

### **Background**

- **New Thought Vermont**, established in 2004, is a small mission-based non-profit based in Weston and is focused on furthering individual wellbeing, meaning, and resilience. Our programs have been particularly effective to help and support people as they navigate the challenges of COVID-19.
- We serve all demographics, regardless of age, ability, financial ability, or other conditions of life, including those on the margins of society – no one is turned away due to an inability to pay. Our staff, presenters and advisors include women, older adults, individuals with disabilities, people who identify as LGBTQ+, as well as racial/ethnic minorities. A major aspect of our work is the commitment to serve caregivers and individuals with disabilities.
- We are a critical, community-based resource for a forgotten region. We reach under-served or marginalized people in the under-served area of the Mountain Towns (primarily those communities which sit on the peripheries of three counties – Windsor, Windham, and Bennington). In addition, we have outreach to individuals in other areas of the state.
- In an effort to meet growing demand for our programming, New Thought Vermont purchased a renovated barn in November, 2019. We completed the first stage of required repairs and renovations and were ready to open for in-person services in March, 2020 which we were unable to do because of the pandemic. Having stretched to expand programming, meet demand for our services, and increase our revenue, we found ourselves shut down and starved of revenue while carrying this new facility.
- We've found ways to keep operating - a major criteria for state relief which we DO meet. Since the start of the pandemic, New Thought Vermont has served hundreds. We've continued to offer programs virtually and, when appropriate, limited in-person services. We make a number of these offerings available free of charge during the pandemic with donations encouraged and appreciated.
- We play an important role in our community and region as a partner with social service, mental health and arts organizations, as well as with artists, teachers, presenters and wellness practitioners in developing and offering programs.

### **Ineligible for Economic Recovery Bridge Funding (ERBF)**

**Despite significant losses of income from 2019 to 2020 and 2021, our application to ACCD last summer was deemed ineligible as we had a small "profit" based on the criteria established by the legislature last spring. New Thought Vermont and other organizations and businesses have "fallen through the cracks" because of our/their inability to meet existing criteria and/or because of the unique nature of what we/they do. It seems the criteria need to be less restrictive as many organizations like ours sustained function on the basis of dedicated volunteers and/or by making fiscally conservative decisions to not pay staff and also cut back in other areas.**

Previously, we were ineligible (and did not apply) to earlier state relief programs because we did not have a payroll history and opened the building in March, 2020. With no track record of payment for employees from 2019 to 2020, we were ineligible for a number of funding sources as we could not show payroll losses. We could not show venue losses as the building was first available for use in March, 2020 with no immediate planned events at the very time the pandemic restrictions were put in place.

**New Thought Vermont and others have been harmed uniquely because of three factors:**

- (1) Being relatively **new or operating in a new operating mode** as COVID arrived. Taking on the barn would have accelerated our growth, and instead became a liability as the state shut down. In general, as we feared from the start, the "relief" focus has set back already feeble support for new and emerging organizations/companies. **Helping companies to plan, to pivot, is a great way to go forward.** It's our understanding that for sole proprietors that has been possible with CDBG-CV and in a limited capacity through *Restart Vermont*.
- (2) During the pandemic, we have cut honoraria for staff and contractual providers and donated our time to maintain services and had to make other cuts as well. As the President of *New Thought Vermont* stated, "we were punished for being prudent." One is punished for being prudent - unfortunately, instead of taking into account **pay cuts** that organizational leaders gave themselves to survive COVID, which could be done by using previous compensation as metric against which losses would be measured, many relief programs unintentionally reward those who continued to pay salaries to themselves vs. those who conserved resources in order to survive. **By "hunkering down," being fiscally conservative by not paying staff and making other cuts, the metrics used have not proved an effective way to measure loss or to help such organizations as ours and others to be made whole.**
- (3) While still in need, the "hospitality" sector has been well represented in lobbying and consideration for relief, and there has been some special help (state and federal) for traditional healthcare establishments. *New Thought Vermont* is like a lot of other **wellness** organizations (health clubs, yoga studios, therapy practices) without that kind of lobbying - many of us have done an incredible job pivoting, but it's been grueling and the problem is not over, especially for small organizations and businesses with limited budgets.

**While many moderate to large non-profits and businesses with substantial income and paid staff (who can generate financial reports and easily produce documents necessary to receive ERBF), many small ones do not.** They are often staffed by only one or at maximum a handful of employees or volunteers to provide the same kind of documentation. **This creates an unfair advantage for these larger entities to receive funding. We ask that the playing field be leveled in this next round of funding.**

We know that the mission has not been accomplished and the recovery is not complete. COVID-19 and its effects have injured our organization and others. It has been and will continue to be a long trek back. **We have not been made whole. Now is the time to revisit this process, the criteria, the procedures.**

It is our fervent hope that the legislature and ACCD can move quickly to address and resolve this problem encountered by a number of organizations and businesses throughout the state. In order to survive as an organization during the continuing pandemic and pay our current and anticipated expenses, we need to pivot and look forward with the sustainability of COVID relief funding so that we can continue to serve this region of the state which is geographically isolated and under-served.

**We are asking you to keep this program and make it more viable, to assist those in the "other" category by adjusting the criteria to make COVID relief funding more available to organizations in need, such as *New Thought Vermont*.** We are happy to work with ACCD and the legislature to figure out parameters and measures that might work to assist small organizations and businesses such as ours.