

June 2026



Hardwick Equity Project Executive Summary

Funded by a \$10,000 grant from the Vermont Community Foundation the Hardwick Equity Project created an opportunity for eight different local and regional organizations—all of whom receive some form of funding from the Town or citizens of Hardwick, Vermont—to evaluate their policies and practices through an equity lens and develop procedures or projects to address ways to improve and expand access and services to the citizens of the greater Hardwick area.

Over a period of one year, through a series of four appreciative inquiry based meetings, and using an equity framework developed by the Hardwick Equity Committee, participants first evaluated their strengths (*the Discovery phase*), identified new directions and opportunities to incorporate more intentional equity practices into their organizations (*the Dream phase*), selected a project for their organization upon which to focus their ongoing equity efforts (*the Design phase*), and finally identified both new collaborative opportunities among themselves to enhance their project and the resource needed to sustain these efforts—both human and financial (*the Destiny Phase*).

The four afternoon or morning long quarterly gatherings were designed to allow participants from each agency to become familiar with each others' work, make personal connections with each other, that led to collaborations, and discuss shared challenges and opportunities. Out of the work of these organizations came eight projects. Some of the projects overlap with each other but all address a specific area of need and equity opportunities in the greater Hardwick community.

The Appreciative Inquiry model which entails a four D/ four phase process (Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny) was used because the intention of the model is to allow those using it to highlight the best of what organizations are already doing as opposed to gaps and deficits; to free them up to dream about ways to improve what they are doing; and to use those dreams as a catalyst to create new programs, policies or collaborations that benefit the community.

Common themes that emerged during the year-long project included the recognition during the discovery phase, that all of the participating organizations were already heavily engaged in equity work whether it was around the issue of food security, access to resources and buildings, citizen engagement and education. Participants shared ideas with each other during the dream phase that imagined a community where everyone feels like they are seen and matter, where they can maintain dignity even during the most challenging of times, and where citizens are engaged with each other and with their local government. These conversations fostered new collaborations and connections that can only improve where and how services are available to those who most need them. A vast array of ideas were floated among participants—ideas like ongoing community suppers, a sliding scale grocery store, free CSA's, expanded educational programs that highlight and celebrate our local farming tradition, automatic doors for downtown businesses, expanded staffing resources in agencies and schools to address trauma, after school services and programs for all aged children, daycare

services, transportation, housing, creating a culture where everyone feels like they belong and implementing the Just Transition model to create a community of justice and thriving, just to name a few.

Each participating agency received a \$1,100 stipend and were required to send at least one representative to participate in each of the four planning sessions. In the end, every participant agency had at least one participant in attendance each time, and in some cases more than one representative was in attendance throughout the entire project.

In between sessions the representatives were tasked with returning to their organization to

do work with their colleagues that mirrored the work they had done during the previous Hardwick Equity Project planning session. They identified strengths, engaged in dream activities and developed projects with their colleagues back at their organizations. Most importantly they were tasked with bringing the Equity Framework back to their colleagues and to use it to evaluate areas within their organizations that still might need some equity attention. The purpose was to build the capacity of each of these eight organizations to keep questions of equity on their radar whenever they evaluate their programs, policies and procedures and most importantly when they develop a strategic plan.

Ceilidh Galloway Kane

David O'Brien

Jan Mueller

Amy Rosenthal

June 2026

Hardwick Equity Project Proposed Projects

The proposed projects cover a wide range of areas and while some are and will be easily implemented others will require ongoing collaborations and planning on the part of the agency.

Salvation Farms' HEP Project Proposal

Salvation Farms is working on an emergency response plan for farmers, in collaboration with the Vermont Gleaning Collective that would be ready to provide volunteer assistance in the event of a flood or other natural disasters. The plan is multi-faceted. It will provide support to farmers in rural areas that may not be of a scale to access USDA crop insurance or disaster relief programs. The emergency response plan will be vetted by a collective to ensure that equity is applied in our decision making process and scope of work in other words—it will not advantage some farms and disadvantage others. Salvation Farms will also use its network of volunteer gleaners to create advanced gleaning squads that can be deployed to harvest crops in the event of a predicted weather event.

To activate this emergency plan Salvation Farms is engaging with Hardwick Neighbor to Neighbor, Hardwick Area Food Pantry, CAE, Buffalo Mtn. Coop and other organizations to contribute resources such as trained volunteers to support emergency relief efforts. The diversity of volunteers and the many ways that individuals/orgs can “pitch in” to this effort eliminates and lowers barriers to participation and allows those affected by disasters to access assistance in filling out paperwork, finding sources of financial support and welcoming volunteers in advance of predicted weather events to glean and save vulnerable crops.

Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union Project Proposal

Representatives from the SU's administrative staff, the Hazen school board and its parent community joined the Equity Project and aligned their efforts during the project with the efforts already taking place on an Supervisory-wide basis. The Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union will use their stipend funds to set up a field trip fund to support those students who may not have the funds to participate. This project helped them start this fund.

Center for an Agricultural Economy Hardwick Equity Project Proposal

The CAE is already involved in many equity initiatives focusing on food security, small farmer support and access between growers and consumers. The CAE proposed sponsoring a community wide training on the Just Transitions model—a model that they have been engaged with and would like to expand. The model challenges communities to envision a system that is less extractive (scarcity based) and more regenerative (based on collaboration and sharing) and therefore leading to a more equitable society.

East Hardwick Neighborhood Organization HEP Project Proposal

The East Hardwick Neighborhood Organization (EHNHO) has been working together over the last few years to identify community needs, build relationships among all of its residents and generally build on the strength of the community. They propose to continue their work to provide a variety of programs in order to engage all members of East Hardwick into their community building efforts. They propose creating a steering committee to move the Better Connections study forward which envisions creating a Main Street that would be more accessible to all users.

The Caledonia Grange Hardwick Equity Project Proposal

The Caledonia Grange, one of the oldest continuously operating granges in the State, is committed to fostering a connection to our agricultural past and bringing it into the future. Their proposal, as part of the Hardwick Equity Project, is to make the existing building physically accessible. This will be done by building a ramp that would give community members easier access to the building and in so doing, would make it feel more welcoming, and as a result build a sense of community. This stipend helped them start a building fund.

The Town of Hardwick Hardwick Equity Project Proposal

Representatives from the town identified the civic engagement as their top outcomes for the Town of Hardwick. They developed a community engagement project to roll out in conjunction with Hazen during the J-term program that is designed to get students involved in civics and the town. In collaboration with the teaching staff at Hazen, town staff will provide opportunities for students to learn about how town government works and to observe and participate in meetings of Town related committees, like the equity committee, planning, conservation as well as the select board. The goal of this project is to have students observe how these committees work and to recognize that this is their town too and that they can have voice and entertain the possibility of engaging in place based learning within the municipality. This project will directly help fund this effort.

Lamoille Family Centers Proposed Hardwick Equity Project

The Lamoille Family Center which provides a wide range of economic, mental health and support services to families in the greater Hardwick area had already been engaged in an agency-wide strategic planning process when the Hardwick Equity Project began. They used their strategic plan along with the Equity Framework to create a new position at the Center, the Resource Outreach Project Manager which they are in the process of hiring for. This position will help clients navigate the ever increasingly complicated process of

accessing services and will help remove the barriers that exist between clients and important services. This will be a community based position that will have a visible presence at pop up events in libraries, schools, farmer's markets and anywhere groups gather in the greater Hardwick area community.

The Hardwick Food Pantry Hardwick Equity Project

The Hardwick Area Food Pantry is a critical resource for those experiencing food insecurity and are already working with many community partners to provide greater access to food for those in need. Representatives of the Hardwick Food Pantry used their time to apply the Equity Framework internally to address the challenge of paying their staff members a liveable wage, an issue for many organizations in the area. They plan to organize a forum to engage others in the community—not for profits, small businesses and other community partners in conversation and discussions about how to determine what is a liveable wage, what would it cost organizations to support their staff at higher pay scales, and how organizations can meet the challenges of doing so.

Appendix A

The Equity Framework

As an essential part of this project the Equity Committee developed their own Equity Framework after months researching other frameworks and finding none that addressed the specific needs of local non-profit and government organizations. The goal for creating the framework was to provide a tool that organizations could use to assess and evaluate their organization's approach to equity from an internal perspective: looking at programs and policies and how the organization address issues of equity when it comes to staff, volunteers, donors, consumers and board members, a perspective that is often missed. The categories addressed in the framework included their definition of an equity based mission, access, communication, evaluation and obstacles. The purpose of developing and disseminating this document was to take a "teach them to fish" approach to equity so that moving forward organizations would take a 360 degree approach to equity and have the skills and inclinations to consider issues of equity whenever doing evaluations, policy development, hiring or recruitment—and/or strategic planning

Equity Framework		
	Programs (external)	Operations (internal)
Definition	How does your organization define equity and belonging as related to your programs?	How does your organization define equity and belonging as related to your operations?
Mission	Who does your organization serve or advocate for? What equity issues does your organization address? How do your programs help the people you serve to move from a place of inequity toward greater equity?	How do the structure and function of your organization—including board members, donors, staff, and volunteers—support or impede equity and belonging? How does your organization address equity in its hiring, training, and professional development practices?
Access	Can all the people you aim to serve access your programs? What factors help your constituents access your programs? What factors may be preventing some constituents from accessing your services?	Who is currently involved in your organization as a board member, staff, or volunteer? How does your organization encourage diverse representation, including from the people you serve, in the management and operations of your organization? Are there people that you would like to involve in your organization but who may be less inclined or discouraged from becoming involved?
Evaluation	How are the people your organization serves represented in setting policies and designing programs? Are there ways for your constituents or the broader public to provide input or feedback to improve your programs? Does your organization vet your ideas with other groups outside your organization?	How does your organization periodically evaluate its operations, what benchmarks or indicators do you use? Are equity and belonging part of that evaluation? How does your organization leverage the diversity within your organization to improve the effectiveness of its operations?
Communication	How do you communicate with your constituents and is equity considered when deciding on a method of communication?	Are there safe ways for employees and volunteers to voice concerns and biases within your organization? Do you do exit interviews in a way that fosters authentic feedback? How is that feedback used?
Obstacles	What are the obstacles that hinder equity in your programs? If there were no obstacles, including money constraints, how would you change your programs to reflect the importance of equity?	What are the obstacles that hinder equity in your operations? If there were no obstacles, including money, what could your organization do differently to have more diverse representation among its board, staff, and volunteers? What would you change about the culture of your organization to reflect the importance of equity?

Appendix B

Grant Application Program Description

Helping local organizations and community leaders to assess and strategize about equity

Building on relationships and focused conversations among the Hardwick community, the Hardwick Equity Committee and the Town of Hardwick will engage local organizations and community leaders in a year-long effort to assess their practices regarding equity and help them develop strategies to improve these practices where needed.

Funding for this effort will be used to provide stipends to support participation in the project and assist with related expenses. We will identify eight community organizations with a focus on entities that receive local funding. Each organization will identify up to three individuals from their organization to participate.

The process will include four meetings which will also represent key project milestones. Equity committee members and town staff will support and maintain ongoing communications with participants between these meetings.

1. Kickoff Summit

This first meeting will serve to frame the project, define goals and objectives, promote shared learning to help orient participants, and share the assessment tool they will be asked to use in their work.

2. First Check-in (three months after kickoff)

This meeting will review initial efforts to engage staff and board members and define draft goals, objectives, and action steps to take back to their organizations. Organizations will assess themselves using common benchmarks.

3. Second Check-in (six months after kickoff)

This meeting will review progress and refine goals, objectives, and action steps to be implemented for the remainder of the project.

4. Final Check-in, Celebration

This final meeting will review successes and challenges in implementing action steps and the next steps in the specific strategies that each organization committed to undertake.

By going through a process that is both internal and collective, we will help organizations identify sound strategies and concrete measures that they can take to increase equity and hold themselves accountable for implementing them. This approach, we believe, will strengthen a culture of equity in our community.

Appendix C

Project Budget

The Equity Committee applied for and received a \$10,000 grant from the Vermont Community Foundation to do equity work with 8 Hardwick area organizations, most of whom receive some sort of financial support from the Town. The funds were to be used for direct stipends to each of the organizations with the Equity Committee providing matching funds to cover the administrative costs of the project (room rental, food, printing and publications and miscellaneous items). The project started in February 2025 and all of the funds were drawn down by February 2026. A final report was submitted to the Vermont Community Foundation just after March 1, 2026.

Final Budget

Revenue:	
Vermont Community Foundation	\$10,000
Equity Committee Match	\$500
Total	\$10,500
Expenses:	
Stipends	\$9,300
Misc Administrative Expenses	\$1,069
Project Total	\$10,360

Hardwick Equity Project Report

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