**Rural Business Development Grant**

**Applications Requested**

**VERMONT NEK REAP Zone (Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties)**

**LETTER OF INTENT DUE: Friday January 4, 2019**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: Sunday, March 31, 2019**

**Applications accepted through COB on Monday, April 1, 2019**

**Application Cycle Open**: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development invites applications to compete for fiscal year 2019 (FY19) funding for the Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) program. Please note program funds are not available at this time, however USDA Rural Development anticipates level program funding for FY19. If there are any changes to funding, USDA Rural Development will notify applicants.

Eligible applicants for grant funds include non-profits, municipalities, development corporations, and state agencies.

The RBDG program funds two types of eligible projects:

**Rural Business Enterprise Activities:** Rural Business Enterprise Grants (RBEG) funds may be used for the acquisition and development of land, easements and rights-of-way; construction or repairs of buildings, machinery, equipment, roadways, utilities, and pollution control and abatement facilities; provision of loans for startup operating cost and working capital; professional services necessary for project planning and development; establishment of a revolving loan fund; development or operation of rural distance learning networks and/or programs for adult students; technical assistance for small and emerging businesses; technical assistance and training to rural communities related to passenger transportation services; loan participations.

**Rural Business Opportunity Activities:** Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG) funds may be used for the identification and analysis of business opportunities that will use local rural materials or human resources (including feasibility and business plan studies); technical assistance or leadership development training to rural entrepreneurs and managers; establish business support centers; conduct local or multi-county economic development planning; establish training centers which provide training to rural businesses in the utilization of interactive communication technologies to develop international trade and markets; pay fees and charges for professional services necessary to conduct technical assistance, training, or planning functions.

Additional information on project eligibility can be found in the program regulations [§4280.417](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2018-title7-vol15/xml/CFR-2018-title7-vol15-sec4280-417.xml).

***Please note:*** *USDA Rural Development anticipates making 10 to 15 grants through this notice. Applicants are encouraged to apply for no more than* $100,000 *in funding.*

To learn more about the program, please visit the [RBDG website](https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-business-development-grants/vt)([www.rd.usda.gov/vt](http://www.rd.usda.gov/vt)).

**Letters of Intent**

USDA Rural Development requires potential applicants to submit Letters of Intent (LOI) to review eligibility and to provide timely feedback on an application’s competitiveness for funding. LOI must be received by USDA Rural Development no later than **4:30 pm on** **Friday,** **January 4, 2019.** Emailed LOI will be accepted**.** If this deadline is not met, please contact USDA Rural Development to move forward with the application process. USDA Rural Development staff will provide feedback on letters of intent by January 18, 2019.

[Access the](https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/vtnhRBDG2019LetterofIntent.docx)[Letter of Intent template](https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/vtnhRBDG2019LetterofIntent.docx)[online](https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/vtnhRBDG2019LetterofIntent.docx)

**Applications**

**Application Deadline:** Complete applications must be received by USDA Rural Development no later **than 4:30 pm on Monday April 1, 2019. No applications will be accepted after this deadline date.**

[Access the Application Toolkit online.](https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/vtnhRBDG2019Toolkit.docx)

**Agency Priorities**: The majority of business sectors can be assisted by the program. However, USDA Rural Development is placing specific emphasis on Infrastructure, Partnership and Innovation in the following areas:

1. E-Connectivity (reliable and affordable high-speed internet)
2. Economic development
3. Harnessing technological innovation
4. Supporting a rural workforce
5. Improving the quality of life for rural America

**REAP Zone Priorities:** Additional consideration will also be given to applications that advance the strategic priorities for the region identified by the NEK Collaborative. For more information on these priorities, visit: <https://www.nekcollaborative.org/about/priorities/>

To compete for the Vermont NEK REAP Zone Allocation, applicants must follow these steps:

* **Submit a Letter of Intent** to USDA Rural Development either by mail or email no later than **4:30 pm on** **Friday, January 4, 2019.**
* **Submit a completed application** to USDA Rural Development offices, or by mail or email no later than **4:30 pm on** **Monday, April 1, 2019.**
* ***Please Note:*** *Emailed applications must contain all required documents, including signatures where required on all forms and documents. All forms requiring original signatures must then be received in hard copy (mail) with original signatures.*

All LOI and applications should be sent to the attention of:

Susan A. Poland, Business Programs Specialist

87 State Street, Suite 324

PO Box 249

Montpelier, VT 05601

**Phone:** (802) 828-6002

**Email:** Susan.Poland@vt.usda.gov

* **Attend an applicant workshop (optional):** USDA Rural Development will host a Northeast Kingdom applicant workshop on **Friday, February 8, 2019 at Catamount Arts (Cabaret Room), 115 Eastern Ave., St. Johnsbury, Vermont from 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM.** The purpose of this workshop to ensure RBDG applicants submit the most competitive application possible as well as meet with other applicants and NEK Collaborative Director, Katherine Sims. The meeting is optional, but USDA Rural Development encourages you to attend. Please contact Business Programs Specialist, Susan Poland, at susan.poland@vt.usda.gov or 802-828-6002 should you have any questions.