

Legal Services for Vermont's Small Businesses

Update to Vermont General
Assembly, Senate Committee on
Economic Development, Housing and
General Affairs

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 Vermont Small Business
Law Center
VERMONT LAW & GRADUATE SCHOOL





Access to legal services for small businesses

- Individual educational consults
- Paid attorney referrals for qualifying businesses (10 hours paid, we find the attorney)
- Public educational events



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Our numbers

Outcome	2024	2025	%+/-
Intakes from businesses requesting legal education	288	347	+20%
Educational consultations with small businesses and non-profits	149	212	+42%
Businesses matched with attorneys for representation	~165*	~165*	Flat**
Educational presentations to groups of business owners, and flood clinics	62	70	+13%
Attendees at educational presentations	590	537	-9%

* Placements are approximate, lag behind educational consultations

** Attorney network maxed out without additional funding (above current budget)



Our attorney networks

- General practice network (VBA)
- Capital transaction and employee ownership network (SSBCI)
- National pro bono firm (additional capacity)
- VLGS-VBA Lawyer Incubator Program (building solo and small firm capacity)



2025 Partners

- Vermont Small Business Development Center
- Vermont Professionals of Color Network
- Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity
- Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center
- Magnuson Center for Entrepreneurship
- Vermont Arts Council
- Common Good VT
- Brattleboro Development Corporation
- Vermont Forestry Accelerator
- Upper Valley Business Alliance
- Generator Makerspace
- ClimateReady VT
- Hub Co-Works/Startup Rutland
- DeltaClime VT



2025 Presentation Topics

- Legal Basics for Startups
 - Entity formation and governance
 - Liability, risk, and insurance
 - Contracts
 - Intellectual property
 - Zoning and regulatory compliance
 - Having employees
 - Hiring and working with a lawyer
- Basics for food-based businesses
- Legal Landscape for Vermont's Arts & Nonprofit Community
- Lending & financing for small businesses
- Protecting your innovations (IP)
- Sole proprietor vs LLC, managing risk
- Legal basics for MAID businesses
- Legal basics for mental-health practitioners
- Separating business from personal
- Intellectual property and AI



Areas in Need of Education (2025 Observations)

- Small-scale food producers
- Multi-state service providers (relocating individuals)
- Transitions (informal, structured/over time, straight buy/sell)
- Non-profit boards
- Targeted litigation (IP infringement, ADA noncompliant website)
- Exiting partnerships and joint ventures
- Employee ownership
- Land use (Act 250 & zoning) and neighbor disputes
- Written agreements (especially commercial leases)
- Childcare providers
- Professional services liability (especially waivers)



Flood Response

2023-2024 work (initial response):

- Flood clinics
- Attorney referrals
- VBA partnership

2025-present work (recovery):

- M&T Bank Foundation funding, resilience (\$12k)
- VBA flood survivor referrals
- Buyouts, coordinating with long-term recovery groups
- Small residential landlord challenges



Funding Status

- Currently 100% federally-funded:
 - FY23 Congressionally-Directed Spending grant (SBA-administered) through 6/30/2026
 - U.S. Treasury/State Small Business Credit Initiative (with VtSBDC) through 5/31/2026
- Grants/donations (<3):
 - M&T Bank (+\$12k)
 - Brattleboro Development Credit Corp (+\$800) <3



Capital Raise Attempts

Promising options:

- Congress (\$555k) - just came through 2/10
- Kauffman Foundation (toolkit development)

Attempts to raise capital for base operations:

- NBRC Catalyst (GMEDC statewide project on RPP List)
- Hoffman Foundation Lever for Change
- Mascoma Bank Foundation
- Nasdaq Foundation
- TD Bank Foundation



Current Operating Budget and Ask

Small operating budget to maintain capacity - \$600k

- ~175 businesses educated and referred
- 50 presentations per year

Ask – half (\$300k)

- **Allows operations to continue, prevents closure, opens funding options**
- **Facilitates educational programming for new legislation and new legal issues as they arise**
- **Bolsters existing ecosystem:**
 - **General Assembly**
 - **SBA**
 - **VtSBDC**
 - **VT PoC**
 - **MBDP**
 - **AGO**
 - **Incubators/accelerators**
 - **Chambers of Commerce/RDCs**
 - **Community/workforce development**

Thank you

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