tools to Alabama's small cities (2,000 to 18,000) to promote community growth and prosperity. ACE delivers technical assistance in three phases, beginning with assessment, where the multidisciplinary ACE team conducts a community visit; then, communities, with the assistance of ACE facilitators develop a strategic plan for their development goals; lastly, the community must execute the strategic plan and craft a 10-20-year comprehensive plan for further development in infrastructure, land use, and community design. Generally, within three years,

communities earn the designation of "Alabama Community of Excellence" and must recertify every three to five years by demonstrating progress in implementation of the long-term plan.

- Alabama Rural Water Association

  The Alabama Rural Water Association (ARWA) is a non-profit organization that provides water and wastewater system assistance to rural communities across Alabama. The ARWA team of specialists and technicians provides on-site low-cost help to ensure the systems comply with state and federal regulations, inflow/infiltration detection, sewer system evaluations, and training initiatives to educate communities and businesses about water systems. ARWA works closely with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, USDA-Rural Development, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, among many others.

- USDA-Rural Development Alabama

  USDA-Rural Development's Alabama Office offers many grants and loans for rural municipalities, counties, and federally recognized tribes to conduct community development projects, many of which focus on water and waste disposal, though only a few have an open application window. Some of these include Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants, which help communities prepare or recover from an emergency that threatens/threatened their drinking water, the Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program, which provides funding for clean drinking water systems, sanitary solid waste and sewage disposal, and stormwater systems in rural communities; and Water & Waste Disposal Predevelopment Planning Grants, which helps low-income communities develop applications for USDA-Rural Development water/waste disposal projects.

New Hampshire

According to Census data, New Hampshire's local governance primarily consists of municipal governments. County governments exist across the state, but they provide very few services to municipalities, who instead mainly serve themselves.

New Hampshire's technical assistance provision is mostly governed by the Regional Planning Commissions. Their main responsibilities are to "advise on ordinances, regulations, and land use issues; provide professional planning services; help to secure transportation and infrastructure funds; help to obtain and administer state and federal grants; and reduce local costs through regional coordination." There are nine RPCs across the state, which are governed by their own executive committee and provide their own resources to their regions. The RPCs are governed by the New Hampshire Association of Regional Planning Commissions. This organization "coordinates the activities of the RPCs on a statewide basis by providing information and technical assistance to its members and other groups and organizations." They hold regular meetings to collaborate with officials from each RPC. One of their current projects is a Regional Housing Needs Assessment that is being conducted across the state. The map for the New Hampshire RPCs is included below.

The New Hampshire Municipal Association is a resource available for each municipality in the state, but it does not act as a governing body in the provision of technical assistance. Still, it is a valuable resource

that aggregates information for municipal officials and supports the technical assistance infrastructure across the state. The NHMA is governed by a Board of Directors, which is made up of municipal officials elected by members of the municipal association. The Board has regular meetings that are open to the public.

There are many organizations across the state that carry out valuable work to improve the technical assistance landscape. Among non-profits, there is not much evidence of intentional collaboration across organizations. Similarly, state agencies that work within the municipal technical assistance lens do not seem to collaborate with each other.

- NH Northern Borders Research Collaboration state funded TA model for project development

- PlanNH and Charrette Program
  Since 1989, Plan NH has focused on developing New Hampshire's built environment that prioritizes people's values, a strong sense of place, and environmental needs. Within this organization is the Community Design Charrette Program, which addresses community needs collaboration between a diverse group of professionals. Each Charrette lasts 2 days and focuses on getting a pulse on the issue at hand before making recommendations for the community's next steps. To date, there have been over 75 successful Charrettes across the state of New Hampshire. They have addressed issues like safety, traffic, connectivity, quality of life, economic growth, downtown area improvements, and much more. There will be an upcoming charrette on **May 30-31, 2025, in Nashua, NH**. Given the program's unique nature and success level, it would be valuable for representatives from our team to get to observe part of this experience and evaluate how it may be transferrable to the state of Vermont.

- UNH Extension Community Development
  The UNH Extension bolsters the community through community leadership; economic development; and tourism, outdoor recreation, and the nature economy. Within these three branches, there are a wide variety of programs and reports that are relevant to the VERTA work. For example, the Housing Academy provides resources and training that help municipal officials access grants specifically related to housing matters. On the other hand, the Main Street Academy develops strategies and learning opportunities to revitalize downtown areas.

- USDA RD NH/VT
  There is only one technical assistance grant that is currently open in New Hampshire that is funded through USDA Rural Development. The Mutual Self-Help Housing Technical Assistance Grants in Vermont and New Hampshire is available to both government and private non-profits and Federally recognized Tribes for construction projects. These funds are specifically for local self-help housing projects in rural areas. Organizations may use these funds for TA assistance for families, assist other organizations, and provide grant support to families. This program may be of interest to the Vermont TA model, as it has a focus on low-income families in rural areas where there is low housing availability.

- NH Bureau of Economic Affairs
  The New Hampshire Division of Planning and Community Development is a branch of the NH Bureau of Economic Affairs that provides technical assistance for housing, land use, floodplain management, and broadband access. The Office of Planning and Development host various programs like the Floodplain Management Program and the Municipal and Regional Planning

Assistance Program. The Floodplain Management Program partners with the National Flood Insurance Program, which ensures that participating communities have a floodplain management ordinance that meets the satisfactory criteria. There are plenty of frameworks and information guides for communities and administrators, as well as training opportunities to build staff capacity.

The Municipal and Regional Planning Assistance Program provides technical assistance for several issues, including planning and zoning regulation, land use and development, master plans, natural resource management, and housing and economic development. Additionally, they offer training, handbooks, partner coordination, a land use inventory, and a forum for public planning.

- Clean Energy NH
  Clean Energy NH educates and advocates for the clean energy transition across New Hampshire, and they have two programs that may be of interest for this research. Since 2019, the Energy Circuit Riders Program has supported over 30 projects related to clean energy and has provided over $1.2 million dollars in grant funding. They also provide technical assistance to municipalities that encourage the transition to clean energy. Currently, they operate in the North Country, Rockingham, Strafford, Monadnock, Seacoast, and Sullivan counties, with the intention of expanding across the entire state. The Small Business Technical Assistance Program is also relevant to this research. This program uses REAP funding through the USDA to support small businesses and farms with grants to transition to clean energy. Though this is not directly relevant to municipalities, gaining a sense of this model and whether it could be transferrable to municipalities may be valuable.

- New Hampshire Municipal Association
  The New Hampshire Municipal Association serves as the place where municipalities can find aggregated resources, information, funding opportunities, and more to improve local government functioning. The NHMA advocates on behalf of policy, provides legal services, hosts an annual conference, educates municipal officials through workshops and webinars, and shares helpful information and other resources. Within the NHMA, there are many Affiliate Groups for various types of municipal positions that provide their own educational resources, set strategic goals, and host meetings.

Maine

Maine's local governance structure is a mix of both municipal and county governments. Both municipalities and counties are led by the "home rule," meaning that they can lead themselves how they see fit. Counties mainly provide services like law enforcement, emergency management, and road infrastructure. Other services are delegated to municipalities and state agencies to carry out. The graph to the left shows the flow of services and financial resources in municipal government in Maine. Maine's municipal technical assistance landscape can be described as a "Top Down" model. In Maine (and other states), this model is referred to as a Council of Government Model. Like Vermont, Maine is broken up into Regional Councils (Like RPCs) that carry out the Municipal Planning Assistance Program in their respective regions. Many of the Regional Councils seem to have a "general assembly" or planning day within their region, but it is unclear when/what capacity the Regional Councils work together. An important distinction between the RPC model and the COG model is that COGs have the authority to carry out any action that a municipal official could, which helps to strengthen the capacity of local government. There is quite a bit of evidence of intentional collaboration within non-government orgs and

non-profits throughout the state through partnerships like Policy Action 2025 between Build Maine and GrowSmart Vermont. These partnerships typically work together to provide funding or direct technical assistance. While the state government focuses on providing funding and TA through the Municipal Planning Assistance Program, other organizations across the state also provide specialized services related to TA. Additionally, Maine has a municipal league led by an executive committee that seeks to support technical assistance across the state of Maine. Though MMA provides a large variety of services and resources, there does not appear to be evidence of collaboration across other state or non-government organizations, besides workshops and their yearly convention.

- Maine is doing some work to combine agencies who provide technical assistance to towns into one building to improve communications and efficiency.

- Build Maine
  The Build Maine conference takes place yearly to bring together professionals involved in municipal TA in Maine to discuss what is currently working in the TA landscape and goals for the future. In addition to the conference, Build Maine also hosts other events and workshops all year. Recently, Build Maine launched Policy Action 2025, a collaboration with GrowSmart Maine which encourages legislative development to improve how municipalities function across the state. Currently, there are seven working groups that are building separate policies related to municipal TA. Build Maine also provides some funding through the Tactical Urbanism Lightning Grants. This program allocates funds up to $1000 to municipalities for mid-sized projects that are focused in a public space and typically encourage community participation. In addition to monetary support, the grant program board is also able to provide expertise, connections, or other support for the project.

- Grow Smart Maine
  GrowSmart Maine is an organization dedicated to the preservation and growth of rural towns in Maine. They have collaborated with other organizations within the state to accomplish this work. As mentioned above, they work with Build Maine on Policy Action 2025. One way they connect with the greater Maine community to provide TA resources is through their webinars, like Alternative Housing Models, Smart Growth for Small Communities, Creating Community: Farming and Housing, and many more. This work is built upon further through the Maine Alliance for Smart Growth, which brings together individuals who are passionate about building vibrant communities through the local economy, creative economy, and natural spaces. This network relies on a steering committee to connect their own communities and provide expertise. GrowSmart Maine also represents Kennebec County as the Regional and Tribal Broadband Partner for the Maine Connectivity Authority to improve connectivity and literacy across the state. GrowSmart brings their network together each year for the GrowSmart Maine Annual Summit. In terms of funding, they do some grant funding work with USDA-RD through the Rural Innovation Stronger Economy Program (RISE).

- Maine Office of Community Development
  The Office of Community Development works within the Department of Economic & Community Development in Maine's state government. This organization is responsible for three main programs: The Block Grant Program, Municipal Tax Increment Financing, and the Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund Program. The Block Grant Program, which is funded by HUD, provides financing to municipalities for community projects. The Municipal Tax Increment Financing gives municipalities an opportunity to reinvest new property taxes into new community development

projects. Lastly, the Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund Program is another funding source for municipalities to address abandoned brownfield sites to be revitalized. Based on the Office of Community Development, it seems that Maine's government stays involved in municipal technical assistance primarily as a funder, rather than a collaborator.

- Maine Community Foundation
The Maine Community Foundation brings together financial and human capital to provide to build up communities in Maine through technical assistance. MCF has a multitude of grants with comprehensive information about eligibility and the application process, some of which include Community Building, Conservation For All, and the Frances Hollis Brain Foundation Fund. MCF also provides support through advisors and attorneys for clients, educational materials, scholarships, and more. In 2024, they conducted a Needs Assessment, which found that the main areas of focus in Maine should be housing, health access, economic opportunity, mental health/substance use, early child development, and climate, many of which they have chosen to focus their efforts on.

- Maine Downtown Center
The Maine Downtown Center is an organization started by Main Street America® Coordinating Program, which seeks to build strong downtown areas through preservation and community building. Recently, they released a Cultural and Historic Preservation Toolkit to be used as an educational resource for communities. Within this program, they provide subgrants through the REvitalizeME 2025 Grant Program to municipalities for historic preservation projects. Additionally, they provide resources for technical assistance through educational events and programs, advisory council, and a resource library.

- USDA RD Maine
There are many types of programs and services that fall into the following categories: Business, Community Facilities, Cooperative Services, Electric, Energy, Multi-Family, Single Family Housing, Telecommunications, Water & Environment, and the USDA LINC Training and Resource Library. USDA RD also has several grant awards that Maine municipalities are eligible for, like the Community Facilities Grant Award and the Multi-Family Housing Grant Awards.

- Maine Municipal Association
The Maine Municipal Association's purpose is "Strengthening Maine's Local Governments Through Member Services, Education and Advocacy." MMA is considered a state municipal league, which is recognized by all levels of government for the services they provide. At MMA, their work is divided into advocacy, legal services, risk management services, training & events, HR & personnel services, and health trust. The organization is governed by an executive committee made up of 12 elected municipal officials who meet monthly.

Massachusetts
Though some county governments exist in Massachusetts, most of them were abolished in the early 2000s. The remaining county governments are only required to provide a county jail and are permitted to provide road maintenance and shore reservation at their discretion. It appears municipalities have the authority to govern their community as they see fit and are required to provide most services.

Massachusetts has a top-down technical assistance model – regional planning agencies. There are twelve RPAs across the state that "serves the local governments and citizens in the region by dealing

with issues and needs that cross city, town, county and even state boundaries through communication, planning, policymaking, coordination, advocacy and technical assistance." They have direct ties to local and state governments and work to build partnerships within the communities that they serve. The overarching leadership is The American Planning Association – Massachusetts Chapter, which is governed by a Board. They offer events, professional development, and other helpful resources. The map of Massachusetts RPAs is shown below.

There are plenty of organizations and state agencies that are dedicated to improving technical assistance across the state. There is not much evidence of collaboration between the state, nonprofits, or municipalities, nor any collaboration across these entities.
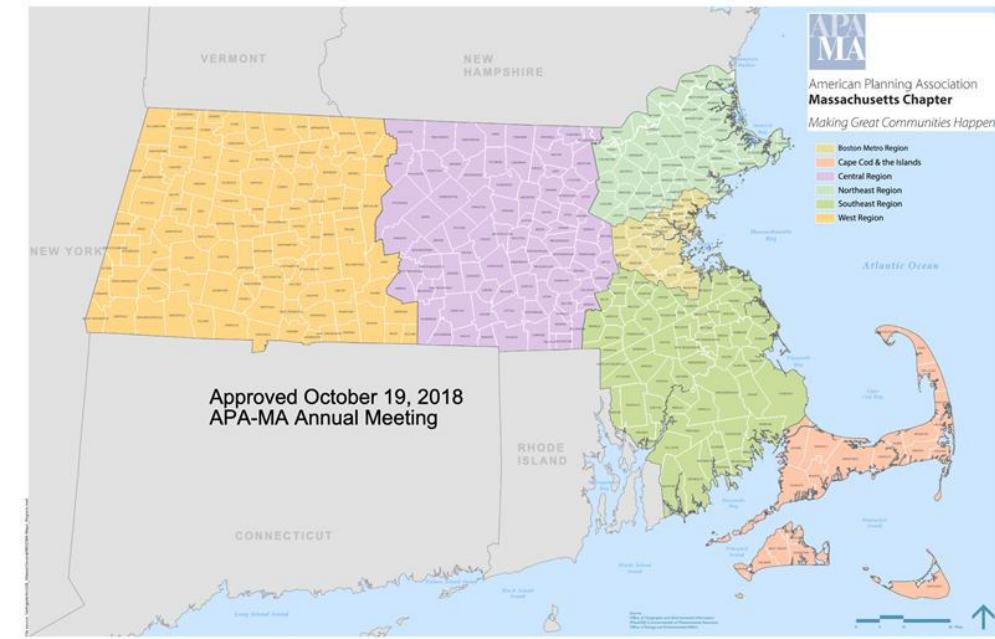
- The Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management
  The Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management is an organization that works within UMass Boston and strives to "improve efficiency, effectiveness, governance, and accountability at all levels of government, with a particular focus on state and local government." They provide a multitude of services in different areas: Budget and Financial Assistance, Charter Change Assistance and Government Study Committee Facilitation, Classification and Compensation, Executive Recruitment, Human Resources, management and Operational Reviews, Performance Management, Regionalization and Collaboration, Strategic Planning and Community Involvement, and Training and Education. They support nearly 80 projects a year and have worked with most of the municipalities in the state. Their project tracking is shown below. They are led by Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 75, Section 45, which established the Center at UMass Boston.

Municipal Engagements as of 2022

Level of Engagement
- Single Engagement
- Multiple Engagements
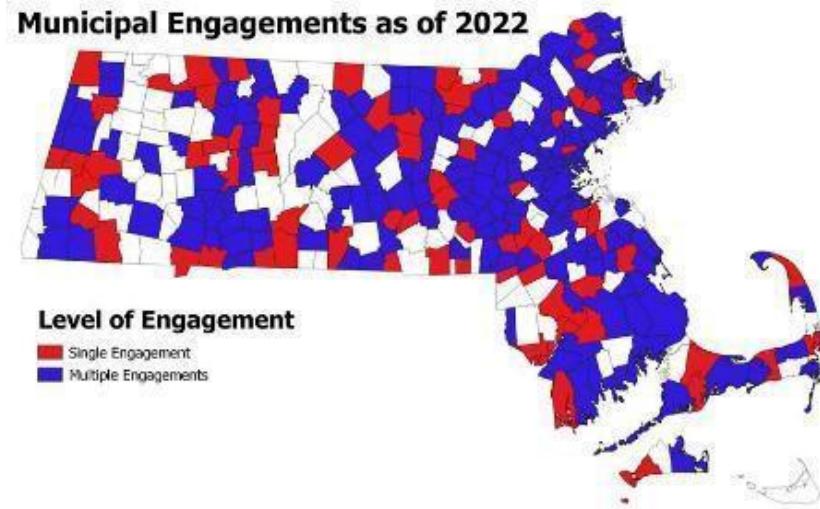
- [MassDevelopment](#) and [Transformative Development Initiative (TDI)](#)
Mass Development is an organization dedicated to supporting and investing in local economies in Massachusetts by providing financial and technical assistance. They have resources designed for many different sectors of work, including manufacturers, businesses, developers, municipalities, and more. Though they also have financing and real estate programs, their [Funding & Tools](#) programs are most relevant to VERTA work. They have many [Grant Programs](#), resources for [Small Businesses](#), direct [Technical Assistance](#), and the [Transformative Development Initiative](#).

  The Transformative Development Initiative works nationally to bring direct technical assistance and resources to communities that have lower access to state and federal resources. They use asset-based community development by employing partnerships with existing organizations to create a stronger support presence for community development work even after TDI has "completed" their work in a community. They have several approaches to doing this kind of work: building capacity within the community, creating partnerships between TDI and community stakeholders, strengthening creative economies, and sharing informational tools. Some of the work that they have done in Massachusetts consists of building a community hub in an abandoned lot in Chicopee, creating the Cosmic Cycles Fashion Show in Springfield, expanding a community theater project in Boston, and more.

- [Rural Development Fund](#) and [Director of Rural Affairs](#)
The Rural Development Fund is a grant program funded by the State Office of Economic Development that seeks to support small and rural communities in completing projects related to community and economic development. These funds are meant to provide opportunities to municipalities with lower capacity that may have difficulty competing with larger communities for general funding. Eligible municipalities are encouraged to submit an application for projects within the scope of planning and zoning, site preparation, building, or infrastructure. This grant program goes through the [Community One Stop for Growth](#), which "combines 12 of the Commonwealth's most popular community focused economic development and housing grant programs into a single application portal and collaborative review process."

  The Director of Rural Affairs works within the state government to "to provide resources and assistance to aid rural communities in shaping and achieving their vision for economic development." In addition to the Rural Development Fund and Community One Stop for Growth,

the Director of Rural Affairs also manages the Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC). RPAC conducts research in the interest of economic prosperity for small and rural communities. In 2019, they released a Rural Policy Plan, which identified opportunities for growth in rural regions of Massachusetts.

- One Stop for Growth
  One Stop for Growth is "the main vehicle for public economic development investment in the Commonwealth." This organization acts as a 'one stop shop' for grant applications in Massachusetts, which allows for communities to apply for multiple funding opportunities with going through many individual application processes. This work makes grant funding more collaborative and strategic between communities and reviewers. Each grant program at One Stop is guided by a Development Continuum, which adds a level of intentionality to each project that is completed. One Stop consists of 12 grant programs that are funded through the Executive Office of Economic Development, the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, and MassDevelopment.

- Abundance Housing MA
  Abundant Housing MA is an organization that advocates on behalf of housing access in Mass. Their main goal is to increase the housing stock across the state, but they also support "more homes near transit and jobs, robust tenant protections to prevent displacement, reform of exclusionary zoning rules, sustainable development practices and communities, and robust funding of social and subsidized housing." Their 2025-2026 Priorities outlines the specific legislation they are backing, along with comprehensive information about each bill, law, or fund. They also provide access to various resources for individuals interested in learning about the current housing and political landscape in the state.

- Mass Cultural Council and Rural Tools
  The Mass Cultural Council is an organization that leverages the arts, humanities, and sciences to build stronger communities and local economies. They believe that "culture embraces everyone, enriches community, drives growth and opportunity, and empowers a new creative generation." They have extensive lists of resources and grant opportunities that target artists, youth, communities, and organizations.

  One of the resources that Mass Cultural Council provides is the Rural Municipalities Toolkit. This resource was created in collaboration with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development – Rural Affairs. The purpose of this toolkit is to guide communities through prevalent challenges in rural Massachusetts. The toolkit aggregates local, regional, state, and national resources that communities can leverage in their community and economic development work. They also reference examples, case studies, and other toolkits that may be useful for the work being done in Mass.

- UMass Amherst Sustainable Community Development and UMass Design Center
  The Sustainable Community Development program at UMass Amherst seeks to prepare individuals for careers in organizations that support the effectiveness of municipal work. It seems to directly enhance students' skills in landscape architecture and regional planning. Many of the pathways that can be taken with this degree directly apply to VERTA work.

  The UMass Design Center is an extension program of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, which is the same department that Sustainable Community Development

falls under. This center is meant as a makerspace for students to "initiate projects that will support the revitalization of cities and towns in innovative ways that reflect best practices, strengthen the connection between the university and Massachusetts cities and towns, and provide students with a range of learning opportunities, including community outreach, urban design and city planning." Students and faculty actively collaborate with municipalities in the region to strengthen their communities. The Center's current project is titled "Envisioning livable neighborhoods in Springfield, MA." Students are developing assessments of community needs and engaging with the public to understand how they can synthesize the city's cultural and physical vision, and how this would impact the community and economy.

- USDA RD MA/RI/CT
  The Southern New England Rural Development State Office oversees the Rural Development branch of USDA in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Current services being offered in Massachusetts include Single-Family Housing Guaranteed Lender, Electric Programs Engineering, RHS & RBS Environmental Determinations, Rural Development Disaster Assistance, RUS Interest Rates, Direct Loan Application Packagers, Environmental Policies and Procedures, Sustainable Management Tools, USDA LINC Training, and Water & Environmental Engineers. Each of these programs, resources, funds, or training all support USDA RD's mission to support sustainable community development in rural areas.

- 1 Berkshire and Ben Lamb
  According to their website, "1Berkshire is a membership-sustained coalition dedicated to economic development and destination marketing." Their purpose is to improve Western Massachusetts' economy by supporting businesses and bringing in tourism. Currently, 1Berkshire has over 700 membership organizations and is the product of the merging of four separate economic development organizations. They have various programs that support economic vitality in the Berkshires, like the Berkshire Economic Recovery Project (BERP) Technical Assistance Program, which is a cohort program that provides training and direct technical assistance that helps local businesses maneuver a changing economy. Some other notable programs that they run include The Berkshire Immigrant Entrepreneurial Support Pilot Program, The Berkshire Leadership Program, and GoFundU. 1Berkshire is lead by two Boards of Directors: the 1Berkshire Alliance and the 1Berkshire Foundation. Both boards support the network of members of the organization, as well as the education and programming offered by 1Berkshire. 1Berkshire also hosts several events, including their Annual Meeting, to being key stakeholders in their work together.

- Massachusetts Municipal Association
  The Massachusetts Municipal Association is a member organization for municipalities across the state. Their mission is to "articulate a clear and united municipal message, develop and advocate for shared policy goals, share information and best practices, and work together to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of municipal service delivery." They are engaged in advocacy work, education and networking, communication with municipalities, research, insurance provision, MunEnergy, professional development, tobacco control, and various workgroups. This organization is governed by a Board of Directors, who hold regular meetings and vote on MMA priorities.

New York

New York municipalities are governed by both local and county governments. New York is led by Home Rule, meaning that municipalities can act as they see fit to improve the quality of life of their communities. Local governments are given the power to provide services like court systems, education systems, public assistance, civil service merit systems, and more. On the other hand, county governments are required to provide administrative buildings (jails, courthouses, etc.), mental health services, assistance and child welfare services, and senior services. They are also permitted to provide other services at their discretion.

New York employs a top-down Council of Government model of technical assistance across the state, which are referred to as Regional Economic Development Councils. Their mission is to "support the State's innovative approach that empowers regional stakeholders to establish pathways to prosperity, mapped out in regional strategic plans." Their resource center is an aggregated list of thousands of events, press releases, webinars, news articles, and other resources for each REDC. They also offer a Consolidated Funding Application that allows municipalities to apply for multiple funding sources without submitting individual applications for each grant.

The state is broken up into 10 regions, which acts as the "voice" for the region and provides support for municipal projects, issues, and more. REDC's are led by the Secretary of State, who serves as the Chair of each region, and a Regional Co-Chair that serves a two-year term. The Co-Chairs also make up the Regional Council's Executive Committee. This Committee meets regularly in a public setting. There are also work groups across the REDC's to engage in specific work or address pressing issues. The REDC Guidebook provides more detailed information about the governance of this organization, and the map of Regions is shown below.

Much of the technical assistance work is provided by state agencies, including the REDCs, the Downtown Revitalization Initiative, the Department of State, The Regional and Local Assistance Program, and much more. There is extensive collaboration between these agencies and specific programs. There does not appear to be many non-governmental organizations doing this type of work across the state, so it is also unclear if these organizations collaborate among themselves or with the state.

- New York State's Downtown Revitalization Initiative

The Downtown Revitalization Initiative is a significant program within the state's economic development program. This program works to "transform downtown neighborhoods into vibrant centers that offer a high quality of life and are magnets for redevelopment, business, job creation, and economic and housing diversity." DRI's process is broken into three main pieces: communities apply within their respective Regional Economic Development Council, communities develop a Strategic Investment Plan, and funding is allocated to selected communities to carry out various projects. The DRI also provides resources to participating communities, including capacity building webinars and information about decarbonization.

- The Division of Local Government Services
  The Division of Local Government Services is a branch of the Department of State dedicated to providing "training and technical assistance, Local Government Efficiency grant programs, and regionally focused community and economic development organizations." They provide information Grants and Bid Opportunities, and currently there are 44 different funding opportunities being offered for local government work.

- The Regional and Local Assistance Program
  The Regional and Local Assistance Program is offered through the New York State Government and "provides grant funding to New York local governments, counties, municipalities, Tribal Governments, and other government entities or entities created by units of government to plan and implement broadband or wireless deployment and digital equity projects and programs, and other efforts consistent with the ConnectALL mandate." In addition to funding, the program may also provide direct technical assistance and planning support for projects.

- Preservation League of NYS
  The Preservation League of NYS is an organization that encourages historic preservation in New York State as a solution to sustainable community development. They offer several League Grants, which can be used for funding preservation projects. One grant currently being offered is the Technical Assistance Grants: Short Studies for Small Projects. This fund provides up to $7,500 with a $500 cash match for preservation projects like accessibility studies, engineering & structural analyses, limited condition assessments, MEP analyses, specialized conservation studies, and energy efficiency studies & energy audits. In addition to funding, the Preservation League also provides access to several resource guides, a variety of different programs, and a Public Policy Program that advocates for historic preservation.

- New York Main Street
  New York Main Street is a grant program that operates within the New York State Government to "provide financial resources and technical assistance to communities to strengthen the economic vitality of the State's traditional Main Streets and neighborhoods." These grants can be used to bring in technical assistance for a project, building renovations, and to improve downtown "anchor sites." This organization seeks to improve existing assets within a community rather than fund new projects. Eligible grant awardees include municipalities or other local government entities, and nonprofit organizations engaged in this type of work.

- NYS Tugg Hill Commission
  The NYS Tugg Hill Commission is an organization dedicated to supporting municipal government in the Tugg Hill region, which is made up of 41 towns and 18 villages. The Commission has developed a strategic plan that will guide their work for the next 5 years. High priorities include

reporting on relevant issues; coordination work; aggregating technical studies; apply for public and private funding; encourage advocacy across public and private organizations; and provide direct technical assistance for local governments through planning assistance, legal assistance, training, citizen education, participation assistance, and grant application assistance. This organization is in collaboration with the NYS Department of State.

- New York State Conference of Mayors and the Elected Officials Academy
  The New York Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials is New York's version of a municipal league. Their mission is to "unite local government officials in an active statewide network focused on the singular purpose of finding the most effective means of providing essential municipal services." NYCOM provides these services through advocacy work, training, and other resources. Some of these resources include publications like the Handbook for City Officials and the Handbook for Village Officials. NYCOM is governed by an Executive Committee, who is responsible for developing the organization's policies.

  One interesting program that is offered through NYCOM is the Elected Officials Academy. This is a "two-tiered program that facilitates and recognizes the educational and leadership accomplishments of elected city and village officials." They offer a wide variety of educational courses and training geared toward elected municipal officials free of charge. To complete level 1, the academy requires enrolled individuals to take four core courses: Fundamentals of Financial Management, Fundamentals of Leadership Roles and Responsibilities, Fundamentals of the Legal Frameworks of Municipalities, and Fundamentals of Employer-Employee Relations. Individuals must also take elective courses, conference attendance, and advocacy. Level 2 has a separate set of requirements.

Texas

Texas is divided into county governments that are led by locally elected county officials. Counties are responsible for an extensive list of services, including public safety, elections, record safety, health and safety, and emergency management, among others. Texas also has local municipal government that has the authority to create and enforce local laws as they see fit. Like county government, they provide their own services like police, fire, utilities, and sanitation to their communities.

Texas does not have a centralized or top-down model for technical assistance provision. Instead, the TA landscape in the state is very unstructured. There are a variety of state organizations and programs, like the State Energy Conversation Office and Texas Broadband Development Office, that are engaged in this type of work. The only example of a centralized organization for TA provision in the state is the Texas Municipal League (see more detailed information below).

It seems that TA provision is more so in the hands of nongovernmental organizations like nonprofits and member organizations to fill this gap. There are also several programs within higher-education entities that focus on technical assistance education or direct assistance. There is no significant evidence that shows meaningful collaboration across state or nonprofit organizations, or between these types of organizations.

- Texas Rural Funders
  The Texas Rural Funders is a membership organization that "helps funders build knowledge about, generate attention and resources toward, and engage in collaborative action" to support

rural communities in Texas. Members of the organization include "private foundations,

community foundations, and a variety of intermediary organizations, both statewide and national, small and large." In terms of financial resources, they have a list of grants available as well as grant writers who are available for assistance. They also have an entire page dedicated to Rural Resources like data and tools, media, partners, events, and more. TRF focuses a lot of their energy on helping rural communities in Texas gain access to Broadband. In collaboration with Connected Nation, they developed Community Technology Action Plans. They share many more resources for broadband access and have connections to the Texas Broadband Development Office, who is engaged in very similar work.

● Brookings Institute Podcast: Policy innovations that strengthen rural capacity to access investment
Summarizes what several other states (KY, MI, IA UT, KS) have done to help smaller communities get things done. Key strategies include boosting local capacity for planning, providing technical assistance for grant applications, offering cohort leadership training to local leaders, and aligning regulations to foster growth. It also highlights the need for flexible funding, and it showcases how successful partnerships between federal, state, local governments, residents, and private investors can get things done.

● State Energy Conservation Office
The State Energy Conservation Office is a branch of the Texas state government that sponsors the Technical Assistance for Local Governments Program, which "makes energy engineering expertise available to political subdivisions in Texas through its Technical Assistance Program (TAP)." They offer free direct technical assistance to municipalities and other local government entities regarding engineering or water issues.

In addition to the TA for Local Governments Program, SECO offers funding and incentives, other programs, education and training, and other resources.

● TxLTAP
The Texas Local Technical Assistance Program works within UTA Extension to "focused on preserving and enhancing the local road system by delivering quality training and technical assistance to local city/county road agencies in Texas." They offer direct technical assistance to municipalities, newsletters and magazines, and trainings. In addition, they have an entire library of resources for Workforce Development, Technical Briefing Papers, Texas and National Resources, Transportation News, Video Resources, and Inspection Checklists.

● Texas Broadband Development Office
The Texas Broadband Development Office is a branch of the Texas state government that "awards grants, low-interest loans and other financial incentives to internet service providers who expand access to broadband service in underserved areas." Currently, some of their goals include building a map that identifies broadband access across the state and developing a broadband plan for the state to employ. They provide funding to municipalities through grants like the Broadband Infrastructure Fund, the American Rescue Plan Act Capital Projects Fund, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) Programs

One notable program within the Broadband Development Office is the Technical Assistance Program. The TAP program's mission is "aiding local governments and communities by providing assistance to identify local broadband development opportunities and prepare for forthcoming

state and federal funds." They have eight main services within this program: Broadband Planning and Consulting Services, Stakeholder Identification and Outreach, Asset Mapping, Gap Analysis and Community Needs Identification, Public Private Partnership (P3) Identification and Analysis, Workforce Development Strategy, Digital Opportunity Strategy and Needs Identification, and Network Design Assessment.

- **Texas Water Infrastructure Coordination Committee**
The Texas Water Infrastructure Coordination Committee is an aggregation of funding opportunities for municipalities who need support with their water system. This organization "is a collaborative effort by State and Federal government agencies and technical assistance providers promoting an efficient process for affordable, sustainable, and innovative funding strategies for water and wastewater infrastructure projects that protect public health." Their Funding Resources Guide is a resource for municipalities to understand their options for financial support. In addition to funding information, they provide access to direct technical assistance, whether this is one-on-one support, project development and management resources, or general resources. TWICC also has information about specific water system issues like disasters, water loss, nonpoint source solutions, feasibility studies, drinking water watch, drinking water advisory work group, and faucetfacts.

- **Texas Municipal League**
The Texas Municipal League serves 1,174 communities in Texas by providing services that will help to build stronger communities. TML is governed by a Board of Directors that meets regularly to serve their member communities. They provide extensive resources that touch areas like Business Development, the BuyBoard Purchasing Program, City Financial Services, Connect News, Directories and Publications, Municipal Excellence Awards, Newly Elected Resources, Regions, Small Cities, Surveys, Youth Programs, and other Helpful Links. Their Legislative Program clearly outlines the legislation that they intend to support or oppose in the upcoming year, and they have more information about the legislative work that they do on their Legislative Information page. TML also educates municipal officials through the Certified Municipal Official Program and various types of online training.

- **TEEX Technical Assistance Courses**
Texas A&M Engineering Extension Services has an extensive catalog of technical assistance courses. Several relevant training courses that are most relevant to the VERTA work are listed below.

The Disaster Recovery Training "helps jurisdictions build recovery capabilities through facilitated training and exercises using established National Frameworks and best practices."

The Economic Development Training "serves a variety of professionals including local elected officials, government agency staff members, business leaders, community leaders and volunteers, and chamber of commerce or economic development organizations and their staff."

The Emergency Preparedness Training "provides technical assistance, training, and exercises for professionals working in both public and private sector organizations. Our customizable solutions are designed to make a 'good plan' better, a sound team stronger, and a safer, more resilient community."

Kentucky

Kentucky is mainly governed by counties at the local level. The state government uses counties as an extension to provide necessary resources like road maintenance, public infrastructure, public safety services, and more. Still, municipal governments in Kentucky have the authority to act as they see fit, so long as it is "within the boundaries of the city, in furtherance of a public purpose of the city, and not in conflict with a constitutional provision or statute."

Kentucky employs a top-down technical assistance model through the structure of Area Development Districts. ADDs were developed to "administer and deliver needed federal resources to communities" and build a stronger connection across state, regional, and local governance. The ADDs are governed by the Kentucky Council of Area Development Districts, which is led by a Board of Directors who meet regularly. Individually, each ADD has its own Board of Directors that manage the goals and objectives of the communities that they serve. They are also connected through the Kentucky Association of District Directors, which is a collaboration between each ADD executive director.

ADDs are in collaboration with the Kentucky Regional Planning and Development Agency & the Kentucky Infrastructure Authority. According to the KIA, each ADD (and county within) needs a regional water management council and county water management council, which are responsible for "prioritizing all water and wastewater projects in their region for any available funding through the Kentucky State Legislature." The map of ADDs is shown below.
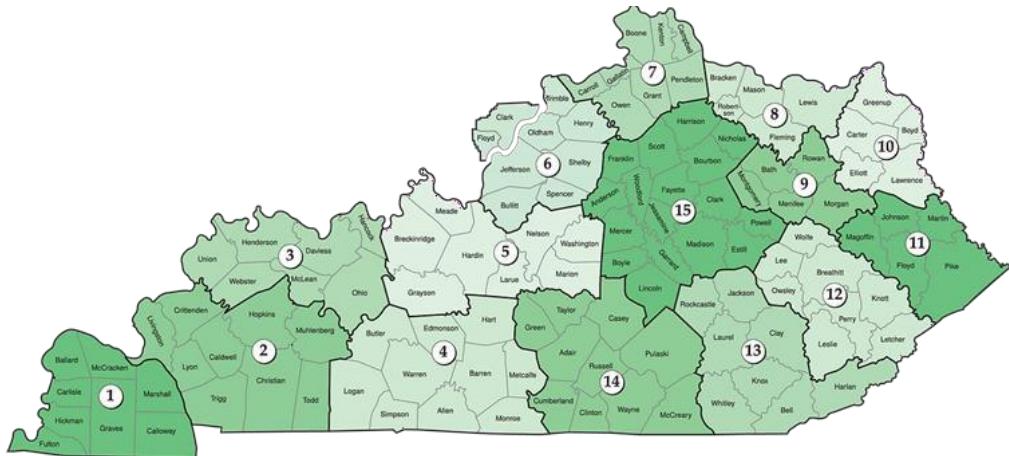
There is evidence of a strong presence of technical assistance provision within the state government. There are also a multitude of organizations providing general or specialized technical assistance across the state. There is evidence of collaboration between various state agencies, but there is not much evidence of collaboration between nongovernmental organizations or across gov/non-governmental entities.

- Grant Ready Kentucky

  Grant Ready Kentucky is an organization funded through the Blue Grass Community Foundation. This organization is focused on assisting nonprofit organizations across Kentucky, typically those in rural areas or underserved organizations, to gain access to grant funding. They do this through educating nonprofits about grant opportunities, hosting grant training workshops, providing individualized coaching, and strengthening networks across the state. Through doing this work, Grant Ready Kentucky hopes that nonprofits will be more equipped to get necessary funding as it gets released. Many of their support is free, but their training workshops do cost a fee.

- [Department of Rural and Municipal Aid](#)
  The Department of Rural and Municipal Aid works within the Kentucky state government to provide funding and technical assistance related to transportation needs among local Kentucky government. There are two offices within this department: the [Office of Local Programs](#) (OLP) and the Office of Rural and Secondary Roads (ORSD). The OLP is concerned with overseeing grants like Transportation Alternatives Programs (TAP) and the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program (CMAQ). Some of these projects include improvements to bike transportation facilities, traffic flow, and roundabouts.

  Several programs within the ORSD include County and Municipal Road Aid, the Cooperative Program, and the Rural Secondary Program, all of which are revenue-sharing programs. The County and Municipal Road Aid program provides funding to municipalities for road improvements based on census population data. The Cooperative Program is open to municipalities who choose to withhold a percentage of their road aid funding, in exchange for the ability to apply for additional emergency funds as needed. The Rural Secondary Program has funding opportunities available for municipalities to improve drainage and resurfacing improvements, based on population data and road conditions.

- [Technology Transfer Program](#)
  The Technology Transfer Program works within the Pigman College of Engineering at the University of Kentucky. Their main scope of work is providing direct technical assistance and other aid to improve municipalities' road systems. It is important to highlight two of the active programs at TTP right now: the [Safety Circuit Rider Program](#) and the [Local Road Safety Plan](#). The Safety Circuit Rider program is in partnership with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet Highway Safety Improvement Program. Program administrators use crash data to identify communities to develop road safety improvement projects. The Local Road Safety Plan provides communities with needs assessments for their road systems that can be used as "working documents" for continued road system improvements. In addition to these programs, the Technology Transfer Program also connects people to funding resources like the [Safe Streets and Roads for All Grant Program](#), which is funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for local infrastructure projects. In some cases, they will provide direct technical assistance throughout the planning and engineering phases of a project for free.

- [Kentuckiana Regional Planning & Development Agency](#)
  The Community and Economic Development division within the Kentuckiana Regional Planning & Development (KIPDA) assists communities with accessing grant information and funding. Their [Grant Opportunity Guide](#) provides a comprehensive list of current grant opportunities, application requirements, and deadlines organized by sector (community development, agriculture, etc.). In addition to grant information, KIPDA also has staff dedicated to supporting municipal staff to maneuver grant applications. They provide more direct technical services through their Planning and Administrative Services branch, which mainly focuses on project planning and zoning, educational training, and other technical assistance.

  KIPDA works in collaboration with Kentucky's ADDs to carry out water management and infrastructure work as required by the state government. The Water Management Coordinator has the authority to assist with relevant projects funded through the State Revolving Fund. KIPDA also has a Regional Water Management Council that meets regularly.

- Appalachian Community Technical Assistance and Training

  The Appalachian Community Technical Assistance and Training Program was developed to assist rural communities in Kentucky by providing outreach, technical assistance, and training activities. This program has a specific emphasis on helping municipalities gain access to financial capital to manage their water infrastructure. They have several staff members dedicated to working directly with municipal officials to provide expertise and training. Several links on this website are broken, so it is unclear what specific activities the organization hosts, or if the program is still active.

- USDA RD Kentucky

  USDA RD Kentucky is a branch of the United States Department of Agriculture that aims to support rural communities through grant programs and services. In Kentucky, programs areas are split into Business Programs, Community Facilities Programs, Electric Programs, Energy Programs, Multi Family Housing Programs, Single Family Housing Programs, Telecommunications Programs, and Water & Environmental Programs.

- Kentucky Council of Area Development Districts

  The Kentucky Council of Area Development Districts is the governing organization of all 15 ADDs across the state, representing each county to support local governance. Their mission statement is "to bring local civic and governmental leaders together to accomplish major objectives and take advantage of opportunities that cannot be achieved or realized by those governments acting alone." They also help to make connections between local, state, and federal governments to make the funding process easier. Some of the work that the ADDs support consists of workforce development, economic development, water planning, transportation, healthcare & aging, GIS mapping, and broadband planning. Each ADD provides their own services and resources to individuals, businesses, and governments in their county. Still, KCADD brings each ADD together in a network that supports collaboration and a common purpose.

- Appalachian Regional Commission

  The Appalachian Regional Commission works through the federal government to support 423 counties in the Appalachian Region, part of which is on the eastern side of Kentucky. ARC's mission is to "invest in Appalachia's economic future by providing grants, publishing research, and sponsoring learning experiences — all to help Appalachia's communities seize their opportunities, address economic disparity and advance prosperity." Their current work in Kentucky is focused on community infrastructure, improving the workforce ecosystem, building capacity & training community leaders, and more.

- Cabinet for Economic Development

  The Cabinet for Economic Development is an agency working within the Kentucky state government to build up the local economy by incentivizing job creation, retention, and more. The Kentucky Economic Development Finance Authority, a part of the CED, provides financial incentives to encourage business growth. In addition to financial incentives, CED sponsors eight innovation hubs, which are used to stimulate the local economy. The innovation sector of CED also provides specialized information for entrepreneurs and investors looking to do business in Kentucky. CED also has a Grant Program, but it is unclear what exactly the funding is allocated for.

Michigan

Michigan's local governance structure is a mix of municipal and countywide leadership. Municipalities have the primary authority to carry out governing actions for their locality. Still, countywide government exists as a bridge between the state and local governments in terms of service and funding provision. They also carry out some of their own local service provision in partnership with the municipalities that they serve, like parks and recreation departments and library systems.

Michigan's municipal TA system seems to be fairly unstructured and informal – there is no top-down model. There are several branches within the state government concerned with municipal TA – the Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and the Michigan Infrastructure Office. The MEDC and MIO both involve the work of the Michigan Governor, but it is unclear whether these two initiatives are connected in any way. The Michigan Municipal League also exists to provide comprehensive TA and policy work across the state, but it seems fragmented from other non-profits doing similar work. There is no shortage of organizations working to improve the municipal TA landscape across Michigan. They provide funding, resources, networks, and more. Still, many of them are not connected to each other, and there isn't evidence that there is purposeful collaboration.

As Michigan works to adjust to the current administration's actions, they raise concerns over the loss of funding they may experience if agencies like FEMA were to be cut significantly. This Detroit Free Press article does not discuss anything related to capacity issues within local government, so it is unclear whether this is a concern to them at this time. They have not proposed any strategies to combat these new policies.

- Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity
  First founded in 2022, the Office of Rural Prosperity works within Michigan's state government to build municipal capacity to carry out technical assistance work. One of the biggest initiatives within this office is the Rural Readiness Program, which provides both a network of support for municipal TA providers and a grant program. There are several levels of support within Rural Readiness Network – the first being a core team within the Office of Rural Prosperity to guide the network from the top. There are also Local Readiness Teams that engage directly with rural communities and a group of Rural Readiness Partners at various levels of government that provide funding support and guidance. The grant program within the Rural Readiness Program offers financial support up to $50,000 for rural communities to support TA capacity. Much of the office's work is informed by local voices and municipal TA providers across the state. They have used input from people to develop the Roadmap to Rural Prosperity and their 2024 Annual Report. Additionally, they recently hosted the Michigan Rural Futures Summit in April to bring people in this sector together to develop strategies for the future of TA in Michigan.

- Michigan Municipal League
  The Michigan Municipal League supports the municipal TA landscape across the state. Though the MML's Board of Trustees is a significant part of the organization, it is unclear whether they directly govern the MML. One of the interesting aspects of the MML is its commitment to giving space for underrepresented voices. The 16/50 Project is one example of this; the project aims to promote woman leadership in technical assistance through tackling election bias, organizing professional development opportunities, and recruitment of future leaders. The MML provides many other programs and services, educational materials and events, and other resources. Within their advocacy work, the MML emphasizes arts & culture, sustainability, infrastructure, local economic development, and other subject areas in the legislative process to improve and provide local municipal technical assistance.

- MiPlace Community Development Programs
  MiPlace works through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to provide technical assistance and incentive programs. One of their bigger projects is Michigan Main Street, a framework that emphasizes business attraction and retention, customer attraction, prevention and revitalization, and beautification to build better downtown areas. These projects have been seen in other states that we are studying, like New Hampshire, Maine, and Iowa, but there is no Main Street Project in Vermont. Other technical assistance programs that MiPlace has in place include Redevelopment Ready Communities, a Resiliency Toolkit, a Developer Toolkit, and Permit Ready Housing Plans. MiPlace also has many incentive programs, one being the Revitalization and Placemaking Program (RAP). RAP has funding available that provides grants for real estate redevelopment projects that will encourage economic prosperity in communities. Other grant programs available through MiPlace include Build MI Community, Match on Main, the Michigan Community Revitalization Program, Community Development Block Grants, Brownfield Incentives, and Public Spaces Community Places.

- Michigan Economic Development Corporation
  The Michigan Economic Development Corporation works to assist businesses and communities in filling specialized roles, accessing financial capital, building resiliency through the supply chain, expanding businesses internationally, and more. Additionally, they provide incentives for job creation and business investment through programs like the Michigan Business Development Program and the New Jobs Training Programs to bolster the state's business sector. The MiPlace community development programs also operate within MEDC, which are discussed in the section above. MEDC is led by an executive committee of 20 members, one of which is the Governor of Michigan. In addition to the executive committee, MEDC has partners across Michigan that they work regularly with, especially the Collaborative Development Council.

- Rural Partners of Michigan
  Rural Partners of Michigan is a program that operates within the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan to "grow conversations around the state regarding rural community and economic development." They do this work by engaging in policy conversations, providing grants, informing RPM members, and hosting an annual conference. The Small Town and Rural Development Conference is a way for CEDAM to bring members together to share key findings from their work and develop a plan for community revitalization.

- Michigan Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP)
  Michigan Local Technical Assistance Program serves communities across the state, particularly in the transportation sector. Some of the work that they do consists of training sessions, engineering TA, and sharing information about transportation technology. This program is funded by Michigan Technological University in the Center for Technology and Training. They have a schedule of upcoming and past training sessions on their website. Currently, they are hosting a series of workshops regarding pavement warranties.

- Michigan Infrastructure Office Technical Assistance Center
  The Michigan Infrastructure Office Technical Assistance Center is overseen by the Governor of Michigan and provides technical assistance and funding to municipalities across the state. They have comprehensive informational resources for communities to learn about the type of work that they do and resources they may be eligible for. For example, they have a Community Grant

Navigator that helps municipal leaders search for available grants through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act. Another interesting feature of their website is the TAC Community Project Tracker, which is a map of the TAC's impact across the state. It is unclear whether there is any collaboration between the MIO and the MEDC.

- Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity Rural Readiness Program (RRP) Discussed in detail in the MORP section.

Iowa

Iowa is divided into 17 Councils of Government (COGs), which are regional planning organizations that promote regional collaboration and provide technical assistance. There are several leading agencies who facilitate most of the technical assistance in the state and collaborate with similar technical assistance providers to ensure that the work being done is not repetitive and is for mutual benefit.

Cities and counties in Iowa have home rule power and therefore govern themselves on the condition that they do not violate state law. Iowan municipalities are most commonly governed by an elected city council and mayor, however there are six total forms of municipal government from which municipalities can choose to follow. Depending on how a municipality chooses to organize, the appointment of legislative and administrative responsibilities varies. Counties in Iowa are required to provide a few essential services including law enforcement, social and human services, public works, and public health, with the governance of remaining services being determined by municipalities.

Some of the leaders in TA include the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), a government agency which hosts many programs including the Center for Rural Revitalization, the Rural BOOST Program, Main Street Iowa, and the Certified Local Governments Program. Many of these programs centralize funding and stakeholder support to ease TA access for Iowa's rural communities. Other key stakeholders include the Iowa Rural Development Council (IRDC) and Iowa State University- both of which connect stakeholders and various funding sources to the communities who need them. Much of the TA landscape in Iowa is funded by state and federal funds, excluding the IRDC which operates on membership fees from area businesses and supporters. Technical assistance in Iowa is by and large being conducted by a handful of strong organizations, with little oversight from one specific stakeholder or the government.

Councils of Government and Other Multi-County Planning Regions

AREA XV	CIRTPA	INRCOG	NIACOG	REGION XII	SIMPCO
BSRC	ECIA	MAPA	NWIPDC	SEIRPC	SWIPCO
CHARITON VALLEY	ECICOG	MIDAS	REGION 6	SICOG	UERPC

- **Iowa Economic Development Authority**
  The Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) is one of the main hubs of TA activity in Iowa. Funded by state and federal appropriations, it seems to facilitate much of the TA that takes place around the state. In this respect, they seem to have partnerships with nonprofits and financial stakeholders across the state to make TA and their programs more accessible for communities, working to ensure that resources are used for mutual benefit. Their main TA programs are as follows:

  o **Iowa Center for Rural Revitalization / Empower Rural Iowa**
    Within the IEDA, the Iowa Center for Rural Revitalization provides funding for rural projects and initiatives across Iowa and technical assistance through its many programs, notably the Rural BOOST Program. The Center manages the Empower Rural Iowa (ERI) Initiative, which holds a partnership with the Iowa Rural Development Council to address leadership and growth-related challenges in Iowa's rural communities. The Center serves as a "liaison to rural communities and helping small communities access programs that support rural areas" (Iowa Economic Development and Finance Authority, 2025). Funding for the Center's programs come from federal and state appropriations on a yearly basis. There is evidence that the Center collaborates with funding sources and stakeholders across the state to make it easier for communities to access TA.

  o **Iowa Rural Building Ownership & Organization by Strengthening Teams (BOOST) Program**
    The Iowa Rural Building Ownership & Organization by Strengthening Teams (BOOST) Program, managed by the Center for Rural Revitalization, provides specialized TA to rural communities of 20,000 or fewer or area nonprofits who are looking to advance their economic and business development. Participants receive 3-5 experts who will meet with a local committee to discuss existing conditions, existing assets, and goals/needs. From there, the Center and its partners create an action and financing plan to guide the community towards revitalization, like the efforts of the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD). Participating communities also receive an initial $10,000 grant to kickstart their efforts.

- o   Main Street Iowa

     Main Street Iowa operates within the IEDA, working with over 50 communities in Iowa to revitalize their downtowns through training, leadership development, and TA opportunities. Using an asset-based approach to community development, Main Street Iowa creates locally developed strategies based on economic vitality, organization, promotion, and design. Some of the TA includes workshops, design assistance, and business assistance to build stronger, revitalized downtown areas as a means for community economic development. This program is part of Main Street America, meaning that the 50 communities in Iowa are connected to a larger network of programs across the country, allowing for cross-state collaboration and communication, though it is unclear how this takes place.

- o   Certified Local Governments Program (CLGP)

     Another program within the IEDA is the Certified Local Government Program (CLGP), which provides funding, training, technical assistance, and access to a network of communities to 90 cities and counties and Iowa. This program focuses on historic preservation, revitalization, and stabilization of historic areas, and communities can join this program through an extensive application process and demonstrated commitment to historic preservation. This program allows like-minded communities across Iowa to connect and collaborate on their efforts and receives funding through the U.S. Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, which is distributed to communities through grants.

- ●   Iowa Rural Development Council

   Since 1992, the Iowa Rural Development Council (IRDC) has worked to bring together partners and stakeholders to advance the interests of rural Iowa. Originally managed by the Iowa Department of Economic Development, the group has since become independent and has operated informally for 20 years with no paid staff. The IRDC relies on sponsorships from area businesses and organizations to unite private, public, and nonprofit partners to support Iowa's rural communities through strategic planning, collaboration, and the pooling of resources; annually, the IRDC hosts the Iowa Rural   Summit, which brings together individuals and statewide partners, offering opportunities for exploring rural growth strategies and networking. The IRDC has many programs and initiatives that address rural issues, take an asset-based approach to community development, and build capacity within small towns. Their Leadership Exchange and Bootcamp Programs enable communities to grow local leaders through training, mentorship, and grant funding. Other initiatives support rural business development, strategic planning, and housing development. The IRDC works closely with Iowa State University Extension & Outreach, Iowa Association of Business & Industry, Iowa Area Development Group (IADG), Iowa Economic Development Authority, and local development corporations to facilitate coordination in TA efforts in the state and ensure that resources are being used for mutual benefit.

- ●   Iowa State University Local Technical Assistance Program

   Iowa State University provides TA to local governments through their Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP). This program supports local governments in addressing growth challenges pertaining to infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and public transportation. LTAP provides TA and management assistance to transportation officials primarily through workshops and training programs. Some of their most popular programs include Safety Circuit Rider, a transportation safety-related workshop; the Equipment Loan Program, where local agencies can borrow equipment for managing roadway signing and infrastructure safety for free; trainings ranging from

Bridge Inspection to Work Zone and Flagger Safety; and specialized TA for transportation-related problems through one-on-one consultations with LTAP staff. LTAP works closely with the National LTAP Program and the Tribal Technical Assistance Program as part of a network of larger LTAP programs across the country. LTAP also hosts a Statewide Multi-Discipline Safety Team (MDST) Program with the Iowa Department of Transportation and the Iowa Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau, uniting stakeholders from around the state to discuss safety topics, problems, and improvements on a regular basis.

- **Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT)**
  The Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) provides transportation-related grants and programs to municipalities statewide with the goal of improving infrastructure throughout Iowa. While most the TA that IDOT provides is funding to municipalities, they have some programs such as the Traffic Engineering Assistance Program (TEAP), which provides local governments with up to 150 free hours of traffic engineering expertise through a traffic study with a consultant. This program targets Iowa communities with minimal government capacity and populations <35,000 to build capacity and promote cost-effective traffic safety. IDOT also provides funding to municipalities and counties for specific transportation safety initiatives, such as the Local Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP-Local), the Traffic Safety Improvement Program (TSIP), and the City Bridge Program.

- **Iowa League of Cities**
  The Iowa League of Cities (ILC) serves as Iowa's "unified voice of cities," providing TA to large and small cities through advocacy, training, and one-on-one guidance. Over 850 cities in Iowa are members and pay yearly dues for the organization's services that work to strengthen and improve local government in Iowa by uniting as one hub. ILC serves as an advocate for Iowa's cities at the state and federal levels and offers workshops and training to city officials on topics pertaining to effective and strengthened government.

- **Iowa Association of Councils of Governments**
  The Iowa Association of Councils of Governments (also known as COGs) provides technical assistance through professional planning and programming to Iowa's cities, counties, organizations, and businesses. Iowa is split into 17 regional COGs that each serve their local governments and citizens, with each COG being governed by a board of local elected officials, business owners, educators, development professionals, and citizens. COGs are Regional Planning Affiliations that are responsible for pursing funding from local, state, and federal sources and distributing such funds within their regions for various development projects that aim to grow and strengthen Iowa's communities. Some of the services they provide include individual assistance in the form of loans and grant planning, and strategic planning services for localities and regions. COGs serve as organizations that unite many stakeholders to discuss community and economic development, enabling collaboration within Iowa.

- **Iowa City/County Management Association (IACMA)**
  The Iowa City/County Management Association (IACMA) seeks to increase the capacity and knowledge of local government officials by promoting collaboration between IACMA members statewide. As a part of the International City Management Association (ICMA), IACMA hosts training and networking events for government managers and administrators, promoting collaboration and idea-sharing about effective governance. IACMA works to develop and sustain

local leadership within Iowa communities through shared resources among communities and stakeholders.

- Midwest Assistance Program Iowa
  A member of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) network across all 50 states, the Midwest Assistance Program (MAP) serves 9 states across the Midwest including Iowa, providing technical assistance for community growth and longevity through individualized training and technical assistance. MAP is dedicated to ensuring the longevity and growth of rural America and helps Iowa communities build managerial, financial, and operational capacity. The scope of MAP's work is broad and adaptable, aiding with infrastructure development, management & finance, solid waste and water systems, operations and maintenance, and emergency management through specialized consultant services, free of charge to municipalities.

Utah

Utah follows a top-down approach to technical assistance, within which the state government provides financial support to Utah's seven Associations of Government (AOGs) which distribute resources to counties and municipalities. However, it must be noted that there is minimal collaboration between AOGs and the state government outside of receiving funding despite AOGs being the deliverers of critical services on behalf of the federal and Utah governments (Office of the Utah Legislative Auditor General, 2007). Utah government agency staff solely provide oversight of AOG activities for enhanced accountability.

AOGs are multi-county regions established in the 1970s that serve as multi-purpose umbrella-type organizations to promote regional facilitation and encourage cross-county collaboration for economic development. These AOGs facilitate six main TA programs/services with funding from several offices within the state government and have Executive Boards who meet bi-monthly and direct the efforts of the agency. AOGs often collaborate on statewide efforts, and six of seven AOGs are designated as economic development districts (EDDs) by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and are funded as such (Utah's Association of Governments, n.d.). Funding for AOGs is primarily provided by the federal government in the form of grants and state appropriations on an annual basis in the Utah budget (Office of the Utah Legislative Auditor General, 2007). Utah's AOGs seem to be the intermediary between funding sources, primarily from the state and federal governments, and municipalities and counties, also working with area public, private, and nonprofit partners to address local issues and leverage resources. There is minimal information about efficiency monitoring for municipal TA, given that AOGs were established as a means to promote cost-effectiveness by pooling resources. Most of the TA is funded by the Utah Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (as pictured in the chart below) which has a Results Management Team that aims to "reduce inefficiencies and improve government services", though it is unclear how TA will be evaluated.

In Utah, municipalities and counties are governed under Hutchinson's Rule, within which they have broad powers to govern themselves, if the legislation they pass does not conflict with state laws and pertains to their "general welfare" (NACO, 2022). However, the state legislature may "preempt local governments on any subject," meaning that ultimate jurisdiction is granted to the state, and TA funding is distributed from the state and is tailored to local needs by regional AOGs (LSCC, 2019). Municipalities are most often governed by a city council and a mayor who is the executive decision-maker, with counties being required to provide health services, road maintenance, and fire protection services (NACO, 2022).

- **Utah Center for Rural Development**
  Utah's Center for Rural Development operates within the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity (GOEO) and is a TA funding provider for Utah's rural counties, communities, and businesses. The Center offers many funding opportunities including the Rural Employment Development Incentive, which provides grants to businesses creating new jobs in rural areas. Another rural community-specific funding opportunity is the Rural Communities Opportunity Grant (RCOG), which is tailored to the unique economic development projects of rural counties, cities, and towns. Many of the Center's other initiatives include tax credits and tax increment financing to businesses in rural areas to promote economic growth. The Center funds staff members that serve several counties in the state as Outreach Managers to assist with economic development, economic planning, and grant assistance, but it should be noted that this takes place outside of the AOGs, meaning that this form of TA is directly facilitated by the state government. Outside of being a funder, the Center connects businesses and communities with additional state and federal resources and programs and offers educational webinars on applying for funding.

- **Mountainland Association of Governments** (MAG)
  The Mountainland Association of Governments (MAG) is one of the aforementioned seven Associations of Government (AOG) organizations that centralizes regional planning work for Summit, Utah, and Wasatch Counties. MAG facilitates a wide variety of TA programs including but not limited to a U.S. Department of Housing and Community Development (HUD)-sponsored Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program for job and housing development, a Transportation Improvement Program through MAG's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and a Technical Assistance to Governments Program (TAG) which provides consultant services and up to $1,000,000 in annual funding to local governments for plans and studies that address growth-related challenges. As an AOG, MAG connects area governments and communities with nonprofit, state, and federal funding sources for regional economic development and growth-related TA projects that address community needs. As pictured in the chart of Technical Assistance Programs above, MAG facilitates many TA programs with funding from the Utah Governor's Office of Planning and Budgeting. Utah's other AOGs include Bear River Association of

Governments, Wasatch Front Regional Council, Southeastern Utah Association of Local Governments, Uintah Basin Association of Governments, Five County Association of Governments, and R6 Regional Council.

- [Utah League of Cities and Towns](#) (UCLT)
  Founded in 1907, the Utah League of Cities and Towns (ULCT) serves 255 cities and towns statewide. ULCT seeks to be a voice for the interests of municipal governments at the state and federal levels and provides an array of technical assistance programs to local officials to strengthen municipal government quality and capacity. One notable program is the [Local Administrative Advisor (LAA) program](#), which provides administrative support to municipal governments that have limited or no administrative staff. This program seeks to build government capacity in Utah's communities of 10,000 residents or fewer to make governments more efficient and effective. In this program, TA is provided by resources and staff that are centrally located at ULCT's office in Salt Lake City, and on a regional scale in each AOG. This work is funded by the Utah Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (GOPB), demonstrating how much of the funding for TA is sourced from the federal and state levels, but the state government seems to rely on different offices and programs to administer the TA itself. LAAs can help governments create progress reports, work with leaders to create objectives, monitor city budgets, obtain funding, and more. This program is an example of one that is, once again, partially administered through the AOGs, emphasizing the role that these organizations play as an intermediary for TA in the state of Utah.

- [Utah Department of Workforce Services](#) (DWS)
  The Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS) Housing and Community Development Division (HCDD) offers many programs pertaining to housing and community growth, serving local governments, citizens, and organizations. Two notable TA programs administered by DWS HCCD include the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program and the Regional Planning Program (RPP).

  o Utah Department of Workforce Services Housing and Community Development Division (HCDD) [Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program](#)
    The Utah Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program is a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-funded program that provides grants to cities of fewer than 50,000 people and counties of fewer than 200,000 people to "assist in developing viable communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment and expanding economic opportunities, particularly for persons of low and moderate incomes" ([Utah DWS](#), 2025). This funding is allocated by the federal government into the Utah DWS and CDBG programs, but the grants and TA itself are administered to municipalities or counties by the seven AOGs.

  o Utah Department of Workforce Services Housing and Community Development Division (HCDD) [Regional Planning Program (RPP)](#)
    The Utah Regional Planning Program (RPP) involves having a Permanent Community Impact Fund Board (PCIB) that provides loans and grants to counties and municipalities that were "impacted by mineral resource development on federal lands," and have thus had reduced abilities to provide fundamental infrastructure like roads, municipal buildings, water systems, and sewer systems because they cannot collect taxes from federal lands ([Utah DWS,](#) 2025). This program aims to create stability and a foundation for

infrastructure development in rural Utah and directly provides funds to participating/eligible AOGs to hire a planner to accomplish such development goals.

- Land Use Academy of Utah (LUAU)
  The Land Use Academy of Utah (LUAU) was established by the Utah State Legislature in 2015 as a resource to "train, inform, and educate elected and appointed officials on statutory land issues and best planning practices" (LUAU, 2025). Today, the agency is managed by the Office of the Property Rights Ombudsman, from which it receives its funding from state and federal revenues, and offers online, pre-recorded, digital, and in-person training options for government agency staff, the public, and appointed officials alike. This form of TA primarily seeks to educate the public and government staff about land use practices and policies, building capacity at the local and state levels. The training and education are administered by LUAU staff and are not administered by AOGs, unlike many other forms of TA in Utah.

- Utah Department of Transportation Technical Planning Assistance Program
  The Utah Department of Transportation Technical Planning Assistance (TPA) Program provides funding to communities to support transportation development projects in their community plans. The TPA Program aims to "integrate land use and transportation planning, maximize the value of investment in public infrastructure, increase travel options to optimize mobility, and create communities with opportunities to live, work, and play." Funding from this program can also be used to help municipalities, counties, and jurisdictions conduct studies and analyses about land use and transportation needs in their areas, with the program generally seeking to build capacity through understanding community needs and meeting those needs with additional funding. Providing this funding enables communities to create long-term goals and plans to support residents through infrastructure investment.

Kansas

Kansas is divided into seven regional councils which facilitate coordination amongst local governments and agencies to collectively address regional development challenges. These regional councils are voluntary and often serve as a voice for their respective region at the state level, promoting regional collaboration and the pooling of resources and information for mutual benefit. Despite the existence of these regional councils, Kansas's approach to technical assistance seems fairly unstructured, but there are many entities providing services. Most of the collaboration seems to occur between funding sources (most commonly the state and federal government) and TA providers, and TA providers and municipalities, or regional councils and municipalities. Most commonly, the state gives funding to agencies, who then distribute the funding or TA to municipalities, or the state gives funding to universities/organizations who then distribute the funding or TA.

There are several hubs of TA activity within Kansas, some of which appear to collaborate with each other, but based on the information available online, there does not seem to be any structured meeting or communication between the primary TA providers. Despite this, TA in Kansas is relatively extensive. The Kansas Department of Commerce, state universities, and a handful of leagues and associations facilitate much of the TA that is provided, which focuses primarily on effective governance, infrastructure, and rural community development. Many of these providers, such as the Kansas Association of Counties and the League of Kansas Municipalities work with one another to enhance service delivery, but that seems to be the extent of the coordination that occurs in non-governmental TA

organizations. TA providers within the Kansas government seem far more likely to collaborate with other government agencies in their service delivery, and with the state universities.

Kansas municipalities are governed under home rule, most commonly in a mayor-council government, wherein mayors and councils can make their own policies in their best interest, provided that such policies do not go against state law. Furthermore, counties and cities in Kansas may act "when state law is silent, and subject matter is not otherwise prohibited by the legislature." The state government provides services including public health, emergency management, solid waste planning, law enforcement, transportation, and weed eradication. Municipalities may determine how to deliver services including hospitals/medical, culture and leisure, economic development, and planning and zoning. Municipalities are also responsible for managing their own administration, public safety, utilities, and infrastructure.
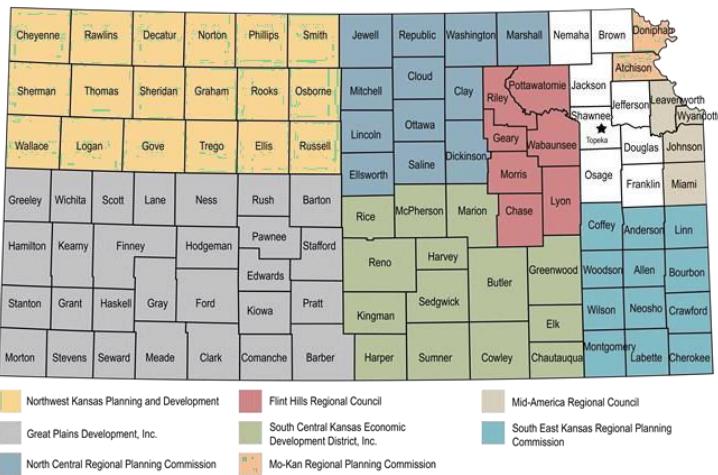
- Kansas Department of Commerce

  The Kansas Department of Commerce heads many community development and technical assistance programs. Some of these programs include a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program which offers funding for low-to-moderate-income neighborhoods' development projects; Kansas Main Street, which funds redevelopment in downtown districts and individualized training for local leaders; and broadband investment programs. The Kansas Department of Commerce seems to serve as a hub for much of the federally and state-funded technical assistance that occurs in Kansas, acting as an intermediary between funding and the provision of technical assistance itself.

  o Kansas Office Of Rural Prosperity (ORP)

    Established in 2019, the Kansas Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP) is a division of the Kansas Department of Commerce. ORP offers technical assistance to rural communities in Kansas through workshops and funding, focusing on economic development and improvement to help rural Kansas grow and prosper. ORP serves as an advocate for rural Kansas in the Kansas legislature and connects communities with the resources and attention of the state. They administer several programs including the Historic Economic Asset Lifeline (HEAL), a program designed to rehabilitate downtown buildings; Kansas

Rural Opportunity Zones, which provides tax credit and student loan repayment incentives to new full-time residents; Rural Murals, which provides funding for municipalities of under 15,000 residents to create new public art that promotes the community's history and culture; the Strategic Economic Expansion and Development (SEED) Grant which communities of 5,000 people or less can use to address quality of life through revitalization; the Rural Champions Program, which unites a network of local grassroots leaders to lead and inspire communities to resolve local needs (in partnership with the Kansas Sampler Foundation); and workshops to support communities in applying for grants. Most of the work of ORP is focused on building capacity in and revitalizing rural communities through funding and training, uniting many stakeholders to do so.

- Kansas Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP)

The Kansas Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) is administered by the University of Kansas and operates with support from the Federal Highway Administration, the Kansas Department of Transportation, and the University itself. Kansas LTAP seeks to improve transportation safety and build capacity at the local government level through training, education (technology transfer), and technical assistance. Most of Kansas LTAP's services are designed for communities' public works departments and their employees, and contractors/consultants who are contracted by local governments. Kansas LTAP offers in-person and online training, a resource library, and technical assistance through programs and grants, such as the Local Field Liaison Program and the Equipment Loan Program which provide on-site technical assistance to improve capacity and roadway safety. Kansas LTAP collaborates closely with the National LTAP Program as part of a larger network of LTAP programs across the country.

- Kansas Infrastructure Hub

The Kansas Infrastructure Hub is a government-run organization which is led by a steering committee with representatives from the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, Health and Environment, Transportation; the Kansas Corporation Commission; the Kansas Department of Emergency Management; the Kansas Water Office, and the Kansas Office of Information Technology Services. The Hub unites various state agencies to "serve as a resource center for Kansas communities." The Hub develops cross-sector and governmental partnerships to secure grant funding for infrastructure across Kansas communities. Through collaboration at the regional, state, and federal levels, The Hub offers free technical assistance such as grants, management support, coaching, and capacity development for communities who apply for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) grants. There is a designated technical assistance team for each region of the state. Additionally, The Hub facilitates the Build Kansas Fund, which provides communities with the funding they need to pursue BIL opportunities and build better infrastructure.

- Kansas State University Technical Assistance to Brownfields

Funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Kansas State University Technical Assistance to Brownfields (KSU TAB) program provides free individualized technical assistance, online tools, and workshops to communities in EPA Regions 5, 6, 7, and 8 who are looking to revitalize and repurpose brownfield sites. From October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024, KSU TAB provided technical assistance to 273 communities across EPA Regions 5, 6, 7, and 8 (pictured

below), some of which included strategic planning, identification of funding sources, community outreach, and technical presentations on brownfields. Technical assistance with KSU TAB is administered through the municipality, tribe, or non-profit's project manager; technical assistance is provided through a network of 20+ smaller TAB partners with staff that are distributed in firms, organizations, and universities across the aforementioned EPA Regions.

- Kansas Rural Water Association (KRWA)

  The Kansas Rural Water Association (KRWA) provides "cost-effective" training, technical assistance, and education to municipal leaders and employees about water and wastewater system safety in rural communities. The website has minimal information about the specific types of technical assistance provided; however, there is an extensive list of training events listed which can be signed up for. KRWA also claims to partner with state and federal agencies, demonstrating a level of collaboration, though the specific agencies and how this collaboration occurs are unclear.

- League of Kansas Municipalities

  The League of Kansas Municipalities is a statutory entity that seeks to improve effective governance and management of Kansas communities by partnering with member cities, universities, and organizations to provide regional and professional development programs, online and in-person education, and networking opportunities with League staff and local elected officials. Communities pay annual dues for membership, and the League is governed by a body of elected officials (mayors, attorneys, and administrators) from around the state. The League works to promote collaboration amongst municipal leaders and increase managerial capacity in its member cities, hosting many meetings throughout the year and an annual conference for municipal leaders to engage with one another and address common issues.

- Kansas Association of Counties

  The Kansas Association of Counties (KAC) is a statutory entity which aims to promote effective, responsive county government in Kansas through leadership, professional education, technical assistance, and legislative representation. KAC is operated by a governing board of Kansas county leaders and currently provides its services to 102 out of 105 Kansas counties. KAC unites

counties, local leaders, and affiliate members from statewide associations, hosting events and leadership programs such as Foundations in County Government, and providing access to many tools for county governments. Based on the website, it is unclear what other types of technical assistance may be available.

- Midwest Assistance Program Kansas

  A member of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) network across all 50 states, the Midwest Assistance Program (MAP) serves 9 states across the Midwest including Kansas, providing technical assistance for community growth and longevity through individualized training and technical assistance through a team dedicated to Kansas specifically. MAP is dedicated to ensuring the longevity and growth of rural America and helps Kansas communities build managerial, financial, and operational capacity. The scope of MAP's work is broad and adaptable, aiding with infrastructure development, management & finance, solid waste and water systems, operations and maintenance, and emergency management through specialized consultant services, free of charge to municipalities.

- Kansas Association of City/County Management

  The Kansas Association of City/County Management (KACM), operated by a group of local government management officials, seeks to increase the capacity and quality of local governments by promoting collaboration among administrators statewide. As a part of the International City Management Association (ICMA), KACM hosts several training and networking events every year for government managers and administrators, promotes collaboration and idea-sharing about effective governance through a coaching program, and gives members access to an international network of government administrators.

Appendix B – Municipal Survey Report

VERTA Municipal Outreach Survey

Methodology
The VERTA team utilized the VT League of Cities and Towns municipal officers email list and engaged the VERTA Steering Committee in additional outreach via their networks. The survey generated 155 unique responses from 114 municipalities around Vermont.

What is your current role in your municipality? (Select all that apply)

	Percent
Elected official (e.g., Selectboard, City Council, Clerk. etc.)	39

Municipal employee (e.g., Town Manager, Planning/Zoning staff)	37
Volunteer (Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, Library or School Board, etc.)	31
Other community support (please specify)	7

Vermont's system of technical assistance for municipalities is the interconnected network of federal, regional, state and local organizations that provide funding, technical resources (like training, guidance and info), and direct collaboration (grant writing, project management and on-the-ground support) to municipalities. This system supports communities in areas of community and economic development like:

- Housing development
- Climate resilience and disaster preparedness
- Public infrastructure investment (like sidewalks and wastewater)
- Local administrative capacity (like grant writing & project management support)
- Equity, diversity, and access (like inclusion & community outreach training)
- Livability and social services
- Historic preservation
- Disaster recovery
- Workforce and economic development

Select the ways your community has accessed technical assistance (TA) to support community and economic development projects across the following categories in the past 5 years or so. (Select all that apply)

	My municipality hasn't done a project on this	Accessed information, trainings or resources about this	Funded all or in part by my municipality	Received non municipal funding	Collaborated with project partner(s) to do this work
Housing development	31%	30%	15%	19%	27%
Climate resilience and disaster preparedness	15%	35%	20%	23%	29%
Public infrastructure investment (like sidewalks and wastewater)	13%	28%	33%	41%	31%
Local administrative capacity (grant writing & project management support)	8%	35%	34%	27%	30%
Equity, diversity, and access (inclusivity & community outreach training)	30%	28%	14%	11%	14%
Livability and social services	34%	18%	17%	11%	18%
Historic preservation	21%	28%	17%	26%	20%
Disaster recovery	12%	24%	23%	32%	26%

Workforce and economic development	31%	25%	13%	9%	18%

On a scale of 0-10 where 0 is not a barrier at all and 10 is a very difficult barrier, <u>how much of a barrier</u> are each of the following to doing community and economic development projects in your community?

	Mean
Limited municipal funds for a project	7.9
Limited municipal staff time to seek out or manage a project	7.1
Coordinating with multiple project funding sources	5.7
Coordinating with multiple project technical assistance collaborators	5.5
Knowing which funding sources are best suited for a project	5.0
Knowing where to find funding for a project	4.9
Knowing which technical assistance providers are best suited for a project	4.9
Technical assistance options do not meet our project needs	4.9
Limited public interest for doing a project	4.6
Knowing where to find technical assistance providers to collaborate on a project	4.5
Limited municipal interest for doing a project	4.4
Knowing where to find information, training or guides for a project	4.1

Please order these according to where you <u>go most often</u> to find information about community and economic development project resources for your community.

	Percent Listed 1st
Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs)	43%
Nonprofit organizations (like VT League of Cities and Towns, VT Council on Rural Development, Preservation Trust of VT, etc.)	23%
State Government agencies & departments (like Commerce and Community Development, Natural Resources, Transportation, etc.)	18%
Other municipalities	7%
Regional Development Commissions (RDCs)	5%
Federal agencies (like Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, Environmental Protection Agency, etc.)	2%
Universities or Colleges	1%
Non-government Business Organizations (like Chamber of commerce, etc.)	0%

To the best of your knowledge, how challenging is it <u>to find information about</u> community and economic development resources (funding, training, models, collaborators, etc.) from each of the following sources?

	Not at all Challenging	Somewhat Challenging	Very Challenging
Federal agencies, programs, etc.	10%	48%	42%
VT non-government business organizations	18%	63%	19%
VT non-government foundations or funders	17%	65%	18%

State of VT agencies, programs, etc.	33%	57%	10%
VT non-government community development organizations	30%	60%	10%
Regional Planning or Development Corporations	64%	29%	7%

Finding Information
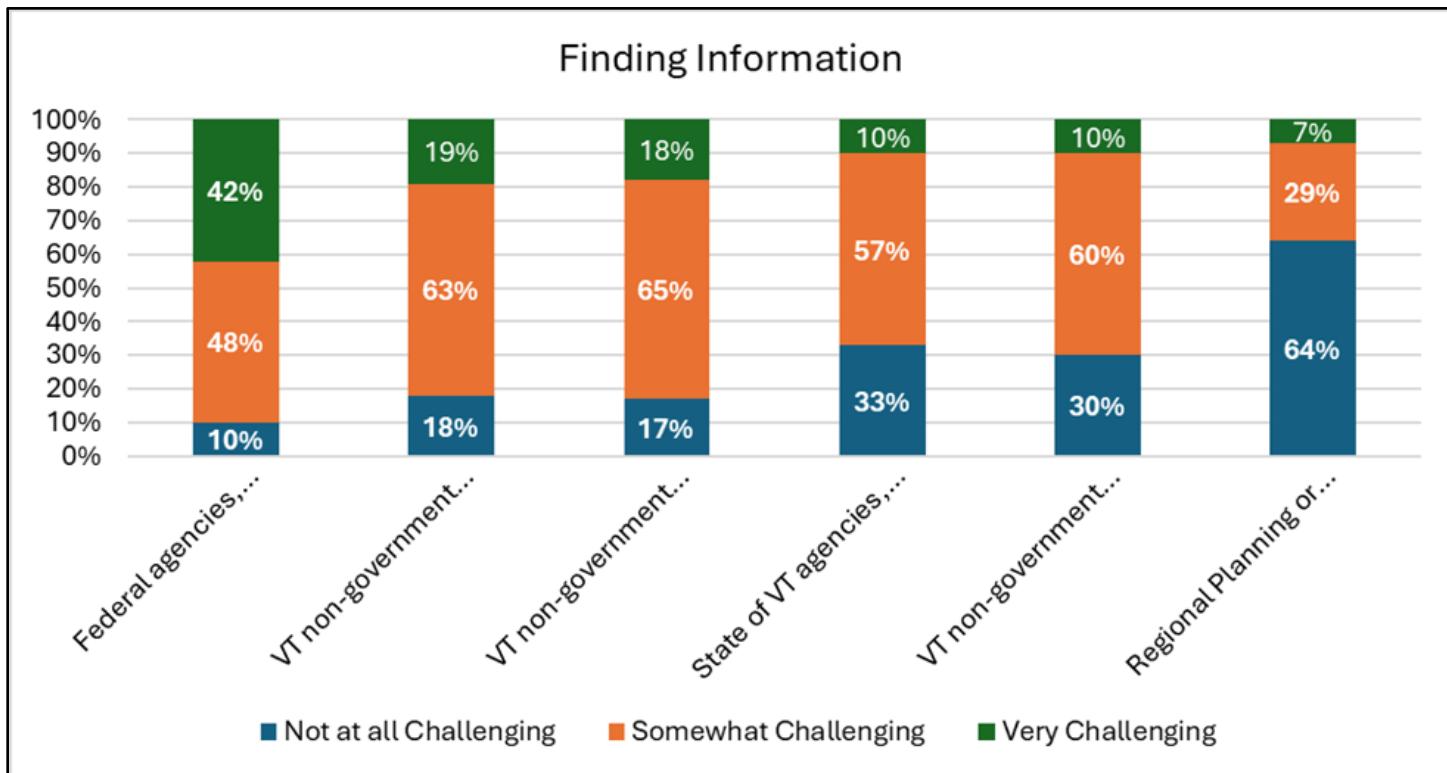
To the best of your knowledge, how challenging is it for your municipality <u>to collaborate with</u> each of the following on community and economic development projects?

	Not at all Challenging	Somewhat Challenging	Very Challenging
Federal agencies, programs, etc.	4%	38%	58%
VT non-government foundations or funders	16%	70%	14%
State of VT agencies, programs, etc.	21%	66%	13%
VT non-government business organizations	15%	73%	12%
VT non-government community development organizations	24%	67%	9%
Regional Planning or Development Corporations	66%	27%	7%

Collaborating

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with State of VT agencies, programs, etc.?

Because no one cares and they are all on the same team. Fox watching the henhouse
Changing rules mid project, one silo within a department not aware what other silos are doing therefore you can get a yes and a no from the same department , funding pools are limited so projects that seem appropriate for a certain pool are not eligible when you read the fine print or at the mercy of employee whim.
Difficult to contact and often get different opinions from different state employees
Difficult to find info, find and connect with the right people, keep conversations going, receive the help needed
Due to their stringent guidelines, often seems like they're looking for ways to get to a 'no' answer compared to a yes.
Hard to find what program is tucked into what agency/department and exactly what services they provide.
I find myself saying "moving the goal posts" when it comes to one-off programs, and for consistent/annual programs, there is a LOT of conditions to be met. The most restricting factor is staff capacity- which limits our ability to chase down redundant paperwork, keep track of moving targets, and accomplish it all in tight deadlines (set by state - totally disconnected from pressing timetables on the local level).
lack of staff, delay in response
Low staffing levels. Poor follow up.
Mostly it is within the Agency of Natural Resources……There are multiple divisions and then when you get the person, they put the ownness back to the municipality, requesting hiring an engineer when they should be helping you. That is what our tax payer dollars are for. Housing agencies are very difficult to work with in the small communities. They are trying to address the more populated areas. But no funding comes to our small towns where private developers could help our housing crisis.
The State of Vermont seems to experience a lot of turnover. Their resources (websites, etc.) are dated and not user friendly. I have not been able to get in touch with anyone at the state workforce development board in recent history.

There isn't a lot of information on their websites, they are not user friendly. The State also has all the data for measuring economic development but won't share it with municipalities (but then asks us for it). State does not seem agile or innovative, it is not the first partner we would go to for achieving results.
They don't coordinate with one other.   Regulatory hurdles by one agency erode projects and partnerships.
We rarely get the correct information the first time we ask. We find we have to ask multiple sources before we get 1.the information we were truly looking for 2.accurate information
Weak relationship and unclear program information. More outreach and networking would help.

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with Regional Planning or Development Corporations?

55 towns, 7 watersheds, 3 counties and not enough bandwidth - no watershed/water quality/hazard mitigation help.
Challenging communicators and a "one-size-fits-all" expectation for fulfilling a local grant to review by-laws; lack of knowledge
They are extremely short staffed and generally don't follow through
They are fake, shove state agendas down your throat
They seem to think they know better or best what should happen, despite our own staff background and qualifications.
We feel we get very little benefit from our RPC. We are exploring trying to join a different one.
Workload constraints and limited staffing. Hard to make long-term projects a priority.

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with Federal agencies, programs, etc.?

1) So many programs, 2) each program even very similar programs have different rules, 3) Federal Register has many different programs and it is difficult to cull out the relevant sections as they are often dependent on the current federal presidential administration and agency head, some do a good job of outreach and public facing activity and some don't and it changes based on above dependencies, and 4) Cost-Benefit formulas are challenging for small rural community even though the events can be catastrophic for the community 5) Challenging for small rural community to meet the criteria AND BE COMPETETIVE for a federal highway project like rebuilding a major connecting route with the once in 40 year total rebuild.
Amorphous and very technical
Bureaucracy
Because the money is drying up and the staff is disappearing (no joke, the USDA RD staff our community has been working with all took a buy out and left last week - this will be the third staffing transition since the beginning of our project, which slows things down and incredibly inefficient). Also, programs change ALL THE TIME making it hard to keep up with what standards, focal areas, criteria, eligibility, etc. all apply to any given agency, program, etc. This has always been a challenge, but the current administration has poured gasoline on the fire.
bureaucratic nightmare; jump through hoops; make things more complicated than they need to be
changing rules; opacity of regulations; delays in responding to inquiries
Complex rules and regulations, legal and reporting issues beyond the capacity of elected officials, slow process--often not completed while elected officials are in their terms, HUGE amount of administrative work that the town cannot undertake
Complex rules, lack of follow-up, uncertainty of funding
Complexity of applications, requirements- difficult to decipher, time consuming
Complexity of navigating requirements, applications, etc.
Confusing or dense info, long wait times to get responses or answers

Currently: completely schizophrenic. Generally: huge burden for compliance.
Difficult to find appropriate person with decision making authority to collaborate on a project with. Bureaucracy.
Diversity of funding sources, differing applications, environmental review, slow approval process, Lack of administrative transparency
Do not know contacts.
Dysfunctional reporting portals and moving deadlines.
Excessively particular application and follow-up requirements, limited direct staff guidance.
FEMA - for disaster relief and other buy-out projects - their staffing and timing challenges make it difficult to know how to deal with very technical requirements.
FEMA is an absolute pain to work with.
FEMA PDMG all have different processes and perspectives and do not stay through the project
For large projects we have heard that many funders would like to be the 'last money in' which can make moving forward with a project challenging.
Getting a response
Hard to find what is available for resources etc before its needed
hard to get a call back.   They are understaffed.
Hard to know where to turn and challenging to get to the most relevant info.
Hard to know which agency to talk with, very long hold times to ask questions just to be told you need to contact another department.
Hard to reach. Lots of red tape.
Information isn't provided.
It is difficult for a small community and minimal municipal staff to meet the requirements of federal programs
Lack of funding, funding takes a long time to be paid back, lots of red tape it can be difficult for small Towns to foot big bills until federal funds come through
Lack of local staff and outreach to understand what they need.
Limited federal staff capacity, although rarely relevant
Monty since Trump became President which has resulted uncertainty, less staffing, changes in funding.
Navigating the requirements and budget cycle.
Never know the right people or places to call
Opaque process, lack of good guidance, scaling issues
People lack the experience and knowledge regarding everything from whom to contact, what questions to ask, and so much more. Additionally, every Agency or Department has different processes and procedures, often confusing people even more.
Pre-Trump: hard to know where to look for fit to our need and Now-Trump: massive cuts mean federal money is probably gone for everything that matters.
Programs are opaque. Can't ferret information out from websites, can't get people to speak to, forms are needlessly complicated....
Regulatory and administrative burdens. Our municipal government is largely volunteer. No one is willing to devote the time necessary to get anything done at the federal level. The federal government has also proven to be capricious in revising their 'oversight' policies.
same as the state - finding info, getting answers from folks, etc.
The amount of repetitive red tape, the length of time it takes to get answers (FEMA etc.) The length of time it takes to get funding. The length of time it takes to get answers. The length of time it takes for return messages & emails. The length of time it takes for assessment of a situation and how to resolve it.
The current landscape in Washington makes it very difficult to obtain reliable information or rely on funded programs. I was on a webinar yesterday where it was noted that federally approved grant funding for a project could be taken away in the current climate. In addition, the applications for Federal grants and programs is

mind-boggling at times. Each entity has a different means of applying. Honestly, it would be almost impossible for our municipality to write a Federal grant application without hiring a consultant or working with our local RDC
The process/rules/procedures are often set up for Omaha, Dallas, and Bakersfield, CA -- in other words, it's overwrought and often inaccessible for our needs.
the unknown future of all programs from federal agencies
There requirements often don't align with the State's.
They don't demonstrate interest in collaborating, even working with them on reporting requirements for funding we receive is a whole process. They seem very disconnected from the reality of the work on the ground. With the administration change I would also say they are unlikely to be a partner.
They don't talk to the other hands
They have created such a complicated system, the people they have tasked with running it are just as confused on how to administer it. So cumbersome to navigate.
too cumbersome
Too many agencies, tough to get perspective for a village our size.
Too many rules, regulations, and wasted time trying to comply
Trump fired everyone
Uncertainty and long communication timelines
unreasonable 'one-size-fits-all' paperwork for a very small town with part-time officials
Very little live technical help, if any. Detailed processes that require a lot of time and experience to navigate. Unclear how to put together the most compelling application.
We are less familiar with individuals within these Federal agencies and who to contact for a specific activity. It is much more effective to work through the state agencies which already have the connections.
We have no idea where to start.
We really only see fed agencies offering programs or grants that you have to apply for. It's challenging to do so b/c 1) applications are extremely burdensome; 2) grant management and reporting with fed agencies is extremely burdensome; 3) it's sooooo much work, often with little chance of getting the grant, so we don't even bother; 4) our town and/or projects are often too small to even really work for fed opportunities. I think the Town gov has had good success with FEMA and some major grants, but not small volunteer committees or projects.
We simply do not have the staff to deal with the excessive back and forth, questions and answers, the incredibly long application processes, meetings, etc. No one has the time to commit fully to this so a group of us do so. The application, agreement process, reporting, and other related processes take so much time that we are discouraged to even consider applying. These grants were setup under the assumption that all towns have staff to manage these grants. WE DON'T. So the town's with staff and resources and residents with deep pockets get funding while poorer communities with limited municipal staff just pass on these opportunities.

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with VT non-government community development organizations?

Application of funding -- especially if it's historic preservation (preservation easements that are eternal in exchange for less than 15% of total project funding, for example).
Discovering who and how takes time
Don't know organizations or contacts.
I'm not sure we have a development organization unless NVDA is both a development organization and a regional planning commission.
Just challenging knowing where to go and whom to speak to.
Too many related agencies, unclear who is the best specialist for which purpose.
too much 'noise' and many unsolicited offers

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with VT non-government foundations or funders?

Difficult to find appropriate non-govt funders. There are lots of options and not a single place to find information about them.
Discovering who and how
Don't know who they are
Don't know organizations or contacts.
limited staff.
Many different application requirements to pay for the same project
There simply aren't very many, and look to have favorites when making choices of projects to fund in certain areas.
They already seem to have projects in mind for their grant and while they consider our LOIs we don't get selected. Again, we are just a group of volunteers and the more arduous they make the process, the more likely we are to just not apply again.
too cumbersome
too much 'noise' and many unsolicited offers
UVM in particular has a unique bureaucracy which is hard for newcomers to navigate.

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with VT non-government business organizations?

discovering who and how
Don't know organizations or contacts.
I don't even really know what you mean by this? Don't think we've ever had one approach us or seen a way to collaborate.
Ineptitude, in our experience.
Not even sure where these exist.
too much 'noise' and many unsolicited offers

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with the other entity you described?

Act 250 is not like any other agency in the state. Almost all others are quick, professional, responsive and helpful. No one at Act 250 will take your call and they won't call you back. You have to wait at least two weeks to hear back from an email, it at all. Attitudes are the opposite of the other agencies - they act burdened and feel disrespectful. Our main contact is pretty much rude and completely useless in terms of support.
again , who is the right contact , timely communication and how to engage
Collaboration is really hard with most partners because of the lack of local capacity, and/or the limited fit between entity offerings and what we need. Our town staff don't have time, and committees are really limited. We really need a local staff person to manage this sort of thing. But entities often have very specific offerings that don't match up, or don't match up completely --- wrong funding amounts or match, don't meet an eligibility point, only eligible once and the need continues, resources or staff/partners aren't actually that helpful, etc.
Can be unclear who to contact for what activity.
Capacity challenges all the way around.
Communication issues
Contacts keep changing
Difficult to find information, develop relationships & consistency
Don't know where to start.
Federal agencies are difficult, just because of the size of the regions they cover, they are assisting large cities with more population before they assist a small community. Which is understandable.
Federal government has many hurdles - especially now.

general connection and working together. understanding different requirements and processes
Hard to get ahold of right person and resources to collaborate. Bureaucracy.
Hard to locate correct resources.
Having to hire someone to aid and getting your emergency plan to pass FEMA is insane for small communities.
How our proposed work fits or does not fit their mission can be hard to discern.
it seems that all agencies, not-for-profits and businesses are over burdened with work.
It's not necessarily that challenging, but it's like looking for a needle in a haystack
Just not being confident that those entities are offering things that are actually helpful.
Lack of response and/or response time.
lack of training and administrative bandwidth
limited knowledge of all resources and activities required to get funding
Most (not all) municipal staff, regardless of the community, do not have experience or education in project management, economic development, grant writing or management, procurement, or most any part of development projects.
No notifications of grants through emails or forums
Not sure. state has started farming out management of funding to counties and other entities who do not seem communicative.
Our RPC didn't have the time, staffing, or funding when it came time to rewrite our town plan. We hired a consultant who did an amazing job of gathering data, input from the public, and helping run meetings. (His fee was less than the RPC's bid for the work) RPC then held up approval until they could get around to it and we were ineligible for certain state funding for around two months.
Paperwork and limited staffing
These grants were essentially designed for non-rural towns with large staffs to help plan for and implement grants. The idea that Groton could apply for a grant with multiple funding sources is a complete joke as we have a hard time managing one grant with one funding source. The whole process needs to be made simpler or assistance needs to be provided to small towns, otherwise Brattleboro, St. Johnsbury, Burlington, Montpelier, Rutland, and other towns with administrators, mayors, or managers, get all the funding while the other poor rural town's simply pay their taxes and watch that money fly away to these better off, more developed towns. The whole system is setup for town's with more resources to receive funding.
Same-- Too many agencies, tough to get perspective for a village our size.
Selectboards are severely stretched with all ever-increasing state and federal administrative demands, increasing legal issues, social service demands and pressure to keep taxes down. Seeking out and following up with funding opportunities takes much more time than a small town can manage
Small Business Administration - did a good job of outreach after disaster, but when received help from an SBA Staff - they gave me a number, and the online system was very rigid and unforgiving, and wouldn't recognize my application number and no way to really follow through after I ran into a snag with the number, could not get any assistance reaching back and addressing the storm damage to this business.
State agencies sometimes seem to be at odds with one another as to what they require
we are a small community which does not offer the potential benefits the programs offered
We have no local staff available or capable of pursuing opportunities.

If you could change one thing about the community and economic development technical assistance system in Vermont, what would it be?

	Code
A central hub for TA with a user friendly website that makes good use of AI tools to guide people to resources. For a small state, there are way too many different players and it is confusing. The state hasn't done a good job of being the convenor. We need to all work together, especially as we enter times with limited federal resources.	Hub, Centralize

A more interconnected system.	Hub, Centralize
Access to a digital guide by specialty or topic.	Communication
Accessible state government employees. Project guide to how to seek funding A-Z.	Communication
Be more proactive. Look at your lists of who has received grants and funding in the past and find out which town's have never applied or received any funding. Reach out to those towns and offer assistance, soup to nuts assistance, not just 'here's where grants are... apply for them.	Direct Assist
better websites and outreach	Communication
Burn it down and start from scratch? Very little that is offered seems to match the needs of our very rural town. Everything seems to assume a town with professional staff and more existing infrastructure than we have. Generally VTrans seems to work well for us, while almost everything else is totally missing our needs.	Equity
central knowledge base, right now it is more like "have you tried x,, y or z?"	Hub, Centralize
Communities across Vermont have different capabilities to work with community and economic development technical assistance. Rural communities are extremely challenged to seek out, fund and manage this work. Rural communities are the backbone of the State of Vermont, but are often left out in the cold. You cannot treat a city like Burlington's ability to access community and economic development technical assistance the same as a rural community in Essex County.	Equity
Consistent state funding	More Money
Create a single online hub to connect with all the resources.	Hub, Centralize
Create an actual system.	Intentionality
Define it. And build community buy-in.	Intentionality
Employ a team at the ACCD level, instead of having RPC's do it.	Hub, Centralize
enable grant stacking by having standardized application, administration and reporting requirements	Simplify
Ensure that information is available to smaller municipalities that don't have staff with the time to do research about the.	Communication
Fewer consultants, more full-time staff embedded in communities. They are lovely people but we have four different consulting agencies on one small-to-medium sized project this summer.	Direct Assist
Get rid of it and go back to the simple zoning we had before	Simplify
Good news: Many providers. Bad news: Many providers. Hard to navigate, choose, focus, coordinate, prioritize.	Complexity
greater help from VTrans in initial design of projects	Direct Assist
Greater public exposure.	Communication
Have a focus on working with Act 250 and permitting with fire safety and wastewater. Our projects get pounded by inspectors changing the requirements even after a project is finished. It can be very punitive.	Build Capacity
Have a one-stop shop "portal" or the ability to work with a seasoned project manager.	Hub, Centralize
Have local visits to municipalities to educate what there is available	Communication
Have town volunteers on Planning Commission and Zoning Board trained by State personnel to offer a standardized training that will take municipalities out of the politics of local regional planning commissions and better expose individual municipalities to ideas and techniques used successfully in other communities.	Build Capacity
Having a single source of information and assistance.	Hub, Centralize
hire more staff.	
Honestly it's not the system in VT, it's my municipality's lack of capacity and funding to take it on. We don't have economic development staff, so we can't have a committee. It's a priority	Build Capacity

for the city council but we can't act on it. We are letting opportunities pass us by, most importantly, opportunities to collaborate more with developers on the large projects happening or coming to our community.	
I am serious about reducing regulation	Deregulate
I think infrastructure and transportation is well funded & advertised. Everything else is opaque, not funded, or not a priority.	Communication
I wish there was one central location that entrepreneurs and business support organizations could go to see all the available assistance in one place.	Hub, Centralize
Identifying easy to access funding sources.	Communication
Improve facilitation skills as conversations get hostile, ugly, for example, about affordable housing. As the amount of uncertainty increases in multiple aspects of life, how will TA adapt to keep projects moving along?	Build Capacity
It feels loose, providing per project allotment would direct the TA evenly vs all on one project.	Simplify
It is not clear to our town officials how to help with economic development.	Build Capacity
It needs to be easier for development consultants to provide assistance to communities. Especially when it comes to getting access to resources such as administrative systems.	
It would be great if we had a single location that could direct us to the various resources available	Hub, Centralize
lack of resources	More Resources
Less ACT 250	Deregulate
Less planning money, shift to doing money	Simplify
Lots of information is available, and that is great for small projects with a cost estimate. But, more often what volunteers need is project development help.	Direct Assist
make it more equitable for small towns	Equity
Make rich people pay taxes, so we're not all fighting over pennies and jumping over massive oversight hurdles to account for those pennies.	More Money
Make the path of project development more clear and less cumbersome	Simplify
Money. We need more of it. Programs like MTAP, etc. are game changer. Small, rural communities with little or no staff depend on this capacity.	More Money
More accessible and funneled for use - for municipalities, for organizations, for nonprofits, etc.	Simplify
More administrative lift from the state. The state seems to silo information into departments/divisions, and appears to make no effort to share internally what they know. Relying on a strapped municipality to relay/regurgitate info the state is asking of another branch of the government is taxing.	Hub, Centralize
More convenience and alacrity.	Simplify
more development providers in southern Vermont	More Resources
More financial resources needed.	More Money
more funding	More Money
more funding and quicker accessibility	More Money
More funding for infrastructure like Wastewater. It is such a complicated puzzle, both logistically and economically. I don't think the general population understands how important it is to a community as well, which makes it a hard type of project to gain public excitement about.	More Money
More in person regional informational meetings.	Communication
more private company involvement	
More resources and guidance at RPC level. This is the most sensible place to deliver services that we have to shop all over the place for. Make the RPCs the main point of contact and support staff for Towns.	Direct Assistance

More training about the steps municipal employees/officials should take when beginning projects or seeking grants.	Build Capacity
More user friendly, increased staff to better able to help municipalities work through the issues and applications	Direct Assist
Need one-stop shopping	Hub, Centralize
non-competitive grants for technical assistance on all the reports and plans that have regular update cycles	More Money
Non-municipal funding comes with too many restrictions and caveats.	Simplify
Often the assistance programs and mechanisms are built from the perspective of the other entity -- even VLCT struggles to provide assistance that matches a local perspective and needs. I need help navigating actual conditions, not theoretical ones. The Feds often give non-answers to direct questions about their own rules (this has been a constant of the FEMA experience, for example).	
One place for all resources and opportunities. We don't have staff or time to keep up with multiple agencies, commissions, etc.	Hub, Centralize
Provide more financial resources to the state RDC's to hire more staff to support municipalities and businesses in their regions.	Direct Assistance
Put it all in one place. Have all parties talking and working together instead of changing things that affects other agencies.	Hub, Centralize
Right size it, somehow, for small towns. This survey is taking longer than you expected, for example. Local elected leaders are largely volunteers, and we don't have time to manage multiple grants for the small amount we get in return.	Equity
simplify it.	Simplify
Someone available to help communities put together a package or figure out a workable plan to access the TA/resources they actually need -- not just to refer you to a website that has incomplete info or resources that don't actually work.	Direct Assistance
Streamline communication and support. Make it it easy to find and use resources all in one place	Hub, Centralize
streamline data	Simplify
Streamline information sources, streamline application processes. reduce the regulations (Act 250) that upend so much of what the town would like to do	Simplify
Streamline it. Easy cooperation between entities.	Simplify
Stronger state office with clearer goals and more coordinated leadership to bring towns along.	Hub, Centralize
Synchronize the variety of resources. What funds work well together? If you are seeking funds for X type of project, which resources are the best fits? Create a search engine that prioritizes options based on the type of project.	Hub, Centralize
The state (or someone) should provide in-person training for development review boards, zoning boards, planning commissions and zoning administrators, and attendance should be required for people being appointed to these positions. The whole statutory process is extremely difficult for towns without paid staff, and new appointees don't realize how important these positions are.	Build Capacity
There are too many organizations involved in technical assistance, Regional Planning Commissions are always a good place to start	Simplify
transparency	Communication
Try to prevent towns in VT from becoming monocultures of the wealthy like Norwich has become	Equity
Visibility of opportunities- and help	Communication

VLCT orientation for new Selectboard members provides many useful perspectives in a single, half-day session. Something similar that presents and unifies information about community and economic development would be a useful change.	Build Capacity
We need to enable county or regional powers. A town of 800 can't keep up.	Hub, Centralize
While each project is different, the upfront costs for the following services can kill a potentially successful project in the early stages: Technical expertise on pre-development costs including - NEPA requirements, Historic preservation and Section 106 costs	More Money

If there is anything else you would like to share about your experiences with municipal technical assistance in Vermont feel free to share it here.

A lot of towns are too small to have a paid position to provide technical assistance.
Act 250 - it has just killed so many municipalities. And legislators don't want to hear it. It is over 50 years old, anti-housing in its practices, and not at all able to work collaboratively to keep a project moving. It's a time and money prison that has driven away all of the good developers, while our legislators label them all as greedy profiteers. That is an incredibly biased and uninformed prejudice that has done Vermont great harm. We must do better.
After the 2024 floods, we were told we were getting technical assistance, and we got help developing lists of projects. But the funding then was granted to other towns, and was used up. It was a good starting point, but maintaining momentum is difficult.
As with anything, there's a learning curve that sometimes gets steeper with time.
Have had great success getting some grants, TA programs, and other resources to do great work in the last few years -- we're grateful. But the biggest limitation to us is lack of an actual *organization* (or staff person somewhere) to coordinate and carry it forward. We could be doing SO much more to follow up on planning and implementation projects if we had a person or org to lead it. Without that, we do something cool and then often see volunteer burnout or plans forgotten about pretty quickly. It feels like we're too small to try for the downtown program and get help having a coordinator, but big enough that we could do a lot more than just have village center designation -- we just need more help to do it.
even 10% or 20% matching is still a burden when people are struggling to combat any tax increased. we are ALWAYS behind in the budget.
Everyone is short staffed and all of the staff that are currently in place are underpaid and overworked.
Frustration when fed and/or state requirements increase cost of doing something simple. A block and canvas salt/sand shed should not cost $1M!!!
generally, the help we get is very high quality. We just don't have the time or resources to access. Dealing with FEMA is extremely time consuming. Our town is in debt. No margin for grant matching funds. Selectboard is consumed with general operations. In the past 5 years several initiatives have failed because they are costly (Town Hall ADA modifications) or perceived as intruding on people's autonomy (adopting regulations to join the National Flood Insurance Program).
I am answering as a TA provider who assists multiple municipalities. VT's CD TA system is incredibly fractured. Many municipal officials don't understand the entirety of what community development means, and go to the business community, architects, engineers, and lawyers for answers. These types of professionals provide limited answers due to lack of awareness of the comprehensive approach to and funding resources available for CD projects. There is also a capacity limitation issue for Selectboards in terms of bandwidth for managing the community engagement required to garner support for projects. Municipalities need a guidebook that gives them a foothold for steps 1 through 10 and outlines the CD project development process from start to finish. NH CDFA has a good model. NH Community Loan Fund also has a TA program for small towns and municipalities. It would be good for UVM CLP to talk with these NH colleagues about their TA models.
I don't know about other RPCs but NVDA hosted a Zoom meeting for muni participants for a couple different types of development projects, sharing experiences and fielding questions. It was interesting to hear about the challenges with different types of projects. Acknowledge successes

I think that so far the best experience for me has been with the staff at ACCD, in particular the staff within VCDP. They understand and try very hard to make things work for our communities and us as consultants. I have worked with their staff both as a former municipal employee, as well as now as a consultant for other communities. While their systems are not perfect and could use improvement, and Vermont agencies are still siloed off from one another, they are definitely the best current example in our state.

In general I've noticed towns need help most with grant maintenance and reporting and with IT support—website maintenance, document storage, hybrid virtual meetings, and cybersecurity.

It is difficult to manage the different timing constraints of different funding sources. The most problematic is the Accessibility Modification grant that can only be submitted within 3 months of breaking ground. This means you have to prepare bid requests before knowing that funding has been secured.

Most people don't know about what's available unless they are receiving or have received some sort of assistance.

My criticisms are of process and structures, not people. Generally speaking, everyone is doing the best they can to be as helpful as possible.

Northwest Regional Planning Commission and Franklin County Industrial Development are both exceptionally skillful, knowledgeable and motivated. They are excellent partners in all Economic Development and Community Building projects, but they could use more staff.

NVDA has reached out to us and offered excellent assistance

Overall, there are very talented and committed state, regional & local people that we really appreciate partnering with us.

Part of the problem is there are not enough people doing it! And it is expensive to procure help beyond the surface gloss of programs. Fund programs like MTAP.

Regional planning commissions have been most helpful in our community.

RPC and RDC in our region do a good job, more resources would help.

RRPC and VLCT are the best.

Seems crazy that we were awarded a $40k building engineering grant and then denied any funding for the construction of said building.

Shitcan all of it period

Small communities need human capacity through TA, otherwise you can throw as much money as you want at them and it won't matter. People make things move, and the TA support makes that possible.

State agencies are always very helpful. Also Regional Planning Commissions, although they seem to suffer from frequent staffing changes.

Technical assistance is hard to find and fund. Not all RPCs provide equal assistance - enforcing consistent standards would be helpful. TA needs to be better prioritized across state agencies, including coordinating between agencies.

The main challenge is that very people know the technical assistance is available, no matter how many front porch forum posts. There are so many amazing free resources in this state and in Burlington alone. We need to find a better way to spread the word so that communities are making better use of this TA!

The RPC is terrific, but coordinating with our own project and budget cycles and departmental capacity is a challenge even with really personalized and motivated help coming from the RPCs.

The time it takes between scoping and feasibility study and actual implementation funding make projects in small towns problematic

The towns in the northeastern section of Vermont need the most assistance and have the least provided by their RDC/RPC

The whole system is setup for larger towns to succeed and smaller town's to not have the resources to even play the game. It's an incredibly unfair system. As our Town residents' tax dollars are taken away to pay for projects in Chittenden County or other larger municipalities and none of their money goes back into our community. Our town is basically floundering with no one at the State or Federal level even caring that that's the case. Or they are pouring money into a culvert that literally no one cares about that has survived multiple floods and we have no problems with. They just want to show 'look what we did with the money... all this great work' but never

anything in our town or when it is its not something the Town necessarily cares about, and no one seems to care that the St. J's, Burlingtons, and Montpeliers get all the grant money and projects to help them move forward. It's really sad.
VLCT and our regional planning center are our two best sources.
VLCT is great
We currently have many improvement projects going on, many I have been working on for years (one is 12 years), we have technical assistance for these projects, but we have many more projects that need TA and funding and I don't know how to find that help.
we have to bring the private sector businesses to the table to help here
We mostly access it via our contracted engineers
We need help with environmental and mapping concerns, not economic development.

Appendix C – Municipal Focus Group Protocol

Moderator Discussion Guide: Municipal Technical Assistance Focus Groups

Framing Statement (Moderator Reads Aloud):
Thank you for participating today. This focus group is part of a statewide effort to better understand how Vermont's municipal technical assistance (TA) system has functioned in recent years. Your insights into what has worked well, what has been challenging, and what changes you'd like to see will inform recommendations for strengthening Vermont municipal technical assistance in the future. While the system is in flux due to recent federal changes, this conversation focuses on your past experiences, so we can learn from them to help inform the future.

Before we get started, let's go over a few guidelines for this discussion:
When responding, please state your name and town. Please speak only for yourself and speak one at a time so that everyone can be heard. It's important that we move through all our questions and provide opportunity for everyone to comment. Please try to be succinct in your responses. And we may call on participants to ensure everyone has an opportunity to share their perspective. This session is being recorded for note taking only; the recording will not be shared with anyone beyond our immediate research team.

FOR Hybrid/ONLINE
Since not everyone may be familiar with Microsoft Teams, I'd like to go over some of the basic features:

There is a menu bar at the top of your Teams screen. The first icon shows you the list of participants in this meeting. The icon with the hand and smiley face can be used to "raise your hand" if you have a comment or question. Please feel free to try out the hand raising now. There is also an icon with three dots that offers you more control options. Finally, if you need to go off camera due to poor internet quality or for any other reason, click on the video camera icon. You can also mute and unmute yourself using the microphone icon.

Are there any questions right now about the (Teams features), recording, or anything else? If you have questions during the meeting, feel free to raise your hand and we will call you in order.

Our questions focus on your community's experiences with technical assistance programs and services.

- Has your municipality experienced any challenges when seeking out, developing or implementing community and economic development projects?

- And what are some strengths you've seen when your community is seeking out, developing or implementing community and economic development projects?

- Thinking about your experiences and what you have heard here today: If you could change one thing about Vermont's system of technical assistance, what would it be?

Moderator Notes:
- Keep the conversation grounded in participants' *past experiences*.
- Be attentive to variation in access, effectiveness, and outcomes based on community size, staffing, and resources.
- Encourage specificity and examples wherever possible.

Appendix D – Technical Assistance Providers and Funders Survey Report

2025 VERTA Technical Assistance Providers/Funders Survey Results

Methodology

The VERTA team crowd-sourced a list of technical assistance providers and funders working with Vermont communities. These included federal and state government entities, quasi-governmental entities like Regional Planning Corporations (RPCs) and Regional Development Corporations (RDCs), non-government nonprofits and other private, for-profit consultants. Survey outreach generated 37 responses.

Results

Within which sector does your technical assistance (TA) organization fit best?

	Frequency	Percent
Federal or State government TA provider	17	45.9
Non-governmental nonprofit TA provider/Funder	12	32.4
Non-governmental for profit (private) TA provider/Funder	3	8.1
Quasi-governmental TA provider (RPC, RDC, Etc.)	5	13.5
Total	37	100.0

Vermont's system of technical assistance for municipalities is the interconnected network of federal, regional, state and local organizations that provide funding, technical resources (like training, guidance and info), and direct collaboration (grant writing, project management and on-the-ground support) to municipalities. This system supports communities in areas of community and economic development like:

- Housing development
- Climate resilience and disaster preparedness
- Public infrastructure investment (like sidewalks and wastewater)
- Local administrative capacity (like grant writing & project management support)
- Equity, diversity, and access (like inclusion & community outreach training)
- Livability and social services
- Historic preservation
- Disaster recovery
- Workforce and economic development

Select all the subject areas that best describe the areas of technical assistance your organization provides to Vermont municipalities.

	Frequency	Percent
Housing development	15	40.5
Climate resilience and disaster preparedness	22	59.5
Public infrastructure investment (like sidewalks and wastewater)	22	59.5
Local administrative capacity (grant writing & project management support)	21	56.8
Equity, diversity, and accessibility (inclusivity & community outreach training)	9	24.3
Livability and social services	6	16.2
Historic preservation	9	24.3
Disaster recovery	18	48.6
Workforce and economic development	16	43.2

On a scale of 0-10 where 0 is not a barrier at all and 10 is a very difficult barrier, how much of a barrier are each of the following to doing community and economic development projects in your community?

	Mean (Average)
Municipal funds for projects	8.0
Municipal staff time to collaborate on projects	7.8
Municipal skills to apply for or administer a project	7.4
Coordinating with multiple project funding sources (Stacking)	6.6
Funding a municipal TA project	6.3
Knowing where to find funding for a project	5.4
Knowing which funding sources are best suited for a project	5.2
Coordinating with multiple project technical assistance collaborators	4.2
Municipal interest in doing projects	4.1

Knowing where to find additional technical assistance providers to collaborate on a project	3.9
Knowing where to find information, training or guides for a project	3.5
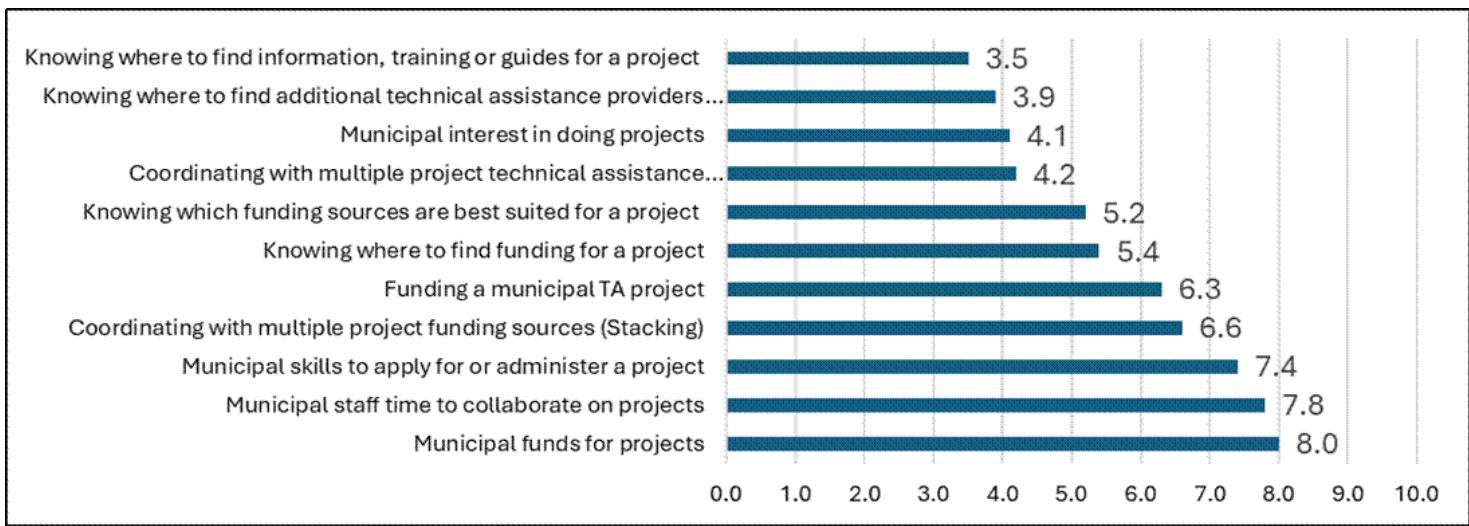
To the best of your knowledge, how challenging is it <u>to find information about</u> community and economic development resources (funding, training, models, collaborators, etc.) from each of the following sources?

	Not at all Challenging	Somewhat Challenging	Very Challenging
Federal agencies, programs, etc.	7.9	57.9	34.2
VT non-government foundations or funders	16.2	54.1	29.7
VT non-government business organizations	12.1	63.6	24.2
VT non-government community development organizations	31.4	48.6	20.0
State of VT agencies, programs, etc.	23.7	60.5	15.8
Regional Planning or Development Corporations	41.7	44.4	13.9
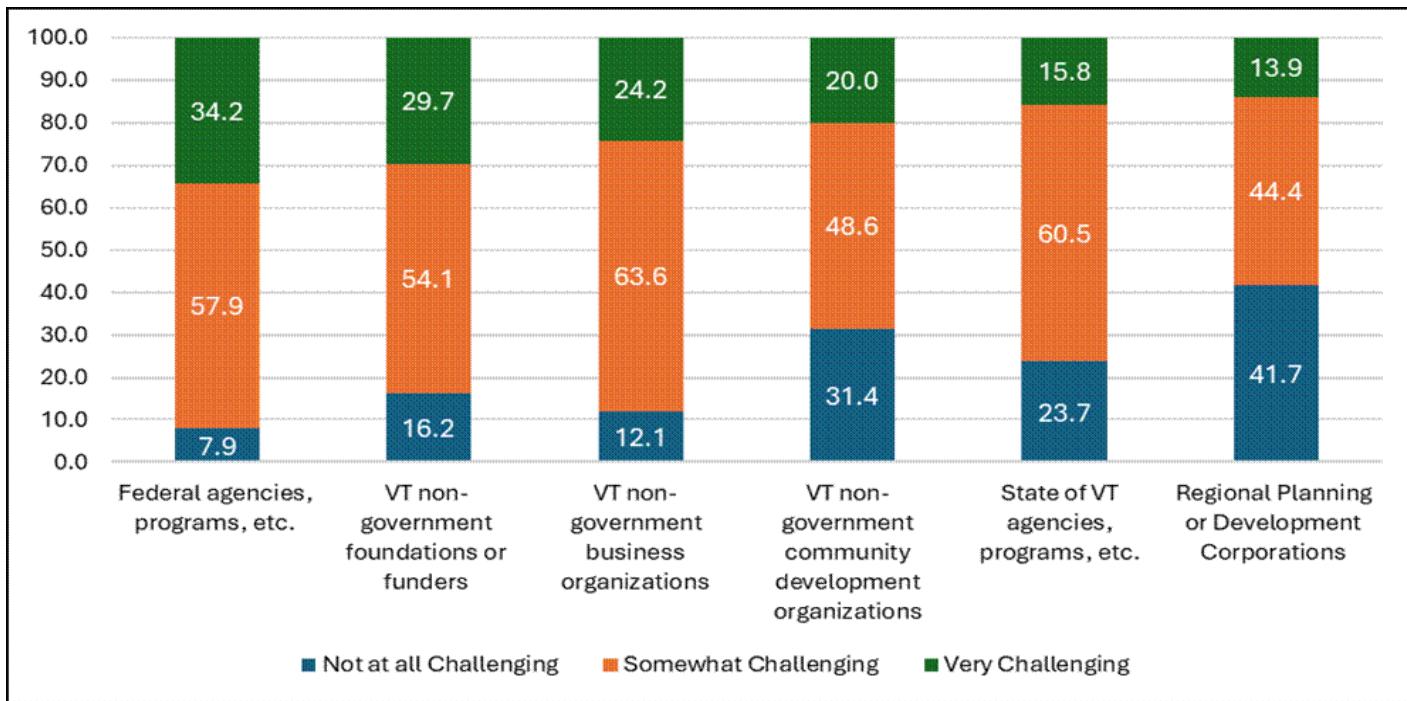
How challenging is it for your organization <u>to collaborate</u> with each of the following on municipal community and economic development projects?

	Not at all Challenging	Somewhat Challenging	Very Challenging
Federal agencies, programs, etc.	2.7	48.6	48.6
Small municipalities	16.2	45.9	37.8
State of VT agencies, programs, etc.	29.7	48.6	21.6
VT non-government foundations or funders	22.9	62.9	14.3
VT non-government business organizations	20.7	72.4	6.9
VT non-government community development organizations (non-profits serving municipalities)	22.9	74.3	2.9
VT Regional Planning or Development Corporations	54.1	43.2	2.7
Large municipalities	27.0	70.3	2.7
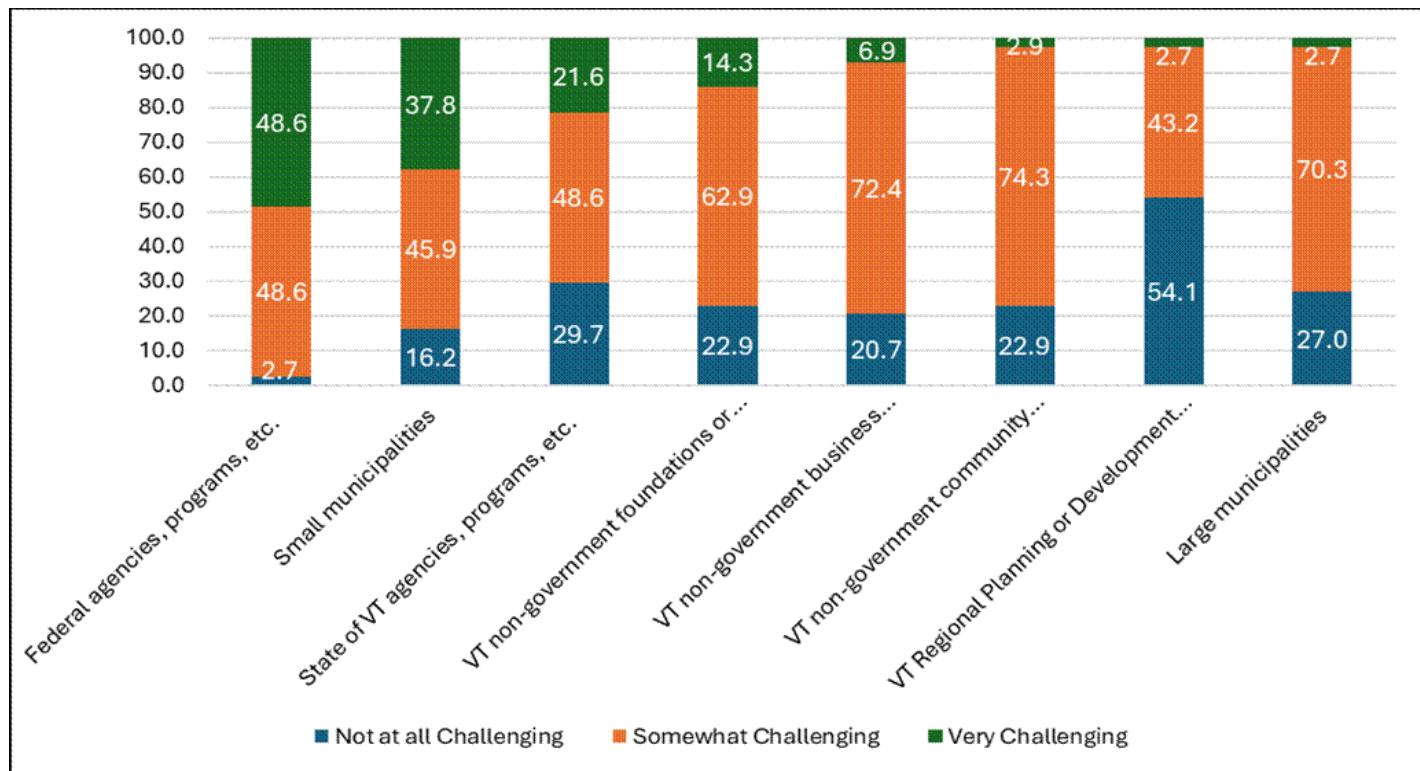
Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with State of VT agencies, programs, etc.?

Agency regulations do not meet project timelines. Contradictory expectations among agencies and programs.
I came from the private sector. The state government is highly inefficient and ineffective. Way too many hand-offs and approvals required. The only goal seems to be compliance rather than actually providing service.
It is not uncommon to have inquiries go unanswered for long periods of time. Many webpages and online resources are outdated. Follow through on program announcements and implementation milestones is often unreliable. Delays in the State's long-planned/long-promised CRM system has been especially frustrating.
Lack of clarity on roles, timelines, response time; disconnect of knowledge between legislation design and experts in the field relative to what the legislation is being designed for; length of time it takes to design, approve and implementation; staff turnover/lack of staffing resources
Red tape, unwillingness to change approach to truly engage community in process
The ANR requirements to obtain and administer wastewater and water funds are significant. Some agencies treat the RPCs as a contractor not a partner.
There is often too much information on too many webpages which creates confusion. Information should be easy to understand. State website often has outdated information / access to old PDFs when searching.

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with Regional Planning or Development Corporations?

It is difficult to identify and reach out to who is responsible.

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with Federal agencies, programs, etc.?

1) Clarity as to who and what qualifies; 2) Clarity as to probability of funding (selection criteria, intensity of competition, changing priorities within the program); 3) scale of administrative burden; 4) reimbursement criteria (i.e., will funds cover indirect rate); 5) non-federal match requirements
Convoluted grant/program requirements; delayed communications; unstable funding levels/decisions;
different interpretations of federal regulations by funding source, different set of rules for each source along with different timelines
Difficult to navigate who the appropriate contact is. Long response times. Limited federal agency staff in Vermont.
Federal programs have many requirements and complicated structures that smaller organizations are not familiar with. It takes time even for experienced organizations and can be over whelming for inexperienced orgs.
In our current climate, there are very few staffers left at federal agencies. This makes all the work harder, if not impossible!
lack of knowledge if program will continue, too much red tape
Lack of understanding of scale of Vermont communities.
Multiple layers of bureaucracy. Bound by process; agencies are not rewarded for results
Municipalities often need to stack funding for large-scale projects. Federal funders do not play well together -- duplicative efforts as far as environmental reviews, appraisals, reporting, etc., where each funder requires their own forms and materials
Response time is sometimes very long, technical requirements for funding sources may conflict with other grants/funding in a stack
Staff availability
Staff turnover and different levels of support from different people in the same positions.
The administrative requirements for many funding streams are extensive and require great administrative capacity on the part of our small organization
The uncertainty and unreliability of federal programs, staffing turnover and loss, and lack of funding makes federal partners difficult to partner and rely on for projects, funding, or technical assistance.
With staffing cuts, knowing who to call from the USDA (as an example) is nearly impossible.

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with VT non-government community development organizations?

I'm not clear if you mean the RDCs? if so, I have very little contact with them; they seem mostly focused on businesses. If you mean RPCs, they have various levels of ability and as a private consultant, I feel as if some of them see me as competition and aren't helpful.

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with VT non-government foundations or funders?

Different rules around money/funding; regulatory constraints;
Missions of philanthropic organizations may not align with community desires
The challenge is matching up Vermont State Government Systems with systems run through non-gov foundations / funders. It requires new systems to be set-up so they can talk to each other.
The foundations have their favorites. If you're not a favorite, it's difficult to receive funding. Also, the amounts on offer are very small for the needs of municipalities.

they typically are behind the scenes, with funds granted well before our state involvement and our requirements are not known or respected

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with VT non-government business organizations?

Resource constraints on part of small business organizations makes long term collaboration difficult. Timeline needed for private investment is often shorter than those required for public programs aimed at meeting needs.

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with the other entity you described?

capacity
Capacity
funds are typically granted well before our involvement and our requirements are not known or respected, and these requirements can cost additional funds not anticipated or planned for.
I described it as somewhat challenging to collaborate with small municipalities. The staff time and resources are frequently limited. Lack of dedicated staff for grant writing, planning and economic development leaves small municipalities without the foundational documents and systems to successfully complete for projects and grant funding. It's difficult for small municipalities to build momentum for projects without staff to champion, inform, and engage the public.
It is moderately challenging with the federal government. Things are more organized at the federal level than the state level. The reporting and contacts are clearer.
lack of shared knowledge of programs
lacking leadership and/or well defined projects and/or prioritization of projects
Large municipalities have more staff and folks to collaborate with, making points of contact difficult to identify.
Since the start of 2025, federal agencies are severely understaffed and even if you speak to someone, they are not able to answer any questions or give helpful information.
Small towns have extremely limited capacity which can make it difficult to plan for projects, apply for funding, and implement the project
The lack of capacity, expertise, and general understanding from state agencies, TA providers, and state organizations on the realities that small municipalities face - with limited funding, resources, and staff capacity at the municipal level. Many small towns lack the staff capacity, resources, and knowledge to engage with state and federal partners.
There is a lack of staffing at other agencies to provide collaborative efforts that are required for complex, long term projects.

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with Large municipalities?

they have their own processes and are not transparent

Briefly, why is it very challenging to collaborate with Small municipalities?

capacity
Lack of money and time
lacking leadership (including staff capacity) and/or well defined projects and/or prioritization of projects

Limited staff capacity
limited staff time to dedicate to projects, competing priorities/attentions, and limited knowledge and/or buy-in of stakeholders
Most simply do not have the resources needed to deal with the complex state and federal agencies.
Small municipalities are run by either part-time staff or volunteers who have very limited capacity and may have no experience with the skills required to be successful (e.g. managing a grant project, overseeing a budget, facilitating community conversations)
small municipalities do not have the resources or the staffing capacity. Most are volunteer positions and do not have the knowledge, skill set, or time to devote to complex, long term projects. In order for municipalities to have the ability to compete for grants, or other financing programs, they need to have capacity to do so.
Small municipalities often lack paid staff and don't have the time, energy or capacity for collaboration
Small municipalities often have below staff capacity and rely on volunteers to manage projects. All municipalities need paid project management staff...outside assistance does not build capacity.
Small towns have extremely limited capacity which can make it difficult to plan for projects, apply for funding, and implement the project
Their lack of capacity (admin, financial, timely decision-making, etc.) is the greatest challenge.
they don't have capacity to manage or pay for projects;

If you could change one thing about the community and economic development technical assistance system in Vermont, what would it be?

A more accessible list of organizations and what they provide
Add well-paid and well-trained/supported staff to the smallest municipalities.
Better coordination between providers so hopefully there are fewer touch points.
celebrate the successes more
Clear structure of support and a central place to find information that helps people understand the roles / responsibilities of the various technical assistance providers and what they can assist with.
Continued resources and coordination through programs like MTAP.
Coordinated approach! Input of a project into one place and a review of the project by all potential partners/funders. Rather than VT projects competing against each other, they should be backed in a coordinated way to ensure they cross the finish line in a timely manner. Then the next round of projects can be supported and then then next.
Develop a central clearing house for all TA and Funding opportunities.
Develop an ombudsman organization that would spearhead the assistance in-step with a municipality
Earlier communication and coordination. More funding for early planning to get projects on the right track.
easy to follow information and resources
Funding
Funding allocated to municipality, proportional to population, that residents could engage with via participatory budgeting to allocate to technical assistance
have more regional support that are more well versed in funding programs available.
I would create more programs like the REDI program to assist with grant applications for planning activities that are not covered by REDI.

I would do a thorough business process redesign of the state government and eliminate unnecessary steps and hand-offs.
It is decentralized, everyone wants to help, and recipients may not have the time to receive all that help.
Lack of capacity, particularly in smaller communities, for follow up on recommended actions
Make it easier to navigate for communities and allow all TA providers to participate equally.
More money to RDCs for technical assistance.
More opportunities to access startup capital and less focus on technical assistance.
More paid staff to help with statewide collaborative efforts
More programmatic coordination between State agencies
Providing fully packaged services to our municipalities, where they are not required to apply for or manage the project. The select board provides input, guidance and decision making authority, but a team shows up with the service and the administrative capacity to run the program with no additional municipal effort.
recognizing there are parts of the reviews required under state and federal laws that could add time to the schedule and costs to the overall project. Thus, identifying those reviews should have an initial consultation immediately will help keep a better schedule and ensure costs are covered.
Reduced duplicative permitting and reviews by agencies for infrastructure investment.
RPCs are currently funded by the legislature on a project by project basis which limits the type of service we can provide and often does not align with actual municipal needs. Looking ahead to FY2027 the RPCs are at risk of losing much of the capacity we've built over the last 5-6 years at a time when the state and municipalities are relying upon us more. As a state we need to develop an RPC funding rubric that is predictable and reliable, reflects state and local needs, and the necessary sustained RPC capacity to meet those needs .
Run more through the RPCs rather than piecemeal efforts, particularly for projects in towns without town manager/administrators
State programs should use consistent application and reporting forms
Stop reinventing the wheel, and stop thinking that new models and frameworks and tools are what is needed.
The lack of one place to find the information. Vermont has many opportunities but it's a needle in the haystack to find the ones that best suit the program or project you are looking to help. In addition, it would be nice to have staffing and resources to house this service at one location, managed by the State Economic Development Office
To have a streamlined system of providing TA across the board with all organizations/entities.
Vermont needs an intention and strategic focus on rural development with direct leadership from the state. I'd propose a 10 year intentional focus and committed funding to support rural VT communities with a 10 year commitment for funding and staffing to support small town community and economic development. Many other states have successfully created an Office of Rural Partnership at the cabinet level with intentional and dedicated focus on rural communities. Vermont could do the same - with Governor leadership and focus on improving the lives, businesses, and vitality of Vermont rural communities. Imagine - a $100 million, 10 year investment, with a cabinet level Office of Rural Prosperity (with a small team of 5-10) that would guide, collaborate, and leverage state, federal, and philanthropic investments to improve the vitality and economic opportunity for Rural Vermonters. Just imagine...

Please list any community and economic development technical assistance models or programs that are particularly effective.

Because RPCs can be flexible in how we offer TA, and stay with projects long term, I think we can be quite effective. Those are two ingredients needed for successful TA.
collaborative funders meetings between ACCD, USDA-RD, ANR, had been effective but are not meeting regularly now.
Downtown and Village Center Tax Credit Program: https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation/funding/tax-credits, NVDA's USDA RBDG funded Professional Assistance Cost Sharing Program: https://nvda.net/cost-sharing.php
MTAP as administered by PTV to help with the predevelopment/planning phase of projects involving historic resources.
MTAP, if it were more centralized. I saw some communities really benefit from the "wrap around" services of the MTAP providers (We received support from Stone Environmental for an Environmental Survey, from VCRD in the form of a Community Visit, from PTV in the form of architectural feasibility study)
Preservation Trust of Vermont, REDI
REDI, Vermont Municipal Planning Grants, Sales Tax Reallocation, TIF
Regional Planning Commissions, MTAP funding.   Vtrans MAB model for project development
RPC services
Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) - for very small communities, Vermont Council on Rural Development - Good assistance to develop common visions but no assistance for taking on next steps
SBTAE program was a great success. Would like to see this brought back.
The economic development assistance that RDC's offer is tailored to the specific municipality's needs.
The RIVER Program was structured very well.
The RPC/VTrans Transportation Planning Initiative has been and continues to remain a very effective TA model. Overarching programmatic tasks are defined and agreed to between the agency and the RPCs, and the RPCs have flexibility in doing the TA work in a manner that fits the municipalities we serve.
VCRD Community Visit and Resilient Communities Programs, PTV historic buildings trainings, Village Trust Initiative, Block Grants, Buildings and General Services Grants, RPC support.
Vermont Local Roads
VHCB REDI. Limited "red tape" to get projects underway. Most of the time does not require match which allows a jump start on the project (municipality doesn't have to chase grant funds on their own to hire a grant writer to write apps for project funding)
VT Small Business Development Center, VMEC,
VTrans Transportation Planning Initiative

If there is anything else you would like to share about your experiences with municipal technical assistance in Vermont feel free to share it here.

After 4 years of working in State government I'm still trying to figure out the structure for technical assistance and how to best support non-profits and small communities who are trying to undertake big and time consuming economic development projects. The biggest time saver is understanding the landscape of technical assistance available, the programs that can provide funding, what types of projects those programs fund, and the skills needed to advance those projects. The information about these various pieces lives in different places and it's time consuming to track it all down and then piece it together at a local scale. The other piece of the puzzle is regional connectivity and ensuring that if

you're putting all this work into a local project that you understand the regional impact and value and also that you're not creating something that then competes with someone else.
An additional barrier is the amount of approvals municipalities need to move forward implementing projects. I.e. it's hard to get stuff done!
I believe we need to continue to fund MTAP to support our smallest communities.
In person TA seems more impactful; however with the turnover at local/municipal level there is always a need to retrain their staff which is time consuming
municipal capacity to invest time in development is limited
The MTAP program really augmented our organizations capacity to support the initial knowledge base needed for projects to move forward (or not).
The needs are changing to much more complicated models (TIF) and small towns miss out due to lack of admin and financial capacity.
The time is now! We need a vision for Rural Vermont with the backing of state leaders and a 10 year commitment in funding and resources to make positive change happen.
We have seen the power of bringing technical assistance to the smaller municipalities in Vermont, and I hope that the legislature can find a way to continue to fund this level of technical assistance.
When many/most of the other TA providers leave a town, RPCs are the entities that towns turn to in order to continue the work. We provide critical continuity across state, federal, and NGO (i.e., VCRD) programs and organizations and are the most reliable constant.

Appendix E – Technical Assistance Providers and Funders Focus Group Protocol

Moderator Discussion Guide: Technical Assistance Providers
Purpose:
This focus group is part of a statewide effort to better understand how Vermont's municipal technical assistance (TA) system has functioned in recent years. Your perspective as a provider is essential to understanding what has worked well, where challenges persist, and how TA delivery can be improved. While the system is in transition due to changes at the federal level, this discussion will focus on your past experiences to help inform recommendations for the system's future design.

Framing Statement (Moderator Reads Aloud):
"Thank you for joining today's focus group. Our conversation will focus on your experiences providing technical assistance to Vermont municipalities. As you know, the TA system is evolving in response to changes in federal policy, but this discussion is about how the system has worked in the past. Your insights will be invaluable in shaping recommendations to make TA more effective, accessible, and aligned with community needs moving forward."

Discussion Topics and Questions
- What types of technical assistance have you most frequently provided to municipalities?
- What approaches or delivery models have worked best?
- Have you experienced challenges providing services to municipalities?
- If you could change one thing about how Vermont's TA system works, what would it be?
- What would an ideal technical assistance system look like from your perspective as a provider?

Wrap-Up Prompt

- Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience providing TA to Vermont municipalities?
- What advice would you offer to those tasked with redesigning the TA system?

Moderator Notes:
- Draw out specific examples of past experiences—both positive and negative.
- Note variation in provider capacity, funding, geography, and scope.
- Probe gently on tensions between compliance and responsiveness to community need.

Appendix F – Legislators Survey Report

2025 VERTA Legislators Survey Results

Methodology

The VERTA core team designed the legislators' survey and conducted direct outreach to selected legislators. Despite significant personal outreach, only three legislators completed parts of the survey. Given the incredibly low number of respondents, these results are provided as a placeholder for future potential legislative research.

Results

Before receiving this survey and information, how familiar were you with the VERTA rural technical assistance research project and report that is required by Act 181?
- Two responded they were "Not at all familiar" and one respondent said they were "somewhat familiar".

Have you heard from towns in your district about challenges with staff capacity like having enough time or subject matter expertise, that impact their ability to find and access grant funds or implement projects?
- Two respondents replied they "Often hear about these challenges" and one said they "Occasionally hear about these challenges".

Please rank the following potential challenges from most to least limiting to Vermont's small towns' ability to thrive.
- Limited town staff/volunteer time (Average rank- 2.5)
- Limited town staff/volunteers expertise (Average rank- 3.5)
- Difficulty successfully getting grants and funding (Average rank- 5)
- Declining or stagnant local economy (Average rank- 8)
- Housing shortage (Average rank- 7.5)
- Lack of infrastructure like water/sewer, high speed internet, etc. (Average rank- 5.5)
- Regulatory burdens associated with projects (Average rank- 8.5)
- Available resources don't match town priorities (Average rank- 3.5)

How important is it for the legislature to invest resources into strengthening local capacity for activities like planning, grant-writing, project management, etc.?

- The three respondents stated this was "Very important", "Not at all important" and "Somewhat important", respectfully.

Should technical assistance resources be prioritized to:
- Only to towns with the greatest needs- 1response
- All towns equally, regardless of needs- 2 responses
- Towns with the greatest need first and then to other towns- 0 responses

If you could change one thing about the community and economic development technical assistance system in Vermont, what would it be? (open response)
- Allocate help based on population.
- employ people with a biocentric worldview and have goals and strategies that reflect that view.

If there is anything else you would like to share about your experiences with municipal technical assistance in Vermont feel free to share it here.
- No responses.

Appendix G – Legislators Interview Protocol

Moderator Discussion Guide: Vermont Legislators
Purpose
This focus group is part of a statewide effort to understand how Vermont's municipal technical assistance (TA) system is functioning and how it can better support local governments, state agencies, and community outcomes. Legislators have a unique vantage point on systemic challenges, resource gaps, and opportunities for improvement. Your perspectives will help shape recommendations for strengthening Vermont's TA system going forward.

Framing Statement (Moderator Reads Aloud)
"Thank you for joining today's discussion. We're exploring Vermont's municipal technical assistance system—how it works now, where it struggles, and where it succeeds. As legislators, you hear directly from constituents, municipal officials, and state agencies. This makes your insights essential for understanding policy, funding, and structural issues within the system.
Today, we will focus on three core questions:
1. The challenges you hear about or observe.
2. The strengths you hear about or observe.
3. The changes you believe would improve the system.
This session is about your lived experience and what you encounter in the course of your work—not about evaluating specific programs or agencies.

Discussion Topics and Questions
What challenges do you hear about or know of within the municipal technical assistance system?
Potential Probes:
- What barriers do municipalities bring to you most often?
- Where do you see gaps in capacity, coordination, or communication?
- Are there equity issues—geographic, fiscal, administrative—affecting small or rural towns?

What strengths do you hear about or know of within this system?
Potential Probes:
- Where do you see the TA system functioning well?
- Are there examples of effective coordination between municipalities, RPCs, state agencies, or nonprofits?

- Which programs, structures, or relationships seem especially effective?
- Have you observed improvements in the system over time? If so, what changed?
- Where does Vermont's system compare favorably to other states or national models?

What changes would you like to see in the municipal technical assistance system?
Potential Probes:
- What improvements would help the system better serve municipalities?
- Are there policy, structural, or funding changes that feel especially important?
- How could the Legislature support strong cross-agency coordination?
- What would a more effective, accessible, and integrated TA system look like to you?
- Are there specific reforms that would improve the legislative process (e.g., clearer information from agencies, more consistent data, simplified program design)?

Wrap-Up Prompt
- Is there anything else you'd like to share from your vantage point as a legislator?
- What advice would you offer to those redesigning Vermont's TA system?

Appendix H – Out-of-State Municipal Technical Assistance Interview Protocol

Discussion Guide: Out of State Interviews
Framing Statement (Moderator):
We want to expressly thank our out of state interview participants today. This conversation is part of Vermont's efforts to learn from other states about the challenges and best practices they encounter and deploy to deliver efficient and impactful community and economic development technical assistance to rural communities. Your insights will inform recommendations for strengthening Vermont's system of municipal technical assistance in the future.

We have a couple guidelines for everyone participating in this discussion: Please speak one at a time without interrupting anyone. Use the raise hand function and we will call on folks in order. Use the chat to add comments or resources that are relevant. We will monitor the chat and respond to questions or comments there as appropriate. This session is being recorded for note taking only; the recording will not be shared with anyone beyond the immediate research team. Your comments are kept confidential outside of this session. We will report results without naming you or your state.

Are there any questions right now about the (Teams features), recording, or anything else?
Our first questions are centered on municipal technical assistance system Strengths and challenges or weaknesses in your state.
- Off the top of your head- what are some of the existing strengths within your state's system of municipal technical assistance? What is working well? (Please think about aspects like collaboration, communication, accessibility, utilization, reporting, etc..., and these facets could be between TA providers, funders, etc., or between municipalities and those providers and funders.
- And have there been challenges or weaknesses in your state's system- in providing or funding services that system stakeholders have identified? What hasn't or isn't working well? Again- we're thinking about aspects of collaboration, communication,

accessibility, utilization, reporting, etc..., and these facets could be between TA providers, funders, etc., or between municipalities and those providers and funders.
- o If yes- What are or were they?
- o And- have your system stakeholders made efforts to address these challenges?
- ▪ If yes- How have you worked to address challenges? And how would you rate success?
- ▪ Why have these efforts been/not been successful (to date)?

Thank you for your thoughtful responses so far. We have covered a lot of ground, and we have a fun, final question. For you.
- If you could change one thing about your state's system of municipal technical assistance, what would it be?

Follow up. How would you describe the quality of collaboration between government TA providers when providing technical assistance services to municipalities?
- How would you describe the quality of collaboration between government TA providers and municipalities when conducting municipal TA programs, services, etc.?
- How would you describe the quality of communication about municipal technical assistance programs, resources, etc.?
- How would you describe the accessibility to municipal technical assistance programs, resources, etc. in your state's system?
- How would you describe the level of municipal utilization of technical assistance programs, resources, etc. in your state?
- How would you describe the quality of implementation of municipal technical assistance projects in your state?
- Would you characterize your system as being: Top Down Primarily? Bottom Up?
- What level of local control do municipalities have to engage in community and economic development activities?
- What is one aspect of the municipal technical assistance system in your state that works well for municipalities?
- What is one aspect of the municipal technical assistance system in your state that does not work well for municipalities?