



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

Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Business Enhancement Grant¹

FISCAL YEAR 2023 REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

KEY DATES

Request for Applications Release Date: September 9, 2022

Applicant Webinar with Q&A: September 15 at 12:00-1:00 PM

Application Opens for Submission: September 23, 2022, at 12:00 PM (noon)

Application Deadline: October 28, 2022 at 11:59 PM

Award Notification: January 2023

Estimated Project Start: February 2023

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¹ The Business Enhancement Grant covers the same types of eligible projects as the former Standard Business Grant.

CONTACT

PROGRAMMATIC QUESTIONS

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WEBGRANTS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

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Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets staff are available 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 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 (VAAFMM) 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 applied, you will be redirected to an **Application Submitted Confirmation** page with an Application ID number. You will also receive a confirmation email.

When an application has successfully been submitted, the applicant will receive a confirmation email from agriculturegrants.vermont@mail.webgrantscloud.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.

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 forest 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 <https://workinglands.vermont.gov/history-initiative/funded-projects>.

FY23 WORKING LANDS FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

To learn more and decide which of the four Fiscal Year 2023 Working Lands Enterprise Initiative funding opportunities is most appropriate for your business, please visit: <https://workinglands.vermont.gov/grant-contract-opportunities/overview>.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Businesses must be based in Vermont and registered with the Secretary of State at the time of application submission. All structures are eligible (e.g., Partnerships, Limited Liability Corporations, Sole Proprietorships, Cooperatives, Corporations, S Corporations, L3Cs, B Corporations, and/or non-profits that are involved in the support of production of agriculture and/or forest products). Applicants must be

in compliance with all state regulations (i.e., water quality, taxes, child support) and in good standing with the State of Vermont at the time of applying and must remain so during the entire grant period.

Previous Working Lands Standard Business and COVID-19 Response Business Development grantees are eligible to re-apply for funding during Fiscal Year 2023. Previous Working Lands Supply Chain Impact, Market Level Infrastructure Impact, or Meat Slaughter and Processing Development Grants are eligible to apply for further Working Lands funding after three years, meaning that Fiscal Year 2020 and earlier grantees are eligible to apply this year. Previous grantees who apply again must explain how the project either 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 improve the project or business.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

The Business Enhancement Grant covers the same types of eligible projects as the former Standard Business Grant, but with an increased maximum allowable award (formerly \$25,000; now \$35,000) to account for inflation and rising business costs. The WLEB recognizes that capital projects are a high priority for businesses and that it is currently a challenging time complete such work due to supply chain disruptions and the rising costs of materials and labor. Eligible project activities are as follows:

- Market development – professionalize marketing and/or branding approach to new or expanded markets; hire a professional marketing/branding contractor to develop strategy and/or content; implement the strategy and/or content developed by the contractor (e.g., branding, website, or social media development)
- Research and development – testing new systems or technology
- Infrastructure development – project-specific planning, permitting, engineering or architectural plans; building and equipment costs
- Energy focused projects – efficiency enhancements, including lighting, refrigeration/cooling, heat pumps, solar panels, low-energy water management, ventilation systems, and/or energy generation; may include equipment, installation, and/or technical assistance costs
- Workforce training and development – technical skill training for staff, business management training, and/or business succession planning, including hiring a consultant to support any of these processes

AVAILABLE FUNDS

Up to \$450,000

MINIMUM & MAXIMUM AWARD

\$20,000-\$35,000

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 a combination of cash and **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 demonstrate a clear need for this accommodation.

PROJECT LENGTH

12 months

FUNDING SOURCE

State of Vermont legislative appropriation with additional philanthropic contributions

Section 2: Application Process and Content

HOW TO APPLY

Applications must be submitted via the online grants management system, WebGrants, at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov between Friday, September 23rd, 2022 at 12:00 PM (noon) and Friday, October 28, 2022 at 11:59 PM. Paper applications will not be accepted. Application components are outlined below as they will appear in WebGrants.

An informational webinar for applicants will be hosted by the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (AAFM) on Thursday, September 15, 2022 at 12:00 PM online, via Microsoft Teams. Webinar content will include the grant cycle timeline, a demonstration of how to create an application in WebGrants, other tips for applicants, and a public question and answer period. Please RSVP to attend the webinar at <https://tinyurl.com/WLEIFY23BEGrantWebinar>. For those not able to attend, beginning on September 16th, 2022, the webinar will be recorded and available for future viewing at <https://workinglands.vermont.gov/businessgrants>.

For technical instructions on the application submission process, please see the guide on the AAFM 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
- Secondary product category
- 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 would be used. Explain why your project is being proposed and reference key anticipated impacts.

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 applied for in conjunction with this project application, if any.
- Has your organization received a grant from the State of Vermont or from the Federal government in the past?
 - If so, were these grants successfully completed? If not, please indicate why.
 - If your previous funding includes a Working Lands grant, please indicate specific outcomes achieved through your past project (up to 1800-characters).
 - Please provide any additional comments on your previous State of Vermont and/or Federal government grants (optional).

Organization Information

- **Organization Description** (2000 character limit): Describe the business in terms of activities, products, markets, and number of years in business.
- **Stage of Business Development**: Review the [definitions](#) for the different stages of business development and select the one that applies to your business.
- **Business Viability** (2000 character limit): Describe your efforts to build financial viability and promote overall business sustainability beyond the grant period.

- **Accounting System:** 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.
- **Business Financial Statements:** Submit PDF versions of the following documents:
 - Current Balance Sheet that demonstrates assets and liabilities
 - Profit and Loss (or Income Statement) showing revenues/income and expenses (and Costs of Goods Sold (COGS) where applicable) for past year
 - Cash flow statement

Intended Project Impact

- **Business Impact** (1500 character limit): Describe the intended outcomes of your project (e.g., change in production, sales, marketing, staff positions, business growth, etc.).
- **Projected Impact on Product Output**
 - What units of measurement are used by your business for product output (e.g., jars, cases, pounds, board feet)?
 - What is the current annual product output of your business (number of units produced)?
 - Will this project result in increased product output for your business?
 - If so, by how much is product output anticipated to increase (in percent)?
- **Projected Impact on Sales**
 - What were your annual gross sales in the past 12 months?
 - Will this project result in increased gross sales for your business?
 - If so, by how much are sales anticipated to increase?
 - Will this project advance the marketing efforts of your business?
 - If so, please explain.
- **Projected Impact on Employment**
 - How many full-time equivalent (FTE) positions are currently employed by your business?
 - Will this project increase the number of full-time employees and/or weekly employee hours?
 - If so, how many anticipated full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs will be added as a result of this project? (1.0 FTE = 40 hours/week; 0.25 = 10 hours/week, etc.)
- **Projected Impact on Acreage in Production**
 - Within your business, what is the current total acreage in production?
 - Will this project result in increased acreage in active production?
 - If so, how many new acres will be used?

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 units sold per month). Finally, create a measurable outcome by

adding anticipated numbers to your performance measure (e.g., sell 100 pounds per month by February 2024).

Expected measurable outcomes must be discrete and attainable within the 12-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 goals, 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.

Goal	Performance Measure	Expected Measurable Outcome
<i>Example: Increase early tomato production to help satisfy local demand</i>	<i>Example: Pounds of tomatoes harvested and sold in June and July</i>	<i>Example: Increase from 100 lbs to 200 lbs of “early” tomatoes harvested in June and July</i>
<i>Example: Offer 2 week lead time for furniture products.</i>	<i>Example: Average time between customer placing order and product shipping.</i>	<i>Example: Shorten average time between order placement and product shipping from 6 weeks to 2 weeks.</i>

Project Work Plan

Enter at least five project activities into the Project Work Plan table (up to 1000 characters per row):

- **Project Activity** – Describe the activities (i.e., milestone tasks) that are necessary to accomplish your project objectives. Include your performance monitoring/data collection activities. If you request funds for travel, these activities must also be included.
- **Personnel/Responsible Parties** – Indicate the project participants who will do the work involved in each activity, including yourself, employees, and/or contractors. Any personnel or contractors referenced in your budget must be included in the work plan to demonstrate their role and justify associated funds.
- **Estimated Timeline/Completion Date** – Identify your project timeline, including the activity start date and projected completion date. Project activities must be completed within the grant period ending in March 2024.

Project Activity	Personnel/Responsible Parties	Estimated Timeline/Completion
<i>Example: Construct addition on storage building.</i>	<i>Example: Contractor</i>	<i>Example: March 2023 – May 2023</i>

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

- Describe how Working Lands Enterprise Enhancement Grant funds (personnel, supplies, 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 Enterprise Enhancement 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:

- $\$20,000 \text{ Working Lands grant request} \times 10\% = \$2,000 \text{ eligible as indirect costs}$
- $\$20,000 \times 100\% = \$20,000 \text{ minimum cash and/or in-kind match}$
- $\$20,000 \text{ grant request} + \$20,000 \text{ match amount} = \$40,000 \text{ total project cost}$
- 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 (Personnel)						
Benefits						
Travel						
Machinery/Equipment						
Supplies						
Contractual						
Other Direct Costs						
Indirect Costs						
TOTAL						

Budget Narrative (1000-character limit for each question):

- Describe your intended use of Working Lands funds. Provide further detail on proposed amounts for all line items, as needed.
- 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

- Additional documentation is also encouraged, e.g., cost estimates for contractor fees.

Section 3: Application Review and Scoring

APPLICATION REVIEW

Working Lands Business Enhancement 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 (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 January 2023.

APPLICATION SCORING

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

Quality of Proposal: The proposal is comprehensible and clear, and the proposed project fits within the eligibility criteria outlined in the Request for Applications. (20 points)

Business Viability: The applicant possesses characteristics of a viable business, including a solid financial management system, diverse markets, partnerships, and strong internal management. (15 points)

Outcomes/Impact: The applicant's project will 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. (15 points)

Goals and Expected Measurable Outcomes: Proposed goals and outcomes are relevant to the project, are explained clearly in the proposal, are significant according to scale of the business, and are realistically achievable within the project period of 12 months. (15 points)

Budget: The applicant has prepared a clear budget reflecting realistic, well-planned component, including required matching funds. Budget narrative supports and further details items in budget table. (10 points)

Business Statements: Applicant submits documentation of profit & loss, cash flow, and balance sheet that demonstrates sound business financials (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. 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. The need for the work outlined in this proposal is demonstrated in optional letter(s) of support and/or commitment. (10 points)

Innovation: The business model surrounding a product, service, or process is creative, new, and/or responsive to current gaps and needs. The proposed project uses new ideas or business models, such as

showing a new solution to an old problem, creating a new product, or commercializing a researched product or process. (5 points)

Local Sourcing/Production: Applicant creates products and/or uses raw materials produced within the State of Vermont. Proposals will be less competitive that do not source locally.

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 (VAAFM) indicating their intent to complete the proposed project and authorizing VAAFM to monitor progress. The grant agreement will include provisions (terms and conditions) set by the State of Vermont as well as any program-specific requirements. Review **Attachment C - Standard State Provisions for Contracts and Grants (12/15/2017 Revised)** at bgs.vermont.gov/purchasing-contracting/forms for the most recent State of Vermont provisions.

Prior to commencement of work and release of any payments, grantees must submit:

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 VAAFM).
3. 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 Interim and Final status reports 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 their business.

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 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 because 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.