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**Rural Business Development Grant  
Applications Requested**

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

**LETTER OF INTENT DUE: Friday January 17, 2020**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: Tuesday, March 31, 2020**

**Application Cycle Open:** The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development invites applications to compete for fiscal year 2020 (FY20) 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 FY20. 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](#).

***Please note:*** *USDA Rural Development anticipates making 10 to 15 grants through this notice. Applicants are encouraged to apply for not more than \$100,000 in funding.*

To learn more about the program, please visit the [RBDG website \(www.rd.usda.gov/vt\)](http://www.rd.usda.gov/vt).

**Rural Development • Montpelier State Office**

87 State Street, Suite 324, P O Box 249 • Montpelier, VT 05601  
Voice (802) 828-6002 • (855) 794-3680  
[www.rd.usda.gov/vt](http://www.rd.usda.gov/vt) or [www.rd.usda.gov/nh](http://www.rd.usda.gov/nh)

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To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

## 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's must be received by USDA Rural Development no later than **4:30 pm on Friday, January 17, 2020**. Emailed LOI's will be accepted.

Potential applicants unable to meet this deadline date should contact Susan Poland, Business Programs Specialist at (802) 828-6002 or [susan.poland@usda.gov](mailto:susan.poland@usda.gov).

USDA Rural Development staff will provide feedback on letters of intent by January 24, 2020.

[Access the Letter of Intent template online](#)

## Applications

**Application Deadline:** Complete applications must be received by USDA Rural Development no later than **4:30 pm on Tuesday March 31, 2020**.

- To be eligible for REAP Zone funding applicants must obtain a "Benchmark" Number from Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA). Please contact Karen Geraghty, Economic Development Specialist at (802) 334-5861 or [kgeraghty@nvda.net](mailto:kgeraghty@nvda.net)
- If an indirect cost rate will be used, an approved indirect cost rate with all approval documentation must be submitted with the application.
- Applications may be submitted via Email or hard copy and must be received by COB (4:30pm) on Tuesday, March 31st.
- All application documentation, including verification of match funds, must have required signatures on all forms.
- 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 4:30pm, Tuesday, March 31, 2020. This includes emailed applications.

[Access the Application Toolkit online.](#)

**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: [NEK Collaborative 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 17, 2020**.
- **Submit a completed application** to USDA Rural Development offices, or by mail or email no later than **4:30 pm on Tuesday, March 31, 2020**.
- ***Please Note:*** *Emailed applications must contain all required documents, including signatures where required on all forms and documents. Incomplete applications will not compete for funding.*

All LOI's 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@usda.gov](mailto:susan.poland@usda.gov)

- **Attend an applicant workshop (optional):** USDA Rural Development will host an applicant workshop on **Wednesday February 12, 2020 from 2 – 4 pm at Northeastern Vermont Development Authority - 36 Eastern Avenue – St. Johnsbury, VT 05819**. 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.

Please contact Business Programs Specialist, Susan Poland, at [susan.poland@vt.usda.gov](mailto:susan.poland@vt.usda.gov) or 802-828-6002 should you have any questions.