

# We Have Broadband... Now What?

## Lessons from Vermont's Digital Experience

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# Vermont's Digital Stories

THE VERMONT COUNCIL ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
FINAL REPORT ON THE DIGITAL ECONOMY PROJECT | 2014





# Vermont Digital Economy Project

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- ▶ Created by the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD)
- ▶ \$2.2 Million Project (18 months)
- ▶ Disaster Recovery Grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- ▶ Informed by the e-Vermont Initiative
- ▶ Promoting Digital Tools to 50 Vermont Towns Impacted by Floods

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# Vermont Digital Economy Project

## Creating Resilient Communities



- ▶ Free Public Wi-Fi
- ▶ Town Websites
- ▶ Front Porch Forum
- ▶ IBM Strategic Consulting



## Building Effective Organizations



- ▶ Small Business Advising
- ▶ Non-Profit Advising

## Bridging the Digital Divide



- ▶ Digital Literacy
- ▶ Online Digital Workforce Training



The project implemented 26 downtown Wi-Fi zones and hot spots, for a combined 7.3 square miles of free Wi-Fi coverage.

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# Importance of Partnerships

Federal grant directed  
by a long-standing  
state-wide nonprofit



3 Full-time  
Project Staff

“Internet Interns” – State Library and  
State Colleges Joint Venture



Corporate Partnerships:



Small Business Consulting Expertise



Local Government Expertise



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# Our Project Results

We kept close tabs on our metrics throughout the project.

This kept the team focused and our funders happy.

**150**  
Communities  
Strengthened



**266**  
Businesses  
Strengthened



**127**  
Organizations  
Strengthened



**102**  
Jobs  
Created/Filled



**26**  
Wi-Fi  
Districts



**25**  
Municipal  
Websites



**166**  
Digital Tools  
Workshops



**50**  
Flooded Towns  
Assisted Directly

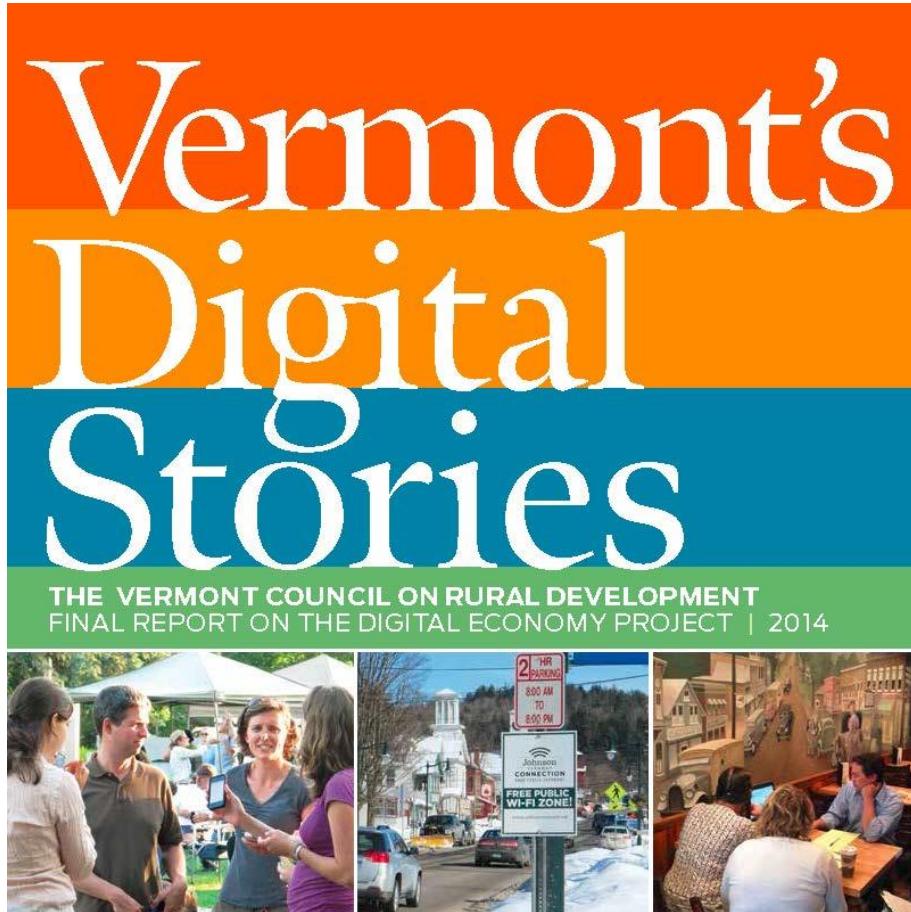


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# Our Project Results



- ▶ So Many Stories, So Little Time!
- ▶ 26 Wi-Fi Zones & Hot Spots
- ▶ 25 New Town Websites
- ▶ 150 new Front Porch Forums with 40,000 new members
- ▶ 260 Small Businesses Advised One-on-One
- ▶ 120 Nonprofits Advised One-on-One
- ▶ 24 Internet Interns Providing Free Digital Literacy
- ▶ Free Online Digital Workforce Training
- ▶ And...Much More

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# Creating Resilient Communities



Downtown Wi-Fi zones were among the many services the project deployed to create community resilience. Rural Cambridge is one of the 26 communities with a new Wi-Fi zone.

Fostering resilience

through better communications

## 5 TIPS FOR TOWN WEBSITES:

1. Remember that a municipal website is a space for citizens to get information.
2. You don't need to have a technical person on staff to have a powerful, effective site, but training is important.
3. Get a plan in place for site maintenance from the start.
4. Start with a very simple site, and work forward from there.
5. Posting meeting minutes is key for any town website.

The Snelling Center's Tess Gauthier (at right) training Linda Martin from the town of Wolcott to make updates to their new website.



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# Building Effective Organizations

“There is an expectation on the part of modern consumers that your company will have a professional online presence.”



**Pat Ripley**  
eCommerce Director  
Vermont Small Business  
Development Center



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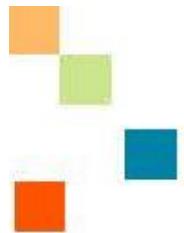
# Building Effective Organizations

Our full-time nonprofit adviser provided one-on-one and small group digital training.



## CASE STUDY: Black River Historical Society

We helped build more effective nonprofits such as the Black River Historical Society in Ludlow, where staff, all of whom are in their 70s, were empowered to use Facebook to promote their events and to use the "square" on a new iPad to take donations by credit card, increasing event donations by 29%. Anita Alic, Vice President of the Black River Academy Museum, said "Most of our sales and donations come from events, such as our annual gala silent auction which isn't held at the museum itself. This is why we wanted to find a mobile solution for credit and debit card processing – to make it very easy for our donors and auction bidders."



He also organized "hack-a-thons" whereby tech experts donated valuable training and web development work for free.



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# Bridging the Digital Divide



"When I first started as an Internet Intern, I had no idea about the impact that I could have or the lives that I would touch. Because I am proficient with the Internet and know how a computer works, it didn't occur to me that some people would not understand how these devices operated or even know how to perform a simple Google search. Through my work at both the Dailey Memorial Library in Derby and the Goodrich Library in Newport, however, I have discovered how pervasive digital illiteracy can seem, though I am doing my part to lessen this."

Many of those who sought help from the Internet Intern program returned several times. Over the course of many meetings, Interns did more than just solve immediate problems, they also helped patrons develop long-term skills to safely and successfully enter and take part in the online world. For some Vermonters, this development was truly transformative.



Arguably our most important program was the most rewarding and the easiest to measure....

Our Internet Intern Program.

College interns were paid \$15 / hour to teach digital literacy at public libraries.

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# Quick Recap of Major Lessons Learned

- ▶ Don't recreate services or positions that are already being performed by another group, bring them into your project as a partner.
- ▶ In the end, every single one of our services boiled down to Digital Literacy.
- ▶ "Internet Interns" still exists at CCV thriving under its third different funding source.
- ▶ Teach Digital Tools at the level the person or the organization is at, whether at the most fundamental level or at the highest tech savvy level.
- ▶ Anyone can learn Digital Skills if you teach at their level AND invest the time.
- ▶ Never under-estimate the importance of what might seem like a small thing.
- ▶ Consider harnessing members of the tech community to volunteer their time.
- ▶ If you focus on people – telling the stories of the lives and the communities you are changing -- then you will find partners and donors.
- ▶ Keep track of your both your stories and your metrics – they are powerful tools.

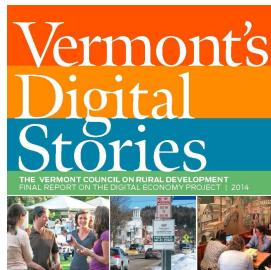
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# Questions?

Contact the Vermont Council on Rural Development:



[Final Report PDF](#)



**Vermont Council on Rural Development**

[VDEP info on VCRD website](#)

Contact Sharon Combes-Farr, former Vermont Digital Economy Project Director:

