STATE OF VERMONT

Policy Impact Assessment

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This assessment is intended to act as a useful framework for the development and review of a proposed policy and its potential impacts, both direct and indirect. It can be used in multiple ways:

- to inform decision makers prior to a final decision on legislation, rules, or spending;
- to inform project planning and community/economic development approaches; and
- to assess legislation, policies, and programs that are already in existence.

Regardless of when it is used, it serves as a powerful mechanism to help qualify, quantify, and provide transparency into the decision-making process.
The order of the questions is intentional and is meant to mimic an ends-to-means thinking process which should bring to light the assumptions and logic behind the proposal, as well as the ways in which progress towards desired ends will be monitored over time.

Many of the questions focus on equity. Historically, policy has been made based on the needs and preferences of people in dominant groups, which has created disparate impacts for groups who are marginalized. Further, some well-meaning policies are intended to be neutral but still result in disparate negative impacts for specific groups.

Vermont recognizes that in failing to protect our most vulnerable community members from the impact of our policies and programs, we are only hurting ourselves. One crucial defense against disparate impacts of policies and programs is to conduct an impact assessment prior to budgetary or programmatic decisions that will impact communities.

How to Use This Tool

This tool is intended to serve as a systematic examination of

1. The theory of change, and the assumptions therein, embedded within the proposal;
2. How different marginalized groups will be affected by a proposed action or decision; and
3. The degree to which we can measure, track, and align our proposals with overarching goals.

Use it to

- ✓ **minimize** unanticipated adverse consequences in proposed policies, institutional practices, programs, plans, and budgetary decisions.
- ✓ **maximize** investments and staffing by anticipating needs, benefits, and harms.

These analyses are best conducted during the decision-making process, *prior* to enacting new proposals (much like environmental impact statements, fiscal impact reports, and workplace risk assessments).

This form is not to be used as a "final check" before submitting a proposal. Rather, it should be used early in the idea-generating phase to ensure you have gathered the community input, demographic data, and resources necessary to make the program **efficient**, **inclusive**, and **successful**.

SECTION II: ASSESSMENT

Instructions: Complete this form as thoroughly as possible and submit with any supporting documentation to your reviewer/approver. For questions regarding this form, contact the Chief Performance Office or the Office of Racial Equity. **At a minimum you must answer the bolded questions for initial review by the Governor's Office: 1, 4, 6-9, 12, 16, 18-25, 27-31, 33-34, 38, 39**

BACKGROUND

1. **What population-level outcomes from the Annual Outcomes Report and/or breakthrough indicators from the Statewide Strategic Plan does this proposal contribute to?**

   Statewide Strategic Plan Outcomes
   Grow the Economy
   - Size of workforce

2. What Statewide Strategic Plan strategy is this proposal associated with?

   Expand Agricultural Economy
   - Gross sales, profitability, and total acres in agricultural production

3. What other priorities (e.g., agency, department, etc.) does this proposal align with?

   the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative (WLEI) aligns financial assistance with the historically demonstrated and ongoing demand for catalytic investments in critical leverage

PROBLEM DEFINITION

4. **What is the specific problem/gap being addressed by this proposal?**

   WLEI investments would support expanded investments in agriculture, farm, forest, and wood manufacturing businesses as well as expand the ability for technical service providers

5. What is known about the problem/gap? What specific data are available that indicates there is a problem/gap? What trendlines are you attempting to turn?

   Since the formation of the WLEI program, over $12 million grant funds have been awarded to over 300 grantees, leveraging more than $22 million in matching funds. 2022 brought historic grant

6. For whom does this problem/gap exist? Who is the target population of the proposal? **Include demographic information such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, ability, etc.**

   The target population of the WLEI program is all Vermont working lands businesses and the various service providers within our state's food system (farmers, land managers, food businesses, processors, supply chain partners, funders, policy makers, etc.). There is some farmer demographic data available in Vermont but we recognize that this is incomplete and

7. **How was this group(s) determined?**

   In 2012, the Working Lands Enterprise initiative, Act 142, created the Working Lands Enterprise Fund (WLEF) and the Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB). As outlined in the Findings section of Act 142:

8. **What geographic areas of the state will be most impacted by the proposal?**

The WLEI investments reach a statewide audience and have impacted working lands businesses in all 14 counties of the state. Grant funds have supported businesses of all sizes, sectors, and stages of development. The expectation is that participation is representative of the state's food system. There is some farmer demographic data available in Vermont but we recognize that this is incomplete and not a comprehensive assessment on the Vermont food system's target population.

PROPOSAL

9. **Is this proposal related to COVID-19 response or recovery?**

☑ Yes ☐ No

10. What are you proposing to do?

11. Why do you think it will work? What data or evidence supports this proposal?

12. **What does success look like?**

Access to grant funds and technical assistance to grow their business, pivot to new production methods, expand operations, innovate models, and secure business assistance needed to remain a viable working lands business. Impacts will be increase in gross sales, job growth, maintenance or expansion of acres of land in production, and increased technical assistance offerings to businesses.

13. Are changes to statute needed? If so, what changes or new language are needed? Can this be done via rulemaking? What other laws or regulations will be implicated by this change?

☐ Yes ☑ No

14. What contextual conditions (e.g., social, political, economic, legal, technological, environmental) might facilitate or hinder your ability to successfully implement this proposal?

15. What assumptions are being made about your approach to addressing the problem identified above?

16. **What are the consequences of not implementing this proposal?**

Permanent loss of agricultural land, loss of farming income and culture in Vermont, fewer next generation (new and beginning) farmers on the landscape; lost market opportunity for VT and opportunity to make tourism connection and value to VT

17. What are the possible unintended consequences, both positive and negative, of implementing this proposal?

Stakeholders & Impacts

18. **Which other agencies (SOV or non-SOV) may have an interest in this proposal or its outcomes? What is likely to be their perspective on it?**

ACCD and FPR are co-leads for the WLEI. The Working Lands Board has representation and support from VHCB, VSJF, VEDA, VT Community Loan Fund, Shelburne Farms, and NEVDA. Each of these organizations understand the annual over-subscription for WLEI funds and the growing demand for our working lands businesses.

19. **What outside stakeholders will likely have a position or testify on this proposal? What is likely their perspective on it? Examples of possible stakeholders include municipalities, organizations, business, and regulated entities.**

Any of the WLEB board members would be likely able and willing to testify on the WLEI appropriation - this includes organizations listed above as well as at least 6 businesses

20. **Did you meaningfully consult community members in developing this proposal? If so, how?**

☐ Yes ☑ No

The WLEB board was engaged in developing the funding opportunity but it didn't extend beyond the board and AAFM/ACCD/FRP staff

21. **Does the proposal enhance services and/or seek to reduce disparities to underrepresented or underserved communities? If so, how?**

☑ Yes ☐ No

Aims to make farm viability more attainable - leading to higher paying jobs, new income streams, better work-life balance; new customer access and market development

22. **Could a disparate racial impact or other unintended consequence result from the proposal? Do you have sufficient data to understand whether the proposal would address or create any racial disparities? If not, what data would be needed?**

☐ Yes ☐ No ☑ Maybe

Disparate racial impacts are unintended consequences of these investments, but could occur.

23. **Could a disparate impact for any other marginalized group result from the proposal (including but not limited to groups identified by national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, ability, etc.)?**

☐ Yes ☐ No ☑ Maybe

Hopefully not

24. **How will the proposal incorporate cultural concerns of specific groups (i.e., use of traditional healing practices, use of culturally appropriate diagnostic assessment tools, etc.)?**

unsure

25. **Will public written materials and/or other social marketing strategies generated through this proposal be translated for the target population? Why or why not?**

☐ Yes ☑ No

Not sure, would like to make transition services available. hope additional resources will make this possible

RESOURCES

26. What resources are needed to implement this proposal (human, financial, technological, environmental, etc.)?

27. **Does this proposal have financial implications for the Agency/Dept or other state funds?**

☐ Yes ☑ No

28. **Are cost savings anticipated? If yes, what are the estimated savings and to which fund(s)?**

☐ Yes ☑ No

29. **Does this proposal require modifications (reductions, changes, elimination) in other agency/department programs? If yes, where and what is the justification for reprioritizing?**

☐ Yes ☑ No

30. **Does this proposal require new General Fund dollars? If yes, what is the cost estimate and the source of funding?**

☐ Yes ☑ No

31. **Does this proposal relate to deploying federal dollars (ARPA, IIJA, ESSER, FHWA, etc)? If yes, what is the cost estimate and source of federal funding? If yes, what major initiative category does it fall under?**

☑ Yes: ☐ Housing ☐ Wastewater/water ☒ Economic Development ☐ Other
☐ Broadband ☐ Transportation ☐ Climate Change

☐ No

$3 million

32. If you are proposing to expand an existing program or staffing, what steps have been taken or completed to improve existing processes to make them more effective and efficient?

33. Will this proposal require or make changes to any technology, platform, or software?

☐ Yes ☑ No

34. Does the proposal encourage or prioritize contractors led by members of marginalized groups? This may include, but is not limited to, vendors designated as Minority- or Women-Owned Business Enterprises or Disadvantaged Business Enterprises.

☐ Yes ☑ No

Measurement and Monitoring

35. What performance measures will you use to track how much service was provided by this proposal? What are your expected targets?

PERFORMANCE MEASURE	TARGET

36. What performance measures will you use to track how well service was provided by this proposal? What are your expected targets?

PERFORMANCE MEASURE	TARGET

37. What performance measures will you use to track if customers are better off or you made a difference (e.g., change in knowledge, skill, behavior, circumstance) as a result of this proposal?

PERFORMANCE MEASURE	TARGET

38. Are there staff trained to analyze the data related to the proposal?

☑ Yes ☐ No

39. How and how often will you communicate your performance on this proposal to relevant stakeholders (e.g., PDF report, dashboards, quarterly, annually)?

Upon grant release, at application close, at selection of awardees, and one year post award via programmatic impact report

SECTION III: REFERENCE

Glossary

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE): As defined by the U.S. Department of Transportation, DBEs are "for-profit small business concerns where socially and economically disadvantaged individuals own at least a 51% interest and also control management and daily business operations. African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian-Pacific and Subcontinent Asian Americans, and women are presumed to be socially and economically disadvantaged. Other individuals can also qualify as socially and economically disadvantaged[…]"

Disparate Impact / Disparity: An imbalance or inequality between the treatment of different groups. These imbalances may manifest as differences in economic outcomes, income, housing options, societal treatment, safety, justice outcomes, health, educational opportunity, or other dimensions.

Equity: The condition that would be achieved when a person's race or other demographic group membership is no longer predictive of that person's life outcome.

Marginalized population/group: Communities or groups that have historically experienced systemic barriers to access, resources, and infrastructure investments. It may include communities of color, women, sexual orientation, transgender individuals who identify along the gender spectrum, immigrants and refugees, or people with disabilities. It may also include others who have received limited access to benefits, services, investments, and resources from public/private institutions, including the State of Vermont.

Minority- or Women-Owned Business Enterprise (M/WBE): Businesses that are at least 51% owned and substantially managed by people of color and/or people identifying as women.

Performance Measure: A measure of how well a program, agency or service system is working. Performances measures answer one of these three questions:

1. How much are we doing?
2. How well are we doing it?
3. Is anyone better off?

Performance Measure Target - The quantification of a desired result associated with a particular performance measure.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What should we do if we identify a disparity or other issue after using this tool?**
   Next steps will vary on a case case-by -case basis. At one extreme, it may be wise to withdraw the proposal altogether. More realistically, it may just require tweaks to make the proposal more equitable or efficient in design or delivery. This might mean more money is needed to reach more people or specific people. Other times, this means lengthening the timeline to complete translations *before* launch, not after. There are many ways to improve upon our policy ideas in ways that make our work more effective and more inclusive—contact the Chief Performance Office or the Office of Racial Equity with questions or concerns.

2. **For questions related to demographic or other data, what if there are no data on point?**
   In Vermont, we face challenges with demographic data collection, especially on race and ethnicity. You may struggle to find recent or accurate data to answer the questions in this tool—do your best, cite your sources as needed, and thoroughly explain what we know and what we don't know. If there are gaps in data that are relevant to the proposal, consider using the proposal as a vehicle to capture those data—this helps our colleagues across state government who will rely on these data in the future.

3. **For questions related to demographic or other data, should we only provide quantitative data? Or should we provide qualitative data too?**
   Anecdotal and qualitative data are important to policymaking. They provide policymakers and analysts a glimpse into the reality "on the ground," and provide a line of communication for people with lived experience to provide meaningful insight into programs and policies that impact their lives. That said, use these sorts of data judiciously: have a plan for how, when, where, and why to collect it. Create spaces where respondents know they are safe to share their feedback, and return to the community to show them how their feedback impacted our work. Data, time, and feedback are valuable, so consider compensating people for their participation.

Further Learning

- Learn more about the State Strategic Plan and the Act 186 Population-Level Outcomes:
  - Statewide Strategic Plan
  - Annual Outcomes Report

- Learn more about continuous improvement, Results-Based Accountability and performance measurement:
  - Chief Performance Office
  - Continuous Improvement SharePoint Site (SOV Internal)
  - Results-Based Accountability Overview
  - Performance and Productivity Measure Primer (SOV Internal)

- Learn more about how to advance equity and inclusion through policy and programs:
  - Equity Toolkit
  - The Curb Cut Effect