

FY 2015 Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Agriculture, Forestry & Forest Products

LETTER OF INTENT: CAPITAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS

Instructions & Guide

APPLICATION PROCESS:

It is imperative that applicants read the entire application guide before developing and submitting an application. Applications must be submitted [electronically online](#). See page 7 for more details on submitting an application.

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.

For more information on Service Provider and Enterprise Investment Areas, please see: <http://workinglands.vermont.gov/apply/rfp>.

APPLICATION TIMELINE:

LETTERS OF INTENT ARE DUE: **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2014 by 4:00 p.m.**

APPLICANT NOTIFICATION OF ACCEPTANCE/DENIAL OF LETTER OF INTENT: **DECEMBER 2014.**

INVITED APPLICATIONS ARE DUE: **FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2015 by 4:00 p.m.**

APPLICANT NOTIFICATION: **LATE MARCH 2015**

ESTIMATED PROJECT START DATE IS NO EARLIER THAN: **MONDAY, APRIL 13, 2015**

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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 Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) is an impact investment organization whose mission is to grow the economies, cultures, and communities of Vermont's working landscape by making essential, catalytic investments in critical leverage points of the Vermont farm and forest economy, from individual enterprises to industry sectors.

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.

History of Success to Date

WLEB began operations in August of 2012 and in Fiscal Year 2013 awarded over \$1 million in grant funds to 37 grantees. An additional \$750,000 in outside funds were leveraged as a result of these projects. In Fiscal Year 2014, The WLEB awarded 37 projects for \$1.1 million in grants reaching every county in Vermont and leveraging \$1.8 million in matching funds. To see a list of FY13 and FY14 funded projects, visit <http://workinglands.vermont.gov/projects>.

FY 2015 Program Year

This year, WLEB has \$1 million in grant funds available for investment into farm, food systems, forestry, and forest products enterprises on October 1st. Funds for local food market development projects, previously solicited through a separate request for proposals (the Local Food Market Development Program) will be allocated through the WLEB grant process.

Capital and infrastructure Investment Area - Projects may include, but are not limited to: costs associated with project specific planning, permitting, and/or engineering/architectural design plans, capital investments in access to land (i.e., acquisition and easement), working capital, purchase and/or construction of physical assets (i.e., building and equipment costs) for value-added manufacturing (i.e., processing, storage, distribution), information technology, and renewable energy technology.

Applicant Information Sessions are scheduled for October 9th and 14th. Please see <http://workinglands.vermont.gov/webinar> for more information.

For information on the Enterprise and Service Provider Investment areas, please see: <http://workinglands.vermont.gov/apply/rfp>.

2. Eligibility Requirements – Capital and Infrastructure Area

Applicant Criteria

- 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.
- Vermont applicants and/or their business must be registered with the Secretary of State at the time of application submission.
- Working Lands Capital and Infrastructure grant recipients are ineligible for further Working Lands funds until three years after the start date of their first grant (Example: Grant start date 6/4/2013. Applicant not eligible for further WLEB funding until 6/4/2016). Enterprise Investment grant recipients are not eligible for FY 2015 Working Lands funds unless applying for Capital and Infrastructure Investment area project funding.

Project Criteria

- Provides a budget that uses between \$15,000 - \$75,000 of Working Lands Enterprise Funds.
- Provides 100% match (at least 50% of match must be in cash) of total requested WLEB funds.
- Please note: applicant labor associated with the project is eligible for Working Lands funds; it may be also used as match. Labor rates should be in line with current market rates. Costs incurred prior to signing of a full grant agreement are not eligible.
- Project must be completed within 18 months after grant agreement start date.
- Primary beneficiaries are Vermont agriculture, forestry & forest products based businesses (including farm and/or forest landowners).
- Businesses with revenue of over \$2.5 million dollars will need to provide detailed justification on why this project would not happen without Working Lands funds.

3. Scoring Criteria

Projects will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Quality of Proposal and Concept –The proposal 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. Projects showing innovation are encouraged.
- Impact - The project demonstrates how it will enhance Vermont’s working landscape and impact the supply chain (e.g., increases business profits, improves product value/quality, improves access to markets; enhances business operations; creates an innovative replicable model, creates or retains jobs, and/or enhances the Vermont brand), with measurable outcomes.
- Need – The application demonstrates a clear need for the project and the need for Working Lands Enterprise funding. The requested funds leverage other funds, and the project cannot

be fully funded through other sources. Without these particular funds in this form, the project would happen more slowly, in a less desirable fashion, with a lower probability of success, or would not happen; and/or an urgent window of opportunity to advance a business, value chain, or industry as a whole would be missed.

- **Sustainability** - The project contributes to long-term sustainability/viability of working landscape businesses, builds partnerships, and demonstrates a plan for long term financial viability beyond the Working Lands grant period. Projects that credibly outline anticipated positive impacts based on measurable financial, social, and environmental criteria will be given preference.
- **Leveraging Funds** - Provides 100% match (at least 50% of match must be cash) of the total Working Lands Enterprise grant requested. Match must be identified at the time of proposal application and verified as in hand at the time of the award.

4. Timeline

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In the event of a timeline change, applicants will be notified directly. Timeline changes will also be posted on our [website](http://www.vermontworkinglands.com).

5. Creating a Strong Proposal: Technical Assistance is Available

First time applicants are encouraged to work with an advisor to develop their project concept and convey a well thought out and clearly written grant application. For a list of service providers, please visit our [website](#). Applicants are encouraged to utilize current business advisors, colleagues, friends, and family, etc., to review the grant application for additional feedback on the need and innovation of the project, proposal clarity, spelling, and grammar before submitting the application. Costs of preparing the application are not eligible for working lands funds.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to investigate other possible funding streams before applying for a Working Lands Enterprise grant. For a list of other common grant programs, and potential funding streams please visit our [website](#).

For tips on writing a successful grant proposal please visit our [website](#).

6. Receiving a Grant: Expectations

Businesses/Organizations selected for funding will be expected to meet the following requirements:

- Must already be registered with the [Secretary of State](#) as a business.
- Enter into a grant agreement with the State of Vermont - costs incurred prior to signing of a full grant agreement are not eligible.
- Submit a W-9 (for tax identification purposes) – unless already a state vendor
- Provide evidence of:
 - Worker’s Compensation (unless you are a sole proprietor)
 - Insurance Certificate with a minimum coverage of:
 - General Liability - \$1,000,000 coverage (details in grant agreement)
 - Automotive Liability - \$1,000,000 coverage (details in grant agreement)
- Provide Interim and Final reports which will include: financials documenting expenditure of both grant and matching funds, text suitable for a press release, high-resolution digital photos in jpg format , and a narrative of accomplishments which will include project goals, performance measures, and outcomes accomplished to date.

- 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.

7. Submitting your Application

All applications must be electronically submitted online. It is imperative that you prepare the application and all templates/attachments in full and save to your computer or to an external drive BEFORE entering your data into the electronic application. It may be most helpful to create your application as a Word document and then cut and paste online. The application DOES NOT save data. If you leave the application for any reason, all the data that you have entered will be lost. Note that the application will automatically reset after 24 hours and your data will be lost. Be ready to complete your entry in one sitting and submit it.

8. Review & Selection Process

Applications will be reviewed by the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board and its partners, subject matter experts, and/or state agency staff and assessed based on the criteria outlined on pages #4 to 6. The Working Lands Enterprise Board makes final decisions on all grants. Applications will not be reviewed by competitors or those with conflicts of interest.

Please NOTE: the proposal review committee may request additional information about your project (i.e., additional financial information, project clarification).

Not all Letter of Intent applicants will be invited to submit a full application. Full applications will only be accepted from LOI applicants receiving acceptance letters.

9. 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, personal financial information of an individual, 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 considers 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; and the purpose and amount of any Working Lands Enterprise Funds received. Other information may be shared in aggregate form (without identifying individual business info).

10. Tax Consequences

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

11. Application Feedback Policy

The Working Lands Enterprise staff will email notification letters regarding the Board's funding decisions. These letters will not provide specific application feedback. If you would like specific feedback on your application, please email a [request for feedback](#) no later than two weeks after receipt of your notification email.

12. The Letter of Intent

Applicants must submit an electronic letter of intent (LOI). 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. Not all applicants will be invited to submit a full application. Full applications will only be accepted from LOI applicants receiving acceptance letters. [Submit a Letter of Intent Now](#)

I. Project & Applicant Summary

- a) Project title:
- b) Project category:
- c) Location of supply chain impact:
- d) Business name:
- e) Business category:
- f) Stage of business development: ([Definitions of business stages](#))
- g) Working Lands Funds requested:
- h) Matching Funds:
- i) Do you have a business plan?

II. Application Information

- j) Applicant name:
- k) Organization Affiliation:
- l) Phone Number:
- m) Email:
- n) Physical Address:
- o) County:
- p) Identify any technical assistance, supporting organizations, services, programs, friends, relatives, involved in the development of this proposal:
- q) Have you, or are you, currently working with a Technical Assistance Provider? If yes, please list:
- r) Please list and explain any technical assistance that you have received in the past 2 years:
- s) Please list other grants you are applying to in conjunction with this project:
- t) Have you received grants or loans before? If yes, please list:
- u) Please list any memberships in associations / trade organizations:

- v) Where did you learn about this grant opportunity?
- w) Applicant must be in compliance with state regulations and in good standing with the State of Vermont – signature line and date
- x) Are you interested in receiving Working Lands related e-news/events/funding opportunities updates by email?

III. Additional Project Questions

1. (350 words) Please provide an overview of your project and how requested and matching funds will be used. Please explain why your project is being proposed (e.g. important, timely, innovative). What will be the most important outcomes of your project?
2. (350 words) Describe your business or organization, its experience and successes with similar activities, and the expertise of any partner businesses or organizations expected to participate in the project.
3. (250 words) Describe the proposal’s benefit to the supply chain it impacts.
4. Budget Template and Narrative [Download Template Now](#)

This is a draft budget for your project. We understand the budget and uses of funds may be different in the final submittal of your application.

Please use the **Budget Template** to provide a detailed budget including any other funding sources supporting the proposal and match equal to at least 100% of the Working Lands Enterprise funds requested. **Please note that applicant labor associated with the project is eligible for Working Lands funds or as match. Labor rates should be in line with current market rates.**

In the **Budget Narrative Section (350 total word limit, located on the template itself)**, provide:

- Details of line items (provide details for the purpose and use of funds)
- Describe other efforts to fund this project with other sources, and why those efforts have not been sufficient. If you are a large business, note why this would not happen without WLEB funds.

- Please be sure to indicate whether all matching funds are committed, or if not, your plan and timeline for securing such commitments.
- Please provide the source(s) for all matching funds listed in the template.
- If requesting funds for land acquisition, please specify how this use of funds will help you meet your goals. Please note that if you are invited to submit for a full application, you will need to provide additional documentation.
- If match waiver requested, please provide justification here.

5. Although not required, we recommend the submission of historical (previous year) income statement and a projected income statement showing estimated revenues and expenses for the next 1-3 years (submit up to three attachments).