

Vermont Economic Justice Grant Program  
2017 Grant Recipients



**Center for an Agricultural Economy**

\$11,000

**Grow Your Own**

Hardwick

The Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE) is a nonprofit organization with a mission to engage the public in a regenerative, locally based, healthy food system through collaboration opportunities, educational outreach, providing infrastructure, and through assisting in hunger relief and local food access projects. The CAE acts to create opportunities and partnerships that allow for more local food to be grown and consumed locally. The CAE's programs range from a revolving loan fund for farmers and food producers, to community garden classes and networking, processing local agricultural products for schools and institutions, as well as working with food service directors to purchase and source more locally grown products. Continued funding was provided for the Grow Your Own program, a collaborative project of CAE, Hardwick Area Food Pantry, and NEK Kids on the Move, which works to find and developing new leaders for food justice in Hardwick. Specifically, GYO plans to train ten new leaders in various capacities: as garden mentors, workshop leaders, committee members, and volunteers helping neighbors build garden infrastructure. They will maintain the system already in place for the growing team of leaders and numbers of participants and continue to explore creative methods of connecting with potential local sponsors to boost sustainability. In addition, they will create a plan for community organizations around Vermont that wish to start their own similar project.

**Community Capital of Vermont**

\$15,000

**Serving the Underserved**

Barre

Community Capital of Vermont is a statewide small business and microenterprise lender serving low and moderate-income entrepreneurs through the provision of flexible capital. CCVT helps Vermonters create and retain jobs, build wealth, and enhance Vermont's downtowns and working landscape. Their borrowers are lower income entrepreneurs who plan to start, grow, or purchase a micro or small business in Vermont, but lack access to conventional financing. CCVT responds by providing responsive, respectful and personalized customer service, and offering highly flexible loan products. Some may consider CCVT a "lender of last resort" but they prefer "lender of first opportunity." This project "Serving the Underserved" will assist CCVT in funding the development of an outreach and marketing plan to better connect its much needed business services to underserved areas of the state.

**Greater Bennington Interfaith Community Services (GBICS)**

\$19,000

**Food Fit Bennington Healthy Food Champion**

Bennington

GBICS is a community-based, non-profit community organization that works with people who live in or near poverty in Bennington County, providing food assistance, financial assistance and medical care. Recognizing that moving up and out of poverty requires not just a stream of income but also a reservoir of personal and community assets, GBICS take actions in a way that treats others with genuine respect and in an equitable manner. They rely heavily on volunteers, many of whom are the people they serve. Funding was awarded to hire a 15 hour per week Health Food Champion for one year to help further develop Food Fit Bennington, a 12 week food, nutrition, cooking and exercise program for low income people that has been piloted in Bennington over the past year. Food Fit has

radically increased produce consumption and has increased physical activity among participants. It has also resulted in a strong sense of community among and between participants and a shared desire to make this experience available more broadly. A dedicated Champion will allow them to develop the use of the kitchen at their new facility; build an enhanced schedule of Food Fit courses; codify mentor training to allow graduates to mentor others; and increase outreach.

### **Mercy Connections**

\$20,000

#### **Women's Small Business Program Offerings**

Burlington

Mercy Connections nurtures self-sufficiency through education, mentoring, entrepreneurship and community. 350 adults attend a myriad of program offerings in three areas: the Education & Transition Program, Women's Small Business Program and the Justice & Mentoring Program. Many participants face formidable challenges. MC responds with research-based practices (differentiated instruction, gender-responsivity, multicultural sensitivity, trauma informed practices, etc.). Participants/students experience a welcoming learning community, re-frame their struggles, discover their talents, gain greater knowledge and move in new directions in their lives and communities. This grant will contribute to direct costs associated with the delivery of seven WSBP offerings within two areas: Financial Empowerment; and Entrepreneurship. These courses, workshops and coaching opportunities help women gain confidence and strategies to craft financial and business plans toward greater financial stability and entrepreneurial success and will empower graduates to: improve their financial well-being; move toward entrepreneurial self-employment; gain professional networks; and engage in planning opportunities that can result in increased income and new businesses and jobs in Vermont.

### **Public Assets Institute**

\$10,000

#### **General Support**

Montpelier

Public Assets Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that promotes sound state budget and tax policies that benefit all Vermonters and improve the wellbeing of ordinary citizens, especially the most vulnerable. Public Assets Institute conducts research and fiscal analysis, disseminates information, and develops and advances policies that state government can enact. In addition to their core state tax, budget, and economic work, they focus on three issue areas: education finance, health care finance, and family economic security. PAI are the Vermont member of the State Priorities Partnership, a national network of 42 state organizations—supported by the DC-based Center on Budget & Policy Priorities—that collaborate on state tax, budget, and economic work on behalf of low- and moderate-income people. PAI publishes reports, op-eds, blogs, and briefs that are clear and easy to read and connect historic trends and the complexities of government with the daily lives of Vermonters in school, work, families, and communities. General Operating Support was provided to allow them to maintain their capability to address threats to essential public services and the equitable distribution of resources, while improving the lives of Vermonters through fair and just economic and fiscal laws and practices.

### **Spectrum Youth & Family Services**

\$15,000

#### **Multicultural Youth Program (MYP)**

Burlington

Spectrum Youth and Family Services helps vulnerable youth transform their lives by addressing basic needs, supporting growth and development at times of transition, and preparing them for adult independence. Spectrum's comprehensive programs serve 1500 youth ages 14-26 and their families each year, supporting them amid housing failures, dropping out of school and returning, relapses, justice system involvement, and other u-turns as they develop the confidence, skills, and motivation to take on adult responsibilities. Funding was provided in support of the Multicultural Youth Program (MYP) which brings multicultural youth together as peers who can support each other, introduces them to community resources, and increases their visibility and voice within Spectrum and in the community-at-large. MYP's primary objectives are to support MYP youth to meet basic needs for

housing, education, employment, health, and community connections, in ways that ensure that every young person has the opportunities and preparation for adult independence.

### **The Seedlings Program**

\$15,000

#### **Seedlings Expansion Plan**

Bennington

Seedlings is a multi-year after-school program that serves children in poverty living in Bennington County beginning in 1st grade and continuing through the transition into middle school. As such the program makes a 6-7 year commitment to each child and their family. The program provides consistent programming to build academic and social skills, creativity and resiliency through one-on-one academic tutoring, enrichment activities, and mentoring. While the program works primarily with children, families of the children served are provided support and resources as appropriate. Through work with volunteers and the greater Bennington community, The Seedlings Program strives to build awareness and support around the issue of childhood poverty in Bennington. Funding was provided in support of a full-time director to assist in program expansion and sustainability as well as an AmeriCorps\* Vista for a second year. Next year's goal includes expansion of a new pod serving 6-8 additional students at a new school.

### **United Way of Lamoille County**

\$15,000

#### **New Foundations Transitional Housing Program**

Morrisville

Unlike most United Ways, The United Way of Lamoille County is not a traditional pass-thru funding agency. They are a direct service/community impact organization administering many of their own programs, including New Foundations(NF), the Lamoille Firewood Program, CARE (Citizens Assistance Registry for Emergencies), Shoveling for Seniors, HOPE (Holiday gift for local seniors), Prescription Discount Program, Teen Gift Card Program for Holidays, and a Community Food Drive. They also invest in community programs run by other agencies which meet their funding criteria. Funding was awarded in support of New Foundations (NF), an innovative, residential program designed to provide educational and employment opportunities to low-income, single parents in order to enable them to achieve higher wages to support their families. While in the NF program, participants receive a beautiful, furnished apartment for up to two (2) years while they work on furthering their education and gaining employment to their maximum potential. Participants receive all the supports necessary to prevent a cycle of poverty that can be passed on to the next generation.

### **Vermont Farmers Food Center**

\$10,000

#### **Community Integration Project**

Rutland

VFFC began as a grassroots, volunteer-led project and is spearheading the rebuilding of infrastructure necessary for agriculture to serve as a regional economic engine through the development of 2.93 acres of industrial-zoned land with four existing buildings in the heart of Downtown Rutland. VFFC increases access and availability of locally produced food through educational programs and markets necessary for the growth of a vibrant and sustainable regional agricultural system that has the capacity to feed its citizens regardless of economic status, increase the personal health of the population, and add to the economic wellbeing of the community. VFFC is the main initiative of the Vermont Farmers Market Education Center, Inc. Continued funding was provided in support of the Health Care Share (HCS) program, which provides year-round, free farm shares to those living in or on the edge of poverty. In addition to socio-economic need, HCS members are identified by primary care providers as at risk of or already suffering from, diet related health issues. Now in it's third year, VFFC HCS has expanded to include more memberships, offer enhanced cultural and relationship building opportunities, on-site training, and year-round support. Operating within the VFFC facility, located in a refurbished industrial space in the heart of Rutland City, the HCS supports emerging farmers, the health and dignity of the vulnerable citizens, and the reclamation of Rutland neighborhoods.

**Vermont Workers' Center - Jobs With Justice, Inc.**

\$20,000

**General Support**

Burlington

The VWC is a democratic, member-run organization committed to taking action on the full range of issues of concern to people most impacted by economic and social injustice. They seek an economically just and democratic Vermont in which all residents can meet their human needs and enjoy their human rights, including dignified work, universal healthcare, housing, education, childcare, transportation and a healthy environment. VWC works to raise the voice of the marginalized and build a democratic, diverse movement of people by building strategic alliances, working with organized labor to strengthen workers' rights, and with other allied organizations in support of the human rights of all people. Continued funding was provided to support the VWC's work to organize and mobilize working families and low income people across Vermont for a more equitable and just society — to build power and voice across divides of race, class, and geography; resist corporate and federal attacks on the healthcare system and push for universal healthcare; stand in solidarity with immigrants and refugees; engage communities in grassroots organizing with a Human Rights framework; advance policies that help working families and communities; and develop anti-oppression leadership skills among the working class.

**Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform**

\$20,000

**Re-imagining Justice**

Burlington

Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform (VCJR) is an education and advocacy organization committed to transforming Vermont's criminal justice system into one that is more restorative and effective. Addressing systems issues like mass incarceration, hyper-incarceration, racial disparities, gender inequities, inadequate mental health and drug treatment services, and inadequate opportunities for education and rehabilitation, VCJR uses a range of grassroots strategies including political education, outreach, coalition building, leadership development (among directly affected individuals), and root-cause analysis. VCJR works to move toward an alternative criminal justice model that promotes healthy accountability, heals transgressions, and prevents crime. Continued general support funding was provided to support their work to reduce over incarceration among low income Vermonters, Vermonters of color, non-violent offenders, and Vermonters struggling to live with and overcome mental illness and addiction. VCJR will be highlighting how the opioid crisis in Vermont is both contributing to mass incarceration and hyper-incarceration and creating opportunities for positive change and shining a light on how current policies especially hurt incarcerated parents and their non-incarcerated partners and children.

**Voices for Vermont's Children**

\$10,000

**Getting to Thrive: Equity Matters**

Montpelier

Voices for Vermont's Children is the only independent, non-profit children's research and policy advocacy organization in Vermont. They focus their efforts on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and youth, recognizing that when all children thrive, families and communities thrive. Voices works to advance policies that support and protect Vermont children of all ages in such issues as health, child welfare, juvenile justice, public education, child care and child poverty by integrating quantitative and qualitative research with in-depth knowledge of Vermont's public sector and robust, inclusive coalition-building. Continued general support funding was awarded in support of their efforts to build an equity campaign which challenges the dominant political framing that balances the budget on the backs of the poor and replaces it with a narrative of needed investments in the future of the state. In the coming year they will work in coalition to advance paid family leave legislation, expand funding for low-income housing, shore up child nutrition programs, and demand educational equity.