



# Resilient Vermont: *Building the Foundation for Success* Pre-Meeting Materials

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## I. Introduction to Resilient Vermont Project

The ‘Resilient Vermont’ project seeks to help the Green Mountain State—including state government agencies; regional planning commissions; individual cities, town and villages; and key environmental and business stakeholders—effectively meet the challenge of developing a shared vision and an integrated long-term strategy for a resilient Vermont.

In the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene, state agencies, community organizations and neighbors sprang into action to help those affected and rebuilt roads, bridges and homes as quickly as possible. The challenge now is to sustain this momentum and spirit of collaboration and camaraderie, and to develop a shared vision and an integrated, long-term strategy for a resilient Vermont – one that weaves together related but still-fragmented state, regional and local initiatives, and better equips the state to prepare for, respond to and bounce back from future natural disasters that we know will come.

Over the next year, ISC will work with stakeholders and partner organizations to develop a Resilience Roadmap. Building on much of the work already underway in different communities and organizations, this roadmap will offer a set of practical solutions that will support an integrated approach to community, economic and ecosystem resilience. October 11th will be the first of three stakeholder convenings designed to inform and shape the Resilience Roadmap.

We are honored that you have chosen to join us for Resilient Vermont. We encourage you to engage deeply, be provocative, be bold, and think creatively.

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## II. Summary of Challenges and Opportunities Cited by Stakeholders

In the weeks preceding the Resilient Vermont workshop, ISC staff interviewed approximately half of the workshop invitees to better understand the unique perspective of each individual and organization in regard to the challenges and opportunities Vermonters face as we work to build a more resilient state. While stakeholders differed in their perspectives and priorities, a set of common themes and challenges emerged:

*There is strong support for an integrated, comprehensive approach to long-term resilience.* Program participants are willing and eager to reflect on lessons learned from the 2011 disasters, and pivot from the work of rebuilding into broader conversations for strengthening the state's long-term resilience. There are a wide range of programs and activities now underway to support recovery and



build resilience, particularly focused on our communities and our rivers. However, there is concern about a lack of coordination between these efforts and the potential for duplication and redundancy. Stakeholders largely agree on the need for a comprehensive and collaborative approach that helps to align all of these efforts around a shared vision of resilience.

*The “smallness” of Vermont – and our strong social connections – are widely recognized as our greatest assets.* Almost without exception, stakeholders pointed to Vermont’s small population and tight knit communities as the attribute that most contributes to our resilience. Our small communities mean that most people know their neighbors and many residents are able to easily connect with local leaders and elected officials when they need help or information. The size of our state makes it seem more realistic to implement solutions quickly. However, smallness does bring challenges and many of our communities find themselves limited in terms of staff, technical training, equipment and access to capital. On whole, most agree that the benefit of being small far outweighs the drawbacks and that by working together we can deepen our capacity reserves.

*One of the greatest challenges facing Vermont is limited resources and capacity at all levels of government.* Key players from every perspective recognize the financial challenge inherent to long-term resilience-building initiatives, given the difficulty accessing funds needed only for response and recovery activities. This lack of funding directly relates to a lack of capacity in human and technical resources to carry out the work. To overcome these resource constraints, stakeholders recognize the need to pull together across sectors and jurisdictions to find ways creative ways to leverage resources across programs and maximize the impact of our investments.

*The Vermont ethos of self-sufficiency is both a strength to build on and a challenge to overcome when seeking to align efforts across jurisdictions and levels of government.* Even as stakeholders sought to develop and implement broad-based solutions, they expressed concern that the high degree of autonomy in communities and public sector institutions could potentially hinder progress towards integrated approaches. Stakeholders cited the long history of communities making land use and economic development decisions in isolation and a tendency to view neighboring jurisdictions as competitors rather than collaborators. The same sense of local self-sufficiency that allowed communities across the state to respond quickly to the immediate needs following the 2011 disasters, has the potential to stand in the way of collaborative efforts between communities and regions that are likely necessary to building resilience.

*Resilience needs to be incorporated at all levels.* In describing what needs to be done to increase Vermont’s resilience, stakeholders identified the need for action at all levels—from increasing the resilience of individuals and households to businesses and local governments, up to building more resilient transportation, communication and energy systems. Many people pointed to the challenge of implementing change at the local level where capacity limitations often make it difficult to “try something new” while others noted that working at the state level will not necessarily result in real change “on the ground.” Many stakeholders described the end goal as a well-coordinated system of change that would create consistency between the efforts of the communities, regional, statewide and federal entities.

*Vermont is ready and well-positioned to tackle the challenges of resiliency.* The 2011 disasters have brought many of Vermont’s vulnerabilities to light. Not only did the events highlight flooding risks, they revealed economic vulnerabilities, infrastructure vulnerabilities and challenges of coordination and communication. There is growing recognition that weather patterns are changing and that Vermont communities and residents need to be ready for more frequent and intense weather events. Leaders at all levels, from the governor’s office to local communities and businesses, are supportive of efforts to prepare for future events, and build the capacity to respond and recover. These factors create a window of opportunity to take action and implement new programs and policies that will build Vermont’s resilience.

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### III. Selected Resources for More Information

#### VERMONT RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE RESOURCES

**Community Recovery Partnership Report (2012)** Irene Recovery Coordination Team

▶ [http://vtstrong.vermont.gov/Portals/0/Documents/CRP\\_Report10\\_2012\\_F.pdf](http://vtstrong.vermont.gov/Portals/0/Documents/CRP_Report10_2012_F.pdf)

*This report describes the work of the Community Recovery Partnership and includes a summary of key findings, lessons learned and outstanding needs related to the Irene recovery effort.*

**Recovery and Resilience the Vermont Way (2012)** Governor's Institute on Community Design

▶ <http://vtstrong.vermont.gov/Portals/0/Documents/VTRecoveringStronger RptJune 2012.pdf>

*This memo provides recommendations on advancing the goals of creating more disaster resistant communities and a more resilient economy emerging from a recent convening of experts and sector leaders.*

**Resilience: A Report on the Health of Vermont's Environment (2011)** Vermont Agency of Natural Resources

▶ <http://www.anr.state.vt.us/anr/envrptsb/ANREnvReport2011.pdf>

*A report describing key indicators of the health of water, air, forests and wildlife in Vermont*

**Vermont Recovering Stronger: Irene Recovery Status Report (2012)** Irene Recovery Office

[http://vtstrong.vermont.gov/Portals/0/Documents/GICD\\_Report\\_032812.pdf](http://vtstrong.vermont.gov/Portals/0/Documents/GICD_Report_032812.pdf)

*This report summarizes progress to date on longer-term Vermont recovery efforts, including goals, key milestones and challenges.*

#### GENERAL RESOURCES ON CLIMATE ADAPTATION & RESILIENCE

**Adaptation Clearinghouse (2011)** Georgetown Climate Center

<http://www.georgetownclimate.org/adaptation/clearinghouse>

*This webpage tracks adaptation initiatives, searchable by location, resource type, sector or impact. The clearinghouse includes brief overviews and links to state and local adaptation planning efforts.*

**Adapting to Climate Change: A Risk-based Guide for Local Governments (2010)** Natural Resources Canada

▶ [http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/sites/www.nrcan.gc.ca.earth-sciences/files/pdf/projdb/pdf/ris\\_e.pdf](http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/sites/www.nrcan.gc.ca.earth-sciences/files/pdf/projdb/pdf/ris_e.pdf)

*This guide argues for a risk-based approach to adaptation planning and outlines the process for risk management, highlighting climate trends and projections for Canada.*

**Community and Regional Resilience: Perspectives from Hazards, Disasters, and Emergency Management (2008)** Community & Regional Resilience Initiative

▶ [http://www.resilientus.org/library/FINAL\\_CUTTER\\_9-25-08\\_1223482309.pdf](http://www.resilientus.org/library/FINAL_CUTTER_9-25-08_1223482309.pdf)

*This research paper outlines: what makes people and places vulnerable; what makes communities resilient; and barriers to planning for resilience.*



**Community Resilience and Wealth: The Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Communities in a Rapidly Changing World** U.S Endowment for Forestry and Communities

▶ <http://www.usendowment.org/communityresilience.html>

*A report focused on the “state-of-the-issue” of resilience in rural communities from the perspective of economic development practitioners. Appendix A offers an annotated list of tools that can be used to assess and build community resilience.*

University of Washington's Climate Impacts Group, King County Washington, and ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability

▶ <http://cses.washington.edu/cig/fpt/guidebook.shtml>

*This guidebook describes a step-by-step process for achieving a set of climate change preparedness milestones within the context of municipal planning.*

**A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, Themes, and Pathways for Action** (2011) Federal Emergency Management Agency

▶ <https://www.mmr.fema.gov/about/wholecommunity.shtm>

*This strategic framework seeks to enhance resilience and security in communities through engagement and collaboration.*