

VOREC Community Grant FAQs

7/9/21

Note: this document reflects questions received during past grant cycles and email and phone inquiries. 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 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. If you have match, it is a bonus. 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.

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

- Tuesday, 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: How long do we have to get the work completed following grant approval?

A: The ideal timeframe is a year, but grantees will have up to two years to complete work.
Grants can be extended with approval from grant program staff.

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.