



The Vermont Digital Economy Project is produced by:

Vermont Council on Rural Development

PO Box 1384, Montpelier VT 05601 | 802-223-6091 | info@vtrural.org | www.vtrural.org

Helping Rural Vermonters create a sustainable future through the effective use of public and private resources

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Paul Costello, Executive Director, Vermont Council on Rural Development
(802) 223-5763; pcostello@vtrural.org

Vermont Council on Rural Development Announces Staff for Vermont Digital Economy Project

March 6, 2013 (MONTPELIER, VT) – The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) is excited to announce the hiring of three new staff members who will oversee the launch the Vermont Digital Economy Project (VDEP). The project, which was announced earlier this year by Governor Peter Shumlin and Vermont’s congressional delegation, is funded in large part by a disaster recovery grant from the Economic Development Administration.

“The VDEP will work directly with businesses, nonprofits, and municipalities to expand their use of online tools and strengthen their ability to operate when faced with major disruptions to their location or usual methods of communication and marketing,” said Paul Costello, Executive Director of VCRD. “The goal of the VDEP is to help build resilience in many of the towns that were affected by 2011’s floods and to advance locally-driven community and economic development in rural Vermont,” Costello added.

Sharon Combes-Farr, of Ludlow, will serve as Project Director. She will lead the implementation of the Digital Economy Project and coordinate the work of staff and partners to deploy services and systems in Vermont communities. Combes-Farr has worked for more than 12 years in the telecom industry, most recently as the Director of Marketing at Vermont Telephone Company (VTel).

Due to her own experiences during Tropical Storm Irene, Combes-Farr has great personal passion for the mission of The Digital Economy Project. “During Irene's devastation, we were lucky to be able to get online to complete our FEMA application and post positive images and messages to help my parents' inn stay in business, and even host a wedding just two weeks in the storm's aftermath. Our larger community also leveraged the power of social media in the days and weeks following the storm.”

Rob Fish, of Burlington, will serve as the Non-Profit Advisor and Community Organizer. Fish, in conjunction with the Vermont Small Business Development Center, will be providing custom advising and implementation assistance to community groups, municipalities, businesses and non-profit organizations as they advance their use of Internet-based communications and applications. Fish has

over fifteen years of community outreach experience with various community development and advocacy projects in Maine, Vermont, and Ghana.

According to Fish, “The Digital Economy Project is a means of developing and ensuring wide-spread access to tools that will better connect residents, businesses and organizations to each other, to local, state and federal officials and resources, and to the information they need to make informed, efficient, and empowered decisions about their future.”

Caitlin Lovegrove, of Burlington, will serve as the Outreach and Network Coordinator for the Digital Economy Project. Lovegrove will be coordinating efforts to deliver digital services and online tools to Vermont communities. She comes to the project with a strong background in online media and networking, having developed her online skills while participating in a journalism fellowship with the Northwest Institute for Social Change and interning with international development and human rights organizations in London and New York.

“I have seen the power of social media and improved technology to improve the reach and scope of an organization,” said Lovegrove, “I’m excited to share that with communities across Vermont.”

About VCRD

The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the locally-defined progress of Vermont's rural communities. A dynamic partnership of federal, state, local, non-profit and private partners, it is actively non-partisan with an established reputation for community-based facilitation. Through collaboration with government entities, businesses, and other groups, VCRD helps Vermonters and Vermont communities develop their capacity to create a prosperous and sustainable future through coordination, collaboration, and the effective use of public and private resources. To find out more, visit www.vtrural.org.

About VDEP

The Vermont Digital Economy Project (VDEP) was created to advance the recovery, resilience and economic progress of Vermont business and communities affected by the floods of 2011. VDEP will work directly with at least 25 of the towns to help businesses, nonprofits, and municipalities expand their innovative use of online tools. The VDEP is funded by a disaster recovery grant from the Economic Development Administration and from the contributions of its partners: IBM, the Snelling Center for Government, the Vermont Department of Libraries, the Vermont Small Business Development Center, Microsoft, and the Vermont State Colleges. More information can be found at: <http://vtrural.org/programs/digital-economy>.