

FOREST LANDOWNER INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFER PLANNING

FY23 SERVICE PROVIDER APPLICATION

The [Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program](#), a program of the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB), is pleased to announce FY23 funding for forest landowner transfer planning. Eligible applicants are entities that work to increase the health, connectivity, and viability of Vermont’s forests and those who provide direct services to forest landowners. VHCB has approximately \$600,000 available in funding for contracts up to two years in length.

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I. Program Overview:

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program has been managing a [forest landowner transfer planning program](#) at a small scale for several years, which has funded both in-depth, individualized family consulting as well as workshops on this topic. Given the pace of forest fragmentation, changes to our landscape due to climate change and development pressure, and the need for connected and healthy forests for a wide variety of community needs including climate resilience, wildlife, recreation, and timber, we are seeking partners to grow the scale and reach of this program. We are particularly seeking contractors to work collaboratively with VHCB, preferably by developing new staff positions, new planning services, or expanding existing services.

Due date: Applications will be accepted until February 20th, 2023. We may be able to make short extensions if necessary; please contact program staff.

Info sessions: We will hold an informal info session on January 12th from 11-12:30 via zoom. If you would like to attend the info session but are not available at that time, please reach out as soon as possible; if enough people want a second meeting option we can schedule one.

Thursday January 12th, 2023 11:00am-12:30pm Info Session link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6828873586>

Application support: We strongly encourage interested applicants to reach out to program staff to discuss potential applications. For more detailed questions on the application, VHCB staff are available to help workshop your application, but to do this we will need to hear from you at least three weeks in advance of the application deadline. Please contact Program Director Liz Gleason at [liz\[at\]vhcb.org](mailto:liz[at]vhcb.org). Liz and Mark Raishart, VHCB's Forest Program Specialist, will be available to support you.

Funding available: We have a total of around \$600,000 available, and there are no limits to size of application. In the review and decision making process, we may ask applicants to revise budgets/scopes if needed. You can apply for a 12-24 months contract term. We expect to approve between two and eight contracts depending on the type and size of applications we receive.

Who is eligible to apply: Eligible applicants include non-profits, state agencies, and independent consultants such as foresters or other consultants who have the skills and capacity to deliver services in accordance with program guidelines. If you have a question about your entity type and eligibility, please reach out.

What you can apply for: This Request for Applications solicits applications for several bucket areas of work, which are described briefly below and in more detail in the What We Will Fund section. Please review each bucket closely to figure out what you are most interested in.

- 1. In-depth intergenerational transfer planning:** this bucket of funds is available for service providers who are interested in providing in-depth, multi year transfer planning support to individual landowners. This will involved growing an existing program model that involves deep collaboration with VT Farm & Forest Viability Program staff.
- 2. Workshops and other group education:** this bucket of funds is available for service providers to deliver lighter-touch education and support to landowners around the issues of transferring their land. The goal of these funds is to provide broad education to a larger array of landowners, introduce them to topics of transfer planning, and help set the stage for them to be able to plan for the future and keep their land intact.
- 3. Other:** we don't know what we don't know! If there is an innovative project or approach to addressing the issue of forest fragmentation and forest and transfer, please reach out to discuss your ideas! While the majority of our funds will focus on the buckets above, we are open to feedback and ideas on other interventions. Applications will be considered only if they directly address forest fragmentation and land transfer issues, and also are in line with [VHCB's overall mission](#).

II. Program Need & Background:

Vermont's forests are integral to our economy and our ability to adapt to climate change, improve water quality, and protect biodiversity. The majority of our forests are privately owned and are facing increasing

development pressure, making the need to protect these lands even more urgent.

Since 2014, the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB) has been running our Forestland Transfer Planning Program on a small scale in partnership with the Vermont Woodland Association and Vermont Coverts. In collaboration with these organizations, we have developed program guidelines, created an enrollment and evaluation process, and developed a small network of skilled contractors delivering on-the-ground services to landowners. In FY23, with increased VHCB state funding and a Congressionally Directed Spending award through the US Forest Service, VHCB will significantly expand this program.

Program Background:

Vermont is 75% forested, and keeping these forests intact helps our state address water quality, mitigates climate change, fosters outdoor recreation, and supports a functioning forest products economy. The majority of Vermont's forestland is owned by aging landowners, and transferring land to the next generation is incredibly complex. During this process, forested parcels are in significant danger of fragmentation, as demonstrated by the 2017 report, [Intergenerational Transfer of Forestland Working Group Recommendations](#). The need to protect Vermont's forests is increasingly urgent. Over 65% of Vermont's private forest landowners are over 55 and an additional 15% are over 75; much of the land they steward will change hands in the next ten years. Moreover, the pandemic has dramatically increased development pressure in Vermont, putting our forests at additional risk of fragmentation. Vermont is losing forest acreage that we cannot afford to lose, at a rate of about [1500 acres per year](#).

The goal of this RFA is to expand Vermont's ability to combine needed mediation, legal, tax, and conservation expertise to prevent forest development and fragmentation. This project was identified as a priority by Vermont's Climate Action Commission and the 21017 Intergenerational Transfer of Forestland Working Group. In 2021 VHCB conducted a stakeholder outreach with foresters, landowners, the Agency of Natural Resources, and Forests, Parks, and Recreation (FPR), which confirmed the ongoing need for this program.

III. Application Instructions & Timeline:

Please submit your application including narrative, budget, and any attachments through the online application link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SLKVQ3K>. The narrative and budget documents should be combined into one pdf, and the attachments (required organizational documents and other information) should each be submitted separately. You will also be asked to certify that the organization applying for VHCB funds is not presently debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, declared ineligible or excluded from participation in federal program or programs supported whole or in part by federal funds.

Applications are due February 20th, 2022. Any questions can be directed to VT Farm & Forest Viability Program Director, Liz Gleason, at liz@vhcb.org. You are encouraged to contact us to discuss your application beforehand.

Timeline:

1. **December 14th, 2022** – Request for Applications released
2. **January 12th, 2023 11am-12:30pm** – Info session
3. **February 20th, 2023** – Full Application Due Date
4. **February-March 2023** – Staff Review

5. **April 2023** – VHCB Board Review
6. **By end of April, 2023** – Decisions Announced
7. **April-May 2023** – Contract drafting & finalization

Info Session Details:

VHCB program staff will hold an informal info session on January 31st from 11:00-12:30 for interested applicants to ask questions, workshop their applications, and learn more about this contract. If you would like to attend the info session but are not available at that time, please reach out as soon as possible; if enough people want a second meeting option we can schedule one.

Thursday January 12th, 2023 11:00am-12:30pm Info Session link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6828873586>

Required Organizational Documents:

At the time of application, you will be required to submit the following through the online application. If you do not have any of the following documents/policies, or the document is not relevant to your entity type, please submit an explanation of why, and we may ask for additional information during our application review process.

- ✓ 501c3 documentation and organizational bylaws, if applicable
- ✓ Cost Allocation Plan: We will need to see documentation for how your organization calculates overhead, ideally a Cost Allocation Plan, if you are requesting this as part of your budget. We require the overhead determination to meet best accounting practices and will need to approve these calculations before we allow the organization to request funding for overhead expenses. If you do not have a Cost Allocation Plan, please submit a detailed description of how your organization calculates overhead or other management/administrative rates that are being requested.
- ✓ Organizational procurement policy: if you do not have a procurement policy, please submit an explanation of how your organization procures services in a fair, systematic, and equitable manner. We may ask that you create a policy as part of VHCB's contracting process; if this is the case we will provide examples of other organization's policies.
- ✓ Certificate of insurance
- ✓ Certificate of worker's compensation if your organization has employees
- ✓ Audited financial statements or external third party review of financials

IV. What We Will Fund

In FY23, VHCB priorities for funding include in-depth intergenerational transfer planning for forest landowners, as well as other efforts to educate landowners on transfer planning issues. The goal of this program is to keep forests healthy and intact and reduce subdivision to combat forest fragmentation, so all applications must describe how their work will contribute to this goal.

What is intergenerational transfer planning? We know that forests are at increased risk of fragmentation and subdivision at the time of transfer or sale. Transfer planning pulls in a range of support systems to help plan for keeping forests intact into the future – including family facilitation, financial and tax planning, legal assistance, and help navigating the range of supports available for maintaining forest health from NRCS funds to conservation easements and more.

We will prioritize applicants who are interested in engaging in a network structure to collaboratively grow and develop this program and we encourage applicants to include time for professional development and network development in their budgets. We will build on successes in the Farm & Forest Viability Program to shape this program, which includes a strong network structure, professional development, collaboration between VHCB staff and contractors to best meet the needs of clients, and contractor feedback on long-term program development.

Applications may include one or several of the types of funding available:

- In-depth intergenerational transfer planning
- Workshops/educational training
- Other

In-depth intergenerational transfer planning:

We are primarily interested in funding in-depth, individualized transfer planning to Vermont forest landowners. We are seeking contractors who will provide landowners with a transfer planning advisor, or team of advisors, who are skilled in helping them facilitate family discussions about what to do with the land, develop a succession plan, and navigate the legal and financial decisions that follow from the planning process. This will involve growing an existing program model that involves deep collaboration with VT Farm & Forest Viability Program staff.

In collaboration with the Vermont Woodlands Association, VHCB has issued guidelines for in-depth family forest transfer planning based on the Ties to the Land model. Applicants should review these guidelines closely and work to develop a proposal that meets this program model, or adheres to it very closely. These guidelines can be found on the [VHCB website](#). All applications for in-depth, long-term coaching should include an adequate budget for both lead advisors/case manager roles as well as for technical assistance such as tax and legal services. See the guidelines for more information.

Please reach out at any time to discuss the existing program guidelines and how your organization may be interested in delivering services.

What will collaboration with VHCB look like for this type of project?

VHCB will provide the backbone structure, program policies, and funding. VHCB will do much of the outreach and enrollment of landowners (in close collaboration with selected contractors), we will monitor progress of landowners through their engagement, and we will support contractors to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Your team will provide the on-the-ground expertise, deliver direct services to landowners, hire any needed technical expertise, report regularly to VHCB, engage in problem solving and program development with VHCB, and participate in professional development and network development with VHCB and other contractors.

Workshops and other group education:

Workshops on topics related to the issue of family forestland ownership transfer planning are also eligible for funding, especially if these are oriented toward identifying and preparing families who can take advantage of one-on-one succession planning services. Workshops may take several different formats depending on the landowners needs, including peer-to-peer learning, lecture-style, and educational sessions with access to an introductory amount of one-on-one technical expertise included (legal/tax/family mediation, etc). VHCB has been supporting both VT Coverts and Vermont Woodlands Association to develop models for these workshops, and we expect that other organizations will also be involved in developing their own content and models based off of past successes. We have found that workshops have been an effective tool to begin conversations with several families at once and prepare families to commit the time to longer-term planning. Peer-to-peer model workshops show a lot of promise for engaging more landowners with an “onramp” toward more complex and, for many, intimidating planning processes.

The goal of these funds is to provide broad education to a larger array of landowners, introduce them to topics of transfer planning, and help set the stage for them to be able to plan for the future and keep their land intact. We expect that this will focus on education on the array of legal/tax considerations, but may also need to include education on access existing programs and funding streams to support healthy and connected forests such as carbon credits, conservation easements, and NRCS funds.

What will collaboration with VHCB look like for this type of project?

For this category of funding, VHCB will contract with selected applicants to deliver workshops and other educational efforts. VHCB staff will support applicants with outreach, enrollment, and curriculum design & evaluation; however, we do not have set program guidelines for this type of service and are open to supporting a wide variety of applicant-led models for landowner education. Applicants will lead the curriculum development, outreach strategy, coordination with trainers and other applicable partners, and deliver the workshops/education.

Other projects:

We are open to considering services that do not fit into the above categories. This may include research, professional development for other service providers, and outreach/education strategies not described above. If you would like to request funding for services or projects that don't fit the criteria above, please contact program staff as soon as possible. Applications will be considered only if they directly address forest fragmentation and land transfer issues, and also are in line with [VHCB's overall mission](#).

What can be included in your budget?

For any type of service above, your application should include personnel costs (salaries and benefits) to deliver the planned programming, any subcontractors needed (such as tax and legal specialists or workshop presenters), materials (including printing of outreach materials or educational materials), travel, overhead, and other applicable costs. If you include overhead, you will need to provide an explanation of how that rate is calculated. We expect that most applicants will need to conduct outreach, engage in an evaluation process, and have adequate administrative time to coordinate services for enrolled landowners. Please make sure that your budget per landowner is sufficient for them to receive excellent services. Please reach out if you'd like to discuss what we have seen historically for per landowner costs, and what it might cost for your organization to deliver these services.

VHCB will organize approximately two professional development/network development meetings per year for selected applicants, and will develop the content for those meetings based on the needs of the applicants to support excellent services for enrolled landowners. Please include the time to participate in your budget.

Because the structure of these awards will be contracting for specific services, your budget should include only the costs to deliver the specific services you are applying for, as well as engaging in professional development. General organizational development activities like fundraising should not be included in your budget. If you are selected for a contract, budget revisions will be possible should you determine changes need to be made to deliver the programming.

Timeline: contracts can be for 12-24 months, with start dates as early as May 15th, 2023 and end dates as late as May 15th, 2025.

V. Review Criteria

Applications will be assessed based on the ability of the applicant to deliver services according to the Viability Program's Forest Landowner Transfer Planning Guidelines and the guidance in this Request for Applications. The following factors will be critical:

- Employees' and/or contractors' familiarity with family forestland transfer planning.
- Ability and potential to offer high-quality services to participants in keeping with the mission of the Program, including ability to meet participants' needs in a timely manner and communicate clearly with participants.
- Skill of employees and/or contractors in acting as educators and to facilitate family discussions, develop succession plans, and provide assistance to families as they seek out professional services from lawyers or financial advisors.
- Degree to which applicant can demonstrate technical expertise in at least one area of skill related to this work, such as forest health, forest management, forest land transfer legal & tax mechanisms, mediation, or other skill area. Or the ability to bring in this expertise from subcontractors.
- Ability and potential to provide services equitably to eligible participants, including those of various ethnic and racial backgrounds, as demonstrated by training, background and/or lived experience, as well as programming designed to be accessible to BIPOC participants and low-income participants.
- Ability, interest, and enthusiasm to collaborate with VHCB staff on program development.
- Ability to coordinate and collaborate among other service providers and Viability Program staff.
- Capacity to complete transfer planning, related services, invoicing and reporting in a timely fashion and in accordance with Program Guidelines.
- Budget is appropriate and reasonable

VI. Working with VHCB after Contracts are Selected

Invoicing & Reporting

Should you be selected for a contract, you will be asked to report and invoice on a regular basis. VHCB

requires quarterly billing (or monthly if preferred by your organization) and quarterly narrative reporting that will include updates on work completed as well as client lists. Particularly for those delivering in-depth transfer planning, we will share extensive information on client progress between contractors and VHCB both through quarterly reports as well as up to date client lists. Invoices will need to include detail on staff costs and other budget categories you included in your contract budget, and we will need backup detail for most expenses.

Professional Development

As we have done in the Farm & Forest Viability Program for farm/forest business advisors, VHCB will organize at least two professional development/network development meetings per year for selected applicants, and potentially more depending on interest and need. These meetings will be a chance to learn from each other, receive in-depth and tailored professional development from experts in the field, give feedback to VHCB on program model, and engage in collaborative program development for the future.

VHCB will work together with selected applicants to develop the content for these meetings, and it's very important to us that these events are useful and impactful to you, based on your needs as you deliver services under these contracts. If more and deeper professional development is needed than two meetings per year, we will work with you to plan for that. If your organization would like to be delivering transfer planning services but needs extensive professional development to do so, please contact VHCB to discuss what this might look like and how to plan for this in your application.