

# Vermont Everyone Eats - FY 24 Proposal

**Funding Need:** \$1,200,000

## Vermont Everyone Eats (VEE) Current Position

Since launching on August 1, 2020, 14 VEE Community Hubs have delivered 3.6 million meals through January 2023. As the contracted program administrator, Southeast Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) has worked closely with the VEE Statewide Task Force and the Community Hubs to ensure the greatest possible benefit to participating restaurants, food-insecure Vermonters, and Vermont farmers and food producers.

- Currently funded by 90/10 FEMA/State allocation; before 7/1/22 was 100% FEMA reimbursed
- Current rate of distribution is 25,000 meals/wk; the highest rate of distribution was 50,800/wk in December 2020.
- 211 restaurants currently participating, 321 total restaurants have participated
- 260+ participating farmers with 35% of meal ingredients coming from Vermont farms
- Current 90/10 FEMA/SOV funding for VEE operations will end on March 31, 2023
- VEE has built meaningful infrastructure and momentum during three years of pandemic programming. It is time to move from emergency response programming to carry forward new best practices in strengthening restaurants as cornerstones of Vermont community economic resilience and food systems.

## Future Outlook

Resources are needed to leverage the momentum of the collaborating restaurants, community organizations, farmers and agencies to create sustained programming that continues to activate local restaurants and farms in addressing a gap in Vermont's food system of supplemental prepared meals.

VEE aims to change policy at the federal level to enable Vermont and other states to leverage sustainable federal funding for future programs using VEE's triple-bottom-line model linking economic development, agricultural resilience, and food security while further improving the accessibility and dignity of supplemental food.

## FY 24 Proposal

96,000 meals will be distributed through the digital VEE platform, Localvore App across all 14 counties. There will be at least two restaurant choices in each county with service focused on rural regions. Meal eligibility will be based on self-attestation indicating a need beyond support available from existing supplemental nutrition programs. Outreach will be targeted to populations experiencing higher levels of food insecurity, including Older Vermonters, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, people experiencing disability, or those experiencing homelessness.

Meals will be funded at using the same VEE funding model of \$12.50/meal, with \$10/meal being paid directly to restaurants for a nutritionally balanced 12 oz meal following USDA My Plate guidance, and the additional \$2.50/meal will be used to:

- Hire a Restaurant Meals Strategic Initiatives Director to strengthen connections and collaborations with and between the hospitality sector, small farming businesses, local food product entrepreneurs and local communities. The director will coordinate a diverse network of stakeholders in a community of practice toward sustainable state-wide programming and policies at the Federal level.
- Cover the costs of customer service, vendor management, tech overhead, and contract administration

Bridge funding is essential for the following purposes:

- 1,845/wk in meal distribution maintains this new restaurant meals market channel and keeps restaurants connected to the innovative network of economic resilience, local agriculture, and community food security.
- Time to develop sustained programming with right scale funding sources from federal and private partners.
- Maintain the practitioner network developed during the initial VEE programming. Keeping the network viable and engaged will save considerable time and resources and make good on the investments we made into this program over the last three years.

## **Background**

The Vermont Everyone Eats Program was initially funded in July 2020 through a \$5M allocation from the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) to VT ACCD, with the Southeast Vermont Community Action Agency (SEVCA) designated as the program administrator and a subsequent allocation of \$1,400,000 in late December 2020. In March 2021, FEMA reimbursed 100% of all program costs and continued to reimburse costs at that level through June 30, 2022, based on monthly submissions through VT ACCD. As of July 1, 2022, FEMA switched to a 90/10 cost share model, with the VT state legislature allocating \$1.3M toward that 10% cost share beginning July 1, 2022. Specifically, the House and Senate passed an allocation of \$1.3M (reduced from VEE's \$1.8M request) in bill S.11, an economic and workforce development bill signed by Governor Scott on June 8, 2022. There is significant momentum underway to identify new funding streams to carry forward the most valuable impacts and lessons learned from this innovative, cross-sector community resiliency program ranging from highly decentralized, grassroots fundraising (e.g., restaurant round-up programs) to coordinated, high-level strategies to bring new federal dollars into our state (e.g., SNAP-Restaurant Meals Program, USDA-AMS grant funding, etc.).

## **Lessons Learned**

1. Many restaurants around the state, especially in rural communities, need support to be viable. VEE has provided a secondary market that creates a stabilizing revenue stream. VEE built trusted relationships and connected restaurants to business assistance and support through its hub system. VEE has identified critical areas of need for restaurants to access ongoing assistance with marketing, small business management, financing, local purchasing, and general business support.
2. VEE created new collaborations between organizations, entities, and sectors that had operated separately before the pandemic.

3. The collaboration at the core of VEE resulted in a strong multiplier effect, estimated at 2.6. Thus \$1 spent on prepared meals impacted and aided multiple groups in need simultaneously.
4. VEE brought new financial resources to the economic resilience and food security realms.
5. VEE was able to create a strong brand that was free of the stigma often associated with food security programs. That, coupled with its unique self-certification process and non-traditional distribution models, ensured that many more food-insecure Vermonters were connected with the needed resources.

### **Opportunities**

- Through its Task Force, Hubs, and network of participants, VEE has established a valuable and unique statewide “laboratory” for innovation and cross-sector collaboration. The laboratory has momentum and is working towards identifying federal and large-scale private funding to further develop the concept of economic stimulus joined with food security. It is a good investment for the state to sustain the core program. It is an outstanding investment for the state that will reap many benefits by sustaining this program’s core cross-sector collaboration which supports a unique triple-bottom-line programming model.
- The Localvore Everyone Eats Digital Platform is a proven model that is easy, dignified, and valuable for restaurants and meal recipients. The platform is scalable and highly flexible. Providing a bridge investment to support additional meals through the platform will give restaurants and community partners the time necessary to develop new sustainable funding streams, including restaurant ‘round up’ programs, philanthropic support, and federal grants.
- In FY23 Q1 and Q2, two critical reports will be released detailing 1) the economic impact and 2) pathways for carrying forward the impacts of VEE into new sustainable programming.
- State investment will allow partners to actively pursue these innovative and impactful opportunities.

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