

Note: This document reflects questions received during past grant cycles, recent grant program workshops, and email and phone inquiries. Recently added or updated FAQs begin on page 7. For any questions or concerns, please email Jackie Dagger at jackie.dagger@vermont.gov or call 802-636-7410

Q: When will the full application be available for applicants to review?

A: Applicants will apply using a two-step letter of interest and application process for the 2021 grant program. The letter of interest is linked on the VOREC Community Grant webpage. Strong applicants will be invited to submit a full application and the application questions will be shared at that time.

Q: Is building a play structure or improving a sports field an eligible activity for the VOREC Community Grant Program?

A: The VOREC Community Grant Program is focused on funding project ideas and communities that will show measurable success supporting and growing their local economies through leveraging outdoor recreation. VOREC and the grant program define outdoor recreation as leisure, sport and therapeutic recreation activities pursued outdoors, mainly in a natural setting. Compelling projects will therefore include clear connections between a community's natural outdoor recreation assets (e.g. forests, rivers, trails) and the community / business benefits they will provide. Projects that focus solely on building a play structure or improving a sports field will not make as compelling an application without additional connections to the community's natural outdoor recreation assets and a clear narrative for how those activities will grow local communities and economies.

Q: Are there any forms required as part of the full application? i.e. Project Review Sheet required for RTP

A: Yes. For any capital construction there will be more requirements and applicants thinking about construction should talk to Jackie in advance of the full application to ensure all requirements are understood.

For capital construction FPR will require grantees to provide a Project Review Sheet to determine any state permits needed, written landowner permission in the format we need, and assurances that all construction will be done to the highest standards available for that infrastructure type (example: all bike paths will conform to national bike path standards etc.). A map is also needed to show the location of all planned physical development.

This grant program is not purely for capital construction though and your narrative should tell the full story of how any construction is part of a community-wide effort to become a recreation-friendly community.

Requirements for trail projects will be similar to the RTP Program.

Q: What level of engineering documents are required if applying for construction?

A: A map and a basic design/site plan will be required to show what is being proposed. These materials should allow the applicant to confidently describe their project intentions to FPR.

Q: Are matching funds required?

A: No, match is not required. Having match demonstrates your project readiness and a leveraged capacity at the local level. Match can be any type of funding source or in-kind services/donated materials, as long as they are related to budgeted, eligible expenses in your project scope.

Q: How are we measuring economic development for these projects?

A: FPR wants grantees to develop their own, appropriate metrics for economic development. FPR has been working with pilot communities who received past VOREC community grants to help craft metrics. Eventually the goal is to create a designation program which will be a set of best practices and tools to help communities collaborate and learn from each other as they develop their outdoor recreation economies. FPR's vision is for funding to accompany the designation program.

Data that would be useful to collect for most projects includes the number of people using infrastructure, local tax revenue (rooms and meals tax) and changes in the Grand List. FPR will work with communities to find metrics that work for their projects.

Q: Can you explain measurable outcomes for infrastructure?

A: Let's say you built a trailhead and three new miles of trail. The outcomes of building new trail can be measured by looking at the number of people on the trail and in your community.

Short-term, outcomes will be participation-based (e.g. the number of people using the trail). Measurable outcomes can be shown by recording user counts and efforts to publicize the new trail. These numbers can be compared to other places where the same type of trail exists to see how participation and use compare.

Long-term measurable outcomes could include looking at the number of new residents and tourists in your community. These outcomes can be measured through the Grand List and the meals and room tax as well as new jobs that are created.

Q: Must landowner agreements be in place at the time of the full application?

A: No, however having written landowner agreements will strengthen your application and show your project readiness. FPR will also need to see and approve landowner agreements before a project grant can be signed.

Q: A town is hoping to have New Town Center designation within 18-24 months. Does this effect their eligibility?

A: Towns without the New Town Center designation can apply to grant program, but having that designation already will strengthen your application.

Q: Does a trailhead need to be near a downtown? Like 6 miles away?

A: No. A trailhead is not required to be near a downtown, but FPR will be looking to understand how the applicant's outdoor recreation assets connect to the businesses and community that they are intended to support (e.g., population that lives there, that may visit, amenities and services). The applicant must be able to make the case for the connection between outdoor recreation assets and businesses/community. If there is no relationship, the project will not be as compelling and may not receive an invitation for a full application.

Q: If we had a project that we wanted to pursue in conjunction with private businesses would that preclude us from applying?

A: Since grants are meant to be community-based, only municipal entities and non-profits are eligible to apply for a VOREC Community grant as the lead or sponsor applicant. That does not preclude a private business from joining an applicant team.

Q: Is it possible to secure grant funding to market and promote existing infrastructure?

A: Marketing activities are an eligible use of VOREC Community Grant Funds but can only be a percentage of the funding for a project/program.

Q: In past grant cycles the emphasis was on communities that can demonstrate success that other communities can learn from. Is that still the case?

A: The designation program component of this grant program is important. Communities that can demonstrate a level of readiness and innovation/creativity that hits on as many of the five pillars of VOREC as possible have a better chance at demonstrating success and receiving an invitation for a full application. There are varying levels of demonstrating success and applicants do not need to be part of a community that is close to having the "perfect" outdoor recreation community to have a compelling project. The enthusiastic embracing of the idea of demonstrating success is most important.

Q: What are the steps and timeline for the application and selection process?

A: Applicants are asked to apply using a two-step letter of interest and application invitation process for the 2021 grant program. Key deadlines for this year's grants are listed below:

Application deadlines

- Friday, August 27 - Letters of Interest due
- Week of September 27 - FPR invites applicants with eligible projects to submit a full application. Only those invited may submit a full grant application.
- Monday November 15 - Full application due

Ranking Meeting and (tentative) Grant Announcement Schedule

- Week of December 13, 2021 – Grant Ranking Committee Meeting
- Week of December 20, 2021 – Grant Recommendations given to Commissioner
- Week of January 10, 2022 – Grant Award announcements
- February – March – Grant Agreements Prepared
- April – Grants Fully Executed

Q: Does this grant program favor rural areas?

A: Not necessarily. In the past, top applicants have ranged in size and location around the State.

Q: If we were not successful last year, is there any information sharing or coaching to help improve our applications?

A: Yes, if you want to talk through a prior year application, Jackie can coordinate a debrief conversation. Strong answers to the letter of interest questions and telling your story succinctly will help strengthen your application.

Q: Is there a list of past VOREC grantees / projects available?

A: In 2020 VOREC partnered with VOBA on [an article published in VT Sports](#), linked. This article highlights communities that have received past VOREC Community Grants. Take a look at the bottom of each page for the “What the VOREC Grant Will Do” section to see what each community received funding for

Q: How does the VOREC Community Grant program define outdoor recreation?

A: VOREC and the grant program define outdoor recreation as leisure, sport and therapeutic recreation activities pursued outdoors, mainly in a natural setting. Compelling projects will therefore include clear connections between a community’s natural outdoor recreation assets (e.g. forests, rivers, trails) and the community / business benefits their project will provide.

Q: Can you apply for both a VOREC and ERSA grant? Can you submit multiple projects to either one of these grant programs? Can you apply for the same project to both grant programs?

A: Applicants can apply for both the VOREC Community Grant Program and the ERSA Trail Grant program. Although it is unlikely that an applicant will be invited to submit a full application for both programs, there are no consequences to submitting a letter of interest. It is up to the applicant to determine whether they want to submit a letter of interest for the exact same work for both programs or whether they would like to fund different work through each program. Grant program staff are coordinating closely and will be in communication to determine who to invite to submit full applications. If you have questions about the best approach for your project proposal, please feel free to contact grant program staff.

Q: Why are designated downtowns and village centers given preference?

A: Communities who are designated downtowns and village centers have already shown that they have the capacity for planning and pulling together teams of people. VOREC’s decision to give preference to these communities was a way of recognizing that they have already done a lot of work to bring together the stakeholders that would make a VOREC grants successful.

There are a lot of designated downtowns and village centers across the State, and anyone can join by filling out an application on the Agency of Commerce and Community Development website. Lastly, VOREC is not the only grant program to give preference to designated downtowns and village centers and communities can get priority consideration for many different programs by having this designation.

Q: I'm a non-profit organization who is interested in applying to the VOREC Community Grant Program as the lead applicant. I'm required to have a municipal partner on my project team, what does that mean?

A: Non-profit organizations are eligible to apply for the VOREC Community Grant Program for the first time in 2021. In past grant cycles only municipal entities were eligible to apply. VOREC decided to expand eligibility to include non-profit organizations because they realized that non-profit groups are leading a lot of work meant to help communities get what they need to achieve their vision for what economic recovery development looks like with outdoor recreation at their center. The requirement to include at least one municipal partner in the project team is meant to ensure non-profit organization applicants are working in collaboration with their community and that their work is supporting the community's broader planning goals.

Q: If a community has multiple projects, is it better to submit one application or multiple applications?

A: The goal of the VOREC Community Grant Program is to help communities get what they need to achieve their vision for what economic recovery development looks like with outdoor recreation at their center. Since the grant program's intent is to support communities as a whole, VOREC's preference is for a community to collaborate and submit one application for all proposed work. The application will need to clearly communicate how the community is achieving the five pillars of VOREC and/or how the proposed work will help them reach those pillars. The application will also need to communicate how the work leverages the community's natural outdoor recreation assets (e.g. rivers, forests, trails) for the community's benefit and greater economic vitality.

Q: How will letters of interest be evaluated?

A: Letters of interest will be evaluated on how communities are meeting the five pillars of VOREC, involvement of community partners and other indicators of readiness, minimum eligibility requirements, and the three main buckets they fall into (e.g. Large regional work, small local work, state-engaged economic impact studies). Program staff will also be looking for opportunities to encourage partnership building and may follow up with applicants with suggestions on who to partner with for a full application. Alternatively, if there are elements of a project that program staff won't fund with a VOREC Community Grant they will make that clear when an applicant is invited to submit a full application.

Q: If awarded a VOREC Community Grant, when will work need to be completed?

A: For the 2021 grant program, grant winners will have two field seasons to complete work and the deadline for completing work will be 12/31/23.

Q: How much of the project can be devoted to planning, marketing, and administrative activities?

A: There are no limits on the percentage of your project that can be devoted to planning (e.g. community planning, getting people together, master planning, etc.) and marketing. The only stipulation is that these can't be the only activities you include in your proposal, there needs to be an element of implementation. For administrative activities, like the management of the program, there are also no limitations but grant staff will be reviewing your budget to make sure the scope is reasonable based on the size of the project.

There are limitations to the percentage of overhead administrative activities or indirect costs that can be funded (e.g. Executive Directors, Administrative staff, office space rent, utility bills, printers, etc.). If an applicant wishes to request funding for indirect costs, they will have three options should they win a VOREC Community Grant.

1. If the applicant has a federally negotiated indirect cost rate, The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation will accept it.
2. If the applicant has a negotiated rate with VT Agency of Transportation, The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation will accept it.
3. If the applicant does not have a federally negotiated indirect cost rate or a negotiated rate with VT Agency of Transportation, they can elect to use the 10% "de minimus" rate to calculate their indirect costs in their budget and as they incur expenses on the grant.

Q: Does having matching funds or in-kind services/donated materials benefit project applications?

A: Having matching funds or in-kind services/donated materials is not a requirement for the VOREC Community Grant Program. That said, program staff will be evaluating project readiness when reviewing letters of interest and having match is one way to demonstrate readiness, as long as the match is for activities included in your grant proposal. There are other ways to demonstrate readiness without match which include showing things like community planning and support for the proposed work and having all necessary permits secured.

Q: Does asking for more money hurt your chances of getting the grant? In other words, what would partial funding look like?

A: Asking for more money does not hurt your chances. The grant minimum is set at \$50,000 with no maximum and we are looking for projects to think big about the potential for grant funding. It is important to keep in mind that we are looking to fund up to 25 projects and we want to distribute funding as equitably as possible across three big buckets. These buckets include large regional projects, small local projects, and state-engaged economic impact studies. The geographic location of projects will also be important, and the goal of grant program staff is to fund projects throughout the state.

Q: Are projects on US Forest Service lands eligible?

A: Yes. Grant program staff would need to make sure that the US Forest Service has already done its environmental documentation, that there are no additional conversations that need to happen, and that the proper permits have been acquired.

Q: How is the grant ranking committee using identified project “buckets” (e.g. large regional projects, small local projects, state engaged economic impact studies, diversity & equity) to evaluate project proposals?

A: The goal of the 2021 VOREC Community Grant Program is to make the biggest impact possible for communities across Vermont looking to leverage their natural outdoor recreation resources for greater economic vitality. With this goal in mind, project teams are highly encouraged to look for partnerships wherever possible. Grant program staff will also be reviewing projects for partnership opportunities during the review of Letters of Interest and may connect with applicants to suggest partnerships for submitting a full application.

Project buckets have been identified by grant program staff and VOREC Steering Committee members to make sure that the projects invited to submit a full application and the projects that are eventually selected to receive grants represent a broad spectrum of work across Vermont. There is no set number of projects or amount of funding set aside for any one bucket. Grant program staff view the buckets as a set of overarching goals to complement [the five pillars, or goals of VOREC](#).

Example: If a project is focused on one community, they should think about partnerships that would allow them to do an economic impact study and/or diversity & equity work. Likewise, they should also consider if there are partnership opportunities with other communities in their region to do their work on a larger scale.

Recently added or updated (8.19.2021)

Q: Is there a word limit on the “brief project description” in the letter of interest? What should applicants be talking about in the description?

A: There is not a word limit on the “brief project description” but there is a character limit on the full Microsoft form. Applicants are allowed 200,000 characters across all long answer responses. Applicants are asked to be succinct in all responses but most especially question #13, the project description. Please keep responses to question #13 to around 600 words or about one page of text. The intention of the description is to give program staff a high-level idea of the intended work. If an applicant is invited for a full application, there will be plenty of opportunity to dive into the details. Descriptions should focus on how the community is achieving the five pillars of VOREC, how the intended work supports the community in reaching those pillars, and how the work leverages the community’s natural outdoor recreation assets (e.g. rivers, forests, trails) for the community’s benefit and greater economic vitality.

Q: Can I use funding from this program to purchase equipment and tools? What is the difference between the two?

Yes, grant funds can be used to purchase equipment and tools to support your project or program. For the purposes of an applicant’s budget, “equipment” is defined as any item with a fair market value of at least \$5,000. Any item under that fair market value is considered “supplies.” If a grantee uses these grant funds to purchase equipment at the end of the project period the grantee will be required to attest that they will continue to use the equipment purchased under this assistance agreement in the

project or program for which it was acquired as long as needed, whether or not the project or program continues to be supported by State funds.