
SOCKS External Evaluator and vRSV recommendations— discussion and next steps

Summary



Virtual Reverse Site Visit (vRSV) – September 2025

- 5 recommendations

Year 3 External Evaluation

- 5 “key” recommendations
- 22 “actionable” recommendations

We will review...

- the 5 vRSV recommendations
- and the 5 “key” recommendations from the Year 3 external evaluation

vRSV Recommendations



- **Recommendation:** *Reforming the State EPSCoR Steering Committee is strategically important for ongoing EPSCoR activities in the jurisdiction, and the step merits careful review by NSF to ensure that selected members are objective in terms of UVM's role in both current and future EPSCoR funded projects in Vermont*

Response

- VIRa is nearly assembled
- Ensures broad representation across stakeholders in Vermont
- Academia, key business sectors, economic development agencies, Vermont State Government

vRSV Recommendations



- **Recommendation:** *There is an opportunity to strengthen the engagement of PUIs/ERIs within the jurisdiction and we recommend to SOCKS leadership to consider appropriate avenues towards this goal*

Response

- SOCKS affiliates are Champlain College, Middlebury College, Norwich University, Saint Michael's College, and Vermont State University
- Engagement with Landmark E-CORE
- Expanded support for seed-grant programs, encouraging applications from PUIs
- PUI representation on VIRA

vRSV Recommendations



- **Recommendation:** *Re-visit the current implementation of the seed grant initiative to achieve greater inclusivity of other institutions and strengthen engagement with faculty in PUIs*

Response

- “Applications from junior faculty (assistant professors or equivalent rank) and applications that engage Vermont primary undergraduate institutions (PUIs) will be given priority.”
- November 7, 2025 grant-writing workshop at Saint Michael’s College
- December 5, 2025 state-wide webinar on funding opportunities
- Materials posted on the Vermont EPSCoR web page

vRSV Recommendations



- **Recommendation:** *Develop a plan for the sustainability of SOCKS software tools, stewardship of data resources and extensibility of platforms. Account for possible areas of application, such as industrial, commercial, academic infrastructure service and related opportunities to enable channels for sustainable use*

Response

- Initiatives in process
- Cyberinfrastructure for Sustained Scientific Innovation (CSSI) grant opportunity. This proposal, in the *Frameworks Implementations* class

vRSV Recommendations



- **Recommendation:** *Assess the current landscape of research computing and software tools, recognizing areas where they may be constrained, and explore how emerging AI technologies can provide new opportunities for growth and integration*

Response

- Initiatives in process
- Santa Fe Institute December 10–12, 2025 “Towards a Data-Driven Science of Stories”

Ext. Eval. “Key” Recommendations



- **Strengthen alignment between technical staff and research teams**
Clearly define roles and expectations and increase the visibility of available technical services. This should include implementing proactive communication strategies to ensure faculty fully understand the available support and how to access it to more effectively engage the program’s technical capacity

Ext. Eval. “Key” Recommendations



- **Strengthen alignment between technical staff and research teams**

Response

- SOCKS maintains a robust technical and research infrastructure support system in collaboration with the Vermont Advanced Computing Center (VACC)
- VACC offers personalized support and tutorials as well as a weekly, Virtual Research Computing Café. Expert staff available
- Hired two new postdoctoral research associates to assist
- Working toward a new central-support webpage

Ext. Eval. “Key” Recommendations



- **Strengthen Undergraduate Summer Internship Workshops and Mentorship**

Enhance the design, sequencing, and delivery of workshops by improving clarity, relevance, and alignment with interns’ research needs. This includes offering flexible participation in technical sessions, providing clear workshop descriptions and appropriate content levels, ensuring presenters and mentors understand program goals, and organizing workshops to follow the research life cycle throughout the summer. Consider hosting a brief “get to know the mentor and intern” meeting (e.g., Teams, Zoom, FaceTime) prior to interns’ arrival, followed by an early-semester engagement meeting once they are on campus. This would help establish rapport, clarify expectations, and ensure mentors are fully oriented to the program from the outset, without relying solely on written materials

Ext. Eval. “Key” Recommendations



- **Strengthen Undergraduate Summer Internship Workshops and Mentorship**

Response

- Working to implement improvement with CWPE at VTSU
- Strengthen engagement of faculty mentors
- Possibly expand funding for the program to deliver the recommendations (e.g., additional staffing)

Ext. Eval. “Key” Recommendations



- **Improve Coordination Around Small-Scale Funding Opportunities**

Increase intentional and coordinated efforts to identify and pursue smaller, supplemental funding opportunities to support spin-off projects. Faculty and post-doctoral researchers would benefit from a more organized approach to scanning, communicating, and mobilizing around these funding streams to strengthen the program’s research sustainability and innovation capacity

Ext. Eval. “Key” Recommendations



- **Improve Coordination Around Small-Scale Funding Opportunities**

Response

- Tied to sustainability initiatives
- Tied to seed-grant programs
- Requires highly individualized engagement
- Enhance mentoring plans

Ext. Eval. “Key” Recommendations



- **Advance Communication and Collaboration**

Strengthen cross-team and cross-institution collaboration by expanding structured opportunities for faculty to share research updates, connect with colleagues, and build partnerships through both virtual and in-person engagement

Ext. Eval. “Key” Recommendations



- **Advance Communication and Collaboration**

Response

- SOCKS already maintains a robust engagement program to advance collaboration
- Team meetings and research meetings
- Newsletters and videos
- Achieving communications milestones
- Comprehensive SOCKS webpage
- Explore expanding partnership with VTSU to enhance communication (may require additional staffing)

Ext. Eval. “Key” Recommendations



- **Strengthening GRA Retention in the Vermont Workforce**

Improve Graduate Research Assistants (GRA) retention by embedding Vermont-based career opportunities into coursework and mentoring, strengthening supports related to housing, family needs, and community integration, and expanding local professional networks through alumni connections. Foster stronger peer relationships to build a sense of belonging and engage GRAs in ongoing conversations about career goals and perceived barriers to remaining in the Vermont workforce

Ext. Eval. “Key” Recommendations



- **Strengthening GRA Retention in the Vermont Workforce**

Response

- Being done in collaboration with UVM resources, UVM Graduate College, student’s home college, faculty mentor, UVM Career Center
- Individualized approach is required—faculty mentorship is key
- Expanding connections with Vermont industry (e.g., VIRA)
- Expanding research across Vermont
- Explore how we can help further