**Rural Business Development Grant**

**(**Formerly Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) and Rural Business Opportunities Grant (RBOG)

**Applications Requested**

**VERMONT NEK REAP Zone**

**LETTER OF INTENT DUE: Friday, December 15, 2017**

**APPLICATIONS DUE: Thursday, February 15, 2018**

(See below for detailed instructions)

**Application Cycle Open**: USDA Rural Development invites applications to compete for FY18 funding for the Rural Business Development Grant program.

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

The Rural Business Development Grant program (RBDG) has two components:

* Rural Business **Enterprise** Activities: Technical assistance activities that will benefit businesses to create and retain jobs, such as marketing assistance, website design, expert consultancy services, and assistance with business plans. Also encouraged are equipment purchases, such as shared-business incubator equipment (grantee must retain ownership).
* Rural Business **Opportunity** Activities: Opportunity activities promote sustainable economic development in rural communities. Funds can provide for economic planning or to identify, train, and provide technical assistance to existing or prospective rural entrepreneurs and managers. Comprehensive area wide planning is also possible, however, please contact Rural Development for more information.

***Please note: Rural Development anticipates making 10 to 15 grants through this notice. Applicants are encouraged to apply for no more than $100,000 in funding. However, Rural Development will consider requests of up to $200,000 if the project can demonstrate it is in line with the*** [***Northern Vermont CEDS***](http://www.nvda.net/CEDS.php) ***and benefits a community containing a census tract with poverty of 30%.***

* ***Funding for Opportunity-like activities has been limited to 10% of available funds.***

**Letters of Intent:**

Letters of intent to apply must be received by Rural Development no later than close of business **Friday,** **December 15, 2017.** If this deadline is not met, please contact Rural Development to move forward with the application process.

[Access the **Letter of Intent template** online](https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/vtnhLetterofIntent2018.docx).

USDA Rural Development requires potential applicants to submit letters of intent in order to review eligibility and to provide timely feedback on an application’s competiveness for funding. USDA Rural Development staff will provide feedback on letters of intent by Friday, December 29, 2017.

**Applications:**

**Application Deadline:** Complete applications must be received by Rural Development no later than **Thursday, February 15, 2018. No applications will be accepted after this deadline.**

[Access the Application Toolkit online](https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/vtnhRBDGtoolkit2018.docx).

**Agency Initiative**: Nearly all business sectors can be assisted by the program. However, USDA Rural Development is placing specific emphasis on the following business sectors in 2018:

1. Projects that support the USDA’s Bio-economy Initiative
2. Projects that impact locally produced/locally manufactured food networks and/or distribution systems
3. Projects located in USDA’s targeted High Poverty Areas in support of USDA’s Poverty Funding Initiative

While USDA Rural Development does not anticipate a change in these initiatives, updates will be provided if changes are made.

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

* **Submit a Letter of Intent** to Rural Development either by mail or email no later than close of business **Friday, December 15, 2017**
  + Susan A. Poland, Business Programs Specialist

87 State Street, Suite 324

Montpelier, VT 05601

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

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

* **Submit a completed application** to Rural Development by mail or email no later than close of business **Thursday, February 15, 2018.**

**\*Please Note\*:** Emailed applications must contain all required documents, including signatures where required on all forms and documents. All forms requiring signatures must then be received in hard copy with original signature by mail.

All applications should be sent to the attention of:

* + Susan A. Poland, Business Programs Specialist

87 State Street, Suite 324

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 **Wednesday, January 17, 2018 at the Barton Memorial Building at 19 Village Square in Barton, Vermont from 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM** to ensure Rural Business Development Grant applicants submit the most competitive application possible as well as meet with other applicants and funders to foster potential collaborations. 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.

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