



## Vermont Council on Rural Development's Community Visit Program

Vermonters know that local action makes our communities vibrant. But local action often needs support from regional, state, and even federal resources to achieve goals for prosperity. The Vermont Council on Rural Development's (VCRD) **Community Visit program** is a way for towns to engage and bring together their residents, set common goals and directions in a neutral and facilitated structure, and access resources that will help them take action on those goals. The program gets citizens engaged in working for their communities and connects them to the resources they need to be successful.

### How It Works

The Community Visit program happens in four months, with a series of major community events, bringing together a broad mix of community members with a *Visiting Team*, made up of state, federal, non-profit, and philanthropic experts, to create intensive partnerships and tailored work plans for long-term local success. VCRD provides the structure and neutral facilitation each step of the way. The Visit begins with a series of focus forums (STEP 1) followed by a community wide discussion where residents champion their ideas for the future of their town (STEP 2). After the community chooses its priorities, interested citizens join local task forces to work forward on the community goals set through the process (STEP 3). Each task force has a *chairperson* who will manage meetings and keep work moving forward. A local *Community Visit chairperson* ("chair of the chairs") will help to keep the community informed and involved as the program progresses. While the program is provided to towns for free, residents are expected to assist with logistics, outreach, and community meals.

*"VCRD hosted its first community visit to Bellows Falls, at a time when the community was really at a loss on how to move forward. Ten years later we have an active main street, a strong arts community and a great integration between our industrial park and downtown."*

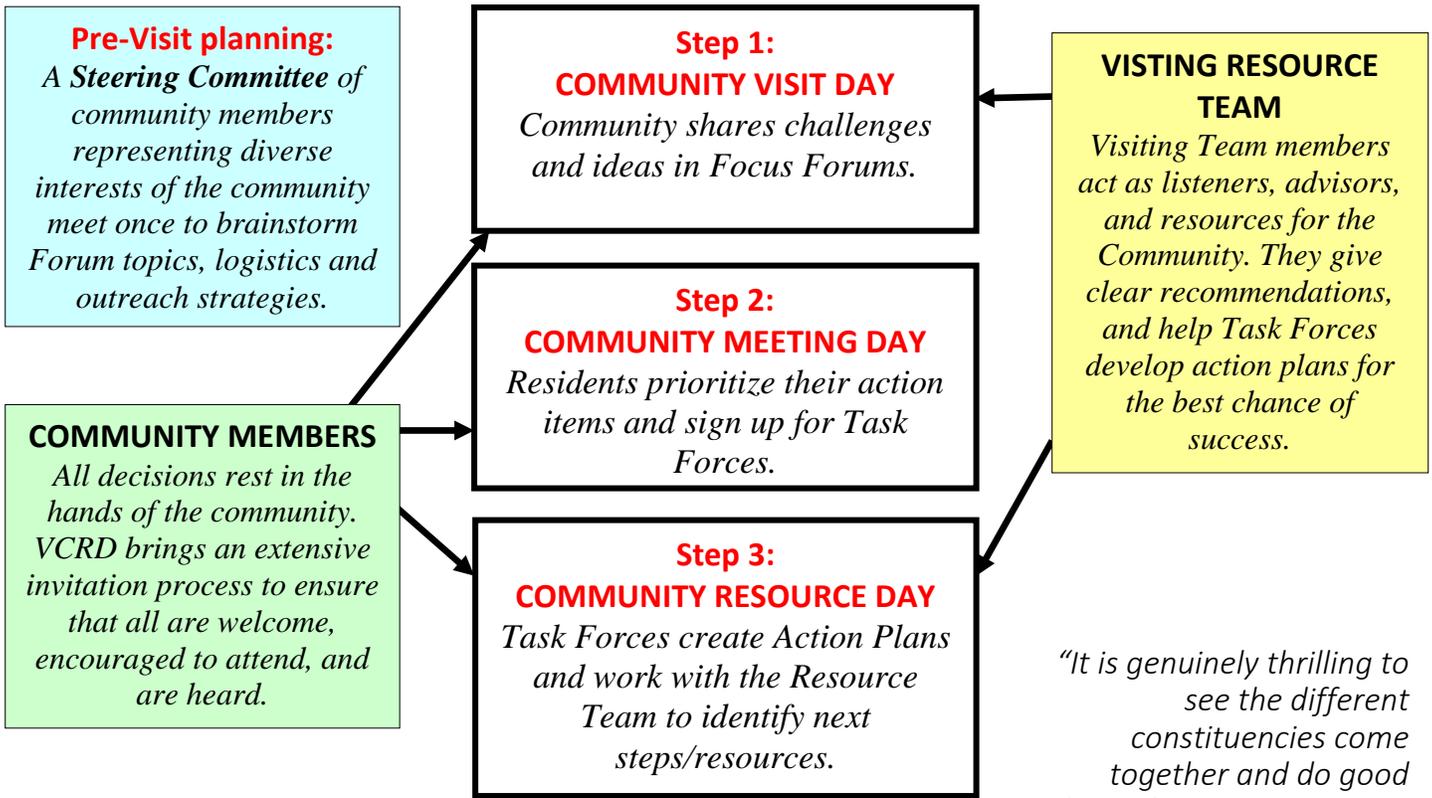
~ Robert McBride, RAMP,  
Bellows Falls

*"I have been involved in dozens of planning sessions and community forums here in St. Johnsbury over the last 15 years and I can truly say that this event was, by far, the best – and will, without a doubt, result in productive outcomes for St. Johnsbury."*

~ Mike Welch, St. Johnsbury  
Community Visit Chair

*"I have never seen as much activity, excitement, and accomplishment in our town. VCRD is doing meaningful work that will improve the quality of life in Vermont towns for generations to come. I will always be grateful."*

~ Sandy Kilburn, Swanton Resident



*“It is genuinely thrilling to see the different constituencies come together and do good things for our community. The most significant results of the process are the lasting effects in the town around community engagement. The town has been transformed.”*  
~ April Tuck, Cambridge Community Visit Chair

*“I have been hearing such a great buzz today after all of the fun yesterday. Thanks again for helping our community get reinvigorated. I really believe in the task forces that have been formed and their determination and ability to better serve our community.”*  
~ Emily Maclure, Craftsbury Community Visit Chair

**What Does a Community Visit Produce?**

The Community Visit program is built from the priorities that a community decides together, so results vary from town to town. Overall, towns report energized volunteers, better community engagement, and new connections to state, federal, and regional resources. For some towns, the Visit creates community goodwill and celebrations, such as *Rutland’s Friday Night Live* series; outdoor each summer week with live music, food and shopping opportunities. For others, it is used to leverage funds or planning resources, such as *Pownal’s affordable housing project* or *Johnson’s downtown redesign*. For some towns, the Visit provides a mechanism to talk about important issues and begin long term work for the future, as in *Killington’s 4-season tourism planning*, or *Poultney’s downtown revitalization work*. And for still others, it is a chance to help the community get healthier; *Troy, Westfield, Jay and Woodstock built and advertised new walking trails*.

Find out more about the Community Visit program:  
<http://vtrural.org/programs/Community-Visits>.