Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance (VERTA)

Core Team Members:

UVM – Michael Moser, Andrew Brown, Kelly Hamshaw, Richard Amore, Luka Joffray (student), Miranda Degreenia (student)

DHCD – Chris Cochran, Gary Holloway, Jeff Dube

https://accd.vermont.gov/VERTA

A Town on the Brink – Why This Work Matters

Meet Maple Hollow, VT (A Fictional, But Familiar Story)

- Population: 1,200. A dedicated town clerk, a volunteer selectboard, and a part-time road crew.

- Their town hall needs repairs, but **they missed the grant deadline**—they didn't have time to apply.

- Their aging water system needs upgrades, but **navigating funding sources is overwhelming**.

- A flood last year damaged the library and general store—**residents worry about rebuilding**.

- They rely on their **regional planning commission for help, but it's stretched thin**.

A Town on the Brink – Why This Work Matters

This is not just Maple Hollow—it's a reality for many Vermont communities.

- **Municipal leaders are doing more with less**, often struggling to meet state & federal requirements.

- **Funding and technical assistance resources exists, but accessing it requires capacity that not all towns have.**

This project will help assess Vermont's technical assistance system to help communities like Maple Hollow

Project Introduction

Purpose: To develop actionable recommendations for enhancing Vermont's municipal technical assistance model.

Collaboration: Led by UVM's Center for Rural Studies in partnership with DHCD, and other key stakeholders.

Alignment: The project aligns with Act 181 of 2024, Section 67.

Project Goals

Provide
Provide a comparative analysis of Vermont's current model against other states.

Engage
Engage at least 50% of Vermont's municipalities to identify challenges and successes.

Foster
Foster collaboration among policymakers, TA providers, funders, and municipalities.

Host
Host a statewide summit to build consensus.

Develop
Develop strategic recommendations to improve municipal technical assistance.

What This Project Strives For

- Soliciting various stakeholders throughout
- Identify the system's strengths
  - Recommend ways to build upon
- Identify the system's challenges
  - Recommend ways to overcome
- Learn from strengths and challenges of other systems

What This Project Is Not

Not an Evaluation of Any Individual Organization

This project is assessing Vermont's **technical assistance (TA) system as a whole**, not grading or singling out any one organization or provider

Not Seeking to Prove a Predetermined Outcome

Our goal is to **identify opportunities to strengthen and align resources**, not to advocate for a pre-decided change

Not a Recommendation to Eliminate TA Programs

The intent is to **enhance existing efforts and support providers**, ensuring resources are more accessible and effective for rural communities

Not a One-Size-Fits-All Approach

We recognize that **diverse TA providers serve different needs**, and our recommendations will reflect this complexity

Roles and Responsibilities

CRS Staff:

Lead research and project management.

Mentor students and manage data collection/analysis.

DHCD Staff:

Recruit steering committee members.

Facilitate legislative engagement.

Steering Committee:

Act as ambassadors and provide feedback.

Attend monthly meetings and contribute to the project's success.

Students and UVM Faculty:

Conduct research and engage in service-learning activities.

Steering Committee Engagement

Monthly meetings (~90 minutes each).

Responsibilities:

Provide ongoing feedback.	Share insights from their networks.	Assist in shaping the final recommendations.

Membership includes representatives from municipal technical assistance providers

Timeline

Phase 1: Literature review and stakeholder engagement (Jan - Mar 2025).

Phase 2: Comparative trips, surveys, interviews, and listening sessions (Apr - Jul 2025).

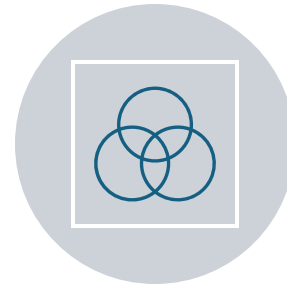**Phase 3:** Comparative analysis and best practices research (Aug - Oct 2025).

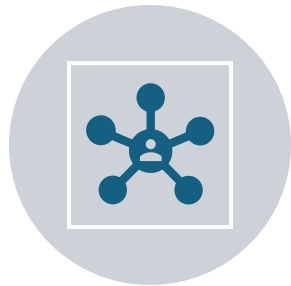**Phase 4:** Summit and final report drafting (Nov - Dec 2025).

Key Activities

Conduct surveys and listening sessions with municipalities.

Comparative analysis of TA models in Wisconsin, Auburn, and other sites.

Develop a network map of Vermont's TA providers.

Host a convening summit for feedback and recommendations.

Stakeholder Engagement

SURVEYS: TARGET 50% OF VERMONT MUNICIPALITIES.

INTERVIEWS: COLLECT QUALITATIVE DATA FROM POLICYMAKERS AND TA PROVIDERS.

LISTENING SESSIONS: REFINE SURVEY FINDINGS AND IDENTIFY ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS.

Summit Overview

Purpose: Build consensus and inform final recommendations.

Goal: At least 150 participants, incorporating actionable suggestions into the final report.

Format: Present findings, facilitate discussions, and gather input.

Comparative Analysis

Research and fact-finding visits to:

- Wisconsin
- Auburn
- [Other locations to be determined]

Focus Areas:

- Governance structures
- Network Collaboration
- Funding streams
- Innovative practices
- And more…

Measurable Outcomes

Report Production: Detailed report with at least five strategic recommendations.

Network Map: Comprehensive map of municipal TA providers and funders.

Stakeholder Engagement: Data collection from over 128 municipalities.

Summit Participation: Attendance of at least 150 participants.

How Can You Help?

Provide Expertise & Input

- **Share Your Insights** – Your experience working with municipalities is critical; provide feedback on system strengths and challenges.
- **Help Identify Gaps** – Where do communities struggle most in accessing TA? Your knowledge will shape our findings.
- **Participate in Listening Sessions** – Engage in facilitated discussions to refine and validate research findings.
- **Review & Improve Recommendations** – Help ensure that final recommendations are realistic, actionable, and beneficial.

Expand Engagement & Awareness

- **Encourage Municipal Participation** – Help connect local leaders to this effort by sharing surveys and engagement opportunities.
- **Host or Promote Discussions** – Provide venues or outreach for regional conversations about improving Vermont's TA model.
- **Support the Summit** – Play a role in planning or facilitating the statewide convening, ensuring broad participation.
- **Help Translate Findings into Action** – Advocate for implementing the most effective recommendations in your networks.

Project Steering Committee

- Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA)
- Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT)
- Preservation Trust of Vermont
- Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD)
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)
- Vermont Community Foundation (VCF)
- Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies (VAPDA)
- State Treasurer's Office
- Land Access & Opportunity Board
- Agency of Administration

Questions?

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Disclaimers