

## Rural Business Development Grant Applications Requested

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VERMONT Northeast Kingdom REAP Zone – Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: Wednesday, February 28, 2024**

**Application Cycle Open:** The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development invites applications to compete for fiscal year 2024 (FY24) funding for the Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) program. This notice pertains to applications being accepted for Counties located in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont (NEK) REAP Zone comprised of Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties.

**Please note** program funds are not available at this time, however USDA Rural Development anticipates level program funding for FY24.

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.

**Rural Development • Vermont/New Hampshire State Office**  
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Additional information on project eligibility can be found in the program regulations [Subpart E - Rural Business Development Grants](#)

***Please note:*** *USDA Rural Development anticipates making approximately six grants using this notice. Due to limited funding, applications of \$200,000 or less are encouraged.*

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

### **Applications**

**Application Deadline:** Complete applications must be received by USDA Rural Development no later than **4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 28, 2024.**

- To be eligible for REAP Zone funding applicants must obtain a “Benchmark” Number from Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA). Please contact Lorna Higgs, Project Manager at (802) 424-1421 or [lhiggs@nvda.net](mailto:lhiggs@nvda.net).
- If an indirect cost rate will be used, you must provide a copy of your approved indirect cost rate with all approval documentation with the application, otherwise indirect costs are limited to 10% of Grant dollars.
- Applications may be submitted via email (preferred method) or hard copy, BUT a complete application MUST be received by close of business (4:30 p.m.) on Wednesday, February 28, 2024 (postmarks are not acceptable).
- All application documentation, including verification of match funds, support letters and commitment letters must have required “wet” or digital signatures (typed signatures are not acceptable).
- Electronic signatures on emailed applications will be accepted. Submission of hard copy applications require original Ink signatures.
- Incomplete applications will not compete for funding.
- Applications will **not** be accepted after 4:30 p.m., Wednesday, February 28, 2024. This includes emailed applications.

[Access the Application Toolkit online.](#)

**Section 6025 Strategic Economic and Community Development:** Section 6025 of the 2018 Farm Bill enables the Secretary of Agriculture to provide priority to projects that support strategic economic and community development plans. Projects must be part of both a multi-jurisdictional and multi-sectoral Strategic Community Investment Plan in order to receive consideration for the set aside. plan should address multiple jurisdictions, and the plan should document that there is participation by multiple stakeholders.

Applicants who have proposed eligible projects for RBDG, that support multi-jurisdictional and multi-sectoral Strategic Community Investment Plans can request the opportunity for SECD set aside funding by submitting Form 1980-88 and other required information in RD Instruction 1980-K, “Strategic Economic and Community Development.” Innovation Center staff will assess the packages for completeness.

[SECD Instruction 1980-K](#)

**Agency Priorities:** The majority of business sectors can be assisted by the program. The Agency encourages applications that will advance the following key priorities of Rural Development:

**1. Addressing Climate Change and Environmental Justice**

Reducing climate pollution and increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change through economic support to rural communities.

**2. Advancing Racial Justice, Place-Based Equity, and Opportunity**

Ensuring all rural residents have equitable access to RD programs and benefits from RD funded projects.

**3. Creating More and Better Market Opportunities**

Assisting rural communities recover economically through more and better market opportunities and through improved infrastructure.

For further information, visit <https://www.rd.usda.gov/priority-points>

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

- **Submit a completed signed and dated application** to USDA Rural Development either by email (preferred method) or mail no later than **4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 28, 2024.**
- ***Please Note:*** *Emailed applications must contain all required documents, including signatures where required on all forms and documents (**electronic signatures are accepted – typed signatures are not allowed**). Incomplete applications will not compete for funding.*
  - **Ken Yearman**, Business Programs Director  
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PO Box 249  
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**Phone:** (802) 488-0118  
  
**Email:** [Kenneth.Yearman@usda.gov](mailto:Kenneth.Yearman@usda.gov)  
CC: [Cindi.Gelinas@usda.gov](mailto:Cindi.Gelinas@usda.gov)

**Attend an applicant workshop (optional):** USDA Rural Development will host an applicant workshop via Zoom **on TBD.**

The purpose of this workshop is to ensure RBDG applicants submit the most competitive application possible. The meeting is optional, but USDA Rural Development encourages you to attend.

**A link to the meeting will be provided via email registration,** please contact Business Programs Director Ken Yearman at [Kenneth.Yearman@usda.gov](mailto:Kenneth.Yearman@usda.gov) or 802-488-0118 to register for the workshop and obtain the link.

This program is subject to Section 70914 of the Build America, Buy America Act (BABA).