

Funds for Professional and Organizational Development

Funds Available: \$100,000 total; \$5,000-\$15,000 per project

Proposals Due: September 29, 2010

The Vermont Agriculture Innovation Center (AIC) was created in 2009 when Senator Patrick Leahy secured \$469,000 in funding through the USDA's Agriculture Innovation Demonstration Center program. The goal of the Innovation Center program is to fund state-based Agriculture Innovation initiatives that provide technical, marketing and organizational development services to value-added agricultural businesses. Value-added businesses include farms that do some level of processing for raw products, alternative production (e.g. organic), diversified farming, or local foods marketing. The AIC is chaired by the VT Secretary of Agriculture Roger Allbee and directed by 13 board members, representing food system components and primary agriculture sectors of the state of Vermont. For FY 2010, Senator Leahy has secured one million dollars for the Vermont Agriculture Innovation Center to continue its work and disburse funds to strategically enhance value-added agriculture in the state of Vermont. FY 2010 funding will be available in five high-leverage project areas, including **Professional & Organizational Development**.

Agricultural Innovation funds will be used to provide professional and organizational development to support the organizations, businesses, and individuals who have the potential to carry out the strategic initiatives and foster individuals to become engaged in the marketing or the production of value-added production systems. **Activities pertaining to general agriculture production without a value-added strategy or focus are not eligible for funding.**

The Vermont Agriculture Innovation Center will make \$100,000 available from 2010 USDA-RD funding for farmers, organizations and/or individuals to offer professional and organizational development in the following areas:

- Establishment of peer-to-peer learning networks for producers
- Exchanges with other regions
- Organizational capacity building, for example if a group of volunteers wanted to do a feasibility study for incorporating as a non-profit, or existing organizations wanted to plan for & implement a major expansion in their farmer services, or two existing organizations are planning & implementing a merger.

Vermont can benefit from improving the capacity and efficiency of support services to farmers, improving and promoting the exchange of information and visits with other regions of the country as well as supporting and enhancing a peer based learning network. Professional development support will be available to farmers, ag related businesses and organizations supporting farmers.

Eligible Applicants:

Applications are encouraged from existing service provider organizations, educational institutions, incubators, individual consultants and anyone else with experience in providing professional and organizational development. Projects may address more than one of the topic areas listed above. **Strong preference will be given to proposals that demonstrate partnerships between multiple organizations, have a statewide reach, are innovative, and build on existing programs.**

Projects must meet the following criteria:

- Demonstrate how organizations that are not producers will provide benefit to producers from the professional development funded through this project area.
- Development must benefit more than one person.
- Provide professional development either directly to farmers or to service providers who work directly with farmers.

- Provide professional development that will directly benefit producers who meet the USDA definition of “value added”, which includes products that are transformed from one state to another, produced using special practices (eg organic, IPM), marketed as local products, farm-based renewable energy, and /or produced on a diversified farm.
- **Be completed prior to September 30, 2011.**
- Present a budget that uses between \$5,000 - \$15,000 of Agriculture Innovation Center funds **and has a match of non-federal funds equal to at least 60% of the total budget.** In-kind contributions *can* count towards this match. For FY 2010, in recognition of time constraints, the AIC will review and consider **strong** proposals with an insufficient match, pending further match development. Meeting the 60% match requirement must be verified prior to contracting and release of AIC funds.
- Proposal does not exceed 4 pages for the proposal narrative; an additional page may be used for budget information, and an appendix may be used to list board members and/or to list personnel and their qualifications.
- All proposals are due: **September 29, 2010** and are to be **submitted electronically** to: RTorres@vermontcf.org

Required Proposal Outline:

1. Name of Organization(s) & Contact Information.
 - If there are multiple organizations presenting a collaborative proposal, please identify one primary contact.
 - Identify board of directors for applying organizations.
 - Number of years in business for each applying organization or business.
 - Current activities related to Professional & Organizational Development and any examples of relevant past experience at your organization(s).
2. Project area or areas addressed in the application & brief description of how you plan to address each.
3. Description of value-added business/businesses targeted in the proposal.
4. Project Goals
5. Performance Measures
 - Plans for measuring effectiveness of services provided (what will be measured, how it will be measured, when it will be measured).
6. Expected Outcomes
 - What will the expected outcomes of this project be and how will it enhance value-added agriculture.
7. Timeline
8. Target Audience
 - If the target audience is primarily service providers please describe the producer audience that these service providers reach. Producer audience must meet USDA definition of value-added.
9. Marketing & Outreach Plan
 - All marketing & outreach materials will need to recognize AIC as a funder
10. List the personnel who will work on the project, and their qualifications.
11. Detailed budget including non-federal match funds.
 - Contracted services or in-kind donated services require a per-hour or per-diem rate.
12. Include a budget narrative.
13. Include the page number, lead organization, and project title(s) on each page.