Leahy Institute
for Rural Partnerships

ANNUAL REPORT



Our Impact

Colchester

A statewide initiative to strengthen Vermont's bioeconomy through workforce development, industry partnerships, and economic growth.

Lyndon

A statewide weather monitoring network to improve flood prediction, emergency preparedness, and community resilience.

Stowe

A thin-film solar demonstration project to reduce energy costs and expand renewable energy access for Vermont farms.

Websterville

Strengthening Vermont's goat dairy industry through research, technical assistance, and partnerships that support local producers and industry growth.

Middlebury

Developing technology to produce essential medical-grade fluids on-site, strengthening rural hospitals and emergency preparedness.

Randolph

Developing innovative microbot technology to remove microplastics from Vermont's waterways and improve water quality.

White River Valley

Expanding access to asthma treatment in rural Vermont schools by connecting students with consistent care to improve health and academic success.

Brattleboro

A novel tool to expand innovative wastewater treatment solutions that support rural housing growth and protect Vermont's waterways.

- Healthy Ecosystems
- Transit and Housing Solutions
- Community Schools
- Remote and Co-Working Practices
- Regenerative Agriculture
- Policy and Governance
- Access to Health Care in Rural Areas
- Resilient Energy Systems



2.5M
Total Grant Funds Awarded

1,024
Total Partners Engaged

16
New Projects Funded

2026 was a year of growth at the Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships. We expanded our grantmaking, launched new engagement initiatives, and built new partnerships across Vermont and beyond. Through it all, our focus remained the same: bringing together the knowledge and resources of UVM with the expertise of communities to address the challenges and opportunities facing Vermont. As our work continues, so does our commitment to building meaningful partnerships that strengthen our connections to Vermont.



What makes these partnerships truly powerful is that they are collaborative by design. As a land-grant institution, we don't operate in isolation. We work alongside industry, community, and state leaders to ensure our research is informed by real-world challenges and needs.

Linda Schadler

— Provost and Senior Vice President, UVM

Partnership Highlights



Microbots for Microplastic Remediation

MICROPLASTICS THREATEN VERMONT WATERWAYS

Repeated flooding events in Vermont increase the risk of microplastics entering our water supply. UVM researchers and Applied Research Associates are developing microscopic robots, or "microbots", to clear microplastics from our waterways. The partnership is creating a functional prototype that could help clean Vermont watersheds while engaging UVM students in emerging microrobotics research.

Vermont Innovation Accelerator (VIA)

RURAL BUSINESSES NEED ACCESS TO SKILLED TALENT

Rural businesses and nonprofits often lack access to the skilled talent needed to grow. The Vermont Innovation Accelerator connects these organizations with paid UVM student teams, providing support in marketing, technology and business strategy while giving students meaningful professional experience in businesses across the state.



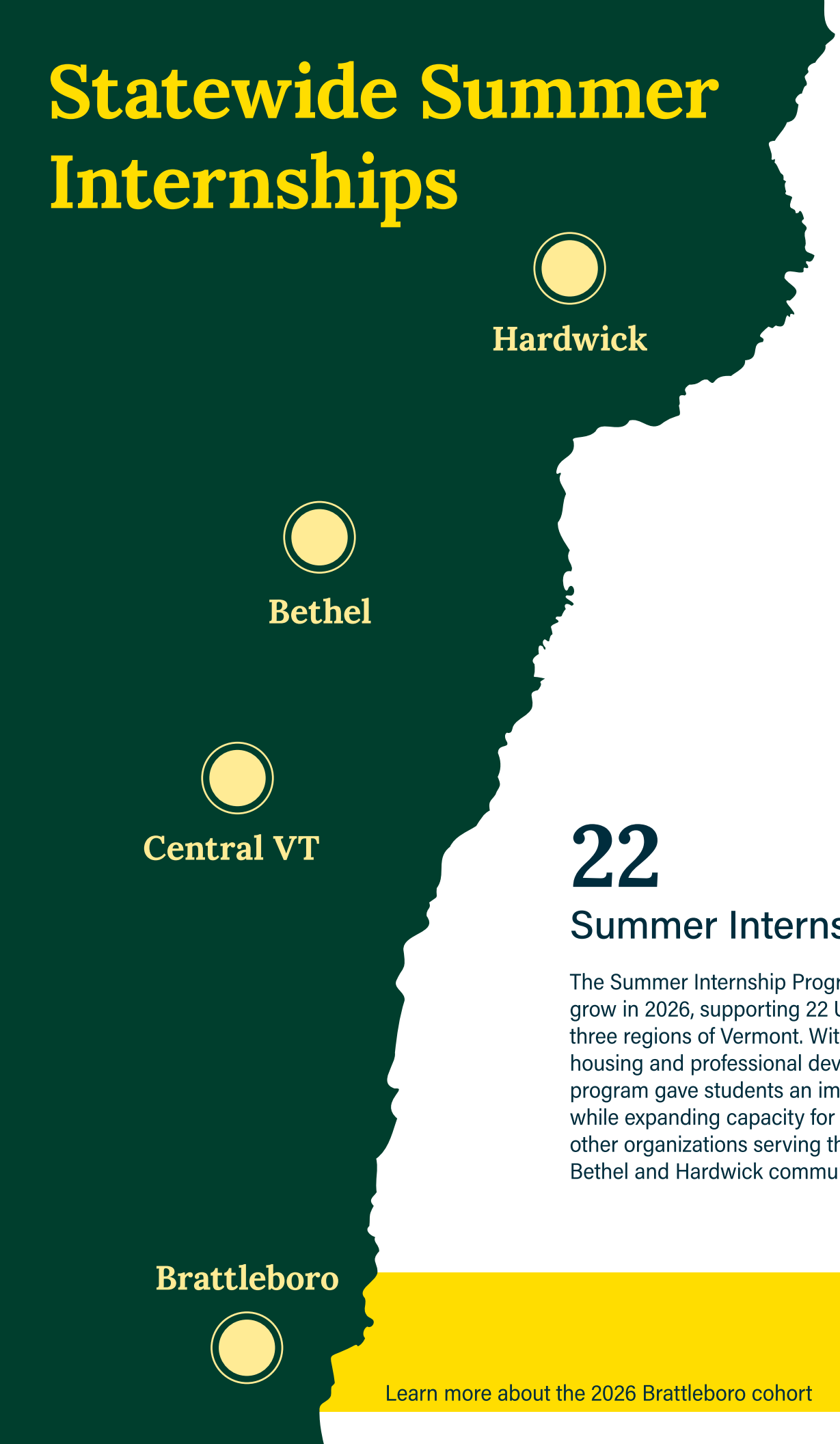


Building a Statewide Mesonet

GAPS IN WEATHER DATA LEAVE COMMUNITIES VULNERABLE

UVM's Water Resources Institute and state partners are building a statewide Mesonet to expand weather monitoring, giving emergency managers, state agencies and communities better data to anticipate hazards, prepare for emergencies and strengthen resilience.

Statewide Summer Internships



22

Summer Interns Supported

The Summer Internship Program continued to grow in 2026, supporting 22 UVM students across three regions of Vermont. With paid internships, housing and professional development, the program gave students an immersive experience while expanding capacity for businesses and other organizations serving the Brattleboro, Bethel and Hardwick communities.

Learn more about the 2026 Brattleboro cohort

SERV

The new Student Engagement for a Resilient Vermont (SERV) grant is expanding hands-on learning opportunities for UVM students. Through these experiences, students develop practical skills, build relationships with communities and gain a deeper understanding of Vermont, while community partners gain additional capacity to advance locally driven priorities. This year's pilot courses are focusing on:

- A partnership to create a sustainable plant nursery
- Support for grant writing for non-profits
- Capacity building for local organizations through data
- Boosting plant diversity
- A new data assessment tool for rural development
- Field research on culverts and flood resilience



VT Data Collaborative

VISIT THE FULL PLATFORM WEBSITE: VTDATACOLLAB.UVM.EDU



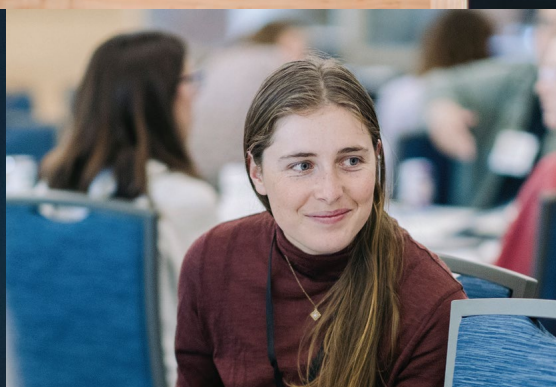
The Vermont Data Collaborative is transforming how communities access and use information to address some of the state's biggest challenges. Developed through a collaboration of UVM partners, the platform brings previously scattered data together in one accessible place and translates it into tools communities can use. From housing and zoning to flood risk, infrastructure and community wellbeing, the VDC gives municipalities and local leaders a clearer picture of their communities, helping them identify needs, understand local capacity and make more informed decisions about Vermont's future.

RISE Summit

PARTNERSHIPS FOR RURAL PROSPERITY







More than **600** people gathered at UVM for the fourth annual RISE Summit, centered on the theme "Partnerships for Rural Prosperity." The Summit created space to explore the challenges and opportunities shaping rural communities and the role that community-university partnerships can play in addressing them.



610
Attendants
at RISE 2026

117
Students
in Attendance

Leadership

Tricia Coates
Director

Michele Karode
Manager of Outreach Operations

Emma Spett
Engagement Initiatives Coordinator

Daria Jarani
Program Manager

Summer Colley
Economic Development Coordinator

Faith Morgan
Communications Coordinator



Photos by: Bailey Beltramo, Hannah Fischer, Jacob Thomas, Jeff Paxton, and Joshua Defibaugh.

Engage with Us

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Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Institute for Rural Partnerships Consortium

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

University of Vermont

About the cover: A close-up of microplastics found in our waterways, highlighting a growing environmental challenge in Vermont that one of our funded partnerships is working to address.