

Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Service Provider Strategy Request for Proposals

Introduction

The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative is seeking non-profit organizations or for-profit organizations (hereafter referred to as applicants) to apply for contracts in a specific service area, identified by the Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB). Funding of multi-year projects are contingent on future state budget allocations, in addition to funding decisions of the Working Lands Enterprise Board, pursuant to the State of Vermont's Payment Provisions Attachment B.

Fiscal Year 2021 proposals span categories, focusing on a broad set of services and total deliverables, and across the business lifecycle (e.g., succession planning is a facet of business assistance and does not always exist as a separate conversation). The WLEB encourages increasing the flexibility of Service Provider funding by focusing contracts on broad sets of services and total deliverables. This insight was surfaced and reinforced after convening a panel of pre-qualified vendors at a 2019 WLEB meeting, and subsequent WLEB Service Provider Strategy (SPS) deliberation. While the scope of work for the contract is strategically indicated to be flexible, rather than focused on discrete categories, the outline and range of relevant potential services include:

- Business Coaching across the Stages of Development
- Enterprise Transitions, Succession Planning, Next Generation Business Owners and Post-Succession
- Workforce Development – forming an interconnected set of solutions to meet employment needs, designed for personal and professional skills development processes
- COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience: Supply Chain – Improving Adaptability within Markets, broader solutions for VT/regional supply chain impacts e.g., distribution and aggregation bottlenecks,
- COVID-19 Recovery: Emerging Market Development Needs - e-commerce, home delivery, curbside pick-up, block chain(traceability), and farmer/forest products to market apps

Funding for contracts will range from \$50,000-\$100,000 with a focus on to-be-determined strategic partnerships with service provider organizations. Applicants will find additional information regarding specific goals outlined in the service area and assigned contract terms section below.

Applicants are welcome to apply with a proposal that assists food, farm, forest and/or wood products businesses under a new contract or in coordination with an existing umbrella contract.

Proposals are due on or before the end of business day, 5:00pm, on November 20, 2020 Proposals can be sent as a single .pdf file to Lynn Ellen Schimoler, Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Program Manager at LynnEllen.Schimoler@vermont.gov.

Proposals will be reviewed by the Working Lands Enterprise Board. Project decisions will be communicated by email, on December 4, 2020.

Overall Application Requirements

- Preference will be given to proposals that demonstrate the use of new and innovative approaches and tools to reaching working lands enterprise businesses, such as new learning delivery models, novel outreach, and different approaches to communicating with farmers, food producers, loggers and other working lands entrepreneurs.
- Applicants should outline how their program would, or could, be a force multiplier by reaching more businesses, or collectively addressing needs of a larger number of business owners. For example, achieving efficiencies or greater outcomes from higher dollar amount or contract commitment across multiple years.
- Applicants must articulate need and explain the value of work done on a per dollar basis (how much the services will cost per client assisted). Additional explanations of the value of services are welcome, however, per client costs are required.
- Match, if provided, needs to be given as a total amount and as a portion of the per client costs
- Applicants must show that their need is clear, consistent, and otherwise not being met.
- Applicants should include the following proposal components:
 - brief organizational introduction (one page or less, including key staff working on this project);
 - service area project description, using above outlines as a guide;
 - description of collaborative work or partnerships in the project;
 - goals, performance measures, and outcomes;
 - outreach plan to eligible businesses; and,
 - budget by service area and subsector/focus area as appropriate and should include a narrative in addition to the dollar breakdown
 - for those previously awarded WLEB funding, please provide a summary of outcomes & impacts from previous/current WLEB grants/contracts. Please note: Contracts will be designed to avoid overlapping or redundant funding.
- Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria: innovative program development; goals and performance measures; clarity of proposal; partnerships within contract; sustainable program funding; and highest and best use of funds based on outcomes.

Service Area and Assigned Contract Terms

Each awarded contract will be over a one-year time frame, with the option of up to two (2) one-year contract renewals conditional upon funding, performance, and Working Lands Enterprise Board discretion. Applicants may cite any or all focus areas in their proposal. The Working Lands Enterprise Board appreciates both breadth of work and focus, thus will not give advantage to proposals which include multiple focus areas. The contracted work will target active food, farm, forest, or wood products businesses that have a direct impact on Vermont's working landscape.

Interested applicants should elaborate on the following points in their proposal:

- Identify approach for developing and/or providing existing services that are easily accessible and available to eligible clients;
- How many clients and what specific services will be provided to active food, farm, forest, or wood products businesses in a given year.
- Methods including but not limited to the following approaches:
 - Collaboration with other service providers, (e.g., business assistance, accountants, lenders, and financial managers). Webinars and training provided, via video-conferencing. Allowing on-site participation on a smartphone, tablet, or PC; and,
 - Provide flexible assessment methods for evaluating business skillsets and needs, where previously designed onsite visits to an enterprise, (including a preliminary walk through assessment as a means for intake) may not be as convenient due to Covid-19
- Reporting metrics: goals, measures, and outcomes with a focus on what success will look like at the end of the contract period

Interested applicants should elaborate on the following in their proposal:

- Focus Area
 - Articulate and discuss service focus area and the scope of work proposed.
- Target audience
 - Articulate outreach process to recruit businesses, assist businesses in different stages of development, and strategize to reach the greatest number of people; and,
 - Projects can be specific to agriculture or forest based enterprises, or inclusive of both, and the applicant should provide specific details of how each will be engaged as there are recognized differences in need.
- Expansion of Services
 - Elaborate on how this funding will expand capacity to offer services;
 - Give examples of how funding will allow for innovation and service development;
 - Give specific examples of what new tools will be used to deliver the education services; and,
 - Explain how these funds will contribute to existing reach and success of business assistance services across the state of Vermont.
- Outcomes
 - Explain reporting metrics and what a successful outcome will be at the end of the reporting period;
 - Improved viability, profitability and overall health of the businesses

Applicants should take the opportunity to explain how they will utilize these funds to their best and highest value over other applicants, while providing the Working Lands Enterprise Board the greatest value for the money. Applicants should discuss any innovative approaches they will use and explain how this work will be stepping outside the bounds of their normal project scopes, while developing opportunities to do their work more effectively.