

SBTAE

SMALL BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EXCHANGE



Program Wrap Report



Program Report presented by



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PROJECTS AWARDED

Funding intended to serve a minimum of 183 awards was allocated carefully to complete 209 projects by local professionals that support a business's growth and transformation.

209

BUSINESSES ENGAGED

The program was oversubscribed and not every applicant was awarded a grant. However, all applicants were invited to a network of support through email, social media, and in person workshops. Businesses that did receive a program award spent 1-8 months working with a Navigator and a professional vendor.

732

UNIQUE VENDORS

These professionals formed lasting relationships with businesses in their own neighborhoods. Their services were paid as the major cost of this program, benefitting two businness (or more!) with each project.

279

PARTICIPATING NONPROFITS

The shared knowledge of the 12 RDCs of Vermont, 5 Outreach Partner Nonprofits who supported referrals and needs of the prioritized groups of business owners, and nonprofits who supported the SBTAE workshops.

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Success Story



PAPRIKA CATERING COMPANY

BUSINESS OWNER: **Jacqueline de Achaval**

VENDOR: **Tabi Web Solutions**

NAVIGATOR: **Mercy Sheehan**

REGION: **Central**

Paprika Catering is a Waterbury-based catering duo who creates empanadas and more. They worked with Tabi Web Solutions on a digital portolio and online shop.

Executive Summary

The Small Business Technical Assistance Exchange (SBTAE) was a grant program administered by Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation (CVEDC) during the 2023 Fiscal Year. SBTAE was authorized by an allocation made by the legislature in the 2023 session, with funding administered by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

The purpose of the program was to fund special, one-time projects for Vermont-based businesses that may not be able to access such services otherwise. Navigators from the RDCs of Vermont helped business owners in each region determine eligibility, apply, access the program, find a vendor and identify a good project, keep the project on track, and connect with additional resources.

The program was projected to satisfy 183 projects, it actually received over 700 applications and completed 209 transformational projects throughout the state.

SBTAE built upon the learnings of two previous business assistance grants: ReStart Vermont Technical Assistance (RVTA) and through its role in the Community Navigator Pilot Program (CNPP). In this evolved iteration, SBTAE became a more effective program, whilst encountering new concerns as it administered the program.

CVEDC was a demonstrated leader in each of the three programs, and was asked to take an increasingly larger role. For this program, CVEDC was the Administrator. We worked to: present the concept to the Rural Caucus as a Priority Item in FY23. We received the Award legislatively, and then from ACCD as a grant in September, 2023. We designed and implemented the program to launch November 6, 2023.

Throughout the program, CVEDC acted as the central hub for the 11 RDCs of Vermont, 6 Navigators, 5 Outreach Partners, 5-member RDC Oversight Committee, ACCD, Legislature, 183 grant recipients and 279 vendors to query, support, and report to. We communicated to the public on program updates—three TV interviews, 5 public webinars, weekly meetings, and social media campaigns.

This work would not have been possible without the full participation of all 12 of Vermont's Regional Development Corporations (RDCs), our program navigators, the cooperation of our five outreach partners and the many small businesses and vendors who made every effort to achieve success.

LU.LU ICE CREAM

BUSINESS OWNER: **Laura Mack**

VENDOR: **LONDONmiddlebury, LLC.**

NAVIGATOR: **Karen Duguay**

REGION: **Addison**

lu.lu ice cream worked with marketing team LONDONmiddlebury to develop a completely new website that matches their brand identity and goals.

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Success Story





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Success Story

BLACK SACRED SOUL CLOTHING LLC

BUSINESS OWNER: Elisee Seeko
Siriwayo

VENDOR: Flint Consulting and Eternity
Marketing

NAVIGATOR: Cooper Babbitt

REGION: Chittenden

Black Sacred Soul Clothing of Winooski silk screens empowering designs onto their unique streetwear. Besides bringing a smile to everyone's face, they also enjoyed working to grow their following with support from Eternity Marketing and better track their finances with Flint Consulting.

Program Goals & Benefits

An established priority with this program was that it be as equitable as possible. Equity was addressed geographically. Many of the guidelines of the program were also shaped around inclusion of people who face systematic barriers to the success of their business. Elevating a diverse group of business owners brings greater economic success for all of us.

Equity by Region

While it may make sense for the most business awards to go to areas with the most businesses, this inevitably reinforces the strength of those communities that tend to receive economic investments. The program, designed to economically truss all of Vermont, should make sure that the program is not overly concentrated in one region to the disadvantage of other regions. The economic harm caused by the pandemic was not limited geographically, and so neither could the repair be thus limited.

To achieve equitable reach, the state's twelve RDCs paired their zones and assigned one navigator to work full time within that merged zone. This resulted in six navigator positions (new or re-assigned positions) dedicated to administering the program at the local level.

Equity by Demographic Priority

Another goal of the program was that business owners have a fair chance to receive assistance through this program, understanding that certain populations can be challenged systemically. This uses the five groupings that have been identified in the ReVTA and CNPP programs and include four additional priority markers to account for intersectionalities that can further complicate an individual's situation.

The priority groups of the program included:

Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), people with disabilities, justice-involved people, business owners from the LGBTQ+ community, Mature Vermonters, young business owners, veterans, women, and those who live in rural areas.

Applications from individuals who identified in one or more of the groups listed above were prioritized. Additionally, nonprofits whose services include specialization in advocacy for those groups assisted with forming an inclusive program with their clients in mind. The Outreach Partners received funding to support the extra work it can involve to explain to clients who are unfamiliar with a government program how the process works.

Diversity in Vendors

Professional service providers are often eager to participate in programs like SBTAE and its predecessors. The vendors receive the payments of the program, yes, but this is only part of the reason that the work is appealing to them. The average grant award in the program was \$3,463.

In this model, a business owner who has worn all of the hats of the business, often for many years, is agreeing that their business could grow if they would get some professional advice about one of those hats. It may be bookkeeping, marketing, having and maintaining a website--there is a gap in the business owner's skill set, time, or network, and this key skill needs attention for the business to grow.

A business owner may not know how to research, vet, and hire a vendor for the first time. How do you know if a CPA is scrupulous? Sometimes the same demographic concerns that the program hoped to address come up in vendor selection. Financials or legal matters are often informed by our cultural background, beliefs, or how we engage with our families. Having options to work with someone who shares and understands those pieces of your background will help solidify a strong working relationship that is respectful of both people's lives and experiences.

During ReVTA and CNPP, Federal funds served the programs which meant vendors (grantees) had to meet high standards of documentation to participate. This made many vendors eager to work with the program ineligible.

State funding was more flexible, allowing many more businesses to participate as service providers. We recognize that many Vermonters are multi-skilled and may be able to provide professional service as a self-employed individual rather than a formalized business structure.

Our goal in lowering the threshold for participation was to be as inclusive as possible, pairing as many providers with business owners for these projects. The relationships that form hopefully last beyond this project and provide another avenue of support and a positive business relationship for both parties.



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Success Story

BURROWS SPORTS

BUSINESS OWNER: Peter Case

VENDOR: Creative Catalyst Communications

NAVIGATOR: Kate Harris

REGION: Brattleboro

Creative Catalyst Communications supported Burrows Sales in a comprehensive brand identity and market analysis project after the beloved sports store in Brattleboro changed hands to new owners.

Program Outcomes

- SBTAE saw a 26% increase in women-owned business participation and a 38% increase in BIPOC-owned business participation vs. previous programs CNPP and ReVTA.
- SBTAE offered 4.5 times as many vendors of color, 3 times as many vendors with disabilities, and twice as many New American vendors as previous programs.
- Vermont Womenpreneurs and Vermont Professionals of Color Network referred the most clients into the program where previously RDCs been top referrers.
- Goals to achieve equity by demographics and region were surpassed with better regional participation than in previous programs.
- Positive feedback about the program was strong with emphasis on Navigators and the quality of the service provided.
- Marketing helped a rural art supply store announce its move to a new location; a writer was able to copyright her audio works.
- RDC Navigators took the lead on introducing business owners to a variety of service providers in their own backyards

Program Feedback

“Thanks to Deshea’s guidance and expertise, I now have a deeper understanding of various systems and have developed exciting marketing plans for the future. Working with Desha has been a transformative experience.”

“I would like to report that our project with 45 N. and Dave Schmidt is complete. It was a great experience, informative and educational! It wasn’t just hiring somebody to do a job it was having somebody there to explain, describe and teach! This was an awesome experience!”

“thank you again so much for helping me through the SBTAE grant process. The online course project that was the goal of the grant is now finished and up and running. I’m really happy with how it turned out.

I had NO idea when I started this project that it would require a complete overhaul of my website in order to make it possible for the online course modules to work. After I did the website overhaul, Kristen (vendor) helped by creating some of the course website infrastructure and providing a marketing plan. And then there was the lengthy process of creating the content (writing scripts, recording, editing, graphics....) which I knew would take me some time, but I pulled it off.”



BIRDIEBLUE

BUSINESS OWNER: **Kate Harvey**

VENDOR: **Owl's Iris Photography**

NAVIGATOR: **Karen Duguay**

REGION: **Lamoille**

BirdieBlue is a Stowe-based manufacturer of chic bags using repurposed skiwear and other ski materials. Owl's Iris Photography took on some exciting slopeside photo shoots for Birdie's marketing resources.

Budget & Costs

The unique program model does have a higher cost than some programs because there is a hands-on, client first approach. One business owner will engage with at minimum two providers at length--the Navigator and the vendor. But most participants engage with a larger group of new supporters of the business.

Each granted dollar of the program supports the business through service and the vendor, also a Vermont-based small business, with the project award.

Since 2020, RDCs of Vermont have deployed \$3M of State and Federal funding through this model, serving 792 transformative projects for business owners. Here are how SBTAE costs broke down:

- \$1,250,000.00 Allocation by Legislature
- \$342,500.00 Subgrants to partners
- \$110,301.51 Program Administration by CVEDC
- \$797,197.49 Grant Awards

Detail on Subgrantees

Number of Subgrants Issued at date of report

OUTREACH PARTNERS

Working Fields	\$5,000.00
Vermont Professionals of Color Network	\$10,000.00
Community Resilience Organizations	\$10,000.00
Mercy Connections	\$10,000.00
Vermont Womenpreneuers	\$10,000.00
RDCs - OUTREACH	
Bennington County Regional Corporation	\$2,500.00
Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation	\$2,500.00
Lake Champlain Islands Economic Development Corporation	\$2,500.00
Lamoille Economic Development Corporation	\$2,500.00
Springfield Regional Development Corporation	\$2,500.00

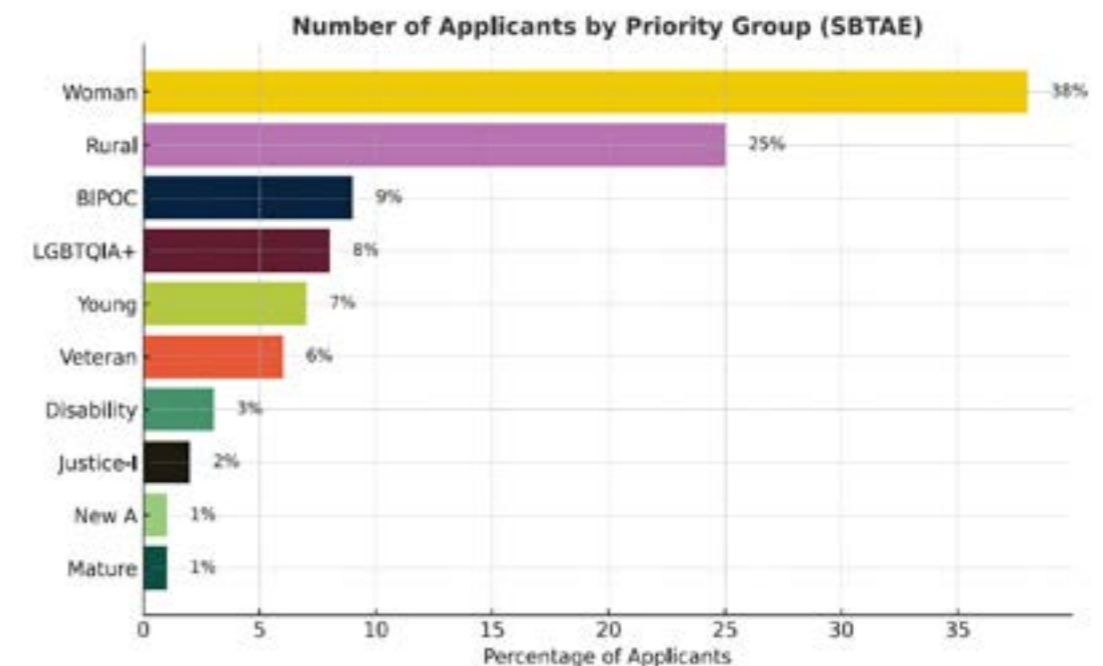
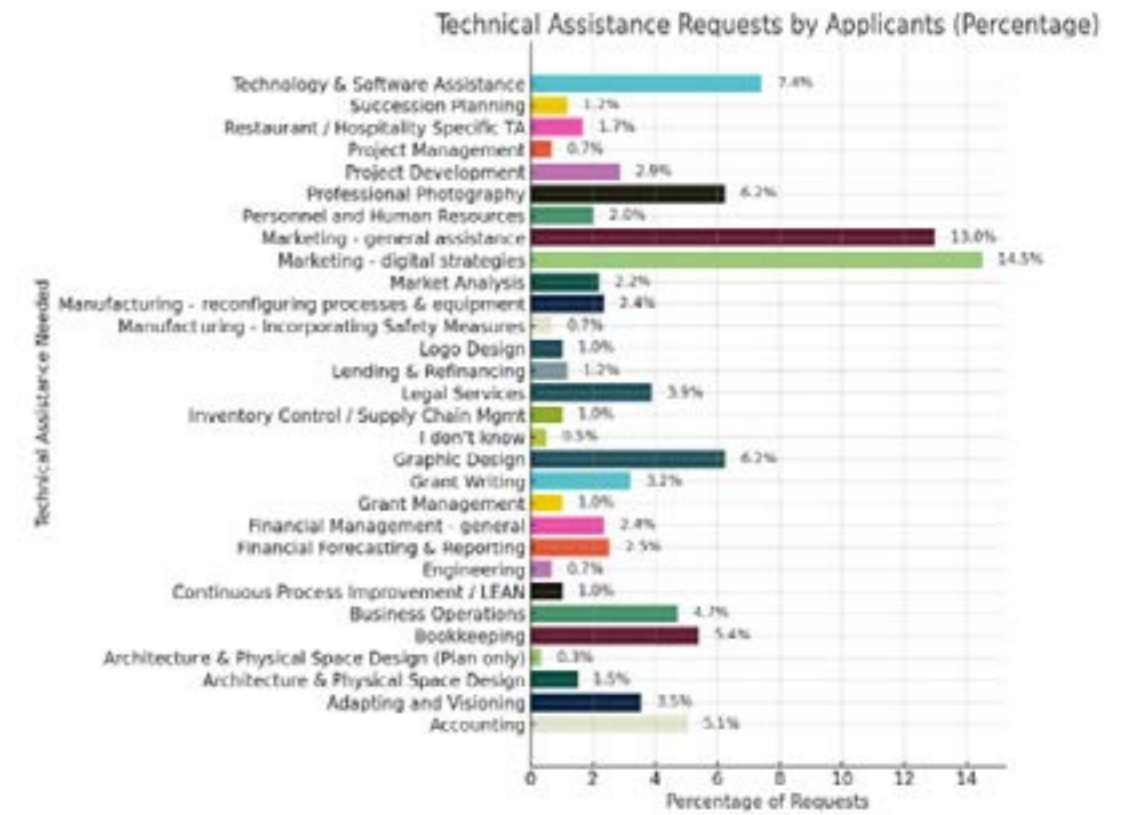
RDCs - NAVIGATOR

Addison County Econmic Development Corporation	\$47,500.00
Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region	\$47,500.00
Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation	\$47,500.00
Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation	\$47,500.00
Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation	\$47,500.00
Northeastern Vermont Development Association	\$47,500.00
Total Paid to date:	\$342,500.00

Program Data

Technical Assistance Requests by Category

The following bar chart presents the percentage breakdown of technical assistance requests based on the data:





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Founded in 1976 with a mission to attract and retain good wage paying jobs for the people of Central Vermont.