



**Vermont
Council
on Rural
Development**

INITIAL RELEASE: 3/25/10

43 State Street • PO Box 1384 • Montpelier, VT 05601
802-223-6091 • info@vtrural.org • www.vtrural.org

\$2.5 million Stimulus Grant Launches *e-Vermont: the Community Broadband Project*

MONTPELIER, VT – A \$2.5 million federal Stimulus Grant from the federal Agency of Commerce, announced today, completes the funding to launch the \$3.8 million *e-Vermont Community Broadband Project*. This major campaign to stimulate broadband use will help rural Vermont towns take full advantage of the Internet and advance a wide variety of local needs including economic development, school innovation, job creation, downtown marketing, community engagement, and e-commerce. Two dozen communities statewide will be selected to work with the new *e-Vermont* Partnership in a comprehensive effort combining online services, training, access, awareness, and planning.

The “*e-Vermont* Partnership” will be led by the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) over the next two years. VCRD is a non-profit organization dedicated to the support of the locally-defined progress of Vermont's rural communities. Additional support for this project came from Vermont philanthropists and corporate associates.

By reaching the bedrocks of Vermont communities—schools, businesses, municipal government, libraries, health and social services groups—the *e-Vermont* Project will drive the benefits of the digital age to parts of the state that have been left behind, both economically and in digital culture, and are just now getting broadband services.

In addition to VCRD, the *e-Vermont* Partnership is made up of the Vermont State Colleges, the State Department of Libraries, the VT Department of Public Service, Vermont Small Business Development Center, the Snelling Center for Government, Front Porch Forum and Digital Wish. Their application has been financially supported by the Evslin Family Foundation, Vermont Community Foundation, the Jan and David Blittersdorf Foundation, UVM's Center for Rural Studies, the Vermont Rural Partnership and by donated services and equipment from Dell, Microsoft, and Comcast.

“The federal stimulus money provides a tremendous opportunity for Vermonters to ensure that our communities take full advantage of broadband technology, including advancing the bottom line of our businesses,” said VCRD Executive Director Paul Costello.

Vermont's congressional delegates have been strong supporters of the *e-Vermont* concept. Senator Leahy pointed out: "The impact of *e-Vermont* will yield both short-term and long-term community development benefits, creating new jobs, educating children and using technology to improve Vermonters' lives."

e-Vermont Partners worked closely with Vermont's stimulus office through the application process. According to Governor Douglas, "This effort is a key part of the SmartVermont strategy. In order to reach our goals in e-Education, e-Health, e-government, and e-Energy, we

need to remove all obstacles to Internet use for Vermonters. Even when the problem of access is solved, other challenges like lack of equipment and training remain.”

e-Vermont will help municipal, school, community and business groups in rural Vermont towns design and implement ways to expand the use of digital tools and resources to serve a wide variety of local needs including downtown marketing, community engagement, business development, and school innovation. Local committees in these towns will work with VCRD staff to customize a two year plan from a menu of *e-Vermont* programs and services such as:

- e-government - training and consultation on podcasting, on-line meetings, community scheduling, website development
- Front Porch Forums that link neighbors to each other and to local services
- Computers and training for libraries and senior centers
- Free Netbook computers for 4-5th graders and extensive teacher training to imbed technology in the curriculum
- Specialized classes ranging from basic computer literacy to advanced applications to meet the range of community and business needs
- e-commerce classes and one-to-one counseling for local businesses
- Building community calendars, business directories, buy-local maps, arts and crafts tours, sports schedules, ride shares, and a variety of new locally-driven digital applications
- Expanding on-line computer health information and opportunities
- Expanding the use of web-based tools to facilitate community engagement and advance locally-designed initiatives

The *e-Vermont* project will learn from each of the selected towns and share these best practices in the uses of digital tools through symposia and conferences statewide.

Contact VCRD at 802-223-6091 or by email at eVermont@vtrural.org. Updates on *e-Vermont* will be posted at www.vtrural.org.