

Referencing the Council on the Future of Vermont and its 2009 report, *Imagining Vermont: Values and Vision for the Future*, is important to understanding the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative program. This report holds a foundational data point that has perennially proved to be vital in the mandate for this program. Working Lands Enterprise Board Committees are a critical leverage point for Board strategy, effective operations, and system impact. Program management works closely with appointing offices for Board seats and created a toolkit for activating and optimizing WLEB's committees that serves board development, governance, and cements WLEI's standing as an impactful and operationally excellent state program.

High-level process of applying for and granting funds through the program is as follows:

1. Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) meets to determine funding prioritization for the year
2. Program Lead translates those priorities into Request For Applications
3. Program Manager conducts outreach to VT businesses across a variety of sectors, via email, social media channels, press releases or website, including but not limited to:
 - a. Forest & Wood Products sectors, wood supply chain, Food & Farm sectors,
 - b. Service Providers, Networks, Programs and Practitioners, Trade associations
4. Program Lead conducts informational webinar sessions, including info for the applicant such as eligibility, scoring criteria, overall programmatic information, and matchmaking to Service Providers for technical assistance such as VHCB, VSJF, NOFA and CAE.
5. Program Lead conducts 1:1 meeting with interested applicants for application assembly assistance. Example, over (50) distinct 1:1 meetings with interested applicants occurred via video between August and November of 2021. This can be an important touchstone, and often leads to matchmaking with farm and forest viability assistance
6. Once applications are submitted, a robust review process ensues which is made up of WLEB members, and public and private thought partners and subject matter experts across sectors.

Program Impact to Date:

- Over 240 projects funded, impacting all 14 counties
- Funded over \$7 million in projects, leveraging over \$11 million in matching funds

With Governor Scott and legislator's unprecedented appropriation of funds of \$5.3 million for the Fiscal Year 2022 grant cycle, the WLEB reviewed over 100 businesses in need, with project requests totaling \$10,522,053.

Awarded as of January 2022:

- Over 600K\$ to Service Provider organizations, providing technical and business assistance to agriculture and forest businesses for marketing & branding
- Over \$500K to Standard Business Infrastructure projects for market development, marketing plans, and sales strategy development;
- \$600K to Meat Processing and Slaughter enterprises for production improvements, processing and/or distribution, addressing known existing bottlenecks; infrastructure improvements; developing marketing plans and/or sales strategies; HCAAP (food safety) plans and implementation; procurement and pricing management;
- Close to \$200K to Producer Associations for leadership and organizational development, and/or transitions for new executive directors and post succession; governance: board training and capacity, building/refreshing by-laws

In relation to question from Committee:

Equity & Inclusion is a current opportunity for the Board to address goals/ challenges recognized by the state as a whole and the working lands economy. The FY22 application scoring criteria of the WLEI Service Provider Grant reads, in part: "Equity and inclusion dialogue with partner stakeholders has moved past peripheral organizational value shifts, to the center of the organization's strategic development. A thoughtful and robust outreach/knowledge sharing strategy is incorporated to support the project." The WLEB Nominating Committee is also involved in nascent conversations on the topic of Equity & Inclusion.