



2019 ANNUAL REPORT

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sobering urgency took over this year. With the landmark Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report setting the tone in fall 2018¹, stark Deep Adaptation² realities, UN Biodiversity Report³, countless other scientific reports and influential works⁴, media attention⁵, and the rise of the global climate change movement through the youth⁶, indigenous⁷, and Extinction Rebellion⁸, it's clear that the impacts of climate change are coming at a much faster pace than was anticipated and that people around the world are calling for deep change.



The severity and abundance of natural disasters we saw around the world in 2019 is staggering. Permafrost in Alaska and Siberia thawed⁹. Carbon dioxide levels reached the highest recorded in human history¹⁰. Arctic sea ice reached record lows¹¹. The Amazon has been on fire and in drought since the summer¹². Climate refugees are being held in nightmarish conditions at the US-Mexico border reminiscent of concentration camps¹³. There was more severe flooding in pockets of Vermont during the Halloween storm than in severe Irene flooding¹⁴. Excessive spring rains and flooding across the Midwest forced delayed and prevented plantings, pushing crop yields down again in 2019, and most states will experience corn and soybean yield declines in 2019¹⁵.

In the confluence of increased severity and regularity of extreme weather events, regulatory rollbacks that are exacerbating ecosystem collapse and their ability to respond to more intense weather events, and the growing social movement drawing attention to the climate emergency, we know that we have landed in a new era. This is what I've found to be most compelling this year: not that we're properly mitigating or adapting to climate change, but that the movement is gaining traction. People are understanding the climate emergency in new ways, and groups of people are more visibly shifting the dial.

CROs was founded after Tropical Storm Irene hit and profoundly changed human and non-human communities in Vermont. I've spent a lot of time this year thinking about Irene and the aftermath of that powerful storm as I've been thinking about the increased urgency of climate change. Terms like "climate crisis," "climate emergency," and "climate collapse" are now commonplace and are important to use to shift

¹ [IPCC Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 °C](#)

² [Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy](#)

³ [IPBES Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#)

⁴ [Naomi Klein: We are Seeing the Beginnings of Climate Barbarism](#); [Charles Eisenstein: The Core Themes of Climate: A New Story](#); [Project Drawdown](#); [Drawdown Learn Conference On Demand](#)

⁵ [Media outlets take pledge to prioritize covering climate change](#)

⁶ [Youth movement: The New Face of Climate Activism is Young, Angry - and Effective](#)

⁷ [Indigenous movement: Meet the Young Activists of Color Who are Leading the Charge Against Climate Disaster](#)

⁸ [Extinction Rebellion is Creating a New Narrative of the Climate Crisis](#)

⁹ [More than two million hectares on fire in Siberia, with tundra on fire destroying the permafrost](#)

¹⁰ [Carbon dioxide levels in Earth's atmosphere reached all time high in human history](#)

¹¹ [Arctic sea levels reached record lows](#)

¹² [Amazon fires and droughts](#)

¹³ [Climate refugees - 'People are Dying': How the Climate Crisis Sparked an Exodus to the US](#); [The Climate Crisis, Migration, and Refugees](#)

¹⁴ [Vermont Halloween 2019 floods and power outages](#)

¹⁵ [Corn and Soybean Production, 2019](#)

our mindsets from previous thinking that the worst predicted impacts of climate change would be farther off in the future, perhaps outside of our lifetimes. If we continue to believe that it's a concern of the future and not right now, we face dangerous division in the way we confront, or fail to confront, the root issues and to slow the process of critical action. I believe that utilizing the more urgent language is imperative to shifting the social dial and prioritizing addressing climate mitigation and adaptation at the speed and depth at which we respond. If we act like we are in the emergency that we're in globally, we have more options now than we will if we procrastinate any longer. **At this moment, we have the opportunity in the northeastern U.S. to act on resilience-building and climate mitigation and adaptation from a place of empowered and deliberate culture change - rather than devastation and forced action from resource-scarcity or violence.** There are many other regions in the world that are deeper into the emergency than we currently are in Vermont, though we do not escape being on the cusp of very significant risks here, too.

Like Irene, this is a pivotal time, and a sense of newness is emerging out of a very difficult situation. Irene is a microcosm of the climate emergency. It's easy to see what a difference it makes when a lot of people come together to clean something up, and we're able to re-create with improvements. This is the time for regional resilience-building. It's the time for neighborhood resilience-building and embracing both newness and tradition.

Despite daunting uncertainties and as the risks increase, a fascinating and inspiring thing is taking place. New leaders are emerging around Vermont, and with strength in numbers. Empowerment is a theme that is coming alive this year, and it couldn't come at a more crucial time. As a result of increased urgency, more and more people at local levels are emerging into new roles and are acting boldly - and with more desire to build collaborations.



One interesting similarity I've seen in most of the communities that have completed our Community Resilience Assessment¹⁶ is that they feel like they're missing community centers - places that make a community feel cohesive and where people go to spend time as a community. While civic engagement has been declining since the 1980s¹⁷ and public infrastructure can be hard to maintain in small towns, it's no surprise that community centers have slipped away. However, it's important not only for adults to have connections with community involvement but also for young people to understand what it means to experience multi-generational community gathering places. Perceptions of connection and sense of place in community

improves quality of life and health and reduces crime rates and addiction - the benefits of human connections are far-reaching and life-giving.

The structure of CROs allows for a lot of flexibility for engagement with communities. This is a structure designed to meet people where they're at, to try to help leverage strengths, and to break down social barriers. We have a unique vantage point working with communities and organizations around the Northeast that are focused on resilience-building and addressing the climate emergency. That vantage point and the ability to listen to what people need has inspired two new programs that CROs, in partnership with other organizations, will launch in 2020 that respond to short- and long-term needs:

1) *5a_g [fk DAWM]: gTe* - coalescing resilience work happening locally by convening resilience skills-building opportunities, groups working on similar resilience/climate initiatives, emergency shelter, social connectivity, and projects that re-localize resources that we need to survive (food, water, energy). Resilience

¹⁶ [CROs Community Resilience Assessment](#)

¹⁷ [The Strange Disappearance of Civic America. Robert Putnam](#)

Hubs are spaces where people can take part in their neighborhood, learn new skills together, provide for basic needs, prepare for disruptions, and build a more inclusive and joyful community. The overarching purposes and practices of Resilience Hubs¹⁸ include:

- Community engagement and inclusion
- Disaster preparedness and response
- Local environmental stewardship and permaculture
- Creating opportunities for collective work that lasts
- Providing sanctuary and other basic needs
- Hosting and supporting community activities



2) *9di [Y DAWMOW 8av EWMA]* - a series of skills-building workshops throughout the year taught by community members that increase the amount of food grown locally and build community. The series will begin with participants calculating the amount of food that's needed to feed individual households and the wider community, designing personal and public gardens, and swapping seeds in February, and winding down the year with seed saving and a Harvest Celebration in October/November. Program goals include:

- Peer-to-peer exchange of teaching/learning resilience skills that both mitigate and adapt to climate change
- Create spaces where BIPOC¹⁹ leadership and wisdom are empowered
- Increase the amount of food that's grown and consumed locally
- Contribute to public understanding of what it takes to have food sovereignty in different communities
- Improve the health and vitality of soil ecosystems
- Reconnect farmers, food suppliers, etc. with their communities
- New local leaders emerge as teachers and organizers

One of the areas where I feel most hopeful is in the relocationization of food systems. Growing food in our communities and eating it locally is a relatively low-hanging fruit in the climate conundrum that has co-benefits that range from improved nutrition at the individual level to reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, which has global implications. This is how our new program "Growing Resilience" was born.

Moving into 2020, I feel hope in what's transpiring and excited about the role that CROs can play to bridge gaps and support momentum forward, while also feeling nervous as time continues to march on and large-scale action continues to cautiously crawl along. A question I've been asking myself lately is,

"If we could freeze this moment in time and look back on it in ten years, what could we learn?"

I suspect that we will wish that we would have built the relationships we need to faster than we did and that we really need to think outside of our current ways of being. Here's to a 2020 that contributes to the hindsight vision.

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¹⁸ This concept is inspired by the national organizing group, Shareable, whose toolkit "[The Resilience We Want: A guide to making your community space into a hub for local resilience & mutual aid.](#)"

¹⁹ BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, People of Color

BALE's *Equilibrium* and the Center for Transformational Practice's showcase of the artist-activist duo *51 T YBARD*

- **Hartford Potato Fest** - with funding from the Community Sufficiency Grant Program, we were able to launch Potato Fest, a friendly inter-village competition designed to engage residents in potato growing from sprout to spud. More than 100 residents participated in potato growing, with businesses, libraries, and farms joining in. The harvest festival in September attracted 75 attendees, generated no waste, and was a fun, family-friendly feast with games, songs, and skits. Watch this entertaining video to get a sense for the event: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pKK9ivtxsA&app=desktop>
 - We have plans to continue this project for next season. We now have new connections with community members and stronger relationships with area businesses and libraries. Next year, we hope to provide more guidance to participants during the growing season, with more constant contact, do a better job of promotion and outreach, and provide free seed potatoes, like we did this year, but also compost, containers, bags, etc. so that everyone in Hartford can participate - no excuses! We also plan to continue engaging the surrounding towns, since a number of non-Hartford residents were enamored with the idea and grew potatoes after being inspired.
- **The Commons Project** - for 2020, we are working on an ambitious public parks project. We seek to identify alternative uses for some of Hartford's least utilized and most expensive to maintain parks. We hope to fold other initiatives, like local food production and preservation, into this overarching initiative.

RESILIENT HARTLAND



TEAM MEMBERS

- Kira Kelly
- Laurel Stevenson
- Ariel Arwen
- Rebecca Gordon

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Little Free Gardens** - planted four gardens, with a variety of vegetables. more details can be found on the [blog](#) that we made, as well as a map with locations and some pictures. We canvassed and solicited participation via list serve. We held a composter-building party, where we assembled a giant compost tumbler that now serves a 30+ unit apartment complex.
 - Next step: send around an anonymous survey to see how many people participated, picked veggies, and what they'd suggest for moving forward.
- **Hartland Community Breakfasts** - hosted seven Community Breakfasts in 2019, with topics including: *5a_g [fk DAPMOW3e4e Wf* with Mindy Blank, *@aT^ 9SUN Y* with Cat Buxton, *5a_g [fk/ W W* with guests from Windor County Mentors, > *WesT/VG bSW* with all 5 of our local

WATERBURY - FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP



TEAM MEMBERS

- Dina Bookmyer-Baker
- Rebecca Ellis
- Steve Lotspeich
- Ned Swanberg
- Clare Rock
- Natalie Sherman

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Community Rating System (CRS)** - maintaining the Town of Waterbury's eligibility in the CRS, a program of the National Flood Insurance Program that helps reduce insurance premiums due to the rigorous community preparedness levels.
 - We helped coordinate a regional workshop in January, 2019 for realtors and municipal zoning administrators on flood preparedness with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) staff, state floodplain management staff, and the floodplain managers for the City of Montpelier and the Town of Berlin that are also members of the CRS.
- **River corridor maps** - discussing possible regulation of revised river corridor zones (maps prepared by CVRPC) with the Waterbury Planning Commission.
- **Flume table** - held a flume table demonstration in August, 2019 at the Waterbury Farmer's Market. The demonstration was a success in terms of educating members of the public, including children, and we are discussing doing a similar demonstration at a larger, all day long event such as the Waterbury Arts Fest in 2020.

MIGHTY LONDONDERRY



TEAM MEMBERS

- Bruce Frauman
- Dick Dale
- Jennifer Probst
- Fred Probst
- Kevin Beattie

HIGHLIGHTS

- **CAT-4 state-wide emergency preparedness exercise** - organized this exercise in October 2019 that saw statewide participation and simulated emergency operations needs and communications as if a real emergency was happening. Everyone learned something, and as a result of the exercise, our Town Administrator Shane O'Keefe revised the town's Purchasing Policy to account for needed purchases during an emergency.
 - In preparation for the exercise, we worked with Emergency Management officer Richard Cogliano to offer a two evening workshop titled G-191 that helped us better understand the role of an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and first responders and how best to work together. Rich said ours was a more successful workshop than others, in his opinion, because we were able to gather people who actually work together, such as firefighters from Weston and South Londonderry and Londonderry's town clerk, treasurer and Town Administrator. He also spoke with the Weston Select Board the following month to help them better understand their role in an emergency.
- **EOC information-sharing** - a Mighty Londonderry team member and Emergency Management Director, Kevin Beattie, taught a class on how to set up and operate an EOC so that in his absence or in an emergency that lasts several days, more people know what to do.
- **Emergency shelter coordination** - team member Jennifer Probst is helping establish a group to set up and arrange volunteers for an overnight shelter/warming/cooling center in an emergency situation.
- **Building regional resilience** - in the next few months we will revisit our membership with the Londonderry Town Administrator. We recently found out that non-Londonderry residents can serve on town committees. In 2020, we look forward to inviting residents from the greater Londonderry area to join our efforts.
- **Londonderry Community Forum** - the Facebook group that was created by former Mighty Londonderry member George Mora now has 2,167 members (in a town of 1700 residents!) and is useful to quickly spread important information in an emergency as it was intended as well as other uses such as finding lost pets and letting people know about wandering farm animals.

JEFFERSONVILLE - FLOODPLAIN ADVISORY GROUP



TEAM MEMBERS

- Seth Jensen
- Jean Jenkukas
- Danielle Owczarski
- Laird Macdowell
- Peter Ingvoldstad
- Anita Lotto

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Community collaboration** - we have a great group working on planning for the future of the Bell Gates property - some of the same folks plus some new faces. We're also about to tackle stormwater planning and bringing in some folks from VT Fish and Wildlife.

SHARON



TEAM MEMBERS

- Carol Langstaff
- Mary Gavin
- Peter Anderson
- Carol Flint
- Becky Owens
- Jason Flint
- Greg Elder
- Ryan Hack

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Community Resilience Assessment** - gathered 25 community members in January to complete the assessment and hosted a follow-up project planning workshop.
- **Emergency preparedness resource-sharing** - created emergency preparedness materials and maps for Town Hall Meeting Day and distributed them throughout the community.

WORCESTER (MA)



TEAM MEMBERS

- Peter Friedland
- Greg Doerschler
- Matt Johnson

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Climate emergency resolutions** - developed a city-wide Climate Emergency resolution in collaboration with 48 organizations and countless individuals that was passed by the city in the fall.
- **Connecting initiatives and groups** - we're working on connecting Worcester State University (WSU) and other academic institutions with the city's current Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program (MVP). We're also connecting several climate action and social justice initiatives under resilience principles and climate action research.

