

Vital Communities' History

3rd edition, June 2011

- 1993 In September, the League of Women Voters of the Upper Valley launched a new project called "Upper Valley: 2001 & Beyond" (UV:2001). Betty Porter and Charlotte Faulkner were the project Co-Chairs; Delia Clark was the Coordinator. The project's purpose was to increase communication and cooperation among Upper Valley towns for regional planning, sustainability and civic engagement. The League envisioned: (1) increasing awareness and participation at the town level by holding Community Profiles throughout the Upper Valley; (2) developing a list of quality-of-life indicators (Valley VitalSigns); and (3) recruiting local organizations to monitor those indicators over time. The League contracted with Antioch New England Institute for staffing (Delia) and fiscal agent services.
- 1994 Staff created the Community Profile model for town visioning. (The *Civic Profile* used by the NH Cooperative Extension Service didn't evaluate a town's economic conditions, and the *Take Charge* model used by the VT Cooperative Extension Service didn't evaluate a town's social conditions, so UV:2001 borrowed from each of those, as well as from other models). Other activities included: (1) talking with civic leaders about how to make Profiles and Indicators widespread in this region; (2) holding two Community Profiles to test and polish the new model; and (3) making a video to promote Community Profiles.
- 1995 Four Community Profiles were held. UV:2001 convened a region-wide "Valley VitalSigns Forum" in October, run by Alan AtKisson (Director of *Sustainable Seattle*) and attended by 150 people from 25 Upper Valley towns. Its goal was to learn from participants *what they valued* in this region and what sustainability indicators they wished to track. Participants suggested over 50 indicators in 14 topic areas. To advertise the Forum, the Valley News donated tongue-in-cheek versions of October 2010 front pages of the Valley News, with stories and graphics depicting dire consequences from ignoring the region's sustainability. Planning began for Valley Quest, a program to strengthen community among young people by working with schools.
- 1996 Four Community Profiles were held. UV:2001 brought Alan AtKisson back to the Upper Valley to give a talk on the value of indicators programs. Fifteen volunteer groups worked on the list of proposed Valley VitalSigns indicators – at its longest, the list numbered 81 indicators. UV:2001 requested public input to help narrow the list. It was finalized at 23 indicators in four categories: social, economic, environmental and cultural. Valley Quest was piloted in 10 schools. The first Quest booklet was created, with 16 Quests, and the first *Teachers' Guide* was published.
- 1997 The League of Women Voters of the Upper Valley spun off *Upper Valley: 2001 & Beyond* to become an independent organization called "Vital Communities of the Upper Valley." Its mission was "to engage citizens in community life and to foster the long-term balance of cultural, economic, environmental, and social well-being in our region." Delia Clark was the Executive Director. The organization's first programs were Community Profiles, Valley VitalSigns, and Valley Quest. Four Community Profiles were held. The second Quest booklet, featuring 21 Quests, was published.

- 1998 Vital Communities of the Upper Valley received 501(c)3 status from the Internal Revenue Service. Three Community Profiles were held. The third Quest booklet was published, containing 39 Quests in 18 towns.
- 1999 No Community Profiles were held. The fourth Quest booklet was published, containing 52 Quests in 24 towns. Local trails groups formed an umbrella organization, the “Upper Valley Trails Alliance,” for which Vital Communities was the fiscal agent.
- 2000 Two Community Profiles were held, and 25 new Quests were created. The organization shortened its name to “Vital Communities” and became an independent nonprofit organization (no longer contracting with ANEI for services). Len Cadwallader became Vital Communities’ Executive Director.
- 2001 One Community Profile was held. Vital Communities published 2,500 copies of *Valley Quest: 89 Treasure Hunts in the Upper Valley*. The book’s 89 Quests spanned 31 towns. Under the auspices of the Valley VitalSigns program, three new projects began: one supported local agriculture; one (partnering with local businesses) was called the “Upper Valley Housing Coalition”; and one (partnering with town officials and transportation companies) was called the “Upper Valley Transportation Management Association.” The Housing Coalition and the Transportation Management Association were independent entities that hired Vital Communities for staffing and fiscal agency. The Upper Valley Trails Alliance received 501(c)3 status from the Internal Revenue Service and became an independent nonprofit organization.
- 2002 No Community Profiles were held. 30 new Quests were created. Valley Quest published the *Village Quest Curriculum* and released a 2nd printing of *Valley Quest: 89 Treasure Hunts in the Upper Valley*. Vital Communities held a local agriculture fair called “Flavors of the Valley.”
- 2003 One Community Profile was held. Valley Quest published the *Cemetery Quest Curriculum* and 35 new Quests. Vital Communities named its agriculture project “Valley Food & Farm,” and the program hosted its 2nd annual “Flavors of the Valley.” The Upper Valley Housing Coalition produced two short videos on the need for workforce housing in this region. Vital Communities ran a *Great Train Adventure* in October for outreach, development and education.
- 2004 The Community Profile program was suspended. The Valley Quest program now included 164 Quests in 50 Upper Valley towns. University Press of New England published *Quests: A Guide to Creating Community Treasure Hunts*. Vital Communities published *Valley Quest II: 75 MORE Treasure Hunts in the Upper Valley*. Valley Food & Farm hosted its 3rd annual “Flavors of the Valley” and published a *Locally Grown Guide* (listing farms/stores where locally grown farm products could be bought). Vital Communities held a 2nd *Great Train Adventure* and discontinued the use of “Valley VitalSigns” as a program name. It now ran two programs (Valley Quest and Valley Food & Farm) and two partnerships: Upper Valley Housing Coalition and Upper Valley Transportation Management Association. The Hanover Conservation Council gave Vital Communities its “Community Organization of the Year” award. Vermont Housing Finance Agency gave the Upper Valley Housing Coalition its bi-annual “Housing Hero” award.

- 2005 Valley Quest began offering workshops outside the Upper Valley: Burlington, Berlin, Keene, Manchester and Martha's Vineyard. Valley Quest seminars were offered for graduate credit through Plymouth State University. Valley Food & Farm hosted its 4th annual "Flavors of the Valley" and published the *Locally Grown Guide's* 2nd edition. Valley Food & Farm also launched a "Farm to Dartmouth" project to help Dartmouth Food Service purchase locally grown foods for its dining halls. The Upper Valley Housing Coalition educated citizens, planners and zoning officials about the importance of affordable housing. It advised other regions in NH and VT on how to start local housing coalitions. It also studied the feasibility of starting a "Land Bank" fund to buy desirable properties and sell them to developers of affordable housing. The Upper Valley Transportation Management Association studied the impact of Advance Transit bus service on the City of Lebanon. Vital Communities conducted a one-year project to measure quality-of-life in the Upper Valley through a survey and a series of five public forums.
- 2006 Valley Quest helped other regions and organizations develop Quest programs. The first Quest book went out of print after selling 5,000 copies. The program received the "Marie Pirie Environmental Program of the Year" award from the New England Education Alliance. Valley Food & Farm's 5th annual "Flavors of the Valley" drew 1,000 attendees. Its 3rd edition of the *Locally Grown Guide* listed 300 businesses selling locally grown farm products. Valley Food & Farm printed 20,000 copies of the *Guide* and also made it available online, where users could search by product, location, or farm name. The "Farm to Dartmouth" project continued, and "Healthy Eating by Design" was launched to engage children in healthy eating. The Upper Valley Housing Coalition advocated for zoning changes to facilitate new affordable housing. It endorsed specific development proposals in Woodstock, Norwich and Hanover. The Upper Valley Transportation Management Association published a regional Transportation Map showing bus routes, rail services, and contact information for four public transit providers. It advocated for increased public funding for these providers and researched additional funding sources.
- 2007 Valley Quest taught six organizations across the country to develop their own Quest programs and curricula. Staff attended 12 conferences and taught 12 multi-day workshops throughout the United States. Valley Food & Farm printed 20,000 copies of the *Locally Grown Guide* (4th edition) and drew 1,500 attendees to its 6th annual "Flavors of the Valley." "Farm to Dartmouth" concluded with contracts between Dartmouth and 10 local growers to supply its dining halls with fruits, vegetables, meat and eggs – an increase of \$30,000 in its local food purchases. The 18-month "Healthy Eating by Design" project concluded after teaching local children how to grow and cook vegetables. The Upper Valley Housing Coalition hosted two well-attended Business Leaders' Breakfasts and two seminars, continuing its advocacy for affordable housing. It also educated prospective home buyers about the moderately priced housing being built and how to purchase a home. The Transportation Management Association printed "A Widening Gap," analyzing the increasing demand for public transit services and the shortfall of state and federal transportation funds. It also supported the opening of a new park-and-ride, advocated for bus shelters, and helped transit providers apply for state funding.
- 2008 Valley Quest published *Best of Valley Quest*, featuring 70 Quests (old and new) in 50 towns. 16 new Quests were created. Staff gave workshops and talks in 10 states and in Hungary.

Valley Food & Farm hosted its 7th annual “Flavors of the Valley” and printed a 5th edition of the *Locally Grown Guide*. It also launched a new project called “Fresh Connections,” linking local business owners and their employees with local farms and food. The Upper Valley Housing Coalition continued its popular Business Leaders’ Breakfasts and its home ownership classes. It also hosted a conference on the advantages of clustering smaller homes in new developments and helped create the New Hampshire Housing and Conservation Planning Program, which awarded grants for housing proposals that blended housing and conservation. The Upper Valley Transportation Management Association printed the “Mobility Checklist: Guidelines for Efficient and Livable Growth,” which helped communities reduce their reliance on single-occupant vehicle commuting. The checklist received “Project of the Year” recognition from the New Hampshire Planners’ Association. The Transportation Management Association also helped create commuter vanpools and other solutions to address rising fuel costs.

2009 Valley Quest spun off a national/international consulting organization called “Poetics of Place” to meet growing demand from outside the Upper Valley for Questing education. Valley Quest continued to support the existing network of Quests in the Upper Valley. Valley Food & Farm printed its 6th edition of the *Locally Grown Guide*, listing 234 local farms (a 76% increase over the number of farms listed in the 1st edition). It hosted the 8th annual “Flavors of the Valley,” continued to support “Fresh Connections,” launched a Valley Food Council, and participated in a Vermont statewide network called the Regional Food Centers Collaboration. The Upper Valley Housing Coalition hosted a Business Leaders’ Breakfast and a charrette to design developments of small, efficient homes near town services. It continued its advocacy for zoning changes to support such developments. The Transportation Management Association launched the “Smart Commute Project” to make alternative transportation easier and more desirable for commuters. The project helped commuters and employers decrease their direct and indirect transportation costs. The TMA also convened a committee to plan an Intermodal Transportation Facility for the region. Vital Communities changed its mission statement to: “Vital Communities engages citizens, organizations and communities in creating solutions to our region’s challenges.” The organization launched the Local First Alliance and took on the running of Leadership Upper Valley, thereby gaining two programs. It also began two new projects: the Municipal Network (a quarterly gathering of municipal officials to address regional issues) and the Corporate Council (a bi-monthly forum for business leaders to discuss common economic challenges and create solutions).

2010 12 Upper Valley towns, established by charters in 1761, were preparing for their 250th anniversaries. Valley Quest developed the *Colonial Quest Curriculum* to help them learn and celebrate their town histories. Valley Food & Farm held its 9th annual “Flavors of the Valley” and printed its 7th *Locally Grown Guide*. It continued its support of “Fresh Connections,” the Valley Food Council, and the Vermont Regional Food Centers Collaboration, and also launched the Rising Farmers Network. The Upper Valley Housing Coalition moved out of Vital Communities’ office and became a fully independent organization. The Transportation Management Association continued its “Smart Commute Project” and lobbied VT and NH federal representatives for transportation funding and tax benefits. The TMA supported its transit company partners in adding new bus routes and continuing to plan an Intermodal Transportation Facility. Local First Alliance recruited members and ran a “Think Local First” campaign to increase consumer awareness of the benefits of local purchasing. Leadership Upper Valley graduated 20 leaders from its 2010 Leadership Institute and enrolled 26 people

in its 2011 Institute. Vital Communities launched an “Energy Initiative” to support the work of town energy committees throughout the Upper Valley. Staff provided information about funding sources for energy conservation projects and supported officials trying to change town policies to increase energy efficiency. Vital Communities won the “Small Business Innovator of the Year Award” from the Hanover Area Chamber of Commerce.