

FY 2017 Working Lands Enterprise Initiative

LETTER OF INTENT: SERVICE PROVIDERS

Applicant Guide

IMPORTANT NOTES – PLEASE READ!

It is imperative that applicants read the entire guide before developing and submitting a Letter of Intent (LOI). All LOIs **must** be electronically submitted online at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov. Paper applications will not be accepted. Applicants are **strongly** encouraged to log onto the website well in advance of the LOI deadline to register as a new user and gain familiarity with the online system. A detailed guide for entering information in the online application can be found here: <http://workinglands.vermont.gov/apply/rfp>.

A Letter of Intent is required in order to be considered for the submission of a full application. Not all applicants will be invited to submit a full application.

This is the applicant guide for Service Provider Grants. More information on Business Grants may be found at: <http://workinglands.vermont.gov/apply/rfp>.

CONTACT

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1. About the Initiative

The backbone of Vermont’s heritage and economic viability is our working landscape. Over 97 percent of Vermonters value the “working landscape” which consists of agriculture, food systems, forestry, and forest products based businesses. Approximately 20 percent of Vermont’s working land is used for agricultural purposes and 75 percent is forested. The Findings section of [Act 142](#) outlines nine goals of the Working Lands initiative.

Mission

The mission of the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Initiative is to grow the economies, cultures, and communities of Vermont's working landscape. The Working Lands Enterprise Board achieves this by making essential, catalytic investments in critical leverage points of the Vermont farm and forest economy, and facilitating policy development to optimize the agricultural and forest use of Vermont lands.

Vision for Future Success

Vermont prospers and its unique sense of place thrives in large part because of intelligent investment in the people and enterprises that comprise its farm, food, and forest based systems. Strong community engagement and support for the farm and forest sectors leads to enhanced quality of life for Vermont citizens and working lands business owners.

Approach (our change theory about what systemic factors will create progress towards our mission and vision)

1. **Access to capital:** Ability of an enterprise to secure the right match of capital to meet its financing needs for its stage of growth and scale.
2. **Technical assistance:** Availability of services to develop business plans, identify risk management strategies, and implement financial management systems, as well as provide topic, product, and process expertise.
3. **Workforce development:** Access to training that allows Vermonters who want to work in the working lands sector – and by extension, the employers they choose – to be at a world-class level.
4. **Smart policy:** Rules and statutes that optimize the agricultural and forest use of Vermont lands, while protecting human, environmental and animal health.
5. **Value chain and sector collaboration:** Relationships between different actors along the chain, as well as across industry sectors, that strengthen the system as a whole.
6. **Public awareness:** Communities’ understanding of and support for the businesses and organizations that contribute to our working landscape.

History of Success to Date

The WLEB began operations in August 2012 and today has awarded over \$3.5 million in grant funds to over 130 grantees, leveraging an additional over \$5 million of matching and other funds. For a list of previously funded projects, visit <http://workinglands.vermont.gov/projects>.

2. FY 2017 Application Process

This year, approximately \$650,000 is available for investment into farm, food systems, forestry, and forest products enterprises. Funds will be disbursed in two investment areas: Business Grants and Service Provider Grants.

Service Provider Grants – Projects should demonstrate direct impacts on Vermont Working Lands businesses. Types of technical assistance provided may include:

- Market development, marketing plans, and sales
- Business and financial planning
- Succession planning
- Access to capital and financial literacy
- Manufacturing efficiencies or process flow
- Developing sector benchmarks

Timeline

ONLINE APPLICANT INFORMATION SESSIONS RECORDED AND POSTED ONLINE:

<http://workinglands.vermont.gov/webinar>

LETTERS OF INTENT ARE DUE: Thursday, December 2, 2016 at noon

APPLICANT NOTIFICATION OF ACCEPTANCE/DENIAL OF LETTER OF INTENT: Week of January 24, 2017

INVITED APPLICATIONS ARE DUE: Tuesday, March 7, 2017 at noon

APPLICANT NOTIFICATION: Late April 2017

ESTIMATED PROJECT START DATE IS NO EARLIER THAN: Late May, 2017

Applicant Eligibility

- The applicant must be in compliance with state regulations (i.e. land, water, unemployment compensation, taxation, child support) and in good standing with the state of Vermont at the time of application and must remain so during the entire grant period.
- Primary applicant must be headquartered in Vermont and must be registered with the Secretary of State at the time of application submission.
- Working lands Service Provider grantees are eligible to apply for multiple years. Applicants who have received Working Lands grants in the past must measure and report on the results of previously funded projects, and demonstrate how continued funding will be used to grow or improve the program. Services must go to a new cohort of businesses each year.

Project Criteria

- Provides a budget that uses between \$15,000 - \$75,000 of Working Lands Enterprise Funds.
- Provides 100% (1-to-1) cash or in-kind match of total requested WLEB funds. Indirect or overhead costs are allowed for up to 10% of requested WLEB funds (additional indirect or overhead may be used as match). Under limited circumstances, match requirements may be reduced or waived for projects that can justify the need for a reduced match (see budget narrative for further detail).
- Project must be completed within 18 months after grant agreement start date.
- Nonprofit projects that compete with for-profit working lands businesses are ineligible.
- Projects that provide direct technical assistance to working lands businesses will be prioritized over those that are solely focused on research.

Submitting your Letter of Intent

- The LOI process allows the Working Lands Enterprise Board to narrow the volume of applications and focus on proposals most in line with the mission and goals of the program. The process also allows Working Lands staff to make connections between LOI applicants that may have similar project focus for greater impact.
- **NOTE:** All LOIs **must** be electronically submitted online at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov. Paper applications will not be accepted. Applicants are **strongly** encouraged to log onto the website well in advance of the LOI deadline to register as a new user and gain familiarity with the online system. Contact Noelle Sevoian at working.lands@vermont.gov or 802-585-9072 if you need additional assistance. We cannot guarantee that a staff person will be able to return your call in the final hours before the deadline, so please plan in advance.

- LOI questions can be found on page 10 of this document. You may find that it is helpful to create your LOI as a Word document and then copy and paste into the agriculturegrants.vermont.gov system.

3. Scoring Criteria and Review Process

Projects will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Quality of Proposal and Concept:** The LOI is clear and complete. The applicant is ready to receive funds and begin promptly and demonstrates previous experience and skills necessary to conduct the proposed activities. The project, as described, identifies relevant performance measures and is likely to accomplish the stated outcomes.
- **Impact and Accountability:** The project demonstrates how it will address a demonstrated need, and enhance Vermont's working landscape, with measurable outcomes that may include job creation and retention; increased income; increased product output; increased acres in active forestry or agricultural use; business creation and retention; increased access to capital, technical assistance, education, and training; higher payroll and wages; and increased quality of life. The management team and project partners have the expertise and resources necessary to achieve stated outcomes within the grant period.
- **Need:** The LOI demonstrates a clear need for the project and the need for Working Lands Enterprise funding. Demand from working lands businesses exists for services proposed, and the project cannot be fully funded through other sources.
- **Stewardship and Sustainability:** The project contributes to long-term viability of working landscape businesses, and/or promotes land stewardship. Projects that credibly outline anticipated positive impacts based on measurable financial, social, or environmental criteria will be given preference.
- **Leveraging Funds:** Budget shows at least a 1-to-1 match (for every dollar of WLEB funds requested, applicant must show at least one dollar of matching funds). Projects that show partnerships for optimizing use of public funds are encouraged.

- **Collaboration:** The project has a strong management team and partners in place with the energy, expertise, and commitment necessary to execute objectives. The project shows collaboration between among enterprises and service providers to maximize the benefit for Vermont’s working landscape businesses.

Review & Selection Process

LOIs will be reviewed by the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board, subject matter experts, and/or State agency staff and assessed based on the criteria outlined. The Working Lands Enterprise Board makes final decisions on all grants. LOIs will not be reviewed by those with conflicts of interest. The review committee may request additional information about your project (e.g. additional financial information, project clarification, etc.).

Confidentiality Policy

Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, as a public instrumentality, is subject to the Vermont Public Records Law, 1 VSA § 315 - 320. The statute contains specific exemptions for tax-related information of persons, financial information of an individual or business, and trade secrets. This information will be held in confidential files by the Working Lands Enterprise Board and will not be available for public inspection under the Public Records Law.

The Working Lands Enterprise Board and the state of Vermont consider the following information about applicants to be subject to public record: contact information of applicants; names, description, and contact information of applying enterprise or organization; the purpose and amount of any Working Lands Enterprise Funds received; and grantee communications. Other information may be shared in aggregate form (without identifying individual business info).

LOI Feedback Policy

The Working Lands Enterprise staff will email notification letters regarding the Board’s funding decisions. These letters will not provide specific LOI feedback. If you would like specific feedback on your LOI, please email a request for feedback to working.lands@vermont.gov no later than two weeks after receipt of your notification email.

4. Grantee Expectations

Organizations selected for grant award funding are expected to meet the following requirements:

- Must be registered with the Secretary of State
(<https://www.sec.state.vt.us/corporationsbusiness-services/start-or-register-a-business.aspx>)
- Enter into a grant agreement with the State of Vermont - *costs incurred prior to signing a full grant agreement are not eligible.*
- Prior to receiving the grant agreement, recipients must:
 - Submit a W-9 (for tax identification purposes)
 - Submit a Certificate of Insurance, listing the State of Vermont as an additional insured:
 - Worker's Compensation (unless you are a sole proprietor)
 - Insurance Certificate with a minimum coverage of:
 - General Liability - \$1,000,000 coverage
 - Automotive Liability - \$1,000,000 coverage
- Provide interim, final, one-year and two-year post-grant reports as well as financial documentation which will include: number of working lands businesses served, paid receipts noting expenditures of both grant and matching funds, high-resolution digital photos in jpg format, and a narrative of accomplishments which will include project goals, performance measures, and outcomes accomplished to date. Grantees will also be required to survey their clients on metrics including (but not limited to) jobs created, increased sales, and increased output (business data will be kept confidential and reported in aggregate).
- Willingness to share project details, including successes and challenges with the public, the WLEB, and the media, which tell the broader story of how the grant is impacting the working lands economies of Vermont. This sharing may take place by way of media inquiries, possible press events on location, and site visits from WLEB members and/or their partners.
- If selected, service provider grantees will be required to survey their clients on metrics including jobs created, increased sales, and increased output (business data will be kept confidential and reported in aggregate).

Tax Consequences

We recommend that all entities consult with a tax accountant with any questions on how to report grant awards on tax returns.

5. The Letter of Intent

Below is the information requested in the LOI. All LOIs **must** be electronically submitted online at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov. You may find that it is helpful to create your LOI as a Word document and then copy and paste into the agriculturegrants.vermont.gov system.

- **Applicant Information**

- Organization name:
- Type of legal entity (e.g. sole proprietorship, LLC, cooperative, 501(c)3, etc.)
- First Name:
- Last Name:
- Title:
- Phone Number:
- Email:
- Physical Address:
- County:
- Where did you learn about this grant opportunity?
- Applicant must be in compliance with state regulations and in good standing with the State of Vermont – signature line and date.
- Are you interested in receiving Working Lands related e-news/events/funding opportunities updates by email?
- Do you allow this program to share your project information with other state and federal funders? (Yes or No):

- **Project Information:**

- Project title:
- Project category (drop down menu):
- Working Lands Funds requested:
- Matching Funds:
- County(s) impacted or Statewide Impact?
- How many working lands businesses are anticipated to be impacted by this project?
Please give a number or a range:
- Have you received grants for this project (not for this organization as a whole) in the past 5 years? If yes, please list:
- Please list other grants/loans you are applying to in conjunction with this project:

- **Project Abstract (1000 characters max):** Abstracts will be provided to Board members to give a broad overview of each project. Please provide a brief overview of your project for Board member review, including key impacts.
- **Organization Description (1800 characters max):** Describe your organization, its experience and success in providing similar services, and the expertise of any partner organizations expected to participate in the project. Please describe the core team of individuals involved and explain how they have the knowledge, energy, expertise, and commitment necessary to turn your project idea into a reality.
 - Are you a previous Working Lands Grantee? If yes, please list grants received and speak to the specific outcomes achieved for clients (1800 characters max).
- **Project Summary (2000 characters max):** Please provide an overview of your project and how requested and matching funds will be used. Explain why your project is being proposed, and what makes it timely, important, innovative and/or sustainable. Describe the demand for these services, and how demand was assessed.
- **Impact (1800 characters max):** Outline projected measurable outcomes on working lands businesses served including increased sales, increased net income, jobs created or retained, increase in acres in active use, and/or increased product output. Briefly describe the evaluation plan.
 - Will your project increase gross sales for businesses served? If yes, how much do you anticipate gross sales to increase (in aggregate dollars)?
 - Will your project increase product output for businesses served? If yes, how much, on average (in percent), do you anticipate product output to increase for businesses?
 - Will this project increase jobs for businesses served? If yes, how many Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Jobs are anticipated to be created?
 - Will this project increase working lands acres impacted? If yes, how many additional acres will be impacted by this project? (Project Utilization includes acres directly used for production, committed for production through other producers and/or under active management by your enterprise)

- **Budget and Narrative:** Please provide a detailed budget, including Working Lands funds requested and any other funding sources supporting the project. Cost incurred prior to the signing of the grant agreement are ineligible.

Matching funds should equal at least 100% of the Working Lands Enterprise funds requested (either cash or in-kind). Match must be identified by the time of full application submission, and in place by the time of grant agreement execution.

- Examples of **cash match** include: funds in the bank, third party funds, and applicant labor directly associated with the proposed project.
- Examples of **in-kind match** include: goods or services provided during the grant period for which no expenditure is made (e.g. contractors, consultants, or equipment provided pro bono for the project, volunteer labor, and/or donated supplies that are not part of the normal cost of doing business).
- **Indirect costs** (i.e. Facilities/administrative costs) are allowed for up to 10% of requested WLEB funds. Additional indirect costs may be used as match.

Example:

\$20,000 Working Lands grant request (up to \$2,000 could be indirect costs)
 $\$20,000 \times 1 = \$20,000$ minimum cash or in-kind match (could include additional indirect costs)
 $\$20,000 + \$20,000 = \$40,000$ total project cost (WLEB request + match amount)

Under limited circumstances, match requirements may be reduced or waived for projects that can justify the need for a reduced match. Waiver requests must outline the impact of the project and indicate if the project benefits an underserved sector of the working lands economy. For consideration, waiver requests must be outlined in the budget narrative.

Budget Template: Enter each line item of your budget into the appropriate field in the agriculturegrants.vermont.gov system. You may wish to utilize the budget template below to construct your budget. We understand the budget and use of funds may be different should you be invited back for the full application. Your budget should include any other funding sources supporting the proposal and a match totaling 100% of Working Lands funds requested.

Project Sources and Uses		Applicant Contribution	Match Source	Details/Purpose	Total
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	Working Lands Request	Cash	In-Kind			
Salaries/Wages (Personnel)						
Benefits						
Travel						
Machinery/Equipment						
Supplies						
Contractual						
Other Direct Costs						
Indirect Costs						
TOTAL						

Budget Narrative (1000 characters max for each question):

- Please use this space to expand on your use of Working Lands Funds. Provide further detail for all line items, as needed.
- Match: Indicate whether all matching funds are committed:
- If not, provide your timeline for securing such commitments:
- Are you requesting a match waiver (check yes/no):
- Match Waiver: If match waiver requested, please provide justification here.

Thank you for the time and effort put into this application. While not everyone can be offered the opportunity to submit a full application or receive a grant, your contributions to Vermont's working landscape are greatly appreciated.