



# Northwest + Central VT Prevention Summit Recap

The fourth annual Prevention Network Summit was held on October 8th, 2025, 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM, in South Burlington. Over 50 attendees representing 30 organizations joined us, including our partners at the State of Vermont. Below is a summary of the goals, framing, content, and outcomes of the Summit, as well as highlights of the day and participant feedback. The purpose of the Summit was to set shared priorities and create a coordinated plan for prevention activities over the next 18 months in our region.

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## Summary

**Welcome & Opening Remarks:** We heard welcoming remarks from [Mahat Abdullahi](#), Prevention Network Manager, and [Amy Carmola](#), Chief Impact Officer at United Way of Northwest Vermont.

Mahat used his experience as a youth soccer coach to bring in the idea of using a “constraints-led approach” (CLA) to our work as a prevention region during the Summit. He shared how using this approach brought his team closer together and created a more resilient and connected group, even in the face of difficult losses.



*“That experience taught me something: that I had to do things differently as the coach and that we needed to do things differently as a team in our training environment, that the struggle wasn’t the obstacle - no, it was the opportunity, and that the constraint was the teacher.”*

- He prompted attendees to reflect on an experience where opportunity was born out of a struggle and to share it with the person sitting next to them.

- He also expressed heartfelt gratitude for the community of prevention providers and partners in our region and charged attendees to embrace the spirit of collaboration and working together through challenges as our greatest opportunities.

Amy provided context for the Prevention Network and United Way’s role as the [Lead Prevention Organization](#) (LPO) for Region 1, and highlighted the importance of the annual Summit in leading this work.



- As the LPO, our responsibilities are:
  - To lead coordinated, equitable, regional strategy for prevention of substance misuse to address the needs of people and communities.
  - To hold the process for allocating state prevention funds through subgrants, contracts, and projects.
- Amy acknowledged how difficult this last year has been due to federal actions, loss of funding, uncertainty, strain, and general upheaval and wanted to recognize what this means for the organizations and people who do the work.
- She highlighted that the purpose of the Summit was to talk about what we can do together and within this challenging context, to find where, collaboratively, we can make a difference. This year’s approach was a working summit where we applied our network’s expertise and energy to prioritize specific actions.

## Breakout Sessions

There were six breakout groups organized around shared strengths and priorities regarding specific substances (alcohol, cannabis, or tobacco) and using [CADCA’s 7 Strategies for Community Change](#). Each group focused on a specific substance and came up with strategies at the individual level or environmental level of prevention.



### **Breakouts: Identifying and Prioritizing**

For the first breakout, each group generated a list of ideas for strategies at either the individual or environmental level and then prioritized their ideas by discussing as a group if they met this criteria:

- a) essential for regional effort
- b) level of impact and
- c) readiness in the next 18 months.

Each group then came back to the main room and summarized their discussion, highlighting ideas that were the ranked highest priority and why.



## Breakouts: Mobilization

After lunch, each group wrote out one or two of the highest priority ideas from their morning session and began to outline a workplan for each using these elements:

- a) Who currently does this work?
- b) Who's missing and needs to be involved?
- c) What is our current capacity and what are the gaps?
- d) Are there opportunities for collaboration and alignment?
- e) What are the obstacles we have to overcome?



## Report Out: Common Themes

### Common Themes from the Breakout Groups

- **Gaps:**
  - A universally accessible place for accurate and current information
  - Buy-in from the business community, including those who have been wary of the Flavors Hook Kids campaign
- **Needs:**
  - More collaboration at the local and state level and also between sectors
  - Trusted and askable adults; peer messengers; building skills in youth and adults
  - Education about the importance of positive childhood experiences (PACES); mentoring mindset for adults; youth voice
  - Sustainable funding
- **Concern:**
  - High rates of youth substance use and access
- **Other Ideas:**
  - Social norm campaigns (Standard Drink Size inspired by Winooski Partnership)



## Projects

The Prevention Network Backbone Team has been reflecting on the many in-depth conversations and ideas from the Summit to identify projects to support in the next 18 months. We have taken these four proposed projects to our Funding Committee and to our Region 1 Coordination Team, which meets monthly:

- 1. Alcohol Policy Bill**
  - a. Add capacity to advance policy recommendations proposed by Winooski Partnership for Prevention
  - b. Strengthen awareness, engagement, and action in Region 1 and beyond
- 2. Tobacco/Nicotine Policies**
  - a. Advance Flavors Hook Kids campaign, address remaining resistance
  - b. Decouple Alcohol & Tobacco Licensing
- 3. Cannabis Awareness & Understanding**
  - a. Promote awareness and understanding of existing laws and policies
  - b. Facilitate accessible, appropriate conversations about cannabis *\*see project 4*
- 4. Regional Information**
  - a. Deliver accessible, non-biased, audience-appropriate information about alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco
  - b. Promote awareness, knowledge, and understanding to support individuals making decisions for themselves and others

## Other Highlights

### Lunch Activity: Storytelling

At lunch, we had the pleasure of having [Susanne Schmidt](#) talk about storytelling, how to tell a story, and to demonstrate her skills in real time. Sue shared pointers through an activity called “The Story Arc” and gave out worksheets for attendees to practice these tactics at their tables. As we know, stories are at the heart of why many of us do what we do, and we are so thankful that Sue could join us and participate in the Summit.



### Networking: We Love Connection

After last year’s Summit, we received feedback that there was a need for additional networking and time for connecting. We both saw and felt the benefit of building in more of that networking time this year, and heard feedback that it was one of the most valued parts of the day. We also observed that one of the strengths of the breakout group design was to have folks who are already involved in relevant activities working on a strategy together so that connecting and networking were happening around the work in real time. United Way is always grateful to have the opportunity to convene around timely issues, so thank you!



## Feedback

In our follow-up Summit Survey this year, we received overwhelmingly positive feedback, from the themes and structure of the day to the speakers to the quality of the local food! Thank you to all who made this day possible and for helping us improve the way we do events.

- *The built in time for connection + networking was great. The intention setting at the beginning worked really well and felt like it carried us through the day.*
- *Great networking - met some wonderful people. The work went deep, gained a great understanding of the topic.*
- *Loved the presentation at lunch!*
- *Loved the framing Mahat gave us and the storytelling guidance.*
- *It was so wonderful to collaborate across multiple groups/orgs and hear what is happening across the region!*



## Next Steps

**Network Meeting December 11, 2025** – The Backbone Team will share details and invite input for four projects coming out of the Summit, highlighting opportunities for partner engagement. We will invite input and suggestions for the year ahead around Network meetings and activities.



## Thank You!

-Adrienne, Amy, Diana, Liv, Mahat, Megan, and Steven. [preventionnetwork@unitedwaynwvt.org](mailto:preventionnetwork@unitedwaynwvt.org)