



# Vermont Everyone Eats Formative Evaluation:

Community Hub and Restaurant Experience



December 2020

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# INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

Vermont Everyone Eats (VEE) is a grassroots-driven program providing food assistance and economic support to communities throughout the state. Conceived in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and its impacts on food security, businesses, and the local economy, the program model was developed and implemented through multi-sector mobilization.

The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in an economic crisis. In an effort to mitigate the spread of the virus, the state of Vermont, similar to many other states, issued stay-at-home orders and curtailed in-person operation of non-essential businesses. As a result, businesses struggled to keep their doors open, households experienced job disruption and job loss, unemployment rates increased, and the need for food assistance grew significantly. The food insecurity rate for Vermont has hovered around 10%, or 1 in 10 Vermonters, over recent years. The rate increased dramatically during the pandemic, with nearly 30% of Vermont households, or more than 1 in 4 Vermonters, experiencing food insecurity based on findings from a series of surveys administered during the spring through fall of 2020.<sup>1</sup>

With the need for economic and food assistance support, the concept of VEE was developed. The program follows a precedent set by World Central Kitchen, founded by Chef Jose Andres to “use the power of food to heal communities and strengthen economies in times of crisis and beyond.”<sup>2</sup> VEE was established by an act of the Vermont Legislature to provide a stabilizing source of income for local restaurants, farmers and food producers while also providing free meals to Vermonters. A Statewide Task Force with members from a broad cross-section of stakeholders was assembled to guide the program. This involved developing a request for proposals (RFP) and interpreting the legislative intent to create the program. The Task Force also considered other existing initiatives in economic development, food access and agriculture to guide strategic development of VEE that was supportive and not duplicative of existing structures, resources and efforts.



VEE was designed to **stimulate restaurants, feed Vermonters, and support local farms and food producers.**

- 1 Niles, Meredith T.; Belarmino, Emily H.; and Bertmann, Farryl. COVID-19 Impacts on Food Security and Systems: A Third Survey of Vermonters. 2020. College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Faculty Publications. 27. <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/calsfac/27>
- 2 World Central Kitchen. WCK Media Kit: About World Central Kitchen. Retrieved on December 29, 2020 from <https://wck.org/media-kit>



Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) was selected as the fiscal agent and statewide administrator. Through the RFP process, community hubs throughout the state were chosen to implement the program locally. Community hubs are housed within existing organizations. They serve as the regional organizing, management, and fiscal agent of the program and coordinate its partners, operations and distributions.

Each hub is supported by regional partners that help to inform local implementation. Community hubs recruit and onboard restaurants that receive \$10 to prepare and package each meal. Meals are then distributed to Vermonters at community distribution sites. As part of the program, restaurants are required to source 10% of their ingredients from Vermont farms and/or food producers.

One of the hubs, the Localvore Passport, functions a bit differently than the others. This hub, administered by Localvore, is an online app. Participants can request a meal at any participating restaurant around the state. The meal recipient can then pick up the meal free of charge.

VEE has been funded by \$6.4 million from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act as authorized by Vermont lawmakers through the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development. At the time of writing this report, continuation of the program is uncertain. Available funding ends on December 30, 2020 and additional funding has not been secured.

## EVALUATION

SEVCA contracted with JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI), a public health research and consulting firm, to evaluate VEE in two phases. Phase I was conducted using qualitative methods during December 2020 as a formative evaluation of the program's August–December 2020 implementation. The purpose of Phase I was to provide a foundation of initial learning about VEE, including the model and its implementation. In doing so, Phase I was intended to generate findings and elicit further areas for inquiry to serve as the basis for broader, more substantive data collection and evaluation in the future.

Phase I evaluation activities focus on examining the experience of participating community hubs and restaurants. The findings of this first phase of evaluation, along with the priorities of SEVCA, the Statewide Task Force, and other program stakeholders, will inform the focus of future evaluation efforts. Phase II evaluation activities are scheduled to take place in January 2021. In the second phase findings will be reviewed and recommendations will be developed to guide future evaluation efforts.

The purpose of this report is to present findings from the Phase I evaluation.



In December 2020, JSI conducted a **formative evaluation** of VEE's implementation.

## Methods

An initial desk review was conducted to gain understanding of VEE, its implementation and context. This involved a review of VEE-related websites (i.e., <https://vteveryoneeats.org/> and <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/a1bec4367ea24df5a080d60a01be7da8>) and participation in two community hub meetings, one meeting with the Statewide Task Force, one presentation by Middlebury College students interning at the Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE), and discussion with SEVCA staff.

In order to conduct phase one evaluation activities during a short time span (the month of December), key informant interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of VEE community hubs and restaurants. Interviews were designed to gain understanding of community hubs' and restaurants' experience with VEE. More specifically, the interviews focused on examining the value of VEE and its reach and effectiveness; community hub and restaurant experience with implementing VEE, including facilitators and challenges; potential of and considerations for the sustainability of VEE; and interests and opportunities for future evaluation of VEE.

### *Key Informant Interviews*

**Interview guides.** JSI developed two semi-structured interview guides—one for community hubs (Appendix B) and one for restaurants (Appendix C)—to better understand:

1. strengths, challenges, and opportunities of the infrastructure that has been created through VEE;
2. areas for program improvement that support greater reach, feasibility, effectiveness, and satisfaction with implementation;
3. value and effects of the program on community hubs, restaurants, and, as much as interviewees could speak to it, on meal recipients and farmers; and
4. insights to inform future evaluation activities.

SEVCA reviewed and approved both interview guides.

**Recruitment of community hubs and restaurants.** Community hubs and restaurants were recruited to participate in a 60-minute interview by video or teleconference. Recruitment efforts for community hubs included direct outreach to community hubs conducted via a community hub meeting, a mass invitation email to all community hubs, and individualized emails to community hubs. The first three community hub representatives to respond to outreach efforts were scheduled for an interview. Due to the large response and interest in participating in an interview, additional community hub interviewees were selected purposefully to obtain geographic diversity among the interview sample.

A convenience sample of representatives from participating VEE restaurants was identified through referrals from community hubs. All community hubs were contacted and asked to share an invitation email with their participating restaurants. Some community hubs provided JSI with restaurant email addresses. JSI directly engaged those restaurants to participate in an interview, with the aim of obtaining as much geographic diversity in the sample as possible. Restaurants were offered a \$50 gift card incentive for their participation.



**Interviews conducted.** Interviews for community hubs and restaurants were conducted between December 11 and December 21, 2020.

For each interview, one staff member conducted the interview using the semi-structured interview guide. For a subset of the interviews (four community hub interviews and seven restaurant interviews), a second staff member took notes. All interviews were recorded.

For community hubs, JSI conducted six interviews with 10 individuals representing nine organizations and six community hubs—Bennington Hub, Brattleboro and Beyond Hub, Central Vermont Hub, Chittenden County Hub, Northeast Kingdom (NEK) Hub, and Windham/Windsor Counties Hub (More information is provided about each community hub in Appendix D). For restaurants, JSI conducted eight interviews with nine individuals representing eight restaurants (More information is provided about each restaurant in Appendix C). The eight restaurants were associated with four different community hubs: Brattleboro and Beyond Hub (one restaurant), CAE Hub (two restaurants), Rutland Area Hub (three restaurants), and Upper Valley Hub (two restaurants). Restaurants interviewed included permanently sited restaurants as well as mobile businesses that provide food via catering, farmers' markets, or a food truck.

### Analysis

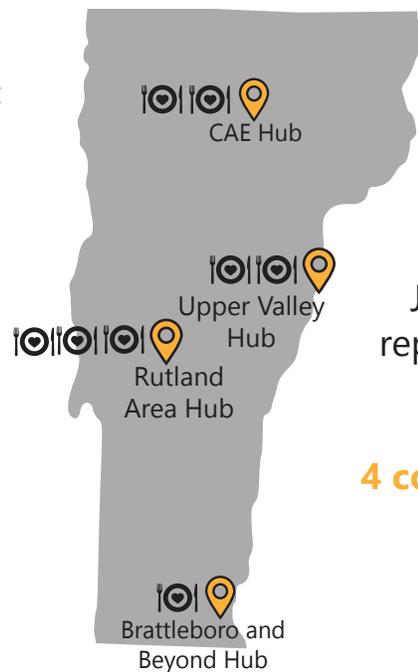
Two JSI staff members reviewed websites and meeting minutes to summarize the reach of the program (number of community hubs, farms, restaurants, distribution sites and meals).

The JSI staff member who led the interview conducted an analysis of the notes and the recording (if necessary) to identify themes and noteworthy information to present in this report.

Findings are organized by each stakeholder group interviewed (community hubs and restaurants) into five categories: benefits of the program, program implementation, sustainability, quality improvement, and future evaluation opportunities.



  
JSI interviewed 10 representatives from **6 community hubs**.



  
JSI interviewed 9 representatives from **8 restaurants**  associated with **4 community hubs** .

# FINDINGS

Between August 2020 and December 2020, 14 community hubs throughout the state implemented VEE.<sup>3</sup> Community hubs recruited and onboarded more than 120 Vermont restaurants that prepared and packaged more than 500,000 meals to Vermonters throughout all 14 counties by more than 160 distribution sites.<sup>4</sup> Meals were distributed free of charge to anyone who could attest that their life had been impacted by the pandemic. Distribution sites included food shelves, community centers, worksites, faith-based organizations, housing authorities, schools, libraries, health centers, and community organizations. During this time period, more than



**14 community hubs**  
implemented VEE.

**AUG-DEC 2020:**

-  **14** community hubs
- +**
-  **170+** farms
- +**
-  **120+** restaurants
- +**
-  **160+** distribution sites
- =**
-  **500,000+** meals

170 farms and food producers throughout Vermont participated in the program, providing restaurants with local products.<sup>4</sup> Over the course of five months, partnerships formed, and infrastructure and systems developed to implement VEE.

Using a learning-oriented focus, findings from the 14 key informant interviews with community hubs and restaurants are presented, respectively, by five categories—benefits of the program, program implementation, sustainability, quality improvement, and future evaluation opportunities. Within each category, findings are provided by themes on the common topics, ideas and sentiments that were heard during the interviews.

3 Vermont Everyone Eats Story Map: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/a1bec4367ea24df5a080d60a01be7da8>. Accessed December 20, 2020.  
 4 Personal communication with Southeastern Vermont Community Action. December 21, 2020.

# COMMUNITY HUB INTERVIEWS

Community hub interviewees shared a variety of reasons why their organizations chose to serve as VEE community hubs. One organization indicated that supporting the three pillars of the program—restaurants, farms, and community members—drove them to participate. Three organizations noted that they were driven by the opportunity to expand their organizations' food systems work. One of these organizations added that it was an opportunity to do so without increasing their organization's operating costs. Another organization commented that they decided to step up and participate because they had the capacity to support the program at a time when other organizations in their area did not. Finally, one organization stated that they chose to serve as a hub in an effort to increase awareness of their organization in their community.



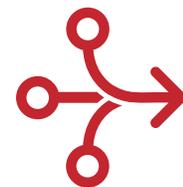
## Community hub organizations **chose to participate** in VEE:

- to support restaurants, farms, and community members
- to expand their organizations' food systems work because they had capacity to do so
- to increase awareness of their organization in their community

## Benefits of the Program

It was clear that community hub interviewees felt VEE provided numerous benefits to their organizations, as well as to their communities. The findings presented below showcase the benefits described, including how interviewees believed VEE: broke down silos, reduced social isolation and enhanced human connection, enabled participants to give while receiving, mitigated stigma associated with accessing charitable foods, fed people, stimulated restaurants, supported farmers, increased community hub organizations' visibility in their communities, enabled community hub organizations to fulfill and expand organizational missions, and helped lay the groundwork to enhance community hub organizations' future work.

**Breaking down silos.** By requiring restaurants, farmers, and community-based organizations to coordinate efforts, VEE's program design inherently called for multi-sector collaboration. As a result, while implementing VEE, interviewees reported that they formed new partnerships and enhanced existing partnerships (see *Building new relationships, strengthening existing relationships* under *Program Implementation* below). Specifically, seven of the organizations interviewed (representing five hubs) described working with new partners, and at times new sectors they had never worked with before (e.g., restaurants, food producers, farmers, businesses, and community-based organizations). VEE helped diverse stakeholders find commonality and alignment in their work, as yet another interviewee explained: "...it all lines up and we are all actually working together and sometimes we just don't know about it."



VEE helped **diverse stakeholders** find **commonality** and **alignment**.

One interviewee described how new connections with for-profit businesses that are now willing to help the organization order through wholesalers, will dramatically enhance their ability to acquire charitable foods moving forward (see Laying the groundwork to enhance future work for more information).

**Reducing social isolation and enhancing human connection.**

Two interviewees described how during a time of mass social isolation (as a result of social distancing and stay-at-home orders), VEE brought people together and enhanced human connection. The interviewees cited numerous examples, including: providing community members with a safe way (because meal distributions were outside) to volunteer in-person in a social activity; giving families a new way to engage with their community by eating from restaurants they may never have eaten from before; and providing older adults and those in rural, more isolated areas with regular human contact from their meal delivery drivers. In fact, the interviewee described how one older adult looked forward to the meals every week so much so that he would dress up in a suit and pick flowers to give to the delivery driver.

“There’s just a human interconnectivity that has really been heightened in this, which is interesting in a time of isolation and quarantine that people should come to know more people in their community and be more familiar with organizations they never knew about, farmers they never knew about.”  
- Community Hub Interviewee

**Giving while receiving.** VEE enabled meal recipients, restaurants, and farmers to be able to give and receive at the same time. Two interviewees representing two community hubs described scenarios where meal recipients chose to participate in VEE only after they learned that they would be supporting restaurants by doing so. As one noted, “It’s this feeling of I don’t want to take just to take, but if I can give and take then that feels much more allowed to me.” This interviewee went on to describe how once these individuals agreed to participate, they would disclose that they were in fact facing mental and/or financial hardships (e.g., hours cut, having to leave work to care for kids) and

could benefit from meals. One interviewee saw examples of meal recipients taking the concept of “giving while receiving” a step further by helping other meal recipients. These meal recipients would pick up and deliver meals to neighbors with health

issues or those who lived alone. Another interviewee talked about how restaurants too found value in the ability to give while receiving—grateful for the opportunity to feed their community while making money. Finally, an interviewee noted that farmers also sought ways to give back while benefiting from the program. The interviewee described how farmers would donate gleaned produce to the restaurants to use for this program, noting how “[t]he farmers can receive a check for the produce they bought and they can give to be supportive of the program.”

“There is a way to give and there is a way to take, and this program really embodied that.”  
- Community Hub Interviewee



**Mitigating stigma associated with accessing charitable foods.** As interviewees described, VEE built on best practices for mitigating stigma associated with the charitable food system, including considerations for accessibility and acceptability. Specifically, these practices included:



VEE built on best practices to **mitigate stigma** associated with accessing charitable meals.

- providing people with choice;
- making meals convenient by distributing them in community spaces or delivering them directly to individuals' homes;
- serving restaurant meals (high-quality food);
- making administrative barriers as small as possible by not requiring identifying information or income levels for individuals to participate; and
- allowing participants to give while they receive

**Feeding people.** All hubs interviewed reported providing thousands of meals to Vermonters via VEE (see Appendix C). One interviewee stated: "The impact of these meals on the people who are getting them cannot be overstated. It is really helping." In spite of the large number of meals distributed, three interviewees wondered whether or not they were reaching people that would most benefit from food assistance. From their perspective, identifying and engaging priority populations is needed to enhance the program moving forward (see *Identify and engage priority populations for food access* under *Quality Improvement* below).

**Stimulating restaurants.** Interviewees noted that restaurants benefited and were able to keep staff on because of VEE. In fact, one interviewee commented that participating restaurants in their area had indicated VEE was providing 80% of their revenue.

**Supporting farmers.** Interviewees noted that farmers benefited from VEE. For example, one interviewee described how a farmer was able to add a whole egg operation to their farm as a result of the program.

**Increasing visibility.** Three interviewees described how VEE increased their organizations' visibility in their communities, not just from conducting and managing the on-the-ground work, but also through partnerships and media clips. As one interviewee put it, it has given their organization more "street credibility."

**Fulfilling and expanding organizational missions.** Three interviewees indicated that VEE allowed their organizations to fulfill and/or expand their organizational missions.

## SUCCESS STORY

Prior to VEE, Chester Helping Hands was providing 1,000 meals per week to the residents of Chester, VT. Through VEE, Chester Helping Hands was able to support an expanded, multi-partner distribution network, providing as many as 2,500 meals per week to multiple towns throughout VT. As the interviewee from Chester Helping Hands stated: "It allowed us to continue our purpose."



**Laying the groundwork to enhance future work.** VEE not only helped community hub organizations fulfill and expand organizational missions, it also helped to lay the groundwork for enhanced future work for these same organizations. As one interviewee described: “[VEE] helped sow seeds for future work, as well as thinking about food access differently.” Additionally, one interviewee shared how new partnerships with for-profit businesses through VEE will enable them to order food through wholesalers in the future—something that will greatly enhance their ability to obtain and provide charitable foods to their community. Another interviewee described how the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with worksite employees through VEE will facilitate their ability to provide additional services to these employees in the future. Yet another interviewee mentioned that the partnerships and connections made through VEE will help them expand their gleaning program. Additionally, lessons learned from their participation in the program has their organization reconsidering their gleaning distribution process whereby they are now considering distributing gleaned food through community sites versus having individuals pick up the produce at their organization. Moreover, another interviewee exclaimed that the program has sparked new ideas for them on what they can do with their community kitchen. Another interviewee indicated that they plan to outreach to restaurants to cater future organizational events as a result of their increased connections and relationships with restaurants.



**“Charitable food organizations are constantly writing grants and always having to rely on charity. One of the most rewarding pieces for my organization is that I now have partners that are willing to help us go the extra mile.”**

**- Community Hub Interviewee**

## Program Implementation

Overall, interviewees reported their experience with VEE to be positive describing it as “amazing” and “unbelievably successful,” and declaring that “Everyone Eats fills our souls as well as our bellies.” Part of this positivity stemmed from the fact that the mechanics of the program worked. This meant, for example, that distributions were well-run and organized and that payments to restaurants were consistent and reliable. As one interviewee put it: “Every part of the program looks like a success to me.” Nonetheless, implementation of VEE required community hubs to put in sizable efforts. When asked to describe the effect of VEE on their organization, four interviewees representing three community hubs recounted the amount of staff time required to implement VEE. “A lot of time is put into the program! A lot more than anticipated.” and “We’ve probably made about \$2/hour given the amount of time we’ve spent.” In particular, two organizations noted the strain it put on their finance departments because of the requirement to collect invoices from and distribute checks to restaurants every seven days.

The Community Hubs interviewed often found themselves coordinating meal distribution within weeks of onboarding to VEE. The information presented below highlights interviewees’ experiences with implementing this fast-paced program, as well as their descriptions of key components associated with program implementation.



**“Building the plane while flying it.”** Interviewees noted that VEE involved a lot of moving pieces compiled in a very short amount of time. During weekly community hub meetings, a SEVCA staff member would describe program implementation as “Building the plane while flying it.” Numerous interviewees quoted this phrase, stating that it accurately depicted the program’s implementation where the program was being developed at the same time it was being implemented. One benefit of this “on the fly” implementation was that hubs were given the flexibility to learn as they went—a flexibility that enabled them to adapt, adjust, and be responsive to community context and needs. As one interviewee stated: “The whole project start to finish was a ‘learn as you go’ kind of way, which was really beneficial because you could iron out what works and doesn’t.” Another interviewee noted: “The heart and functionality behind the program includes a bunch of people who are willing to pivot, be graceful, and listen...to shift with the needs of their community.”



Fast-paced implementation provided community hubs with the **flexibility** to **adapt, adjust, and be responsive** to community context and needs.

**Outside of funding, statewide implementation support was limited.** All hubs interviewed confirmed they participated in weekly calls facilitated by SEVCA with all the community hubs. These calls served as a way for the hubs to receive statewide program updates. Three of the interviewees noted that outside of these calls, lines of communication between their organizations and SEVCA felt open and generally responsive. However, when asked about other support provided by SEVCA (e.g., trainings, technical assistance, resources) responses were limited. Two hubs remembered SEVCA providing hubs with a Stretch Your Budget flyer, and one hub took it upon themselves to translate the flyer into different languages for local distribution. One interviewee explained that hubs had to learn a lot on their own and that each hub likely educated SEVCA about the program (rather than vice versa) because “we were the people on the ground.” Another interviewee described how SEVCA’s primary focus was financing and because it was a lot of work, they had limited capacity to put energy elsewhere. As the interviewee described, they had to move quickly and “SEVCA was able to pivot and deploy new resources to Everyone Eats.”

**Statewide networking varied.** Interviewees were asked about their connections and communications with other hubs across the state. This varied with some not connecting with other hubs beyond the weekly calls held by SEVCA and others creating subgroups and holding regular check-ins.

**Program design varied by location.** Meal distribution models varied between community hubs. Types of distribution models included:

- public distributions where anyone from the community could stop by a community site (e.g., a senior center, church) to pick up a meal;
- direct deliveries to community locations such as low-income housing, workplaces, and childcare centers where residents, employees, or families associated with the site were provided meals; and
- direct deliveries of meals to individual homes.

One hub even described a situation where a childcare center picked meals up directly from a restaurant to serve to its families (eliminating the need for the hub as an intermediary distributor).

The flexibility permitted to adapt the program to meet individual community needs was especially beneficial during a pandemic, as one interviewee noted: “Different communities did their thing differently. That is extremely unique. And I think that is a beautiful example of how especially in an emergency response...that we are on task to support [communities], has really been a fantastic thing.”



“Each community hub does not need to look the same, so in that regard it is of the community.”  
- Community Hub Interviewee

**Building new relationships, strengthening existing relationships.** Interviewees described numerous scenarios where new partnerships were formed or existing partnerships were strengthened. For example, one interviewee stated that because of VEE their organization is now connecting with economic development organizations, agriculture, and businesses—sectors with which they had not previously engaged. Another interviewee noted that the program opened up channels between them and other service organizations, explaining that the connection and cooperation among them was significantly different than it was a year ago: “Better interconnectivity and being able to communicate with each other and combine forces across programs—together we are better than trying to do it all ourselves. Rather than every agency trying to provide food, we can share resources.”

**Communities mobilized to leverage resources.** Interviewees indicated that communities stepped up to help with implementing the program. This included leveraging resources beyond the CARES Act funding to support implementation of VEE, including money (private donations and grants), volunteers (to help with meal distribution, reporting), community hub staff time (above and beyond what staff were paid for), media and advertising, community organization networks, and donations of space for meal distribution.

## Sustainability

Community hub interviewees were asked to share their thoughts on the sustainability of VEE. Although all interviewees described the benefits of VEE in its current existence as an emergency feeding program, the group was divided on whether or not the program should serve as more than that post-pandemic.



Numerous **resources were leveraged** above and beyond the CARES Act funding to support implementation of VEE:

- money
- volunteers
- community hub staff time
- media and advertising
- community organization networks
- donations of space for meal distribution

**A future beyond COVID-19.** Seven interviewees representing six organizations saw VEE in its current format as solely an emergency feeding program. For example, one interviewee stated: “Post-pandemic [food access programming] should go back to the organizations that were doing food relief before.” Even so, these same individuals felt that there were numerous lessons learned through implementing VEE that should be incorporated into diverse sectors moving forward, including existing hunger relief programs, businesses, and farmers. For example, one interviewee noted that they were interested in learning and continuing to apply to their work the micro-efficiencies of the program, as well as finding ways to continue to link the food security, restaurant, and agriculture components together. With the understanding that funding for VEE was due to expire December 30, 2020, three of the interviewees explicitly stated that the program should continue until the pandemic winds down. However, one interviewee noted that the program burns through a lot of money quickly. Accordingly, they believed that it cannot continue to rely on state aid nor can the philanthropic community sustain the level of funding required; rather, federal aid is required.



**Best practices and lessons learned** from VEE should be incorporated into diverse sectors’ work moving forward.

On the other hand, two interviewees spoke clearly to their beliefs that VEE is not just an emergency response program, but rather should operate year-round. When sharing about the beneficial impact on farmers, an interviewee noted: “There’s a trickle down effect—it’s not just an emergency response.”



“Of course it’s unsustainable as it is right now. In my mind, from a systems thinking perspective, this is the deep and heavy hit of setting that foundation and then really finding the micro efficiencies and the places where maybe the cost of it can get pulled away but the network is still there, so that those ideas that are in place and those new developments can maybe find some traction with other funding. What it’s doing is infusing this new sense of how to think about this approach in that decentralized way in that systems networking way and putting it into action rather than it staying as a concept somewhere.”

- Community Hub Interviewee

## Quality Improvement

Regardless of whether or not VEE were to continue to operate as an emergency response or a more integrated year-round program, interviewees shared a variety of ways in which the program in its current capacity could be enhanced.

**Provide more resources to operate VEE.** One interviewee noted VEE is a lot of work because it involves preparing and distributing meals. Accordingly, in order to be sustained, organizations would need more staff to operate the program. Another interviewee agreed, indicating that they would like to see more money given to the distribution sites to be able to focus on just the distribution component (e.g., paying a delivery driver). As previously mentioned under the *Sustainability* section above, yet another interviewee stated that the program burns through a lot of money and sustainability of the program would depend on securing federal aid. However, “more resources” doesn’t mean just funding. As yet another interviewee noted, marketing support (e.g., large signs with generic core messages) would be beneficial given their organization did not have the bandwidth to market VEE.



**More resources** like funding, paid staffing, and technical support are needed to improve program operation.

**Evaluate the \$10 per meal reimbursement.** Interviewees were divided in their opinions on whether or not the \$10 per meal reimbursement was sufficient for restaurants. One community hub interviewee thought that restaurants could provide the meals for less (e.g., \$5-\$6 per meal) and still be able to make a profit, even with using local ingredients. On the other hand, two interviewees believed \$10 per meal was too low and that even a \$2 per meal increase would increase restaurants’ margins, help them provide more food per meal, and help them incorporate more local produce. One interviewee noted that the fact that the program enabled restaurants to mass prepare meals (versus getting paid \$10 for one-off meal orders) helped restaurants make the \$10 per meal more feasible.

**Examine additional program requirements.** In addition to evaluating the \$10 per meal component of VEE, interviewees suggested the following:

- increase the local sourcing requirement, especially during the growing season;
- require nutrition standards for meals served;
- more equitably recruit and engage restaurants and distribution sites (e.g., via an application process); and
- refine reporting requirements.

It should be noted that suggestions for refining reporting requirements were mixed, with one interviewee looking for more standardized data reporting and another interviewee wanting a reduction in reporting requirements.

**Identify and engage priority populations for food access.** Interviewees representing three community hubs noted that true success of VEE is reaching people who were most likely to benefit from food assistance, and none of them were sure if they were doing so. For example, one interviewee stated that intentional outreach to communities not engaged thus far would be critical to improving VEE moving forward.

## Future Evaluation Opportunities

Interviewees were asked what they would like to learn about VEE through future evaluation activities. The evaluation questions interviewees would like answered are presented below by the intended audience for data collection.

### **Meal recipients:**

- Why did meal recipients feel comfortable getting meals from VEE?
- Are meal recipients applying for 3SquaresVT?
- Why did meal recipients participate in VEE two days out of the week and not more?
- Is VEE providing culturally-appropriate foods?
- Are meal serving sizes adequate for meal recipients?
- Is VEE reaching people who would most benefit from this food assistance (for example, those without a smartphone or a car who cannot get to distribution sites)?

### **Partner organizations (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs, women's shelter):**

- To what extent did VEE take something over or duplicate services other organization(s) were providing (or could provide)? Did it fill a need in a new way that emerged in the context of COVID-19?

### **Community hubs:**

- How did other community hubs function? How did they improve their systems over time?

### **Restaurants:**

- How and to what extent has VEE impacted restaurants? For example, what was the economic impact of VEE on restaurants? (Beyond the number of jobs.)
- Was \$10 per meal sufficient?

### **State Systems:**

- What is the overall economic impact of VEE on the State?
- What is the coverage of VEE (e.g., a map of farmers, food providers, and restaurants)?

# RESTAURANT INTERVIEWS

## Benefits of the Program

All restaurant interviewees reported benefits of the program that extended beyond their individual restaurant to other restaurants, farms, food producers, meal recipients, and the community as a whole. The information presented below showcases the benefits described, including: providing a dependable source of income, giving while receiving, and increasing visibility.

**Providing a dependable source of income.** The pandemic generated a lot of uncertainty for restaurants; they did not know how or if they would be able to sustain themselves. VEE offered a dependable source of income and a safety net. Many described VEE as a program that helped to keep their businesses operating during a difficult time. The steady income meant that they could pay bills (vendor fees, goods, rent) and staff (keep them on, extend the season). The program also allowed them to keep making food and doing what they loved. It was not a handout but a reason to work.



“It’s a chance for us to have work for our staff to do during those days and it’s a guaranteed source of revenue when NOTHING is guaranteed right now. Everything is a variable, so to have a consistent weekly source of revenue REALLY, really helped everything across the board.”

- Restaurant Interviewee

The financial implications of the program for restaurants were diverse. VEE helped to keep some businesses open, even as they made cuts. One interviewee noted, “I had three staff ...[W]hen this started I had to lay them off and I have yet to be able to bring them back...I’m able to work and keep the [restaurant] going, but have to do it alone.” Another restaurant reported that approximately 18% of their current revenue is coming through VEE. A third restaurant described the buoying effect of the program, stating, “It covered one-third of payroll and without that I don’t know how we’d have made it.” Some businesses have even been able to expand as a result of VEE. Two restaurants that began as mobile food vendors were able to open permanently sited restaurants since they began participating in VEE.

**Giving while receiving.** VEE has a strong appeal because it helps restaurants sustain their own businesses but also gives them the opportunity to help farmers, food producers, meal recipients, and their communities. Helping others boosted staff morale during a difficult time and created good will toward restaurants in communities. Restaurant interviewees reported being proud of their food and knowing that they are providing high quality, locally-sourced, nutritious meals to their communities. Some believed that the food that they were providing was healthier than the food provided by other food assistance programs. Others noted that their meals offer meal recipients human connection and help offset social isolation. They described how meals provided comfort to those receiving them because they knew the restaurant and the people making the food. In the words of one interviewee, “I can help people. This is the best feeling. People stop me on the street ... and they say thank you. That is so important. You feel good about yourself that I can make that happen.”



Another interviewee said, “Everyone Eats gives me life. It makes me feel strong again...The feeling is like your business has been reborn again. It’s alive again. Something that you thought was done, instead it wasn’t. Every time I go and give my food I’m always very grateful and proud...Because in a very dark moment for everybody’s lives there’s always that little shining light that you can touch. And that’s what VEE was for me.”

“Federal and state funds that went to help our restaurant without any freebies—my staff had to work. We then gave that money to local farms, so that money helped another small business. And then these meals went to our community. Those who grow, those who cook, and those who eat—a perfect triangle that the money helped. It’s a real success story.”

- Restaurant Interviewee

As mentioned in the Program Implementation section of this report, VEE helped to build and strengthen relationships between restaurants and farmers.

Restaurant interviewees were keenly aware of the stable income that VEE was providing to farmers and food producers who had been hurt by the closure of farmers’ markets, restaurants, and stores. With VEE, participating restaurants tend to buy from farmers in bulk, preventing them from having to throw out food that they had already grown but otherwise would not be able to sell.

**Increasing visibility.** The program has provided restaurants with “free advertising”, increased visibility and/or a reputation boost. Many restaurants chose to put their restaurant’s stickers on the meals they prepared so that recipients would be aware. One restaurant noted that distributions happen at the center of town, increasing awareness of the program and the participating restaurants. Restaurants have gained new customers this way. As one interviewee noted, “When we were offering it, we would get people that would not necessarily come to our restaurant. You create customers. They come back...Giving out free meals is giving out good will.” This was particularly helpful for new restaurants; as a result of VEE, they established a strong foundation within the community.



VEE provided restaurants with “**free advertising**”, **increased visibility**, and a **reputation boost**.

## Program Implementation

Restaurant interviewees universally reported a positive experience with VEE, their community hub, and, for those that were participating, with the Localvore program. One person summarized their experience, saying, “It really has been such a great thing for our State and our company.” Specific comments were that the reporting and payment systems were easy, there was little paperwork, payments came regularly, coordination was organized, communication was clear and there was enough lead-time to fill the orders. They also appreciated that the hubs facilitated connections with farmers and made it easier to source their ingredients locally. While some experienced challenges in getting started, the ease of participating in VEE often stood in contrast to accessing other forms of support like the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP).

**Getting the program off the ground.** Some participants mentioned challenges getting their restaurant up and running to implement VEE. Examples of difficulties they encountered included having the proper insurance in place and establishing systems to coordinate meal packing and delivery. Some restaurants did not have experience in providing take-out meals, so obtaining, sizing and paying for take-out containers was something new for them. One restaurant noted that it took some time to learn how to parse out costs for VEE meals when they purchase ingredients in bulk. Another commented that they were not able to meet an initial requirement to provide receipts for purchases, but the hub worked with them and they were able to provide a weekly sum of purchases instead.

There were some indications that the program could have reached more restaurants. One interviewee said that restaurants in their area did not participate because they did not understand the program. While community hub coordinators invited most restaurant interviewees to participate in VEE, at least one interviewee found out about the program on their own and asked to participate.



**“I was really impressed with how quickly from inception to execution the program got up and running. The first couple of weeks were a little rocky, but we figured it out.”**

**- Restaurant Interviewee**

One interviewee questioned how VEE made decisions about the number of meals that were allocated to each restaurant. They thought that their restaurant could have done more and wondered whether the process of allocating the number of meals was as equitable as it could have been.



VEE has helped restaurants **build relationships with farmers/food producers, source new products, and in some cases, expand their menu.**

**Building new relationships, strengthening existing relationships, and inspiring innovation.** VEE has helped restaurants build relationships with farmers/food producers, source new products and in some cases, expand their menu. Many of the restaurants who were interviewed already had a strong commitment to sourcing local products. They also had strong connections with local farmers and producers, often referring to them as friends and neighbors. One interviewee explained that before VEE, they did not actually measure the percentage of local ingredients they were using. They now use this metric to challenge themselves to continue increasing the percentage of local ingredients used in meal preparation.

Some interviewees noted that they made new connections with farmers. One interviewee said, “[B]efore I only knew a fair amount of the farmers, but now I have a whole list of other farmers that I didn’t know before. I can call them up and ask what products they have that day.” Others noted that working with an expanded group of farmers and food producers helped them to acquire new ingredients to incorporate into their menus.

VEE inspired them to create new meals that their regular customers enjoy. One participant said, "I am buying ingredients that I would not normally buy... [We] developed [a new offering] for a VEE meal but I want to keep it on our menu. The customers loved it; it worked well with our systems."

Some restaurants said that they also built new relationships or strengthened existing relationships with distribution sites/partners, other participating restaurants and volunteers for the program. One interviewee said that VEE has built collaboration in the local restaurant community and they are working on other initiatives together, including outdoor seating and pedestrian-friendly plans for the town.

**Exceeding the target for local purchasing.** All restaurant interviewees said that they were easily meeting the 10% target for local purchasing. Many noted that they were substantially exceeding the target, with one restaurant sourcing up to 80% local. One interviewee explained that their current circumstances (lower overhead due to restaurant closure and staff layoffs) facilitated more local purchasing. Others indicated that the 10% target for sourcing locally was too low.

“I think it was a missed opportunity to require only 10%. It should’ve been at least 25% because it is not hard to do.”  
- Restaurant Interviewee

**Tapping Localvore’s potential.** Those participating in the Localvore app felt it was a nice supplement to the local community hub program. Customers with the app can order meals and pick them up free of charge. They call ahead so they are less likely to forget to pick up the meal, and the items they can order are regular items on the restaurant’s menu. There may be technological barriers for some in getting started, but the program provides resources to help participants get started.

“The Localvore program was not on my radar until three weeks ago. I wish that it was around sooner. Now people are just starting to learn how it works and the funding is running out.”  
- Restaurant Interviewee

All of the interviewees participating in the Localvore program had joined within the last month although the program has been in place for two months. They commented that it had been successful, in one case providing more revenue in the first few weeks than the community hub program, and they wished they had known about it sooner. One person said they will look into continued participation with

the Localvore program / app beyond VEE, appreciating this innovation that may help attract paying customers to the restaurant.

**Challenges accessing other support.** Those restaurants that sought out other sources for support and funding found that they were often harder to access and sustain than VEE. Barriers included research to understand the programs and paperwork to apply, little follow through when inquiries were made, and new restaurants being ineligible for some forms of assistance.

The types of programs that restaurants accessed (or tried to access) included the Paycheck Protection Program (or PPP from the Small Business Administration), Restart Vermont (help with website development and marketing), the economic development relief grant and the small business association loan. One person noted that the funds provided by some of these programs were running out.

## Sustainability

When asked about the sustainability of VEE, all interviewees said that they hoped that the program would continue beyond 2020 and potentially beyond the economic downturn that resulted from COVID-19. For many, the current dining restrictions and economic downturn threatens their own restaurant's sustainability. They are uncertain that their business will be able to stay open without the income that VEE provides.

**A successful model.** Restaurant interviewees feel that VEE has been a huge success and they want this program to continue. They noted that the program infrastructure is now built, systems are in place and VEE is running smoothly. Participants said that it would be a shame to lose momentum, especially given the growth that the program has seen over time. Each week, more and more people in the community learn about the program and participate in the meal distributions.

Cuts to the program may decrease its ability to operate effectively. One participant noted that the program has to be continued at a certain scale for it to be sustainable; there is a minimum number of meals restaurants need to make in order for the investment in ingredients and preparation time to be cost-effective.



"I would hate to discontinue this program that has been really successful and getting more successful every week."

- Restaurant Interviewee

**The need continues.** A key theme from restaurant interviews was that Vermonters still depend upon the meals and the restaurants still need the revenue. Some interviewees were not sure if they would be able to stay open if VEE stops operating. Winter is a particularly difficult time for restaurants and the ongoing pandemic will make it even more challenging to continue functioning. One interviewee said, "If VEE ends, it's going to be a dark winter." Another person described VEE as "survival" for their restaurant and indicated that many others were in the same position.



Without VEE, many restaurants fear that they will have to **close their businesses.**

**A future beyond COVID-19.** Interviewees expressed interest in exploring the sustainability of the VEE program model beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. A couple of interviewees felt that their communities were already invested in continuing to connect restaurants with charitable meal distribution. Some examples of existing efforts are described:

- **Center for an Agricultural Economy.** Before the pandemic, the CAE in Hardwick had partnered with restaurants to implement a community meals program. Restaurants rotate to provide the meals. CAE leveraged these systems when they became a VEE community hub, and the community meals program will likely continue post-pandemic.
- **Meals on Wheels.** In the Upper Valley, Meals on Wheels has been working with restaurants to provide meals.



“[T]here are opportunities during this time because it’s exposing the hunger issues in our community and exposing the flaws in the restaurant industry...Just because a Tyson factory shuts down, it doesn’t mean there’s a shortage on chicken. It means we need to look inward to our community... To connect farms to restaurants. It’s not just a Band-Aid but it has been needed for a long time for the food system in general. It has so many benefits beyond just \$10. It’s really well thought out and I think if we can keep executing it our community will be all the better for it.”

- Restaurant Interviewee

## Quality Improvement

Restaurants reported learning a lot through the process of implementing this innovative program. Interviewees were able to reflect on what is working well with the program and what might be improved if it continues. Opportunities were cited to build upon the successes of the program in order to create an even stronger model.

**Evaluate the \$10 per meal reimbursement.** Responses were mixed when interviewees were asked about the adequacy of the \$10 per meal reimbursement. All interviewees said that they appreciated the dependable income that they received from the \$10 per meal. While some felt that \$10 was the right amount, others said that reimbursement could be a bit higher. They noted challenges in making a substantial, locally-sourced meal for \$10. A couple of interviewees specifically noted the cost of take-out containers and one interviewee suggested adding \$1-2 to the reimbursement to account for those costs.



There are opportunities to **build upon the successes** of VEE to create an **even stronger model.**

**Identify and engage priority populations for food access.** Some interviewees thought that more steps should be taken to ensure that the program is reaching those who are most likely to benefit from food assistance. They felt it was important to make participation easier for those with barriers like transportation challenges, inadequate internet, housing insecurity, or limited English proficiency.

**Consider other suggestions for improvement.** Participants offered several other suggestions for improvement. While each of these ideas was mentioned by one interviewee and did not rise to the level of a theme, they may warrant further exploration. Suggestions included:

- Add income requirements to ensure that the program is reaching those with the greatest need.
- Add standards for the meal such as nutritional guidelines or portion requirements.
- Examine the sustainability of the delivery system. The interviewee who suggested this questioned whether the delivery people were working extra hours for VEE and if they were getting paid extra for this time.
- Create a system for cancelling meals.
- Establish a centralized VEE system. The interviewee noted that the challenge of the community hub is that it is just in one geographic area, but many people work in one place, live in another and would like to pick up food in the middle. The Localvore program is statewide, but participants who sign up to participate with one community hub only have access to those restaurants.

## Future Evaluation Opportunities

Interviewees were asked what they wanted to know about VEE, should future evaluation of the program be possible. One of the key questions that restaurants wanted to know was whether the program would continue to be funded and the duration of that funding. Although these questions would not be answered through program evaluation, some of the other questions summarized below could demonstrate VEE's value, reach and effectiveness, helping to make the case for continued funding.

- What are the characteristics of meal recipients, i.e., who is served by the program and how does that compare to state and local demographics?
- Who is not being reached by the program?
- What is the geographic spread of the program (statewide)?
- How many people are served by the program each month statewide?
- What is the experience of the meal eaters and what benefits does the program have for them?
- What is the percentage of local purchasing that restaurants are meeting?



**More extensive evaluation** could demonstrate VEE's value, reach, and effectiveness, helping to make the case for continued funding.

# DISCUSSION

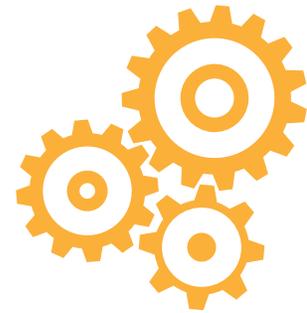
This report represents the findings from Phase I evaluation of VEE, with the purpose of laying a foundation for more comprehensive evaluation. In this formative evaluation, JSI interviewed a subset of representatives from community hubs and restaurants. These two groups of interviewees had different roles in program implementation, with hubs coordinating the program at the local level and restaurants managing preparation for their allotted number of meals. These differences in roles offered distinct perspectives of the program, nonetheless, common themes across the two groups arose. The following questions are offered as a structure for synthesizing and interpreting Phase I evaluation findings. Additionally, these questions could be used to guide discussions with program stakeholders on the future course of VEE and evaluation efforts.

## What has VEE built that is new?

VEE's program model leveraged cross-sector collaboration to collectively impact multiple systems. COVID-19 presented a crisis for food security, restaurant stability, farm and food producer viability, and overall economic development. VEE provided a common cause for organizations with different missions, bringing a broad cross-section of stakeholders together who may not have previously worked with one another. Community hubs included organizations dedicated to economic development, social services, charitable food systems, and agriculture. Distribution sites included faith-based organizations, worksites, childcare centers, and housing units. The program also encouraged new partnerships between for-profit businesses and non-profit organizations. The community level systems and processes developed further supported this collaboration around shared value of food security and economic security within communities.

Another unique aspect of the program echoed throughout the interviews was that it provided the opportunity to give while receiving. Those who received meals felt good about helping restaurants or bringing meals to community members; restaurants felt good about helping farms, food producers and meal recipients; and farmers felt good about contributing ingredients for the meals. With this, the program fostered community engagement, connection and well-being.

VEE expands beyond the boundaries of economic development, charitable food distribution, and promotion of buying local. The implementation of VEE has flourished as a dynamic system of interrelated and interdependent components. By inspiring collaborations and providing mutual benefit, VEE strengthened communities.



VEE fostered **cross-sector collaboration** and developed **community level systems** around a shared value for food security and economic security.



VEE fostered **community engagement** and **connection**.

## What has VEE strengthened that was already in place?

Vermont is well-known for its agricultural economy and the high value placed upon using locally-produced ingredients. VEE reinforced this value by requiring that participating restaurants source at least 10% of their ingredients from local producers. The initial research presented in this report indicates that participating restaurants embraced this requirement and often significantly exceeded it.

VEE has supported community organizations (community hubs) in expanding their role and reach by building on or newly initiating food access services. With existing partners and established credibility within communities, these organizations are well-poised to address food security with responsive and acceptable services and offerings.



VEE strengthened restaurants' value for **sourcing local** and community organizations' ability to **address food insecurity**.

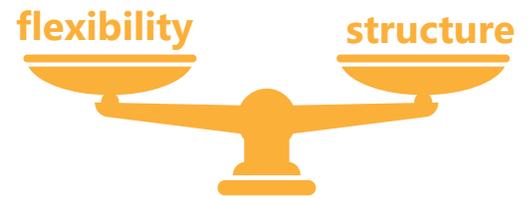
## If VEE continues, what can we learn from the first phase of implementation?

VEE has served as an opportunity to build ideas, partnerships, energy, and knowledge that can be used in the next phases of program development. All representatives interviewed in this phase of the evaluation recognized that VEE was envisioned and implemented in a short period of time. With time to reflect upon program successes and potential improvements, it will be important for SEVCA and implementing partners to consider how to go forward.

While VEE has thrived and leveraged many available resources in this initial period, a clear theme from the community hub interviews was that more implementation support will likely be needed to sustain the program and help it to meet demand in the longer term. There were concerns about the strain on organizational capacity for the community hub organizations, delivery personnel, and distribution sites. Given that the program must operate at a certain scale to benefit restaurants and food producers, leveraging more federal, state, and local resources to keep the program going seems critical to ongoing success.

Interview findings revealed a tension between the current program's flexibility and adaptability versus a desire for more structure and standardization. Many interviewees appreciated the ease of joining the program, the minimal reporting requirements, and the embodiment of "everyone eats" that allowed them to provide meals with few questions asked.

However, some of the suggested quality improvements included a call for more structure including: establishing a higher threshold for locally-sourced produce, creating more equitable standards for engaging restaurants and distribution sites, establishing nutritional requirements for meals and creating systems to ensure that the program was reaching those who would most benefit from food assistance. As the program evolves, there seems to be interest in finding the appropriate balance between flexibility and structure.



As the program evolves, VEE should consider **balancing flexibility with structure.**

## What can we learn from VEE that might benefit other systems?

Whether or not VEE continues, some lessons from its implementation can be carried forth to improve other programs or systems. A key theme from the community hub interviews was that VEE helped to mitigate stigma associated with accessing charitable foods. Some aspects of the program that seem to have helped mitigate stigma were: no eligibility criteria; the opportunity to “give while receiving”; the dignity of eating a restaurant meal and, in some cases, having a choice of meals; and the fact that meals were distributed to places that recipients frequented (worksites, childcare centers, etc.). Examining the meal recipients’ experience with the program and their perspectives could help to determine the value of integrating some of these elements into other charitable food programs.

Connecting restaurants to charitable food programs may be another concept for further exploration. Several of the restaurants interviewed expressed interest in continuing to provide meals to the community once the COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed and restaurants can operate at full capacity. In addition to VEE’s systems, there are precedents for this type of program with the Hardwick community meals program and the Upper Valley Meals on Wheels program. In the words of one restaurant participant: “I think [VEE would] be successful if it wasn’t a novelty. If it just became that this is how we do it in Vermont. This is how we feed people, keep restaurants going, connect to farmers. It’s not just a Band-Aid on the problem ... [I]f we can make it replicable so that other states and other communities start to do it.”

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to note some limitations to the evaluation methodology and findings. This formative evaluation drew upon findings from interviews with a small convenience sample of community hubs and restaurants. JSI interviewed six of the 14 community hubs and eight of the more than 120 participating restaurants. As such, it is not known if the findings in this report are comprehensive or representative of the broader experience of participating community hubs and restaurants.

There is a risk of selection bias, meaning that those who chose to participate in the interviews may be different from those who did not choose to participate.

The scope of this evaluation did not include data from other stakeholders such as meal recipients, farms, food producers, SEVCA, volunteers, Task Force members who were not also representatives of community hubs, or other charitable food organizations not involved with the program.

While several organizations sent the results of their own evaluation activities, such as surveys of meal recipients, these results were not integrated into this Phase I report. In consultation with SEVCA, JSI will establish priorities for future phases of evaluation to expand upon the foundation that has been laid in this Phase I report.

## CONCLUSION

The findings from this formative evaluation shed light on some aspects of VEE. The program has reported value in its role to provide access to food while supporting local businesses and the economy during a crisis scenario. An unintended benefit of the program is its role in building relationships, partnerships, and community connectedness. There is interest in the program continuing in some form, building on the innovations and learnings from this initial implementation of VEE. There are opportunities to explore how VEE can develop into a sustainable program and interface and/or integrate with the existing food access system in Vermont while maintaining its components that support economic development and cross-sector collaboration.

Phase II evaluation activities will involve further synthesis and interpretation of Phase I findings, and development of recommendations to guide future VEE evaluative planning. This will include establishing priority areas of focus for examination and learning.



# APPENDICES



## Appendix A. VEE Statewide Task Force Members

# VEE Task Force Members

1. Agency of Commerce and Community Development
2. Capstone Community Action
3. Downtown Brattleboro Alliance
4. Hunger Free Vermont
5. ShiftMeals
6. Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA)
7. Vermont Association of Agencies on Aging
8. Vermont Community Foundation
9. Vermont Department of Public Service
10. Vermont Emergency Management/ State Emergency Operations Center
11. Vermont Foodbank
12. Vermont Fresh Network
13. Vermont Hospitality Coalition
14. Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund - Farm to Plate Network

## Appendix B. Community Hub Interview Guide

## VEE Community Hubs Interview Guide

**Organization:**

**Interviewee(s):**

**Interviewer:**

**Date/Time:**

**Introduction (JSI to read to the interviewee(s)):** Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Laura Rios Ruggiero and I work for JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI), a public health consulting firm with offices in Burlington and Boston. As you may know, JSI has been contracted by Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) to conduct a first phase of evaluation of the Vermont Everyone Eats (VEE) program. This involves conducting interviews with community hub representatives like yourself and also restaurant participants in the program. The purpose of this interview is for us to learn about your experience with and perspective about VEE, including:

1. Strengths, challenges and opportunities of the infrastructure that has been created through VEE,
2. Areas for program improvement that support greater reach, feasibility, effectiveness and satisfaction with implementation,
3. Value and effects of the program on community hubs and regional partners, and as much as you can speak to it on meal recipients, and
4. Insights to inform future evaluation activities.

The interview should take approximately one hour. It is being recorded, only to help with making sure we capture all the details for our notes. In addition, [INSERT NAME HERE] will be taking notes throughout. Your honest responses are encouraged. The information from all of our interviews will be compiled and shared in summary to SEVCA and stakeholders of VEE.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

### **Questions**

#### ***General***

Let's start with some general questions on your role and experience with VEE then we'll move to more specific questions on implementation, effects, sustainability, and success.

1. Briefly describe your organization and the role it has played in VEE.
2. What motivated or inspired your organization to be a community hub?

3. Before I ask a series of specific questions about your experience with VEE, could you briefly describe your experience with the program.
4. What have you found most valuable about your participation in VEE?

### ***Implementation***

5. Please describe SEVCA's support to your community hub.

#### Potential prompts:

- What type of technical assistance and other resources did they provide?
- What additional support would have been helpful to your organization over the past several months?

6. How has your organization collaborated with other community hubs and partners (both for and non-profit) across the state in order to implement the VEE community hub?

#### Potential prompts:

- Have you participated in the weekly community hub calls? What have you found helpful about them? What could be improved?
- What has been your experience participating in the Community of Practice?
- If the organization served on the Task Force - Did you find the Task Force to be a valuable component of the program? Why or why not?

### ***Effect***

7. Can you share one success story from your organization's participation in the program?
8. What do you see as the program's effect on your organization?

#### Potential prompts:

- Have you:
  - Hired new staff?
  - Developed new partnerships?
- Does the program align with your mission or has it prompted you to expand your mission?
- Are there other changes or support of the organization that have been driven by the program?

9. Based upon your interactions and observations of meal recipients, are there any anecdotes you'd like to share about the significance or value of the program for meal recipients?

### ***Sustainability***

10. What are your thoughts on the sustainability of VEE?

#### Potential prompts:

- Should VEE be continued, in some form, post-pandemic? Why?
- Do you see it functioning more as continued hunger relief or response to emergency situations?

- What are your thoughts on continuing to participate in VEE if it continues to be funded after December?
11. What funding sources and/or resources has your community hub leveraged above and beyond the CARES act to support this program?
- Potential prompts:
- For example, were there volunteers or donated goods/services like vans, signs, advertising, report writing etc.?
  - Have you applied for the Department of Children and Families, or DCF, mini-grants?

***To Inform Future Evaluation Activities***

12. What would you consider success to be for VEE?
13. What would you like to learn/know about the program through future evaluation efforts?
14. Have you been collecting or monitoring any information about the program to date via formal or informal surveys, anecdotes, etc.? If yes, what have you been collecting or monitoring and how? How has this information or data been used?

**Conclusion**

15. Is there anything else about VEE and your community hub that you would like to share?

Thank you very much for your time. We greatly appreciate your insights for this evaluation. As I mentioned before, a summary of findings across the interviews we conduct will be provided to SEVCA in December and they intend to share it with all interview recipients.

## Appendix C. Restaurant Interview Guide

## VEE Restaurant Interview Guide

**Restaurant:**

**Interviewee(s):**

**Interviewer:**

**Date/Time:**

**Introduction (JSI to read to the interviewee(s)):** Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Sasha Bianchi and I work for JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI), a public health consulting firm with offices in Burlington and Boston. As you may know, JSI has been contracted by Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) to conduct a first phase of evaluation of the Vermont Everyone Eats (VEE) program. This involves conducting interviews with restaurant participants, like yourself, and also community hub representatives in the program. The purpose of this interview is for us to learn about your experience with and perspective about VEE, including:

1. Strengths, challenges and opportunities of the infrastructure that has been created through VEE,
2. Areas for program improvement that support greater reach, feasibility, effectiveness and satisfaction with implementation,
3. Value and effects of the program on restaurants, and as much as you can speak to it on farms, and
4. Insights to inform future evaluation activities.

The interview should take approximately one hour. It is being recorded, only to help with making sure we capture all the details for our notes. In addition, [INSERT NAME HERE] will be taking notes throughout. Your honest responses are encouraged. The information from all of our interviews will be compiled and shared in summary to SEVCA and stakeholders of VEE.

Recognizing the value of your time and many competing priorities, we are offering a \$50 gift card for your restaurant's participation in this interview.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

### **Questions**

#### ***General***

Let's start with some general questions on your role and experience with VEE then we'll move to more specific questions on implementation, effects, sustainability, and success.

1. Briefly describe your restaurant and the role it has played in VEE.

Potential prompts:

- When did the restaurant start participating in VEE? Have you participated consistently since you joined? About how many meals do you provide on average, for example, weekly?
  - How have staff responded to working on VEE? Thinking about the staff you regularly employ, what proportion are working with VEE?
2. What motivated or inspired your restaurant to participate in VEE?
  3. Before I ask a series of specific questions about your experience with VEE, could you briefly describe your experience with the program over the past months?
  4. What have you found most valuable about your restaurant's participation in VEE?

**Implementation**

5. What community hub did you work with? What was your experience like coordinating with them for meal preparation and delivery? Has anything helped to facilitate the process? What have been some of the challenges? What have been some of the benefits?
6. Were you able to meet the program's requirements (E.g., sourcing 10% of your food locally)? If yes, what facilitated your ability to do so? If no, what made it challenging to do so?

Potential prompts:

- How do you feel about the requirement of sourcing 10% of food locally? Based on your experience meeting this requirement, would you suggest maintaining, increasing or decreasing this requirement? Why?
  - How did you feel about the reporting requirements?
7. Have you developed any new collaborations and partnerships through your participation in VEE? Please tell me about these.

**Effect**

8. Can you share one success story about your restaurant's participation in the program?
9. What do you see as the program's effect on your restaurant?

Potential prompts:

- Did it provide a stable stream of revenue?
- Did it enable you to retain or hire new staff?
- How did the program impact staff morale?

- How did it impact your local food sourcing relationships? Were you already buying local? Has your awareness or attitude about buying local ingredients changed as a result of the program?
  - How has the program impacted your connection to or reputation in the community?
10. Based on your interactions and your observations of farmers or local food producers supplying food to restaurants participating in VEE, are there any anecdotes you'd like to share about the significance or value of the program for farmers and/or local food producers?

### ***Sustainability***

11. What are your thoughts on the sustainability of VEE?

#### Potential prompts:

- Should VEE be continued, in some form, post-pandemic? Why?
  - Do you see it functioning more as continued hunger relief or response to emergency situations?
  - What are your thoughts on continuing to participate in VEE if it continues to be funded after December?
  - Did \$10/meal work for your business?
    - i. If no, what amount would work better?
    - ii. If yes, would you participate for a lower reimbursement amount? If yes, what's the lowest amount you would be able to participate in this program for?
12. What funding sources and/or resources has your restaurant leveraged above and beyond the CARES act to support this program?

#### Potential prompts:

- For example, were there volunteers or donated goods/services like vans, signs, advertising, report writing etc.?

### ***To Inform Future Evaluation Activities***

13. What would you consider success to be for VEE?

14. What would you like to learn/know about the program through future evaluation efforts?

15. Have you been collecting or monitoring any information about the program to date via formal or informal surveys, anecdotes, etc.? If yes, what have you been collecting or monitoring and how? How has this information or data been used?

### **Conclusion**

16. Is there anything else about VEE and your restaurant that you would like to share?

Thank you very much for your time. We greatly appreciate your insights for this evaluation. Please provide your email address and sign here so that we can send your electronic gift card. As I mentioned before, a summary of findings across the interviews we conduct will be provided to SEVCA in December and they intend to share it with all interview recipients.

## Appendix D. Interviewee Profiles

## Community Hub Interviewee Profiles

The profiles below list key attributes of the community hub organizations that were included in the evaluation. Details listed in the profiles were obtained from interviews and the [Community Hub Story Map](#). Lists of partners, distribution sites, restaurants, farmers, food producers and food hubs are meant to illustrate the breadth of participating organizations. These lists may not capture all participating organizations.

Bennington Hub	
Interviewee Organization	The Collaborative
Organization Type	Youth substance use prevention
Communities Served	Bennington, Manchester Center, Woodford, Shaftsbury, Pownal, Dorset, Arlington, Sunderland
Hub Initiation	Mid-November 2020
Example Partners & Distribution Sites	GBICS/Kitchen Cupboard, HIS Pantry, Head Start Bennington County, Manchester Food Cupboard, Arlington Food Shelf
Example Restaurants	Not specified
Example Farms, Producers and Food Hubs	Not specified
Meals (if noted)	Not specified

## Brattleboro and Beyond Hub

Interviewee Organization	Downtown Brattleboro Alliance
Organization Type	Economic development
Communities Served	Brattleboro, Guilford, Vernon, Dummerston, Putney
Hub Initiation	August 2020 (first hub)
Example Partners & Distribution Sites	Brattleboro Community Justice Center, Brattleboro Area Mutual Aid, Edible Brattleboro, Health Care and Rehabilitation Services of Vermont, Dummerston Cares, Loaves and Fishes, Retreat Farm, Groundworks Collaborative / Foodworks, Women's Freedom Center, SEVCA, Boys & Girls Club Brattleboro, Putney Mutual Aid/Putney Foodshelf, and St. Brigid's Kitchen and Pantry
Example Restaurants	Mama Sezz, The Works, Brattleboro House of Pizza, Dosa Kitchen, Yalla, The Gleanery, duo Vermont, Hazel, Shin La, Masala House, The Vermont Table, Fast Eddie's Bakery
Example Farms, Producers, Food Hubs	Food Connects (Brattleboro), Dutton Farm, New Leaf Community Supported Agriculture, Walker Farm and Bunker Farm (Dummerston)
Meals (if noted)	1,050 meals/day

## Central Vermont Hub

Interviewee Organization	Capstone Community Action
Organization Type	Anti-poverty
Communities Served	Berlin, Royalton, Randolph, Granville, Hancock, Rochester, Stowe, Hyde Park, East Montpelier, Waitsfield, Roxbury, Calais, Worcester, Brookfield, Braintree, Washington, Turnbridge, Barre Town, Montpelier, Warren, Waterbury, Williamstown, Barre City
Hub Initiation	August 2020 (estimated)
Example Partners & Distribution sites	Skinny Pancake / Shift Meals, Barre Salvation Army, Enough Ministries, Good Samaritan Haven, Montpelier Unitarian Church, Another Way, St. Augustine, Washington County Mental Health, Northfield Food Shelf, Worcester Food Shelf, Capstone Head Start (Barre Center, home visitors Washington), Working Bridges / United Way, Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice, VYCC Health Care Share / Central Vermont Medical Center, Plainfield Health Center, Family Center of Washington County
Example Restaurants	Skinny Pancake / Shift Meals, Cornerstone Restaurant & Pub, Peg & Ter's, Jake's ONE Market; Open Hearth Pizza, Richmond Community Kitchen, American Flatbread Burlington, El Toro, Grazers, Agave, Rabble Rouser, The Woods Hospitality Group, El Cortijo Taqueria, Bliss Bee, Three Penny Taproom, The Scale Poke Bar, Ruben James, Momo's Market, Alla Vita, Pizzeria Verita, Trattoria Delia, St. Paul Gastro Grub, Single Pebble, Sweetwaters, Good Taste Catering / Taste Solutions, Zabby and Elf's Stone Soup, Top of the Block Sandwich Shop, Kismayo Kitchen, Little Morocco Cafe, Joe's Kitchen at Screamin' Ridge Farm, RiRa Burlington, Piecemeal Pies, The North Branch Cafe, Morse Block Deli & Taps, Big Picture Theater & Cafe, Hotel Vermont, Edelweiss Deli, Pingala
Example Farms, Food Producers and Food Hubs	Not specified
Meals (if noted)	Over 5,000 meals / week

## Chittenden County Hub

Interviewee Organization	Intervale Center
Organization Type	Community food systems
Communities Served	Burlington, Williston, Essex, Colchester, Shelburne, Hinesburg, South Burlington, Winooski Sites available to the public are listed as "Open to the public" Meals are also sent to Franklin & Grand Isle Counties
Hub Initiation	September 2020 (estimated)
Example Partners & Distribution Sites	Skinny Pancake/Shift Meals, Champlain Housing Trust, Burlington Housing Authority, Decker Towers, Burlington Salvation Army, Cathedral Square/Support and Services at Home (SASH), O'Dell Apartments, Salmon Run Apartments, Holy Rosary Church, AALV/New Farms for New Americans (NFNA), ANEW Place, Heineberg Community Senior Housing, Holy Cross, McAuley Square, Ruggles House, Thayer House, Champlain Senior Center, Early Years Child Development Center, Feeding Chittenden, The Boys and Girls Club of Burlington, University of Vermont Pediatrics, Town Meadow Senior Housing, Whitcomb Woods Terrace, Elm Place Apartments, Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) Health Care Share / Richmond Community Meals, Wright House, Grand Way Commons, Whitney Hill
Example Restaurants	Grazers, Bliss Bee, Skinny Pancake / Shift Meals, Little Morocco Cafe, Pingala, New Moon, Momo's Market, Farmhouse Group
Example Farms, Producers, and Food Hubs	Not specified
Meals (if noted)	100,000 meals over three months 9,000 meals per month since early November 1,000 meals sent to Franklin & Grand Isle Counties in partnership with the Healthy Roots Team

**Northeast Kingdom Hub**

Interviewee Organizations	Northeast Kingdom Community Action	Green Mountain United Way
Organization Type	Anti-poverty	Health/education/financial sustainability
Communities Served	Lyndon, St Johnsbury, Brighton (Island Pond), Barton, Canaan	
Hub Initiation	Early October 2020	
Example Partners & Distribution Sites	Helping Other People Every Day (H.O.P.E.), Weidmann Electrical Technology, Little Dippers Doodle Childcare Center, ABC & LOL Childcare Center, Cherry Street Playcare	
Example Restaurants	Burke Public House, The Pizza Man, Pica-Pica Filipino Cuisine, Lake Morey Resort	
Example Farms, Producers and Food Hubs	Black River Produce (Springfield), Joe's Brook Farm (St. Johnsbury), Upper Valley Produce (White River Junction)	
Meals (if noted)	Not specified	

<b>Windham / Windsor Counties Hub</b>		
Interviewee Organizations	Springfield Family Center	Chester Helping Hands
Organization Type	Anti-poverty	Hunger relief
Communities Served	Chester, Londonderry, Ludlow, Westminster, Athens, Rockingham, Springfield, Cavendish, and surrounding area	
Hub Initiation	August 2020 (estimated)	
Example Partners & Distribution Sites	Free Range Restaurant, Windham Congressional Church, Grafton Community Church, Bellows Falls Senior Center, Our Place Drop-In Center, Parks Place/Greater Falls Connection, Neighborhood Connections,	
Example Restaurants	MKT, Jamaican Jewelz, Wunderbar, New American Grill, Upper Pass Lodge	
Example Farms, Producers and Food Hubs	Not specified	
Meals (if noted)	35,000 meals since hub initiation	

## Restaurant Interviewee Profiles

The profiles below list key attributes of the restaurants that were included in the evaluation. Details listed in the profiles were obtained from interviews.

<b>Andrzej's Polish Kitchen</b>	
Restaurant Type	Food truck
Community Hub	Brattleboro and Beyond
Length of Time Participating in VEE	2 months
Number of Employees	1 full time, 1 part-time
Number of Weekly Meals (if noted)	300
In Business Less Than a Year Before the Pandemic?	No

<b>Front Seat Coffee</b>	
Restaurant Type	Permanently sited
Community Hub	Center for an Agricultural Economy & Localvore
Length of Time Participating in VEE	Not specified
Number of Employees	Not specified
Number of Weekly Meals (if noted)	70-75
In Business Less Than a Year Before the Pandemic?	Yes

**Green Mountain Fungi**

Restaurant Type	Catering and food producer
Community Hub	Rutland Area
Length of Time Participating in VEE	1-2 months
Number of Employees	1
Number of Weekly Meals (if noted)	Not specified
In Business Less Than a Year Before the Pandemic?	Yes

**Mama Tamara & Famiglia**

Restaurant Type	Catering, now permanently sited
Community Hub	Rutland Area
Length of Time Participating in VEE	4-5 months
Number of Employees	2
Number of Weekly Meals (if noted)	100 to start, increased to 200
In Business Less Than a Year Before the Pandemic?	Yes

<b>Parker Pie</b>	
Restaurant Type	Permanently sited, currently open for takeout only
Community Hub	Center for an Agricultural Economy & Localvore
Length of Time Participating in VEE (if noted)	Not specified
Number of Employees	Not specified
Number of Weekly Meals (if noted)	160
In Business Less Than a Year Before the Pandemic?	No

<b>Piecemeal Pies</b>	
Restaurant Type	Permanently sited
Community Hub	Upper Valley
Length of Time Participating in VEE	3-4 months
Number of Employees	9 (4 working on VEE)
Number of Weekly Meals (if noted)	160
In Business Less Than a Year Before the Pandemic?	No

**The Rollin' Rooster**

Restaurant Type	Food truck and permanently sited
Community Hub	Rutland Area
Length of Time Participating in VEE	Not specified
Number of Employees	8 (began the summer with 3)
Number of Weekly Meals (if noted)	450-600
In Business Less Than a Year Before the Pandemic?	Yes

**Windsor Diner**

Restaurant Type	Permanently sited, currently open for takeout only
Community Hub	Upper Valley & Localvore
Length of Time Participating in VEE	Not specified
Number of Employees	Currently 1 (others laid off)
Number of Weekly Meals (if noted)	50-100
In Business Less Than a Year Before the Pandemic?	No

## Appendix E. VEE Community Hubs



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible through funding from Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA). JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. was contracted to gather data, conduct analyses, and produce this report of findings. SEVCA provided overall guidance and input into the evaluation process. We extend our thanks to the Vermont Everyone Eats community hubs and restaurants for generously sharing their time, experiences, and insights for this evaluation.

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## About JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.

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