The Pownal Trails Association and Empower Pownal were formed out of a community visit process with the Vermont Council on Rural Development. These groups collaborated to redevelop a former brownfield site into an outdoor recreation location with trails, parking, and river access, and utilized REDI to help them secure a grant from the Recreation Trails Program.

Outdoor Recreation in Pownal
Credit: Empower Pownal

The Albany Community Trust is re-opening a general store in Albany Village that was destroyed by fire several years ago. As the only retail store in town, the community has felt its loss deeply. The goal of the reopening is to create a gathering place, increase property values, create jobs, and spark civic pride. REDI helped Albany Community Trust access $90,000 from USDA Rural Development, which in turn leveraged an additional $80,000 in other grants.

Many small towns and businesses in rural areas are limited in their ability to make their communities more vibrant, livable, and economically robust by a lack of capacity to find funding for critical projects. The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), created by the Legislature in 2017, helps bridge this gap by assisting with fundraising strategy and hiring skilled grant writers on behalf of businesses and communities, leading to more successful grant proposals. REDI works closely with partners such as Regional Development Corporations, Regional Planning Commissions, and state and federal agencies to identify projects ready to seek funding for implementation.

In the first year of the program, VHCB used $75,000 in REDI funds to hire grant writers and provide technical assistance for 12 projects seeking $2 million in funding. Ten of the 12 projects successfully secured $1.78 million dollars in grants for communities from Albany to Pownal. Utilizing REDI funds for grant writing is an effective leverage point to bring money into small communities, with an average cost of $5,700 and an average return of $177,000 per project in grant funds in FY18.

Work on the second year of the program is well underway with commitments to ten projects and outreach for 5-7 more. FY19 projects include the redevelopment of the Bridgewater School into a multi-use business and community hub and the expansion of outdoor recreation infrastructure at the NorthWoods Stewardship Center in Island Pond.

“The store was where everyone met each other, getting groceries or stopping in for coffee or gas. It’s the only retail in town and has really created a hole in the fabric of our community since the fire closed it down in 2014.”

— Hannah Pearce, Albany Community Trust
Albany - The Albany Community Trust used REDI to secure a $90,000 USDA Rural Development grant for general store renovation and fit-up.

Charlotte – Clemmons Family Farm was awarded $350,000 from the nationally competitive ArtPlace America Program to establish an arts and cultural center focused on African American heritage.

Hardwick – The Town of Hardwick was awarded $39,000 from USDA Rural Development for the Yellow Barn, a business incubator and manufacturing facility, and also used REDI to create a long-term fundraising plan.

Fairfax – Runamok Maple accessed $250,000 from USDA Rural Development’s Value Added Producer Grant Program to expand the business and move production from Brattleboro to Fairfax.

Irasburg - Ardelia Farm received a $28,000 USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant to build a lab for flower breeding propagation that will benefit flower farmers across the country and grow their business.

Lyndonville – The village successfully applied to USDA Rural Development for $51,000 towards the construction of a downtown co-working facility.

Newport - The Vermont Land Trust and local partners raised $678,000 from three federal grant sources to connect Newport’s downtown to a popular pre-existing bike route to Quebec.

Newport – Newport was awarded $250,000 from the competitive USDA Rural Community Development Initiative for a downtown development and recreation strategy, and to strengthen the Newport Downtown Development Organization.

Pownal – The Pownal Trails Association was awarded $24,000 from the Recreation Trails Program to develop a trail and recreation site on a remediated brownfield site on the Hoosic River.

Windham County – The Windham County Solid Waste Management District received $17,000 from USDA Rural Development’s Community Facilities Grant Program to expand composting infrastructure to meet Act 148 requirements.

$75,000 of REDI Funds

$1.78M in additional Grant Funds

Last year, Runamok Maple purchased the former Morse Hardwoods/Milton Bradley plant in Fairfax in order to expand. To help finance this expansion, Runamok Maple turned to the REDI program, which helped the company access a $250,000 USDA Value Added Producer Grant to increase production and hire 15 new staff. Runamok expects this expansion will result in an additional 30 jobs over the next two years as they grow the brand nationally.