



**VERMONT AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & MARKETS**

# **Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Producer Association Development Grant**

**FISCAL YEAR 2023 REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS**

## **KEY DATES**

- Request for Applications Release Date: July 29, 2022
- Application Opens for Submission: August 12, 2022 at 12:00 PM (noon)
- Application Deadline: September 23, 2022 at 11:59 PM
- Award Notification: November 2022
- Estimated Project Date Start: December 2022

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## CONTACT

### PROGRAMMATIC QUESTIONS

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Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets staff are available assist applications during State of Vermont business hours, Monday - Friday, 7:45 AM to 4:30 PM. Please note that immediate assistance may not be available shortly before deadlines.

## WEBGRANTS

Applications for this program are accepted through the [WebGrants](#) grants management system.

### REGISTRATION

New users must complete the [WebGrants Registration Form](#) to start an application. New registrations are typically processed within two business days. Please register for an account well in advance of the application deadline.

### SUBMISSION POLICY

It is the applicant's responsibility to follow all application instructions including the submission dates and times included in this request for applications (RFA). The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFAM) will accept the last validated submission through the grants management system, [WebGrants](#), prior to the posted deadline as the final and sole acceptable submission of an application.

We cannot accept submission or re-submission of incomplete or delayed applications after the posted deadline, barring exceptional circumstances.

**WebGrants will prevent applications from being submitted after the posted deadline.**

### SUBMISSION CONFIRMATION

When you have successfully submitted an application, you will be redirected to an **Application Submitted Confirmation** page with an Application ID number. You will also receive a confirmation email.

## Section 1: Overview

### 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 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 agriculture and forestry supply chains
- Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets staff
- Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation staff
- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development staff
- Vermont Housing & Conservation Board staff
- Vermont Economic Development Authority staff
- Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund staff

### HISTORY OF SUCCESS TO DATE

Since its formation in August 2012, the Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) has awarded over \$12 million in grant funds to over 300 grantees, leveraging more than \$22 million in matching funds. Since 2013, the WLEB has invested over \$3 million to 41 distinct service provider organizations in the form of grants and contracts. For a list of previously funded projects, visit [workinglands.vermont.gov/projects](http://workinglands.vermont.gov/projects).

### ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Producer 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 eligible to apply.

Producer associations 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 supporting 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.

Producer associations that have previously applied for and/or received funds from a Working Lands Producer Association Grant or Service Provider Grant are eligible to re-apply for funding during Fiscal Year 2023. Previous grantees who are applying again must explain how this project builds on previous work or is a separate project, as well as 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 relate to the development of the association itself and/or services that support the development of Vermont-based working lands business members. Eligible organizations are encouraged to submit applications for projects that encompass the following project activities:

- **Leadership and organizational development:** Organizational governance, leadership development, strategic planning, selecting appropriate legal structure, leadership succession planning/transition support
- **Governance:** Board training and capacity building, by-law development, committee work
- **Membership development:** Member recruitment and outreach, networking across businesses, communication development
- **Marketing and sales support:** Identifying appropriate markets, branding and selling products, pricing, performing or accessing market research, including research and design
- **Business research and development:** Business and financial planning, continuing COVID-19 response work

### **AVAILABLE FUNDS**

Up to \$65,000

### **MINIMUM & MAXIMUM AWARD**

\$10,000-\$25,000

### **MATCHING REQUIREMENT**

Grant recipients must provide matching funds at a 100% (one-to-one) rate using **cash** (e.g., funds in the bank, paid staff labor hours) or **in-kind** items (e.g., donated goods, pro bono services, volunteer labor) that the grantee organization has received from other sources. Match sources must be identified by the time of application submission and commitments in place by the time of grant agreement signing.

Matching funds may not be sourced from other State of Vermont funding opportunities. Under limited circumstances, the matching requirement may be reduced or waived for applicants who can demonstrate a clear need for this accommodation.

### **PROJECT LENGTH**

18 months

**FUNDING SOURCE**

State of Vermont legislative appropriation

## Section 2: Application Process and Content

### HOW TO APPLY

Applications must be submitted via the online grants management system, WebGrants, at [agriculturegrants.vermont.gov](http://agriculturegrants.vermont.gov) between Friday, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022 at 12:00 PM (noon) and Friday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022 at 11:59 PM. Paper applications will not be accepted. Application components are outlined below as they will appear in WebGrants.

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

#### Applicant Information

- Organization Name
- Type of Legal Entity (e.g. sole proprietorship, LLC, cooperative, 501(c)(3), etc.)
- Contact Name
- Job Title/Position
- Phone Number
- Email
- Physical Address
- County
- Primary product category of business members
- Secondary product category of business members, if applicable
- 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
- 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)

#### Project Information

- Project title that briefly summarizes proposal (150-character limit)
- Project Category (drop down menu)
- Amount of Working Lands grant funds requested (\$)
- Amount of matching funds committed (\$) *\*Please note: must be a minimum of 100% of the amount of grant funds requested, through either cash or a combination of cash and in-kind sources*

- **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.
- Select the topics that will be addressed by your proposed project as related to your organization's development:
  - Organizational strategic planning
  - Leadership development of executive director (ED) and/or board members
  - Management/financial skill building of ED and/or board members
  - Staff development; recruitment/hiring
  - Web/communications capacity building
  - Leadership succession planning
- Elaborate on your selections above, including planned methods and timing for each organizational development component.
- Please select the topics that will be addressed by your proposed project as related to your organization's business members:
  - Industry-specific skill development/technical assistance
  - Business planning support, including responses to COVID-19
  - Business management and/or financial skill building
  - Marketing and sales development
  - Web/social media presence
  - Employee hiring, training, retention
  - Succession planning/generational transfer
- Elaborate on your selections above, including planned methods and timing for each member support component.
- Will this project reach historically underserved and/or marginalized communities? If so, please describe strategies you will employ to engage these communities.

### **Previous Funding**

- List additional grants received for this project (not for your organization as a whole) in the past five years, if any.
- List other grants/loans you are applying for in conjunction with this one, if any.
- Have you received a grant(s) from the State of Vermont in the past?
  - If so, was this grant(s) successfully completed? If not, please indicate why.
  - If your previous funding includes a Working Lands grant, please indicate the year(s), funding amount(s) received, and specific outcomes achieved (1800 character limit).
  - Please provide any additional comments on your previous State of Vermont grant(s) (optional).

### **Organization Information**

- **Organization Description** (2000 character limit): Describe your organization, including key activities, number of members, leadership structure, years in operation, etc.

- Describe the core team of individuals who will be involved in the project and their expertise that will contribute to project success.
- Identify any organizations expected to participate in the project, and specify their role.
- **Outreach Plan** (2000 characters max): Provide a brief summary of your outreach plan, including the intended targeted audience and evaluation process for the plan.
- Do you have an accounting system, such as QuickBooks or a formatted Excel spreadsheet, for tracking grant project expenses?
  - Will you use this system for tracking employee time associated with this grant, including both time paid by the grant and in-kind time used for matching purposes?
  - If not, please explain your system for time and expense tracking.

### **Intended Project Impact**

- Describe how you will evaluate the success of your project (1000-character limit).
- 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.
- Will this project help member businesses address industry-specific 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.

### **Goals and Expected Measurable Outcomes**

Enter your project goals into the appropriate field. Enter at least three and not more than five goals. For each goal, enter an indicator of your organization's performance toward that goal (e.g., number of businesses reached). Finally, create a measurable outcome by adding anticipated numbers to your performance measure (e.g., 15 businesses will be trained by April 2023).

Expected measurable outcomes must be discrete and attainable within the 18-month period of the grant. You are encouraged to include at least two indicators of growth and viability for businesses served, such as increases in employment, new markets accessed, businesses management skills acquired, 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](http://workinglands.vermont.gov/business-toolkit-resources/writing-goals-performance-measures-and-outcomes).



| Goal   | Performance Measure  | Expected Measurable Outcome  |
|--|--|--|
| <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> |
|  |  |  |

### 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 collectionactivities. 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 June/July 2024.

| Project Activity  | Personnel/Responsible Parties | Estimated Timeline/Completion |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Convene stakeholders for event planning sessions</i> | <i>Executive Director</i>     | <i>March 2023 – June 2023</i> |
|   |                               |                               |
|   |                               |                               |

**Budget and Narrative** (1000 character limit for each question):

- Describe how Working Lands Producer Association Grant funds (personnel, benefits, travel, etc.) will be used to support your project. Costs incurred prior to the signing of the grant agreement are not eligible.
- Explain why Working Lands Producer Association 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
  
- **Budget Template:** Enter the dollar amount for each line item of your budget into the appropriate field. Your budget should include any other funding sources supporting the proposed project as matching funds. Up to 10% of requested grant funds may be used for indirect costs (i.e., facilities/administrative costs).

Example Budget Calculations:

- \$20,000 Working Lands grant request x 10% = \$2,000 eligible as indirect costs
  - \$20,000 x 100% = \$20,000 minimum cash and/or in-kind match
  - \$20,000 grant request + \$20,000 match amount = \$40,000 total project cost
- Identify the source(s) for all matching funds with a timeline for securing these commitments.
    - 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)

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

**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.

**Additional Attachments** – space provided to upload up to five documents

- At least one letters of support and/or commitment from the applicant's governing board is required to justify the current need and importance of this project. Additional letters of support from members are optional.
- Additional documentation is also encouraged, e.g., cost estimates for specific board training fees.

## Section 3: Application Review and Scoring

### APPLICATION REVIEW

Working Lands Producer Association Grant funds will be awarded to applicants whose projects 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 November 2022.

### APPLICATION SCORING

Priority will be given to producer associations that are not already implementing WLEF-funded projects or scopes of work at the time of application submission. 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 of operational leadership. Staff and/or contracted providers are selected at least in part based on relevant operational skill sets, such as marketing, production, or business management. (20 points)

**Expected Measurable Outcomes:** The applicant identifies clear and measurable project outcomes related to the development of the association and/or its business members. The applicant demonstrates how engagement with businesses will enhance Vermont's working landscape, with performance outcomes that may include number of businesses served, number of technical assistance hours provided, and member outcomes such as increased employment opportunities, income, leadership skills, 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, while showing an evident need for Working Lands Enterprise Initiative 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. (10 points)

**Innovation:** The applicant demonstrates how business engagement methods are innovative in approach. Association uses outreach and support mechanisms that are a combination of emergent, being piloted, and/or incorporate proven concepts. (5 points)

**Collaboration:** The applicant demonstrates effective collaboration and leverages partnerships among/within the producer association, businesses, and other organizations to promote project success. Relationships with statewide networks (non-profit or for-profit) do not facilitate competition or

redundancy with other services. Equity and inclusion dialogue with partner stakeholders is a focal point within the organization's strategic development. A thoughtful and robust outreach/knowledge sharing strategy is incorporated to support the project. (15 points)

**Demonstrated Need:** The proposal demonstrates a credible need for specified support to be provided to businesses. The need for the work outlined in this proposal is confirmed by the applicant's governing board, as demonstrated in a letter(s) of support. (20 points)

**Budget:** The 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. (10 points)

## Section 4: 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](https://bgs.vermont.gov/purchasing-contracting/forms) for the most recent State of Vermont provisions.

Before beginning project work and receiving the first payment, grantees must submit:

1. A current IRS Form W-9 (Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification), signed within the past six months
2. 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)
3. Documentation that verifies pledged matching funds, as applicable.

### GRANTEE PAYMENT SCHEDULE

Except for the first payment following grant agreement signing, grant payments are based upon project performance and completion of project activities. Progress will be communicated via interim and final status reports, which must be approved by the State grant program manager before claims (payment requests) are approved.

Working Lands Grant funds are typically distributed according to the following schedule:

1. Up to 40% of the grant award following signing of the grant agreement, and receipt and approval of an initial claim in WebGrants
2. Up to an additional 40% of the grant award (80% total) at the mid-point of the project, following completion and approval of the Interim Report demonstrating project progress, and a second claim
3. Final 20% (or other remaining amount) of the grant award, following receipt and approval of the Final Report demonstrating completion of project and satisfactory achievement of expected measurable outcomes, and a final claim.

Grantees must maintain documentation of project costs, both those paid with grant funds and with matching funds, throughout the grant period. Accurate expense totals are a required component of status reporting.

## **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, a budget table showing amounts of expended grant and matching funds, and high-resolution digital photos in .jpg format that demonstrate project work. Grantees will be expected to collaborate with VAAFAM 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 VAAFAM 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 WorkingLands partners are not authorized to advise or provide input on tax-related information, including the completion of federal forms.