Vermont Agency of Transportation

Better Connections Program Evaluation

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Executive Summary

The Better Connections (BC) Grant Program is an integrated planning program that funds municipal efforts to increase transportation options, improve water quality, public health, and economic vitality in Vermont's community centers. The program is funded by the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD). To date, 15 municipalities have benefited from approximately $300,000 in annual funding.

Twenty-three interviews were conducted, a survey was developed and administered, and nine people participated in a focus group. Managers from similar programs in three other states were also consulted.

As an integrated planning process, the BC Program is an innovative example of modernized state government. It gains efficiencies by looking at transportation, economic, environmental, and public health planning as an integrated and holistic process rather than isolated events. It also grants communities enough money to conduct extensive community engagement and build buy-in to the local plans. Additionally, the plans that are developed have real economic benefits. For example, one grantee used its plan to leverage an additional $1 million in implementation funds. In another community, improvements to a trail system significantly increased trail usage and tourism. Overall satisfaction with the grant program was high, with 90% of survey participants indicating they thought it prepared them for implementation.

Largely due to the project management being conducted at a local level with varying capacities, the different projects lack standardization that would help ensure the success of more projects. This current project management structure has led to uneven project management and some consultants feeling they need to devote a significant amount of time to "hand- holding" municipalities. One consultant expressed reservations about bidding on new BC- funded contracts because of this issue. Therefore, we recommend changing the project management structure so that the state plays a greater role. Standardization could also be gained by the state managing consultants' contracts. This would eliminate the municipal-consultant-state triad, reducing the municipalities' burden of managing consultant contracts and allowing the municipality to focus its efforts on the specifics of the project.

Other high-level recommendations in this report include: engaging in continuity planning so that the knowledge of the state program managers can be institutionalized; improving program metrics and tracking; and continuing to work on increasing collaborations among state partners. Increasing collaboration among partners ideally will involve some focused changes such as having the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) expedite BC projects for environmental review to help gain efficiencies and lead to quicker implementation, and convening a meeting of the four partners to explore how the work of the program can be distributed to make the BC program more sustainable. We also recommend moving to a second tier contracting process with consultants and fine-tuning the technical review process. Ideally, the review process would flag ideas that may not be feasible but also provide more

"outside the box" thinking that attempts to find alternative ways to move more communities' ideas forward.

Finally, to free up capacity to implement the recommendations in this report, and to add capacity to help municipalities implement the plans they develop, we recommend funding two projects every other year. In this new grant cycle, grantees would have 18 months to develop a plan and project managers would spend six months assisting in implementation of the plan.

While this report contains many recommendations, the BC programs is a success story that needs to be told. Many of the recommendations made involve ways to improve the customer experience of the program, the application process, and the screening process, but do not at all reflect negatively on the program's success or substantial positive impact.

Introduction

The Better Connections (BC) Grant Program is an integrated planning program that funds municipal efforts to increase transportation options, improve water quality, public health, and economic vitality in Vermont's community centers. Funded by the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), it provides targeted assistance to:

- help communities use an integrated planning process to identify and prioritize their goals and projects
- develop an action-oriented roadmap to achieve the goals and move projects forward; and
- link the communities to a growing network of public and philanthropic partners to help them implement their priority projects.

For the last five years, municipalities have competed for approximately $300,000 in projects funds annually. Since its beginnings in 2015, the BC program has organically grown in project diversity. Additionally, the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) and the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) have become new partners. These changes, as well as limited staffing capacity and inconsistency in project types, led to a desire to evaluate the program and project management effectiveness, consider revisions, and develop improvement strategies. The development of formal program metrics and a monitoring system were also thought to be critical to support program objectives and project quality.

Methodology

To conduct this evaluation, the consulting team reviewed program materials, including the program web page, story map, and the 2013 report titled, "Strengthening Vermont's Economy by integrating Transportation and Smart Growth Policy". We also walked through the process of applying for a grant and hosted Zoom focus groups of past grant recipients to explore the program's strengths and opportunities for improvement. A survey of past grant recipients was conducted, and, throughout the process, we spoke regularly with BC staff.

Interviews were conducted with partners at VDH and DEC, with consultants who had worked on BC projects, and with people running similar programs in other states. In total, 10 people took our surveys, 23 people were interviewed, and nine people attended the focus groups we conducted. A summary of those interviewed for this report is contained in Appendix A.

Modernizing Government: Program Strengths

While this evaluation lists some areas for improvement, as an integrated planning process, BC is an innovative program that exemplifies modernized government. It gains efficiencies by looking at transportation, economic, land use, environmental, and health planning as an integrated and holistic process, rather than isolated events. As such, it gains efficiencies and avoids redundancy in planning. It also builds the type of cross-agency partnerships in state government that are logical and better serves the public.

> **"We know that the foundation of planning work is relationship building. This grant allowed us to start building those relationships and learn how to work together."** *Joshua Schwartz, MRVPD.*

Additionally, many people we interviewed repeated the theme that Better Connections is critical because it is one of the few funding sources that gives people the resources to really engage the community and build consensus. It gives people the resources to do what is needed and necessary to build buy-in, which is a critical step towards local implementation.

Due in part to the program's exceptional leadership, the BC Program helps move planning projects into reality. Overall, survey participants felt highly positive about how BC positioned their projects for implementation, with 30% saying the program strongly positioned them for implementation, while 60% said it somewhat positioned them for implementation.

Additionally, the plans that were developed have real economic benefits. For example, one grantee community used its plan to leverage an additional $1 million in implementation funds. In another, improvements to a trail system significantly increased trail usage and tourism.

Those we spoke with in similar programs in other states also applauded the BC program for conducting an evaluation as a tool to make it even better. Those states believed that the fact that an evaluation was being conducted spoke volumes to the maturity of the program. The Best Practices programs we spoke with asked for permission to see this report when it is finalized.

A Note About the Recommendations in this Report

As with any evaluation report, implementing the recommendations in this report will require commitment and bandwidth. VTrans, as the lead partner and ACCD as the secondary partner are extremely committed to this program; however, given the ongoing push to do more with less, they may not have sufficient bandwidth to do all the work necessary to implement these

recommendations. This creates an opportunity to strengthen the program partnerships by inviting DEC and DOH to play a greater role in the BC program.

What's Happening in Other States: Best Practices

Four individuals from three states that manage programs comparable to Vermont's Better Connections program were interviewed. The purpose of these interviews was to:

- demonstrate how successful processes have been executed in other states and regions
- identify best practices or strategies and approaches that helped sustain momentum and innovation
- identify areas or key issues where programs have faced challenges

The recommendations that follow are based on information gathered in a series of interviews with each program. The questions asked were designed to identify what is working well and to glean best practices that could be adopted in whole or in part by Vermont's Better Connections program. Individual program information provided below should be used for informational purposes only and as a basis for questions should further information be desired about any of the programs.

Note: The best practices identified in this section are not recommendations but rather are intended to provide context for recommendations made elsewhere in this document.

Table 1 below provides programmatic contact and program information and is followed by more detailed descriptions of identified best practices.

Description	Albany, New York	Salem, Oregon	Salt Lake City, Utah
Point of Contact	**Sandra Misiewicz**, AICP, Principal Transportation Planner, Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) smisiewicz@cdtcmpo.org (518) 458-2161	**Matt Crall** Planning Services Division Manager, Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) matthew.crall@state.or.us (503) 934-0046 **Michael Rock** Unit Manager, Statewide Transportation Planning Unit, Department of Transportation (ODOT) Michael.D.ROCK@odot.state.or.us (503) 986-3179	**Megan Townsend** Transportation and Land Use Connection Program Manager, Community and Economic Development Team mtownsend@wfrc.org (801) 363-4250 Ext. 1101

Description	Albany, New York	Salem, Oregon	Salt Lake City, Utah
Program Name	Linkage Program (Linkage)	Transportation and Growth Management (TGM)	Transportation and Land Use Connection (TLC)
Program Structure	CDTC Project Manager in consultation with New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA), Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC), and relevant counties.	Jointly managed by two Oregon state agencies: The Department of Transportation and the Department of Land Conservation and Development	Program manager and two staff members
Program Organized Under	Capital District Transportation Committee. Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady counties, with the exception of the Village of South Glens Falls and the Town of Moreau.	Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development	Wasatch Front Regional Council
Year Program Started	2000	1993	2013

Description	Albany, New York	Salem, Oregon	Salt Lake City, Utah
Local Project Manage-ment Structure	CDTA is contracting agency on behalf of CDTC and study sponsor. Once contract is in place, CDTC's PM and study sponsor(s) jointly responsible for study oversight through a Study Advisory Committee (SAC), whose members (no more than 15) they jointly identify. SAC guides the study and reviews interim and final products. Smaller technical advisory committee (TAC) may be used.	Interagency agreements between towns/tribes and the State. DOT state planner is PM for the state side. Local PMs handle dates, times, city councils, venues, etc. Smaller towns or rural transit districts default to city planners or their equivalent in a tribe. Larger towns and cities have staff who may be designated as PMs.	Co-PM plan. City staff person responsible for content of projects. Wasatch staff of three. Assigned PMs administer contracts, keep things on track, track funds, and ensure project goals are adhered to.
Program Partners	▪ Capital District Transportation Committee ▪ State DOT	Joint program directors from DLCD and ODOT	▪ Wasatch Front Regional Council ▪ Salt Lake City County Regional Development ▪ Utah DOT ▪ Utah Transit Authority
Program Funding Sources	▪ Consultant Budget: o U.S. Dept of Transportation (75%) o Sponsor Share (25%) ▪ Additional CDTC staff technical assistance ▪ Additional in-kind local government contribution	TGM is primarily funded by U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration funds, with additional staff support and funding provided by the State of Oregon	▪ Surface Transportation Program, WFRC ▪ Salt Lake City County Regional Development ▪ Utah DOT ▪ Utah Transit Authority

Description	Albany, New York	Salem, Oregon	Salt Lake City, Utah
Funding Disbursement	CDTC will reserve up to $100,000 in staff time and up to $175,000 in consultant budget authority from federal planning funds to support the Linkage Program in CDTC's 2020-22 Unified Planning Work Program.	▪ Grants are distributed among the five ODOT regions based on a formula that considers the population and number of cities in each region ▪ Yearly program within a 2-year state budget cycle ▪ Contract with consulting companies to provide services to local governments ▪ State staff to administer contracts ▪ State staff providing direct technical assistance to local governments ▪ Direct payments to local governments	Awards made in March. Funds are dispersed through contracts with consultants on behalf of the communities, directly from the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).
Project Oversight/ Quality Control	▪ CDTC and Study Sponsor(s) MOU ▪ CDTC Planning Committee oversight ▪ Progress requirements at 1, 2, and 3 years	TGM Advisory Committee	Dedicated staff person from each partner meet regularly. Tech Advisory Committee.
Program Metrics	After study is completed for at least one year, CDTC staff follow up with sponsor to learn progress on implementing the plan, the degree to which CDTC can further assist the sponsor in implementing the plan, and if there is a need to modify the Linkage Program based on lessons learned from the completed planning effort.	No formal evaluations.	After the Transportation and Land Use Connection (TLC) project competition, the community will provide project updates to the TLC project manager. These updates will be provided at major project milestones, such as adoption by the city council, new infrastructure developments in the project area, or as requested by the TLC project manager. WFRC works alongside program partners to develop measures and report program progress and outcomes. Reporting the program's impact is a central focus as the program matures.
Projects per Year	Proposing to fund no more than three Linkage Program projects in the April 2020 through March 2021 fiscal year.	15-20	12-17

Description	Albany, New York	Salem, Oregon	Salt Lake City, Utah
Funding Awarded	2020-2021: $305,000[1]	2017-2019: Nearly $5,000,000[2]	2019: Nearly $2,000,000[3]

Table 1. Information of states interviewed

Best Practice #1: Prescreening / Pre-Application Process

Description:

A screening process or pre-application process is used to vet ideas and intent to apply prior to the formal submission of an application.

Albany's Linkage Program does not have a prescreening or pre-application process. Interested parties follow the Submission Instructions contained in their Application Information . Applications are due in December and awardees begin work in April. The program is looking to set up a "pre-qualifying meeting."

The Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) Transportation and Land Use Connection (TLC) program application process is a two-step procedure. Interested parties submit a Letter of Intent form (due in September) under the signature of the city mayor or county commissioner and include the applicant's contact information, project description, type of assistance requested, estimated project cost, and local match amount. Interested parties also include supplementary materials as appropriate to help describe the project.

Program staff review the letters of intent and request additional information as needed. The program's pre-application process aligns with several other departments' pre-application processes, allowing staff to redirect out-of-scope proposals to more appropriate agencies or departments in time to still meet submission deadlines. Upon receipt of approval for the project's letter of intent, interested parties submit an application using the TLC Application Form (due in December) and, when available and applicable, letters of support are also submitted at that time. Program staff and partners review the applications based on the TLC project selection criteria.

Oregon's Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) program has a pre-application phase from January through March. The program has dedicated TGM staff who work with the regions, regional staffs, and DOT to help guide pre-applications and complete the Pre-Application Packet. Staff screen for projects that meet goals and objectives of the program (mixed use, walkability, etc.), and look at past performance, among other things, and solicit information from TGM's regional staff. The program has two categories of objectives and recent projects tended toward Category II

[1] Source: https://www.cdtcmpo.org/images/linkage_program/Funded_2021_Linkage_Studies.pdf
[2] Source: https://www.oregon.gov/lcd/TGM/Documents/2017_2019BiennialReport.pdf
[3] Source: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OKY5B5IlledsBWNHqsvDOrdyIUY1v61B/view

(transportation). Staff is trying to encourage more Category I projects (dual land use and transportation). The pre-application process is not mandatory but highly encouraged, because the applicant can work closely with regional staff and the state to plan a project. Selected pre-applicants submit their Application Packet, which are due in July and awards announced in September.

Benefits:

Prescreening or pre-application processes improve collaboration among stakeholders and help set a solid foundation from which the projects can commence. Stakeholder efficiencies are gained from open communications and being clear on each other's expectations. Additionally, the coordination of grant processes among departments allows for better planning. Before significant resources are expended, prescreening or pre-application processes help determine if proposals fit within the scope of a department's program and, if so, identify the readiness and capacity of the applicant to complete the project. For example, program managers can research locally passed resolutions, the availability of local matching funding, the state of applicants' local planning, and how they expect to take their proposed project through implementation.

Prescreening or pre-application processes serve as a valuable tool to educate local governments on state government processes, educate the state on what is needed and desired by local governments, and introduce people to one another early in the overall process.

How Success is Measured:

These processes have been used since the programs' beginnings. Anecdotal information suggests that these processes improve communication among stakeholders and provide for more information sharing, better grant applications, and help local governments become better educated in state government processes and programs.

Best Practice #2: State-Managed Program and Projects

Description:

Programs and projects are managed at the state level with state employees to centralize fiscal management, project management, and communication among stakeholders and to better serve and include smaller municipalities that lack the necessary resources to complete these tasks.

Benefits:

State-managed programs and projects provide efficiencies in application and procurement processes, improve overall project management, stakeholder communications, communication between other relevant government departments or agencies, and fiduciary tracking and accountability. Having a staff member manage each

project allows for continuity between and among projects, consistent information and expectations from all stakeholders, and standardization of processes between the state and municipalities.

Operational Experience:

Variations within this best practice were noticed across the programs. A co-project manager (PM) plan utilizes a state-level PM assigned regionally and a city staff PM for each project. The state PM is responsible for administering contracts, tracking funds, and keeping projects flowing, ensuring project goals are adhered to. The city PM is responsible for day-to-day operations of a local project.

Best Practice #3: Pre-Qualified Consultants List

Description:

The state establishes and maintains a categorized list of in-state and out-of-state pre-qualified consultants who are vetted every three years. For each project, a small committee made up of state and municipal representatives selects three consultants from the list and provides them the project's Statement of Work (SOW). Interested consultants respond with a Letter of Intent and the committee selects one of them.

Benefits:

A vetted list of pre-qualified consultants streamlines the procurement process, reduces paperwork, and better matches the skills and qualifications of a consultant to project requirements. A vetted, pre-qualified list also eliminates the need for Requests for Proposals (RFP) and limits the amount of responses to SOWs to only three consultants. Out-of-state consultants are included to provide a pool of large consulting firms and/or firms that can provide "fresh eyes" to new or complex situations. The use of a consultant selection committee gets the right people involved to collaborate and make the best selection for the project. A categorized list of specialties streamlines the committee's selection by quickly identifying consultants qualified in those specialties.

Problems or Issues:

The establishment of a pre-qualified list requires a concerted level of effort up front to vet all applicants and qualify and categorize them.

Usage Experience:

A pre-qualified list reduces the burden of having to write an extensive RFP and review its numerous responses. It streamlines the consultant selection process by matching vetted qualifications to requirements. Consultants have commented that they feel privileged to be on the list and enjoy working for the state agencies. They have mentioned taking pride in the work they have done, being able to say, "I was a part of the project that created that!"

Best Practice #4: State-Managed Consultant Contracts

Description:

The state administers, manages, and tracks all consultant contracts to provide centralized project management oversight, continuity, and standardization.

Benefits:

By having the state manage consultant contracts, it standardizes contracts, provides a greater level of authority, and lessens the burden on the municipalities to manage consultant resources.

How Success is Measured:

Responsiveness of consultants in attending meetings and reviewing other stakeholders' work, quality of consultants' work, and commitment to the project's scope.

Best Practice #5: Quality and Regular Communications

Description:

Program managers, project managers, and staff meet regularly to discuss what is working well.

Oregon's TGM program has staff spread throughout the state to support the local entities. They are experienced in local governments, stay attuned to local budget and state budget realities, and "know what it's like to be in the locals' shoes." State staff meetings are conducted via video conferencing. The three-prong PM team (TGM, DOT, local) helps alleviate any surprises. The DOT PM usually identifies issues very early.

Oregon's TGM inter-agency agreements are signed at each new budget cycle (every two years). Both program managers and staff from each department meet weekly for their Operations Committee meetings. They conduct full staff meetings twice a year with both departments' teams in attendance.

The Wasatch TLC program has a dedicated staff person from each of the program's partners meet regularly. A member from the Technical Advisory Committee attends all meetings to announce any opportunities. The Technical Advisory Committee meets every other month to see what is going well. Emails go out to all committee members and partners.

Benefits:

Sound and current data keeps the right people informed at the right times. The greater the frequency and accuracy of communications, the more likely shared visions and goals are reached.

Problems or Issues:

Dispersed staff require more communications to maintain efficiencies, avoid surprises, and align expectations. No matter how much states feel they are communicating, some people say they did not hear about something.

How Success is Measured:

Timeliness in completing projects, amount of re-work, number of missed opportunities, and application rate.

Table 2 below provides a summary, by program, of each of the best practices. Further information about the Linkage Program is provided in the their Planning Program document.

Best Practice	Albany, New York Linkage Program	Salem, Oregon TGM Program	Salt Lake City, Utah TLC Program
# 1. Prescreening / Pre-Application Process	Application process that has been simplified to 11 questions (see below for link to submission process).[4]	Three-month pre-application process; highly encouraged but not mandatory; dedicated TGM staff work with applicants and partners.	Letter of Intent (see *TLC Letter of Intent Form 2020*) to determine eligibility; designed to match other program timelines to redirect applicants if submitted to the wrong program (see *TLC Application Form* and *TLC Project Selection Criteria*).
#2. State-Managed Programs and Projects	MPO-Managed Program. Rotates staff around the various Linkage Program projects each year with the more senior staff members typically taking the lead, and a junior staff member backing them up in the event something happens. Total staff of 14; 9 participate in some way with 5 currently able to serve as PMs. No one is entirely dedicated to the Linkage Program; being a PM represents roughly 20% or less of workload depending on the project.	Local Project Managers (PMs) handle local city councils, venues, dates, times, etc. Selection is determined usually by the size of the community. Smaller towns or rural transit districts default to city planner or equivalent in a tribe. Larger towns and cities have staff who may be designated PMs.	Co-PM design: state staff and city staff assign PMs for each project; city staff responsible for content of project; state PM administers contract and tracks funding and deliverables.

[4] The submission process description that contains the 11 questions can be found on pages 7 – 9 of the following document: https://www.cdtcmpo.org/images/linkage_program/FINAL_2020-21_Link_Prog_solicitation.pdf

Best Practice	Albany, New York Linkage Program	Salem, Oregon TGM Program	Salt Lake City, Utah TLC Program
#3. Pre-Qualified Consultants List	No pre-qualified list. Competitive procurement process. MPO staff writes SOW and consultants submit Letter of Interest.	Pre-qualified list; negotiate SOW between state and consultant.	Pre-qualified, categorized list; committee selects three or more consultants to submit proposals based on a Request for Pool Letters or Qualification (see *TLC RFQ Consultant Pool 2020-2022).*
#4. State / MPO-Managed Consultant Contracts	MPO project manager manages contracts.	State contracts with consultant; inter-governmental agreement with city, tribe, and state; roles clearly described within those agreements and the SOW.	WFRC manages contracts and tracks project funding.
#5. Quality and Regular Communications	Staff spread out across the region to support local entities; keep abreast of local budgets and state budgets capacities; experienced in local planning; three-pronged PM team helps align expectations.	Weekly operations committee meetings with both program managers and a couple of staff; conduct full staff meetings twice a year with both departments' teams in attendance.	Technical committee meets every other month to review what is working well; partnerships with county, DOT, and transit authority keep everyone in the loop.

Table 2. Summary of best practices by states interviewed.

Better Connections Structure

The strength of the current structure is the co-management of the program. Jackie Cassino and Richard Amore (BC Program Managers) have received consistent and continual accolades from everyone we interviewed for this project. They both supplement and complement the strengths of their individual agencies. The breadth and depth of their knowledge provides the needed support for communities to be successful. That said, over the five years of this program, their time available to dedicate to the program has slowly diminished. This will impact the number of projects awarded in future years and the need to find a balance between directing projects at the state level and the need for projects to be community-led.

Recommendations for Strengthening the Structure

We have four recommendations to improve the structure of the BC program. Each of these recommendations is described in more depth below and some will require further discussions to determine how the state wishes to proceed. The recommendations are:

1) Increase the state's role in project management.

2) Simplify the consultant selection process by moving to a list of pre-qualified consultants or a second-tier selection model.
3) Begin business continuity planning.
4) Increase inter-agency coordination.

Increase the State's Role in Project Management

Having the State increase its control of projects and their resources could be very beneficial to the BC program. State PMs employed by VTrans can improve the consistency and quality of PM services and enhance BC projects' successes by:

- Increasing project management expertise.
- Ensuring dedicated time to manage projects.
- Increasing knowledge of interdependencies across stakeholder groups and ability to engage them when and as often as needed.
- Improving scheduling and tracking of deliverables.
- Ensuring that people are held accountable and reimburse and disperse funds according to procedure.
- Taking pressure off consultants to "hold the hands" of the grantee.
- Improving the technical review process through increased continuity and better leveraging relationships to improve efficiencies. Internal project managers should have strong relationships with various AOT technical staff (i.e. ROW, environmental, Highway Safety & Design, etc.), ACCD staff, and other state agencies involved in the technical review process. These relationships are always helpful in increasing responsiveness when delays occur.

We propose four options to potentially structure state-level project manager positions. These are high-level options that will require further discussion:

1) Assign an AOT Planning Coordinator (PC) who devotes a percentage of their time strictly to the BC program.
2) Take a regional approach and use Regional Planners (RPC) as PMs.
3) Take a hybrid approach in which some projects are managed by AOT PCs and others are managed by RPCs.
4) Take a partnership approach between PCs and RPCs with clearly defined roles for each project. If the RPCs take on a greater PM role for BC, there would be an additional cost.

Paying for State-Level PM Services

Either a regional or centralized state-level PM approach could be funded by increasing a municipality's program contribution from 10% of award (perhaps using a sliding scale depending on the size of the grantee), or reducing the amount awarded to municipalities for time and effort no longer devoted for project management. Redistributing this amount would allow the state to cover the cost of PM services.

AOT Statewide, Regional Planning Project Managers, or a Hybrid Approach?

1) AOT statewide PCs would provide greater continuity and standardization across projects. AOT PCs would be limited to how many BC projects they could manage, given their other responsibilities.

2) Regional PMs would have the advantage of increased knowledge of local stakeholders, perhaps at the cost of some continuity. PMs embedded within the regions/communities they serve have greater potential to create stronger and longer-lasting relationships, as well as having more insight and perceived interest in bettering local communities. Level of effort for regional PMs would fluctuate, based on the number of BC projects to manage in their regions. This could create workload distribution challenges. The applicant screening process could be used to assess the level of local buy-in, ownership capacity, and leadership.

3) One advantage of a hybrid approach is that the level of responsibility given to local PMs and/or RPCs could vary depending on their skill level. Having some roles for local PMs could also increase buy-in to the project at a local level. One of the keys to the success of a hybrid model will be to clearly define the roles of all parties, even if those roles change from project to project.

   As an example, in the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) program (discussed above in the best practices section), Principal Transportation Planner and current Linkage Program Manager, Sandy Misiewicz, described the Linkage Program using a hybrid approach:

   > For projects with a single local sponsor, CDTC provides a project manager and the local sponsor designates someone to jointly manage the project with them. If there are multiple sponsors, their memorandum of understanding includes all sponsors and each is asked to provide a designee to manage the project collaboratively, unless the group opts to identify a lead with others simply serving on the technical or study advisory committee. Generally, they have found that when sponsors provide local cash for a project involving multiple sponsors, they all have assigned someone to represent them on the study advisory committee. Ultimately, the PMs are accountable to the CDTC Principal Transportation Planner and their Executive Director[5].

Additional Planning Coordinator Roles

<u>Managing Consultant Contracts</u>

[5] They use a tracking sheet to provide monthly updates on the progress of each project which is shared at meetings and online: https://www.cdtcmpo.org/images/linkage_program/Linkage_Study_Status_6-1-2020_web.pdf

Instead of municipalities managing consultants and their contracts, all consultant contracts would be issued at the state level and the AOT PCs or RPCs would manage them. The state would be in a better position to keep consultants on task. Conversely, by answering to the state, consultants, and municipalities would have clearer and more defined roles. Under this model, the state would issue contracts to consultants and AOT would manage them. This would eliminate the city-consultant-state triad, reducing the municipalities' burden of managing consultant contracts, and help standardize the management of consultants across the BC program.

Managing Transition from Planning to Implementation

An additional role of the PCs would be managing the transition from planning to implementation. Their project knowledge and continuity would serve as a trusted resource to the implementation project/program managers.

Simplify the Consultant Selection Process by Moving to a list of Pre-qualified Consultants

The BC program requires a variety of consultant expertise in projects related to land use, water quality, transportation, community and economic development, public health and well-being, community engagement, and combinations thereof. Developing a prequalified pool of consultants to provide planning and technical assistance to these and other local government projects could streamline the application process, simplify the consultant selection process, and reduce time and cost requirements for all parties.

Notional High-Level Process. To qualify for BC projects, consultants would respond to a Statement of Qualifications once every two years (determined by VTrans and ACCD with an option to extend) instead of to detailed Requests for Proposals for each project. A consultant selection committee would qualify consultants for the pool and categorize them based on their range of expertise. Through this second-tier process, grantees would review the pre-qualification list, choose three consultants for their project, and forward each of them a copy of the project's Scope of Work. Consultants would submit a Letter of Intent and a small committee made of up of the project's stakeholders would select one of the three consultants for that project.

The following recommendations suggest a structure for a pre-qualified pool of consultants (refer to the TLC RFQ Consultant Pool 2020-2022 document for a detailed example).

1) Develop a Statement of Qualifications evaluation and selection process that includes a selection committee, criteria of expertise, and scoring criteria.
2) Identify project categories of expertise from which consultants will select based on their expertise.
3) Identify communication mediums to solicit applicants both in-state and out-of-state.
4) Develop guidelines identifying the time limits of the pool (e.g., three years), roles and responsibilities of the selection committee, selection scoring criteria, procedures for adding and removing consultants from the pool, and other procedures as needed.

Begin Business Continuity Planning

Perhaps the greatest risk to BC's future is the lack of having business continuity books. While some of the BC program is documented with program material, marketing reports, story maps, and program files, much of the institutional knowledge of BC lies in the heads of its two co-program managers, which is not documented. Additionally, the fact that the program is not in state statute makes it vulnerable to shifting priorities and tight budget years. Therefore, in thinking about the "structure" of the program, we have included a few recommendations to attempt to solidify it and provide for business continuity if either of the co-directors left their current positions.

1) Advocate to put the program in state statute to increase its long-term viability and sustainability.
2) Formalize the roles of each of the four partners in state statute.
3) Consider developing a continuity book during the next two-year project cycle with milestones at six-month intervals.
4) Create MOUs with DEC and DOH to formalize and clarify their roles.

Increase Inter-Agency Coordination

As an integrated planning process, BC is an example of modernized government. It gains efficiencies by looking at transportation, economic, environmental, and health planning as an integrated and holistic process, rather than isolated events. While this is a forward-thinking and innovative model of government, structurally more can be done to improve coordination between the partner agencies. These recommendations suggest ways to improve inter-agency coordination.

> **"It takes time to build consensus and most planning processes don't fund this hard work."** *Bob Flint, Springfield Regional Development Corporation.*

1) Work to streamline the application process to align it with other grant programs within VTrans and other Vermont state agencies. Having Quick Build for Health Grants available to grantees is one way this is currently being done. However, in other states there has been a greater alignment of grant cycles that has improved efficiencies.
2) Require, as part of the project scopes of work, that existing water, transportation, and economic plans be reviewed by consultants. This would include Storm Water Master Plans, Intended Use Plans for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Funds, and Tactical Basin Plans.
3) Require the inclusion of stakeholders with knowledge of water planning and public health on all steering committees to ensure projects are being viewed through the lens of multiple disciplines. These stakeholders could be state employees from DEC, district health department officials, local health officers, or others who have the appropriate knowledge base.

4) Consider how to involve and coordinate a broader spectrum of state agency programs (Tourism, DEC, VTrans- Highway Division, Department of Economic Development, etc.) in the local BC planning process. Ensure their participation during strategic points to provide multi-agency input and review of early drafts (50-75%) of the plan.
5) Work with DEC to see if BC projects can be expedited for permitting. (Ethan Swift at DEC seemed to think this was a reasonable request.)
6) Improve coordination between Municipal Planning Grants (MPG) and BC (and the Vermont Community Development Program planning funds) to:
    a. Distinguish between the types of master planning that are appropriate to do through BC and those that can be done with less money and state support through MPG. While all communities are different and have different needs, a general guideline might be:
        i. Downtowns (BC) vs. small village centers (MPG)
        ii. Capacity building (BC) vs. creating a spark (MPG)
    b. Think about how to help towns use MPGs to prepare for, or help execute, a finalized BC master plan (town plan, Capital Improvement Plan, etc.)
7) Share and discuss the final report from this BC evaluation with DOH and DEC.
8) Convene a meeting of all four partners to clarify roles and discuss the distribution of tasks. This should include assigning who will take the lead on implementing the recommendations in this report as well as discussing the ongoing distribution of work with the goal of increasing the sustainability of the program.

Better Connections Metrics

Overview

Currently, the BC Program's annual report tracks grant funds requested; grant funds awarded; local match funds; and grants awarded. It also collects anecdotal data on the community impact of its grants. While these metrics are important in tracking what the BC program does, they do not tell the full story of the grants' impact. We sought metrics that would be relatively simple to gauge and might do a better job of communicating the impact of the BC Program. Additionally, we tried to find at least one metric that would relate to outcomes desired by each of the four partners (noted in parenthesis below). The proposed new metrics are the result of conversations with the four BC partners as well as research into what other states measure.

Proposed New Metrics

1. Public funds leveraged for implementation, including municipal matching funds, state implementation grants, federal implementation grants, and private foundation funding (Economic).
2. Grand list value increases in the geographic study area (Economic).
3. Miles of non-motorized, multi-modal transportation created or upgraded, including bike lanes, sidewalks, recreation paths, and trails (Health and Transportation).

    a. Increased usage of upgraded multi-modal options.
4. Percent of projects implemented per year (General).
5. Increase in capacity to implement, measured through a dedicated committee that has continued meeting post-BC planning project and/or staffing dedicated to implementation of the project (General).
6. Percentage of project that improves transportation safety through access management, including decrease in existing curb cuts or curb cut width, increase of shared access or shared parking for new or existing developments, and/or increase in pedestrian and bicycle connections. (Transportation).
7. Percentage of projects that increase access to physical activity, including ensuring bike/walk/transit connectivity, new or improved trail heads, wayfinding signage, boat launches, parks, bike lanes, bike racks, cross walks, and shared use paths; or new or improved safety enhancements, such as lighting or traffic-calming efforts (Health and Transportation).
8. Percentage of BC projects that include municipal road drainage and/or erosion control measures (Environmental and Transportation).
    a. Miles of road where drainage has been improved.
    b. Number of culverts replaced.
9. Incorporate the new metrics and surveys into the grant close-out process.

While BC currently measures local match amounts in its annual report, the economic benefit from the program comes from additional public and private funds that the plans leverage for implementation. The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) uses "Funds Leveraged" as the main indicator of its Transportation and Community Development Initiative's (TCDI) program's success on a dashboard on its web page.

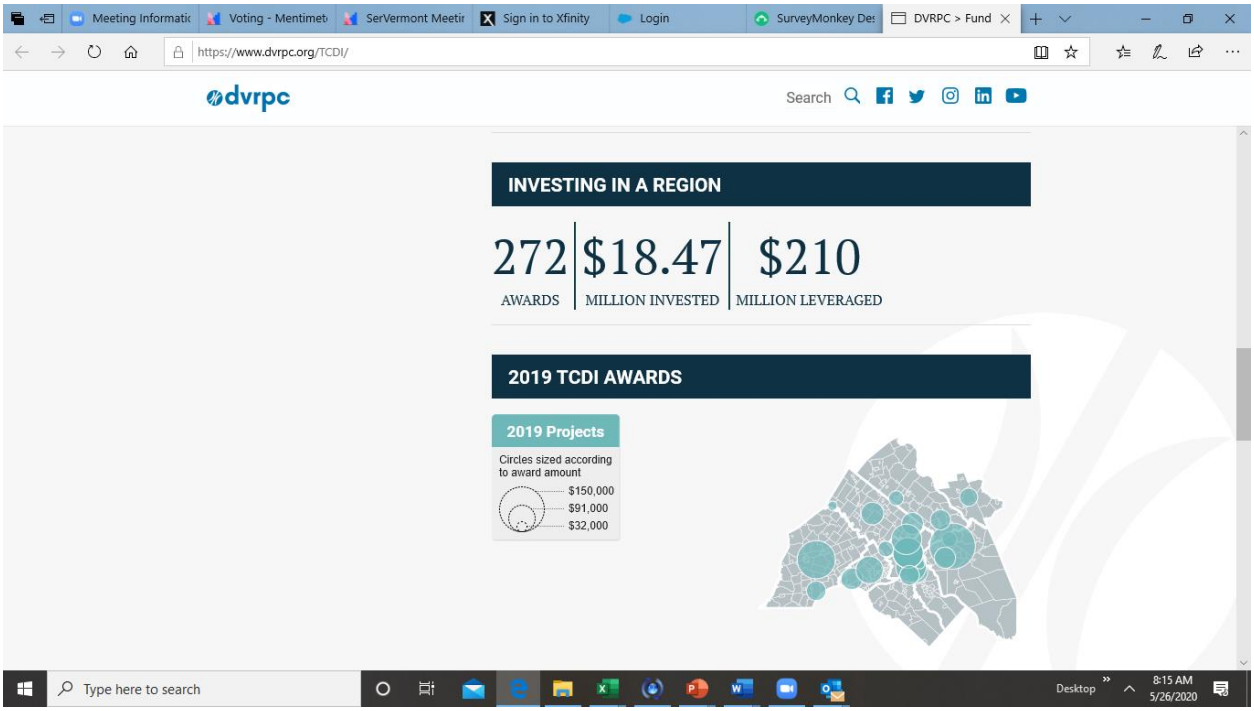
Additionally, from our work on BC case studies, we know that the towns of Springfield and Chester alone have leveraged approximately $1.1 million which is equivalent to what the BC program has awarded in grants. It is our guess that statewide, for each dollar in funds given, over $2 is leveraged.

A second economic indicator of success we propose is grand list value increases in the geographic study area. Each year, the ACCD downtown program collects data on the ROIs for ACCD[6]. In theory, investment into a community should increase grand list values.

Miles of multi-modal transportation created, a third indicator of success, measures both transportation and health outcomes. We propose this as it is easy to measure and links directly to the program's goal of "increasing transportation options."

[6]A summary report is included in this link -https://accd.vermont.gov/sites/accdnew/files/documents/CD/CPR/CPR-DT-Reinvestment-Statistics.pdf

A screenshot of the DVRPC dashboard is shown below.



We also recommend two additional general metrics of program success. First, given that planning projects can take ten years or more to implement, we propose measuring the percent of the project that has been implemented, with the target being 10% per year. Using this metric, seven of the nine grant recipients for whom we have data seem to have achieved this target goal.

Since the BC program ideally brings communities together in a way that fosters future collaboration, we also propose measuring whether towns designate and budget for committed staff time (existing staff or hiring new staff) to advance the BC plan.

Finally, we believe Better Connections' focus on integrated planning saves the state money and is an example of "modernized government". Not only does the BC program integrate local planning efforts, but it also integrates state agency investments and advances the kind of multi-agency collaboration that is needed to make government more efficient. We explored options for how this savings could be measured, but all the avenues we explored seemed too complex, so that metric has been left out for now. That said, because we feel this is a significant benefit of the program, BC's leadership might consider asking recipients, "During implementation, were you able to take advantage of integrating your project or a portion thereof with another project that resulted in cost savings?" If they have, recipients could be asked to estimate the cost savings.

Recommendations for Strengthening Metrics

1. Develop an online dashboard similar to the one shown above and used by DVRPC. We recommend that the dashboard metrics be:

   a. Public funds leveraged for implementation
   b. Miles of multi-modal transportation created or upgraded

2. As the program matures, and as more plans are implemented and more environmental and health goals are met, consider adding the following metrics to the dashboard:
   a. Percentage of projects that increased access to physical activity
   b. Percentage of projects that include municipal road drainage and/or erosion control measures
   c. Percentage of project that improves transportation safety through access management
   d. Grand list value increases in the study area

(Keep in mind that the surveys ask grantees for cumulative metrics. Therefore, in calculating dashboard metrics, the difference between the most recent metric and the previous metric will be added to the dashboard numbers. For example, if the close-out survey reports 30 miles of trails created and in the Year 4 follow-up shows 70 miles of trails created, the total miles created is 70, not 100 and the updated dashboard would need to be calculated accordingly).

3. Help grantees anticipate the metrics they will be expected to track.
   a. Help them structure a process to target metrics (i.e. 10% per year of the project implemented) at the start of the grant cycle. The simple act of letting grantees know what you plan to track will help them pay attention to those things and help increase the likelihood that they will be successful.
   b. We recommend tracking these metrics by using the surveys listed below. We recommend that surveys be sent to participants one, four, seven, and ten, years after the planning grants have been completed. In year one, the close-out survey would be sent and in subsequent years the -follow-up survey would be sent.
   c. To avoid confusion when sending follow-up surveys, send grantees a copy of their answers to the most recent surveys.
   d. Require all past grant recipients to take the survey with the new metrics.

4. Conduct a focus group of all projects every five years to gather additional anecdotal data. During the focus groups, survey data could be further explored as well as ways to improve the BC project.

5. Revise the Annual Report
   a. Include the metrics outlined in the first recommendation above in the annual report.
   b. Eliminate the list of all towns that have received funding in previous years from the annual report. The annual report should focus on overall program metrics and towns that were awarded funding in the current year. A link can send those interested to a listing of all towns.

c. Eliminate the case study from the annual report (Vergennes in 2020). Only highlight towns if they have achieved milestones in the current year.

d. Rewrite the Overview section of the annual report to make it more succinct. A revised Overview section might read:

   Better Connections is an integrated planning program that funds municipal efforts to increase transportation options, improve land use, water quality, public health, and economic vitality in Vermont's community centers. The interagency program provides targeted assistance to:

   - Help communities identify and prioritize their goals and projects;
   - Develop an action-oriented roadmap to achieve the goals and move projects forward;
   - Link the communities to a growing network of public and philanthropic partners to help them implement their priority projects.

6. Revise the Close-Out Report.
   a. Incorporate the new metrics into the Outcomes section of the close-out reports.
   b. Incorporate the dashboard metrics and surveys into the grant close-out process
   c. Consider putting the close-out documents into a Google Docs form. This will allow you to summarize the data in Google Docs and will keep you from having to add the metrics manually.

Recommendations for the Grant Cycle

The grant cycle of BC should be aligned with other related grant programs. Aligning related grants' application schedules can increase efficiencies by implementing projects closer to their initial submission date. Additionally, we believe that, over the next few years, implementing the changes in this report will take significant bandwidth and capacity. Therefore, we recommend:

1. Aligning BC's grant cycle with grant cycles of other related grant programs.
2. Reducing the grants given out to two or three every other year, beginning in 2021.
3. Reevaluating the grant cycle after the recommendations in this report have been implemented and there has been time to see how the changes have impacted workload.
4. Having the VTrans Project Managers continue to work with the municipalities for six months after the plan has been submitted to assist with implementation.
5. If bottlenecks persist where receipt of new applications overlapping with project close-out reports, consider delaying the close-out process to free up capacity.

Better Connection's Processes and Supporting Documents

The consultant team reviewed the project selection process, the grant cycle and contract lengths, the technical review process, and the close-out process. We were also asked to review the supporting documents for each of these processes and make recommendations to support

project implementation. Finally, we were asked to evaluate the local project presentations. What follows is our recommendations for improving and streamlining BC's processes.

Recommendations for Making all Supporting Documents More Accessible

1. Make the documents more visually appealing. The pages of most of the documents are dense with print and not inviting. Some qualified potential applicants may see the mass of print and become discouraged or uninterested. Consider giving all the documents to a graphic designer who can create space between paragraphs, use bullet points or boxed pull-out text when possible, and generally make the documents more visually friendly, which then makes the application process seem more inviting. The web site for the Wasatch Front Regional Council's Transportation and Land Use Connection Program (a best practice program) is an example of an online application landing page that is simplified and visually appealing and easy to navigate.

2. Throughout the documents, work to simplify the language. Use a more conversational tone with shorter words and sentences. Example: "The Better Connections program aims to improve state interagency coordination by providing targeted assistance and funding to awarded communities to align state and local investments to increase transportation options, improve water quality, public health and economic vitality in Vermont's community centers" could become "The Better Connections program funds municipalities' efforts to conduct integrated planning in order to increase transportation options, improve public health and water quality, and stimulate economic vitality in Vermont's downtowns and village centers."

3. Eliminate redundancies in different documents, including the MOUs. For example, the application checklist and Story Board (keep) have some of the same information as the Previous Recipients document (do not keep). With an online application landing page (explained below), the program purpose can be stated on the landing page and not repeated in each document.

4. Update the mission statement to eliminate, "aligns state and local investments". This statement is not clear or inspiring and many customers will not care about it even if it is clarified. We suggest something like, "Better Connections is an integrated planning process that funds municipal efforts to increase transportation options, improve land use, water quality, public health, and economic vitality in Vermont's community centers. The interagency program provides targeted assistance to:

   - help communities identify and prioritize their goals and projects
   - develop an action-oriented roadmap to achieve the goals and move projects forward
   - link the communities to a growing network of public and philanthropic partners to help them implement their priority projects."

Recommendations for Reworking the Scoring Template and Selection Process

1. Strengthen the scoring rubric. A draft of a more developed rubric for the Community Capacity is included in Appendix C. Specifically, in the updated rubric, explain what "well developed" means. This is a phrase that is used frequently and needs to be better defined. If the intent is to ensure alignment between the level of public engagement in

the project and the budget and-or staff time, that should be reflected in the rubric and more clearly spelled out. Similarly, if the intent of the term "strong phasing" is that there is alignment between the scope, budget, and schedule (steering committee meetings monthly, public engagement events at regular intervals throughout life of the project, etc.), that should be reflected more clearly in the rubric.

2. Some reviewers give bonus points for an applicant while others do not. Yet the bonus points are yes/no questions and should be scored consistently for all reviewers. Consider having the program managers evaluate and award bonus points for all applications before they are scored.
3. Any time there is more than a 20% deviation in scoring between reviewers of the same application, reviewers should discuss the scores and come to an agreement. Over 20% deviation means the reviewers are not understanding the criteria in the same way and, therefore, the criteria lack reliability.
4. Add "has a history of…." to different sections of the rubric. The best way to predict future behavior is a history of having done it in the past. What is the history of the applicant on implementing plans and engaging the community? This should be requested in the application.
5. Community Capacity and Readiness to Implement seems like the second bonus category. (The submission is supported locally through complementary activities and/or funding commitments beyond the minimum match requirements.) Consider eliminating the bonus category and including it in the rubric for Community Capacity. If the bonus category is eliminated, add five points to the scoring of Community Capacity. Consider also adding points for leadership, emphasizing the need for a cross-sectional representation of the community's leaders.
6. Consider increasing the points allocated to Community Capacity and Readiness. In conversations with consultants, VTrans, and ACCD, this seems like a critical part of a project's success.
7. Our sample rubric has added dedicated staffing time to the Community Capacity scoring criteria. A question used for the [Local] Project Manager [LPM} that might be tweaked and helpful on the application is: "In an average workweek how many hours are you available to allocate to project specific [LPM} duties for this project? ____ hours available each week. Please describe your commitment to remain as the [LPM] for the duration of the project (including implementation). How would this commitment fit into your routine workload?"
8. Consider adding a section to deduct points for "poor performance on previous state grants" to better align the scoring with the application guidelines criteria. The poor performance points should not necessarily be deducted if the person responsible for this performance is no longer working for the municipality. This could be done as a part of a more robust risk assessment, or it could be part of the application process. Typically, VTrans has assessed past performance by focusing on misuse of funds, project incompletion, or other more extreme instances. It would also be helpful to add

something along the lines of demonstrated ability to work well with diverse groups. Ask for past performance examples with references. Conversations with AOT's audit department, AOT's Municipal Assistance Bureau staff (program managers), ACCD MPG Program Manager, and RPC staff could also shed light on how to better assess project risks.

9. In the public engagement section (additional scoring guidelines), eliminate "or more" (as in two or more active outreach tasks). "Or more" indicates there could be three or four, which means it would go to the next level of the rubric and get a higher score.
10. Consider requiring a larger match for all grantees or a sliding scale of 10% to 20%, with the larger municipalities paying more. Other states we have been in touch with tend to have a larger match than 10% and increasing the match might be a way to pay for project management.
11. Consider adding a screening question for other major competing projects. (For example, does the town have active bond votes for sewer/water?) This seems like a part of "readiness" that is not screened for. Alternatively, it could be added to a separate risk assessment.
12. Consider adding a few components to the pre-application phone call. As a part of that process, consider a community health checklist (capital plan adopted, steering committee active and working on projects, and so on). Additionally, consider a simple one-page pre-application form that you can keep to document grant activity. See the Transportation and Land Use Connection Letter of Intent form as an example.
13. Someone reported what seemed to them like a conflict of interest on one BC project: a person involved in the project owned land near the project. Given this, consider adding a screening for conflict of interest on the risk assessment.
14. Consider aligning this application process with other programs' application processes to allow out-of-scope applications to be redirected to the proper program in time to meet application deadlines. Especially look to align with the VTrans Bike and Pedestrian and the Transportation Alternatives grant Programs. Find a way to track referrals to other grant programs. Once changes are agreed upon, make corresponding changes in the application.
15. Consider adding bonus points (scored only by DOH) for the health benefit of the project.

Recommendations for Improving the Application Experience

1. Update the Application Form
    a. Consider moving to an on-line application, which would allow users to access instructions while completing the application, much like TurboTax uses. The online method could be optional if less tech-savvy communities wanted to stick with hard copies. More is written about this in the Recommendations for the Application Guidelines below.

b. Number the headings on the application to align them with the application checklist.

c. Check all the links in the document; many do not go where they claim. Rather, they go to the landing page of the agency that hosts the target document. The link to the watersheds on the Clean Water Funds section is particularly hard to navigate. The map that comes up does not help identify the watershed. This might require more instructions.

d. Consider adding language to articulate the risk assessment process more clearly.

e. Add questions to dig deeper into risk categories such as:

    - Prior experience with similar awards
    - Current staffing levels and qualifications of the Subrecipient, dedicated staffing for the proposed project
    - Conflict of interest

f. Rewrite the overview of the document. The first paragraph does not draw readers in and the language regarding "invites municipalities to apply" is not needed. The second paragraph does not use the same (stronger) mission language that the web page does, stating the program "aims to improve state interagency coordination". The Program and Purpose section of the document more clearly articulates the overview in more inspiring language. The fourth paragraph in the Overview about the partnership with ANR is redundant.

g. Add a template for a confirmed planning process letter, like the one included for a resolution.

h. Eliminate the scoring rubric in the document as it is also part of the application guidelines. Readers could be directed to the rubric in the application guidelines with a hyperlink and a sentence or two in the guidelines.

2. Update the Application Guidelines

    a. Initially, we had thought it might make sense to combine the Application with the Application Guidelines. However, potential applicants might read the guidelines and decide not to apply or realize that their project does not qualify. In those cases, they do not need the application form. Also, there is so much information in the guidelines that putting it together with the application makes for a very large document. Trying to jump back and forth between sections in a large document is sometimes more frustrating and time-consuming than using two separate documents side by side.

    One effective way to combine the two is to move to an on-line application form (see the TLC program Application Form as an example) and have links in each section of the application to instructions or supporting documents. Alternatively, a two-column format could be used. On the left side could be boxes to fill in text in response to questions; on the right, instructions or guidance for the information that goes into the boxes.

b. Change "Application Guidelines" to "Application Form Instructions".
c. Simplify the Grant Administration section of the document by redesigning the layout and reviewing content. This section contains more information than is probably needed for the application and, if applicants are interested in more information, they can follow the link to explore the Grant Administration document in more detail.
d. Make the sample workplan and list of previous grantees a part of the Application Guidelines document, perhaps as appendices or hyperlinks.

3. General Recommendations for the Application Process

    a. Eliminate the application checklist on either the Application or the Application Guidelines. It is redundant.

    b. Allow applicant to submit all documents electronically, except where impractical; e.g. blueprints. (as a consultant, submitting hard copies is a time-consuming and unnecessary).

    c. Consider having RPCs assist with the application writing and review process to offer support to those communities that have less capacity. VTrans and ACCD are balancing the need to keep the document simple with the need to have a thorough screening. We believe you should error on the side of having a thorough screening but provide support for communities who need it.

    d. Add behavioral questions—not just what the applicant plans to do, but examples of having done similar things successfully in the past (meeting as a steering committee, leading public engagement projects, implementing plans, and so on). The best predictor of someone doing something is that they have done it in the past.

Recommendations for Strengthening the Technical Review Process

1. Best practice in process improvement is catching “mistakes” early. VTrans has been working to do this by getting the right VTrans staff involved earlier in projects to conduct a cursory review before the Technical Review Process. Continue to cultivate relationships with subject matter experts and other relevant AOT staff to flag potential issues through cursory reviews at the front end of projects. This could be done post-selection but before awarding the grants.

2. Involving people with a water perspective early is important to ensure that DEC is not perceived as the “bad guy” when the agency raises issues that could have been caught earlier in the process. Consider, as a requirement of each project, having someone with a water perspective on the steering committee and having the consultants review the Storm Water Master Plan, Intended Use Plan, and Tactical Basin Plans to help ensure that opportunities for coordination are not missed.

3. To improve consistency from grantees and consultants, consider tying the release of funds to key technical review milestones such as completion of existing conditions, design alternatives, and final plans.

4. Consider whether the technical review process would benefit from a more formal process-mapping exercise involving all stakeholders. This stage seems like a good candidate for process mapping (it is complex, has multiple handoffs, and not currently functioning optimally). By investing six to eight hours of stakeholders' time, and another day or so of VTrans and ACCD time, Better Connections could clarify roles, eliminating redundancies and bottlenecks, improve efficiencies, and institutionalize the process for continuity planning purposes.
5. As a part of the final plan review, add language that specifies or mandates how the memo tracking all comments from the Online Shared Review (OLSR) and draft summary are to be used by the consultant and community.
6. A few people we interviewed for this project expressed frustration that those involved in the review were designers who were reviewing a planning process. One of the consequences of this is that the feedback tended to be "way too detailed and full of minutiae". The sense of these participants was that the feedback was not relevant or helpful and that reviewers did not think "outside the box". While this tension may always exist between consultants and towns who want to think big and envision "out of the box" ideas and the regulatory arms of state government, identifying and recruiting big-picture thinkers or reviewer who can also represent the state's interests might help.

Recommendations for Simplifying Grant Administration Documents

NOTE: The final Grant Administration Guidance document will need to be edited, based on finalizing decisions about recommendations for changes to the consultant selection process and the project management structure, among others. In the outline below, we have highlighted sections that may need to be changed, based on how BC chooses to proceed with other recommendations.

1. We recommend combining all six current documents into one document. A draft outline of a combined Grant Administration Kit is included in Appendix D.
2. Add a section under "Roles and Responsibilities" for the role of the steering committee and what makes steering committees successful. Steering committees often need guidance as to how involved they should be in keeping the consultants on track, especially if there is not strong project management.
3. The current guidelines talk about the invoice and report together. Consider separating the instructions on progress reports from those about invoicing to make sure the two are clearly distinct in the reader's mind.
4. In the grant close-out documentation section, consider including a template for the summary ledger and the requisition.
5. Update the contact addresses at the end of the document.
6. Consider conducting some in-depth work to clarify roles such as RASI/RASCI charting. At least one RPC stated that it was technically not the project manager; however, due to limited capacity, RPC staff sometimes played the project management role. At times,

this was awkward and conflicted with other roles the RPC was playing for the project. Another focus group participant said, "At times it was not clear what was expected of the different players. What was the town's role vs. the consultants vs. the state, the RPC and the steering committee?" While this could shift with a new project management structure, the lack of role clarity was cited by multiple parties as something that would help improve the program. If RASI charting is not done, consider adding a matrix to help grantees visualize the roles of the different actors.

Recommendations to Bolster Support for Project Implementation

Since the BC program is five years old, and most projects take three to five years from planning to implementation, one would not expect most of these projects to be implemented at this time. Overall, survey participants felt positive about how BC positioned them for implementation, with 30% saying the program strongly positioned them for implementation, while 60% said it somewhat positioned them for implementation. That said, what follows are some recommendations to support and improve implementation of granted projects.

> **"The beauty of these projects is that they build the capacity of towns to do more work on their own."**
> *Mark Kane, consultant*

1. As is addressed above in the grant cycle section, move to a two-year cycle, which would include 18 months of planning and six months of the state BC PM assisting with implementation.
2. A few people who participated in our assessment noted that there is sometimes money for planning and implementation, but what is often lacking is money for the middle step of preparing (purchasing ROW, scoping and feasibility studies, in depth studies, and so on). Identify resources that BC can connect grantees with to fund this middle step.
3. Find ways to promote, and better utilize ACCD's funding directory. This resource should include application deadlines and a list of criteria specifying who is eligible to apply. [7]
4. Have some "low hanging fruit" implementation actions for each project to sustain momentum.
5. Work to give these projects priorities not only for future funding, but also for expedited environmental review and ROW reviews. Continue the new practice of a pre-project technical review to look for red flags so that issues can be caught early. This can remove bottlenecks to implementation.

[7] ACCD manages a funding directory that can be accessed with the link below.
https://accd.vermont.gov/sites/accdnew/files/documents/CD/CPR/CPR-Funding-Directory.pdf

6. Consider, as a part of the yearly work cycle, reaching out to the Collaborative Funders Group (CFG) during BC program announcement (to help identify communities to apply), after awards are granted, and again when projects are completed. This active engagement of CFG before awards, right after awards, and then after plans are complete would help keep funders connected to local BC projects and perhaps help find implementation funding.
7. Continue to prioritize projects with Quick Build for Health aspects to gain momentum.
8. In at least one project, the consultant made some recommendations that the town select board did not understand or approve. One project participant thought the process of educating the select board as to why the recommendations made sense was missing from the scope and project. Therefore, consider requiring that at least one select board member be on the project committee to ensure a direct liaison between the Select Board and the project.
9. Use planning project consultants as a bridge to implementation when their expertise and project legacy could prove beneficial.
10. Require BC grantees to review/analyze their existing bylaws to support walkable and compact development.

Recommendations to Better Market the Program

1. Continue to market the program to internal VTrans stakeholders so that staff will see the value in projects that are planning focused. This may involve Joe Segale playing a more active role and developing a simple marketing plan.
2. Use the case studies and new metrics to market the program to external stakeholders.

Recommendations to Redesign and Target Project Presentation Meetings

1. If presentations are to continue, be clear on the purpose of the gatherings. We think there are three potential reasons to continue the presentations. First, they serve as a pitch to potential funders to support implementation. Second, they are a venue to solicit feedback and improve interagency coordination. And lastly, they celebrate success. A part of the reason these presentations may not have “worked” in the past is that there seems to be a lack of clarity as to the purpose.
2. Conducting a meeting to give short presentations and solicit feedback about interagency coordination seems to be a good idea every two or three years, especially when there are new leaders involved. As former DHCD Commissioner Katie Buckley commented in the 2017 meeting, ongoing meetings to focus on Interagency coordination and collaboration would be helpful.
3. Once the purpose is clear, invite people who are relevant to that purpose. Leaders may not want to spend time at the meetings if they are to pitch to investors or celebrate success, but they are critical to improving interagency coordination.

4. Design the agenda around a clear purpose. For example, many of the notes from the 2017 meeting had to do with improving interagency coordination. If that is the goal, then presentations should focus on examples of coordination working or not working and how coordination can improve.
5. Regardless of the goal, decrease presentation time and increase engagement. Panel discussions might be a useful format. Presentations should be limited to no more than 10 or 15 slides. Getting the right level of depth for the audience is essential, especially if leadership is involved.
6. If you want to promote the program to leaders and better engage them, use high-level messaging. Consider touting BC as an example of modernizing state government to make it more streamlined and efficient. The 2017 agenda had shorter presentations and more engagement. This seemed to move in the right direction.
7. Provide coaching of those presenting to ensure presentations are succinct and relevant to the audience
8. Tailor a version of the presentation to funders. Continue to pursue the Collaborative Funders Network.
9. Consider celebratory gatherings that are more local and mark the transition from planning to implementation. Keep them fun.

Guidebook

What is the Better Connections (BC) Program?

History

The BC Program was an outgrowth of the 2013 Smart Growth American Report, *Strengthening Vermont's Economy by Integrating Transportation and Smart Growth Policy.* The BC program is administered by the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD).

Any unit of local government (i.e., town, city, or village), outside of Chittenden County, with a confirmed local planning process, is eligible to apply for BC grants. Both the state and federal governments fund the BC Initiative.

Before 2019, BC grants consisted of $160,000 in Federal Highway Administration State Planning and Research Funds and $20,000 in ACCD resources. In 2019, BC expanded its annual grant pool to $280,000 through the addition of Clean Water Fund Grants and Vermont Department of Health Quick Build Grants.

Projects are awarded on a competitive basis with grants ranging from $35,000 to $67,500. From 2015 to 2019, the program funded three projects per grant cycle, totaling $1.1 million in grants to 15 municipalities, whose local matching funds totaled $155,000.

Purpose

The BC program supports local master planning initiatives that make communities more livable and enjoyable for all Vermonters by:

- Engaging local stakeholders in the planning process
- Leveraging partnerships that collaborate on providing safe, multimodal, and resilient transportation systems, and improved water quality and public health
- Integrating planning efforts of transportation, economic development, public health and water conservations, thereby increasing efficiency and strengthening economic vitality
- Leading municipal plans to project implementation

Better Connections Today

Mission/Vision

Better Connections is an integrated planning process that funds municipal efforts to increase transportation options, improve water quality, public health, and economic vitality in Vermont's community centers. The interagency program provides targeted assistance to:

- help communities identify and prioritize their goals and projects
- develop an action-oriented roadmap to achieve the goals and move projects forward
- link the communities to a growing network of public and philanthropic partners to help them implement their priority projects."

General Objectives

- Fund master planning efforts for downtowns, villages, and neighborhoods throughout Vermont
- Actively engage communities in a master planning processes
- Promote integrated planning processes that consider:
  - improved multimodal connectivity
  - active transportation and complete streets
  - improving safety through access management
  - traffic calming
  - parking
  - wayfinding
  - rehabilitation of buildings or redevelopment of sites
  - housing
  - land use
  - stormwater management

    - zoning bylaw
    - form-based code development
    - increased access to physical activity
    - municipal road drainage and/or erosion control
    - Increased economic development
- Develop action-oriented plans that are implemented
- Promote public and private investment in Vermont's downtowns and village centers

Legislative statute (placeholder)

Funding

The BC program is primarily funded by the federal transportation legislation Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, under an agreement with the Federal Highway Administration, through the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD).

Municipalities annually compete for approximately $280,000 in project funds, and if awarded, provide a 10% local cash match of the cost of their plan.

Federal Requirements

Partners

The BC program is a collaborative effort made possible through the following diverse partnerships and their funding sources:

VTrans

ACCD

DEC

DOH

Operations

Grant Cycle/Annual Calendar

Project Management

1. Role of VTrans?
2. Role of RCPs?
3. Role of Municipality?

Application Process

Partner Collaboration

Technical Review Process

Selection Process

Close Out Process

Metrics

Surveys

Implementation

Program Management

Reporting

1. Metrics
2. Monthly Reports
3. Annual Reports
4. Better Connections Story Map

Audits?

Indirect Costs?

Invoicing?

Procurements?

MOU/Contract Administration

Work Plan Timeline

Communications

1. Grantees
2. Key Contacts
3. Consultants

Consultant Management

Local Match

Resources

Summary of Recommendations

At a high level, we believe the roadmap to implementing the recommendations in this report should be sequenced as follows:

Recommendation	Priority	Rational
1. Changing the Grant Cycle	High	This could impact the timeline of remaining implementation items.
2. Strengthening the Structure	High	Changes to project management will be significant and affect other recommendations.
3. Improving Metrics and Reporting	High	These will be important to ongoing marketing efforts internally and externally.
4. Reworking the Scoring Template and Selection Process	High	This is the first thing that will be required in before the program relaunches.
5. Marketing the Program	Medium	Ongoing
6. Improving the Application Experience	Medium	Required in the fall of 2021.
7. Reworking the Scoring Template and Selection Process	Medium	Required in the fall of 2021
8. Simplifying Grant Administration Documents	Medium	Required after grants have been awarded in 2022.
9. Strengthening the Technical Review Process	Medium/High	This will be required in the 2021 grant cycle, but not until some planning has been done. Probably needed by late in 2022.
10. Bolstering Support for Project Implementation	Medium	This will be required in the 2021 grant cycle, but not until some planning has been done. Probably needed in 2022 or 2023.
11. Using Metrics and Case Studies to Market the Program	Medium	This can be done after the metrics have been benchmarked. It will be an ongoing task. It is important but not urgent.
12. Redesigning and Targeting Project Presentation Meetings	Low	Not required until the 2021 grant cycle ends.

Action Plan

Description of Recommendation (PROPOSED)
Please refer to the Vermont Agency of Transportation's Better Connections Program Evaluation Report, dated July 2020, for further information about each recommendation listed below. Numbered items below correspond directly to section headings in the report.
1. Recommendations for Strengthening the Structure
Increase the state's role in managing projects
Clearly define roles of Program Manager vs. Planning Coordinator
Revise the MOU with ACCD to ensure their role is clear and as equitable as is feasible.
Clarify who is responsible for management/oversight of implementation or demo activities that may occur as an outgrowth of BC project.
Develop a process that creates a list of pre-qualified consultants
Strengthen business continuity
Advocate to put the program in state statute
Formalize the roles of each of the four partners in the state statute
Create MOUs with DEC and DOH to formalize and clarify their roles
Develop a BC program Continuity Book
Increase inter-agency coordination
Align related programs' application due dates with one another (Grant Cycle Duplicate)
Require consultants to review existing water, transportation, and economic plans as part of project SOWs
Include stakeholders knowledgeable of water planning and public health on all steering committees
Include other state agency programs such as tourism, DEC, VTrans, DED, etc. in local BC planning processes
Coordinate with DEC to see if BC projects can be expedited for permitting
Improve coordination between MPGs and BC with respect to preparing, completing, and executing master plans
Share and discuss the BC Evaluation Report with DOH and DEC
Convene a meeting of all partners to clarify roles and discuss the distribution of tasks.
2. Recommendations for Strengthening Metrics
Develop an online dashboard similar to DVRPC. Initial dashboard metrics should include:
Public funds leveraged for implementation
Miles of multi-modal transportation created or upgraded
As the program matures, consider adding the following dashboard metrics:
Percentage of projects that increased access to physical activity
Percentage of project that included municipal road drainage and/or erosion control measures

Description of Recommendation (PROPOSED)
Percentage of project that improves transportation safety through access management
Grand list value increases in the study area
Help grantees anticipate the metrics they will be expected to track
Assist grantees structuring a process to target metrics (i.e. 10% of the project implemented per year) at the start of the grant cycle
Track metrics using surveys, sent to participants 1, 4, 7, and 10 years after planning grants were completed
Require all past grant recipients to take the survey with the new metrics
Send grantees a copy of their answers to the most recent past surveys
Conduct a focus group of all projects every 5 years to gather additional anecdotal data
Revise the Annual Report
Include dashboard metrics in the annual report
Eliminate previous years' lists of towns that received funding from the current annual report
Eliminate the case study from the annual report (Vergennes in 2020)
Rewrite the Overview section, making it more succinct
Revise the Closeout Report
Incorporate the dashboard metrics into the Outcomes section of the Closeout Report
Consider converting the Closeout Report to a Google Form
Incorporate the dashboard metrics and surveys into the grant closeout process
3. Recommendations for the Grant Cycle
Align related programs' application due dates with one another (Structure Duplicate)
Reduce number of grants awarded to 2 or 3 every other year beginning in 2020
Reevaluate the grant cycle once every 2 years
Have VTrans PM work with municipalities for 6 months after plan is submitted to assist with implementation (Implementation duplicate)
Delay the closeout process to free capacity if applications/closeout report bottleneck persists
4. Recommendations for Making all Supporting Documents More Accessible
Format document to increase visual appeal, adding graphics, call-out boxes, images, etc.
Improve readability by simplifying the language and using active voice
Eliminate redundancies across documents, including MOUs, unless essential to specific documents
Remove “aligns state and local investments” from the mission statement
5. Recommendations for Reworking the Scoring Template and Selection Process
Strengthen the scoring rubric using Appendix C of the Evaluation Report as a template
Program managers assign bonus points for all applications before they are scored

Description of Recommendation (PROPOSED)
Develop policy to discuss and resolve score differences among viewers greater than a 20% deviation
Add “has a history of….” to appropriate sections of the rubric to focus scoring on past behavior (Application Process duplicate)
Eliminate second bonus category and include it in the Community Capacity rubric
Increase points allocated to Community Capacity and Readiness to better reflect BC priorities
Add this question used for the Municipal Project Manager (MPM) to the application: “In an average work week, how many hours are you available to allocate to project-specific MPM duties for this project? _____ hours available each week. Please describe your commitment to remain as the MPM for the duration of the project, including implementation. How would this commitment fit into your routine workload?”
Add a section that deducts points for “poor performance on previous state grants."
Eliminate “or more” in the public engagement section/additional scoring guidelines, "as in 2 or more active outreach tasks"
Require a larger match for all grantees or a sliding scale of 10 to 20% with larger municipalities paying more
Add a screening question for other major competing projects; e.g. "Does the town have active bond votes for sewer/water?"
Add a few components to the pre-application phone call to screen for community health (capital plan adopted, steering committee active and working on projects, and so on)
Add a screening question for conflict of interest on the risk assessment
Add bonus points scored only by DOH for the health benefit of the project
6. Recommendations for Improving the Application Experience
Update Application Form
Convert Application Form to a Google Form for easy access, universal use, and ease of tracking
Update the Application Form overview
Include Application Form Instructions (Guidelines), where applicable, within the electronic Application Form. Use smaller font to delineate instructions from submission requirements
Include the sample workplan and hyperlinks to previous grantees' websites
Number the Application Form's headings to align with the Application Checklist
Check all the links in the application form and guidelines documents—many do not go where they claim they will
Clarify and add transparency to the risk assessment process
Develop questions that will allow you to assess levels of risk in the risk categories

Description of Recommendation (PROPOSED)
Eliminate the scoring rubric in the Application Form; keep in the Application Form Instructions
Update Application Checklist
Change "Application Guidelines" to "Application Form Instructions"
Include as many of the application Instructions as possible in the Applications Form to reduce what is needed in this document and avoid redundancies
Include the Application Checklist in the Application Form Instructions; delete it from the Application Form itself
Simplify the Grant Administration section of the Application Form Instructions
Other Application Process Recommendations
Submit all documents electronically, except where impractical; e.g. blueprints
Expand RPC's responsibilities to include assisting communities that have less capacity with the application writing and review process
Add behavioral questions that include examples of similar past successes; e.g., meeting as a steering committee, leading public engagement projects, implementing plans
Develop a Confirmed Planning Process letter template (similar to the one for a resolution)
7. Recommendations for Strengthening the Technical Review Process
Cultivate ROW relationship to involve them and other relevant AOT staff early to flag potential issues
Directly link the release of funds to key technical review milestones such as completion of Existing Conditions, Design Alternatives, and Final Plans
Develop process maps to eliminate redundancies, bottlenecks, and inefficiencies in the technical review process
Describe how memo tracking of comments from the Online Shared Review and draft summary will be used in reviewing the final plan
Recruit "big picture thinkers" who represent the state's compliance interests to serve as reviewers
8. Recommendations for Simplifying Grant Administration Documents
Combine all six current documents into one document
Add a section under roles and responsibilities for the role of the steering committee and what makes steering committees successful
Separate progress reports instructions from invoicing instructions
Develop a template for the Summary Ledger and the Requisition in the Grant Closeout Documentation section
Update the contact addresses
Clarify roles to help grantees visualize the roles of the different actors (use of RACI/RASCI or matrix)

Description of Recommendation (PROPOSED)
9. Recommendations to Bolster Support for Project Implementation
Add responsibility to state PM's job description to provide 6 months' implementation assistance after project closeout (Grant Cycle duplicate)
Include in yearly work cycle to reach out to Collaborative Funders Group (CFG) during BC program announcement, after awards are granted, and when projects are completed
Prioritize projects with Quick Build for Health aspects
Require that at least one select board member be on the project committee
Use planning project consultants as a bridge to implementation when their expertise and project legacy could prove beneficial
Develop process that can connect grantees with funders that can pay for preparing for implementation
Find ways to promote, and better utilize ACCD's funding directory.
Identify and execute "low-hanging fruit" actions to obtain momentum through the transition to implementation
Advocate for BC projects in order to advance the program's priorities for future funding, expedited environmental reviews, and ROW reviews
Require BC grantees to review to review/analysis their existing bylaws to support walkable and compact development
10. Recommendations to Better Market the Program
Develop ongoing BC Program marketing and branding campaigns to internal stakeholders
Increase communications and marketing of case studies and metric results to external stakeholders
Reach out to the states who supported this project by sharing their experiences. Consider sending them a thank you note and the project report, and utilizing them in an ongoing manner when questions arise.
11. Recommendations to Redesign and Target Project Presentation Meetings
Clarify the purpose of the presentation meetings
Target invitations based on presentation meetings' purposes
Solicit feedback about interagency coordination every 2 to 3 years
Develop agendas that decrease presentation time and increase engagement
Use high-level messaging for leadership that both promotes the program and better engages leaders
Coach presenters to ensure presentations are succinct and relevant to the audience
Tailor a version of the presentation to funders
Develop meetings into "celebratory gatherings" that are fun and interactive, more local to attendees, and mark the transition from planning to implementation

Appendix A: Table of Those Interviewed for this Project

Name	Title	Focus Group	Interview
Joe Segale	VTrans, Director of Policy, Planning and Research		x
Amy Bell	VTrans Planning Manager		x
Richard Amore	Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, Planning and Outreach Manager		x
Jackie Cassino	VTrans Planning Coordinator		x
Jacqui DeMent	VTrans Planning Coordinator		x
Suzanne Kelly	Healthy Communities Coordinator, SNAP-ED Program Manager, Vermont Department of Health		x
Neil Kamman	Director, Water Investment Division, Department of Environmental Conservation		x
Ethan Swift	Watershed Coordinator, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources		X
Joshua Swartz	Executive Director Mad River Valley Planning District		X
Greta Brunswick	Senior Planner, Northwest Regional Planning Commission		X
Jonathan Slason	Consultant, RSG Inc.		X
Carolyn Radisch	Consultant, GPI		X
Bob Flint	Executive Director Springfield Regional Development Corporation	X	X
Mark Kane	Principal Consultant, SE Group		X
Jason Rasmussen	AICP, Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission	X	X
Alison Low	AICP CFM Northeastern Vermont Development Association	X	X
Julie Hance	Town Manager, Chester		X
David Raphael	Consultant		X
Claire Tebbs	Project Manager		X
Best Practices			
Sandra Misiewicz	AICP, Principal Transportation Planner, Capital District Transportation Committee, Albany, New York		X
Matt Crall	Planning Services Division Manager, Department of Land Conservation and Development, Salem, Oregon		X
Michael Rock	Unit Manager, Statewide Transportation Planning Unit, Department of Transportation, Salem, Oregon		X

Megan Townsend	Transportation and Land Use Connection Program Manager, Community and Economic Development Team, Salt Lake City, Utah		X
Ronald Rodjenski	Town Administrator, Hyde Park	X	
Seth Jenson	Lamoille County Planning Commission	X	
Mary Ann Goulette	Town Manager, Town of West Rutland	X	
Kate Whitehead	Danville Planning Commission	X	
Bob Haight	Town of Windsor Zoning Administrator	X	
Mike Miller	AICP CFM, Director of Planning & Community Development, City of Montpelier	X	

Appendix B: Case Studies

Mad River Valley Moves: Connecting Trails to Unite Communities and Attract Tourists

FFY 2015-2017

The Context

Much of Vermont's economy depends on tourism and recreation. In rural areas, tourism has traditionally been understood to be primarily the ski industry. In 2013, the Mad River Valley Planning District (MRVPD), which represents the towns of Waitsfield, Warren and Fayston, undertook an economic analysis of the region and concluded, in part, that the local recreation economy extended well beyond the ski industry. The agency found that a critical part of that economy was hiking, biking, and other active ways to be mobile. Knowing that mobility can often also be recreation, the MRVPD began looking at recreation in a transportation context. It secured a planning grant from Better Connections in 2014 to map the current trail infrastructure and create a vision for a unified active transportation network[8] that would embrace region-wide connectivity.

The Challenges

In New England, people often pride themselves on independence. Therefore, projects that extend beyond municipal boundaries are sometimes challenging. The towns in the Mad River Valley Watershed (Waitsfield, Warren, Fayston, Moretown, Granville, and Duxbury) did not have a history of collaborating on projects other than stormwater management and roads. Neither did the 19 different stakeholder groups that manage different trails have much history in joint ventures. Yet the MRVPD knew that a unified plan would be essential to the project's success. The challenge was to engage all the watershed's stakeholders and get them to work together to create a vision for the future of the transportation network. This is impossible without significant outreach, communication, and public engagement.

The Process and Approach

"Most planning grants say that communication and community engagement are important", said Joshua Schwartz of the MRVPD, "but most grants don't really fund this work. The size of the Better Connections grant allowed us to focus on public outreach in a way that we haven't been able to with other planning grants. The funding allowed us to think differently about outreach and it paid off."

Using a multiple-method approach to engagement, online and in person tools were developed. A project website was created and over 350 people participated in surveys that informed the direction of the group. Most survey participants were residents, but second homeowners and visitors were also engaged. As a part of the process, stakeholders were asked what aspects of

[8] *Active transportation is any self-propelled, human-powered mode of transportation, such as walking, bicycling, hiking, or skiing.*

the active transportation network they wanted to connect with others. The emphasis was not just on meeting the needs of tourists, but also on meeting the needs of residents.

Additionally, the group sought to get people involved by making it fun. A walking audit of the trails was combined with an ice cream social. An effort was made to keep the process positive. Predictably, engagement was robust. When an economic analysis of the trails indicated that one of the region's 185 trails brought $1.8 million into the region annually and that 34% of tourists said the availability of trails was the deciding factor in where they visited, municipalities interest in the project increased.

"Working together is hard work," said Schwartz, "but we did it for a larger purpose. We know that the foundation of planning work is relationship building. And this grant allowed us to start building those relationships and learn how to work together."

The Outcome (and why it matters)

Working with previously disparate groups to create a unified vision of a human-powered mobility and transportation system has had a major impact on the Mad River Valley. Shortly after completing the plan, stakeholders prioritized recommendations and decided to unify the branding and signage of the watershed's trail system. This led to the leveraging of $60,000 in additional money, in-kind professional services, and hundreds of hours of volunteer labor invested to create kiosks, maps, and trail signs. A graphic designer and a local sign maker were hired to produce 18 major kiosks at trail heads and 32 minor trailhead signs. These work products are the manifestation of a system that did not exist before the Better Connections grant.

Also, digital and paper maps of the integrated trail system were produced. These guides to the current system allowed trail users to access new trails they might not have been aware of previously. It also pulled together previously disparate data into one central location. (The online version of the trails is available in the recently revamped trailfinder.info)

Additionally, usage of the newly marked and branded trail system has increased by 45% in general while the Blueberry Lake Trail usage has increased by 59% from 2016 to 2018. While a new economic analysis has not been conducted, trail usage was the primary factor in calculating economic impact in the past. Given estimates that overnight users comprise 34% of Blueberry Lake Trail users and two-thirds of non-locals stay at least one overnight and spend an average of $175 per day, this increased usage certainly represents a large economic impact, perhaps as large as $800,000 per year.

Project Highlights

- Leveraging 130% of the Better Connections grant to implement the project
- Creating a unified, branded trail system for the Mad River Valley with consistently branded signage

- Designing and building 52 new signs and trail heads and installing them on area trails (currently, 30 of the 52 are finished and the rest are in the design phase)
- Producing a hard copy and digital map of the watershed's trail system
- Purchasing 1,000 copies of the map so that area residents have free access to them
- Increased trail usage by 45% from 2016 to 2018 (with the average spending of an overnight tourist estimated to be $175 per day)
- A unified vision of how to continue to work together to increase the connectivity of the watershed's active transportation system

Keys to Success

Relationship building is the foundation of planning work. Collaboration is a key to the success of many projects but without relationships, collaboration is hard. Better Connections' funding allows grantees to seriously invest in engagement and relationship building. Keeping the process positive and fun kept people involved and made some of the difficult discussions more likely to succeed. Additionally, MRVPD had a dedicated staff member responsible for shepherding the process forward. This dedicated staff was indispensable to the success of the project.

Chester: Uniting a Community to Move Forward Together

FFY 2016

The Context and The Challenge

Chester is an idyllic, charming town in southeastern Vermont that has been struggling to stay economically viable. The town has many assets, including a wonderfully intact and vibrant historic district, numerous and diverse local businesses, a rich and lively arts community, and a location central to the broader region. However, the town has never articulated a clear, unifying vision of how to move forward together. While there was agreement around the need for economic revitalization, there have been competing views about how to attain that goal.

Some in town wanted revitalization to focus on helping the local population, while others felt that prioritizing tourism was the best approach; some felt strongly that historical aspects of the town needed preservation, while others wanted to reduce regulation so that small businesses could thrive. Some wanted to focus on the arts and others on branding and identity.

Recently, these different interest groups failed to come to consensus around a proposal to bring a Dollar General store to the area. Residents of Chester knew each other's perspectives well and nerves were raw. Julie Hance, the town manager, believed the various factions needed to develop a master plan in order to move forward together. Her hope was that a robust, comprehensive planning process might unite the town around a vision of the thriving town everyone wanted.

The Process and Approach

After securing a Better Connections grant to develop a village master plan, Hance and the project consultant spent a lot of time thinking about the composition of the steering committee. Jointly, they made a strategic decision to invite a spokesperson from each interest group onto the project steering committee. Mark Kane from the SE Group said, "We wanted to engage strong opinions in the process. We knew if we did not do this, we would run the risk of residents not buying into, and perhaps sabotaging, the final plan. We also knew that having all perspectives at the table would require working through some differences. But we thought it was better to have those emerge during the process than after it."

Work was invested in coalescing the steering committee before the town residents were engaged. Each interest group was given the opportunity to express its views, but none were allowed to dominate the conversation. All perspectives were viewed as equally important and the team was tasked with finding as many opportunities as possible that met the needs of all stakeholders. As possible initiatives emerged, they were explored through the lens of each stakeholder group. **"It takes time to build consensus", said Bob Flint of the Springfield Regional Development Corporation, "and often planning processes don't fund this hard work."**

The process strongly emphasized building upon what works, correcting what needs to be fixed, and ensuring that the results enrich the lives of residents and those who visit Chester. Additionally, the consulting team listened carefully to comments so the team could help residents rediscover the positive aspects of the town's identity. The emphasis was not on changing the town, but rather on finding out what residents wanted the town to be and what united, rather than divided, them.

The Outcome (and why it matters)

These complex community interests were synthesized into a revitalization plan to create a more walkable and vibrant village. The plan recommends bringing people to Main Street through improved signage and wayfinding, connecting Depot Street and Main Street, and enhancing connections to the Williams River. The plan sought to preserve its historic settings, increase tourism and recreation, promote the arts and culture, and provide safe and convenient transportation for all forms of mobility.

The plan's recommendations included upgrading sidewalks, hiring a local artist to design new signs, improving lighting for pedestrians, creating small parklets to improve river access, conducting a zoning audit, and improving connections to the train depot. These initiatives included a mix of projects that were pragmatic and easily implemented as well as those that were more ambitious. Despite its struggles to build consensus in the past, each of these initiatives was met with widespread approval.

Due to this newfound unity, residents began projects before the plan was finalized. With leadership from the town, volunteers mobilized to begin constructing parklets. Residents began to see progress even before additional implementation funding was secured. Because a

consensus was built, the project did not rely on one person to lead the implementation but became a group effort.

Furthermore, the steering committee continued to work together after the project finished. **"The beauty of these projects", said consultant Mark Kane, "is that they build the capacity of towns to do more work on their own**." The Chester project brought people together to make positive change happen.

Soon after the plan was completed, $800,000 of additional funding was secured to upgrade sidewalks. "Julie (Hance) was on top of every new funding opportunity," Kane said. "She knows how to get things done." According to Hance, "This project was truly a community project and those are the ones that turn out to be successful because you have community buy-in."

Project Highlights

- Leveraged roughly $890,000 in additional implementation funding
- Leveraged volunteer labor and donations to begin constructing parklets
- Upgraded and widened sidewalks with a green strip and pedestrian-scale lighting
- Hired a local artist to assist in creating new signage and wayfinding
- Implemented 80% of the 33 recommendations on the implementation plan
- Ongoing commitment and work of the steering committee to implement the plan

Keys to Success

A key to the success of the Chester project was that it prioritized listening to diverse perspectives. The committee chair was a skilled facilitator who allowed all perspectives to be heard, but none to dominate. The project also had great leadership from the town manager, who invested heavily in the planning process and implementation. In the end, Chester united around a vision and came together to implement it. As a result of its master plan, people are working together and the town is coming back to life.

Springfield: Coalescing the Community to Revitalize Downtown

FFY 2016

The Context

Springfield, Vermont, was once a thriving center of precision manufacturing, but globalization and outsourcing have taken their toll. After a few decades of decline, Springfield's downtown had become economically challenged and was trying to lift itself out of a post-industrial malaise. Poverty and blight had set in and several of Springfield's historic buildings fell into disrepair as the town searched for a way to revitalize itself. Fortunately, Springfield has many assets to aid in its revitalization: its' historic buildings are nestled in a spectacular natural setting along the Black River with a dramatic waterfall and cascade and it has a compact,

walkable downtown. An eclectic mix of old and new businesses also give the downtown a unique identity and sense of place.

Things began to change when town leadership took a more proactive approach to downtown redevelopment. With the select board's support, the town took action against property owners with blighted buildings. A victory in Vermont's Superior Court allowed the town to seize a building that had become the epicenter of illicit activity. When the building was demolished, people began to believe that things could improve.

The Challenge

After receiving funding from Better Connections to develop a downtown master plan, the town manager and select board recruited a steering committee to guide downtown redevelopment. A major challenge in the Springfield project was to keep the community engaged and convinced that the project was relevant and would lead to change. "In too many planning processes, small towns get stuck complaining about what doesn't work instead of focusing on what could," said Bob Flint of the Springfield Regional Development Corporation. Plans often are developed for projects that are long-term and feel unachievable. People lose interest and move on to other priorities. Convincing them that the plan can, and will, make a difference is a key to success.

The Process and Approach

Together with the consultants., the steering committee focused on making community engagement fun. The consultants did not design meetings; they designed events. Some public sessions were more like cocktail mixers with an informal atmosphere and plenty of time for people to mingle. After the events people felt like they had been to a party rather than a meeting.

Additionally, the town manager, Tom Yennerell, provided excellent leadership. "It takes leaders who have a vision, strong relationships, and know how to get things done" Flint said. "Tom knows how to lead and how to build consensus". He also focused on some easy, short-term wins to maintain momentum and to show progress while longer-term projects were being planned and implemented.

The Outcome (and why it matters)

A plan was developed to better connect the town to the Black River. The plan prioritized pedestrians and cyclists while also creating a green, welcoming downtown that respected the streetscape and landscape. Because the process focused on some short-term wins, residents began to see tangible changes in the community. A park was created where an old, rundown building had stood. "Seeing visible changes to the heart of your community is huge," Flint says. "It gives people a sense of hope and belief that leaders care." Soon after the park was built, a coffee roaster moved downtown near the park and the local food coop also made plans to relocate downtown. These represented concrete steps towards a reimagined downtown that

depends less on retail businesses and more on pedestrians who go downtown for meals, culture, and "hanging out."

"The plan coalesced the community, but it also helped the community get money", said Jason Rasmussen of the South Windsor County Regional Planning Commission. Over $370,000 of additional grant funds and over $980,000 in tax credits were leveraged to implement the plan. The tax credits were used to improve six downtown building and included creating commercial space, affordable housing, and space for service providers. All of this work significantly beautified the downtown. **"This is the type of work we have wanted to see our communities do for decades but, frankly, there has never been enough money," Rasmussen said**. **"The Better Connections program is critical because it is one of the few funding sources that gives people the resources to really engage the community and build consensus. People have always wanted to do it but there haven't been the resources."**

The steering committee has continued to meet after the grant period ended to continue implementing specific aspects of the plan as well as other projects. The Better Connections grant created momentum that the town has continued to enjoy. People have seen tangible changes and now have hope, and expectations, that there will be more to come.

Project Highlights

- $370,000 of additional implementation funds were leveraged (500% of the Better Connections grant)
- Over $980,000 in tax credits and Community Development Block Grants leveraged to improve six properties
- 40% of the plan has been implemented or begun to be implemented
- A park was built near the Black River where a blighted building once stood
- A coffee shop moved downtown and the food coop made plans to also relocate near the park

Keys to Success

Leaders in Springfield had begun meeting before receiving the Better Connections grant, so they were ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work when the project was funded. A broad spectrum of the community was already engaged, and some positive changes had already begun. Town Manager Tom Yennerell also had years of experience leading projects and building consensus. His skills in consensus building were crucial.

Additionally, the town focused on some projects that could be implemented quickly so that tangible results could be seen. Implementation grants were written before the master plan was finalized. The results were an infusion of hope for a town looking to reimagine and reinvent itself for the 21st century.

Best Practices of Vermont's Better Connections Program

Research into the case studies, which represent Vermont's most successful BC projects, led to the observation that in Vermont the most successful projects tend to have the following elements:

- Some momentum going into the project – readiness
- Strong local leadership and/or regional partnerships
- Community engagement that is fun
- Good consultant team match to community – (three of the four "best" Vermont projects had a consultant team that specialized in planning as opposed to expert engineering consultants)
- Looking for additional funding and quick wins throughout the process

Having dedicated staff time or someone committed to shepherding the process

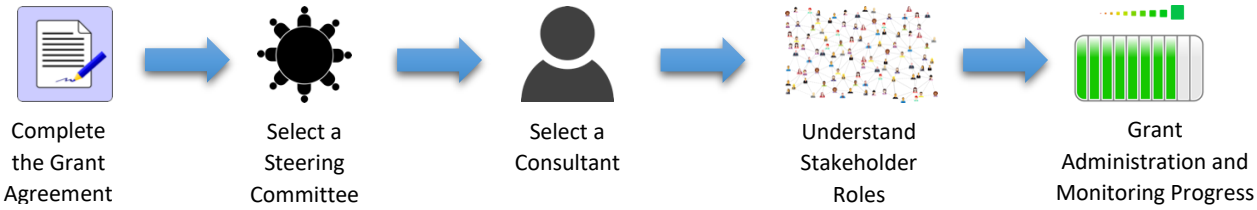
Appendix C: Draft Grant Evaluation Rubric

Category	Low (0)	Moderate (7)	Good (14)	Exceptional (20)
History of working together	None	Occasional meetings of stakeholder groups over the past 3-5 years, but not recently.	Stakeholder meetings with some frequency over the last 12 months, but not regularly.	Over the last 6 to 12 months, stakeholders in this project have been meeting regularly. There is momentum, a clear sense of direction, and success in past ventures.
Linkages to implementation	None	Minimal	Moderate	Clear and strong linkages demonstrating readiness and capacity to implement.
Local staff time allocated	None allocated	Minimal RPC or municipality staff time has been allocated to this project specifically.	Some municipality or RPC staff time has been allocated to help shepherd this project, although it may not be sufficient.	Sufficient municipality or RPC staff time has been allocated to this project.
Knowledge of funding sources	No history of having found funding sources, nor do they indicate they are likely to do so with this project.	No history of having found funding sources, but the application indicates some knowledge of implementation funding sources.	Some history of funding implementation efforts and some knowledge of, and thinking about, implementation funding sources and potential next steps.	The application indicates that the stakeholders have put adequate thought into possible implementation funding and have the capacity to, and a history of, pursuing implementation funding.
Leadership	Weak, with no track record of leading multi-stakeholder projects.	Moderate, with some track record of success with less complex projects.	Strong, with a track record of success, but not a cross sectional representation of the community leaders	Strong, with a track record of success and representing a cross-section of the community's leaders.

Appendix D: Outline of Possible Better Connections Grantee "Grant Administration Kit"

Highlighted sections of this outline may be subject to change based on recommendations elsewhere in this report. In addition to the content listed below, we recommend that BC invests in a new layout of the document. In our research on best practices, we found that the Wasatch Frontal Regional Council had a very simple, yet seemingly effective, layout of their Grant Administration Kit. In this appendix, we attempt to replicate some of the collapsible layout that they use.

The following steps outline the post-award instructions, as well as provide information regarding available resources. Click on the icon or associated text to go directly to that section.



Complete the Grant Agreement

1. Program Contacts
   a. Jackie Cassino, Planning Coordinator
      Policy, Planning, and Intermodal Development
      Vermont Agency of Transportation
      Barre City Place, 219 N. Main Street Barre, VT 05641
      802.272.2368
      jackie.cassino@vermont.gov

   b. Richard Amore, Planning and Outreach Manager
      Community Planning and Revitalization
      Agency of Commerce and Community Development
      One National Life Drive
      Montpelier, VT 05620-0501
      802.828.5229
      richard.amore@vermont.gov
2. The resolution from the town must be printed, signed by the select board, and emailed to VTrans. (The resolution form is already included in the grant application).
3. The Project Commitment Form (PCF) emailed with the grant award notice must be printed, signed by the Local Project Manager or Authorized Municipal Official, and emailed within 10 days to Jackie Cassino, the VTrans BC Program Manager.
4. (Sample Project Commitment Form inserted here.)
5. Review the Grant Agreement

a. Within 30 days of submitting the PCF, you should receive your grant agreement electronically. Make sure the information about your grant is correct and that you understand the terms of the Grant Agreement.
b. Sign the Grant Agreement. VTrans will generate a fully executed copy of the Grant Agreement and will provide the LPM an electronic copy. The municipal official or LPM whose name appears on it must review and sign it via E-Sign. Once the signed signature page is received by VTrans, you will then:
   - Receive an email notification of the "Grant Awarded" status of your grant
   - Receive an electronic copy of your fully executed Grant Agreement and be enabled to begin the consultant procurement process.

6. Consider publicizing your grant.
   a. Discuss benefits of publicity
   b. Insert sample press release here.

Select a Steering Committee

1. The community is responsible for establishing the people who will manage and complete the project. We advise the community to recruit a Project Steering Committee that represents a broad cross-section of the community and many different interest groups. The BC project manager will work with the community to determine the optimal mix of stakeholders and community members.

Participate in the Process of Selecting a Consultant

1. Consult with your Better Connections program officer to learn about structuring, wording, and presenting your Request for Proposals to consultants.
2. (Insert sample RFP here or a hyperlink to a sample located at the end of this document)
3. Insert proposal requirements.
4. After drafting your RFP, submit it to your Better Connections program officer for review and comments.
5. When you are ready to issue your RFP, here is a list of places to send it so consultants will see it (insert list of RFP venues here or a hyperlink to the document in an appendix)

Understand the Roles of Each Stakeholder

1. Program Managers Role in Local Projects
   a. VTrans and ACCD program managers will assist the municipality throughout the planning process and in the consultant procurement process, including, but not limited to serving on the municipal project selection committee; and cooperatively developing the final scope of work, schedule, budget, and contract for each individual project along with the local project manager, local representative, and where appropriate, RPC representative.
   b. The program manager will actively work with the awarded communities during the life of the project, serving on the local steering committee, attending public outreach meetings, reviewing draft products, and providing targeting assistance

and resources to support the development and implementation of the local planning effort.

c. Program managers provide post-plan technical assistance and connect the municipality to funding resources and partners to support plan implementation.

2. Local Project Management (LPM)
   a. Only a local project manager (LPM) can sign and accept the Grant Agreement. LPMs may also perform all other grant administration functions
   b. Local commitment and engaged project management are critical to the success of the project. As a condition of the award, grantees will be asked to provide a written commitment that they will meet all grantee obligations in a timely manner. Grantees must designate a local program manager (LPM) who will:
      - Serve as principal contact person for the project
      - Develop and advertise the RFP
      - Manage and coordinate work, including consultant work products
      - Inform local decision makers and elected officials about the process
      - in a timely manner
      - Provide logistical arrangements for stakeholder meetings, public
      - meetings and other engagements as necessary
      - Provide public notification for all local meetings and public events
      - Work with the state program grant managers and consultant to
      - ensure the completion of all work on time and within budget
      - Work with state program managers to arrange
      - state agency review of the draft (50-75%) plan in progress
      - Review consultant work products and payment requests
      - Prepare progress reports, match reports, close-out reports, and
      - reimbursement requests

3. Grant Administrators
   a. Grant Administrators may perform all the functions described in this document, EXCEPT signing the Grant Agreement and Resolution.

4. Regional Planning Commissions
   a. The grantee is strongly encouraged to work with its Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and must provide a letter of support and a municipal planning process confirmation letter from the RPC.
   b. The grantee must employ third-party contractors in order to complete the work associated with a project.
   c. The grantee shall have the demonstrated ability to manage federal funds or provide a letter from its RPC confirming such grant technical assistance.
   d. The grantee or its RPC shall be the local project manager.

e. RPC technical assistance to projects funded through Better Connections will be reimbursed directly through the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI) program funds. The program does not fund RPC or municipal staff time.
f. Add a section on the roles of the steering committee.

Grant Administration and Monitoring Progress

1. Invoicing and Progress Reports
   a. Grantees are required to submit project invoices and progress reports on a quarterly basis, beginning upon execution of the grant agreement.
   b. Invoices and progress reports shall differentiate the period billed for, the grant agreement number, and the amount of grant funds requested and shall note local match funds utilized for that billing cycle.
   c. Progress reports shall be broken up by tasks and based on the final workplan.
   d. You are requested to submit invoices and progress reports together in one document. (Insert sample progress report / invoice template here.)
   e. Invoices must show that grantees have spent or obligated all grant funds and match funds, if applicable, no later than December 1, 2020. Funds that are unused as of December 1, 2020, as well as money spent on expenditures that are ineligible or have not been documented, must be returned to VTrans.
   f. While grant activities must be completed by December 1, 2020, grantees have until the end of that month to assemble the final report. The final close-out report and the project reports and files must be submitted via email no later than December31, 2020.
   g. The reimbursement is made when the project and its deliverables, as detailed in the Grant Agreement, are complete, and the expenditures are budgeted and documented (copies of invoices and canceled checks or a detailed transaction report), showing that the funds were spent for the purposes specified in the grant agreement.
2. Changes to Work Plan or Budget
   a. Minor alterations to the work plan or the approved budget may be allowed but only upon written request and approval from VTrans. Substantial alterations are not allowed and the final product must remain the same. Projects that cannot be completed within the grant period under the terms of the grant agreement are closed out. The grant will cover eligible work completed and documented costs. However, ineligible or undocumented costs will not be funded and associated funds must be returned.
   b. To request agency approval for changes, contact the BC program manager with a proposed amended work plan and budget. BC program managers will review the revised work plan and budget and will either approved your amendment, deny your amendment, or require modifications to your amendment.

3. Closing Out the Grant

a. Better Connections Program projects must be completed within 18 months from the award date. No time extensions are granted
b. Make certain all outstanding grant expenses have been incurred by insert date.
c. Provide a copy of all studies or other products developed with grant funds, making sure that all of the Grant Agreement requirements have been met.
d. Compile and submit the following financial documentation:
    - Summary ledger or similar document. Grant administrators must maintain financial records throughout the grant project, providing details of all grant-related financial transactions.
    - All receipts and invoices for grant expenditures showing that grant work was completed within the grant period, including any work covered by match funds.
    - Copies of cancelled checks OR a detailed transactions report, certified by the treasurer, including date, recipient, check number, and amount, showing that payments were made for all project expenses (including evidence of match payments, if applicable).
    - (Insert detailed instructions for submitting the final close-out documentation and requisition here.)
    - Final reports must be submitted electronically and in hard copy no later than 4:00 p.m. EST, December 31, 2020, to Jackie Cassino, VTrans Better Connections program manager.

Appendix E: Close-Out and Follow-Up Grant Surveys

Better Connections Grant Close-out Survey

Better Connections Grant Close Out

* 1. What town or community do you work with that received Better Connections funding?

* 2. In what year was your project plan finalized?

- ◯ 2015
- ◯ 2016
- ◯ 2017
- ◯ 2018
- ◯ 2019
- ◯ 2020

* 3. What percent of the recommendations in your plan have you implemented or begun to implement?

- ◯ Less than 10%
- ◯ 10-20%
- ◯ 21-30%
- ◯ 31-40%
- ◯ 41-50%
- ◯ 51-60%
- ◯ 61-70%
- ◯ 71-80%
- ◯ 81-90%
- ◯ 91-99%
- ◯ 100%

* 4. To what extent do you think your grant positioned you for implementing the plan?

- ◯ The Better Connection plan strongly positioned us for implementation
- ◯ The Better Connection plan somewhat positioned us for implementation
- ◯ The Better Connection plan could have done more to position us for implementation
- ◯ The Better Connection plan did nothing to position us for implementation

Comment

* 5. Have you applied for other funds to implement the plan that was developed through the Better Connections Program?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Comment

Better Connections Grant Close Out

Page 2

* 6. Approximately how many dollars in other funds did the Better Connections Program help you leverage?

* 7. Did your plan include new, or improvements to existing, non-motorized multi-modal transportation such as bike lanes, sidewalks, recreation paths and trails?

- Yes
- No

Better Connections Grant Close Out

Page 3

* 8. How many miles of non-motorized, multi-modal transportation (such as trails, sidewalks or bike lanes) have currently been improved or created?

* 9. Is your project steering committee continuing to meet to work on implementation and/or do you have staff time dedicated to working on implementation?

- Yes
- No

If there is dedicated staff time, how many hours per week?

* 10. Did your project plan increase access to physical activity (including ensuring bike/walk/transit connectivity, new or improved trail heads, wayfinding signage, boat launches, parks, bike lanes, bike racks, cross walks, or recreation paths; or new or improved safety enhancements such as lighting or traffic calming efforts)?

- Yes
- No

* 11. Did your project plan improve transportation safety through access management, (including decrease in existing curb cuts or curb cut width, increase of shared access or shared parking for new or existing developments, and/or increase in pedestrian and bicycle connections)?

- Yes
- No

* 12. Does your plan include improvements to municipal road drainage and/or erosion control measures?

- Yes
- No

* 13. What impact, direct or indirect, do you think the Better Connections grant has had on your town or community?

Better Connections Grant Follow-up Survey

Better Connections Grant Follow Up Surveys

* 1. What town or community do you work with that received Better Connections funding?

* 2. In what year was your project plan finalized?

- 2015
- 2016
- 2017
- 2018
- 2019
- 2020

* 3. Is your plan still viable/ in use?

- Yes
- No

If no, why not

Better Connections Grant Follow Up Surveys

Page 2

* 4. What percent of the recommendations in your plan have you implemented or begun to implement?

- Less than 10%
- 10-20%
- 21-30%
- 31-40%
- 41-50%
- 51-60%
- 61-70%
- 71-80%
- 81-90%
- 91-99%
- 100%

* 5. Have you applied for other funds to implement the plan that was developed through the Better Connections Program?

- Yes
- No

Comment

Better Connections Grant Follow Up Surveys

Page 3

* 6. Approximately how many dollars in other funds did the Better Connections Program help you leverage?

* 7. Did your plan include new, or improvements to existing, non-motorized, multi-modal transportation such as bike lanes, sidewalks, recreation paths and trails?

- Yes
- No

Better Connections Grant Follow Up Surveys

Page 4

* 8. To date, how many miles of roads has drainage been improved on?

* 9. What has been the net change in grand list values in the study area since the plan was finalized?

* 10. Did your project increase access to physical activity (including ensuring bike/walk/transit connectivity, new or improved trail heads, wayfinding signage, boat launches, parks, bike lanes, bike racks, cross walks, or recreation paths; or newor improved safety enhancements such as lighting or traffic-calming efforts)?

- Yes
- No

* 11. Does your plan include improvements to municipal road drainage and/or erosion control measures?

- Yes
- No

Better Connections Grant Follow Up Surveys

Page 5

* 12. To date, how many culverts have been replaced?

* 13. To date, how many miles of non-motorized, multi-modal transportation (such as trails, sidewalks or bike lanes) have been improved or created?

* 14. Have you been able to integrate your project, or a portion thereof, with another project that resulted in cost savings?

- Yes
- No

If so, what is your estimate of the savings?

* 15. Is your project steering committee continuing to meet to work on implementation and/or do you have staff time dedicated to working on implementation?

- Yes
- No

If there is dedicated staff time, how many hours per week?

* 16. Have you added capacity to the town through the hiring of an economic development professional?

- Yes
- No

Comment

17. What impact, direct or indirect, do you think the Better Connections grant has had on your town or community?