

2/17/26 Testimony

House Commerce and Community Development

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Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance

VOBA is a state-wide nonprofit organization established in 2018 to educate Vermonters on outdoor recreation and to educate businesses on development, collaboration initiatives, and outdoor recreation policy. VOBA members are dedicated to Vermont's natural and recreation resources and equitable access for all in the outdoors.

www.vermontoutdoorbusinessalliance.org



US Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023





A Time of Unprecedented Economic Challenge

Despite a tremendous winter for outdoor recreation, insurmountable headwinds continue to hinder a positive business outlook in 2026:

- Costs of tariffs
- Decline in Canadian visitation
- Drop in consumer confidence
- Loss of federal funding
- Impacts from climate change



- A decline in January foot traffic to a retailer was 50% below pre-pandemic levels of 660,000 customers.
- Tariffs cost a 5 - year old Vermont manufacturer 20% of their 2025 revenues.
- A guide service saw a 25% decline in bookings and another business experienced a 50% decrease in Canadian visitors renting bicycles last year.
- Tariff-driven increases of products led a retailer to reduce full-time staff by 27%.
- In 2024, variable snowfall, mid-season rain, and rapid freeze-thaw cycles caused an outdoor center to lose significant operational days and revenue.



VOBA FY27 Legislative Asks: Economic Development

Invest \$100,000 in VOBA's Outdoor Entrepreneur Program

- To facilitate technical assistance to small- and mid- sized companies at all stages of development for strategic and financial planning, market analysis and access, and climate adaptation and resilience.
- Outcomes would lead to stability and collaboration during a time of economic uncertainty.



Support \$500,000 for the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Community Grant program

- Included in the Governor's FY27 budget and we recommend base funding within the Dept of Forest, Parks and Recreation
- Request to include VOREC funding in the Committee's budget memo.

A VOREC grant renovated the **Danville** train station where **Lamoille Valley Bike Tours** rents bikes to users of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail.



VOBA's Outdoor Entrepreneur Program

VOBA provides business development services to 100 entrepreneurs and cured a service provider network of 30 business and financial advisors, trade and marketing consultants, and climate resilience planners offering specific outdoor sector expertise.

- 30 manufacturers producing gear, apparel and accessories attended 5 regional and national trade shows; 30 businesses were vendors at the VT Gear Makers Festival
- 10 businesses received 10 hours of pitchfest coaching; Presented at Outdoor Pitchfest

"Going forward, the pitch coaching will shape how I talk about my business, both internally and externally. It helped me refine my core message, clarify my value proposition, and develop a more compelling narrative, all of which will support stronger partnerships and growth."





VOBA's Outdoor Entrepreneur Program

- 8 businesses participated in a 10 - week capital strategy cohort

"We were selected for VOBA's financial planning resource to educate entrepreneurs and small business owners on how to raise capital. It was an eye-opening, inspiring experience and we would not have had the opportunity were it not for VOBA."

- 50 attended VOBA Business Agility Workshop with trade, legal, and financial experts
- 5 businesses and organizations were profiled in VOBA climate resilience guidebook



Case Study: [The Boot Pro Ski & Bike Shop](#)

The Context: The Boot Pro began as a 600-square-foot ski boot-fitting shop at the base of Okemo Mountain Resort, growing over 17 years into a 6,800-square-foot, full-service ski & bike shop known for top-tier boot fitting and race tuning. As they assessed their climate exposure, owners Alex and Shon Racicot identified several





VOREC Community Grant Program

The VOREC grant program has demonstrated a strong return on investment:

- \$11.2 million in 84 grants to businesses, organizations, and municipalities across all 14 counties beginning in 2019.
- Increased demand for the program evident in 2024 grant round where 51 projects were awarded \$6.3 million from 127 applications requesting \$21 million.
- VOBA's VOREC grant of \$150,000 to support workforce development in Montpelier/Randolph, St Johnsbury/Lyndonville, and Rutland/Killington leveraged \$400,000 in additional funding for statewide technical and climate jobs training.
 - 19 trainings have supported 140 professionals, benefitting 60 employers.





VOREC Community Grant Program

Petra Cliffs Climbing Center and Mountaineering School in **Burlington** purchased new mobility and adaptive climbing gear and trained staff in adaptive coaching skills.

"David benefits enormously from the individualized attention of the 1:1 lessons through Petra Cliffs, which allow him to feel strong, powerful, and competent doing the activities he loves. The confidence and joy he experiences during rock climbing are a lifeline for him in the midst of many life challenges."

*"The VOREC grant for new trails was a factor in us choosing it as a place to live when finally making the move to VT. The work done [in **Randolph**] has been an example to neighboring communities and added to the economic viability of the downtown." - **guide***

*"The marketing resources that we developed have led to outcomes such as greater event attendance, higher business revenues, and even people moving to Central VT. The infrastructure we are developing is helping to build **Montpelier's** outdoor recreation economy in a time when we desperately need economic development." - **trail builder***



VOBA FY27 Legislative Asks: Economic Development

We appreciate your consideration of investing in:

- \$100,000 for the VOBA Outdoor Entrepreneur Program to facilitate technical assistance.
- \$500,000 for the FPR-VOREC grant program as base funding.

Both programs demonstrate the positive ripple effect of funding:

- With a small investment in VOBA, we can bolster the success of 40 VT companies.
- With VOREC awards averaging \$134,000, another round of grants to businesses, organizations, and municipalities would make a real difference to VT communities.

