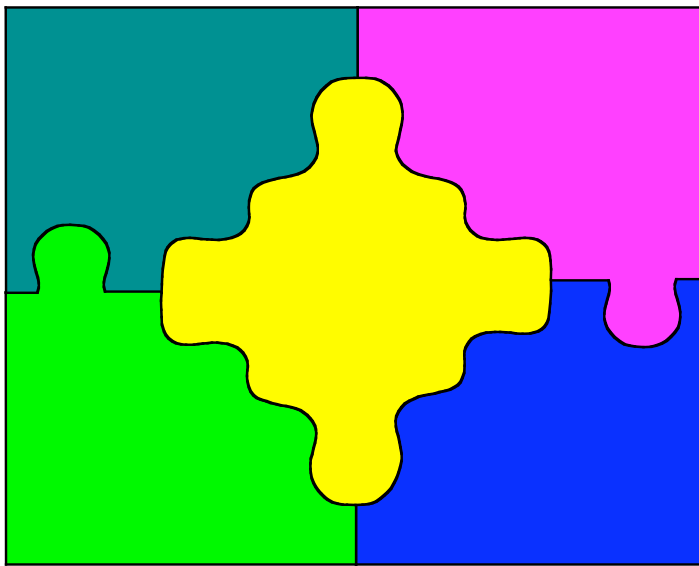


NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES
PROJECT:

ONE YEAR LATER ASSESSMENT

April, 1999



*There are three kinds of people:
People who make things happen;
People who watch things happen; and
People who keep asking what is happening.*

[Steve Knox, President of the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council]

For:

The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation

By:

Elizabeth Kline

Tufts University, Global Development And Environment Institute

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PROJECT
**ONE YEAR LATER ASSESSMENT
AND MORE LESSONS LEARNED¹**

By Elizabeth Kline
April, 1999

Overview

Approximately a year ago, an unusual partnership linking the Ford Foundation, the three statewide community foundations in New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont, and six “chosen” communities officially ended. This assessment responds to the basic question, What happened to the communities and the community foundations since then?

In asking and publicizing answers to this question, Tom Deans, Vice President of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation continues the practical learning from the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project. Two previous assessments were conducted and lessons learned are described through community stories, community progress charts, and analyses.²

The Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project was designed in early 1993 as an experiment in learning. While many people in the United States were engaged in conflicts over jobs versus the environment, this project was launched with the intent to explore “new ways to balance economic development and revitalization with the need for environmental and natural resources protection”³. The Ford Foundation, through its environment and development program, recognized that “real solutions to environmental problems had to be developed in the communities grappling with these conflicts” (Maughan, p. 2).

One of the key lessons learned from the six rural communities in Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire was that “projects and processes designed to enhance environmental protection or build constituency for environmental goals are often best approached through the broader lens of community sustainability” (Maughan, p. 10).

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOTS

Each of the three community foundations chose two projects within their states based on their values, interests, contacts, and experiences. More detailed community stories can be found in the 1996 assessment report and a comparison of progress can be viewed by looking at the time charts from mid 1993 when the Northern New England

¹ Key findings and lessons learned are printed in bold type.

² “Northern New England Sustainable Communities Implementation Project: An Evaluation (January, 1996) and “Northern New England Sustainable Communities Implement Project: Lessons Learned (October, 1997). Both reports, by Elizabeth Kline, are available from the NH Charitable Foundation in Concord, NH for \$5.00 a copy (Telephone: 603/227-6641 extension 252; email: sam@nhcf.org).

³ “The Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project: A Review” was prepared by Janet Maughan in January, 1998 (p. 1).

Sustainable Communities Project began, and mid 1997 when the four year assessment was completed.

What follows are brief synopses highlighting what has happened over the past year in each community.

COBSCOOK BAY, MAINE

Description

Approximately 6,800 people live in communities that circle Maine's Cobscook Bay, with some towns as small as 355 people. Located in Washington County, the eastern most spot in continental United States, this region is comprised of nine municipalities (Eastport, Perry, Pembroke, Dennysville, Edmunds, Whiting, Trescott, and Lubec, and the Passamaquoddy Nation Reservation at Pleasant Point). Two miles of Cobscook Bay separate Eastport and Lubec. They have a long history of economic dependence on natural resources. Today, salmon aquaculture, fishing, and sea urchin harvesting are significant sources of income. The largest employers, however, are in public service fields and light manufacturing.

The Maine Community Foundation chose this region because of the Bay's rich biodiversity, the importance of environmental protection and management to residents' heritage and economic well being, and the presence of two community leaders.

Past Year's Results

Maine Community Foundation's investment in leadership and community capacity building continues to pay off. Both leaders nurtured during the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project are infusing the philosophy of sustainability and natural resources/community-based economic development into their work. Their organizations are expanding in scope, level of effort, and effectiveness.

Will Hopkins' Cobscook Bay Clam Restoration Project is transitioning into the Cobscook Bay Resource Center with rental office space, an assistant director, a board of directors, non-profit status (pending), and a broader agenda beyond clams. The home office start-up is converting into a small, regional enterprise. Its objectives still focus on improving the health of Cobscook Bay, increasing the productivity of fisheries, creating a regional approach, and increasing education and training in resource conservation.

Dianne Tilton, through Washington County's Sunrise County Economic Council, is involved in local projects such as helping Eastport replace the loss of the Guilford textile facility (and its 70 jobs) with three small-scale industries that will produce 180-200 jobs, use environmentally-sound practices, and be owned in part by the Passamaquoddy Tribe. She credits the Washington County Leadership Institute and the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project for educating her, Eastport's city manager, and others about the value of cottage industries as more appropriate economic engines for rural communities than single, large-scale businesses or industries. She is also involved in county-wide projects such as helping the 150 people who have crab meat processing jobs out of their homes get funds to meet new costly regulatory requirements. During this year, Dianne Tilton has been exporting the "Cobscook model" (her words to describe the community-based process and the links between economic development and environment) elsewhere in Washington County.

Some Cobscook Bay projects described in the 1997 assessment report are on hold. The ferry between Eastport and Lubec was slated to receive federal funds but circumstances changed and funding is uncertain. The McCurdy Museum project in Lubec has been rejected four times for funding under three different programs perhaps because its multiple purposes do not fit into one of the designated program funding categories. **These are but two examples of the difficulty people face getting financial support for projects which do not reflect traditional approaches and do not fit single-purpose grant or loan program requirements.**

Contacts

Dianne Tilton
Sunrise County Economic Council
63 Main Street
Machias, ME 04691
(207) 255-0983
dianne_scec@nemaine.com

Will Hopkins
4 Favor Street
Eastport, ME 04631
(207) 853-6607
wilhopkins@nemaine.com

HARDWICK, VERMONT

Description

This rural town of 2,500 to 3,000 people, located in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, is the market “hub” for the surrounding area. The region relies on forest products, agriculture, and tourism. Hardwick’s Main Street hit a low point in the winter of 1992 when three buildings in the center of town burned to the ground. The community had already been faced with economic hardship when the once thriving granite industry closed down decades earlier. Many residents travel considerable distances for work. When the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project began in 1993 the challenge was how to revitalize Main Street, retain its “sense of place”, and create economic opportunities that correspond with a natural resources-based economy.

An informal group, the Hardwick Business Group, was created in 1994 by a group of local businesspeople (primarily women). They focused on marketing and promoting businesses primarily on Main Street. A few years later, most of the once-vacant storefronts in Hardwick were rented and the group’s efforts expanded to support businesses in nearby towns. In 1997, the group became an official program within the Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce (an eight town regional organization).

Past Year's Results

Memberships continued to increase (now at 75 members), with the bulk of the memberships and active participation coming from Main Street Hardwick businesspeople. The part-time staff person tried to balance the dual interests that compete for her time and the organization's attention – to support Hardwick businesses as well as to market and promote the greater Hardwick region. The Chamber's approach is to link with other groups, such as the Economic Development Committee recently formed by Hardwick's town manager, and to broaden the Chamber's appeal through activities such as the regional snow mobile brochure and an inventory of 400 businesses in the eight town region.

Overall, economic conditions have improved; storefront vacancies on Main Street are due primarily to personal reasons rather than to an adverse economic climate. The Chamber will continue to invest in major projects such as the annual Crafts Fair. However, like many of the community-based organizations, they are taking time to figure out which new projects to work on. Since the region relies "heavily on outdoors for tourism", they want to enrich this asset by collaborating with others on projects such as creating a bicycle path along the river running through Hardwick.

Contact

Marilyn Rogerson
 Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce
 P.O. Box 111
 Hardwick, VT 05843
 (802) 472-5906

MT. WASHINGTON VALLEY ECONOMIC COUNCIL, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Description

The Mt. Washington Valley region is a popular tourist destination in northern New Hampshire. This region is located two and one-half hours north of Boston and consists of twelve towns, including two in Maine (Albany, Barlett, Brownfield, Chatham, Eaton, Freedom, Fryeburg, Jackson, Madison, Ossipee, and Tamworth. The area's population is approximately 35,000 people. The median age is 37 and the median household income is \$28,100. The booming economy has created economic opportunities and expanded incomes for many residents and newcomers; but there are still significant pockets of poverty.

The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation chose the Mt. Washington Valley region for a number of reasons. Surrounded by the 750,000 acre White Mountain National Forest, the valley's tourist economy and quality of life is dependent on its natural resources. Yet, the growing number of retail shops and name-brand factory outlets draws many day visitors creating traffic congestion as well as offering potential opportunities to keep more dollars within the region. Recent advances in computer and telecommunications technology enable more people to live and work in the valley region.

Another key ingredient of this region is the existence of an organization called the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council which was established in 1991. Tom Deans,

Vice President of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation is a resident of the valley and an active board member of this organization. He saw the advantages of investing in an existing organization and knew that its participants connect economic improvements with natural resources protection and management, and with strong community life.

Past Year's Results

This past year we “kind of grew up”, according to executive director Margaret Howlett. The organization evolved over the past five years from a traditional economic development organization into one whose mission is “economic opportunities” and values the links between economic development, environment, and quality of life. Business outreach programs such as “Eggs and Issues” and “Bits and Bites” are flourishing and funds for the Council’s revolving loan program are accumulating and being distributed to small businesses in the region.

Circumstances, including a change in top leadership with Vice President Steve Knox taking over for long-time president Dave Sorensen, over-reliance on a paid full-time staff executive director, obligations to produce certain kinds of jobs tied to a federal capacity grant, a proliferation of many programs, and experiences over the past eight years, are leading the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council into a new cycle of soul-searching and long-range strategic thinking and planning. They are asking, Where is our focus? What do people want now? What don’t they want to lose?

With a booming economy, skilled workers are scarce. Yet, the Stitchers Project, once touted, failed for lack of people willing to be trained and perform this kind of full-time work. The MWVEC wants to understand better what lifestyles and job options workers seek in a rural economy. Perhaps, multiple low-paying seasonal jobs may be preferable to some people in certain circumstances to full-time employment.

Contacts

Margaret Howlett
Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council
P.O. Box 1066
Conway, NH 03818
(603) 447-6622
mwvec@landmark.net.net

NORTHEAST STEWARDSHIP PROJECT, VERMONT

Description

The Vermont Community Foundation chose Concord in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont initially to support an innovative, but beleaguered, Natural Resources Program at the Concord High School. It was also selected to help build interest and support for sustainable forestry in an area where many people’s lives are linked to forestry and where there had been substantial clear cutting. Concord, a regional hub, has a population of approximately 1,500 people and is located in South Essex County, which has approximately 6,000 people and is the least populated county in the state.

Past Year's Results

By mid 1997 the Concord High School's Natural Resources Program was stable and had public support. Jim Wood, a local forester and the most active volunteer board member, became the part-time staff person. Educational workshops and training sessions for loggers and foresters gained the fledging organization, re-named the Northeast Stewardship Project, some credibility and a good mailing list.

In this past year, the organization continued to support the high school program, but its primary focus is exploring the feasibility of a regional natural resources center. A federal sustainable development grant is paying for that study, anticipated for completion by the summer of 1999. The group decided to channel all of its efforts towards this evolving concept of a center. For example, they agreed to take over the Logger Certification Program and to seek funds to conduct training courses since these forestry training and educational activities can become key components of a center. The board of directors worked hard for six months to determine the core direction for the center.

After struggling for a number of years to form an organization and decide on a course of action, this group is now led by a more seasoned staff leader and is promoting its agenda rather than chasing after grant dollars. It is in the process of moving to new office space, large enough to support Jim Wood, a new project director, and interns.

The Concord High School's Natural Resources Program continues under the leadership of John Irwin, but its scope is on forestry. The marine science aspect could not be sustained when Tom Smith left the position of science teacher and co-director of the Natural Resources Program. The School Board tried, but was unsuccessful in finding a replacement who had similar interests and expertise.

Contact

Jim Wood
 Northeast Stewardship Project
 P.O. Box 374
 Concord, VT 05824
 (802) 695-1006
nespc@connriver.net

STA-NORTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Description

The Sta-North region of northwestern New Hampshire is comprised of approximately 4,000 people from the village of Groveton in the town of Northumberland and the towns of Stark and Stratford. Groveton/Northumberland is the largest at 2,500; Stratford is next with 950; and Stark is the smallest town with 500 people. These townships are located within Coos County that has the slowest increase in population and employment of the ten New Hampshire counties since 1920. The name reflects the desire of some people to entice new residents and visitors to travel north, beyond the southern tier of NH communities and destination places.

The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation chose this region because of its forest-based economy, its concerns in early 1993 with the potential closing of the major employer, a mill, and because of the presence of a citizens organization called Sta-North established to deal with this crisis. The Wausau Paper Company purchased the mill and the crisis abated. Still, the dependency mindset of many townspeople remains, making it difficult to organize and get support for new ideas and projects.

Past Year's Results

At the end of 1997, the fragility of Sta-North was evident. Leaders who had invested countless volunteer hours in meetings, projects, and organizational support were burned out and ready to leave. The bottling plant project proved not feasible. The Crafters and Flea Market had declining numbers of sellers.

All was not bleak, however. The towns continued to approve funds for Sta-North at their annual town meetings. The office space donated by Berlin Bank in Groveton was still available. One of the tents purchased by Sta-North for the Crafters Market was donated for a base camp to a boys and girls forestry group. Even the withdrawal of the key leadership team provided an opportunity for others to step forward.

Moreover, the commitment of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation did not wane. Having selected Sta-North in 1992 and invested staff time and technical assistance for five years, the foundation felt an on-going responsibility. NHCF Vice President's perceived commitment to Sta-North is a critical impetus to community participants in revitalizing their region and group.

However, this time, the response was different. The Quebec Labrador Foundation/Atlantic Center for the Environment decided to hire a person who plays the same kind of mentoring/nurturing role that Eddie Gale offered to the two Vermont sustainable community projects. Marcy Lyman, according to past-president Becky Newton, is "our best asset. She is a professional meeting-goer – talking, chatting, and bringing the information back to us... Funny that it took an outsider to connect us." Marcy Lyman describes her function as "being an intermediary between local people's issues and the outside world".

The results to date are not dramatic, but are promising. There is new blood with political ties. Sta-North's Secretary-Treasurer, who began her involvement with the organization approximately a year ago as president, was recently elected as Groveton's Town Clerk and Tax Collector. Another former board member won a seat on the Board of Selectmen. Through Sta-North's persistence, they were invited to participate in recruiting local people for jobs at a new prison in nearby Berlin. With Marcy Lyman's strategic guidance, the board decided to become an "umbrella organization" and offer small grants for community projects rather than take on its own ones. From previous lessons learned, this shift bodes well for Sta-North's value and credibility.

Community capacity is slowly evolving. The kind of long-term pledged commitment by NHCF and the valued resources provided an "outsider" who spends a lot of time in the region are measures which were found to work in Vermont's two projects. A key reason for this level of support is that NHCF's agenda dovetails with Sta-North's needs. The foundation is interested in developing leadership capacity in the

North Country. After some discussions, they decided to invest in existing organizations rather than start a new entity.

Contacts

Sta-North Office
P.O. Box 11
Groveton, NH 03582
(603) 636-2400

Marcy Lyman
415 North River Road
Manchester, NH 03104
(603) 647-8081
lymanma@aol.com

WESTERN MOUNTAINS ALLIANCE, MAINE

Description

The western Maine mountains region consists of small typically New England towns with rolling hills, working farms, lakes, fertile river valleys, and forests. Forestry, agriculture, outdoor recreation, and light manufacturing are the key economic activities. This large region is 12,020 square miles or almost 38% of the state. It comprises four counties: Oxford, Franklin, Somerset, and Piscataquis. All of Maine's 50 highest mountains are in this region. The estimated 152,440 people living here in 1994 is a little more than 12% of the state's population.

The Maine Community Foundation selected the greater Farmington region because of its natural resources dependent economy, the existence of the Western Mountains Alliance (a regional citizen organization dedicated to building community), and the presence of several effective community leaders.

Past Year's Results

Sustain Western Maine, the project created for the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project, merged smoothly with its parent body, the Western Mountains Alliance. A party was held in the fall of 1998 to bring together people who participated in the four year Sustain Western Maine project. SWM's Steering Committee was disbanded. Many of the same people were involved in both organizations and most remain in their key positions as staff, officers, and board members of the Alliance. For the first time, a representative from each of the four counties serves on the board.

The donated office space at the University of Maine in Farmington has expanded to support the Franklin Careers Welfare-to-Work project person, but is cramped for the expanding Mountain Counties Program (dealing with cultural and community heritage).

As projects expand, especially through partnerships and collaborations (the hallmark of the Western Mountains Alliance's community building approach), the organization's visibility and political utility increase. WMA now is able to charge a

fee for service (e.g. for the Rural Schools for Equity project). Corporate memberships have doubled over the past couple of years. Long-time staff person Debbie Burd is asked to help set up new organizations (e.g., Piscataquis County Economic Development Council). She promotes the Alliances' mission through a number of appointed positions, including serving as vice chair of the Maine Rural Development Council which advises the sub-cabinet in state government on all rural issues.

In the past year, WMA has consciously become more involved in projects beyond Franklin County. Its ability to work simultaneously on many projects in many places is due to its chosen role in informing, enhancing, facilitating, and partnering rather than investing intensively in managing projects.

Contact

Debbie Burd
Western Mountains Alliance
P.O. Box 29
Farmington, ME 04938
(207) 778-7272
dmburd@saturn.caps.maine.edu

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

With the official closure of the Ford Foundation project, the focus for the three community foundations shifted from oversight to internal management. "There is a good feeling and bond formed [from the four year collaboration] but we are all so busy working on our own agendas... One of the sad things is that the working partnership among the three community foundations has drifted away... There are still back channel conversations" (Tom Deans). A project dealing with the northern forestlands is taking shape and may be the impetus for another collaboration.

Part of the stress on the community foundations to emphasize internal management is their tremendous recent growth. For example, the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation doubled in size in both funds and staff over the past three years. The Vermont Community Foundation's endowment is growing at 30 percent per year.

Still, **the community foundations have absorbed lessons learned from the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project.** Marion Kane, President of the Maine Community Foundation, cites many examples to illustrate her belief that "a big piece of the Maine Community Foundation is in capturing lessons learned". For example, last year grantees, staff, and MCF board members were brought together in "learning institutes" to share experiences and insights. In another example, the job description of a MCF staff person replacing a woman who worked closely with community people in Cobscook Bay included working with rural development people. Additionally, grant guidelines have been revised.

Tom Deans, Vice President of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and President of the Northern New Hampshire Foundation, states that his intense participation was a "laboratory" for him to test ideas and get to understand community realities. He has applied that experience in both foundations. For example, the Northern New Hampshire Community Foundation agreed that broad-based community building groups are "important to us". Instead of funding the establishment of a new entity to create leaders in

the North Country, they decided instead to support existing leaders and groups such as Steve Knox and the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council. This choice is a departure for many foundations and reflects the perceived success of the pilot projects supported by the Northern New England Sustainable Community Project. Typically, traditional environmental organizations have received foundation funds for this kind of initiative.

Although the Vermont Community Foundation no longer employs Eddie Gale, President David Rahr wants to use the “friendly schemer”, hands-on mentor model in other projects. Meanwhile, Eddie Gale has parlayed his experience with the two Vermont projects into consulting work.

Contacts

Tom Deans
New Hampshire Charitable Foundation
37 Pleasant Street
Concord, NH 03301
(603) 225-6641
sam@nhcf.org

Marion Kane
Maine Community Foundation
P.O. Box 148
Ellsworth, ME 04605
(207) 667-9735
info@mainecf.org

Eddie Gale
P.O. Box 406
Hardwick, VT 05845
Eddiegale@mt-mansfield.com

PROJECT ANALYSIS: ONE YEAR LATER/LESSONS LEARNED

Summary Overview

One year is not a lot of time given the lengthy, slow, evolutionary process of building communities and changing people’s mindsets. From a distance and a five-year perspective, it appears that all six communities are basically in the same phase of community building as they were in the end of 1997. Some, such as the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council in New Hampshire and the Western Mountains Alliance in Maine, are broadening their partnerships, deepening their sense of regional identity, and gaining more public visibility and credibility. Others, such as Sta-North in New Hampshire and Hardwick, Vermont, are continuing to search for an appropriate niche in their communities and to extend their outreach.

Many of the same people are still involved – on committees, boards of director, and as staff. Jim Wood (Northeast Stewardship Project, Vermont), Marilyn Rogerson (Hardwick, Vermont), Will Hopkins and Dianne Tilton (Cobscook Bay, Maine), Margaret Howlett (Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council, New Hampshire) continue to serve as project leaders. Steve Knox moved from Vice President to President of the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council. Sustain Western Maine has been absorbed by its parent body, the Western Mountains Alliance, but Debbie Burd continues as the staff person. Sta-North has changed the most with the involvement of Marcy Lyman (a consultant, community organizer) and the active engagement of several new participants including Becky Newton (town employee) and Sandy Boitan.

The availability of the Ford Foundation grants and the community foundations' support did not cease at the end of 1997. In fact, some of the communities are still using leftover Ford Foundation dollars and all are leveraging their grants and connection to the foundations to get additional grants, municipal contributions, and/or in-kind offers. For example, Sta-North will use this money to hire two part-time staff people, having chosen not to have a paid person for the past year while they re-grouped. All communities have resisted the urge to chase after dollars, preferring to chart their own courses and let the funding and staff capacity flow from those priorities.

Basic lessons learned from the previous assessments are reinforced even more strongly over the past year. *Community capacity* – personal relationships, effective leaders, focused organizations, and community-based projects – is the precursor to improvements in people's lives and natural resources protection and management. This capacity comes from hard work building trusted relationships, establishing networks, listening to people, and responding to their needs and priorities. Sta-North is putting this notion into practice and already gaining greater community support by working with the Boy Scouts, the Fireman's Association, and local beautification committees.

There is no quick fix and, at times, it seems as if change comes in cycles rather than continuous progress. An important person gets burned out, transfers out of state, or is diverted to other personal concerns. The impacts in small communities by the loss of one key person or a few active people can be devastating. But, over time, new people emerge and join in. These six communities have shown that there is both resilience and a "cause" (i.e. sustainable community), which propel and support incremental changes.

A closer viewpoint reveals how much each of the communities has changed during this past year. Sta-North, New Hampshire has a spark of renewal with new leadership and a new priority based on adding value (through small grants) to existing community projects rather than on promoting their own ideas. Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council is going through a new cycle of strategic thinking having accomplished many of its project objectives, having matured more as a regional entity, and having discovered that times have changed from five years ago. The Northeast Stewardship Project and the Cobscook Bay Resource Center are building on past activities, support for natural resources-based economies, and their leadership skills to evolve into larger-scale enterprises. The Western Mountains Alliance has expanded its reach through projects in counties outside of the greater Farmington region. The Hardwick Business Group has become a viable component

of the Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce and has representation on the newly established Economic Development Committee that is focused on Hardwick, but recognizes its impacts on surrounding towns.

This One Year Later Assessment analyzes four topics: Funding, Institutional Stability, Community Capacity, and Community Results. Lessons learned are described and illustrated with examples from the six communities.

Funding

Operating Expenses

One of the major findings described in the October, 1997 project assessment concerns the importance of staff. “Having part-time staff is an essential building block for continuing the sustainable community projects. There remains a critical need for staff operating funds. Project support is not a substitute for on-going staffing of an organization which is responsible for many projects” (page19).

The practical reality is that each of the six communities is struggling to piece together sufficient funding to pay even part-time staff. Most foundations support projects, but not general operating costs and the few that do have a limited time period of a couple of years. Memberships, except for the Hardwick, Vermont project, do not cover staff expenses. Revenue-generating operations may be a solution for several of the communities in the longer term, but are not feasible now.

Operating needs are relatively modest, but still difficult to raise. For example, the Greater Hardwick, Vermont Chamber of Commerce pays Marilyn Rogerson for only 13 hours per week. She used to work 20 hours per week, but the number was reduced when the informal Hardwick Business Group merged with the Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber has to pay for benefits in addition to wages. These costs are now paid for with the remaining Ford Foundation grant funds and memberships from 75 businesses. Because the grant money runs out on April 1st, Marilyn Rogerson’s immediate priority is to generate 25 new members by then. The Chamber raised \$1,000 from Hardwick, but failed at town meeting in a nearby town because the warrant article was improperly worded and there was no local supporter to explain the mistake (listed the organization as the Hardwick Chamber of Commerce instead of Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce).

Every task requires personal time and attention. Marilyn Rogerson’s 13 hours per week are insufficient to organize events, seek and service members, and represent the broader mission of community economic development. One consequence is that after she ended up not being paid for many “extra” hours working on a brochure, the Chamber adopted a policy to pay for all of her time. This policy means that she no longer solicits advertisements for the Craft Fair, a very time-consuming activity, and that the vendors’ rate was doubled to \$50 for two days. The lesson learned from this policy change is that she can prioritize her time without resulting in a loss to the community. In fact, the fall Crafts Fair is already booked at the new rates and the local newspaper picked up the advertisements.

Hardwick, Vermont is not the only one of the six communities that relies on leftover Ford Foundation grants for operating expenses. Sta-North, New Hampshire will use its

Ford monies saved from not having paid staff last year for two part-time staff people. **These community-based organizations continue to act in accordance with a 1996 finding that they prefer to treasure and leverage, rather than spend, the Ford Foundation grant funds.**

The Northeast Stewardship Project's frugality with its foundation funds allows the funds to last until June 1999. Jim Wood and his board are grateful since an approved \$30,000 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (sustainable development grant) took months longer to process than anticipated. **A lesson from this situation is that funders need to appreciate the critical timing requirements of very small, community-based organizations.**

Like many of the other community organizations, the Stewardship Project's longer-term strategy is to diversify its funding base. They are applying to foundations for administrative and program support before seeking large scale funds for the Natural Resources Center itself. In addition, they expect to receive federal funds from an Ice Storm Recovery program to conduct training courses which will help pay for staff time. The EPA grant will enable them to pay for a contractor as well as hire a part-time program coordinator.

The Western Mountains Alliance uses a variety of techniques to raise operating funds. Four years ago, there were no corporate sponsors. Now, between \$5-8,000 per year are generated from corporation donations. Geographically defined foundations, such as the Western Mountains Fund linked to the Maine Community Foundation, provide a small grant to the Alliance. A board policy adopted three years ago requires a 10 percent administrative fee for programs that are institutionally administered by the Alliance – such as the Mountain Counties Program. Still, all these sources do not provide a stable, secure base of operating support. Perhaps, foundations and government agencies need to accept the necessity of a long-term (5 years or more) investment in operating expenses for community-based organizations and can justify these funds as part of community capacity building. Since many evaluations, including the 1997 assessment of the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project, conclude that community capacity building is an essential precursor and foundation for community improvements, it makes sense to align grant programs accordingly.

Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council discovered one of the pitfalls of accepting outside funds for operating expenses. When its state funded capacity grant ran out in October 1998, MWVEC chose to accept an additional three year extension of the federal Community Development Block Grant. According to MWVEC people, the NH Office of State Planning was "very creative and imaginative" about how to distribute the funds to the MWVEC and are flexible about how to measure results. However, they are bound by HUD requirements that are so restrictive that the Council finds that it cannot count some of the jobs created because they do not fit the agency's rigid parameters. As a result, the sustainability criteria embedded in the Council's revolving loan program are being replaced by the need to create jobs, any jobs, which can meet the HUD criteria. **A lesson from this situation is the need for federal agencies to review and revise their program requirements to reflect their policy initiatives promoting sustainable development and sustainable communities.**

Meanwhile, the Council is diversifying its funding sources so that it will not be as dependent on a single source like the HUD grant. Membership fees have been

restructured based on the number of employees, with a minimum amount of \$25 per year and a maximum of \$1,000. Already \$16,000 have been collected this year, as compared with a total of \$4,000 last year. All 12 towns made financial contributions to the Council for a total of approximately \$10,000. Over the longer-term, the revolving loan program will produce sufficient interest to pay for some of the operating costs. At the moment, however, all interest raised has been reinvested in loans. The priority is to increase the total pool of loan funds. New contributions have recently come from the Bank of New Hampshire (\$7,500 per year for four years), Mt. Washington Valley Business Development Corporation (\$28,000 one time transfer of assets), and from the Rural Development Loan (\$50,000 grant).

Project Funding

Oftentimes, organizations chase after the money. Remarkably, these six community-based groups have kept their “eyes on the prize” and stayed the course, even during this year with no official foundation oversight and no funding restrictions. Jim Wood explained that his board is “careful not to be distracted because of limited staff time...although we are always looking for money for our own ideas”. He noted that the group chose not to accept funds to create a wood incubator project because a pre-feasibility study indicated to them that this project “wasn’t feasible at this time”.

In choosing which projects to encourage and invest in and which to resist, all of the communities have come to learn the value of tapping into community interests and finding “hooks” which provide momentum, resources, and legitimacy. Sta-North came to adopt this lesson over the past year. Some of their early projects relied on local school students and merchants (building three picnic tables), but most involved projects created by board members. Their success depended on convincing other people to join and help Sta-North implement tasks. This past year, Sta-North chose to redefine its role from project manager to supporter of other people’s projects. Board members identified Goals for the 1998-1999 program year and accepted individual responsibility for working with townspeople from the three communities on specific local and regional projects. For example, beautification committees were formed last year when the gas pipeline came through and changed the landscape. Sta-North will fund shade trees and work with committee members.

Finding appropriate “hooks” is not easy. Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council knew, from their Business Visitations, that they were responding to a need for skilled stitchers. However, after purchasing expensive stitching machines and partnering with business people and educators to develop and run several training sessions, they discovered that the women chose not to work in these jobs and that others did not want the training. Why? Steve Knox, President of the Council, speculates that they may prefer to have the flexibility and lifestyle of seasonal and multiple jobs. The lesson learned in this circumstance is the importance of knowing what people want versus presuming to know their needs and values.

Whatever the “hooks”, community-based organizations eventually need to work on projects. An early finding of the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project is that “Excitement, volunteer support, and progress comes from working together on specific projects” (1996 Assessment, p. 2). From a funding perspective, organizations need to be involved in tangible projects if they want

foundation or government support. For example, the Northeast Stewardship Project was able to capture a grant from the Sudbury Foundation to pay for equipment related to the Natural Resources Program in the Concord High School. They were also able to get an EPA sustainable development grant to conduct a feasibility study for the proposed Natural Resources Center. These are specific projects with defined tasks and outcomes.

Leveraged Financial Support

Over the past year, some of the communities have been successful in leveraging their Ford Foundation connections to get additional financial support. Jim Wood believes that the Northeast Stewardship Project was better positioned to receive the EPA grant because of its participation in the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project. “It definitely opened up some avenues for us”. He cites many examples of how he and his organization benefited: he learned how to write grant applications; he met and became comfortable with foundation staff and board members; they were identified and recognized by a large, reputable international foundation and statewide community foundations; and they had a track record.

From the first assessment dated January 1996 (p. 7) it was noted that “Foundation funds are used to leverage additional revenues”. Now, several years later the ripple effects are showing cumulative results. The initial Ford Foundation grant helped the Northeast Stewardship Project get a federal grant that, in turn, makes the organization more attractive to other foundations.

Will Hopkins believes that his Cobscook Bay projects gained “legitimacy” when he mentioned that they “came out of a Ford Foundation project”. Funders know the Ford Foundation and, therefore, any community project associated with that foundation benefits from the link. He has managed to get quite a number of grants from government agencies and foundations. Will believes that foundations themselves are “slowly coming around to fund linkages between the economy and environment or between economic development and education”.

Several more subtle lessons can be learned from this process. Individuals, such as Jim Wood, Eddie Gale, Debbie Burd, Dianne Tilton, and Will Hopkins are being introduced to and sought after by funders because they know them and their work. **These personal relationships, like in community building, have long term payoffs for everyone involved. A question for funders is how to take more advantage of them, as spokespeople from the community perspective?**

It is also true that two of the communities have chosen not to seek outside funding. The Hardwick, Vermont project is still focused primarily on the downtown of Hardwick and from there to nearby towns in the Greater Hardwick region and seeks funds from members rather than outside foundations or agencies. Although Sta-North relies on the potential of foundation support for operating expenses, people are now more concerned about getting support and recognition from their communities. Perhaps, they are in an early phase of community building where they need to develop a broader base and identity before they solicit outside project funds. Or, perhaps, they will choose to remain small-scale, behind-the-scenes type of community organizations that work with others on projects rather than take leadership positions.

Institutional Stability

Home Base

All six sustainable community projects exist a year after the official closure of the Ford Foundation project. This outcome is unusual for foundation-initiated projects. Sometimes, projects do not survive once the initial financial support has ended.

This finding can be explained by a number of possible reasons. **Neither money nor the Ford label was the driving force or motivation for any of these projects. Therefore, their longevity is due more to community people's interest and involvement than to outside resources. Another reason is that these projects were funded for four years not for only one or two, giving them time to build some capacity. Moreover, some foundation funds are still available to support minimal staffing. There is also a pioneer spirit that encourages people to persevere and not give up. Lastly, the New Hampshire and Maine Community Foundation partners and Eddie Gale (former Vermont Community Foundation staff person) remain interested and supportive.**

The home base varies. In three of the communities, the pre-existing organization remains as the home base: Sta-North, the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council, and the Northeast Stewardship Project. The latter group is moving to a new office down the street with more space. Two sustainable community groups merged with larger organizations: Sustain Western Maine folded into its parent body, the Western Mountains Alliance and the informal Hardwick Business Group joined the Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce. A new non-profit organization is being created for the Cobscook Bay Resource Center. Dianne Tilton continues to work out of the Sunrise County Economic Council in Machias, Maine.

Participants

All the communities, with the exception of Sta-North, have the same active participants as they did a year ago. Leadership changed in the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council when former Vice President Steve Knox replaced Dave Sorensen. Since they had worked together as partners the change is more related to personalities and style than to "new blood".

The board of the Northeast Stewardship Project did not change over last year. However, they have been discussing the need to diversify and get broader representation throughout the region as they evolve towards a regional Natural Resources Center. They also identified the need to have a logger and someone knowledgeable about accounting/banking on the board. All these decisions will be made after the completion of the feasibility study since it includes recommendations on board structure and composition.

The board of the Western Mountains Alliance is essentially the same constituency base. However, for the first time, there is now a representative from each county. This inclusion reflects the group's efforts this past year to become involved in projects beyond the greater Franklin County region. Four board members are from Oxford County and, for the first time, the Alliance has a project (dealing with "smart growth") underway there.

Staff

Soon, all six communities will have paid staff, mostly part-timers. The nature of the staff work varies, depending on the organization's maturity, expectations, and needs. For example, Jim Wood continues as a 20 hour per week staff person for the Northeast Stewardship Project and a 20 hour per week project coordinator is being hired. Like Will Hopkins' Cobscook Bay project, the Northeast Stewardship project is evolving from a start-up with no or very limited staff needs towards a non-profit business with an expanding level of staffing required. For a while, the organization shared a secretary/book-keeper with Jim Wood's forestry business, but cannot find a replacement for so few hours per week (8).

This example brings out two lessons learned. First, is the importance of synergy. Over the years, the sustainable community projects have benefited when people and organizations share equipment (e.g. Hardwick's shared copier with a social service non-profit organization) and space (e.g. Sta-North's use of space in the Groveton town hall and Western Mountains Alliance's office at the University of Maine in Farmington).

The second lesson is the difficulty of finding and, particularly, keeping part-time supporting staff people who are willing and able to work few hours per week. Sta-North decided to hire two people in hopes that at least one will be available and knowledgeable at any time period.

On the other hand, the key project staff people have remained in place for years. Two of them pre-existed the Ford Foundation funding (mid 1993) – Debbie Burd at the Western Mountains Alliance and Dianne Tilton in Cobscook Bay. Jim Wood became the staff person at the Northeast Stewardship Project several years ago after having been the most active board member. Both Margaret Howlett at the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council and Marilyn Rogerson with the Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce have been in their positions for more than two years.

Why have these critical staff people stayed involved, especially over the past year? They are personally dedicated and committed to sustainable development as a concept, to their organizations, and to their communities. In the past year, some of them describe the tremendous amount of personal growth that they have experienced. Will Hopkins, for example, describes how much he has learned about management. "You can't do everything. I have to share a lot. I have to turn it off." He is referring to the transfer of his office from his home to a rental space, the hiring and delegating responsibility to another staff person, and the changes his project is going through in expanding its scope.

Jim Wood, in a similar situation, describes how he has gained a "world of funding exposure". He feels that he is more comfortable and "better at" meeting with funders having spent so much time with "people like Tom Deans and Marcy Lyman". He feels more confident in terms of the direction of his organization. He attributes a clearer focus both to his own growth and to the growth of the entity. As a professional forester, he is accustomed to practical, immediate results-oriented work. He is now more able to participate in "idea building" discussions and is pleased to be participating in the development of a community forest project.

Community Capacity

Evolving Visions

“Maybe the Council is reaching a point (positive) saying that we have to face reality. We need to be far more realistic about what we want and can do.” With these words, Steve Knox, President of the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council in New Hampshire summed up his view of how the Council’s vision is changing. The mission has not changed; it remains focused on linking quality of life/environment issues with economic development diversity and opportunities. Steve Knox uses the term “self-reliance” rather than “sustainability” to capture what the communities in the Washington Valley seek to achieve.

He, other board members, and the staff director are realizing the importance of adjusting their strategies and activities to fit the current conditions and respond to lessons they have learned. “We’ve learned that we can’t storm the ramparts and pull the switches... We were naïve about how to change the world... We are slowly coming to the conclusion that the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council is in conflict with some people and this is eye opening for us.” Their response is to embark on a strategic thinking and planning process.

Like the MWVEC, the Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce is going through another visioning process, according to staff person Marilyn Rogerson. There is a natural tension between the traditional chamber of commerce people who focus on promotion of specific businesses and the people who started the Hardwick Business Group, the informal entity established during the Ford Foundation years which is now a program within the Chamber. The latter group wants to focus more on creating a regional identity and marketing economic development as it connects to community life and well being. The problem, according to Marilyn Rogerson, is that she does not have the time to do both.

The Northeast Stewardship Project has found a focus in a very specific project. Their investment last year in a feasibility study for a natural resources center is testimony to their concentration on a single rallying point for their activities. As Jim Wood commented, “if this idea does not work out, then we are back to the beginning again.” **The difference between the likelihood of this project succeeding as compared with Sta-North’s involvement in a bottling plant is that the natural resources center idea has evolved over several years, responds to expressed needs of foresters, loggers, environmentalists, fits with and expands upon the organization’s training and educational programs, and comes from a group with a proven track record in fund-raising. Still, it is a big risk.** NESP is willing to take this risk because it wants to support sustainable forestry practices and, eventually, products. Will Hopkins has an equally compelling vision to promote sustainable fisheries in the Cobscook Bay region.

Community Leadership

Two of the communities are consciously training community leaders. It is not surprising that both are in Maine since Marion Kane, President of the Maine Community Foundation, is a strong believer in building community capacity especially through nurturing community leaders. The Washington County Leadership Institute uses the Sustainable Cobscook Bay project as a case study and has Will Hopkins as a speaker. It is in its third year and trains approximately 20 people per year. Dianne

Tilton and the current city manager of Eastport were in the Institute's first course. She credits that experience as key to changing her model of leadership and her approach to community-based economic development. She also believes that City Manager Bud Finch's response to the closure of the Guilford facility was influenced by his training experience. He brokered a community-led response rather than devise his own economic scheme.

The difficulty with relying on community leaders is the continual need for training and education because people come and go. They move in and out of positions of responsibility depending on their personal and professional circumstances. One of the reasons for the effectiveness of the Western Mountains Alliance is the active participation of Warren Cook and Scott Planting, two very respected community leaders as well as long-standing officers of the Alliance.

Another challenge is to influence different constituencies over time. The Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council, for example, is beginning to hear from the wealthy retirees who want to know what the Council is doing or can do for them. Even though Steve Knox, President, and other participants feel as if they spend a lot of time explaining what they do there will be another group which gets interested and needs to be educated. **The nature of these six community projects, trying to influence the mindsets of people to think 'sustainable development', necessitates a continuous educational and training mode of operation.**

Sometimes, a technique can be successful in facilitating this kind of education and training is the development of a teaching manual. Rose Binda, a science teacher in Lubec, Maine and an active participant in the Cobscook Bay project received funds to prepare a manual for teachers about aquaculture. When she left this document helped ensure that the project continues. In fact, teachers went on to get another grant to institutionalize the aquaculture project and link it to businesses. Students are now involved in a research and demonstration project to raise scallops and sea urchins commercially.

However, Eddie Gale has another piece of advice. As a long-time community organizer and the hands-on person from the Vermont Community Foundation to the Hardwick and Northeast Stewardship projects, he has come to learn that "these things don't work until people have a common bond and have relationships among each other". He claims that people often are not ready to be educated or to change their mindsets until they have built some trust. **So, creating and nurturing community leaders takes time and, perhaps, is founded initially on personal relationships.** Becky Newton became president of Sta-North by being recruited by a member. She agreed to attend a meeting and walked out as its next president.

Volunteers

Despite the increased visibility and credibility of the community-based organizations and their ability to maintain their key staff and board members, the number and diversity of volunteers remains relatively low. The flourishing economy, even in Washington County, Maine, have diverted people's time and attention towards paid work.

In some cases, like in the Cobscook Bay fisheries project the nature of the work makes it difficult to use community volunteers in certain situations. Will Hopkins tried to use volunteers for water quality monitoring, but found that the state's requirements for

predicable number of samples taken at specified times made it difficult. Therefore, he ended up partnering with institutes such as the Sea Grant Extension Service and the Passamaquoddy Tribe to provide a “semi-professional group of samplers”. He finds that volunteers work best for specific events, such as the help provided by a high school marine resource class in re-seeding clams as part of a scientific study. There is, however, another water quality program that successfully uses high school students to monitor during the school year.

The very limited time of the paid staff and space reduce the desire for and value of volunteers. Jim Wood hopes that with the addition of a second part-time project coordinator and new office space with room for interns and volunteers will make it more likely that the Northeast Stewardship Project can attract and use volunteers.

In places like Hardwick “there aren’t enough volunteers”, according to Jane Johns a businessperson and active participant in the Hardwick Business Group and Chamber of Commerce. The one retired, active volunteer recently left to care for her sick husband. There is competition for the volunteers since “everything” depends on volunteers including the school board and the zoning board.

In Mt. Washington Valley, Margaret Howlett noticed that “volunteer involvement has definitely dropped off...less volunteers on committees because of burn out and a belief that the hired staff can do the work.” She went to the President and he is helping to reinvigorate committees and volunteer involvement.

Communications

This year some staff and board members decided to change the ways they communicate their information and messages. Will Hopkins concluded that his extensive newsletter, though well received, took a “huge effort and huge lead time” and was “very expensive”. Instead, he is publishing special reports, data sheets, and articles that provide “fresher information to targeted audiences”. These documents can be compiled into a Cobscook Bay book. In addition, a webpage will soon be available which will include some archival documents about the Sustainable Cobscook project. Although it is difficult to evaluate the level of interest of a newsletter, the people from the Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce have an indication of how few people seem to take it seriously. The Chamber published a newsletter four times a year. In the Christmas edition they asked businesses to put a box on their counter with the Chamber’s graphic (supplied to them). Only 18 businesses chose to do so, out of a database of 375 businesses. Their attendance at the monthly Chamber meetings is also down. They used to get between 15 to 17 people and now they may attract 6 people. At the annual meeting in 1998, 35 people attended.

Acceptance in the Community

All the organizations, including Sta-North, have a track record sufficient for them to get community support, whether in dollar or in-kind contributions.

However, at two town meetings for two different projects, an individual spoke out against financial support. Ironically, according to project participants these opponents were well briefed about the organization. Conway chose not to support the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council this year; however, the 11 other communities did.

Perhaps the lesson learned from these examples is the importance of a long-term perspective. Change is difficult for people. Sometimes, people welcome it and sometimes they do not. These community-based organizations are charting new directions and responding to changing circumstances. They are managing to stay on course and remain afloat.

Another lesson, which was anticipated by Steve Knox, is **that outreach into the communities and increased credibility and visibility for the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council brings out conflicts.** The Council is attracting the interest and attention of a broader cross-section of people, which translates into more pressures and differences of opinion on what the Council should do and how it should proceed. “I could see the likelihood of this happening”. Steve Knox then proceeded to describe the three kinds of people he and his organization deal with: People who make things happen; people who watch things happen; and people who keep asking what is happening”.

The “embeddedness” in the community is an on-going and incremental process. For example, the Western Mountains Alliance’s staff person spent a considerable amount of time in Piscataquis County this past year. She helped develop and organize the Piscataquis County Economic Development Council and now serves on its board. Forming partnerships with existing organizations is another technique that WMA frequently uses, which helps the organization become more known and valued in the four county region.

Community Results

Environment-Economic Links

The previous two assessments concluded that environmental concerns are likely, in northern New England, to be connected to other issues such as economic development, health care, and quality of life. The evolution of these community-based organizations over the past year seems to raise the level of consciousness between environment and economic development into a sharper focus. The importance of a natural resources-based economy is the foundation for the Cobscook Bay Resources Center, the Northeast Stewardship’s Natural Resources Center, and several of the economic incentive projects of the Sunrise County Economic Council (Cobscook Bay). Sta-North is helping fund several town beautification projects because the group has come to realize in the past year that people care about their community’s appearance and that this form of environmental activity is a potential rallying point for community action and pride.

Reasons for this deepened understanding and interest in the integration of economic development and environment can vary. Some people cite the improved economy and say that people can afford to worry about issues other than jobs. Another possibility is that these community-based organizations have had five years to explore, experiment, and educate themselves and others about the nature of a viable economy and an adequate quality of life for rural people. They may be recognizing that a healthy natural resources environment is essential to the type of economic development which provides rewarding jobs, ensures health care benefits, gives people the time and ability to enjoy the outdoors, and taps into the special assets of the northern New England region.

Nitty-Gritty Implementation

Although two of the community-based organizations (the Western Mountains Alliance and Sta-North) have chosen primarily to be facilitators and catalysts rather than program implementers, **they are all intensely involved in the daily challenges and details of making things happen.**

Some mistakes, in hindsight, become learning experiences about how, what, when, and with whom to act. Will Hopkins learned that many of the clams in his initial re-seeding project were killed, misplaced, and not counted in a sampling area that was too restrictive given the dynamic tides. “I was naïve and thought that it was more of a cook-book exercise”. He adjusted the time period and place of sampling in order to view the clams when they are larger and where they end up being located.

Timing and circumstances play critical roles in determining what niche each of the organizations can fill. For example, the Mt. Washington Economic Council sought to administer the regional revolving loan program because of a perceived need to provide dollars to certain businesses that could not get access to traditional financing. This past year, the booming economy has created a situation where the Council is “competing with banks to give out money”, according to past-president Dave Sorensen. In another example of the changing times, he cites the need several years ago to train people so that they could get access to well paying jobs. Now, “there are not enough bodies to help businesses expand and the greatest concern is attracting new workers.

Also, **as certain issues get handled, other ones emerge.** As Steve Knox, current president of the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council describes the pattern: “It is a constant renewal...we need to be continually adapting to a new world.” He provided an example of how the Council’s goal of bringing the Internet to the valley has recently been achieved. The result is that “businesses want more...The bar has been raised”. In response, the Council is considering additional communication technology such as T-1 lines and two-way cable hook-ups.

Takes Time

Achieving tangible community improvements takes time. The importance of patience and perseverance is a lesson learned by everyone involved in these projects -- from the foundation staff eager to track accomplishments to the staff person, like Margaret Howlett, eager to have board members reassume more responsibility and learn that she cannot be a substitute for their voluntary contributions.

This year, the organizations implemented various techniques to “expand” their time. Several hired additional staff in order to delegate responsibilities and broaden their scope of activities. Many now charge for services in order to prioritize time, get recognition and rewards from others for work which they used to perform at no cost, and to let go of tasks which were too time consuming (e.g. newsletter).

They also are more seasoned from their years of experience and know that they need to keep “plugging away” and not look for the quick fixes. Steve Knox had hoped that the town representatives on the Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council would serve as “ambassadors” to their communities explaining what the Council does, getting feed-back, and bringing ideas to the Council. He is now convinced that this simple device is not sufficient. He speculates that he may be the only board member who

has regular meetings with his town's board of selectmen. He meets with them four or five times a year.

Creating Regional Identities and Connections

Four of the communities involved in the Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project began in 1993 with a regional boundary. The Concord and Hardwick, Vermont projects initially were focused on aspects in each town. Previous assessments placed the Mt. Washington Valley, Cobscook Bay, and Western Mountains Alliance projects as "communities evolving a regional identity" (1997 report, p. 6).

This process has continued over the past year, to the extent that people outside of their organizations perceive them more as regional entities. Debbie Burd, staff for the Western Mountains Alliance, refers to a number of examples supporting this conclusion. "Our stars are lining up", she claims. Maine Governor Angus King talks a lot about regions. His "One Maine" approach gives a voice to western Maine. Often, she receives calls to represent the region at meetings, on committees, and other forums. "Western Mountains Alliance is being sought for its regional information and perspective".

This year has also seen the slow building of community connections that help create regions of mutual interest. For example, Eastport (a small city in the Cobscook Bay region) is beginning to develop a regional relationship with Calais based on marine infrastructure. The newly formed Calais Regional Economic Development organization includes Eastport. According to Dianne Tilton who helped bring community leaders together, "It didn't take Eastport very long to figure out what it needs to make its port viable. Calais sees itself as the transportation hub for the port". The lesson she learned from this experience is the importance of "human relationships and leaders". Sometimes, she found, "it takes me pointing out the benefits to several towns and encouraging them to apply jointly for a grant" or to work together on projects. She also credits the leadership of Eastport's city manager, Bud Finch.

Finding areas of mutual benefit is not easy. Inter-town hostilities and jealousies may prevent individuals from reaching out to consider joint projects or projects that may be physically located in one community but may benefit another one. The Sta-North, New Hampshire project has suffered from this kind of innate suspicion among people in the three communities. This year, however, there has been a concerted effort to reach out across the communities, especially since Sta-North is perceived to be oriented towards Groveton. Stratford is being included in a proposed "historical loop" even though it is not directly on the pathway. In addition, Sta-North gave \$300 to help build a greenhouse to raise flowers for the Stratford school.

The Hardwick, Vermont project is trying a different strategy to build regional connections. Marilyn Rogerson describes the approach as "start somewhere". She believes that the "slow process of getting regional support" comes from building a solid base first in Hardwick so that people can see the benefits of the Chamber of Commerce's activities. After several years of investing in Hardwick's Main Street, business people from nearby streets started to participate. Then, a few people from adjacent communities expressed interest. Progress is painstakingly slow, but some results are showing. Two years ago there were 42 members and now there are 75; some of the new members come from businesses outside of Hardwick. One of the new members came as a result of a brochure for snow mobilers which the Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce produced.

This eight town guide gives people something “important to them”. The hope is that a ripple effect from downtown Hardwick outwards into the region will draw people to understand how they can benefit from the regional organization. Simultaneously, the Chamber continues the marketing of the region type of activities that were the hallmark of the informal Hardwick Business Group.

Increased Partnerships and Collaborations

Sometimes, the partnership is of necessity. The informal Hardwick Business Group chose to become a program of the Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce because it could no longer depend on the town to hold its account. Both parties benefit from this relationship – the Chamber by acquiring a community-based orientation focused on marketing, and the HBG by gaining additional resources, memberships, and a regional institutional base. Marilyn Rogerson, the part-time staff person, tries to respond to both groups’ needs.

Dianne Tilton, through the Sunrise County Economic Council, initiates and encourages partnerships of a different kind. Her role is to make connections – to connect people and ideas together to promote economic development in Washington County, Maine. An example that illustrates how she fosters partnerships begins with her learning about a process for helping people develop community-based economic development. She decided to try out the Rocky Mountain Institute’s Economic Renewal method in Washington County, Maine. After securing some federal funding, Dianne Tilton approached selectmen in various communities offering to conduct a workshop on this method. Jonesport eagerly accepted the invitation since townspeople are searching for economic development alternatives to the hard-hit fishing industry which would not depend on an outside business or industry. Sixty-five people attended the workshop and several projects have since been implemented, including a farmers market and a town cleanup. Perhaps, 10 to 15 years from now Jonesport could host a research facility for the fishing industry.

Will Hopkins’ Cobscook Clam Restoration Project illustrates a third kind of relationship. He found organizations, such as the Beals Island Regional Shellfish Hatchery, the Nature Conservancy, and the Maine Department of Marine Resources, that benefit from collaborating with his project. As he and his board develop the Cobscook Bay Resource Center they are linking with Canadian groups (e.g. St. Croix Estuary Project; St. Croix International Waterway Commission). **Each partner contributes and each derives benefits particular to its own needs and agenda.**

This form of collaboration is the approach used by the Western Mountains Alliance, although it is applied to many projects simultaneously rather than focused on one project. WMA’s identified “niche” and what the group “does best”, according to Debbie Burd, is to foster collaborations and partnerships. She is the glue in search of people and places to connect. Because WMA’s mission is “so broad” and this type of niche translates into more behind-the-scenes activities, WMA sometimes does not get recognition for its efforts. **There is a tension between playing the role of facilitator and convenor, and promoting a more sustainable western Maine. Their choice of issues and projects are screened through the lens of community sustainability. However, their choice of collaborators is open-ended and dependent on the interest and resources of potential collaborators.**

In the past year, there are indications that its visibility and stature are increasing. For example, a board member of the Natural Resources Council of Maine sought, and received, WMA's support for a salmon restoration program. He knows of WMA's work because Debbie Burd is also a NRCM board member. In another example, five school superintendents hired WMA/Debbie Burd to write a Rural Schools for Equity proposal.

Community Hooks

As described in other sections of this report, **the six community-based organizations find success when they tap into the momentum, interest, and resources of existing groups or fill a vacuum articulated by community people.** For example, the Northeast Stewardship Project decided to take on the logger certification program recently because the group knew, from its workshops and training sessions, that there is a need for this kind of program. This "hook" will give them credibility with a constituency that they want to serve and it becomes a piece of the evolving Natural Resources Center.

The Maine community projects are definitely aware and taking advantage of the "hook" provided by the Governor and his staff in their promotion of regionalism and in their desire to involve the rural community perspective. Dianne Tilton commented that "Governor King is sold on our organization. We only have three more years of him".

Selection of "hooks" varies by organization and over time. For example, when Linda Fox was the staff person for the Hardwick Business Group she and the group created "hooks" by perceiving an unarticulated need, such as for a social gathering place on Main Street. Marilyn Rogerson, the current staff person, is more bounded by the orientation of the chamber of commerce to service its members. She accommodated both by producing the snow mobile brochure since it encourages people to travel to downtown stores and markets the Greater Hardwick region.

The Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council "hooked" into the desire for people to gain computer access as one mechanism for reducing commuter travel (and, thereby, improving air quality) and encouraging workers to live in the valley. They have embedded their projects in similar "hooks", identified through educational forums, business outreach efforts, and board discussions.

Political Influence

The 1997 assessment described the extent to which policies, laws, regulations, projects have been influenced by the actions of the six sustainable community projects (pp. 23-6). **In the past year, there has been no dramatic change.** There has been, for example, no back-sliding in town support for the once beleaguered Concord High School's Natural Resources Program. Town meeting voters continued to support contributions to Sta-North and Mt. Washington Valley Economic Council (with the exception of Conway).

As some of the community-based organizations expand their funding sources and receive government funds, they need to be careful not to engage in any behavior that might be construed as lobbying. Some organizations such as the Cobscook Bay Resource Center creates opportunities for local people to communicate with regulators and legislators (e.g. Cobscook Fisheries Forum). Western Mountains Alliance and Mt.

Washington Valley Economic Council sponsor similar educational events for and on behalf of legislators and local officials.

Becky Newton from Sta-North sees “ourselves as getting more involved with selectmen”. She cited an example of an earlier Sta-North project idea (i.e. an industrial park) which “didn’t go anywhere without the board of selectmen’s support). She is, herself, a recently elected town official in Groveton.

Like Sta-North, most of the other organizations are reaching out to local officials and taking advantage of local leaders. The current town manager of Hardwick, for example, is “very involved with business people”. According to one businessperson active in the Hardwick Business Group, “we’ve had town managers who haven’t cared about Main Street”. So, they are taking advantage of this “hook” and participating in the Dan Hill’s new economic development committee.

EPILOGUE

This One Year Later Assessment was designed to understand what has happened to the six communities chosen to participate in the four year Ford Foundation-funded Northern New England Sustainable Communities Project. Since the author also assessed these communities over the entire project period, additional lessons can be learned from a perspective of the past five years.

1. *Communities go through cycles of ups and downs, just the way people do.* It can be disheartening to be in a down mode, but experience from these communities indicates that persistence, hard work, focus on the vision, and even time breaks that cycle.
2. Thinking and writing about sustainable development and sustainable communities are much easier exercises than putting them into practice. *Reality bites!*
3. *Quick fixes can produce fast results and improve morale, but are not a substitute for dealing with systemic problems.* Poverty is not overcome through the availability of some jobs. Land purchases, alone, will not protect the Northern Forest ecosystem.
4. *Community-building needs to build from within, but can benefit from outside resources* such as funding, technical consultants, guidance materials as long as those resources are linked to, respectful of, and responsive to people in the community.
5. *Process is as important as products.* Developing community capacity, i.e. nurturing community leaders, helping establish organizations, evolving a shared community vision, is a foundation and precursor to improving the quality of life, economy, and environment of communities.
6. *These kind of community-based organizations and community foundations have proven themselves to be valuable vehicles for promoting sustainable development, conservation-based development, community development – whatever the terms used*

to convey an integration of environmental, economic, and social/quality of life concerns at a community-scale (i.e. place-based locale).

7. *Environmental, “smart growth”, and regional initiatives are more likely to produce tangible outcomes if they are woven into these kinds of community-based projects and through these kinds of organizations than if they are approached directly as single purpose projects.*