

Community Report

The Upper Valley

The Upper Valley stretches along the banks of the Connecticut River, where Vermont and New Hampshire meet as a single community shaped by shared schools, main streets, and daily life. From the covered bridges and hill farms of Woodstock and Thetford to the mill towns of Springfield and White River Junction, the region blends deep rural traditions with strong civic culture. Small businesses, working lands, and world-class arts and educational institutions anchor the local economy—while mountains, rivers, and trails draw residents outdoors in every season.

The Upper Valley's character is defined by its people: engaged, resourceful, and quick to show up for one another. But behind the tidy village greens lies remarkable geographic and economic diversity. The region faces housing shortages, food insecurity, and persistent inequality. Here, a legacy of quiet philanthropy and tight-knit community bridge the

gap between prosperity and need. It is a region small enough to try new approaches and connected enough to make them stick—where a good idea can move quickly from conversation to action.

What holds the Upper Valley together—and pushes it forward—is the same commitment to community that has always defined it. The river doesn't divide this region. It runs through the heart of it.

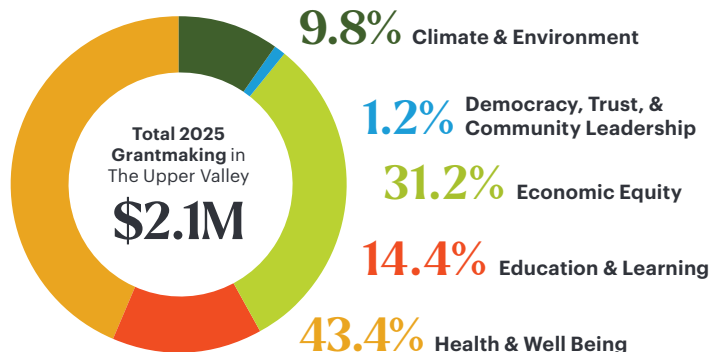


Photo Credit: SafeArt

\$2.1M Total 2025 Grantmaking | 415 Total 2025 Grants | \$450,000 in Active Mission Investments (as of December 31, 2025)

Several key organizations contribute to the Upper Valley's vitality, enhancing life for residents and welcoming visitors and new community members. Here are just a few of those organizations:

West Fairlee Community Trust

After sitting vacant for more than 15 years, West Fairlee's historic Bean Hall is being restored as a community center once again, with support from the VCF and the Village Trust Initiative.

Valley Court Diversion Programs

The programs offer restorative alternatives to prosecution, helping repair harm, build accountability, and move forward. VCF-led and donor advised funds have supported unexpected equipment replacement, general operations, and staffing capacity.

SafeArt

Committed to breaking cycles of trauma, SafeArt in Chelsea uses creative expression, mentoring, and community connection to foster healing. Several donor advised and VCF-led funds support the programming.

Two Funds, One Community

It's hard to separate Woodstock from Laurance and Mary Rockefeller. From Billings Farm & Museum to the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Park and the iconic Woodstock Inn, their legacy forms the cornerstones of the village.

But their impact extends beyond the places visitors see. Established through a legacy gift, the Laurance and Mary Rockefeller Fund carries forward their commitment to the Ottauquechee River Valley. Grantmaking is guided by the Woodstock Foundation's advisory committee in partnership with VCF, combining local knowledge with staff insight to support thoughtful, community-informed grantmaking.

A second fund was established by an estate gift from an anonymous donor who trusted VCF to identify and respond to the region's most pressing needs. Guided by a broad intention to support the community in and around Woodstock, VCF staff

direct grants toward strategic opportunities and respond nimbly as new needs arise. Together, the two funds have awarded more than \$1.5 million since 2007 to support immediate needs and long-term community vitality across the region.

"The Woodstock community is heir to a legacy that began with Laurance and Mary Rockefeller; we are just here for a short while, passing that legacy from generation to generation," said David Simmons of the Woodstock Foundation. "The VCF is helping us do that in a way that ensures continuity and strengthens quality of life across the Ottauquechee River region. They are respectful of our decision making, but also lend insight when questions arise. We all enjoy coming to the table together to make a difference. It's a joy."

Spotlight

The HUB & Woodstock Community Trust

When Meg Seely, a leader and case advocate at The HUB in Woodstock, requests a food card to help someone cover a grocery bill, she also connects them to the local food shelf. A vital safety net powered by volunteers, The HUB is a project of the Woodstock Community Trust offering one-on-one assistance for individuals navigating unexpected hardship—like rising heating costs, lost wages, or car repairs.

The Rockefeller and VCF-led fund both support this work. The VCF-led fund is also helping The HUB share its community safety net model through a cohort of peer organizations across Vermont.

In 2025, The HUB awarded 134 grants to more than 300 individuals in Barnard, Bridgewater, Killington, Plymouth, Pomfret, Reading, and Woodstock.



"We lean in to listen. It's not just about paying a bill," says Meg. "It's treating each person with dignity and hopefully conveying that someone in the community cares. The real story is often something deeper, like illness or job loss. Financial insecurity is often rooted in hidden things."



Photo Credit: SafeArt

Fundholder Spotlights

Arthur L. and Frances P. Hyde Fund

When Arthur and Frances Hyde retired from farming in Bradford, they didn't sit still. Together, they repaired cemetery stones across Vermont, delivered Meals on Wheels, and gave quietly to local schools and community organizations. The fund they established at VCF carries on that spirit.

Today, their children continue to make grants in Bradford and the surrounding towns. Bruce, Rebecca, and their late sister SallyAnn have shaped the fund's commitment to the gathering spaces, health services, and support systems

that help local communities thrive. Grants to the Bradford Fair, Elizabeth's Park, Little Rivers Health Care, and local senior programs reflect that commitment, and the family often issues matching challenges to inspire others to give alongside them.

For the siblings, VCF has been a trusted partner in carrying on their parents' legacy. They don't worry about honoring it in exactly the same way—their parents simply wanted to do good in their community, and so do they.

The Boyle Fund

When Jane Watson Stetson's young daughter was diagnosed with cancer, she saw firsthand that many families with seriously ill children lacked the support they needed. Together with pediatrician Dr. William Boyle at Dartmouth Health Children's, she envisioned a new model—one that brought families, doctors, and community providers into partnership.

The Boyle Fund at VCF supports that vision. VCF holds and invests the fund, distributing annual support to the Boyle Community Pediatrics Program, where Dr. Steve Chapman and his team connect families to housing, recovery support, and food and family services—

and train residents to listen for what families need beyond the exam room.

"Partnering with VCF gives us leverage in both directions—toward the hospital and the community—and lets us put families first," says Steve. "The impact ripples outward with every resident we train and every family we connect to better care."

"We are changing the status quo in healthcare," says Jane. "The Upper Valley is small enough that we could find the right partners, build something together, and see it work. Kids who are supported go on to do wonderful things—and that's what this is all about."



Upper Valley Mission Investing in Action

Photo Credit: AbeOlson



CENTER FOR CARTOON STUDIES

For 20 years, the Center for Cartoon Studies (CCS) has brought artists from around the world to White River Junction. What begins as an education often becomes something more: lasting connection to the Upper Valley community. Students range from young adults to retirees. One of them, Al, enrolled at CCS at age 61 and jokingly called himself the school's "oldest freshman." He came to study cartooning after a career in archaeology and later returned to Vermont because of the community he found here.

CCS's impact extends far beyond its classrooms. Through alumni programs, shared studio access, public galleries, workshops, and a significant graphic novel collection, CCS has become a hub for creativity and connection. Graduates live, work, volunteer, and serve in leadership roles throughout the region.

A VCF mission investment loan helped CCS expand its downtown campus, while grants from VCF fundholders and VCF-led funds have supported programming. Together, those investments have strengthened the physical spaces and creative community that CCS helps sustain.

"VCF's investment helped us do more than renovate a building," said Michelle Ollie, CCS president and co-founder. "It sent a strong signal of confidence in our organization and our vision, helping us attract support from additional funders and reach a turning point for the project."



FEATURES CAPITAL

Major advances in healthcare—from less invasive procedures to remote patient monitoring and advanced medical devices—begin as ideas that require early investment to become reality. Through its investment partnership with Features Capital, VCF funds healthcare technologies designed to improve outcomes, reduce costs, and expand access to care.

Based in Norwich, Features Capital focuses on early-stage healthcare technology companies. Beyond venture capital, co-founders Jenny Barba and Jeff Chu actively support entrepreneurs with mentorship, strategic guidance, and industry connections that help promising healthcare innovations reach patients and improve lives. Their portfolio includes companies addressing some of the most significant health challenges facing communities today, including heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes.

Features Capital invests and is recognized nationally, and supporting local innovation remains an important part of its commitment to the Upper Valley and Vermont. Current investments include Aprexis in Montpelier and Resonant Link Medical in Burlington, supporting healthcare innovators with the capital and expertise needed to grow. For the Features team, the goal is simple: delivering strong returns for investors who share their belief that healthcare innovation can improve lives and strengthen communities.

"We have dedicated our careers to building and financing healthcare companies because *better health is a building block for creating stronger communities.* Innovation helps turn that into reality by improving access to care, strengthening outcomes, and helping people live healthier, fuller lives."

- Jenny Barba, Co-Founder and Managing Partner, Features Capital