



Citizens for a Vibrant Economy: Program Review & Next Steps

WHITE PAPER

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Introduction

Citizens for a Vibrant Economy (CVE), citizen volunteers and leaders in New Hampshire's North Country, came together in 2015 to address issues with the local and regional economy. Working with University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, in partnership with North Country Council and the Town of Colebrook and funded by USDA Rural Development, the leaders engaged in a robust process to determine key themes in improving the economy and designated action groups. They created a vision of a vibrant and resilient economy and held a well-attended community-wide summit in February 2016. Four volunteer action groups were formed as a result of this effort.

This report seeks to give a background of Citizens for a Vibrant Economy, identify work to be done, and discuss the need for a backbone organization, funding and staff.

Program Review & Next Steps

As is common practice for UNH Cooperative Extension, a one-year review took place with leaders from Citizens for a Vibrant Economy in March 2017. Participants in the discussion included:

Britni White – young professional

Jonathan Brown – CEO Indian Stream Health Center

Dick Harris – Retired ski resort professional

Wayne Frizzell – VP of North Country Chamber of Commerce

Jodi Gilbert – North Country Chamber of Commerce

Steve Ellis – retired and past selectman in Pittsburg

Lisa Whitaker – Granite Bank and BDC

Bruce Beasley – SAU7 Superintendent

Neal Brown – Retired teacher

The participants discussed action group successes and the work yet to be done. The challenges of leadership, decline in volunteer participation and the need for organizational support were discussed. There is strong support with the leadership group to work to move forward. The following next steps were recommended:

- **Backbone Organization:** Identify and enter discussions with an organization whose mission is closely aligned with the CVE. A lead organization is needed to connect this work with other work in the region; provide structure to Citizens for a Vibrant Economy; elevate the work; and develop influence on these economic topics. A lead organization could convene these local leaders and support the volunteer efforts to implement recommended programs and changes.
 - **Staff Person:** Identify a staff person (part-time or full-time) to coordinate volunteers, work on specific action group tasks and assist in leading this effort under the guidance of the CVE steering committee and backbone organization. This position would be greatly enhanced if it were to reside within the backbone organization. If necessary, apply for funding to support the position and develop a plan to identify ways to support that position into the future.
- **Citizens for a Vibrant Economy Steering Committee:** Develop a strategy and set of organizational tools to help guide, focus and formalize the CVE committee role to provide context, guidance and confirmation to the backbone organization and staff person when moving forward with various initiatives. Identify and recruit community volunteers to participate and lead the CVE steering committee.

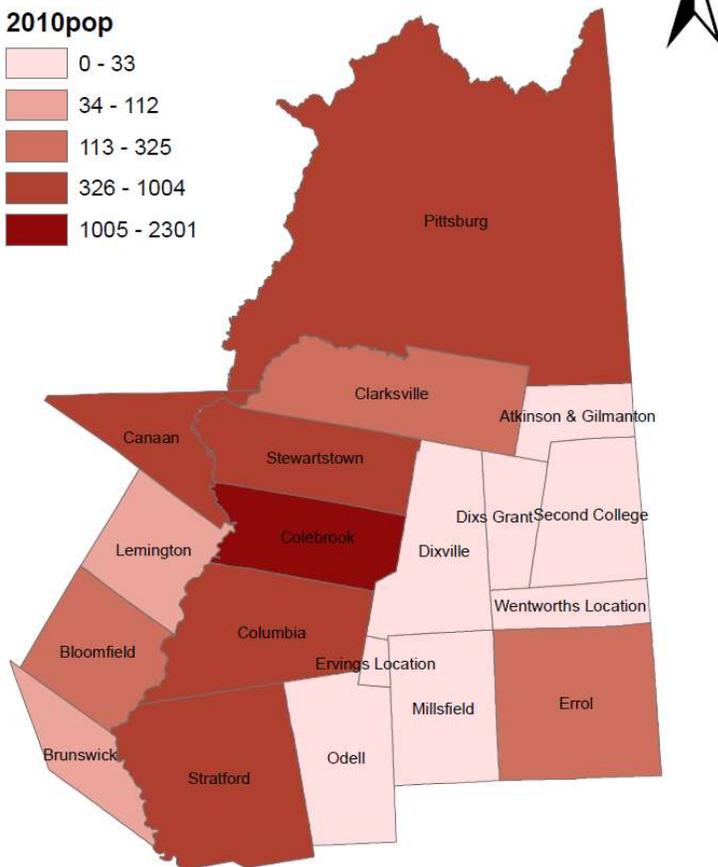
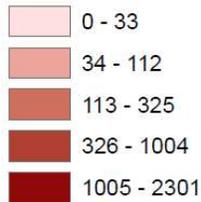
- Action Groups:** Continue with the work of the Action Groups. In some cases, support an existing project of an Action Group, such as the workforce needs survey being developed by the Workforce Action Group. For other Action Groups there is a need to revisit earlier work and revive the effort such as the recommendations on marketing made to the Regional Identity Action Group. It is also important to identify potential initiatives from Action Groups that have disbanded to see if the work is complete or should be moved to another Action Group (i.e. Canadian Markets Action Group work may fit into Regional Identity Action Group). Identify and recruit community volunteers to lead to participate and lead action groups; all have lost membership over the past year.

Background

Building up to the community-wide summit held in February 2016, Citizens for a Vibrant Economy worked to determine a vision for their regional economy which included the following components: leadership, civic pride, cooperation, low taxes, small businesses, a safe and clean place to live, arts and entertainment, housing, agricultural base, diverse economic base, whole health, entrepreneurial spirit, tourism and recreation, and consideration of transportation, infrastructure and energy needs. A deliberate process also identified the region-scope of CVE to include Northern Coös and adjacent towns as seen shaded on the following map by population.

Legend

2010pop



Community Interviews: The CVE steering committee wanted to solicit more information to guide and support the vision. To that end, committee members completed thirty interviews with leaders throughout the region.

Meeting with Burke and Northeast Kingdom leaders: A joint meeting of leaders and economic development stakeholders from Vermont's Northeast Kingdom was held in Burke, Vermont in early 2016. USDA Rural Development and UNH Cooperative Extension organized the meeting with the purpose of giving CVE leaders an opportunity to learn from the ski area redevelopment experiences of Burke. Participants learned that to share in the benefits of resort tourism, community, business and economic leaders must plan ahead, establish a common vision and support policies and investments that minimize negative impacts and capitalize on economic opportunities.

Summit on the Economy: The Summit on the Economy was held on February 20, 2016 at the Colebrook Elementary School. The purpose was to share the Citizens for a Vibrant Economy vision, previous work, findings from community interviews, and the message learned at the Burke, VT visit, generate ideas to strengthen the economy and organize volunteers to act on the ideas. The North Country Chamber of Commerce took the lead in publicizing the Summit. 71 participants, including 53 from local communities and 18 partners representing the business community, local leaders, elected officials and the regional community were in attendance.

Action Groups Initiated: The goal of the Summit was to move the community to action. Forty community members initially volunteered to be on the action groups and the following four Action Groups were agreed upon: ([see report here for details](#))

1. **Workforce**
2. **Community Branding (Regional Identity)**
3. **Canadian Markets**
4. **Preparing for Change**

The Action Groups met to determine their work plan with UNH Cooperative Extension staff providing support to the Action Groups. As is typical in community visioning/action programs, the number of volunteers for each CVE action group declined over time. The North Country Chamber of Commerce website houses much of the documentation. [NCCOC website](#)

Action Group Successes & Work to be Done

Region Identity Action Group

Successes:

- Much work was done to identify components of a regional brand/identity. This work brought realization that the group's focus would be on identity and not brand.
- After that ground work was complete, Gloria Bruce, an expert on rural marketing, developed and presented a [Proposed Scope of Work](#). Her work outlined steps and strategies for regional marketing and brand identification. She also facilitated strategy for developing an action plan to implement a regional identity. This presentation brought back the conversation whether to focus on brand or identity.

Work to do:

- Reconvene action team.
- Identify volunteers and leadership.
- Move forward with a regional marketing and branding/identity strategy.

Canada Action Group

Successes:

- Quebec flags and French language buttons provided by the Bienvenue New Hampshire Program.
- Bienvenue strategy and language training provided by the Bienvenue New Hampshire Program [posted](#) on the North Country Chamber of Commerce website.

Work to do:

- Identify volunteers and leadership for the action group to reconvene.
- Continue to promote use of Quebec flags, language buttons.
- Better promote the Bienvenue NH strategy including language training.
- The town of Pittsburg researched the Pioneer Trail in Quebec and worked with them to add a location in their town. This added a new bench and audio in their town greenspace. This is an opportunity for towns in the rest of the CVE region.

Workforce Action Team Group

Successes:

- Began compiling list of resources available for workforce training.
- Developing survey for region businesses to learn their requirements for employee skills that can inform workforce training initiatives.
- Began collecting data on the aspirations of local high school students to determine how they may be a part of the region's economy.
- Discussed at Veterans skills to determine how they are marketable within the local economy.

Work to do:

- Identify volunteers and confirm leadership that will add strength to the existing action team.
- Document and expand findings from training resources and student aspirations work mentioned above.

- Publish on NCCOC website meeting minutes including data provided by partners.
- Survey of businesses on their employee training needs.
- Expand networking with SAU7 and other education resources.

Preparing for Change Action Group

Successes:

- Data collected and reviewed regarding planning topics.
- Letter distributed outside of the Preparing for Change Action Group, but with its members as signatories, regarding a position on Northern Pass.

Work to do:

- Identify volunteers and confirm leadership to reconvene the action team.
- Consider land use and regulatory regulations as they relate to economic development.
- Summarize and publish to NCCOC website, planning documents collected by action group.

Backbone Organization

Citizens for a Vibrant Economy is interested in identifying a backbone organization whose mission and work is closely aligned with CVE.

This organization will ideally have the following characteristics:

- Located in the identified CVE region.
- A broadly focused mission closely aligned with enhancing the regional economy and quality of life.
- Capacity to take on new action items defined by action groups.
- Interested in pursuing, partnering or accepting outside funding to support this effort.
- Has capacity to focus on long-term projects such as workforce development, regional marketing including Quebec, branding/identity and thoughtful development controls.
- Ability to support the work of volunteers and actively participate with action teams and CVE steering committee --- a key component of Citizens for a Vibrant Economy.
- Interested in future community input and public participation in the efforts to create a vibrant and resilient community.

Potential Funding

Citizens for a Vibrant Economy decided at the year one review in March 2017 that they will likely seek funding for a part-time staff person to carry on the tasks of this initiative. Committee members compiled the following list of potential funders. Note, it is recognized that while some organizations listed, actively support projects similar to CVE, others may not be the best fit with their strategic plan for giving.

Northern Border Regional Commission

2017 Economic Infrastructure Development Grants due June 2, 2017 by 5pm.

<http://www.nbrc.gov/content/2017-eid>

Tillotson Funds

<https://www.nhcf.org/how-can-we-help-you/apply-for-a-grant/neil-and-louise-tillotson-fund-local-grants-program/>

USDA Rural Business Development Program (RBDG) NH

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-business-development-grants/nh>

USDA Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI)

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-community-development-initiative-grants/vt>

USDA Community Facilities (CF)

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program/nh>

Other sources to consider:

AARP Foundation	Hypertherm Hope Foundation
Abraham Burtman Charity Trust	NH Charitable Foundation
Amazon Smile Foundation	North Country Tillotson Foundation
Associated Grocers of New England	Northern Borders Regional Commission
Bishop's Charitable Assistance Fund	People United Bank Foundation
Capital Impact Partners	Samuel P. Hunt Foundation
CHC Capital Fund	Staples Foundation
Citizens Bank Corporate Grants	The Couch Family Foundation
Cogwell Benevolent Trust	The David & Lucile Packard Foundation
CVS Health Foundation (and Corporate Giving)	The Jack and Dorothy Byrne Foundation
Endowment for Health	The Madelaine G. von Weber Trust
FamilyWize	The Ruth Angeline Whitley Memorial Foundation, Inc.
Granite United Way	The Vermont Community Foundation
Healthy NH Foundation	The Vermont Community Foundation
Henry Schein Cares Foundation (Health Lifestyles, Healthy Communities)	Walmart Foundation
Hesed Foundation	William Randolph Hearst Foundation