



WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE

www.vermontworkinglands.com

116 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620
[phone] 802-622-4477
[email] agr.workinglands@vermont.gov
[website] www.vermontworkinglands.com

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

WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE SERVICE PROVIDER 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 agriculture and forestproducts businesses.

KEY DATES

Request for Applications Release Date: August 6, 2021

Application Opens for Submission: August 13, 2021 at 12:00 PM (noon)

Application Deadline: September 27, 2021 at 11:59 PM

Award Notification: End of October 2021

Estimated Project Date Start: End of December 2021

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CONTACT

PROGRAMMATIC QUESTIONS

Lynn Ellen Schimoler
LynnEllen.Schimoler@vermont.gov
(802) 622-4477

WEBGRANTS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Diana Ferguson
Diana.Ferguson@vermont.gov
(802) 622-4094

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 (VAAFMM) 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 (VAAFMM) 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

PROGRAM PURPOSE

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.

ELIGIBILITY

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Service provider 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 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 recipients of Working Lands Service Provider Grants 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. *Services must be provided to a new cohort of businesses for each funding period.*

For optional further context about the history of service providers and the Working Lands Enterprise Board, please see [WLEI's educational paper here](#).

Working Lands Enterprise Fund FY22 Service Provider Grant

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 service providers, sub-state regional programs, and organizations are welcome to apply. Ongoing and pilot programs are acceptable, and services may provide the following:

- Market development, marketing plans, and sales;
- Business and financial planning;
- Business responses to COVID-19;
- Enterprise transitions for next generation business owners and post succession;
- Access to capital;
- Manufacturing efficiencies or process flow;
- Business research and development;
- Workforce development, professional engagement training;
- Import substitution, assistance to businesses emphasizing or exploring Vermont production to fill in or address gaps (packaging, ingredients, etc.) along forest and agriculture supply chains.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DETAILS

AWARD AMOUNT

The Working Lands Enterprise Board plans to fund **Service Provider Grant awards in the range of \$10,000-\$20,000**. Information regarding Business Grants will be released in September, 2021.

PROJECT LENGTH

Service Provider Grant projects will be 18 months in duration.

FUNDING SOURCE

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

II. APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

HOW TO APPLY

Applications must be submitted via the online grants management system, WebGrants, at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov between Friday, August 13th, 2021 at 12:00 PM (noon) and Monday, September 27, 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>.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

A. Applicant Information

- Organization name
- Type of legal entity (e.g. sole proprietorship, LLC, cooperative, 501(c)(3), etc.)
- Contact Name
- Title
- Phone Number
- Email
- Physical Address
- County
- Completed IRS W-9 Form upload (signed in the past 6 months)
- Demonstration of applicant compliance with state regulations and good standing with the State of Vermont – e-signature and date
 - Completed Water Quality Compliance Form upload
- Where did you learn about this grant opportunity?
- Interest in receiving Working Lands related news/funding opportunity updates by email (Yes/No)
- Willingness to share contact information with other state and federal funders (Yes/No)

B. Organization and Financial Information

- **Organization Description** (2000 character limit): Describe your organization, including experience and success in serving businesses. 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.
- Do you have an accounting system, such as QuickBooks or a formatted Excel spreadsheet, to track grant project expenses? If not, do you plan to obtain such a system?
- 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?
- 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.

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- If your previous funding includes a Working Lands grant, please indicate specific outcomes achieved for clients through your past project (1800 character limit).
- Please provide any additional comments on your previous State of Vermont and/or Federal government grants (optional).

C. Project Information

- Project title
- Project category (drop down menu)
- Amount of Working Lands grant funds requested
- Matching Funds: Must equal at least 100% of Working Lands grant funds requested, through either cash or in-kind sources (see item F. below for additional match information)
- **Project Summary** (2000 character limit): Provide a brief overview of your project, including how requested and matching funds would be used. Explain why your project is being proposed and reference key anticipated impacts.
- **Outreach Plan** (2000 character limit): Provide a brief summary of your outreach plan to recruit businesses, 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 than anticipated. (1000 character limit)
- List additional grants received for this project (not for your organization as a whole) in the past five years.
- List other grants/loans applied for in conjunction with this project application.

D. Financial Need and Impact

Financial Need Statement (2000 character limit): Provide an explanation of why these Working Lands 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 would happen over a longer timeframe
- Without this grant, this project would happen in a less desirable fashion
- Without this grant, this project would have a lower probability of success
- Without this grant, this project would not happen
- This grant will not change the implementation and success of this project

E. Intended Project Impact (1800 character limit): Outline projected measurable outcomes on working lands businesses served including: impact on business sales, net income, jobs created or retained, acreage in active use, and/or product output. Briefly describe the project's evaluation plan.

- Will your project increase gross sales for businesses served? If so, how much do you anticipate businesses' gross sales to increase (in aggregate dollars)?
- Will your project increase product output for businesses served? If so, how much, on average (in percent), do you anticipate product output to increase for businesses?
- Will this project increase jobs for businesses served? If so, how many Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs do you anticipate will be created?
- Will this project increase working lands acres impacted? If so, how many additional acres will be impacted by this project? (includes acres directly used for production, committed for production

SECTION II: APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

through other producers and/or under active management by an enterprise)

- Describe how this project will increase demand for Vermont products among consumers who have not previously purchased them. Explain how funds will be utilized to respond to existing and emerging sector demands.
- 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 the executive business skills of entrepreneurs and managers.
- Explain how this project will cultivate a pipeline of qualified employees.
- Will this project support the leadership development of next-generation leaders within client businesses?
- Will this project help businesses address industry-specific or common VT bottlenecks, e.g. workforce housing, technical or financial skills, etc.? If so, how?
- Describe how this project will address the continued navigation of operational business responses as a result of COVID-19.
- Explain how this project aims to focus on business gaps and opportunities that COVID-19 has presented, and assist business capacity to recover critical functionality and find resiliency in altered circumstances.

F. 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 for businesses served (increased income, jobs, product output, and/or acreage in active use). Other goals may relate to business sales, new markets accessed (specify any institutional or wholesale accounts, if applicable), etc.

- **Goals:** Why your project is being proposed, and what you wish to accomplish. *Example:* Forest businesses will learn their cost of production and establish pricing strategies, thus helping them to increase gross profit margins.
- **Expected Measurable Outcomes:** The specific impacts and changes you anticipate occurring due to project work, i.e. how your project will enhance businesses served, in quantifiable terms. *Example:* Forest business clients will, on average, increase gross profit margins by 20% between 2022 and 2023.

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

Goal	Expected Measurable Outcome

SECTION II: APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

G. 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 activity start date and projected completion date. Project activities must be completed within the 18-month grant period ending in May 2023.

Project Activity	Personnel/Responsible Parties	Estimated Timeline/Completion

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

Matching funds should equal at least 100% of the Working Lands Enterprise funds requested and may be comprised of either cash or in-kind sources. Match sources must be identified by the time of application submission and in place by the time of grant agreement execution (estimated January 2022)

- 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, equipment provided pro bono, 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 Working Lands Grant funds. Additional indirect costs may be used as match.

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)

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. Your budget should include any other funding sources supporting the proposed project and a match totaling 100% of Working Lands funds requested.

SECTION II: APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

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.
- Match: Indicate whether all matching funds are committed (at the time of application submission). If not, provide your timeline for securing such commitments prior to grant agreement execution.
- Match Waiver: If a match waiver is requested, provide justification here.

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

- Letters of support are encouraged to justify the current need and importance for this project.
- Additional documentation is also encouraged, e.g., project renderings/plans, cost estimates for specific equipment.

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, by the end of October 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, sales, or production management.

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 product output, and increased and/or retained acres in active forestry or agricultural use.

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.

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.

Collaboration: The applicant demonstrates effective collaboration and leverages partnerships among working lands service provider 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.

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.

Priority Service Area: The proposal demonstrates and documents with data that the focus of services reflects a priority gap, opportunity, or other credible cause for business assistance that Vermont working lands enterprises are currently facing or imminently anticipating.

I. 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) at bgs.vermont.gov/purchasing-contracting/forms 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)
- Documentation that verifies pledged matching funds, as applicable.

GRANTEE PAYMENT SCHEDULE

Working Lands Service Provider 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:

- 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
- 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
- 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.