

2021 Vermont Economic Justice Grant Recipients



Building Bright Futures

\$20,000

Early Childhood Regional Councils

Williston, VT

Building Bright Futures (BBF) is Vermont's early childhood public-private partnership established by law to monitor the state's early care, health and education systems and to advise the Administration and Legislature on policy and systems improvements. BBF operates as a backbone organization for collective impact at the state and local level by convening stakeholders and community members with a common goal of meeting the diverse needs of all Vermont children and families. Through its council network, Building Bright Futures serves thousands of children, their families, and communities across the state. The COVID pandemic has exposed the stark inequities and gaps in service that emerge when employment is suspended, child care closes, and family dynamics shift. The events of this past year have been intense and tested the strength of families, communities, and Vermont's Early Childhood (EC) system.

Building Bright Futures' (BBF) Early Childhood Regional Councils work to collectively identify gaps and improve equity in access to services and supports across early care, health, and education for young children and families in their communities throughout the state. BBF Regional Councils serve as a vehicle to elevate regional concerns and systems challenges related to equity and access in state policy discussions.

Center for an Agricultural Economy

\$20,000

Grassroots Organizing to Address Food Justice Issues in the Northeast Kingdom

Hardwick, VT

The Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE) works to engage the public in building 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, 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.

The Center for an Agricultural Economy's (CAE) Community Programs Team, in collaboration with area partners has an opportunity to shift focus from food access to food justice, thereby creating equitable opportunities for community members to access land, capital, and food through land access planning. In collaboration with Northeast Kingdom Organizing (NEKO), CAE will employ community organizing strategies in neighborhoods to empower them to identify food access challenges and work together to create solutions. CAE envisions a range of opportunities for people to access food by securing access to arable land. CAE is uniquely positioned to do this work because of the vast network of farmers, landowners, and community organizations with whom they work.

Green Mountain Farm-to-School, Inc.

\$20,000

Bringing Food Sovereignty, Access, and Education to Vermont’s Local Food Systems and Communities

Newport, VT

Green Mountain Farm to School (GMFTS) is a small nonprofit located in Newport whose mission is to strengthen local food systems in Vermont by promoting positive economic relationships, education, and access between schools, farms, and communities. GMFTS creates healthy communities by working across the food system with capacity building, resource development, and technical assistance through their interconnected programming including school gardens, the Farm-to-School Program, a local food hub, a free summer meal program for children, and a statewide marketing campaign. GMFTS partners with each community they serve to develop a comprehensive approach to improve access to healthy food and revitalize the local economy. Green Mountain Farm-to-School (GMFTS) is committed to improving farm viability, economic stability, food sovereignty, education and social justice in the Northeast Kingdom (NEK) - an area that historically struggles with systemic poverty due to its rural and isolated nature. GMFTS’ interconnected program areas work across the food system and community engaging farmers, educators, businesses, consumers, students, and individuals, in order to build sustainable local food systems that serve all members of the community regardless of race, class, gender, and ability - creating healthier outcomes both physically and economically for NEK residents.

Inclusive Arts Vermont

\$20,000

Start With The Arts

Essex Junction, VT

Inclusive Arts Vermont (IAV) is a statewide organization whose mission is to use the magic of the arts to engage the capabilities and enhance the confidence of children and adults with disabilities. IAV partners with community organizations of all kinds, in all regions of the state to engage thousands of participants in arts education, professional development, training, and exhibition programs. Start With The Arts (SWTA) is Inclusive Arts Vermont's award-winning program focused on improving the quality of early childhood education in Vermont. SWTA helps low-income childcare providers advance in skills, recognition, and access to increased subsidies. Children in SWTA gain literacy and creative learning strategies crucial to kindergarten readiness. In 2020 SWTA launched a virtual version to serve childcare providers unable to accept visitors due to the pandemic, and an offshoot for parents home with their children. In 2021 they will pilot a professional development series providing flexible options for those who want to further their learning, or those who cannot commit to the full SWTA model.

Lamoille Housing Partnership, Inc.

\$18,450

Housing Awareness and Education Outreach Program

Morrisville, VT

Lamoille Housing Partnership (LHP) develops, rehabilitates and maintains safe, decent, energy efficient affordable housing through rental, home ownership, or other means to low and moderate income persons and families living within Lamoille County and the Town of Hardwick. LHP provides such assistance without discrimination or prejudice using a combination of private and public funding partnerships. LHP supports families, members of the workforce, aging and disabled Vermonters, veterans and the formerly homeless with safe, affordable homes and apartments. Affordable housing is a collective issue – when all people regardless of income have access to safe, healthy, affordable housing, individuals have an equal shot at success and our communities thrive. Through community and Landlord engagement, the Housing Awareness and Education Outreach Program seeks to proactively address strategies and opportunities to reduce homelessness and evictions, eliminate stigma and NIMBYism surrounding housing insecurity and homelessness, address disparities between incomes and rents, and work with communities to ensure that affordable housing is an integral variable within community planning.

Main Street Alliance of Vermont

\$17,500

Equity Through Access - Main Street Alliance of Vermont

Burlington, VT

Main Street Alliance of Vermont (MSA-VT) is a non-profit statewide network of over 700 small business members that fights for policies that serve workers, families and healthy communities. MSA-VT envisions a society where businesses can thrive by ensuring that racial, social and economic justice and equity are at the center of policy objectives. The organization has successfully advocated and advanced reforms for Paid Sick Days, accommodations for pregnant workers, child care, automatic voter registration, and vote by mail and is actively working to support a permanent national paid family and medical leave program. Their core issues are universal paid family and medical leave, child care, and improved voting access, while recognizing the need for fundamental economic systems change. Funding will support MSA-VT as it connects and deepens relationships with business owners, particularly within BIPOC and historically marginalized communities, to understand and amplify their experiences in entrepreneurship, accessing technical assistance, business resources, and capital.

Migrant Justice

\$15,000

Economic Justice for Farmworkers

Burlington, VT

Migrant Justice is a Vermont-based human rights organization founded and led by immigrant farmworkers. Over the past 10 years, Migrant Justice has organized to take collective action, strengthening the community, building leadership, and winning groundbreaking victories. From state policy changes that advance immigrant rights, to national impact litigation, to the Milk with Dignity Program and its transformational impact on labor and housing conditions in the dairy industry, Migrant Justice is a force for human rights and economic justice. During the pandemic, the organization played a crucial role winning and distributing pandemic relief and supporting workers' health and well-being. Migrant Justice is now working to pivot out of the pandemic and resuming their full spectrum of community organizing activities in support of their twin campaigns for immigrant rights and work with dignity.

Milk with Dignity Standards Council Inc

\$15,000

Milk with Dignity Standards Council monitoring work

Burlington, VT

The Milk with Dignity Standards Council (MDSC) is an independent organization set up to implement, monitor and enforce the Milk with Dignity Program which was developed by farmworkers in order to realize a sustainable dairy industry that advances the human rights of farmworkers, the long-term interests of farmers, and the ethical supply chain concerns of consumers and retail food companies. The Program's unique problem-solving approach brings farmers and farmworkers together and ensures compliance with workers' human rights in participating dairy supply chains. MDSC accomplishes these goals through detailed annual farm audits that consist of thorough interviews with all farm employees and ownership or management, as well as review of payroll records and visual inspections of worker housing. They also operate a 24-hour worker support line. The Milk with Dignity Program is working to resolve systemic human rights abuses of a precarious workforce excluded from many labor protections. Since its launch, MDSC has educated workers about their rights and responsibilities, investigated and resolved over 20 complaints, and begun working collaboratively with farmworkers and farm owners to resolve workers' rights issues. Because of the MDSC's work, farmers have agreed to resolve problems ranging from sub-minimum wages, lack of essential personal protective equipment, extremely overcrowded housing, lack of smoke detectors, and others. The Milk with Dignity Program is working to resolve systemic human rights abuses of a precarious workforce excluded from many labor protections.

Northwest Healthy Roots Collaborative

\$15,000

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St. Albans, VT

Housed at Northwest Regional Planning Commission, the Healthy Roots Collaborative is a collective impact partnership of community organizations addressing food access, education, and farm viability. The participating partners are Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation, Franklin and Grand Isle Community Action, South Hero Land Trust, Northwestern Medical Center, and the Abbey Group, along with a network of over 160 growers and makers. In an effort to ensure a resilient and equitable food system, the Collaborative connects farm and food businesses with new buyers and distribution options, increases the amount and variety of produce available at food shelves, meals sites, and health clinics, and provides on-farm learning opportunities for students and volunteers. The Northwest Healthy Roots Collaborative is the sole program across Franklin and Grand Isle Counties that is focused on increasing the overall economic and physical health of the community by creating lasting connections to the agriculture economy. They work to improve food access, provide local food education, and develop essential infrastructure and programs that support farm viability, all of which directly impact the health and wellness of our Northwest Vermont communities. Through strong partnerships they work with growers and makers to support viable and innovative food businesses, buyers to support local procurement, and eaters to improve equitable access to healthy, local food.

Rights & Democracy

\$20,000

Jobs, Justice, Climate: RDI Organizing for Economic Justice

Burlington, VT

Rights & Democracy (RAD) uses grassroots organizing strategies to engage people in the democratic process and create long-lasting change on the issues that affect everyday people. With allies from across sectors, RAD is uniquely positioned to move real change forward. Founded in 2016, the Rights & Democracy Institute (RDI) works across Vermont and New Hampshire to advance human rights and a healthy, just, and equitable future. Through grassroots organizing, transformative policy work, and supporting the development of a new generation of leaders from rural communities, particularly those that have been most impacted by harmful legislation, RDI is building power for a strong and inclusive multiracial democracy where everyone can thrive. RDI leadership development programs and issue-based campaigns encompass a range of organizational and movement-building work, including economic justice, workers' rights, racial justice, universal health care, climate justice, and child care access.

Rights & Democracy Institute (RDI) is the anchor organization of Vermont Renews, a statewide coalition launched in 2020, that is working to develop a legislative agenda and advocacy campaign to pave the way for a just transition to a regenerative economy in Vermont and to ensure that all Vermonters have jobs that pay a liveable wage, safe and affordable housing, access to healthy food; and clean air and water. In 2021, RDI will be base-building, organizing, leading issue education campaigns, and engaging in leadership development and recruitment particularly in communities most impacted by legacies of unjust policy, in order to build strong and widespread support for the VT Renews policy agenda at the local and state levels.

Rural Vermont

\$20,000

Building Collective Power to Uplift the Agrarian Communities that Connect Us All

Montpelier, VT

Rural Vermont is a statewide membership organization that educates, organizes and advocates for family farmers and supports their vital role in sustaining rural communities while creating a fair and resilient food system for everyone. Rural Vermont is dedicated to building communities that embrace regenerative agriculture and wise use of all resources in meeting the needs of people and the environment and believes that a just transition to regenerative agriculture is essential to ensure

economic viability for small-scale diversified farms in Vermont. Rural Vermont works to inform farmers, and the people they feed, about public policies that affect their lives and livelihoods and help empower them to participate effectively in the decision-making processes that create those policies and change them when necessary. Rural Vermont's organizing, education, and advocacy uplifts the voices of those impacted by agricultural policy. They prioritize addressing root causes and systemic inequities within the farm and food sector, and recognize that this work is measured by small gains that accumulate over many years. This year, Rural Vermont focuses on expanding their grassroots network and activist base, helping farmers navigate ag laws and regulations, collaboratively advocating and amplifying agrarian communities for improvements to policies at the state and national level, and moving closer to their goal of being an organizational model of anti-racism.

Special Needs Support Center of the Upper Valley

\$17,500

General Support

White River Junction, VT

Begun in 1979 as an informal parent support network the Special Needs Support Center has built a system of resources and programs that believes relationships are resources; honors the people they serve as experts, partners, and decision makers; supports resiliency in families; fosters knowledge sharing and collaboration; creates a culture of dignity, respect, and compassion; and embraces diversity as an essential component of community well-being. The Special Needs Support Center works to transform the culture of the Upper Valley community of Vermont by adopting, promoting, and supporting a disability lens into their work in the community. Programs include: Adult Services, Peer to Peer Connections, Art Lab – weekly open studio art program, Happenings – large group social activities, Book Club, Youth Services, Aspire – recreation program for children on the Autism Spectrum, and Parent Educational Support and Advocacy.

UP for Learning

\$12,500

Transforming Community Through Youth Voice, Youth-Adult Partnership & Restorative Justice Practices

Montpelier, VT

UP for Learning is a dynamic non-profit that supports educational systems and communities as they fully engage youth in reimagining and transforming education. UP provides coaching, facilitation, and training to youth-adult teams so that learning and leading are founded on equitable cross-generational relationships characterized by shared power, voice, and responsibility. UP for Learning advocates for policies to elevate student voice in learning and decision-making on the state and national levels. Continued and persistent disparities in discipline practices in Vermont, point to the critical need to implement whole school restorative approaches to create schools where all youth are known, valued, and welcome, regardless of race, abilities, identities, as equitable members of the community. This grant will enable UP to expand their restorative justice practices program beyond their current partners, contributing to a systemic culture change in schools across the state.

Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition

\$20,000

Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition-Capacity Building for Organizational Sustainability

Burlington, VT

The Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition (VAHC) is a statewide membership organization dedicated to ensuring that all Vermonters have safe, adequate, physically accessible and affordable housing, particularly the state's low and moderate-income residents, people with disabilities, the homeless, elders, and families with children. The Coalition's 80-plus organizational members represent most of Vermont's non-profit affordable housing developers, community land trusts, homeless shelters and service providers, housing authorities, resident associations, Community Action agencies, funders, regional planners, and housing, disability and tenant rights

advocates. Together, VAHC's members provide housing and services to tens of thousands of low-income Vermonters. VAHC encourages resident participation and control in their housing; advocates for preservation of existing housing, renter protection, and development of new perpetually-affordable housing; promotes recognition of housing as a basic right; and encourages use of innovative means to preserve and increase VT's affordable housing stock. In the past year, VAHC have finalized their first strategic plan and expanded the scope of their advocacy and organizing efforts. Funding was provided to support them through a major leadership transition and as they work to grow their capacity to hire and retain full-time staff, taking the Coalition to the next level and ensuring its sustained impact on housing policy that combats poverty in Vermont.

Vermont Workers' Center - Jobs With Justice, Inc. \$10,000

Building a Leader-Full Movement for Healthcare Justice

Burlington, VT

The Vermont Workers' Center (VWC) is a statewide member-led organization of low-income and working people with the shared goal of an economically just and democratic Vermont. VWC brings people together into organizing committees that carry out new organizing, campaign activities, political education, and group reflection. With organizing committees in six counties, VWC has approximately 200 active members who carry out the bulk of their activities - carpooling to public hearings, hosting workshops and meals, participating in group studies, and organizing rallies and marches. Their work is coordinated through statewide base-building and political education committees, as well as through the elected Coordinating Committee and volunteer Coordinators team. Through the Healthcare is a Human Right Campaign and leadership development programs, VWC is advancing the fight for universal healthcare and growing a leader-full movement to end poverty and systemic racism in the United States. Funding will enable them to expand their membership base, launch new coordination teams, and take full advantage of the political opportunity presented by the Task Force on Affordable, Accessible Healthcare established by the legislature this spring.

Vermont Works for Women \$20,000

Women's Employment & Career Services

Winooski, VT

Vermont Works for Women (VWW) is an economic justice non-profit with a mission to help women and girls recognize their potential and explore, pursue and excel in work that leads to economic independence. VWW's innovative approach promotes employment success through career exploration, work readiness, and specific sector-based skill development programs. In addition, VWW strives to implement systemic change by working with employers, policy makers, and collaborative partners to address the root causes of pay inequity, bust gender stereotypes, and expand access to financially viable jobs and careers so that all women and girls in Vermont have the opportunity to thrive. VWW offers programs statewide that are especially aimed toward women who have barriers to employment, and all girls, who benefit from early opportunities to think about who they are and who they want to become. Funding was provided in support of Women's Employment & Career Services. Through an effective research-based program model that includes customized one-to-one coaching, group learning, and volunteer mentor support, VWW is ensuring that Vermont women have the skills, confidence, and support needed to achieve financial stability for themselves and their families.

Women's Justice and Freedom Initiative, Inc. \$20,000

Women's Justice and Freedom Initiative

Burlington, VT

Women's Justice and Freedom Initiative (WJFI) was founded in 2020 and led by Vermont women directly impacted by incarceration. Using a racial and social justice lens, WJFI addresses the

inequitable systems and policies that disproportionately impact women, girls, and members of the LGBTQ+ community including but not limited to incarceration, child welfare, mental health/addiction, violence, and reproductive health. WJFI achieves its goals through several strategies including community organizing, public education, advocacy and direct service and works across issue areas to address the gaps in systems and services that are amplified by economic, racial, and social inequities. WJFI partners with other grassroots organizations, allies, policymakers and others who support their mission and goals.