



WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE

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Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets
Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation
Agency of Commerce & Community Development

WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE PRODUCER ASSOCIATION DEVELOPMENT GRANT

FISCAL YEAR 2022 REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

The Working Lands Enterprise Board – a collaborative effort of Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets; Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation; and Agency of Commerce and Community Development– announce the availability of grant funds to support the development of Vermont-based producer associations supporting agriculture and forest products businesses.

KEY DATES

- Request for Applications Release Date: September 10, 2021
- Application Opens for Submission: September 21, 2021 at 12:00 PM (noon)
- Application Deadline: November 1, 2021 at 11:59 PM
- Award Notification: January 2022
- Estimated Project Date Start: February-March 2022

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CONTACT

PROGRAMMATIC QUESTIONS

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REGISTERING IN WEBGRANTS

Applicants that have not previously registered in [WebGrants](#) will need to allow 1-2 business days for their registration to be processed. During that time, applicants will not be able to login to start an application. Please plan your application process accordingly.

SUBMISSION POLICY

It is the applicant's responsibility to adhere to all application instructions including the submission dates and times included in this request for applications (RFA). The Working Lands Enterprise Fund, via the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAF) will accept the last validated electronic submission through the grants management system, WebGrants, prior to the posted deadline as the final and sole acceptable submission of an application. Submission or re-submission of incomplete or delayed applications after the posted deadline, barring exceptional circumstances will not be accepted. WebGrants will prevent applications from being submitted after the cut-off time. Applications must be submitted in WebGrants by the deadline indicated.

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAF) staff are available to provide assistance during State of Vermont business hours, Monday - Friday, 7:45 AM to 4:30 PM. Assistance may not be available shortly before deadlines.

SUBMISSION CONFIRMATION

When an application has successfully been submitted, the applicant will receive a confirmation email from agriculturegrants.vermont@webgrantsmail.com. Please add this email address to your "safe senders" list. If you do not receive this confirmation, please check your junk, or spam folder.

I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND FUNDING ELIGIBILITY

Approximately 20% of Vermont’s working landscape is used for agricultural purposes, and 75% is forested. Vermont prospers and its unique sense of place thrives, in large part, because of intelligent investments 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.

The mission of the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative is to grow the economies, cultures, and communities of Vermont's working landscape. The Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) 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. [The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, Act 142](#), created the Working Lands Enterprise Fund (WLEF) and the WLEB. The WLEB is made up of private sector members throughout the supply chains of agriculture and forestry, and staff from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets; Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation; Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development; Vermont Housing & Conservation Board; Vermont Economic Development Authority; and Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund.

HISTORY OF SUCCESS TO DATE

Since its formation in August 2012, the Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) has awarded over \$7 million in grant funds to over 250 grantees, leveraging more than \$11 million in matching funds. Since 2013, the WLEB has invested over \$2 million to thirty-seven distinct service provider organizations in the form of grants and contracts. For a list of previously funded projects, visit workinglands.vermont.gov/projects.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DETAILS

PROJECT LENGTH

The Working Lands Enterprise Board plans to fund Producer Association Grant awards in the range of \$10,000-\$20,000.

FUNDING SOURCE

Producer Association Grant projects will be 18 months in duration.

Grants are funded through a State of Vermont legislative appropriation, with additional philanthropic contributions.

ELIGIBILITY

Producer Association organizations must be based in Vermont and registered with the Secretary of State at the time of application submission. All structures are eligible (e.g., Partnerships, Limited Liability Corporations, Sole Proprietorships, Cooperatives, Corporations, S Corporations, L3Cs, B Corporations, and/or non-profits that are involved in the support of the production of agriculture and/or forest products). Applicants must be in compliance with all state regulations (i.e. water quality, taxes, child support) and in good standing with the State of Vermont at the time of submitting an application and must remain so during the entire grant period.

Previous Producer Association recipients who may have applied and received grants from Working Lands Service Provider or Business Grants opportunities are eligible to re-apply for funding during Fiscal Year 2022. Applicants who have received Working Lands grants in the past will be asked to measure and report on the results of previously funded projects and demonstrate how continued funding will be used to grow or improve the program.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Projects eligible for funding will include the provision of direct technical assistance and/or indirect services to support the development of Vermont-based working lands businesses. Vermont Producer or Processor association groups, also known as trade associations, industry trade groups, business associations, sector associations, or an industry body, are organizations founded and funded by businesses that operate in a specific industry. Vermont-based producer association groups that represent and promote Vermont agriculture, food, beverage, forest, or fiber products are encouraged to submit applications for the following project activities:

- **Leadership and organizational development:** business structure (how to form and when to evaluate organizational structure), business technical assistance, onboarding and/or transitions for new executive directors and post succession;
- **Governance:** Board training and capacity, clear guidance to build and refresh by-laws, committee work, strategic planning process activities
- **Marketing & sales:** how to identify appropriate markets, brand and sell products, articulate concise value proposition, perform or access market research, including research and design
- **Business and financial planning;** business research and development

II. APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

HOW TO APPLY

Applications must be submitted via the online grants management system, WebGrants, at agriculture.vermont.gov between Tuesday, September 21st, 2021 at 12:00 PM (noon) and Monday, November 1st, 2021 at 11:59 PM. Paper applications will not be accepted. Application components are outlined as they will appear in WebGrants below.

For technical instructions on the application submission process, please see the guide on the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets website at <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/howtoapply>.

A. Applicant Information

- Organization Name
- Type of Legal Entity (e.g. sole proprietorship, LLC, cooperative, 501(c)(3), etc.)
- Contact Name
- Applicant Title
- Phone Number
- Email
- Physical Address
- County
- Primary product category
- Secondary product category
- Demonstration of applicant compliance with state regulations and good standing with the State of Vermont – e-signature and date
- How did you learn about this grant opportunity?
- Interest in receiving Working Lands related e-news/events/funding opportunity updates by email (Yes/No)
- Willingness to share contact information with other state and federal funders (Yes/No)

B. Project Information

- Project Title
- Project Category (drop down menu)
- Working Lands Funds Requested (\$)
- Matching Funds Committed (\$) **Please note: must be a minimum of 100% of the amount of funds requested*
- Have you received grants for this specific project (not as an organization), in the past five years?
 - If so, please list grants received
- Are you a previous Working Lands Grantee?
 - If so: In what year? What was the grant amount?
- Please list other grants you are applying for in conjunction with this grant. *If none, please enter N/A*

SECTION II: APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

- Have you received a grant from the State of Vermont or from the Federal government in the past?
 - If so, were these grants successfully completed? If not, please indicate why.
 - If your previous funding includes a Working Lands grant, please indicate specific outcomes achieved (1800 character limit).
 - Please provide any additional comments on your previous State of Vermont and/or Federal government grants (optional).
- **Financial Information** (2000 character limit): Explain why Working Lands Business Grant funds are needed, and how the project would or would not move forward without these funds. Be specific and describe efforts to fund this project with other sources and why those efforts have not been sufficient.
- Select all/any that apply:
 - Without this grant, this project wouldn't happen
 - Without this grant, an urgent window of opportunity would be missed
 - Without this grant, the project would have a lower probability of success
 - Without this grant, this project would happen in a less desirable fashion
 - This project would possibly happen, as planned, without these grant funds
- **Project Summary** (2000 character limit): Provide a brief overview of your project, including how requested and matching funds will be used. Explain why your project is being proposed and what makes it timely and important.

C. Organization Information

- **Business Description** (1500 character limit): Describe the business in terms of activities, products, markets, and the number of years in business. Please include the number of members in your organization.
 - Select your Stage of Business Development from the dropdown menu. For more information, review the [definitions](#) for the different stages of business development.
- **Organization Description** (2000 character limit): Describe your organization overall, including relevant experience and successes. Describe the core team of individuals who will be involved in the project and their expertise that will contribute to project success.
 - Has this organization been in operation for more than two years? If not, how many years of organizational management experience is held by those in leading staff position(s)?
 - Describe the relationship and expertise of any partner organizations expected to participate in the project.
 - Please list your organization's membership in associations/trade organizations, if applicable.
- **Outreach Plan** (2000 characters max): Provide a brief summary of your outreach plan, including the intended targeted audience and evaluation process for the plan.
- Describe how your management team will adjust if you see less demand for services
- What methods are you using for accounting systems (e.g. Quickbooks, formatted excel spreadsheet, contractor)?
- What system will you use to track grant project expenses?
- Do you have a system in place to track employee time associated with this grant – both time paid by the grant and in-kind time used for matching purposes?

SECTION II: APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

D. Project Outcomes and Impact

- **Business Impact** (1500 character limit): Describe the intended outcomes of your project (e.g., change in production, sales, marketing, staff positions, business growth, etc.)
- **Projected Impact** (1800 character limit): Outline projected measurable marketing and leadership outcomes on working lands businesses/producer association served including: sales, net income, jobs created or retained, customer reach, leadership skills. Briefly describe the project's evaluation plan.

Projected Impact on Sales and Margin

- What were your annual gross sales in the past 12 months?
- Will this project result in increased gross sales for your business?
 - If so, by how much are sales anticipated to increase?
- Will this project result in increased overall **operating margin**?
 - If so, by how much is overall operating margin anticipated to increase?

Projected Impact on Employment

- Will this project increase jobs for member businesses served?
 - If so, how many Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs do you anticipate will be created?

Projected Impact on Membership/Leadership

- Describe how the data (quantitatively and qualitatively) their marketing skills?
- Will this project reach historically underserved and/or marginalized communities? If so, please describe strategies you will employ to engage these communities.
- Explain how this project will directly enhance, financial and/or leadership skills of executive directors or board members.
- Explain how this project will cultivate a pipeline of qualified leaders.
- Will this project support the leadership development of next-generation leaders within your organization?
- Will this project help member businesses address industry-specific or governance skills for their organization's leadership?
- Describe how this project will address the continued navigation of operational business responses as a result of COVID-19.

E. Goals and Expected Measurable Outcomes

Enter your project goals into the appropriate field. Enter at least three and not more than five goals. Each goal must have a corresponding measurable outcome. Outcomes must be discrete and attainable within the 18-month period of the grant. You are encouraged to include at least two of the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative priority outcomes (increased income, jobs, sales increases). Other goals may relate to organizational development, new markets accessed (specify restaurant, retail, wholesale accounts, etc.)

For additional reference, view WLEI's Goals and Expected Measurable Outcomes page at workinglands.vermont.gov/business-toolkit-resources/writing-goals-performance-measures-and-outcomes

SECTION II: APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

Goals	Performance Measures	Expected Measurable Outcomes
<i>Example: Monthly trainings for Board members supports the development of committees, including a Nominating committee</i>	<i>Example: Number of new Board members onboarded via the new Nominating committee</i>	<i>Example: The Nominating slate of potential Board candidates increases from 5 to 35 during the life-cycle of the grant project</i>

F. Project Work Plan

Enter at least five project activities into the Project Work Plan table (1000-character limit per field):

- **Project Activity** – Describe the activities (i.e.milestone tasks) that are necessary to accomplish your project objectives. Include your performance monitoring/data collection activities. If you request funds for travel, these activities must also be included.
- **Personnel/Responsible Parties** – Indicate the project participants who will do the work involved in each activity, including yourself, employees, and/or contractors. Any personnel or contractors referenced in your budget must be included in the work plan to demonstrate their role and justify associated funds.
- **Estimated Timeline/Completion Date** – Identify your project timeline, including the activity start date and projected completion date. Project activities must be completed within the 18- month grant period ending in September/October 2023.

Project Activity	Personnel/Responsible Parties	Estimated Timeline/Completion

G. Budget Template and Narrative: Provide a detailed budget, including Working Lands funds requested and other funding sources supporting the project as matching funds. Expenses incurred prior to the signing of the grant agreement are not eligible.

- **Budget Template:** Enter each line item of your budget into the appropriate field. Include all other funding sources supporting the proposed project to meet the required match amount, equaling 100% or more of Working Lands funds requested.
 - Examples of **cash match** include funds in the bank, third party funds, and applicant labor directly associated with the proposed project

SECTION II: APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

- 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; volunteer labor)
- **Indirect costs** (i.e. facilities/administrative costs) are allowed for up to 10% of requested Working Lands Grant funds. Additional indirect costs may be used as match.

Matching Funds Example:

- \$20,000 Working Lands grant request x 10% = \$2,000 (up to \$2,000 could be indirect costs)
- \$20,000 x 1 = \$20,000 minimum cash or in-kind match (could include additional indirect costs)
- \$20,000 + \$20,000 = \$40,000 total project cost (grant request + match amount)

Expense Category	Grant Request	Matching		Match Source	Details/Purpose	Total
		Cash	In-Kind			
Salaries/Wages (Personnel)						
Benefits						
Travel						
Supplies						
Contractual						
Other Direct Costs						
Indirect Costs						
TOTAL						

Budget Narrative (1000 character limit for each question):

- Describe your intended use of Working Lands funds. Provide further detail on proposed amounts for all line items, as needed.
- Future Investment: Please describe if/how this project will strengthen your relationship with existing and prospective funders and funding sources.
- Provide the source(s) for all matching funds with timeline for securing these commitments. If a match waiver is requested, provide justification here. (Match waivers are granted at discretion of the WLEB.)

H. Additional Attachments – space provided to upload up to five documents

- Letters of support and/or commitment are encouraged to justify the current need and importance of this project.
- Additional documentation is also encouraged, e.g., cost estimates for specific board training fees.

III. APPLICATION REVIEW AND SCORING

APPLICATION REVIEW

Working Lands Service Provider Grant funds will be awarded to projects that benefit agriculture and forest-based businesses through a competitive review process. A committee of Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) members, state agency staff, and industry stakeholders will review submitted applications and make funding recommendations to the full WLEB for final awarding decisions. Applicants will be notified by email of application approval or denial, with specific feedback, in December 2021.

APPLICATION SCORING

Priority will be given to service provider organizations that are not currently implementing WLEF funded projects or scopes of work. Criteria that will inform scoring of application quality are as follows:

Quality of Proposal and Management Team: The proposal is comprehensible and clear, and the proposed project fits within the eligibility criteria outlined in the Request for Applications. The management team demonstrates previous experience in the sector necessary to conduct the proposed activities. If applicable, a strong board is in place to set priorities and provide oversight to operational leadership. Staff and contracted providers are selected at least in part based on operational skill sets such as marketing, production, or governance management. (20 points)

Expected Measurable Outcomes: The applicant demonstrates how services to businesses will enhance Vermont's working landscape, with measurable performance outcomes that may include number of businesses served, number of technical assistance hours provided, and client outcomes such as job creation and retention, increased income, increased leadership and marketing skills, and increased and/or retained acres in active forestry or agricultural use. (20 points)

Financial Need: The applicant demonstrates financial sustainability of the organization, clear demand for services from working lands businesses and a clear need for Working Lands Enterprise funding. Project cannot be fully funded through other sources sought by the applicant. If Working Lands funds are not received, this project will have a lower probability of success, would not happen, and/or an urgent window of opportunity would be missed. (5 points)

Innovation: The applicant demonstrates how services to businesses are innovative in approach, and the proposal outlines audience served, outreach and delivery methods, and/or topics, skills, and strategies for implementation. The applicant demonstrates a suite of services that are emergent, pilot or proof of concept. (5 points)

Collaboration: The applicant demonstrates effective collaboration and leverages partnerships among working lands service provider or producer association organizations to promote project success. Partnerships with statewide networks (non-profit or for-profit) do not facilitate competition or redundancy with other services, nor intent to, or willingness to develop such relationships. Equity and inclusion dialogue with partner stakeholders has moved past peripheral organizational value shifts, to the center of the organization's strategic development. A thoughtful and robust outreach/knowledge sharing strategy is incorporated to support the project. (20 points)

Demonstrated Need: The proposal demonstrates a credible need for specified services to be provided to businesses, and a contingency plan if outreach targets are not met. (10 points)

Letters of commitment demonstrate the project partners' involvement and identify the specific

SECTION III: APPLICATION REVIEW AND SCORING

contributions they will make to ensure the project's success. (5 points) Content could include:

- Description of previous collaboration with applicant;
- The role the partner/stakeholder will play in the proposed project;
- Financial support they will contribute (if applicable); and
- Type and value of any in-kind support they will provide – labor, facility space, equipment.

Letters of support articulate general support for the grant request. Support letters reference involvement with applicant and/or the community and/or explain how the funding will help address a need or solve a problem.

Content could include:

- Description of services or individuals that benefited from applicants work;
- Expression of interest in how the funding will benefit the community.

Budget: Applicant has prepared a clear budget reflecting realistic, well-planned components, including required matching funds. Budget narrative supports and further details items in budget table. (15 points)

IV. GRANT MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

GRANT AGREEMENT & PAYMENT

Prior to receiving funding, successful applicants must sign a grant agreement with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFAM) indicating their intent to complete the proposed project and authorizing VAAFAM to monitor progress. The grant agreement will include provisions (terms and conditions) set by the State of Vermont as well as any program-specific requirements. Review [Attachment C – Standard State Provisions for Contracts and Grants \(12/15/2017 Revised\)](#) for the most recent State of Vermont provisions.

Prior to commencement of work and release of any payments, grantees must submit:

- A current [IRS Form W-9](#) (Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification), signed within the past six months (not required if organization is a previous State of Vermont grant recipient)
- A certificate of insurance consistent with the requirements set forth in [Attachment C](#) of the grant agreement (not required if grantee already has a current certificate of insurance on file with VAAFAM)
- A completed [Act 154 Good Standing Certification](#) – find this form at finance.vermont.gov/vendors-and-grantees
- Documentation that verifies pledged matching funds, as applicable.

GRANTEE PAYMENT SCHEDULE

Working Lands Producer Association Grant payments are made on a reimbursement basis, after costs have been incurred, and require documentation of project expenditures (e.g., receipts, paid invoices) to substantiate the total dollar amount of each claim for payment. Grant funds must be matched at a 100% (one-to-one) rate using funds the grantee organization has procured from other sources. Matching funds may not be sourced from other State of Vermont funding opportunities.

After grant agreements are fully executed, i.e., have been approved and signed by all parties, Working Lands Grant funds are typically disbursed according to the following schedule:

- a. Up to 40% of the grant award following receipt and approval of an initial claim for payment via WebGrants; documentation of expenditures to date for which reimbursement is requested
- b. Up to an additional 40% of the grant award (80% total) at the mid-point of the project, pending completion and approval of the Interim Report and a second claim; claim must contain documentation of receipts for all project expenditures to date for the requested reimbursement AND matching expenses at a minimum one-to-one ratio
- c. Final 20% (or other remaining amount) of the grant award, pending receipt and approval of the Final Report demonstrating completion of project deliverables and satisfactory achievement of measurable project outcomes, and a final claim, including documentation of project expenses (both claimed and matching, as above).

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Prior to receipt of the second and third grant payments, respectively, grant recipients must complete Interim and Final status reports in WebGrants. Reports will include a narrative of project accomplishments to date, progress on meeting expected goals and outcomes, and high-resolution digital photos in jpg format that demonstrate project work. Grantees must also complete an Annual Survey one year following and two years following the grant end date. These surveys will be distributed by grantees to the clients who received services as a result of the grant. Grantees will be expected to collaborate with VAAFM staff to measure the impact of their project on businesses served.

Grantees must be willing to share project details, including successes and challenges, with the public, the WLEB, and the media, which illustrate how the grant is impacting Vermont's working lands economies. This may occur through media inquiries, press events on location, and/or site visits from VAAFM staff, WLEB members, and/or their stakeholder partners.

APPENDIX A: PROGRAM PROVISIONS

Working Lands Grant agreements are held between the State of Vermont and the business or, where applicable, the business entity. Should the business entity cease to exist, or if the business entity to which this grant is issued becomes inactive, the State may suspend or cancel this Grant immediately, and the State shall be under no obligation to pay or further pay grantee.

Ready to begin work: Grantee must be ready to begin project work immediately following execution of this grant agreement. If grantee anticipates a delay or experiences a delay of more than two months, grantee shall submit to the grant manager via email an explanation for the delay and note the extent to which the delay will/will not impact project completion. Similarly, grantees should submit their initial claim for funds reimbursement within two months of receipt of the grant agreement. An explanation must be sent to the grant administrator if no request for reimbursement is anticipated within the first two months of the grant.

Publicly known and open to inspection: Except for grantee proprietary and personal identifying data, as noted per 1V.S.A. § 317(c), grantee names, projects, the amount of grant awards, and all other information regarding Working Lands grant projects are considered public information and are open to inspection. Grantee can also anticipate communication from other Working Lands partners and stakeholders regarding project successes and accomplishments.

Grantee Confidential and/or Proprietary Information: Grantee is responsible for noting all information, data, project results and narrative text which it considers confidential and/or proprietary in its reports and communications with the state. Grantee financials are automatically classified as confidential by the state.

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).

Acknowledgement: All meetings and gatherings held as a result of this grant will recognize the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets and the Working Land Enterprise Board as a funder. Written and electronic materials produced shall include text acknowledging the same and shall also feature a Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets graphic. Grantee may be required to reprint event flyers, posters, and/or brochures or repost meeting announcements if the State learns of grantee's failure to acknowledge the Working Lands Enterprise Board as a funder.

Tax Implications: We recommend that all entities consult with a tax accountant as needed regarding how to report grant awards for tax purposes, including advising on your tax return. State of Vermont staff and Working Lands partners are not authorized to advise or provide input on tax-related information, including the completion of federal forms.