The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, a program of the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB), in partnership with The Blueprint, are pleased to announce funding available for organizations to provide one-on-one business planning and technical assistance to farm and food businesses, across the Northern Border region of NY, VT, NH and ME (see information on eligible counties, below).

OPPORTUNITY
This Request for Applications (RFA) offers eligible entities the opportunity to apply for up to $100,000 to provide one-on-one business advising services to farm and food businesses in the Northern Border region of NY, VT, NH and ME, under contract with VHCB. Contracts will cover activities from May 1, 2020 to November 30, 2021 (19 months). Applicants can apply to provide one or more types of business and technical assistance, including business planning, transfer/succession planning, cash flow & enterprise analysis, targeted technical assistance, and business coaching. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit a Letter of Interest early in the process, and by March 11 at the latest, to initiate communications with VHCB staff. Applications are due April 8, 2020*.

In total, VHCB has $390,000 to award, with the intent to provide in depth business and technical assistance to a minimum of 78 farm and food businesses in the Northern Border region. Contracts will be awarded to between 4-10 organizations across the four-state region. Collaborative submissions are encouraged and subcontracting to technical assistance providers, including to other organizations, consultants or firms is expected, although not required.

Eligible applicants (service provider entities):
Any not-for-profit or for-profit entity that provides or has the capacity to provide individualized, one-on-one business assistance is eligible. State and federal agencies are not eligible. The Blueprint’s intention is improve, expand and build capacity over time for the development and delivery of mission-driven business assistance. We anticipate providing contracts primarily to nonprofit organizations. However, we may contract with individual consultants or private consulting firms, especially for smaller contracts, and invite consultants and consulting firms to apply.
Eligible locations:
The NBRC identifies specific counties in each state designated as Northern Border counties; eligible counties can be found on NBRC’s website and interactive map. Services in non-NBRC counties within the region are not eligible for this funding. Please note that only the five Hudson Valley counties listed here are eligible for work under this RFP: Rensselaer, Sullivan, Washington, Green and Saratoga Counties. Please see Appendix C for a list of all NBRC counties under this RFA.

Eligible clients (beneficiaries of business and technical assistance):
Farm and food businesses with a minimum of two years of experience and $15,000 in annual gross income, located in NBRC counties, are eligible for business assistance under the contracts that will be awarded from this RFA. An enterprise that grows crops or raises animals qualifies as a farm. An enterprise that makes food or beverage products or provides certain services to farmers (such as a food manufacturer, a slaughter facility, or a food processing co-packer) is regarded as a food business. Farm and food businesses may or may not be land-based. Please see Attachment A, Process Guidelines, for a more detailed description of eligibility criteria.

Please review the information below, and in the two attached documents, our Process Guidelines and Contracting Guidelines, for a full understanding of this opportunity.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT
This opportunity is part of a regional initiative currently known as The Blueprint – an alliance of agricultural business assistance providers across New England and the Hudson Valley of New York – and is funded by the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC). The Blueprint is in the process of forming an alliance with over 50 member organizations, and a variety of working groups that implement The Blueprint’s mission: to increase the number and economic viability of farm and food businesses representing the diverse populations in New England and the Hudson Valley region of New York State. The Blueprint is led by three organizations – VHCB, The Carrot Project, and the Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation, guided by a steering committee with regional representation, and managed by a project coordinator.

NBRC has provided a two-year, $624,059 grant to VHCB to support the growth and expansion of this alliance, including activities such as networking events, professional development trainings and workforce development efforts. The majority of the grant ($390,000) funds the direct delivery of business assistance services to farm and food businesses, and will be committed in this single round of awards – as contracts – to qualified service provider entities through this RFA process.

Service delivery and contracting under this RFA is designed based on how VHCB’s Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program (Viability Program) operates in Vermont. The Viability Program, begun in 2003, funds and supports business planning and technical assistance across the state, annually contracting with 8-10 organizations as well as independent contractors that work one-on-one with eligible farm, food and forestry sector businesses to increase business acumen, access capital and successfully transition businesses to new ownership, through various stages of development. The Viability Program has an 18-year history of funding and supporting agricultural business assistance providers (organizations) across Vermont. This support includes funding to deliver services, as well as programmatic support (such as developing shared tools including applications, guidelines and evaluations), and professional development for program managers, providers and consultants.
**Supporting new and emerging service providers:**
We intend to support both new and emerging service providers (organizations that are not yet members of The Blueprint, are not currently providing one-on-one business assistance to farm and food businesses, and/or are newly forming entities to deliver such services) as well as existing service providers that are already a part of The Blueprint. Training and support for new and emerging service providers may be provided through ongoing workforce and professional development activities of The Blueprint.

VHCB will likely provide coaching or mentoring to the entire cohort of NBRC-funded service providers, such as coaching related to program design, data gathering and evaluation, or identifying and hiring consultants. NOTE: Please budget for up to 12 hours of meeting time with the cohort (by phone) over the course of the contract, and regular (at least quarterly) checkin calls with VHCB staff.

**KEY OBJECTIVES, OUTCOMES & METRICS**
To meet our mission to increase the number and economic viability of farm and food businesses representing the diverse populations of the region, our key objectives are to:

- Provide one-on-one business assistance to strengthen the viability of farm and food businesses; and
- Ensure we reach and provide these services to farm and food entrepreneurs in an equitable and culturally competent way.

We expect funded activities to support increased business acumen, improved viability, access to capital and successful implementation of business goals for a minimum of 78 farm and food businesses, through one-on-one business advising.

Following are these two objectives and the metrics we will use to track and assess outcomes. The selection criteria, below, is also informed by these objectives. We do not expect any applicant/contractor funded to achieve all objectives and metrics on their own. Rather, the group of selected service provider contractors with varying and complimentary missions, services, capabilities and competencies will meet the project objectives and metrics as a whole.

**Strengthening Business Viability:**
Our (VHCB and The Blueprint) experience shows that one-on-one business assistance can – and is critical to – achieve this goal, resulting in the following outcomes:

- increased business acumen and entrepreneurship skills of farm and food business clients, and
- ability of entrepreneur clients to articulate and meet their business goals.

Based on prior outcomes from VHCB’s Viability business assistance work in Vermont, we anticipate the following outcomes for farm and food business clients within 1 year of the conclusion of service delivery:

- 10% increase in sales, on average for all clients
- 60% of clients will increase net income
- 195 FTEs retained and 39 FTEs created (average of 2.5 FTEs retained and .5 FTE created per client)
- 75% of clients increase management skills
- 75% of clients seeking capital are successful, with a total of over $2.6M in secured capital (average of $45K per client)
**Metrics:** Viability Program staff will collect the following data from contractors for each client in order to report on these outcomes to NBRC:
- changes in gross income or sales, net income, net worth
- changes in business management skills from before to after service delivery
- ability to meet business goals and satisfaction with business performance
- amount of capital sought and secured
- client feedback on service delivery and their business advisors

We will work with selected contractors to collect these metrics, as well as collect success stories and profiles of clients to showcase outcomes achieved. We utilize the following tools in Vermont to collect such metrics: client applications; business plans, financial statements, or other deliverables completed during the program; and end-of-project client evaluations or surveys. We will work with each contractor to identify how best to collect these metrics, and are willing to share data collection tools described above.

**Providing Equitable and Culturally Competent Business Services:**
The Blueprint recognizes that our existing agricultural service provider infrastructure does not serve all farm and food entrepreneurs equitably. In particular, we believe that: certain geographic areas are lacking in access to services; immigrant entrepreneurs and those that speak English as a second language are likely underserved and/or experience particular cultural- and language-related barriers to business success that can be addressed with culturally competent service provision and resources; and that other historically marginalized populations – including low income entrepreneurs, indigenous peoples and people of color (or people of the global majority) – may not have equitable access to services. (NOTE: We are working on collecting data to analyze these assumptions, developing relationships to better understand the needs in this sector, and are building the Blueprint with diversity, equity and inclusion as a core aspect of our work.)

This funding shall either: 1) enable the organization to serve businesses in new geographic areas where access to services is limited; or 2) enable the organization to provide culturally competent business assistance to people of historically underserved populations, particularly people of color, indigenous peoples, immigrants and new Americans, and low-income individuals.

**Metrics:** We will require all services providers under this funding to invite clients to voluntarily provide demographic data, and we will use this data along with census data and demographic data that our network collects overall to assess our progress towards this objective.

Please see the attached document, *Attachment A: Process Guidelines* for further clarity on activities expected of contractors; client enrollment and eligibility; business advising expectations; reporting; and data collection and evaluation.

**WHAT WE WILL FUND**
Applicants can apply to provide one or more types of business and technical assistance, including business planning, transfer/succession planning, cash flow & enterprise analysis, targeted technical assistance, and business coaching. These categories are described below.
**Business Planning:**

Business planning assistance supports a business owner/client through the process of developing a business plan. Typically this involves significant time on financial recordkeeping and financial statements – ensuring the client has a strong understanding of best practices in record keeping, has adequate bookkeeping systems, and understands their balance sheet, inventory, income statement and cash flow. The process of developing a business plan ensures the client identifies their key short and long goals (3-5 year time period, or longer) and creates a plan – both financial plan and detailed implementation plan – to meet these goals. Developing a business plan with a client may take anywhere from 4-12 meetings over the course of a few months to a year or more, and is highly dependent on the business owner (client) being committed to the process and making time to work ON their business instead of IN their business. It is also highly dependent on the business assistance provider/advisor providing a strong structure and process for the development of the business plan over time.

Service providers may in some cases help draft the financial statements and/or narrative, but in all cases this process and the drafting of the plan should ensure the client is developing and enhancing their business and financial skills. VHCB has a clear set of guidelines for farm business plans, which we expect contractors to meet or exceed in their delivery of services.

Service provider contractors may use staff or hire a consultant to work with a client on a business plan. You may consider also utilizing a portion of funding to hire independent contractors to provide targeted technical assistance as needed for clients working on business plans – they may need an additional consultation or a few visits with an expert on a topic such as marketing, branding, bookkeeping, accounting, or other topics.

**Ownership Transfer/Succession Planning/Farmland Access:**

Farm or business transfer planning includes supporting a client through a transfer of assets and management – this may be an intergenerational transfer, or a transfer of ownership to a manager or other employees. It may include assistance provided to a business owner who does not have a successor identified – in which case it may include estate planning, retirement planning, and/or assistance recruiting and vetting a successor. It is our experience that ownership transfer planning often takes more resources and time than a business planning process, and in some cases to see a client through to implementation of aspects of the transfer may take more than a few years. In some cases, service providers may support both the exiting owner and the new generation separately – a retirement and transition plan for the exiting owner and a business plan for the incoming party. This is a complex but important service to provide, especially in the farming sector.

We expect service providers to include a technical assistance budget and incorporate existing transfer planning services into the process when applicable. This might mean working closely with a state Agriculture Mediation Program, requiring participants to attend a transfer planning workshop, using UVM Extension’s online resources or Land For Good’s resources, working with lenders such as Farm Credit, FSA, and other agricultural lenders, and small business programs such as SBDC. Technical assistance funds may be used for family mediation or counseling services, or financial or legal advice that may be needed to plan and/or implement the transfer. Because of the high cost of some of these services (such as legal and professional accounting) the Program may help defray the expense, but expect the client to cover other costs. Our funding can only be used for legal consultations, not to cover document preparation, filing fees, tax accounting, etc.

**Cash-Flow or Enterprise Analysis:**

Supporting a client with a cash flow analysis or enterprise analysis is typically a shorter term engagement than developing a business plan, and has similar components, but is focused in on a certain aspect of the
business, a new product or enterprise, or a cash-flow plan to get through a certain time frame or phase of business (e.g., transitioning to organic certification or making a large investment in a new facility). This can be a way to engage clients not ready to undertake a full business plan, or a way to assist businesses that have a business plan already and may need more targeted help at a certain stage of development. It might involve 3-5 meetings over a shorter time period, and often helps the business owner make a specific decision about the business (such as whether to open a new line of products, or invest in a particular piece of equipment).

**Targeted Technical Assistance:**
Targeted technical assistance can be offered in addition to the above-mentioned services, or as a stand-alone offering to clients, but is meant in this context to be delivered largely in a one-on-one format. It is our preference that service providers offer each participant working toward a business or transfer plan additional technical assistance related to their immediate goals or business needs during the business planning process. Targeted “TA” might include areas such as market research, farmland access, production or engineering assistance, access to capital, or LEAN analysis of production processes and facilities. Targeted technical assistance as a stand-alone offering might include the above services, or more in-depth work such as marketing and sales coaching, assistance with branding and marketing strategy, or bookkeeping training.

TA providers can be subcontracted private consultants, extension personnel, USDA NRCS or FSA staff, Small Business Development Center staff, farmer mentors, nonprofit organization staff, etc. In some cases this TA may already be funded by those organizations that offer such services – such TA services and recommendations may be more valuable to the entrepreneur when well-coordinated and integrated into a longer term, in-depth business planning or coaching process.

**Management Coaching:**
Our concept of management coaching is aimed at particularly mature businesses and/or sophisticated entrepreneurs. It may also be a good fit in a variety of circumstances where a business plan or transition plan or other deliverable is not needed. We find multi-million dollar operations and/or those that are shifting from a sole owner/operator to a management team structure may particularly benefit from management coaching, particularly by entrepreneurs that have successfully led a business through such a transition themselves. Businesses that receive management coaching often seek support as they make major changes such as designing new management positions, hiring and recruiting management team members, delegating key management tasks, seeking new facilities/infrastructure, entering new markets, and/or undertaking a major shift in brand or business model. Coaches are often past CEOs, COOs or CFOs, coaching others as they grow their business and need this level of expertise.

*NOTE: If there is a type of service or way that you provide services that doesn’t fit these categories/descriptions, and you’d like to request funding for that type of service, please contact us in advance of submitting your application to discuss.*

**PROCESS & TIMELINE**
VHCB staff will manage the Request for Applications (RFA) process, and will engage an Application Review Committee in application review and decision-making. The Review Committee will include representatives from all four states and include individuals from the Blueprint Steering Committee. The Review Committee will make recommendations to VHCB where final approval for all commitments resides with the Chair of the VHCB.

February 7, 2020 – Request for Applications Released

February & March 2020 – Outreach; discussions with potential applicants
March 11, 2020 – Letters of Interest due 5pm (LOIs strongly encouraged, not required)

*April 8, 2020 – Applications due (5pm deadline)

April 2020 – Staff and committee review

May 2020 – Notification of funding; contracts negotiated and executed

June 1, 2020 – Contracts Start Date

June 2020 – All contracts finalized and executed

July 2020 – Contracts announced

November 30, 2021 – Contracts End Date

December 31, 2021 – Reporting and final invoice due

Awards are anticipated to range in size and scale based on various organizations’ interest and capacity to deliver services, and the selection criteria shared herein. It is anticipated that there will be between 5-10 awards made across the 4-state region, at least one contractor based in each state, and that contracts may range in size anywhere from $10,000-$100,000. It is expected that per-client costs for business coaching over the course of 6-18 months will average a maximum of $5,000 per-client across all contracts. Some contractors may spend more or less funds per-client, and may provide more or less hours of coaching per client.

VHCB will coordinate regular phone call meetings with each contractor, and, if it seems valuable, will coordinate quarterly calls with all contractors to discuss how services are being provided, project progress, and coordinate the collection of data needed by VHCB across all contractors. We hope that this will create opportunities for service providers to get to know each other, and develop and improve service delivery for the farm and food businesses we collectively serve.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS
We request that all interested parties that are considering applying complete a Letter of Interest or Intent, to ensure staff are aware of your interest. We may put you in touch with other organizations in your area so that you are aware and to promote coordination and/or collaboration. LOIs are highly encouraged, but not required, as we recognize some entities might learn about this opportunity before the March 11 deadline for LOIs.

LOI and application materials are online and linked below.

Letter of Intent:
- Please complete this Letter of Intent (LOI) form by 5pm Wednesday, March 11, 2020. We request LOIs to be submitted as early as possible, to express your interest early.
Application Submission:

- Please download the application packet, complete and email as a single PDF to: Ashia Gallo (ashia@vhcb.org).
- Funding is available for contracts beginning June 1, 2020 and ending November 30, 2021.
- **Deadline:** Applications must be received by 5PM Wednesday, April 8, 2020*.

Required Organizational Documents:

Please review the attached document, *Attachment A: Contracting Guidelines*, for more details on VHCB’s requirements for contractors, on topics including insurance, procurement, invoicing and payment.

If your application is approved, you will be required to submit the following before we finalize your contract:

- **Articles of incorporation:** For non-profit organizations, please include 501c3 documentation or the equivalent. For for-profit organizations, please include articles of registration or incorporation.
- **Explanation of procurement process:** Organizational procurement policy, or an explanation of how you procure services in a manner that is fair, impartial and equitable, and free of conflict of interest.
- **Insurance certification:** Certificates of General or Professional Liability, Motor Vehicle Liability, and Workers Compensation Insurance, that meet VHCB guidelines.
- **Financial statements:** We prefer audited financial statements but will accept a Form 990 or other financial statements.

**REVIEW CRITERIA**

Applications will be assessed based on the ability of the applicant to deliver services according to VHCB guidelines. The following factors will be critical:

- Employees’ and/or contractors’ familiarity with business planning, financial analysis, agricultural marketing, and agricultural production practices.
- Ability and potential to offer high-quality business assistance services to participants, including ability to meet participants’ needs in a timely manner, ability to communicate clearly with participants, and ability to educate participants effectively on business and financial management.
- Skill of employees and/or contractors in acting as business management educators with small and family-run businesses.
- Ability to coordinate between individual service providers (staff or consultants), participants, and Viability Program staff.
- Capacity to complete business planning, related services, invoicing and reporting in a timely fashion.

As a part of this NBRC-funded project, we want to both support existing service providers in our region, and new and emerging providers. While this may seem contradictory, we will be looking to include both in our overall cohort of contractors under this project. The following project-specific criteria will also be considered:
• Ability to identify and meet the needs of underserved geographies and populations of farm and food business owners.
• Ability to track and manage use of funds to meet VHCB contracting expectations.
• Ability to do outreach and recruit clients.
• Ability and willingness to work with VHCB to collect and share client data, in accordance with the VHCB Viability Program confidentiality policy.
• Active participation in the Alliance.
• Cost per client is in a range such that the overall average cost across all contractors is $5,000/client or less.
• Interest and ability to build capacity to provide services, and an interest to sustain capacity into the future to meet the needs of similar farm and food business clients.
ATTACHMENT A: PROCESS GUIDELINES FOR SELECTED CONTRACTORS

Thank you for considering applying to the Alliance of Northeast Agricultural Business Assistance Providers (the Blueprint, for short) to deliver one-on-one business assistance services to farms. VHCB’s Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program (Viability Program) will oversee the provision of one-on-one businesses assistance services on behalf of The Blueprint. This document lays out the processes we expect contractors to follow in providing one-on-one business planning services to farmers.

These expectations come from both the Viability Program’s established model of service delivery and the commitments we have made to the funder of this program to track and evaluate the impact of this work. We will gather data from participants about the impact of their work with a business advisor. The Viability Program has established methods for evaluating our work. It is critical that we collect metrics over time, and we have been measuring key indicators, including: changes in gross and net income, net worth, business management skills, satisfaction with performance, and feedback on their business advisor. We collect metrics in the following ways: from entrepreneurs at the time of enrollment; from entrepreneurs’ completed business plans, financial statements, and other deliverables completed during the program; data provided by business advisors; and in-depth self-evaluations by entrepreneurs upon completing the program.

Outreach to clients
Contractors are responsible for conducting outreach to and enrolling the number of farm and food business clients agreed to in their contracts.

We are particularly interested in contracting with service provider partners that represent or work with underserved populations, including but not limited to people of color, immigrants, veterans, LGBTQIA and low-income individuals or families. We need to promote and develop business assistance services in new geographies and for a broad group of farm and food businesses. Service providers should be inclusive in their provision of services and consider prioritizing providing resources to underserved communities and populations. We encourage organizations that already provide business assistance to consider working with new partners to do outreach or provide actual advising, and/or ask that you travel farther and outside your typical footprint to successfully reach businesses and communities that are particularly rural or underserved.

These funds are intended to support farm and food businesses. A farm is an enterprise that grows crops or raises animals. A food business is an enterprise that makes food or beverage products or provides certain services to farmers (such as a food manufacturer, a slaughter facility, or a food processing co-packer).
Farm and food businesses must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- the owner(s) is year-round resident of an NBRC-eligible county, and is currently operating their business in an NBRC-eligible county. NBRC-eligible counties can be found on the [NBRC website](#) or NBRC’s [interactive map](#).
- the owner(s) is actively involved in the day-to-day management of the business;
- the owner(s) has at least two years' experience managing the current business;
- the business has grossed at least $15,000 in the most recent tax year.

**Start-up businesses in their first two years of business:** A contractor may provide services to start-up farm and food businesses (that do not meet these last two bullet points for eligibility), with up to 20% of their contract. If this does not meet your organizational needs or mission, please discuss with VHCB and we may be able to extend some flexibility in this regard.

**NOTE:** Some organizations that provide business assistance have mission-based eligibility requirements that may include some, but not all, farms or food businesses. For example, an organization might focus on serving small businesses, start-ups, businesses selling into local/regional markets, businesses that focus on environmental sustainability; those owned or operated by people of color, immigrants or other underserved populations, and/or businesses that source from local farms. Farm and food businesses may or may not be land-based. The Blueprint does not require any of these eligibility criteria for use of our funds, but is supportive of applicant organizations adhering to your missions in recruiting clients.

**APPLICATION & ENROLLMENT**

Contractors are responsible for collecting the following data from clients at the time of enrollment and submitting that data to VHCB. We will use this data as a baseline to track change over the course of the engagement with the client.

Metrics that need to be collected at the time of application:

- FTEs (family vs. non-family)
- Gross Income
- Net Income
- Net Worth

The Viability Program has a client application that you are welcome to adapt and use in order to collect this data. You are also welcome to collect data at the time of enrollment using your own application system. Initial data from all enrolled clients should be submitted to VHCB within three months of enrollment.

Though VHCB will not “approve” clients, we will do quarterly check-ins with contractors to review client lists. A primary feature of these check-ins will be questions about how overall client enrollment is going, and monitoring the status of each client’s progression through your program.

**ADvising/coaching process**

Each enrolled business and advisor will work together to develop a scope of work, and will complete the scope of work over a 3-12 month period. Services eligible for funding include basic business planning, ownership transfer planning, cash flow and enterprise analysis, targeted technical assistance and management coaching. If desired, VHCB can provide sample scopes of work or review a selection of the scopes of work you develop to confirm they meet our expectations.
Service providers should follow the following guidelines in providing services:

- [Business Plan Guidelines](#)
- [Guidelines for Transfer and Succession Plans](#)
- [Guidelines for Enterprise Analysis and Cash Flow Analyses](#)

Over the course of business planning, contractors must keep up-to-date and share with VHCB a spreadsheet listing clients who are receiving services. VHCB will schedule regular check-in calls with contractors to discuss project progress.

**DELIVERABLES, REPORTING, METRICS AND EVALUATION**

**Reporting and Deliverables:**
Service providers must submit a final narrative report at the conclusion of their project. This narrative report should include:

- An overview of the work completed as a part of this contract and explanations and a status report for any incomplete work;
- Client List and services provided to each (clients enrolled will be public information);
- Chart of jobs and financial metrics from each client, pre- and post-enrollment (these and other business metrics will be held confidential by VHCB and only used in aggregate for reporting);
- Any challenges faced in delivery of services; and
- A description of any feedback received from participants that would help in future program planning or promotion (quotes, suggestions, etc.).

For each client receiving services, service providers must submit:

- All deliverables completed under this contract
- An approximately one-page Planner Notes summary for each client enrolled – we request one summary per page, so that we can place summaries in the participant’s file. The summary shall list all business planners and technical assistance specialists used with the business and a brief evaluation of the process and any outcome or effect to date for that business. See attached template.

All final deliverables must be shared with VHCB and client. All products of the contractor’s work become the sole property of the client.

**Evaluation:**
VHCB will survey all clients to understand the impact of their work with a business advisor. We measure the following key indicators: changes in gross and net income, net worth, business management skills, satisfaction with performance, and feedback on their business advisor. We collect metrics in the following ways: from data collected by service providers at the time of application; from entrepreneurs’ business plans, financial statements, and other deliverables completed during the program; data provided by business advisors; and in-depth self-evaluations by entrepreneurs upon completing the program.

Clients will be expected to complete a post-services evaluation as a condition of receiving services, where they will self-assess changes in skill levels and identify how the assistance has helped them meet their goals. VHCB manages the evaluation process so that clients will feel comfortable submitting honest feedback about the business planning process. Service providers are responsible for getting the evaluation to clients and ensuring that all clients fill out evaluations at the conclusion of their projects.
The Viability Program will share feedback directly with business advisors to support continual program improvement.

We will need to be able to reach clients 1-year after the close of the NBRC grant, either through service provider contractors or directly, to obtain outcomes information post-project.

**Metrics:**
The RFA describes the aggregated outcomes we anticipate from service providers’ work with clients. Funded contractors will agree to provide standardized data and information about enrolled clients and client outcomes. Service providers are responsible for aggregating and reporting to VHCB the following metrics from each client they work with:

At the time of enrollment or client intake:
- Client contact information
- Business description
- Types of technical assistance requested
- Pre-assistance business metrics, including
  - FTEs (family and non-family)
  - Gross Income
  - Net Income
  - Net Worth

At the conclusion of work with a client, contractors will need to report on outcomes of the business assistance, including:
- A brief summary of assistance provided and changes implemented
- Post-assistance business metrics, including
  - FTEs (family and non-family)
  - Gross Income
  - Net Income
  - Net Worth
  - Whether clients were able to access financing and amount, if applicable

**COORDINATION ACROSS SERVICE PROVIDERS**
VHCB will coordinate regular phone call meetings with each contractor, and, if it seems valuable, will coordinate regular calls with all contractors (up to twelve hours total over 18 months) to discuss how services are being provided, project progress, and to coordinate the collection of data needed by VHCB across all contractors. We hope that this will create opportunities for service providers to get to know each other, and develop and improve service delivery for the farm and food businesses we collectively serve.
ATTACHMENT B: CONTRACTING GUIDELINES

Thank you for considering applying to deliver one-on-one business assistance services to farm and food businesses. The Vermont Housing & Conservation Board’s Farm and Forest Viability Program is administering overseeing the provision of one-on-one businesses assistance services on behalf of the Blueprint. This document lays out the necessary administrative steps to establish a contract with VHCB, including the documentation you will need to provide and a copy of our template contract. This document also summarizes our administrative policies regarding invoicing and payment. Please review carefully to understand our policies.

ESTABLISHING A CONTRACT

If you are approved to provide services, you will need to provide the following certifications and policies to VHCB. If you have any questions or concerns or do not have any of the documents listed below, please contact VHCB as soon as possible so we can discuss how to develop policies that will meet our criteria.

VHCB will draft contracts based upon the final negotiated scopes of work with chosen contractors. VHCB cannot sign contracts until we collect and approve all required attachments and certifications. In order to expedite the contracting process, please submit as many of the below materials as you are able to with your application.

The following forms, certifications and policies are required in order to establish a contract with VHCB*:

- W-9 form
- 501c3 letter/documentation (non-profit organizations) or articles of registration (for-profit organizations)
- Certification Regarding Debarment and Suspension (form provided)
- Certificate of insurance naming VHCB as a certificate holder and showing the insurance coverage. Contractor shall maintain in effect during the term of their Contract the insurance coverages listed below.
  - Professional OR General Liability Insurance with a limit of liability of $1,000,000 per occurrence and an aggregate limit of $1,000,000.
  - Comprehensive All Risk Motor Vehicle Liability Insurance, with minimum limits in accordance with Vermont Law.
- Certificate of workers compensation policy
- A copy of a recent audit, or your most recent Form 990.* If you do not have either, please submit your most recent financial statements and contact VHCB to discuss.
- Organizational Procurement Policy if you have one **
- Copy of your Cost Allocation Plan if you have one ***
- If necessary, a revised application that reflects the final contract amount and scope of work agreed to between VHCB and contractor.

* If necessary, a revised application that reflects the final contract amount and scope of work agreed to between VHCB and contractor.
** If necessary, a revised application that reflects the final contract amount and scope of work agreed to between VHCB and contractor.
*** If necessary, a revised application that reflects the final contract amount and scope of work agreed to between VHCB and contractor.
* If these requirements are difficult for your organization to meet, please contact VHCB staff for support, and consider partnering with another applicant that might be well positioned to be the primary applicant.

**Additional information about Procurement Policies:**
VHCB requires a procurement process or policy so that we can understand contractors’ processes for hiring services that ensure funding is utilized fairly and reasonably. For example, it helps assure VHCB that organizations avoid favoritism or nepotism. What we are not looking for is a policy that says you will put every project out to bid – this is not something we would require, and in our own organizational policy we have identified situations when we are not required to solicit bids, such as when a client requests a certain consultant or when, based on extensive prior experience, we know there is only one person who can provide a certain service.

VHCB does not wish to tell you what your procurement policy should look like, but we can provide support and feedback as you develop your policy. We encourage you to look at and become familiar with the federal guidelines, which can be found in the Uniform Administration Requirements 2 CFR, Chapter 2 Part 200.318-200.326. If your organization and board are looking for assistance creating a policy that complies with federal guidelines, we are happy to make suggestions for where to start.

***Additional information about Cost Allocation Plans:**
VHCB needs to review and approve the basis for indirect or overhead rates before we allow the organization to request funding for such expenses. We require the overhead determination to meet best accounting practices.

**INVOICING**
VHCB pays on a reimbursement basis; no payments will be made in advance of services being provided. Invoices shall be no more frequent than monthly and no less frequent than quarterly.

Please note that the contractor is responsible for keeping track of the project’s overall budget, and VHCB cannot increase the initial contracted amount. Please contact us as early as possible if your project expenses will significantly differ from those in the scope of work. VHCB cannot pay the final 20% of the total contract amount until the project is complete and all deliverables have been reviewed and approved.

All invoices should be sent to Ashia Gallo via email at ashia@vhcb.org. The invoice shall detail hours of work and services provided and provide details of reimbursable expenses, if applicable. The invoice should include the following required components:
- VHCB’s name and address in the TO: line
- Name and contact information for who the invoice is from
- Date of invoice
- Time period invoice covers
- Personnel expenses: staff time summary (include hourly rate and total # of hours) and benefits
- Travel summary
- Reimbursement summary
  - If reimbursable expenses include payment for the work of a subcontractor, please include their invoice as an attachment to your invoice.
If reimbursement is for mileage, please note where travel was to and from, total distance, and mileage rate

- Overhead rate (if applicable)

With each invoice, provide a narrative update about the project and a list of currently enrolled clients. VHCB aims to pay complete invoices within 30 days.

CLOSING OUT CONTRACTS

All projects must conclude by November 30, 2021. The final project invoice and final report must be submitted by December 31, 2021.

Final invoices should include:

- Invoice
- All written deliverables or tools developed under the contract
- Planner Notes (see template) for each client
- Final narrative report

All final deliverables must be shared with VHCB and client. All products of the contractor’s work become the sole property of the client. VHCB will withhold 20% of the contract amount until all deliverables are received and approved by VHCB.
PLANNER NOTES:

Client Name:
Advisor name:
Date:

Type of assistance provided:
- Business plan
- Transfer/retirement/estate plan
- Enterprise/ Cash-flow analysis
- Feasibility Study
- Management coaching
- Technical assistance project
- Accessing capital – grants/financing
- Other:

Notes:
Provide a brief (one page maximum) summary of how the process of working with this client went from the advisor’s perspective, including the following: any significant challenges, successes, and unexpected results not mentioned in the deliverable.

Financial Summary:
Please fill in as many indicators as possible. If a particular piece of information is not available, make a brief note of why not. We will use this data to compare outcomes over time, so be as consistent as possible in how you collect this data. For example, it’s preferable to compare net income calculated through the same method year to year – but if you have NFIFO for one year and net cash income for another, please make a note.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019 (if available)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Income</td>
<td>Specify NFIFO or cash - NFIFO preferred, if not NFIFO use net cash income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net worth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payroll</td>
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</tbody>
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New York
*Greene
*Rensselaer
*Saratoga
*Sullivan
*Washington

Vermont (all counties)
*Addison
*Bennington
*Caledonia
*Chittenden
*Essex
*Lamoille
*Franklin
*Grand Isle
*Orange
*Orleans
*Rutland
*Washington
*Windham
*Windsor

New Hampshire
*Belknap
*Carroll
*Cheshire
*Coos
*Grafton
*Sullivan

Maine
*Androscoggin
*Aroostook
*Franklin
*Hancock
*Kennebec
*Knox
*Oxford
*Penobscot
*Piscataquis
*Somerset
*Waldo
*Washington