

## Summer Internship Helps to Launch LiveGreenVT

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For the past couple of months, I have had the pleasure of working with CEAC and the Acorn Energy Co-op on multiple projects, the main one being the creation of the Champlain Valley Climate and Energy Resource Guide.

In the interview for this summer internship, we discussed the guide and general ideas about what it would look like. It was initially going to be a printed guide that lists local energy-related businesses with accompanying articles. However, this guide has evolved significantly since its inception.

COVID-19 has forced people around the world to think differently and approach problems in completely new ways. This project was no exception. With the uncertainty of distributing physical copies of the guide, we began to think outside the box.

Over the course of this summer, the guide has grown past its initial estimates for the listing of climate-related businesses and organizations within about 50 miles of Middlebury. The guide has also developed into a dynamic online directory with the capacity to add new listings, create and share articles and events, and enable customers to search within various locations and categories for exactly what they need. If someone doesn't know what they need, there will be plenty of resources to guide their sustainable choices.

It has been incredible to watch our ideas come to fruition and adapt to the uncertainty of the time. Not only has this project encouraged me to grow and think differently, but it has enabled me to gain new skills and experiences that I had never considered. I previously had very little experience making websites, much less anything nearly as interactive as this online directory.

Luckily, we found an amazing platform, called eDirectory, that provided the tools we needed to set up the site. From there we had to figure out what structure would maximize the user's experience and organize the features of the site to fit those needs. In the process, I learned all sorts of information about website functionality that I had never known about. This hands-on experience truly pushed me out of my comfort zone and gave me insight that is not something I could gain in classes at Middlebury.



In conjunction with the user interface of the site, I was tasked with making a visual graphic that could encapsulate the project mission. This gave me the opportunity to tap into my love for art and design. I spent significant amounts of time learning how to use various graphic design software and form the main image on the home page of the site. I then tied that design into the rest of the site and the accompanying logo.

Beyond the technical side of the guide, there was also a considerable amount of community outreach involved. As we tried to garner support and participation in the guide, we had to collect contact information for hundreds of businesses and organizations. From there we went to work sending emails and dialing phone numbers.

I was surprised by the satisfaction I felt in contacting these businesses. It provided me with an opportunity to talk directly with community members and share our work, while also getting to learn about the positive impacts they are having on the community. At Middlebury, it's so easy to distance yourself from the community and stay in the campus bubble. This opportunity enabled me to make connections with people outside of the college.

I also learned how many amazing sustainable businesses and organizations exist in the area. I have always tried to live sustainably and make a conscious effort to limit harm to the environment, but this experience showed me how much more I could be doing. I had no idea how many different parts of daily life can be made more sustainable. From electric mowers to reusable bees wrap and green cleaning supplies, there is always a cleaner option. The purpose of this guide is to help people realize that. It certainly helped me realize how much more I could be doing so I am excited for this website to do the same for others in the community.

Overall this experience has been more informative and satisfying than I could have ever imagined. Beyond the enjoyment of developing this guide, I have also loved getting to know the members of this amazing organization. From day one, I felt fully welcomed into the group. As I was thrown into various subcommittees, I had the opportunity to meet regularly with everyone and was surprised at how connected I felt within a group of people that I had never physically met. I was in awe at how knowledgeable and passionate everyone in the organization was and I will forever cherish the relationships formed over this summer. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this work and look forward to watching this project continue to grow.