***Vermont Working Communities Challenge Planning Grant Application***

Overview

The Working Communities Challenge (WCC) is a two-phase, 3.5-year grant opportunity to strengthen Vermont’s rural towns, regions, and small cities. The WCC supports cross-sector teams working collaboratively to build strong economies and healthy communities by changing the way systems work to benefit residents, especially residents with low incomes.

Key Dates and Information

Planning Phase

**Letter of Interest Due:** Friday, November 1, 2019 at 5:00pm (See Appendix A)

**Application Due:** Friday, December 13, 2019 at 5:00pm

**Grant Start and End Date:** Friday, January 31, 2020 through Monday, June 15, 2020

**Number and Size of Awards:** Up to six planning grants of between $10,000 and $15,000 per award

Implementation Phase

*Only those that participate in the Planning Phase will be eligible to apply for the Implementation Phase.*

 **Application Due:** June 15, 2020*[[1]](#footnote-1)*

**Grant Start Date:** August/September (TBD), 2020

**Duration:** Three-years

**Number and Size of Awards:** Three-four implementation grants of up to $300,000 per award

Regional Information Sessions to explain more about the Working Communities Challenge and the Planning Grant application will take place at the following locations and dates:

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| **Date** | **Time**  | **Place** | **City/Town** |
| Tue, Oct 1 | 10:00a-11:30a | Welcome Center, 51 Depot Street | St. Johnsbury |
| Tue, Oct 1 | 3:00p-4:30p | Barre Opera House, 6 Main Street  | Barre |
| Wed, Oct 2 | 10:00a-11:30a | Rutland Free Library, 10 Court Street | Rutland |
| Tue, Oct 8 | 9:00a-10:30a | Great Hall, 100 River Street | Springfield |
| Tue, Oct 8 | 2:00p-3:30p | Historic Memorial Hall, 14 West Main Street | Wilmington |
| Tue, Oct 15 | 10:00a-11:30a  | St. Albans City Hall, 100 North Main Street | St. Albans |

Background

The Working Communities Challenge supports cross-sector teams working collaboratively to build strong, healthy economies and communities in Vermont’s rural towns, regions, and small cities. With a focus on changing the way systems work to benefit residents, especially residents with low incomes, this three-year grant competition is supported by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (Boston Fed), the State of Vermont, national and local philanthropy, and private sector businesses.

The partnership in Vermont is informed by Boston Fed research that examined smaller cities across the country that had not fared well over the past half-century. Finding that a subset of these communities was able to turn their economies around for the better, Boston Fed economists asked, “What did it take for those places to change course?” They found that success was dependent on how well leaders were able to collaborate across the business, public, and nonprofit sectors to pursue a common, long-term vision for the community.

In response to this lesson, the Boston Fed launched a competition for New England states to support diverse, local collaborative leadership teams tackle complex challenges facing their communities. Included in the Working Communities Challenge is funding to accelerate promising local work with a focus on increased economic opportunities for residents.

The Boston Fed and Vermont leaders are working together to adapt the competition model, first started in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, to the unique needs of rural towns, regions, and smaller cities in Vermont.

After September 23, 2019, interested applicants can go to the [Vermont Working Communities Challenge](https://www.bostonfed.org/workingcities/vermont/index.htm) webpage (<https://www.bostonfed.org/workingcities/resources/index.htm>) where information will be posted on the Working Communities Challenge grant application and process.

Purpose, Process and Expectations

Up to six cross-sector teams that each represent a group of rural towns, a region, or a small city in Vermont will be awarded a 4-5 month grant of $10,000-$15,000 to participate in the Planning Phase. The Planning Phase provides content, practical exercises, and time for planning to support teams in their efforts to better understand and get ready to incorporate the core elements of the Working Communities Challenge into their initiatives. The core elements include cross-sector collaborative leadership, community engagement, learning orientation, systems change, and diversity and inclusion. (See Appendix B for more on each of these core elements.) The Planning Phase will also support the cross-sector teams in refining (or developing) their shared long-term vision and goal(s) so that it is ambitious and contributes to significant change in the outcomes of their community, including changes that tackle the underlying conditions or unlock opportunities that benefit residents who are low-income.

Each core group of the Planning Phase grantee team will be expected to attend three full-day workshops during their planning grant. Teams can use the grant dollars in any way they want to support the work involved in the Planning Phase (e.g., reimburse travel expenses, pay participants to attend, pay residents/volunteers to do community outreach, hire a facilitator, etc.).

The six Planning Phase grantee teams will be eligible to compete for one of the three-four multi-year implementation grants. Each Implementation Grant will include an award of up to $300,000 as well as technical assistance, coaching, access to small tactical grants, and participation in a learning community to help each team. The teams will be expected to use the grant awards and assistance to broaden and deepen existing work in their community, or start new work, to achieve their goals. The application for the Implementation Grants will be released at the beginning of the Planning Phase (January/February 2020) and due at the conclusion of the Planning Phase (June 2020).

Submission

Only teams that submit a **Letter of Interest by 5:00 p.m. on** **November 1, 2019** (See Appendix A) are eligible to submit a Planning Grant application. Every team’s application must include at least one *priority community* (see Appendix C for the list of priority communities) and must represent an area with more than 6,000 people. Every town in Vermont can be part of an application as long as the team’s application meets these conditions: includes a priority community and represents an area of more than 6,000 people. Multi-town or regional applications are welcome to meet the 6,000 person threshold. Only one Planning Grant application is permitted per priority community. WCC staff will notify lead applicants[[2]](#footnote-2) in early November if more than one Letter of Interest has been submitted for a particular priority community or region so that all interested applicants can work together to submit a single Planning Grant application, if they so choose.

**Planning grant applications are due by 5:00 p.m. on December 13, 2019**, and should be submitted by email to Steve Michon at stephen.michon@bos.frb.org. Additional information regarding the Planning Grant application will be available at the Regional Information Sessions. Information also will be available on the [Vermont Working Communities Challenge](https://www.bostonfed.org/workingcities/vermont/index.htm) webpage.

Criteria

Applications will be evaluated by an independent selection jury, each receiving a score of up to 100 points based on the below criteria. Finalists may be asked to participate in either a phone or an in-person interview to inform the evaluation and selection.

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| **Criteria** | **Total Points** |
| VISION AND GOAL. Articulation of a shared vision and goal in alignment with the Working Communities Challenge purpose and with potential to change systems that lead to longer lasting outcomes for the community. | 20 |
| LOW INCOME FOCUS. Explicit focus on low-income residents inherent to the project, including the opportunity to change community conditions and systems that lead to longer lasting outcomes for the community and low-income residents. | 25 |
| TEAM COMPOSITION. Engagement of a strategically selected team, positioned to make change, including: leaders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors; leaders of community groups and groups that represent the collective voice of residents with low-income and from diverse backgrounds (e.g., community organizing groups); and people with the substantive knowledge and experience to make the work happen. | 20 |
| ABILITY TO AFFECT SYSTEMS CHANGE. Demonstrated ability or strong potential to affect concrete changes in long-lasting policy, financing, practice, and behavior solutions in the community or region to advance your goals. Such *ability* or *potential* could include, for example, opportunities to build on past or existing local or regional accomplishments or momentum, or simply a strong analysis of community needs and solutions and a strong team to take on the collective challenge. | 25 |
| MANAGEMENT. Identified capacity to manage the grant award by the lead applicant.  | 10 |

Before completing this application, members of your team are encouraged to attend one of the Regional Information Sessions and review the materials that will be posted on the [Vermont Working Communities Challenge](https://www.bostonfed.org/workingcities/vermont/index.htm) webpage.

APPLICATION

*Please provide written responses for the questions below and submit to Steve Michon at* *stephen.michon@bos.frb.org* *by 5:00 p.m. on December 13, 2019.*

**Your Cross-Sector Team**

1. Name of geography or region and all communities represented by your application (e.g. Greater Smithville - City of Smithville, Chaucer, St. Alfio, Nobletown, and Molise Village):
2. Please list the name(s) of each city/town in your geography that is included in the Working Communities Challenge list of *priority communities* (see Appendix C for list):
3. The lead applicant and organization will be responsible for managing your team’s work, communication, and budget during the Planning Phase. They will also coordinate communication with and reporting to Working Communities Challenge staff during and after the grant period. The following information is designed to help us understand the lead applicant’s capacity to do this work. Your team may elect to identify co-leads, in which case you must provide answers to this question for both co-leads.
	1. Name, mission statement, and website of the administrating organization(s) that will administer the grant.
	2. Why is this/are these administrating organization(s) well-positioned to manage your team’s work, communication and budget during the Planning Phase? (limit 150 words)
	3. Name, title, email and phone number of a single primary contact within lead organization(s).
	4. If primary contact for the applicant team is someone who doesn’t work for the lead organization(s), please list name, email, phone and relationship of this person to the lead organization(s).
	5. Does the lead organization have experience administering grants? If yes, please describe up to two examples, including grant amount, of when the lead organization has administered a grant. (limit 100 words)
	6. Attach to application: lead organization(s) most recent IRS Form 990 (for nonprofits, also include evidence of 501c3 status). If the lead organization does not have an IRS Form 990, please explain and provide evidence of effective financial management.
4. Who are the CORE PARTNERS on your team - those who will be highly engaged and participate deeply in the Planning Phase, including the three full-day meetings and planning undertaking in your own community, if your team is awarded a planning grant? *Note: Typically there are 6-12 CORE PARTNERS who participate in the Planning Phase.* *It is likely that other people and organizations will be part of your team, but not as highly engaged as the CORE PARTNERS. These “OTHER PARTNERS” should be listed in question 5.*

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| Name | Affiliation (Organization and Title) | Information on role/interest of this person in the effort (less than 30 words each person) |
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1. Who are OTHER PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS that you expect to invite into the process to engage in the work if your team is awarded a planning grant?

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| Name | Affiliation (Organization and Title) | Information on role/interest of this person in the effort (less than 30 words each person) |
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1. What organizations, sectors, resident communities or perspectives are underrepresented or missing from your team, and how will you engage them during the planning period? *Note: we expect part of the planning process to be an opportunity to build a plan to round out your team, if needed.* (limit: 200 words)

**Your Opportunity/Challenge**

*The Working Communities Challenge advances local collaborative efforts that build strong, healthy economies and communities in Vermont’s rural towns, regions, and smaller cities with a focus on economic opportunity for communities and residents with low incomes. In preparation for undertaking this work, please describe and quantify the opportunity or problem you’ll be targeting through this effort.*

1. What is the long-term vision and goal that unites your team? (limit: 100 words)
2. What measure or measures best illustrate the scope of the opportunity/challenge in your town, city, or region, and how has it changed over time? *Example:* In 2018, 21.5% (1,720) of Whoville’s 8,000 children under the age of 18 lived below the federal poverty threshold. Whoville’s child poverty rates rose from 15.5% in 2013 to 21.5% in 2018, while the U.S. rates increased from 18.2% to 22.2% during that same time period. *Note: This is an example only, and you should use the information/data, including qualitative information or primary data, that best illustrates the problem your town, region, or city has identified.* (limit: 100 words)

**Your Approach**

*The Planning Phase provides content, practical exercises, and time for planning to support teams in their efforts to better understand and get ready to incorporate the core elements of the Working Communities Challenge (collaborative leadership, community engagement, learning orientation, systems change, and diversity) into their initiatives. The Planning Phase also supports teams in refining (or developing) their shared goal, which serves as a roadmap for the initiative and describes the way your initiative is designed to achieve your long-term vision and goals. Your answers to the following questions will help us determine the starting point for your team. We recognize that your answers are likely to change as you engage in this work more deeply.*

1. What are resources and assets that your team can build on to address this opportunity/challenge?

*Examples might include an existing or related planning effort, a complementary grant, an existing or related cross-sector collaborative process, or an organization(s) with experience or expertise in the area of focus. Please share examples that were successful (or not), including lessons learned and any impact. (*limit: 200 words*)*

1. What else is already happening in your town, city or region to address the opportunity/challenge you’ve identified? You may provide examples of investments, initiatives, policies, other collaborative processes, and/or plans that are relevant to your proposed Working Communities Challenge effort. *Note: In addition to your answer in the space below you may attach up to three supporting documents, such as newspaper articles, plans, studies, etc.* (limit: 200 words)
2. How will you involve and empower residents and diverse constituencies in your effort in a sustained, meaningful way? (limit: 100 words)

1. What do you see as the greatest risks and challenges for successful completion of this effort? (limit: 100 words)
2. What is/are the strategy areas that your team plans to pursue to achieve your community’s long-term vision and goal, including those systems changes (in policy, financing, practice, or behavior) that your team might test or consider? (limit: 200 words)

**Remember to attach:**

* Lead organization(s) most recent IRS Form 990 (for nonprofits, also include evidence of 501c3 status)
* Up to three attachments in support of question 10

APPENDIX A: Letter of Interest

**Letter of Interest to apply for the VT Working Communities Challenge Planning Grant**

**Due Date: 5:00 PM, November 1, 2019**

Please return Steve Michon, VT Working Communities Director, at stephen.michon@bos.frb.org

To apply for a Working Communities Challenge Planning Grant, a lead applicant from your team must submit this form to reflect your team’s interest in being a candidate for the Working Communities Challenge. Once complete, save and e-mail this form to stephen.michon@bos.frb.org. Note that where there are multiple expressions of interest from the same community, the Fed will reach out to all respondents to encourage a single full Planning Grant application.

1. Contact Information

Name of primary contact:

Email and phone number of primary contact:

Organization and title of primary contact (if appropriate):

Street address of primary contact:

It is understood that the focus of your initiative and your team partners may change during the planning phase. Please answer the following three questions with this in mind.

2. City/Towns Represented (please list all cities/towns that your team will likely represent though the Working Communities Challenge effort):

3. Community Partners (those organizations, groups, and/or other partners that are or will be an important part of your team):

4. Briefly describe your initiative. (Word Limit: 50)

APPENDIX B: Core Elements

The five core elements of the Working Communities Challenge are:

* **Cross-sector collaborative leadership**. The ability to work together across the nonprofit, private, and public sectors to make progress toward a shared, long-term vision and goal(s).
* **Community engagement**. Authentic involvement of residents in your initiative, particularly those who will be impacted by your work.
* **Learning orientation**. Using research, data, and peer exchange to learn and adapt as progress is made toward a shared, long-term vision and goal(s).
* **Systems change**. Altering long-lasting policy, financing, practice, or behavior within a larger system (e.g. education systems, economic development, public health, workforce systems, public safety, food security, etc.) in order to better solve a persistent problem or unlock new opportunities for residents.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* **Diversity and inclusion**. Honoring and incorporating equity goals across race, socioeconomic status, age, gender and sexual orientation as important part of a shared goal.

APPENDIX C: List of Towns and Small Cities Included as Priority Communities

Every team’s application must include at least one *priority community* listed below and represent an area with more than 6,000 people. Every town in Vermont can be part of an application as long as the team’s application meets these conditions: includes a priority community and represents an area of more than 6,000 people. Multi-town or regional applications are welcome to meet the 6,000 person threshold.

Priority communities have been identified by the WCC Steering Committee as those towns and small cities that (1) meet conditions of high economic need[[4]](#footnote-4) and (2) provide a likely opportunity for greater systems change[[5]](#footnote-5) that benefit residents with lower incomes.

**Priority Communities**

*Each of these priority communities has a total population above 6,000 and can submit an application independently or as part of multi-town or regional application.*

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| Barre City | Springfield |
| Bennington  | St. Albans City |
| Brattleboro  | St. Johnsbury |
| Middlebury | Winooski |
| Rutland City |  |

*Each of these priority communities has a total population below 6,000 and therefore must partner with other communities in their market/area/region to reach a total population of at least 6,000 people*.

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| Barton | Pittsford |
| Bradford  | Poultney |
| Castleton  | Putney |
| Enosburgh  | Randolph |
| Fair Haven | Rockingham  |
| Hinesburg | Royalton |
| Johnson  | Stowe |
| Lyndon | Vergennes |
| Morristown | Westminster |
| Newport City | Windsor |

See the [GIS map](https://vcgi.maps.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=1220b8486269447aadb280db8ca3c902) for a visual representation of priority communities with data on city/town population, prepared by the Vermont Center for Geographic Information. (<https://vcgi.maps.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=1220b8486269447aadb280db8ca3c902>)

1. This date is subject to change. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A lead applicant is the point person responsible for managing your team’s work, communication and budget during the planning phase. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Steering Committee is seeking teams that represent an area that touches enough people and has enough capacity to affect ways that practices, policies and behaviors of larger institutions and systems shape the lives of people who are economically disadvantaged. The Steering Committee is also seeking teams that pursue changes that may be applicable and replicable to other communities across the state. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. These Vermont towns/cities have poverty rates above the state poverty rate (11.4) *and* median household incomes below the state's median household income ($57,808). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Steering Committee is seeking teams that represent an area that touches enough people and has enough capacity to affect ways that practices, policies and behaviors of larger institutions and systems shape the lives of people who are economically disadvantaged. The Steering Committee is also seeking teams that pursue changes that may be applicable and replicable to other communities across the state. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)