

VERMONT AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & MARKETS WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE PRODUCER ASSOCIATION DEVELOPMENT GRANT

FISCAL YEAR 2024 REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA)

KEY DATES

Publication Date: September 6, 2023

Application Opens: September 6, 2023

Grant Application Webinar: September 13, 2023 11:00 AM–12:00 PM

[Register for the webinar](#)

Application Deadline: October 16, 2023 at 8:00 PM

Award Notification: December 2023

Estimated Project Start: January 2024

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CONTACT INFORMATION

PROGRAM QUESTIONS

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WEBGRANTS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

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Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets staff can assist applicants 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 must be submitted through the [WebGrants](#) grants management system at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov.

REGISTRATION

If you're new to WebGrants, submit the [WebGrants Registration Form](#). It usually takes about two business days to process registrations. Make sure to register for an account well before the application deadline.

SUBMISSION POLICY

Applicants must follow all instructions in this request for applications (RFA), including the dates and times for submitting applications. The Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets will only consider the last complete submission through WebGrants before the deadline as the official application. We cannot accept incomplete or late applications after the deadline, barring exceptional circumstances. The WebGrants system will not accept applications after the deadline.

SUBMISSION CONFIRMATION

After you've submitted your application successfully, you'll be taken to a page confirming your submission. This page will have an Application ID number. You'll also get an email confirming your submission.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW & ELIGIBILITY

PROGRAM PURPOSE

Approximately 20% of Vermont's working landscape is used for agricultural purposes, and 80% 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.

[Vermont Act 142](#) of 2011, An act relating to preserving Vermont's working landscape, created the Working Lands Enterprise Fund (WLEF) and the Working Lands Enterprise Board (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 \$15 million in grant funds to over 400 grantees, leveraging more than \$26 million in matching funds. For lists of previous awards, visit the [Funded Projects](#) page.

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 2024. Applicants who are previous grantees must explain how the proposed 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.

A producer association may only apply to one WLEI grant opportunity per year, so any producer association applying to this opportunity should not apply for a Fiscal Year 2024 Service Provider Grant, Business Enhancement Grant, or Supply Chain Impact Grant. Producer associations are not eligible for the ARPA-Funded Primary Producer Impact Grant or the Small Farm Diversification Grant offered this year.

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 one or more of the following activities:

- **Leadership and organizational development:** Organizational governance, leadership development, strategic planning, selecting appropriate legal structure, leadership transition support/succession planning
- **Governance:** Board training and capacity building, by-law development, committee work
- **Membership development:** Member recruitment and outreach, networking across businesses, communication development, member skill building and exchanges
- **Marketing and sales support:** Identifying appropriate markets, branding and selling products, pricing, performing or accessing market research, including research and design
- **Business and financial planning:** Enhancing member business owners' executive business management skills and increasing connections to educational resources
- **Research and development:** R&D activities that address member and sector needs
- **Network building and collaboration:** Initiatives that support collaborations between producer associations for improved efficiency and organizational sustainability

AVAILABLE FUNDS & SOURCE

Up to \$50,000 from a fiscal year 2024 State of Vermont legislative appropriation

MINIMUM & MAXIMUM AWARD

\$10,000–\$25,000 per award

MATCHING REQUIREMENT

Grant recipients are asked to provide matching funds equal to 100% of the grant award (one-to-one) using **cash** (e.g., funds in the bank, paid owner or staff labor hours toward the project) 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

12 months

SECTION 2: APPLICATION PROCESS & CONTENT

HOW TO APPLY

Applications must be submitted via the online grants management system, [WebGrants](https://webgrants.vermont.gov), at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov between Wednesday, September 6, 2023 and Monday, October 16, 2023 at 8:00 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 [WebGrants Application Guide](https://agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/howtoapply) at agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/howtoapply.

STANDARD APPLICATION QUESTIONS

The following four sections are asked to all applicants applying for any grants at the Agriculture Development Division. Questions marked with * are required.

Applicant Information

- Which of the following categories best describes the person/people completing this application? Please select all that apply*
- Name*
- Email address*
- Phone number*
- Preferred method of communication*
- Job title*
- How did you hear about this funding opportunity?*

Applicant's Business/Organization Information

Some questions in this section are optional because they are only applicable to businesses and not service provider or producer associations.

- Legal name of the organization*
- Business or organization type*
- Street address*
- Town/City*
- County*
- Number of full-time employees, including owner(s)*
- Number of part-time and seasonal employees
- Total number of volunteer hours that benefit your organizations in a typical year
- Years in operation*
- Provide the organization's website if one exists
- Share any social media handles the organization uses
- Is the organization a farm, forestry or other land-based operation?*
- If yes, how many acres are currently in production?
- How many acres, if any, are currently in conservation?

- How many acres of leased or rented land does the organization use for production and/or processing?
- Have you applied for or received a grant through the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets in the past 5 years?*

Optional Business/Organization Information

- What is the applicant business/organization's most recent annual operating budget?
- What is the median hourly wage for all employees?
- Does the organization provide any of the following benefits to its employees and/or volunteers?
- Does the organization hire H-2A farmworkers?

Voluntary Demographic Information

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets is collecting voluntary demographic information to better serve our constituents and inform the development of future grant programs. Please click the link to be taken to complete this anonymous survey: <https://forms.office.com/g/dp8zqWrgxL>

The demographic survey is hosted through a separate online platform to ensure that any information collected through the survey cannot be linked in any way to your WebGrants application. Funding decisions are based solely on the information provided in your WebGrants application. Any information collected through the demographic survey is anonymous and will only be used to help improve the programming and services offered by the Development Division of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets.

WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Project Information

- Project title that briefly summarizes proposal (150-character limit)
- Amount of Working Lands grant funds requested (\$)
- Amount of matching funds committed (\$) *Please note: must be equal to or greater than the amount of grant funds requested, through either cash or a combination of cash and in-kind sources
- **Organization Description** (2000-character limit): Describe your organization, including key activities, number of members, leadership structure, years in operation, etc.
- **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 members:
 - Industry-specific skill development/technical assistance
 - Business planning support, including responses to flooding, late frost, COVID-19, or other crises
 - 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.
If applicable, how many businesses will be served through this project?
- 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.
- If applicable, describe how the proposed project will fill an existing gap(s) in services available to working lands businesses, or will address identified barriers to these businesses' participation in continued education/skill-building programs. If applicable, describe how this project will reach historically underserved and/or marginalized communities. Identify strategies you will employ to engage these communities. Examples of historically underserved and/or marginalized communities are people living below the poverty threshold and/or facing food insecurity or homelessness, immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, people of color, people with disabilities, veterans, women, etc.

Previous Funding

- List additional grants received for this project (not for your organization as a whole) in the past five years, 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 describe how your proposed project relates to or builds upon your previous Working Lands grant project, if applicable (1800-character limit).

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 2024).

Expected measurable outcomes must be discrete and attainable within the 12-month grant period. You are encouraged to include at least two measures focused on member businesses, such as new markets accessed, business management skills acquired, industry-specific skills gained, etc.

For additional reference, view WLEI’s [Goals and Expected Measurable Outcomes](#) page.

Goal	Performance Measure	Expected Measurable Outcome
Example: Develop a Board Nominating Committee	Example: Number of new Board members onboarded via the new Nominating Committee	Example: Using candidates identified by the Nominating Committee, increase the number of Board members from 6 to 10 by December 2024

Project Work Plan

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

- **Project Activity** – List 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 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 12-month grant period ending in January 2025.

Project Activity	Personnel/Responsible Parties	Estimated Timeline/Completion
Convene stakeholders for event planning sessions	Executive Director	March 2024 – June 2024

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Budget and 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. Costs incurred prior to the signing of the grant agreement are not eligible.
- 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 signing.
- Match Waiver: If a match waiver is requested, provide justification here.
- Please describe your intended methods of tracking staff time and expenses associated with the grant.
- If Working Lands funds are not received, explain how this will impact your project, e.g., adjusted scope, lower probability of success, would not happen, and/or an urgent window of opportunity would be missed.
- Describe efforts to fund this project with other sources and, if applicable, why those efforts have not been sufficient. Identify other grants/loans you are currently applying for or plan to apply for in conjunction with this one, if any.

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 grant request x 100% = \$20,000 minimum cash and/or in-kind match
- \$20,000 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		MatchSource	Details/Purpose	Total
		Cash	In-Kind			

Salaries/Wages (Personnel)						
Benefits						
Travel						
Supplies						
Contractual						
Other Direct Costs						
Indirect Costs						
TOTAL						

Additional Attachments – space provided to upload up to five documents (must be in PDF format)

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

Signature of Compliance

- 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

SECTION 3: APPLICATION REVIEW & SCORING

APPLICATION REVIEW

Working Lands 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 December 2023.

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. An application can be strong without scoring highly in all scoring categories. Criteria that will inform scoring of application quality are as follows:

Quality of Concept and Management Team: The proposed activities are clear and can be conducted within the 12-month grant period. The proposed activities are a reasonable approach to addressing identified needs. 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 proposed outcomes are a reasonable result of the activities proposed. The applicant demonstrates how association development and/or engagement with businesses will enhance Vermont's working landscape. (20 points)

Demonstrated Project Need: The proposal demonstrates a credible need for association development and/or 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. (15 points)

Collaboration: The applicant demonstrates effective collaboration and leverages partnerships across the association, among businesses, and with other organizations to promote project success. Relationships with statewide networks (non-profit or for-profit) do not facilitate competition or redundancy with other services. and robust outreach/knowledge sharing strategy is incorporated to support the project. (15 points)

Budget: The proposed budget is clear and reflects realistic, well-planned components, including required matching funds. Budget narrative supports and further details items in budget table. (15 points)

Engagement, Equity, and Equality: The applicant demonstrates how this project will reach one or more historically underserved and/or marginalized community(ies). (10 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. (5 points)

SECTION 4: GRANT MANAGEMENT & 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 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 status reports, which must be approved by the State grant program manager before claims (payment requests) are approved. All claims will be submitted and approved via [WebGrants](#) at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov.

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, plus submission and approval of an initial claim;
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 submission and approval of the Final Report demonstrating project completion 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 toward 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 Working Lands partners are not authorized to advise or provide input on tax-related information, including the completion of federal forms.