



University  
of Vermont

Leahy Institute  
for Rural Partnerships

## Request for Proposals

Fall 2026 Application Cycle

Background .....	2
What We Fund.....	2
Evaluation Criteria .....	2
Eligibility .....	3
Award Amounts.....	3
How to Apply .....	4
Frequently Asked Questions.....	6
Letter of Intent Questions .....	10
Proposal Questions .....	11
Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships Evaluation Rubric.....	12

## Background

The Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships' mission is to amplify existing partnerships and develop new partnerships between the University of Vermont and Vermont organizations and communities working to implement solutions to rural challenges.

We envision a Vermont where all communities can thrive.

With funding from the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the Leahy Institute supports partnerships between University of Vermont faculty, staff, students and facilities and rural and community-driven initiatives, non-profits pursuing rural development, and early-stage startups that are likely to have a significant impact on rural communities through a series of Partnership and Capacity Grants.

The Leahy Institute is a program of UVM's Office of Engagement. In addition to this funding initiative, the Office of Engagement offers resources to community organizations including research partnerships, internship support from the Career Center, data services, and service-learning opportunities from the Center for Engaged Learning Office.

Grant availability through the Leahy Institute is subject to any federal changes that may occur at the Congressional or agency level.

## What We Fund

The Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships funds project costs associated with research partnerships between community organizations and the University of Vermont.

Through this funding initiative, UVM will join as partners with Vermont leaders who are working toward impactful solutions to rural challenges in our **priority focus areas**:

- **Regenerative Agriculture**
- **Community Schools**
- **Transit & Housing Solutions**
- **Remote & Co-Working Practices**
- **Resilient Energy Systems**
- **Healthy Ecosystems**
- **Access to Health Care in Rural Areas**
- **Policy & Governance**

## Evaluation Criteria

The Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships is looking to fund proposals which meet the following criteria:

1. **Engage in a partnership** with the University of Vermont and its students, faculty, and resources.
2. Alignment with Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships' **priority focus areas**.
3. Show a **deep understanding** of what is challenging Vermont's rural communities and economies and propose impactful solutions.
4. Consider **under-served rural communities** in project outcomes and evaluation.
5. Demonstrate **feasibility and scalability** in project design.

The Leahy Institute Advisory Board, made up of both UVM and community leaders, vets partnership opportunities, reviews applications, and provides input to program staff toward awarding and approving funded projects.

## Eligibility

The Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships accepts applications for **partnership projects** that involve a Community Partner and a University of Vermont partner.

- **Community Partners** include all organizations that work within the State of Vermont and who are working to impact Vermont’s rural communities. This includes nonprofit and for-profit organizations, and government entities.
- **University of Vermont Partners** include any entity at the University of Vermont (faculty member, department, institute, etc.) that provides support or direction to a partnership project alongside a Community Partner.
- Applications can be submitted by either partner (Community or UVM), and either partner may take the “lead” role in project outcomes and deliverables.
- **Capacity Grant applications (see below) do not require a solidified partnership and are intended to catalyze partnership engagement.** (E.g. If you are a community partner applying for a capacity grant you do not need to identify a UVM partner in this application.)

To ensure eligibility to receive grant funds from the Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships, Community Partners will need to have an active registration with a Unique Entity Identifier in the System for Award Management (SAM.gov).

**Please make sure all community partners receiving funds have an active SAM.gov Entity Registration/UEI before the proposal deadline of October 13, 2026.**

Please contact Daria Jarani, Program Manager, at [djarani@uvm.edu](mailto:djarani@uvm.edu) with questions on SAM.gov.

## Award Amounts

The Leahy Institute awards funding for partnership projects at the following levels:

- **Capacity Grants (Up to \$20,000) will catalyze partnership and project development.** This is the entry track for Community/UVM Partners who have a vision for increased rural impact but **need support to develop the partnership.** Capacity Grant awardees will foster collaborative relationships with the UVM Office of Engagement/Leahy Institute with the goal of developing a strong working relationship with an engaged partner.
- **Partnership Grants (Up to \$250,000) will fund research projects, engagement initiatives, student internships and service-learning experiences, or business plan development for partners working to address rural challenges.** Those interested in applying for a Partnership

Grant from the Leahy Institute should have clearly articulated goals, measures of success, and an existing partnership between Community and UVM Partners.

## Application Timeline

Milestone	Date
RFP Posted & Application Portal Opens	May 4, 2026
<b>Letter of Intent Deadline</b>	<b>August 10, 2026, by 11:59 PM</b>
Invitations for Full Proposals Sent	September 10, 2026
<b>Full Proposal Deadline</b>	<b>October 13, 2026, by 11:59 PM</b>
Award Notification	November 23, 2026 (estimated)
<b>Period of Performance</b>	<b>January 1, 2027 through December 31, 2027</b>

## How to Apply

The University of Vermont uses the InfoReady platform for grant submissions. Applicants will create a user ID and password and will be able to access the Letter of Intent from the applicant homepage.

1. Follow this link to access the Leahy Institute Letter of Intent (LOI):  
<https://submit.uvm.edu/#freeformCompetitionDetail/2012475>
2. Click “Apply” to be redirected to the Log In screen.
3. Community Partners:
  - a. Scroll to the “Login for Other Users” box.
  - b. Click Register
  - c. Fill out the registration form, including the email address where you would like to receive notifications.
  - d. Submit the form and confirm your account using the email address you entered.
  - e. You may now log in to InfoReady and begin your Leahy Institute Letter of Intent.
4. UVM Partners:
  - a. For our applicants who are UVM Faculty or Staff, please work with your Department Chair, Unit Pre-Award Administrator, and/or Business Manager when considering applying for a Leahy Institute grant. **\*\*UVM Click Funding Proposals are NOT required when submitting a Letter of Intent.**

- b. Log in to InfoReady with your UVM SSO.
  - c. Begin your letter of intent once logged in.
  - d. Confirm that your Financial Conflict of Interest Disclosure Profile in [Click](#) is up to date.  
\*If you have any questions about updating your Disclosure Profile, please refer to [OVPR's COI/COC/FCOI webpage](#) and/or the [How to Update your Disclosure Profile User Guide](#) located therein
5. Hit "Submit Application" when completed.

For questions about the grant program or application process, please contact Daria Jarani, Program Manager, at [djarani@uvm.edu](mailto:djarani@uvm.edu).

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. **The Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships is funded by federal funds through a grant from USDA/NIFA. Will these funds continue to be available amid federal funding challenges?**

Funding for the Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships is subject to the direction of our sponsor, USDA/National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). We remain in close contact with our program managers at NIFA and continue to carry out our mission as directed.

If our funding situation were to change, the Leahy Institute will provide notice to applicants and current partners.

### 2. **Who is eligible to apply for a grant?**

This grant is open to all organizations that work within the State of Vermont and is open to University of Vermont faculty and staff.

We accept applications from nonprofit and for-profit organizations, start-ups, local government/municipalities, and UVM-affiliated applicants.

### 3. **I am a faculty/staff member at the University of Vermont. Am I eligible to apply?**

You are welcome to apply to this program as a UVM faculty or staff member.

Please see Question 7 for important details on working with your department/unit to apply for a Leahy grant.

### 4. **How do I know how much funding to request for the project?**

The best practice for requesting funding is to request the amount that will promote the greatest impact while also considering the organization's current capacity.

Project sustainability past the 12-month period of performance is a major component of proposal evaluation, so it is important to consider what the immediate needs are but not promise too much that the project's sustainability would come into question.

### 5. **What project costs are eligible, and which are ineligible?**

Costs essential to completion of the project scope of work are eligible, but must remain compliant within [USDA/NIFA federal guidelines](#).

Examples of eligible costs include:

- Salaries/Time for project personnel
- Consultant & Contract Expenses
- Publications
- Domestic Travel
- Memberships to technical/professional organizations
- Stipends for students and trainees
- Equipment <\$5,000 (e.g. technology)

Examples of ineligible costs include:

- Fixed equipment
- Building renovations
- Entertainment costs
  - o *For more information on food-related costs, see Question 6.*
- Lobbying/Membership to lobbying organizations
- Cash incentives
- Promotional items (Items to give away: Conference giveaways; T-shirts; bags, pens, pencils, etc.)

Indirect costs of up to 1% are allowed on modified total direct costs.

For questions on eligible costs, please contact Daria Jarani, Program Manager, at [djarani@uvm.edu](mailto:djarani@uvm.edu).

**6. The project I plan to propose includes budget line items for food/refreshments. How can I determine which expenses are allowed under NIFA guidelines?**

Food and meals expenses fall under two categories: sponsored provisions or business meals.

\*The Leahy Institute will support eligible sponsored provisions.

\*Business meals, as a rule, cannot be supported through the Leahy Institute or through any sponsored project, as they are considered entertainment

*(Note: Meals consumed while in official travel status do not fall in this category. They are considered per diem expenses and should be reimbursed in accordance with the organization's established travel policies subject to statutory limitations.)*

Sponsored Provisions can be defined as food/meals served during a UVM-hosted workshop, event, training, seminar, etc. with a published agenda that shows the timeframe of the event is of a long-enough duration that food/a meal needs to be served to the attendees. A sponsored provision is for food served at an event *hosted by UVM* and does not include meals provided at external restaurants.

Example of Allowable Sponsored Provision: An event with an agenda from 8 AM to 4:30 PM, where all attendees are expected to stay at the event for the duration. It is reasonable in this case that the organization would serve lunch and light snacks to encourage the attendees to attend the all-day event and still be provided with food and nourishment.

**7. I am a UVM Faculty/Staff Member. How can I communicate to my department my intent to apply for a Leahy Institute grant?**

For our applicants who are UVM Faculty or Staff, please work with your Department Chair, Unit PreAward Administrator, and/or Business Manager when considering applying for a Leahy Institute grant. Projects that will be administered by the UVM Partner will need approval through UVMClick, as with other federal grants.

UVM Click submissions are not required at the Letter of Intent stage. If invited to submit a full proposal, please work with your Department Chair, Business Manager and/or Unit PreAward Administrator to process your Funding Proposal through UVM Click in addition to your InfoReady submission.

**8. What is the Leahy Institute Advisory Board?**

The Leahy Institute Advisory Board was created to advise the Institute on its work and to help promote, review, and approve partnership opportunities that will provide nationally scalable economic development solutions. Board membership is comprised of community and business leaders, and key UVM leaders.

[Click here for the full list of Board Members and their affiliations.](#)

#### **9. How can UVM students be involved in approved partnerships?**

The Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships prioritizes the cultivation of reciprocal relationships among UVM students and rural communities in service to Vermont's economy. Community partners can engage with UVM students through (1) Participation in service-learning courses led by UVM faculty, (2) creating internship positions, (3) micro-internships, (4) semester and summer internships, (5) year-long co-ops, and (6) participation in summer intern cohort workshops.

For more information on Student Engagement at UVM, please contact Kristen Andrews, Internship Coordinator, at [kandrews@uvm.edu](mailto:kandrews@uvm.edu).

#### **10. How can my organization prepare materials for student engagement to include in our application?**

Student engagement, including but not limited to internships and service learning, are an important piece of a successful application. If your organization is preparing to host an intern, or would like to get the process started, please include one of the following **Student Engagement Attachments** when preparing your final proposal:

- \*Internship job description with a named supervisor
- \*Service-Learning scope of work for students and an identified faculty instructor
- \*Micro-internship job description
- \*Research scope of work with faculty sponsor, and evidence of IRB initiation

For more information on Student Engagement at UVM, please contact Kristen Andrews, Internship Coordinator, at [kandrews@uvm.edu](mailto:kandrews@uvm.edu).

#### **11. What is service-learning, and how is it offered at UVM?**

Each year, between 80 to 100 community-engaged service-learning courses are offered at UVM. Students apply their coursework in real-world settings, and in ways that address priorities identified by community partners. Faculty provide a structure for accountability to the project or service that benefits the community partners and helps students learn from their experience.

#### **12. What are the reporting requirements for this grant program?**

Funding recipients will be asked to complete two reports over the year-long period of performance: a 6-month report and a final closeout report. It is the Leahy Institute's intent to keep reporting streamlined, and we will attempt to reduce the burden on the awardee wherever we are able.

#### **13. How does the Leahy Institute work with funded projects during the performance period?**

In addition to reporting, the Leahy Institute will invite partners' participation in our events, including the annual RISE Summit, our annual Pitch Night with funders and other community leaders, and opportunities to network in support of the project.

You'll also be assigned a project lead who will act as your liaison over the course of the period of performance.

**14. If I am denied funding for this cycle, what are my next steps?**

If your proposed project does not receive funding, there will be future opportunities to request support. The Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships hosts annual grant cycles every Fall. We will be publicizing future grant cycles in our Office of Engagement newsletter.

Please sign up [here](#) to receive updates from the Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships directly to your email inbox.

## Letter of Intent Questions

### Applicant Information

1. Applicant First/Last Name
2. Email Address
3. Phone Number

### Organization Information

4. Organization Name
5. Annual Operating Budget

### Project Information

6. Project Title
7. Project Start/End Date
8. Short Project Description (250 characters)
9. Amount Requested
10. UVM Partner Name(s) and Contact Information
11. Community Partner Name(s) & Organization(s) and Contact Information
12. Please outline the primary project expenses you anticipate. (200 words max.)
13. Please describe your proposed project. For guidance on how to structure your answer, please consult the Leahy Institute Evaluation Rubric. (500 words max.)
14. What organizations or projects are you aware of that address a similar rural challenge, and how is your project unique in its contribution? (200 words max.)

### Priority Focus Areas (check box)

- Regenerative Agriculture
- Community Schools
- Transit & Housing Solutions
- Remote & Co-Working Practices
- Resilient Energy Systems
- Healthy Ecosystems
- Access to Health Care in Rural Areas
- Policy & Governance

**By checking this box, I consent to having my letter of intent materials potentially shared with UVM faculty and staff for partnership purposes.**

## Full Proposal Questions

**\*\*The following questions and attachments are *only required if invited for a full proposal*. They are included here for planning purposes.**

### Project Information

All word limits are suggested.

1. List **at least two (2) goals** of your project. For each goal, list the measurable outcomes, quantitative and/or qualitative, that will result from achieving these goals. (400 words)
2. What is the intended impact of the project on the rural communities targeted in this proposal? What are the impacts at the community level, county level, state level in Vermont? Who are the recipients of anticipated outcomes? (500 words)
3. How does this project consider perspectives of underserved rural communities? (300 words)
4. How do you plan to integrate UVM students, faculty, and/or resources into your partnership project? (300 words)
5. How do you plan to sustain the project beyond the one-year period of performance? (200 words)

### Attachments

- Estimated Project Budget (PDF)
- Budget Justification (PDF)
- Partner Letter of Support (optional if Capacity Grant) (PDF)
- UVM Click FP Number (for UVM Partner Applications) (Text entry)
- Sam.gov UEI # (for Community Partner Applications) (Text entry)

**Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships  
Evaluation Rubric  
Fall 2026 Funding Cycle**

*Please note: The Leahy Institute Evaluation Rubric is an evaluation tool that is used to assess project eligibility and alignment. While your project may score highly on the rubric, a high score does not guarantee funding.*

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Letter of Intent</b>	<b>Full Proposal</b>
<b>Engage in a partnership with the University of Vermont and its students, faculty, and resources.</b>	Does the proposed partnership integrate explicit partners within the UVM network? This can include faculty, research centers/institutes, and university offices.	5-The letter of intent clearly expresses how the applicants seek to partner with UVM.  1-The letter of intent does not express a relevant partnership potential.	5-The proposal clearly expresses how the applicants seek to partner with UVM.  1-The proposal displays no clear partnership potential.
	Does the proposed partnership plan for the inclusion of students, either through internships, participation in service-learning courses, or other opportunities for UVM students?	5-The letter of intent clearly expresses how student engagement is incorporated into the partnership.  1-The letter of intent does not articulate how student engagement applies to the proposed partnership.	5-The proposal clearly expresses how student engagement is incorporated into the partnership <b>by including at least one Student Engagement Attachment (see FAQ #10 for details).</b>  1-The proposal does not articulate how student engagement applies to the proposed partnership.
<b>Align with Leahy Institute for Rural Partnership themes.</b>	Does the proposed partnership align with one or more of the eight Leahy Institute priority focus areas?	5 - The letter of intent aligns with one or more of the Leahy Institute’s thematic areas and articulates an innovative approach to problem-solving in that area.  1-The letter of intent does not clearly articulate alignment with at least one Leahy Institute focus area.	5 - The proposal aligns with one or more of the Leahy Institute’s thematic areas and articulates an innovative approach to problem-solving in that area.  1-The proposal does not clearly articulate alignment with at least one Leahy Institute focus area.
<b>Show a deep understanding of what is challenging Vermont’s rural communities and economies and</b>	What is the intended impact on the rural communities targeted through the proposal? What is the impact at the community level, county level, state	5 – The letter of intent clearly identifies the problem and proposes a relevant, impactful solution.  1-The letter of intent does not clearly articulate a	5-The proposal clearly identifies the different impacts that the partnership will have for diverse stakeholders and considers the effects on the larger community.

<b><i>propose impactful solutions.</i></b>	level in Vermont? Who are the recipients of anticipated outcomes?	problem and solution and is vague on who will be impacted.	1-The proposal does not clearly articulate intended outcomes and is vague in who is impacted.
<b><i>Consider perspectives of underserved rural communities in project outcomes and evaluation.</i></b>	Does the proposed partnership incorporate perspectives of underserved rural communities into the intended outcomes?	5- The letter of intent is clear in considering perspectives of underserved rural communities  1-The letter of intent does not address perspectives of underserved rural communities	5- The proposal clearly articulates how the partners plan to incorporate perspectives of underserved rural communities in their programming.  1-The proposal does not meaningfully incorporate these perspectives.
<b><i>Demonstrate feasibility and scalability in project design.</i></b>	Is this project feasible? Does the project have strong potential for creating lasting partnerships that positively impact rural communities in Vermont?	5- The letter of intent clearly identifies how the partnership will achieve its intended outcomes.  1-The letter of intent does not clearly state how outcomes will be accomplished.	5- The proposal clearly identifies how the partnership will achieve its intended outcomes and identifies potential challenges with accompanying solutions.  1-Evidence of the proposal's intended impacts and challenges is vague and unclear.
	Does the proposed partnership and its outcomes show significant potential for funding leverage, activity, or participation beyond the Leahy Institute funding? Does the proposal include plans for future funding opportunities to sustain the work?	5-The letter of intent identifies a future for the project, and how Leahy Institute funds may be leveraged.  1-The letter of intent does not include a clear growth plan.	5-The proposal includes a clear growth trajectory, including additional sources of funding, additional partnerships, and possible replicability of programming.  1-The proposal does not include a clear growth plan.