

NEK Recovery Plan Summary

NORTHEAST KINGDOM COLLABORATIVE | JUNE 2020

The effects of the COVID-19 crisis have illuminated the Northeast Kingdom's most pressing issues. With increased community engagement and funding, we can seize this opportunity to manifest our shared vision for a vibrant, thriving Northeast Kingdom.

As the convener for our region, the NEK Collaborative has partnered with key thought leadership in the NEK to articulate this series of immediate strategies for community and economic recovery.

Based on extensive expert interviews, the most feasible and impactful action steps to accelerate the recovery of the Northeast Kingdom cover these five priority areas:

1 Broadband

Ensure affordable, high-speed internet for all NEK residents.

2 Housing

Meet all NEK residents' housing needs.

3 Education

Construct a high-quality, sustainable birth to career education system.

4 Business Support

Organize & promote structured business support for long-term recovery.

5 Cultural & Civic Infrastructure

Reinvigorate the cultural and civic infrastructure of the NEK.

With an eye on long-term systemic change, the following short-term actions should be implemented immediately.

Recommendations



Broadband

- 1.** Install fixed wireless projects as short-term solutions to be completed in 2020. Partner: NEK Community Broadband CUD
- 2.** Maintain subsidies for internet service & device purchase for low-income Vermonters. Partner: VT Rural Education Collaborative
- 3.** Fully fund build-out of a regions-wide last mile high-speed broadband network through a combination of federal and state grants, loans, private investment and bonding. Partner: NEK Community Broadband CUD



Housing

- 1.** Designate and/or build permanent, year-round supportive housing to address those struggling with chronic homelessness. Partner: RuralEdge
- 2.** Expand integrated mental, physical health, and social supports that can stabilize families and prevent future homelessness. Partner: Northeast Kingdom Community Action
- 3.** Initiate time-limited rental/mortgage assistance program for households earning up to 80% of median income. Partner: Rural Edge



Education

- 1.** Increase Child Care Financial Assistance Program reimbursements for early childcare programs to reflect the increased cost of providing care. Partner: Vermont legislature
- 2.** Conduct a community child care needs assessment to identify new/emerging child care challenges and develop solution. Partner: Building Bright Futures
- 3.** Bring state appropriation for the Vermont State College system in line with other New England states. Partner: VT legislature

Recommendations (cont.)



Business Support

- 1.** Provide direct financial assistance to small businesses for fixed cost expenses. Partner: VT legislature, VT Community Foundation
- 2.** Assign NEK Recovery Guides to provide technical assistance, business and financial planning, grant and loan writing support, and business support. Partner: NEK Small Business Technical Assistance
- 3.** Fund shovel-ready municipal capital projects to restart jobs & construction. Partner: Individual municipal partners



Cultural & Civic Infrastructure

- 1.** Provide bridge overhead funding for 12-18 months for arts and cultural institutions that are unable to reopen yet. Partner: Catamount Arts (NEK Zone Agent for VT Creative Network)
- 2.** Develop best practices guide and coaching to help towns develop recovery plans. Partner: Northeast Kingdom Collaborative
- 3.** Provide public funding to put artists and creative economy back to work. Partner: Catamount Arts (NEK Zone Agent for VT Creative Network)

Conclusion

As we emerge from this crisis, the opportunities for systemic change have never been clearer or more within reach. The success of these strategies requires authentic partnership and efficient coordination.

Through ongoing revision and reflection, this strategic action plan will serve as a model for affecting systemic change to solve our region's most pressing obstacles.

We invite partners, legislators, funders and community members to come together in this work, the results of which will be a healthier, happier region for everyone.

For more information:

Northeast Kingdom Collaborative
nekcollaborative.org
katherine@nekcollaborative.org

Acknowledgments

NEKC Board of Directors

Kathy Austin, President and CEO, Community National Bank
Dr. Elaine Collins, President, Northern Vermont University
Nick D'Agostino, Executive Director, Rural Community Transit
Jon Freeman, President, Northern Community Investment Corp.
Jody Fried, Executive Director, Catamount Arts
Jeanne Gervais, President, Island Pond Chamber of Commerce
Joe Kasprzak, Ast. Town Manager, Town of St. Johnsbury
Jim Kisch, President and CEO, Passumpsic Bank
Julie Laforce, Owner; Dir. of Organizational Dev., Built by Newport
Abby Long, Executive Director, Kingdom Trails
Tom Lovett, Headmaster, St. Johnsbury Academy
Patrick Shattuck, CEO, RuralEdge
David Snedeker, Executive Director, Northeastern VT Development Assoc.
Shawn Tester, CEO, Northern Vermont Regional Hospital
Steve Wright, President and General Manager, Jay Peak Resort

NEK Advisory Members

Suzanne Legare Belcher, Field Service Director, VT Agency of Human Services
Ben Doyle, Ast. State Director VT/NH, USDA Rural Development
Tim Tierney, Director of Business Recruitment, VT Agency of Commerce
Sarah Waring, Vice President for Grants and Community Investments, VT Community Foundation

The Northeast Kingdom Collaborative (NEKC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a vibrant, thriving Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. For more than 20 years, the NEKC has been working to improve the quality of life for all residents of the NEK through coordinated economic and community development. We do this by (1) building a common vision for the region through community convenings (2) supporting collaboration to achieve collective action on shared goals and (3) connecting people and projects to resources.

Field Experts

Thank you to the following industry experts who contributed their feedback and advice:

Suzanne Legare Blecher, Field Services Director, VT Agency of Human Services
John Castle, Superintendent, North Country Supervisory Union
Amanda Cochrane, Executive Director, Umbrella
Amy Cunningham, Deputy Director, Vermont Arts Council
Catherine Cusack, Executive Director, Green Mountain Farm-to-School
Xusana Davis, Executive Director of Racial Equity, State of Vermont
Meg Burmeister, Executive Director, NEK Council on Aging
Rob Fish, Rural Broadband Technical Assistance Specialist, Vermont Department of Public Service
Leah Hollenberger, Development and External Relations Officer, Northern Vermont University
Heidi Krantz, Small Business Advisor, VT Small Business Development Center
Ann Lawless, HEAT Squad Northeast Kingdom Outreach Coordinator, Neighborworks of Western Vermont
Chelsea Bardot Lewis, Senior Philanthropic Advisor, Vermont Community Foundation
Margaret Maclean, Executive Director, Vermont Rural Education Collaborative
Janet McLaughlin, Chief Operating Officer, Let's Grow Kids
Linda Michniewicz, Caledonia, Essex and Orleans Area Regional Coordinator, Building Bright Futures
Sha'an Moulert, Racial Equity trainer
NEK Community Broadband Communication Union District including Evan Carlson, Kristen Fountain, and Nicolas Anzalone
Jenna O'Farrell, Executive Director, NEKCA
Grace Oedel, Executive Director, NOFA-VT
Monique Priestley, Space on Main
Jon Ramsey, Executive Director, Center for an Agricultural Economy
Brian Ricca, Superintendent, St. Johnsbury School District
Rebecca Sanborn, Community Workshop
Joe Short, Vice President, Northern Forest Center
VT Council on Rural Development including Jenna Koloski, Jon Copans, & Nick Kramer