

**Rural Business Development Grant
Applications Requested**

VERMONT – Addison, Bennington, Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, Orange, Rutland, Washington, Windham and Windsor Counties

LETTER OF INTENT DUE: Friday, December 11, 2020

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Friday, February 26, 2021

Application Cycle Open: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development invites applications to compete for fiscal year 2021 (FY21) funding for the Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) program. This notice pertains to applications being accepted for Counties located outside the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont (NEK) REAP Zone comprised of Caledonia, Essex and Orleans Counties. **NEK REAP Zone applications have separate instructions.**

Please note program funds are not available at this time, however USDA Rural Development anticipates level program funding for FY21.

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

Rural Development • Vermont/New Hampshire State Office
87 State Street, Suite 324 • P O Box 249 • Montpelier, VT 05601
Voice (802) 828-6002 • Fax (855) 794-3680

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To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service). Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication should contact the USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 or the USDA through the Federal Relay Services at (800) 877-8339.

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 approximately six grants using this notice. Due to limited statewide funding, applications of \$30,000 or less are encouraged.*

To learn more about the program, please visit the [RBDG Vermont](https://www.rd.usda.gov/vt) (<https://www.rd.usda.gov/vt>)

Letters of Intent

USDA Rural Development is asking potential applicants to submit Letters of Intent (LOI) to apply for funding. LOI's will be reviewed for eligibility and to provide 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, December 11, 2020**. **You may Email your Letter of Intent to: Susan.Poland@usda.gov**

Potential applicants unable to meet this deadline date should contact Susan Poland, Business Programs Specialist at (802) 828-6002 or Susan.Poland@usda.gov USDA Rural Development staff will provide feedback on letters of intent by January 4, 2021.

[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 Friday, February 26, 2021**.

- 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 COB (4:30pm) on Friday, February 26th, 2021 (postmarks are not acceptable)
- All application documentation, including verification of match funds, support letters and commitment letters must have required signatures.
- 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, Friday, February 26th, 2021. This includes emailed applications

Rural Business Development Grant Applicant Toolkit

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.

RD 1980-K

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

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

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- **Submit a Letter of Intent** to USDA Rural Development either by email (preferred method) or mail no later than **4:30 pm on Friday, December 11, 2020**.
- **Submit a completed signed and dated application** to USDA Rural Development either by email (preferred method) or mail no later than **4:30 pm on Friday February 26, 2021**.
- ***Please Note:*** *Emailed applications must contain all required documents, including signatures where required on all forms and documents (**electronic signatures are accepted**). 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 05602
Phone: (802) 828-6002

Email: Susan.Poland@usda.gov

- **Attend an applicant workshop (optional):** USDA Rural Development will host an applicant workshop via Zoom **Tuesday January 12th, 2021 from 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm**. **A Link to the meeting will be provided to via letter of intent responses or you may contact USDA to obtain the Link.** 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@usda.gov or 802-828-6002 should you have any questions.