

Climate Catalysts
Community Leadership
Program

May 2024



Climate Catalysts

Vermont Community Leadership Program

Facing the climate challenge means mobilizing at all levels of human organization. Strong and inspirational leaders are key in unifying and sparking collective action. With hundreds of tight-knit communities, Vermont is a place that can model unique, powerful, and replicable local actions for growing the climate economy.

Produced by the Vermont Council on Rural Development, the **Climate Catalysts Leadership Program** brings together local leaders from Vermont communities for a six month long process focused on building peer connections, strengthening leadership skills and providing project development support. Participants work on implementation of a local project as a focus of their program participation. The goal is to move projects from concept to reality while investing in leaders who provide multi-faceted service to their communities.

Cohorts include a mix of new, emerging, and experienced leaders from a variety of large and small communities who have ideas for projects that are both ambitious and achievable. Participants receive training, peer connections, and consultative support as they develop and implements their projects.

This 5th cohort launched in May 2024 and joins a network of over 60 alumni throughout the state.



Dustin Bowman (he/him) is consistently questioning if our societal response to climate change has thus far been a good idea or just an idea. As we implement adaptation practices and invest in resilience improvements, it is more important than ever to listen to community needs and effectively measure and learn from both our successes and failures. Dustin has invested his professional life in relationship building through solar implementation, sustainable agriculture, energy efficiency and public service. He currently manages the ECO AmeriCorps program for the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation and is a proud AmeriCorps alum himself. He enjoys the act of giving back...doing good work, in good places with good people and baked goods.

Project: As someone placed in a position of leadership at an environmentally themed AmeriCorps program, Dustin will work to identify opportunities to build out Vermont's climate disaster preparedness programs.



Georgina Carley is a long time organic gardener, previous owner of a garden center and flower shop, and is currently teaching people to garden. Other interests are in the pollinator movement and forming a 501c3 in Brattleboro on a 40 acre property with the intention to “bring kids outdoors” from the surrounding

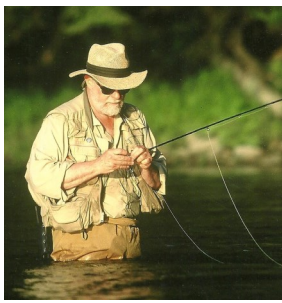
communities. This current project will enable various ways to interact with children and young adults about the climate crisis by vegetable gardening, preparing vegetables, and educating on native plants and why pollinators are crucial to our food chain. The long term goal is to have Brattleboro be a destination for the public to see how native plants can look in their yards. Georgina has raised 4 children, who provided 5 grandchildren and is now proudly watching 4 great grandchildren eat fresh veggies for snacks and watching “bugs” turn into butterflies.

Project: As per our Forest Management Plan filed with the State of Vermont, invasives are a problem on the property. Removal of the invasives is the first leg of this project.



Bill Chidsey (he/him) loves helping people transform their energy consumption away from inefficient methods toward clean and sustainable practices. Often seeing the unseen, Bill achieves personal satisfaction when all the interconnected indoor, outdoor, and occupants needs are defined and mutually supportive. Blending his passions of agriculture, spiritual dance, conservation, and efficient HVAC/R, Bill's Vermont networks keep him inspired and whole. He serves locally as Hardwick's Energy Coordinator, Buffalo Mountain Co-op's Facilities Manager, and Efficiency Vermont's EEN since 2014. Proud parent of entrepreneurs Peter and Deva.

Project: Make Buffalo Mountain Co-op grocery store a net zero enterprise; eliminating fossil fuel [4500 gals] consumption and offsetting all electric consumption with renewable PV; and creating a healthy and safe place to work, shop, and play by the riverside forever.



David Deen served as the River Steward for the Connecticut River Conservancy (Connecticut River Watershed Council) responsible for public education and advocacy on issues in the VT/NH on the 275 mile reach of the upper river from 1998 through 2017, including state regulatory affairs, river cleanup, barrier removal, FERC hydro

relicensing, and published articles and now serves as a trustee for the Conservancy. David owned and operated Strictly Trout, a fly-fishing guide service that was Orvis Endorsed in VT and licensed in NH for 22 years, at the time the oldest guide service in Vermont. David previously served as the Executive Director for Southeast Vermont Community Action from 1974 through 1983. Mixed in with his employment, David served in the Vermont Legislature for 30 years (28 in the House; 2 in the Senate) either on or as chair of the Natural Resources, Water Resources,

and/or the Fish and Wildlife Committees among other assignments including a decade as ranking member of the House Rules Committee. He serves as chair emeritus of the Connecticut River Chapter of Trout Unlimited and is a founding member of the Vermont Community Foundation. He has recently joined the Vermont Climate Council and has since been appointed co-chair of the Rural Resilience Committee. He also serves on the Connecticut River Anadromous Restoration Cooperative, the board of the CT River Conservancy, and the board of the Vermont Conservation Voters. He is a Gubernatorial appointed member of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board. He tries to fish whenever he can.

Project: to interview Connecticut River users for their observations on the effects that climate change has had on the river as they have known it, and publish their stories in watershed-wide newspapers, magazines, and on radio.



Alec Fannin (he/him) is the Gleaning & Food Recovery Coordinator at Willing Hands in Norwich. His work is focused on building a more sustainable food system in the Upper Valley. A voracious learner, Alec is always trying to figure out how things work – a function he considers as necessary to life as breathing. Alec holds a

BBA in Operations & Information Management and a BA in English from UMass Amherst. He has lived in Vermont for almost five years and enjoys the natural beauty of this special state.

Project: As the Gleaning & Food Recovery Coordinator at Willing Hands, Alec is responsible for increasing the organization's food recovery efforts and building a community-wide ecosystem that supports food waste prevention. Alec will build a plan to meet this goal, identify new sources of food, and work with members of the Upper Valley community to ensure that these efforts are sustained long-term.



Erika Faulkner (she/her)'s initial interest in climate policy and community building started at age 13, when her dad dragged her (admittedly unwillingly) to a fire hall meeting to discuss a large pipeline going through her rural community in Pennsylvania, which led to the two of them going to pipeline protests together for the rest of her high school career. Since then, Erika has devoted both her academic and professional careers on advancing just climate policy: she graduated from Dickinson College with a double major in Environmental Studies and Political Science, and moved to Vermont to serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA with the Vermont Energy Education Program. Currently Erika works at Vermont Conservation Voters as their Organizing Fellow. Outside of work, Erika volunteers in her community, and serves on the steering committee for the Old North End's Neighborhood Planning Assembly. In her free time, Erika loves to ski, knit, and swing dance, and recently has been learning how to throw pottery and rock climb!

Project: As a member of her Neighborhood Planning Assembly, Erika has had a few neighbors come to her with a few small neighborhood projects that she would like to help coordinate this summer. Two of these projects involve applying for small community grants, which Erika has no previous experience with.



Luke Foley (he/him) grew up in the mountains of Colorado, but found a home in the Mad River Valley back in 2008. He currently serves as the Climate and Engagement Manager for the Friends of the Mad River, and has an extensive background as an educator, having previously worked as an experiential learning coordinator, a wilderness instructor, an international travel guide, and program director for several schools and programs in Vermont, the western United States, and around the world. He was the 2014 Vermont Teacher of the Year, is a National Park Service Climate Resiliency Fellow, and a Vermont Master Naturalist. He lives in Waitsfield with his family, and enjoys running and biking the local trails, swimming and paddling in the rivers and lakes, and using all types of skis to navigate the winter landscape.

Project: Luke oversees the Ridge to River coalition, a collaborative effort between the five towns in the Mad River watershed to address climate change. In this role, he works to support efforts to increase connection, while simultaneously sequencing and coordinating efforts to take climate action on a range of issues facing the Mad River community.



Denise Greene (she/her) is a “can-do” optimist with a good sense of realism. She enjoys motivating people to build community from the ground up. She strives to collaborate with diverse partners to create funding, volunteer, and talent opportunities for passionate humans wanting to make a difference. In her business and volunteer work, she focuses on projects that promote environmental stewardship, health and wellness, energy efficiency, and strong local economic potential. Her marketing and non-profit development background and, more recently, science and human health guide her work. In her volunteer work, Denise serves as Chairperson for the Hyde Park Energy Committee, Co-Chair of Pollinator Pathways of Lamoille County, and as an Educator and Extension Master Gardener. She is currently working on creating pollinator habitats on municipal properties in Hyde Park and educating on pollinators, native plants, and invasives. She can be found in her greenhouse and gardens propagating native plants and vegetables or mountain biking, hiking, skiing, and cooking.

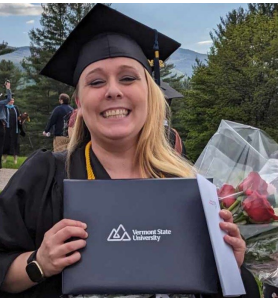
Project: As Chairperson for the Hyde Park Energy Committee, Denise guides the committee in identifying energy, conservation, and weatherization programs, funding sources, volunteer resources, local partners, and advocacy networks to implement programs in the community. She will partner with Pollinator Pathways of Lamoille County, the Lamoille County Conservation District, and the Village of Hyde Park to convert mown properties into richer habitats that increase biodiversity and carbon sequestration and decrease property maintenance.



Susannah Howard (she/her) brings her passion for story-telling, land stewardship, and climate change planning into every facet of her life. As she completed her masters research on developing adaptation strategies for the culturally important plants of the Potawatomi Nation at SUNY ESF, Susannah joined the Upper Valley Land Trust as a conservation project manager. There, she works

with land owners across the region to protect their land for future generations. Susannah also volunteers at the Thetford Historical Society, developing new and improved exhibits at the Hughes Barn Museum, to engage the community on the rich and diverse socio-environmental histories of our region. During the summer, Susannah can often be found outside in the garden, walking in the woods, or curled up under a tree with a book!

Project: As a board member of the Thetford Historical Society, Susannah will develop a stream bank erosion mitigation plan for the Hughes Barn Museum that includes reducing invasive species, replanting bio-culturally relevant native species, and creating educational programming and site signage to engage community members on land and water stewardship in a changing climate.



Johna Keefe (she/her) Johna follows her passion of advocating for the environment in the form of personal education and getting involved in her local community. She is graduating this May with a Bachelors of Science degree with a focus on advocacy and policy change. For the past three years she has been on the Beatification

Committee to bring art and nature together. She has now become an official member of the conservation commission.

Project: Johna's goal is to help her town create or rewild wetlands and rain gardens as a form of mitigating floods and removing toxins from watersheds locally, and hopes to build a framework for other communities as well helping her town and others become resilient and adaptable to climate change.



Michael Lazorchak (he/him). After graduating from Vermont Law School, Michael spent several years working on environmental and natural resources issues throughout the Intermountain West. He returned to Vermont to work for Earle & Freeman PLC, a litigation firm in Montpelier. In 2020, Michael joined Stowe Electric Department as the Regulatory & Legal Affairs Manager. He has served on the Montpelier Development Review Board and Conservation Commission, and currently serves on the Board of Directors for Jericho Underhill Land Trust and Vermont Parks Forever. When not stuck in meetings, you find Michael hiking in the mountains.

Project: The Town of Stowe Electric Department is developing a community renewable energy project and distribution operations center in the historic Village of Moscow. This project has the potential to become part of a comprehensive placemaking project for the Village. Stowe Electric seeks to organize prior work and develop a roadmap for the Town of Stowe and stakeholders to identify the zoning and planning requirements and funding sources needed to implement a placemaking project.



Anni Mackay (she/her), a British native and mother of two, has lived in Rochester since 1996 where she has passionately worked for over 25 years community building through her businesses, BigTown Gallery and BigTown Projects the non-profit arm of the gallery, and since April 2023 the Stable Inn. She provided start-up support to the Vermont Curators

Group, and to local and statewide organizing efforts of the creative economy initiative launched after Tropical Storm Irene. She worked on behalf of community rebuilding efforts after the flood of 2011 through fundraising and distribution of funds to those hardest hit and continues to this day to work on the Rebuild Rochester Foundation as one of three founding board members. For over 10 years, together with her husband, Doon (Green Mountain Bikes), she has adapted her organizing skills and business experience to the redevelopment of a downtown block – BigTown Vermont – a block comprised of four contiguously owned

properties where she is avidly learning about building science and striving to meet Vermont's energy efficiency and sustainability goals for 2030. BigTown Vermont is partnered with the Velomont Trail and Ridgeline Outdoor Collective, two local trail development organizations. Together they are working toward a stronger, more sustainable environmentally focused future for Rochester and its surrounding towns.

Project: Entering into the final, fourth phase of their block redevelopment, Anni will be engaged with the brownfield remediation and building repurposing of a former gas station which will support and enhance their existing businesses completing the campus they've been creating for recreational and cultural enthusiasts.



Fred Pond (he/him) is a senior career college librarian involved in community activities including food provision, regional historical films & videos, preservation and forestry. Recently recognized for green renovation of a 1905 home to meet climate change guidelines, Fred is passionate about involving carbon climate impact/costs and mitigation, is enrolling local forest parcel in carbon sequestration program, and reducing carbon footprint in all aspects of living.

Project: The Tunbridge Church buildings are in need of energy intervention evaluations to reduce their carbon footprints while controlling costs during this period of increasing environmental costs. Efforts will be focused on evaluation of buildings in terms of energy and carbon expenditure, creating credible documentation with which to pursue funding.



Tristan Roberts (he/him) has helped architects and builders remove obstacles to building healthy and energy-efficient homes, schools, healthcare facilities, and offices over the last two decades. His leadership on the Health Product Declaration (HPD), a voluntary transparency label adopted by an industry-consensus process, has helped tens of

thousands of construction projects around the world reduce their use of toxic chemicals. Tristan became chair of Halifax's Broadband Committee

in 2019, was elected to Selectboard in 2021, and State Representative in 2022. Currently completing his two-year term in the Legislature, Tristan has focused his policy work in correctional reform and a systems view of climate issues. Tristan lives with his partner, son, and dog on their homestead, Quill Nook Farm. He writes stories of their life and land in his newspaper column and blog, This Spot on Earth.

Project: Halifax is a rural town with 70 miles of roads but no parks or formal recreational options. Residents want to be more connected and enjoy more resilient and climate-friendly transportation options. Tristan plans to collaborate with willing Halifax organizations and landowners to improve the biking and walking options in Halifax.



Laurie Wilson (she/her) is recently retired after a career of teaching for 29 years and 13 years of work as an Architect. In blending these two careers together students learned to be accomplished problem solvers in creative and meaningful ways. While exploring teaching as an Artist in Resident, Laurie discovered her love for

teaching and curriculum design. She was hired to teach Architecture in an interdisciplinary approach with traditional subjects taught through the lens of Architecture. Later while teaching high school age students at the technical center, students were able to design houses that were built by other students, earn college credits while in high school and gain proficiency with AutoCad and SolidWorks. During this time she also taught as an adjunct for VTC, Castleton, and CCV. Later teaching high school, she developed an integrated technology program for 200 freshmen, created a makerspace, coached a 3D Models team and taught students to use ESRI Story maps. Retirement has given her the time and opportunity to continue contributing to her "communities" through volunteer work with the time for travel to new and familiar places and to spend time with her grown children and two new grandchildren.

Project: Determine the best use for a 100 year old historic town hall, and with community support and engagement, bring it back to a useful life!



Vermont Council on Rural Development

PO Box 1384, Montpelier VT 05602

802-223-6091 | info@vtrural.org

vtrural.org