

Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL)

WETF Questions and Answers

1. Why aren't applications posted on the website? Can applicants copy, and/or forward applications to someone else who may want to apply?

- [*They are available through VDOL representatives as a way of ensuring that applicants receive technical assistance in developing the best possible application. Also, the VDOL representative is aware of other projects, other funding sources, and how they might interconnect.*
- [*Rather than sharing or forwarding applications, please refer interested parties to VDOL.*

2. What determines whether an applicant works with a local or central office VDOL representative?

- [*This is determined by the "scope" of the training initiative, in terms of geographical area(s) served and/or number of new jobs created. See question # 3 for more details.*
- [*Local VDOL representatives are the appropriate contact for local "projects" as defined below.*
- [*Central office staff are appropriate contacts for broader initiatives, either multi-region, statewide or large scale training "programs" that may involve multiple employers or training partners.*
- [*Contact names are found in the WETF Application Instructions on the web site, or you may call your local VDOL office for information.*

3. What distinguishes a one-time local "project" from a longer-term statewide or multi-region "program," and how is sustainability a factor in "programs?"

- [*A "project" may in fact occur more than once, but for the most part it addresses a specific, short-term localized need, like training workers for a new or expanding business, or re-training workers when new demands have suddenly impacted a local business or industry.*
- [*Skills developed in a local "project" don't typically address a statewide or regional skill shortage. They may meet a small scale or local need and are not intended to be sustained over an extended period.*
- [*A "program" should address a skill(s) deficit that impacts multiple sectors, regions, industries (or all three), to a significant degree, and requires a sustainable, comprehensive long-term approach. In developing a well designed "program", the applicant should strive for efficiency, accessibility, economy of scale and consistent quality.*
- [*An applicant can demonstrate actual and potential "sustainability" in several ways. First, the program must be developed at a cost that can eventually be covered through tuition or other "user fees". The cost cannot exceed the perceived value if it's going to succeed without public funding. WETF can help with start up costs, but the applicant must demonstrate how other funding sources such as employer contributions or tuition are likely to support the program on a long-term basis.*

4. Why are applicants required to work with VDOL representatives?

- [*VDOL staff are trained to guide applicants in developing a successful project and completing an application that is likely to be approved. Our staff may also be aware of additional partners or funding sources that can complement the WETF.*
- [*This initial connection helps to ensure that VDOL is a key partner in recruiting candidates for projects that train workers for new jobs, and/or recruiting candidates for entry level positions resulting from incumbent workers being promoted to new positions after training.*

5. Is sustainability a factor in whether or not an application is approved?

- [*Sustainability is not an absolute requirement, because we recognize that many successful initiatives can be completed in a single one-time effort. For example, a new or expanding employer may need to train one large group of workers in a "one time" project.*
- [*However, sustainability is important in applications that address a workforce need that requires ongoing, broad-based, long-term training. The WETF can help launch such programs, but applicants must demonstrate a plan to maintain the effort beyond the period of public funding.*

6. What constitutes "matching" contributions?

- [Cash contributions from the applicant or partners, in the form of tuition paid by employers or students, cash grants from a labor organization, business association or other partner. This can include private and/or public funding.
- [Items purchased specifically for use in training or for jobs resulting from training.
- [In-kind contributions such as classroom space, use of company equipment or materials, trainers provided by an employer or other partner, time spent developing curricula, recruiting, interviewing and screening candidates. All items in this category should be calculated at (realistic) fair market value.
- [Match can include wages paid to individuals while they attend training. It also includes travel, lodging, or other costs related to sending workers offsite for training, if covered by the employer. _
- [**Please note!** Match is entered only in the application itself. **It is not entered on the budget or budget narrative.** We do not “track” match; it is a “good faith” estimate that is as accurate as possible based on information available at the time the application is completed.

7. Under what circumstances can WETF grants train incumbent workers?

- [The strongest justification for training incumbent workers is the employer’s commitment to reward successful trainees with a significant wage increase or promotion as a direct result of the WETF project.
- [In these challenging economic times, it is also appropriate to request funds for re-training that will avert layoffs or reduction in work hours. An applicant needs to describe a direct link between the training and greater job security.

8. Under what circumstances can a WETF grant be used to cover wages, or a portion of wages?

- [If an employer uses internal staff as “trainers” for new or incumbent workers, **but only for the portion of time they are functioning specifically as trainers**, effectively removed from normal work responsibilities.
- [For hours that staff devote to developing, implementing and administering a WETF sponsored training project, again only for hours spent away from regular duties.
- [For hours that staff spend in mentoring or supervising trainees, **over and above routine supervision**, as noted above, only for hours away from regular duties.
- [WETF can offset the cost of “replacement workers” to perform critical functions in the absence of staff who attend training. This is common in health care, where employers must hire temporary staff to provide patient care while trainees are absent.
- [Wages and benefits of external trainers who are hired to deliver training. WETF can also cover travel and other costs for external trainers.
- [All of the above items are identifiable/measurable costs that are directly related to training. They may be supported by the WETF grant, but they also qualify as match, if covered by the applicant or partners.

9. What other items can (or cannot) be covered or supported by a WETF grant?

- [We cannot cover **wages** paid to trainees, whether in OJT or classroom training.
- [While we can’t cover wages of trainees, we can support other costs such as travel, food and lodging for individuals to attend training off site. If the employer covers such costs, it adds to the match.
- [WETF can cover books, equipment (with prior VDOL approval), supplies and materials that will be used almost exclusively for the training project. If a WETF grant is used to purchase items that meet our definition of “equipment” (having a per unit value of \$5,000 or greater), VDOL retains ownership rights to those items. If the employer purchases such items for use in training, it constitutes match.
- [WETF grants cannot cover office equipment, software licenses or other general costs associated with an expansion or hiring new staff. Those are considered normal business investments that are neither used exclusively for, nor consumed during training activities. In most cases, such items should **not** be added to match because they are normal business expenses, not directly or exclusively related to training.
- [WETF can cover, or offset other direct costs related to training, including, but not limited to: classroom space; cost of trainers/instructors; recruitment/promotional materials that (as a general guideline) should not exceed 10% of the grant. You may discuss exceptions to the 10% limit with your VDOL representative.
- [WETF is **not** intended to cover standard (required) safety training; or routine professional development that is the norm in certain occupations (accounting, law, etc.) in order to maintain professional credentials. Such trainings are considered to be a normal cost of doing business.
- [WETF can cover work readiness, soft skills or safety training that is **embedded in** occupational skills training.

10. Why do we ask how soon the training will begin?

- [*It's important to know that training need has been clearly established, that all necessary partners are on board, and that activities are (or can be) scheduled in a timely manner.*
- [*It is crucial that we obligate funds as closely as possible to the time they will be spent, to avoid tying up funds for projects that might not materialize.*

11. Can applicants apply for a new grant while they still have a grant “open”?

- [*Yes, a new application will be considered, provided it meets all program criteria and the applicant can demonstrate the capacity to deliver an additional program.*

12. How long can grant activities last?

- [*Grants are usually awarded for 12 months or less.*

13. Why are grant recipients required to provide Social Security Numbers for individuals who complete WETF sponsored training?

- [*SSNs provide VDOL with an objective way to measure outcomes over time. Wage records can substantiate that individuals retained employment following training (in the case of workers at risk of losing jobs), and can confirm (for all trainees) that post-training wages meet the WETF wage requirements, including wage increases.*
- [*State law requires that all individuals who complete the funded training will provide their SSNs to VDOL.*

14. Must an application include more than one employer partner to be approved?

- [*Multiple partners are not required, because many excellent projects could serve a single employer.*
- [*If a training initiative could benefit multiple employers/businesses, we expect that every effort will be made to include all potential business partners and job seekers.*

15. Separate from the merits of the project, are there other factors that could adversely impact approval of an application?

- [*As a part of state government, VDOL recognizes certain factors that could preclude our awarding a grant to an otherwise eligible applicant. Those factors include, but aren't limited to: outstanding tax liabilities or other known fiscal irregularities, a history of unresolved workplace safety violations, a continuing pattern of employee layoffs despite previous WETF training initiatives.*

16. Why do we ask about the total cost of the training project?

- [*This helps to ensure that an applicant has considered every aspect of delivering the training, and has secured the necessary resources to fund the project. Upfront planning makes it less likely that a project will be derailed by unanticipated expenditures.*
- [*It should state the amount requested from the WETF, and provide a clear picture of the relationship between public and private contributions.*