



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 SUPPLY CHAIN IMPACT AND MARKET LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE BUSINESS GRANTS PRE-APPLICATION GUIDE

FISCAL YEAR 2022 REQUEST FOR PRE-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 – announces the availability of grant funds to support the development of Vermont-based agriculture and forestproducts businesses.

KEY DATES

- Request for Applications Release:** Friday, October 8, 2021
- Pre-Application Opens for Submission:** Friday, October 22, 2021
- Pre-Application Deadline:** Monday, December 6, 2021 at 11:59 PM
- Notification of Pre-Application Acceptance/Denial:** January 2022
- Full Application Deadline:** Monday, March 14, 2022 at 11:59 PM
- Award Notification:** May 2022
- Estimated Project Start:** June 2022

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CONTACT

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Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) 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.

REGISTERING IN WEBGRANTS

All applicants must have an active account in [WebGrants](#) before beginning an application. Applicants who have not previously registered will need to allow 1-2 business days for their account registration to be processed. During that time, applicants will not be able to log in to start an application. Please plan your application process accordingly. If you believe you have previously registered in WebGrants but cannot log in, please contact our technical assistance staff. Do not create a duplicate account.

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 (VAAFAM), 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.

SUBMISSION CONFIRMATION

When an application has been successfully 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 WLEB has awarded over \$7 million in grant funds to over 200 grantees, leveraging more than \$11 million in matching funds. For a list of previously funded projects, visit <https://workinglands.vermont.gov/history-initiative/funded-projects>.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DETAILS

For the Fiscal Year 2022 grant cycle, the Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) plans to award **Supply Chain Impact** grants in the range of \$25,000-\$75,000, and **Market Level Infrastructure Impact** grants in the range of \$75,000-\$250,000. Projects in both grant categories require collaboration with other enterprises, wherein benefits of project completion will be realized throughout the respective supply chain. Commitment of and/or support for both supply of raw materials and demand for product output must be demonstrated for the application to be competitive for these limited funds. This includes specification of the role(s) that partner/stakeholder(s) will play in the proposed project, identification of financial or in-kind support they will provide (if applicable), and demonstration of other specific contributions they will make to ensure project success.

SUPPLY CHAIN IMPACT BUSINESS GRANTS - \$25,000 - \$75,000

Project activities under these grants will demonstrate how the market or product the applicant is developing or expanding will positively impact multiple businesses within its own supply chain.

Characteristics may include:

- Infrastructure improvements that support increased production, processing, and/or distribution of a commodity or value-added product(s), thus benefiting the applicant and additional enterprises;

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- Leveraging supply chain partnerships to reach new or larger markets, e.g., via product aggregation, co-branding, building vertical or horizontal efficiencies;
- Research and development of new products and/or sales avenues for multiple enterprises, (e.g., e-commerce, home delivery, curbside pick-up, blockchain technologies).

MARKET LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE BUSINESS GRANTS - \$75,000 - \$250,000*

Project activities under these grants will illustrate how the market, product or service the applicant is developing or expanding will positively impact multiple businesses and/or create a new market for sector-specific commodities and/or value-added products, as noted below. Impacts of the project will be visible across the market and within its respective industry sector in Vermont.

*Eligible sectors for projects in this grant category are as follows:

- 1) Production and processing for value-added agriculture
 - 2) Low grade wood equipment and forest-based products production
- (See *Eligibility* section for project examples.)

Project characteristics may include:

- Makes significant process and/or infrastructure improvements for medium to large scale production, processing, or distribution enterprises in the forestry, wood products, or value-added agriculture and food sector;
- Scale of the primary product being brought into supply chain has ability to strengthen the industry, address the sector on a market-wide scale, and/or address a market downturn;
- The technology or approach is innovative and will lead to new opportunities for multiple businesses and/or increases the scale of the enterprise in a way that enables it to meet a growing market demand.

PROJECT LENGTH

Supply Chain Impact and Market Level Infrastructure Business Grant projects will be 24 months in duration.

FUNDING SOURCE

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

MATCHING REQUIREMENT

Matching funds are required in an amount of no less than 100% of the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative grant funds requested (otherwise known as a 1:1 match). Matching funds may be comprised of either cash or in-kind sources; at least half of matching funds must be in the form of cash. (For more information, see *Application Questions: E. Budget Template and Narrative*.) Match sources must be identified by the time of application submission and in place by the time of grant agreement signing (estimated June 2022).

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The WLEB is willing to consider match waivers or reduced match requirements for applicants who demonstrate outstanding need. Thorough explanation for a match waiver or reduction request must be provided the application's Budget Narrative section.

ELIGIBILITY

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Business grantee organizations must be based in Vermont and registered with the Secretary of State at the time of application submission. All business ownership structures are eligible (e.g., Partnerships, Limited Liability Corporations, Sole Proprietorships, Cooperatives, Corporations, S Corporations, L3Cs; and/or nonprofits that are involved in 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 recipients of Working Lands Business Grants in the amount of \$20,000 or less are eligible to re-apply for funding during Fiscal Year 2022. Previous recipients of Working Lands grants for more than \$20,000 are not eligible to apply for further Working Lands funding until three years after the start date of their previous grant (i.e., FY19 and earlier grantees are eligible to apply this year). Applicants who have previously received Working Lands grants will be asked to measure and report on the results of past projects and demonstrate how continued funding will be used to grow or improve their operation.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Projects eligible for funding include:

- Infrastructure improvements that enable scaling up of business operations
- Business growth focused on market development, marketing plans, and/or sales strategy to enable scaling up of business operations
- Automation that establishes or enhances process improvements
- Research and design focused on business diversification, operations and/or product development

ENERGY TRANSFORMATION

The WLEB encourages energy focused activities that are related to the overall proposal such as building energy efficiency or generating renewable energy. Projects may include, but are not limited to: lighting, refrigeration/cooling, heat pumps, solar panels, low-energy water management, ventilation systems, and/or energy generation. Project costs can include equipment, installation, and/or technical assistance.

Examples of projects in the Market Level Infrastructure Grant category (\$75,000-\$250,000) are as follows:

- 1) **Production and Processing for Value-Added Agriculture** – Enhancing production of value-added agriculture and/or manufacturing efficiencies; transitioning to operation as a new processor or expansion as an existing processor; adding automation to eliminate bottlenecks, addressing known logistics challenges along the supply chain
- 2) **Low Grade Wood Equipment and Forest Based Products Production** – Producing, screening, weighing, and/or packaging wood fuel products (firewood, pellets, or chips) for heating; kiln or flow-through dryers; increasing commercial sawmill throughput or efficiency

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The WLEB will not fund water quality or soil health equipment and infrastructure projects that are eligible for funding under existing programs of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets. For more information on these funding opportunities, see <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/water-quality/assistance-programs>.

RELATED FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES & RESOURCES

VAAFAM offers a range of [funding opportunities](#) for agriculture-related organizations, which can be found at agriculture.vermont.gov/grants. In addition, [business planning and assistance](#) resources available to the Vermont agricultural community can be found at agriculture.vermont.gov/businessdevelopment/planning.

II. PRE-APPLICATION PROCESS AND CONTENT

HOW TO APPLY

Pre-applications must be submitted via the online grants management system, WebGrants, at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov and are due on Monday, December 6th, 2021, at 11:59 PM. Paper applications will not be accepted. Application components are outlined below as they will appear in WebGrants.

Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets staff are available to provide assistance during State of Vermont business hours, Monday - Friday, 7:45 AM to 4:30 PM. Please read the complete application guide at https://agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/howtoapply_before before requesting support. Please plan ahead, as assistance may not be available shortly before deadlines.

Applicants will be contacted by email in January 2022 regarding the acceptance or denial of their pre-application based on review and scoring criteria (see *Section III. Application Review and Scoring*).

PRE-APPLICATION QUESTIONS

A. Applicant Information

- Organization Name
- Type of Legal Entity (e.g. sole proprietorship, LLC, cooperative, 501(c)(3))
- Contact Name
- Job Position/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)
- Business Grant Type Requested:
 - Supply Chain Impact (\$25,000-\$75,000)
 - Market Level Impact (\$75,000-\$250,000) – forestry, wood products, and value-added agriculture only
- Working Lands Funds Requested (\$)
- Matching Funds Committed (\$) *Please note: value must be at least 100% of funding request

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- **Project Summary** (2000 character limit): Provide a brief overview of your project, including how requested and matching funds will be used. Explain how other enterprises will be involved and/or benefit from the project. Explain why your project is being proposed and what makes it timely and important.

C. Organization and Financial Information

- **Organization information** (1500 character limit): Describe the business in terms of size (gross sales, number of employees, production volume), markets, and number of years in business.
- Select your Stage of Business Development from the dropdown menu. For more information, review the [definitions](#) for the different stages of business development.
- **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, if any, 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
- What methods are you using for financial accounting (e.g., QuickBooks, spreadsheet, or an accountant)?
- Will you use the system identified above to track project costs, including employee time associated with this grant (both time paid by the grant and in-kind time used for matching purposes)? If not, identify what system you will use for time tracking.
- Have you received grants for this specific project (not for your organization as a whole), in the past five years?
 - If so, please list grants received.
- Please list other grants you are applying for in conjunction with this grant, if any. If none, please enter N/A
- Have you previously received a grant from the State of Vermont or Federal government?
 - If so, was your grant successfully completed? If not, please indicate why.
 - Was one or more of these a Working Lands grant? If so, please identify year of funding, grant amount, and specific outcomes achieved.
- Provide any comments about your previous State of Vermont and/or Federal government grants (optional).

D. Impact (2000 character limit per question)

- Describe the intended outcomes of your project for your business (e.g., impacts on product development, distribution channels added, sales, staff positions).
- Please identify the intended impact of your project on the market or supply chain within the industry. Please reference other working lands business involved and how they will benefit.

E. Budget Template and Narrative

Provide a detailed budget, including Working Lands funds requested and other funding sources

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

Budget Narrative (1000 character limit for each question):

- Describe how Working Lands grant funds in each budget category will be used to support your project.
- Provide the source(s) for all matching funds with timeline for securing these commitments. If a waiver is requested, provide justification here. (Match waivers are granted at discretion of the WLEB.)

III. APPLICATION REVIEW AND SCORING

APPLICATION REVIEW

Working Lands Business Grant funds will be awarded to projects benefitting agriculture and forest-based businesses through a competitive review process. A committee of Working Lands Enterprise Board members, State agency staff, and industry stakeholders will review submitted applications and make funding recommendations to the full Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB). The WLEB will make final decisions for official approval of awarded projects. Applicants will be notified by email of application approval or denial in May of 2022. Unsuccessful applicants will receive feedback on their application from the Working Lands Enterprise Board.

APPLICATION SCORING

Criteria that will inform scoring of application quality are as follows:

Supply Chain/Market Level Impact: The proposed project meets the definition of supply chain and/or market level impact and demonstrates potential to achieve the respective impacts. (10 points)

Quality of Proposal and Management Team: The proposal is comprehensible and clear, and the proposed project fits within the criteria outlined in the Request for Applications. The Management team demonstrates previous experience in the sector necessary to conduct the proposed activities. (15 points)

Innovation: The proposed project suggests there will be new ideas or business models deployed which may include (but are not limited to) showing a new solution to an old problem, creating a new product or crop, commercializing a researched product or process. (5 points)

Business Viability: The organization possesses characteristics of a viable business (solid financial management system, diverse markets, partnerships, strong internal business management and skill set within leadership, etc.). (15 points)

Collaboration: The project is collaborative among enterprises to maximize the benefits among the working landscape. (10 points)

Financial Need: The applicant demonstrates a clear need for Working Lands Enterprise Funds. (10 points)

Outcomes/Impact: The applicant demonstrates how other businesses will be involved in the project, and how these enterprises will benefit and enhance Vermont's working landscape with performance outcomes that may include job creation and retention; increased sales; increased product output; increased and/or retained acres in active forestry or agricultural use. (20 points)

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

FULL APPLICATION INFORMATION

Applicants whose pre-application is approved for advancement will be able to begin editing their full application at any point after receiving their approval notification by email. The message will contain instructions and required full application content in detail. In addition to information required in the pre-application (e.g., project summary, budget, etc. – which will automatically populate from pre-application responses), the full application will require the following new information to be submitted:

- Financial management data, including system used for accounting
- Experience and successes implementing similar past work
- Current business plan (uploaded in PDF format)
- Project goals and specific, measurable performance outcomes, with timeline for achieving within the grant period
- Anticipated increase in sales, product output, number of employees, and/or acreage in agricultural or forestry usage as a result of project
- Marketing plan description
- Description of intended supply chain/market level impact
- Project work plan including key activities, completion timeline, and responsible personnel
- Letter(s) of support/commitment
- Optional additional attachments (project renderings or plans, equipment cost estimates, etc.)
- Identification of project management team and business viability support team
- All applicants requesting \$150,000 and above (optional for requests between \$75k - \$150k) will be expected to present a project pitch to the reviewer team. Each pitch will be no more than 5 minutes in length and should include an explanation of intended participation of the management team (including business viability providers), project feasibility, and anticipated project impacts on the supply chain and/or market sector. These will be virtual, so technology preparation will be required in advance.
- Additional financial documentation (required for Market Level Infrastructure Grant applicants):
 - Cash flow record
 - Profit and loss statement
 - Balance sheet
 - Projected income and expenses (for the next 1-3 years)

Additional details regarding the full application will not be shared publicly and will be sent only to applicants whose pre-application has been approved for advancement. Full applications must be submitted in WebGrants by Monday, March 14, 2022, at 11:59 PM. Applicants will receive final award notification via email in May 2022.

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](#) (revised 12/15/2017) at bgs.vermont.gov/purchasing-contracting/forms for the most recent State of Vermont grant 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
- 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](#) (this form will be a required upload within the full application and can be found at finance.vermont.gov/vendors-and-grantees)
- Documentation that verifies pledged matching funds, as applicable

GRANTEE PAYMENT SCHEDULE

Working Lands Business Grant payments are made on a reimbursement basis, after expenses have been incurred, and require documentation of project expenditures (e.g., receipts, paid invoices) to support the total dollar amount of each claim for payment. Grant funds must be matched at a value of 100% (one-to-one) with cash or in-kind services, in accordance with the grant budget.

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:

- 1) Up to 40% of the grant award following receipt and approval of an initial claim for payments submitted in WebGrants containing documentation of expenditures to date for which reimbursement is requested
- 2) 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 containing documentation of project expenditures to date for the requested reimbursement AND matching expenses at a one-to-one ratio
- 3) Final 20% (or other outstanding remainder) 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 funds.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Prior to receipt of the second and third grant payments, respectively, grant recipients must complete an Interim Report and Final Report 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. Final reports will require data regarding project-related changes as outlined in the grantee's approved goals and expected measurable outcomes. Grantees must also complete an Annual Survey one year following and two years following the grant end date. Grantees will be expected to collaborate with VAAFM staff to measure the impact of their project on their business or organization to promote optimal stewardship of state-awarded funds.

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 legislative briefings, media inquiries, press events on location, and/or site visits from VAAFM staff, WLEB members, and/or their stakeholder partners.

V. 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 1 V.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