



## FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) Update as of December 6, 2019

### **Should we submit our application as a Word document or PDF document?**

Please submit your written application as a Word document. Your team can cut and paste pages 4-6 in the application (<https://www.bostonfed.org/workingcities/vermont/process/index.htm>) and submit this portion with your answers as your submitted application. Applications should be submitted by email to Steve Michon at [stephen.michon@bos.frb.org](mailto:stephen.michon@bos.frb.org)

Additional supporting documents that are allowed through the application guidelines can be submitted as Word or PDF documents, whichever is easiest for you.

### **Should members of our team reserve January 13, 2020 for an interview? Who should participate in the interview?**

The Jury will invite most, but not necessarily all, teams to participate in an interview on January 13, 2020 (snow date January 15). Each team should determine who among the team members should join and best represent your application. In other states, teams have brought a range of 4 to 10 people from their team to the interviews. The interviews will be 45 minutes and take place in Montpelier. Team members can join in-person or via video or conference call. More information about the interviews will be given to teams after December 13, 2019.

### **The Planning Grant Application asks the lead applicant/organization to submit its most recent IRS Form 990 in Question #3f. What if our organization does not have such a form, such as a private organization, public agency, board or other IRS designated type organization? Can a 501c-6 apply?**

The lead applicant can be any type of organization – private, nonprofit, public, or other. If the lead organization does not have an IRS Form 990, please provide evidence of whatever IRS designation your organization has as well as evidence of effective financial management. Attachments can be submitted of this evidence.

### **Questions 9 and 10 on the application seem to be pretty similar. Can you help me understand the difference between the two questions?**

The two questions are pretty similar.

Question 9 is “What are resources and assets that your team can build on to address this opportunity/challenge?” Your team’s answer to this question can focus more on general resources and assets such as human capital, natural or built assets, organizational capacity, or some other indigenous resource or asset.

Question 10 is “What else is already happening in your town, city or region to address the opportunity/challenge you’ve identified?” Your team’s answer to this question can focus more on existing or new investments, initiatives, policies, other collaborative processes, and/or plans

that are relevant to your proposed Working Communities Challenge effort. This second question also allows up to three supporting documents, such as newspaper articles, plans, studies, etc. The word limit for this question also can be used to explain or give context to these supporting documents.

In the end, we recognize that it may be very appropriate to have overlap among your answers to these two questions. Or, your team can use these two questions to give longer answers to one or more of your resources, assets, investments, initiatives, policies, collaborative process, or plans. Your team will not be penalized for either approach to answering both of these questions.

**Can state or federal agencies like ACCD or USDA be on the core team if they are also on the steering committee??**

If representatives from ACCD or USDA are part of your team, they will need to recuse themselves from participating during your team's application and interview process because they have representatives on the Working Communities Steering Committee. If your team receives a planning grant we can work with you team to determine the best way representatives from the federal agencies can participate as core members on your team in the planning phase.

If these representatives are also on the WCC Jury they will be disclosing their conflicts to the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and their other colleagues on the Jury through a signed "conflict disclosure form." Members of the Jury who fall into this category will be recusing themselves from any deliberations and decisions related to your team's application as part of the Jury process.

## FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) Update as of November 25, 2019

**Is it true that the Working Communities Challenge will be increasing the number of Planning Grant and Implementation Grant awards?**

Yes. A generous group of partners has committed funding so that the Working Communities Challenge will now award 8 Planning Grants of \$15,000 each and 4 Implementation Grants of \$300,000 each. This is an increase from the originally announced number of awards of 6 Planning Grants and 3 Implementation Grants. The list of funders committing money to the funding pool is at the end of this FAQ. All funding from this pool goes directly to Vermont's rural towns, regions, and small cities through the Planning Grant and Implementation Grant awards.

**We have been notified that another team has submitted a Letter of Interest that includes the same priority community as our team. Can both of our leadership teams with the same priority community submit a full Planning Grant application due on December 13, 2019?**

The Working Communities Challenge will only accept one Planning Grant application for each priority community. As your teams work together to figure out the best path forward to submit one application that covers the priority community, keep in mind that this path forward may include:

- a coordinated application that brings together the teams,
- a decision that one team will refocus its efforts to remove an overlapping priority community from its application,
- a decision that only one team will step forward with an application that includes the priority community because it best fits the emphasis and intent of the Working Community Challenge, or
- some other approach that is made by the leadership teams.

We recognize that this decision is best made by local leaders. With that in mind, the Steering Committee and staff of the Federal Reserve are not allowed to coach, facilitate, or intervene in this process.

**Is the Working Communities Jury or Boston Fed narrowing down the teams that submitted Letters of Interest to a smaller group that then will be asked to submit a Planning Grant application?**

All teams that submitted a Letter of Interest are eligible to submit a Planning Grant application, although teams are asked to figure out a way to comply with the requirement that no two teams include the same priority community as part of their application (should they be in this situation). See the above question for more on this requirement.

**If our team gets an interview with the Jury, what are the dates that we should hold on our calendar so that members of our team are available? Will all teams be invited for an interview?**

The independent Jury that will award the Planning Grants recognizes that a brief, typewritten application may not fully capture your team’s collaborative nature, capacity, and enthusiasm for taking on this work. Therefore, the Jury will select teams to be interviewed on January 13, 2020 based on the assessment of the pool of written applications. It is anticipated that most, but not necessarily all, teams will make it to the interview process. The Jury will invite teams to participate in the interview in-person, or via video conference or conference call. The interviews will be 45 minutes and take place in Montpelier. The snow date for interviews will be January 15, 2020. More information about the interviews will be given to teams after December 13, 2019.

**The application asks for proof of 501c3 status. Can a 501c-6 apply?**

Yes, a 501c6 can apply. The lead applicant can be any type of organization – private, nonprofit, public, or other. Also note that the Planning Grant application asks the lead applicant/organization to submit its most recent IRS Form 990 in Question #3f. If the lead organization does not have an IRS Form 990, please provide evidence of whatever IRS designation your organization has as well as evidence of effective financial management. Attachments can be submitted of this evidence.

**Where can I find the earlier released FAQ with a separate list of questions and answers that covers the overall goals, structure and process of the Working Communities Challenge as well as provides guidance to submit the Planning Grant application?**

Community leaders can find the original FAQ released on November 5, 2019 at <https://www.bostonfed.org/workingcities/vermont/process/index.htm> (see “Planning Grant Application FAQ”).

**List of Funders.**

Doris Duke Charitable Foundation  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
Northern Border Regional Commission/USDA  
State of Vermont  
Vermont Community Foundation  
NeighborWorks America  
Avangrid Foundation  
National Life Foundation  
TD Bank  
Green Mountain Power  
Efficiency Vermont  
Pomerleau Real Estate  
People's United  
Vermont Energy Investment Corporation  
Vermont Electric Power Company, Inc. (VELCO)  
Northfield Savings Bank  
Vermont State Employees Credit Union (VSECU)  
Housing Vermont

**FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) Original as of November 5, 2019**

**I. Overview of the Working Communities Challenge and Planning Phase**

**What does the Working Communities Challenge support?**

The Working Communities Challenge (WCC) supports cross-sector teams working collaboratively to build strong, healthy economies and communities in Vermont’s rural towns, regions, and small cities. With a focus on changing the way systems work to benefit residents, especially residents with low incomes, this three-year grant competition is supported by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (Boston Fed), the State of Vermont, national and local philanthropy, and private sector businesses. A 17-member Steering Committee of Vermont leaders guide and oversee the effort. See the [Vision and Goals](#) statement found on the Vermont Working Communities Challenge [website](#) to learn more about the core elements of what we support.

**What are key dates and information for the Planning Phase and Implementation Phase of the WCC?**

Planning Grant Application and Phase

Letter of Interest (LOI) Due: Friday, November 1, 2019 at 5:00pm

Written Application Due: Friday, December 13, 2019 at 5:00pm  
Team Interviews with Jury: January 13-27, 2020  
Planning Grant Awards Announced: Friday, January 31, 2020  
Number and Size of Awards: 6-8 Planning Grant Awards of \$15,000 each  
Grant Start and End Date: Friday, January 31, 2020 through Monday, June 15, 2020

#### Implementation Grant Application and Phase

Only those that participate in the Planning Phase will be eligible to apply for the Implementation Grant Award.

Written Application Due: June 15, 2020  
Team Interviews with Jury: June/July (TBD) 2020  
Implementation Grant Awards Announced: September (TBD), 2020  
Number and Size of Awards: 3-4 Implementation Grants awards of up to \$300,000 each  
Grant Start Date: August/September (TBD), 2020  
Duration: Three-years

#### **Why is cross-sector collaboration a focus of the WCC? What are some best practices/learned lessons for bringing together a cross-sector collaborative team?**

Cross-sector collaboration is the ability to work together across the nonprofit, private, and public sectors to achieve a shared, long-term vision. Places that develop a culture of cross-sector collaboration strengthen their capacity to adapt to changing conditions and overcome unanticipated challenges, and most importantly, are able to sustain progress toward a long-term shared goal. See the lessons learned on collaborative leadership in the “Regional Information Sessions” PowerPoint on the Vermont Working Communities Challenge [website](#) (slides 12, 13, 17, 18) or [Sparkling Change in New England’s Smaller Cities: Lessons from Early Rounds of the Working Cities Challenge](#).

#### **According to the Planning Grant Application, our team must build “meaningful engagement of a diverse set of residents, including those with low-incomes.” How do we do this?**

Community engagement empowers residents to participate in the development and implementation of your initiative. The Planning Phase is designed to help teams understand why and how to do this. Because communities have different structures, capacity and readiness to address resident engagement we understand that not everyone will have this aspect fully built out, nor do we expect it, for your Planning Grant Application. A lesson from other states is that it is helpful to have a partner at the table who already practices community engagement with a diverse group of residents.

#### **What is meant by systems change?**

Systems change involves a hard look at local processes, institutional practice, and local culture, with an eye toward determining what would cause the community’s systems (e.g. education, housing, child care) to operate more effectively. Faulty systems often block people from new opportunities or get in the way of economic well-being. The Planning Phase provides a structure to understand how local systems are affecting people in your community, especially residents with low-incomes, and what will need to change to make those systems work better for everyone.

**What is the Planning Phase and what kind of planning and technical assistance is provided?**

The Planning Phase is best described as a “get to know you” or “learning” phase where each team will learn about the core elements of the Working Communities Challenge (WCC) and how they might fit with your team and strengthen your approach. This 5-month phase provides content, practical exercises, and team time related to WCC’s core elements. The core elements we will focus on during this phase are: collaborative leadership, community engagement, learning orientation, systems change, and diversity, equity and inclusion. There will be three in-person sessions during the phase, tentatively scheduled for:

- Meeting 1 Week of February 24/March 9
- Meeting 2 Week of April 13
- Meeting 3 week of May 18.

We anticipate teams also will use the phase to get ready for and decide if they want to submit an application to participate in the Implementation Phase.

**Do we need to have a plan at the end of the Planning Phase?**

No. We expect your team to have a stronger understanding of the challenge you are tackling, deeper partnerships and ways to continue to engage residents, and a clearer shared purpose to drive your work in the future.

## II. Planning Grant Application

### **Can we add or change partners between submitting our Letter of Interest and submitting our Planning Grant Application? How about changing partners during the Planning Phase?**

Yes, in other states it has been common practice for teams to add or change partners from the LOI stage to their submission of the Planning Grant Application. Moreover, past experience suggests that teams often add or change partners during the Planning Phase, especially as the leadership team adjusts its approach or discovers that it should include other groups at the table to achieve its goals. This can be an example of a team practicing a ‘learning orientation’ that is encouraged by the WCC model. Teams that adapt and work as they learn are typically more successful with our approach than teams that remain static.

### **Is it okay for the same organization to be included in multiple Letter of Interests or Planning Grant Applications?**

The same organization can be supportive of multiple LOIs and Planning Grant Applications, but it cannot be the *lead applicant/organization* in multiple LOIs and Planning Grant Applications. Partner organizations will have the opportunity to explain their roles in Question 4 and 5 in the Planning Grant Application.

### **Will all teams that submit a Letter of Interest be invited to submit a Planning Grant Application? What if two teams submit a Letter of Interest that includes the same priority community?**

The Jury will only consider one Planning Grant application per priority community. That is, if there are two leadership teams with the same priority community or communities identified in their LOIs, then we require both of those leadership teams to figure out how they will submit only one Planning Grant Application between them. Federal Reserve staff will notify teams shortly after November 1, 2019 if there is more than one team that has submitted a LOI with the same priority community or communities. Between November 1 and December 13 these teams will need to figure out the best path forward to submit one application that covers the priority community. This path may include a coordinated application that brings together both teams, a decision that one team will refocus its efforts to remove an overlapping priority community, a decision that only one team will step forward with an application because it best fits the emphasis and intent of the Working Community Challenge, or some other approach that is made by the leadership team. The Steering Committee and staff of the Federal Reserve is not allowed to coach, facilitate, or intervene in this process.

### **What is the role of the lead applicant/organization identified in the application, and does the lead applicant/organization need to be a nonprofit organization?**

The lead applicant/organization is simply a leader and their organizational entity that agrees to take responsibility for the task of coordinating the team and application. This organization and the responsible party doesn’t need to continue in the role going forward. We will encourage teams to think more deeply about partners’ roles and responsibilities during the Planning Phase. The lead applicant can be any type of organization – private, nonprofit, public, or other.

**The Planning Grant Application asks the lead applicant/organization to submit its most recent IRS Form 990 in Question #3f. What if our organization does not have such a form, such as a public agency, board or other IRS designated type organization?**

If the lead organization does not have an IRS Form 990, please provide evidence of whatever IRS designation your organization has as well as evidence of effective financial management. Attachments can be submitted of this evidence.

**Is it important to demonstrate our team’s ability to collaborate in the Planning Grant Application?**

Cross-sector collaboration is at the core of the Working Communities Challenge. We recognize that some teams will have a longer history of this type of collaboration, other teams will be more emergent, and still others will be newly formed but show a lot of promise in terms of their potential for cross-sector collaboration. Teams can demonstrate their desire, willingness and/or past experiences of cross-sector collaboration as part of questions 9-12 on the written Planning Grant Application. Teams will also have the opportunity to describe their desire, willingness and past experiences of collaboration during the interviews process, if selected for an interview.

**Can we submit a Planning Grant Application to build upon an existing collaborative effort?**

Yes. The WCC is not meant to replace or compete with an existing collaborative effort in town, but rather to deepen and broaden this work if it exists. A community that builds on existing collaborative work may lead to a stronger application and increase the likelihood of success for the overall initiative. Please note that the WCC looks for all sectors (public, private, non-profit, community) to be involved on teams, so building on an existing effort may involve broadening the partnership. If there is another collaborative in town, the selection Jury may ask how and why the team is partnering with them (or not).

**What data do we need to provide to demonstrate we will be serving residents from our community with low-incomes?**

It is up to each team to demonstrate and make the case how they will serve residents with low-incomes in their community. Data providing evidence of residents can come from many sources such as secondary data from federal, state, or local sources or primary data collected by your community leaders or nonprofits agencies or public institutions. It is up to your team to determine the best way to show this.

**What systems changes have to be identified for the Planning Grant Application?**

Teams are not expected to have their approaches to systems change built out as part of their Planning Grant Applications. However, at a minimum, teams should show their potential or interest in a strong analysis of community needs and solutions as it relates to systems change. Teams can also show past success or new opportunity for systems change. For more on how Connecticut’s Working Cities Challenge is tackling systems change see “[Taking on systems change in Conn.](#)”

**Will there be an interview as part of the assessment of the Planning Grant Application and can we use this time to explain more about our team and approach to the Jury?**



Yes. The independent Jury that will award Planning Grants recognizes that a brief, typewritten application may not fully capture your team's collaborative nature, capacity, and enthusiasm for taking on this work. Therefore, the Jury will select the teams to be interviewed based on the assessment of the pool of written applications. It is anticipated that most, but not necessarily all, teams will make it to the interview process. The interviews will be conducted in-person or via skype, estimated to be scheduled from January 13-27. The interviews will be 45 minutes. More information about the interviews will be given to teams after December 13, 2019.

**Do we need letters of support submitted with the Planning Grant Application?**

No, please do not solicit or attach letters of support at this time

**Is there a required match for either the Planning Phase or the Implementation Phase?**

No. Our general principle is that we do not want a funding match to disadvantage teams or communities with energy, desire, and willingness to learn and be part of the competition, but are not as lucky to have the financial resources as other communities. In other states there has been a modest match required as part of the 3-year Implementation Phase. The Steering Committee will revisit that requirement for Vermont's Implementation Phase.

**Can we raise money from a local funder to help us support our work during the Planning Phase?**

Yes. However, see the principle expressed in the previous answer about the Steering Committee's overall interest in partnering with teams with energy, desire, and willingness to learn and be part of the competition.

**Can we build off of an existing grant we have already received (e.g. USDA or NBRC) grant?**

Yes. While the Working Communities Challenge is not focused on typical "bricks and mortar" projects that might be usually funded by federal programs, those type of projects could be part of a leadership group's larger agenda. Moreover, these existing grants may have helped a community develop or refine its goals which would help the team use the WCC grant funding to further strengthen its cross-sector leadership team to implement the goals in a way that deepens community participation, learning, systems change, and diversity.

**How does a town that is not a Priority Community participate in an application?**

A town that is not a Priority Community will need to partner on a multi-town or regional application that includes at least one Priority Community.

**If we receive a Planning Grant, who is expected to attend the three planning sessions?**

It is expected that a consistent set of core partners of the leadership team attend the three meetings during the Planning Phase. Core partners on your team are those who will be highly engaged and participate deeply in the Planning Phase and, possibly, the Implementation Phase. This likely includes people and organizations that play key roles in understanding and influencing the systems you intend to change through your initiatives. Past experience suggests that on average this means 5 to 12 members of the leadership team attend the Planning Phase meetings. It is important to remember that core partners and other partners may come and go

during both the Planning and Implementation Phases based on where the team is focused, how efforts evolve, and other factors that emerge from the work.

**Is this a one-time grant opportunity or will it continue after the initial round of three-year awards?**

There are no current plans for a second round of the WCC in Vermont.

**Who's on the jury and selecting grant applicants for planning grant awards?**

The Jury is a subgroup of the Steering Committee. The list of Steering Committee members can be found on slide 7 in the PDF of the PowerPoint slide deck titled “Regional Information Sessions” found on the [Vermont Working Communities Challenge](#) website. Staff from the Boston Fed are not members of the Jury and do not participate in the selection of the grantee winners.

**Will there be another opportunity to ask a question that will help us prepare our Planning Grant Application?**

Yes, please direct your questions to Steve Michon [Stephen.michon@bos.frb.org](mailto:Stephen.michon@bos.frb.org) / 857-343-2126 and also check the website for updates to the FAQ document.