

**Vermont Housing & Conservation Board
Organizational Grant Committee**

MINUTES

Tuesday, November 16, 2021

Zoom Meeting

Organizational Grant Board Committee Members: Neil Mickenberg, Ann Fielder, Maura Collins, Diane Bothfeld (designee for VAAFAM)

VHCB Staff: Gus Seelig, Marcy Christian, Karen Freeman, Jenny Hyslop, Larry Mires, Jennifer Hollar, Brenda Riddle

Neil Mickenberg called the meeting to order at 9:02 am. Neil said that the organizational summaries were excellent; hitting all of the highlights and were very well organized.

Jenny Hyslop provided an overview of trends and observations for the housing organizations. They continue to perform well in spite of the many challenges of the last two years. She expressed admiration for the hard work of our partners in handling the challenges of the pandemic and taking on additional project work due to the availability of funds. She reminded the committee that last year staff did a light overview and grant extension, and that this year they have returned to our traditional deeper review. Overall the organizations are in solid financial health. She talked about key performance indicators including staff tenure, days of operating cash on hand, overall vacancy and turnover time. She also talked about the issues that organizations were facing as they house people who have experienced homelessness. She reviewed briefly each organization and the staff recommendations.

There was a board discussion about the housing recommendations. Neil pointed out that sometimes increases in funding, particularly capital, bring their own set of challenges. These funding increases have happened so quickly. There appears to be a need for staff training in various areas and he wondered if VHCB could help with this issue. Jenny explained that there is technical assistance funding available to organizations and there are many on-line trainings available at this time. Maura pointed out that on-line trainings are byproduct of the pandemic and there are many national trainings available. NeighborWorks continues to provide excellent educational opportunities for our partner organizations. There was a discussion of ways of encouraging staff to attend by making time for these opportunities.

Ann Fielder brought up the issue of fundraising. Organizations seem to have different levels of success in fundraising. She pointed out that there are trainings available in this area as well. Jenny explained that the capacity of organizations to do fundraising is different across the board. Gus pointed that fundraising is difficult and if the board isn't engaged it is very difficult. Staff are very busy at this time. Maura asked about the fundraising condition and wondered why we don't do a percentage rather than the existing condition which seems more difficult to reach. Jenny pointed that the organizations have typically met this condition.

Neil expressed his concern over organizations struggling with housing the homeless population, and inquired as to whether there is adequate social service support to meet the needs of the housing that VHCB is funding? It was discussed that that some organizations have more capacity to respond than others and that location is also a factor. It was pointed out that there are staffing issues all over the state and especially in Southern Vermont. There was a discussion around this issue. There was a general consensus that it was important to make sure that the services are in place to support this housing. Organizations are trying to respond to an emergency situation within their communities. Maura pointed out that 100% housing the homeless buildings don't seem to work out as well as mixed incomes properties. Integration of these units throughout the portfolio may be a much better model and have less issues in the long term. However, there is an immediate need to respond to the homelessness crisis, and so balancing those two needs will be an ongoing process.

Karen Freeman provided an overview of the conservation organizations. She reported that our partners have done an amazing job dealing with all of the challenges of the past 18 months. Fundraising and events have been very successful as they have pivoted to online in many cases. Organizations have very robust pipelines and they have added staff as well after the layoffs of last year. The average operating reserves is about 6 months for organizations at this time. There do continue to be some challenges with closings and staff capacity, but there is hope that organizations are addressing these issues as staff capacity builds up again. Organizations have been dealing with the issues of climate change and equity and social justice as well. Stewardship obligations will continue to be an area that will need attention. There was a brief discussion about new tools that may help us in this area. Changes in weather patterns and more extreme weather events have affected our partners as well.

There was a board discussion about the conservation recommendations. Diane asked about Vermont Land Trust and their stewardship responsibilities. She wondered if the staffing issues from last year are being addressed. Karen pointed out that they do have good systems and excellent land owner relationships which support stewardship of their easements. Staff have regular meetings with VLT and we remain hopeful about their commitment to adding additional staff to assist with legal work. Their stewardship staff has been consistent during this time. Gus reported that none of the 7 employees VLT had previously laid off were stewardship staff and mentioned that VHCB might consider helping VLT grow their stewardship fund. Diane said that the activities on farm operation are pushing the boundaries of the tenants of the conservation easement. Gus stated that it may be time for the state to reconsider passing easement amendment legislation. Karen noted that VHCB also has a one person stewardship shop and with a growing portfolio of conservation easements that stewardship capacity is an issues we continue to look at as well.

Maura questioned the VCLF proposed award and relayed her concern that although they do critical work around the state, she continues to wonder why they are being funded through this process. There was a committee discussion about this issue. Gus pointed out that we have a long term relationship with them that goes back 30 years. They continue to be a useful and willing partner in helping with deals on both sides of our mission that might otherwise be lost. We are paring back the support this year and we will continue to split the funding between housing and

conservation to represent the work that they do around the state. Ann agreed that this group is very different than the other organizations we provide this type of funding to but agreed that the partnership is valuable to support and asked if scaling back funding over 3-4 years was appropriate. Diane asked about the eligibility to access organizational funding and wondered if there are other groups in the state that might meet the criteria. Maura proposed that the board worked towards reducing the VCLF over the next several years. Gus welcomed further conversation about this issue and suggested that the committee meet in the spring and invite VCLF Will Belongia to attend.

Organizational grants committee recommendation to the board:

Maura made the motion to accept staff recommendations for funding and conditions. Ann seconded the motion. All voted in favor of the motion.

Roll Call

Ann - Yes

Maura - Yes

Neil – Yes

Diane - Yes

All voted in favor of the motion.

There was no other business.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcy Christian

Recommendation

Organizational Development Grants

Organizational grants committee recommendation to the board:

1. To award up to \$1,009,768 in FFY2022 VHCB funds and up to \$160,232 in FFY 2020/2021 HOME CHDO funds for Organizational Development Grants to 19 organizations (ACCT, CHT, CSC, Downstreet, LHP, RURALEDGE, HTRC, TPHT, VCLF, W&WHT, CTA, CVTA, GMC, LCLT, TNC, TPL, VRC, UVLT and VLT) in the amounts recommended and with the conditions recommended to the Organizational Grants Committee (this amount includes a set aside for Shires Housing that will be brought to the board at a future date); and
2. Staff has the authority to modify the relative amounts of VHCB and CHDO awards recommended for housing organizations, but not the total amount of any award to any one organization.