



**HIGH MEADOWS
FUND**

at the Vermont Community Foundation

Building Resilience in Vermont's Watersheds

Request for Proposals

Issued by the High Meadows Fund
www.highmeadowsfund.org

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Summary

Vermont is experiencing severe flooding and other intense storm events. Since 2000 our state has had at least one federally-declared disaster *every year*, and in some parts of the state Vermonters have experienced two, 100-year floods in the past 10 years. Research and patterns we've all seen demonstrate that these events are no longer an "if" but a "when." Planning ahead can reduce or even eliminate the damage that has devastated our physical, economic and social communities.

Flooding does not follow Vermont's municipal and regional boundaries. New thinking and approaches are needed. To inspire and encourage the creative and inclusive building of resilience at a watershed level, the **High Meadows Fund** (HMF) has allocated \$120,000 for projects in which multiple municipalities within a watershed engage and mobilize their residents on this issue. Our goal is to build understanding about the interconnected forces of their common watercourse(s) and support actions that strengthen the participating communities and their watershed's resilience to foreseeable natural events such as flooding, erosion, ice and high winds. HMF has allocated *another* \$120,000 of matching funds for further implementation in successful projects.

In this packet of materials you'll find more information on why HMF is dedicating so much money and time to this kind of work, what it is looking for and the questions applicant projects must address. HMF seeks projects that aim to accomplish outcomes at different scales (from hyper-local to across-the-watershed) and durations (short-, medium-, and long-term) and involve participants from many sectors. The project requires inclusion, thought, AND action.

The applicants (and their eventual projects) will benefit from attending the Leahy Center for Lake Champlain's (ECHO Museum) March 19-21, 2015 summit focused on inspiring and supporting multi-organizational, regional teams to produce specific plans and projects that improve social and structural resiliency for flooding and stormwater issues. This 2.5-day workshop provides an excellent opportunity for watershed teams to envision and design resilience projects. Attendance at the Summit will be considered a plus when applications are reviewed by HMF. Scholarships are available through ECHO.

Full details about the RFP's opportunities and requirements begin on the next page.

Key dates to remember:

- February 1, 2015: Optional Letters of Intent due
- March 19-21, 2015: ECHO Summit
- April 15, 2015: Applications due
- June 1, 2015: Projects chosen
- Projects completed within 18 months
- Possible matching-funds for additional implementation of successful projects

*Keep an eye on **HMF's website** for updates!*

Building Resilience in a Vermont Watershed Request for Proposals—General Description

Issued by the High Meadows Fund

Statement of Intent

Flooding, rising temperatures, and extreme weather demand Vermont communities prepare in new ways for the effects of climate change. Building resilience requires partnerships, creativity, diverse voices and hard choices. The **High Meadows Fund** (HMF) seeks up to three projects in which multiple municipalities within watersheds: (1) creatively and inclusively engage their residents to build understanding about the forces of their common watercourse(s) and the inter-connected nature of watershed planning, and (2) produce actions that strengthen the participating communities and their watershed's resilience in the face of foreseeable, more frequent and more intense storm events and the associated flooding, erosion, ice, high winds, etc.



Background

The High Meadows Fund's (HMF) mission is to promote vibrant communities and a healthy natural environment while encouraging long-term economic vitality in Vermont. Our communities, environment, and economy are threatened by the changing climate and High Meadows helps Vermonters mitigate that change and adapt to its consequences by supporting leadership and innovation in three overlapping areas:

- Energy: Improving buildings and developing transportation systems that use less and cleaner energy.
- Land Use: Encouraging working farms and forests, compact settlements, and responsible watershed management.
- Sustainable Agriculture: Promoting healthy land use and expanding agricultural markets.

As part of its Land Use Initiative, HMF helped support the development of a [Roadmap to Resilience](#) (Roadmap) by the Institute of Sustainable Communities. The Roadmap is the culmination of an 18-month stakeholder engagement process to develop a shared vision for resilience and offers 23 recommendations for moving forward at state, regional and local levels.

The Roadmap defines a resilient Vermont as follows:

A resilient Vermont is better prepared for and able to more effectively manage and bounce back from natural disasters and climate-related shocks, and the risks they pose to our economy, environment, and social well-being.

A resilient Vermont focuses on both proactively reducing our vulnerabilities and improving our response and recovery, to ensure that we are continually strengthening our resilience.

We must be resilient at every level—from individual residents, households, and businesses and neighborhoods, to the entire community and state. There is a shared sense of responsibility for resilience at every level and across the public, private and nonprofit sectors. (p.5)



HMF endorses these statements and supports Vermont communities taking creative steps to guide change and build more resilient futures. Climate change requires work in two areas: (1) *carbon emission reduction*—reducing our reliance on carbon, natural gas and methane fuels and the related damaging emissions; and (2) *climate change adaptation*—taking steps to prepare for, reduce or even eliminate damages caused by climate change--related weather events. This RFP focuses on the adaptation side of this essential climate change work in Vermont.

In Vermont, where flooding and sudden, erosive water surges are two of our most significant climate impacts, the success of this *adaptation* work depends on cross-sector, local leadership that looks beyond traditional geographic and cultural boundaries and addresses challenges and opportunities within a *watershed* context. Watershed planning demands that communities work together in a way that goes beyond conventional municipal planning, where communities share experiences, understand commonalities and ‘downstream’ impacts, and work collaboratively to build resilience.

Leahy Center for Lake Champlain (ECHO) also recognizes the critical importance of multi-sector, watershed thinking and action. ECHO will host a 2.5-day workshop on March 19-21, 2015 bringing community groups from all over the state to envision, design and begin implementing watershed and stormwater resilience. HMF is timing its RFP in concert with this capacity-building conference. Applicants for this RFP will improve their chances for selection by attending this summit (although if you are not able to attend, your application is still encouraged).

Purpose of RFP

This RFP aims to promote new thinking, partnerships, and action within a Vermont watershed. During the extensive stakeholder engagement process utilized by ISC in developing the Roadmap, “community members voiced great concern over the development allowed by their neighbors upstream...; on the other hand, many of the same stakeholders were consistently hesitant about new regulation and about the sort of state- or region-wide regulations (as opposed to local regulations) implied by creating these upstream/downstream linkages” (p.31). As part of a multi-level strategy to address resilience in Vermont, the Roadmap recommends:

[Using] regional networks to support watershed-scale planning and enable municipalities to collaborate across jurisdictions to set priorities and make cost-effective investments that reduce hazards for downstream communities and development. (p. 38)

With this grounding, the purpose of this RFP is to promote up to three, 18-month or less projects in Vermont that are devoted to building resilience within a watershed. Each watershed has its own challenges and opportunities, so this RFP will not definitively define outcomes. Example outcomes could include but are not limited to:

- communities adopting ordinances (such as floodplain, river corridor, shoreland, stormwater, low impact development, etc.) that are developed collaboratively between adjoining towns and account for upstream actions and downstream consequences;
- collaborative, proactive and inclusive engagement, education and planning amongst adjoining communities that identifies shared vulnerabilities and produces votes or other local commitments to new land use regulations or infrastructure improvements, particularly green infrastructure;
- joint land conservation or river/wetland restoration projects aimed at building or retaining flood-resisting attributes, (e.g. improving river access to its flood plain in one community thereby reducing flooding downstream; protecting floodplains up/downstream of vulnerable areas);
- communities developing inter-related strategies for addressing or living with low flooding;
- strategic buy-outs and removals of structures with willing landowners in highly hazardous locations;
- planning and building collaborative solutions for managing flood or storm waters, including innovative arrangements that tap beneficiaries in one jurisdiction to help finance projects in another.

There are surely other possible outcomes and accomplishments that will build resilience within a watershed. HMF has faith in the deep knowledge and creativity that exist at the local levels; thus, this RFP articulates necessary elements and goals and leaves it to the applicants to describe anticipated project approaches and outcomes. HMF seeks projects that move beyond planning to actions that materially advance the resilience of the watershed within which communities exist and from which communities will benefit. Our approach supports an initial process to get collaboration off the ground, but also encourages projects to move from planning to implementation, with additional implementation phases and funding for initially successful projects.

What We're Offering

HMF is dedicating \$120,000 to building resilience in Vermont watersheds and will choose up to three projects in different watersheds for projects requiring up-to-18 months to complete. For example, HMF could choose two \$60,000 projects, one \$60,000 project and two \$30,000 projects, one \$90,000 and one \$30,000 project, or three \$40,000 projects.

Project funds can be used to support new or existing staff, consultants, events, communications, project design, construction, and other expenses directly related to the project. While resources can



be scarce, HMF also asks project participants to provide additional cash funding for this work. The amount of funding is not prescribed but should be significant enough to show and ensure buy-in to this watershed project as well as to help achieve material success on the ground. In-kind contributions will only be considered if there is an easily documentable cash value and HMF can be confident the in-kind contribution will actually occur. One example of a documentable, in-kind match is allocating a percentage of time of a salaried employee to the project.

HMF has also allocated a total of \$120,000 matching implementation-funds for additional resilience activities or improvements for successful projects. Eligibility criteria will be articulated after project selection and amounts awarded will be determined after project completion.

What We're Looking For

For purposes of this RFP a watershed is defined as an area of land drained by a river, river system, group of rivers, or other water courses that converge to a single point at a lower elevation. Watersheds can be defined at multiple scales-from an area of less than 10 acres draining to a small upland stream to the Lake Champlain Basin which contains nearly half the state of Vermont. [Vermont has defined 17 drainage basins](#) for planning purposes-some of them are only a portion of a watershed and others combine several contiguous small watersheds. We expect that most projects applying to this program will encompass a somewhat smaller sub-watershed within one of these basins.

Projects must involve more than two towns (with an exception stated below), as cross-border collaboration is a major goal of this initiative. For small watersheds, a project might seek representation from every town. For larger watersheds, a demonstration project might start out with a small selection of towns that are linked by water flowing from one to another (an upstream/downstream connection). Projects could consist of multiple actions or one larger, high-value project. HMF expects applicants to build their projects on existing information, such as Basin Plans, River Corridor and Management Plans, Local and Multi-jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plans, Vermont's bridge and culvert inventory, the [Flood Ready Vermont website](#), etc.

Multi-stakeholder, cross-government collaboration and commitment

HMF anticipates projects seeking to accomplish outcomes at different scales (from hyper-local to across-the-watershed) and durations (short, medium and long-term) and involving participants from a number of sectors (government, business, planning, nonprofit, civic or faith groups). HMF believes participation by the following entities is critical:

- a. *Municipalities*: Each project should involve a minimum of three municipalities within a single watershed that are linked by a shared watercourse. An application from two municipalities will be considered where the majority of the watershed is within the control of the two municipalities, or under other compelling circumstances. Representation of the municipalities should at a minimum include:
 - the selectboard/city council;
 - the planning commission;
 - in towns that have a local Hazard Mitigation Committee, Conservation Commission and/or Energy Action Committee, representation by members of these entities are highly recommended; and
 - local emergency management directors, basin planners, river corridor managers or green infrastructure coordinators, or the like.
- b. *Regional Planning Commissions*: The relevant regional planning commission for these municipalities should be included in the project. If the watershed crosses RPC boundaries, then each RPC should be included in the project.

c. *State and Federal Agencies:* Various state and federal agencies have worked hard to help the State and its municipalities recover from Irene and other natural disasters. Staff from these agencies has often proven invaluable and you should consider their continued involvement.

d. *Non-profits:* If there is an active local, regional, or statewide non-profit (which also includes academic institutions) with interests in the watershed that would play a role in the project (or help carry the project outcomes forward in the future), it should be included. The nature of interests and concerns in a watershed planning project will have scientific, economic, and social aspects, so multiple non-profits should be considered to ensure a comprehensive understanding of these different influences. Please think inclusively and expansively in this regard.



e. *Local Businesses:* The business community often plays an active role in helping communities guide and build their futures. Representatives of this important sector (whether individual employers or leaders in a local business organization) should be included. Many communities will have farms and farmers facing river corridor challenges and this vital economic sector should be explicitly invited into the conversation.

f. *Other civic representation:* HMF would like to see participation beyond “the usual suspects.” Many times there are community members with important perspectives who have been active but don’t sit on a municipal body. Think also about the demographics of your community: which people should be included that often aren’t or don’t show up? Private property owners, particularly those owning streamside properties, need to participate and including the community’s younger populations will be viewed as a plus. The broader your inclusion in this project the better so long as it remains manageable and realistic.

Inclusive Approach and Actions

HMF envisions a two-phase project with the first focused on building a shared understanding of the watershed’s vulnerabilities, risks and opportunities (i.e., *educational objectives*) and a second phase oriented to designing short-term and longer-term solutions AND progress on at least some of the short-term watershed outcomes (i.e., *action objectives*).

Process: Recipients of these project funds will likely face competing interests within the watershed and within the communities themselves. An inclusive, flexible and transparent process will be important to generate excitement and involvement and to produce accepted and effective actions. Projects must demonstrate a commitment to broad and meaningful community engagement with opportunities for people of varying social and economic backgrounds and ages to come to together with the goal of building watershed resilience. HMF views creative, engaging, and effective process as one of the outcomes of this RFP; however that is not enough.

Action: HMF recognizes the complexity and long-term nature of watershed planning and will look to applicants to define specific actions and outcomes for their watershed. As outlined in the **Process** paragraph above, this RFP is aimed at promoting critical thinking about a watershed and its municipalities so that longer-term issues, opportunities and solutions are identified. Equally important, however, will be communities taking action to build their watershed's resilience. Within 18 months only certain shorter-term actions can likely be accomplished, but HMF believes proactive and tangible actions (even if small) will catalyze further work and also position the participating communities and their watersheds for future funding from other sources.

ECHO's Environmental Summit, March 19-21, 2015

ECHO will hold a 2.5-day workshop focused on inspiring and supporting "multi-organizational, regional teams to produce specific projects, programs, and plans that engage an enthusiastic community to address social and structural resiliency for flooding and stormwater issues related to climate change." This workshop provides an excellent and important opportunity for potential respondents to HMF's RFP to envision and design qualifying projects; attendance at the Summit will be considered a plus when applications are reviewed by HMF (although if you are not able to attend, your application is still encouraged). If your project team has not received an invitation to the Summit, contact Steve Perkins at ECHO.

Please note that an additional way you can improve your watershed's chances for being selected is by submitting a "letter of intent" by February 1, 2015 (see the RFP application form for more information)

Timelines

- Optional Letters of Intent due February 1, 2015 (letters are not an absolute requirement for an RFP award but will be considered a plus); HMF comments by March 1
- ECHO's Summit March 19-21 (attendance is not an absolute requirement for an RFP award but will be considered a plus; if you cannot attend, applications are still encouraged)
- Applications due April 15, 2015
- Projects chosen by June 1, 2015
- Grant Agreement(s) in place within 30 days of selection
- Project completed within 18 months
- Final project report and final payment within 30 days of project completion
- Additional HMF implementation matching-funds possible (see above)

Submission requirements are contained in the following grant application. Questions should be emailed to hmfwatershedrfp@vermontcf.org. Keep an eye on HMF's website for updates!

We look forward to choosing applications that build models for other watersheds in Vermont and around the country!



HIGH MEADOWS FUND

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Building Resilience in a Vermont Watershed Grant Application

This application should be read and interpreted with the RFP

Letter of Intent (due February 1, 2015)

In no more than 300 words please describe your concept(s) for building resilience in your watershed, who would be involved, the challenges and opportunities, the short and long-term outcomes, and the possible budget. Please keep your letter at a higher conceptual level than what is required in the full application; HMF will review your letter and provide feedback on the objectives and possible budget by March 1. *Submission of a letter of intent while not a pre-requisite will be considered a plus when full applications are reviewed; it also gives you a chance to test the waters with HMF.*

Attending ECHO's March 19-21 Climate Change Summit

This 2.5-day workshop provides an important opportunity to complete the vision and design of your proposed projects. Scholarship funding is available through ECHO. *Attendance at the Summit while not a pre-requisite will be considered a plus when full applications are reviewed by HMF.*

Full Application (due April 15, 2015)

Watershed

The RFP has provided a working definition of a watershed for purposes of this grant.

In no more than 150 words, please answer the following questions:

- What is the watershed within which the participating communities are located?
- How do the participating communities relate to each other and have they worked together before?
- Please provide a map and other helpful descriptive material.

Lead Organization(s)

Participating municipalities and their partner organizations are expected to play the primary role in project design, management and implementation. The lead partners must demonstrate that they have the leadership and capacity to ensure successful community engagement and carry out project activities.

- In no more than 400 words, please describe the “Lead Organizations” and “Supporting Partners” and their respective roles, responsibilities and capacities. Lead organizations are those that take primary responsibility for the success of this project and will be involved throughout; supporting partners are those organizations that play smaller or episodic roles. Lead organizations/applicants should demonstrate the capacity to provide the following key resources to conduct a successful project:

- a) effective and representative leadership;
- b) project management and coordination;
- c) communications abilities;
- d) implementation roles and responsibilities; and
- e) structural and financial commitments to the project and to stewarding its results.

If the lead organization will be a non-profit, **letters of commitment** from participating municipalities must be presented as part of this application. One or multiple lead organization(s) should be the applicant.

- Who should HMF communicate with regarding questions or feedback?

Project Narrative

This is your chance to wax eloquent about the project and to provide greater detail about what the project will look like and how you anticipate it will play out.

- In 200 words or less, please provide a summary statement of your project.
- Now, in no more than 750 words, go into greater detail to describe this project by addressing the following questions:
 - **What are the issues your watershed faces** as it works towards greater resiliency?
 - **Why are the participating communities and this watershed ready** for this project—in other words, what is the need, what have you already accomplished, and why is this project timely?
 - **Please describe the inclusive process you envision** for gathering voices and perspectives on the watershed’s vulnerabilities and opportunities. And how will you make decisions within this inclusive process? How have you or will you fulfill the multi-sector representation discussed in the “Multi-Stakeholder” section above. If you believe you’ve already completed the type of process described in the RFP and are ready to dive into implementation, please describe the process already utilized.
 - **What are the short-term outcomes** you’ll accomplish during this grant and what longer-term outcomes will you make progress against? In other words how do you specifically define success?
 - **What constraints or challenges do you anticipate** in this project (either with inclusive process or action)? What factors could impede success (e.g. outcomes may hinge on local ballot items)?
 - **How will you communicate** with your communities and others within the watershed?
 - **How will you monitor progress** and outcomes during and after this project?
 - Are entities or participating municipalities within your watershed undertaking any steps to reduce reliance on conventional sources of energy? These are not required for this watershed project, but will be considered a plus.

Budget

Explain how you project the grant monies will be used:

- Please provide a budget for the project (a mid-level amount of detail is acceptable).
- What will be the financial contribution by participating municipalities and partners (see “What We’re Offering” section)? The amount of matching funds is not prescribed but should be significant enough to show and ensure buy-in to this watershed project as well as to help achieve material success on the ground.

Additional Information

If you believe there is other relevant information, please provide in no more than 150 words.

Submission Requirements

Proposals must be submitted **as a single PDF**. Letters which document commitments to the project or otherwise support your application are encouraged. These letters and any other supporting materials should be included in **this single PDF**. Your application should be emailed to: hmfwatershedrfp@vermontcf.org no later than 5:00 p.m. on April 15, 2015.

Questions should be emailed to hmfwatershedrfp@vermontcf.org. Keep an eye on HMF's website for updates!