

1 Sec. 1. ECONOMIC RELIEF FOR BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS;
2 CORONAVIRUS RELIEF FUND; APPROPRIATIONS

3 (a) Determination of necessity due to COVID-19. The General Assembly
4 determines that the expenditure of monies from the Coronavirus Relief Fund
5 pursuant to this section is necessary to provide support to individuals and
6 businesses that have suffered economic harm due to the COVID-19 crisis.

7 (b) Appropriations. The following amounts are appropriated from the
8 Coronavirus Relief Fund to the named recipients for the purpose specified:

9 (1) \$5,000,000 to the Working Lands Enterprise Fund for grants to
10 businesses within the agricultural, food and forest, and wood products
11 industries.

12 (A) The Working Lands Enterprise Board shall award grants to
13 provide assistance for:

14 (i) recovering from verifiable losses incurred due to the COVID-
15 19 crisis; and

16 (ii) developing new products or markets necessary for the
17 sustainable viability of the business because of changes in the supply chain and
18 relevant markets due to the COVID-19 crisis.

19 (B) The Board shall not award grants to businesses in the dairy sector
20 that are eligible for other assistance from the Coronavirus Relief Fund.

1 (2) \$5,000,000 to the Vermont Community Loan Fund, of which the
2 Fund shall allocate \$2,500,000 to issue grants of not more than \$10,000 to
3 woman-owned businesses and \$2,500,000 to issue grants of not more than
4 \$10,000 to minority-owned businesses.

5 (A) The Agency of Commerce and Community Development shall

6 (i) design a grant application;

7 (ii) provide notice to applicants concerning allowable expenditures
8 under the CARES Act;

9 (iii) host an online application process; and

10 (iv) support outreach efforts through media outlets.

11 (B) The Vermont Commission on Women and a host nonprofit that
12 works with minority businesses shall conduct outreach within their respective
13 business communities and provide support for applicants as they research and
14 apply for the grants.

15 (C) If any funds remain unspent on September 1, 2020, the Agency
16 and the Fund shall assess the participation rates in the grant programs and
17 reallocate funds as is necessary.

18 (3) \$3,000,000 to the Agency for Commerce and Community
19 Development for grants to businesses that provide highway and bridge
20 maintenance services for the Agency of Transportation or municipal highway
21 departments, or both.

1 (4) \$3,000,000 to the Department of Tourism and Marketing to provide
2 marketing support to businesses recovering from the COVID-19 crisis.

3 (5) \$3,400,000 to the Agency of Commerce and Community
4 Development to establish a Restart Vermont Technical Support Network to
5 make available an appropriate level of professional assistance to businesses to
6 enable them to re-emerge from the COVID-19 emergency in a viable way.

7 (A) The Agency shall issue a request for proposals to service
8 providers to establish a group of Recovery Navigators qualified to provide
9 businesses with assistance in revising business models, business and financial
10 planning, and grant and loan writing support.

11 (B) The request for proposals issued by the Agency shall solicit
12 service providers adequately demonstrating their qualifications in areas
13 including:

14 (i) operational expertise and ability in helping businesses
15 modernize current operating practices;

16 (ii) knowledge and experience in developing digital strategies for
17 retailers needing to establish a more robust and competitive online presence;

18 (iii) architecture and physical space design for optimal flow in
19 restaurants adjusting their model and space to accommodate more takeout and
20 less seating, space for meal preparation, and food delivery logistics;

1 (iv) reconfiguration of manufacturing equipment and processes to
2 enable production of personal protective equipment, as well as accommodation
3 of safety measures resulting from the COVID-19 emergency;

4 (v) technology or software consulting to agricultural producers
5 and manufacturers on the utilization of technology to solve problems; and

6 (vi) legal and other professional services experienced in helping
7 businesses develop turnaround plans, including restructuring debt,
8 prioritization of payables, and orderly unwinding businesses.

9 (6) \$1,000,000 to the Department of Housing and Community
10 Development for grants to communities through the Better Places Program to
11 purchase or lease equipment, including masks, sanitizing stations, hands free
12 door pulls, outdoor tables and chairs, and other items used towards public
13 safety measures and the mitigation of the spread of COVID-19, while enabling
14 local businesses and organizations to reopen.

15 (7) \$64,600,000 to the Agency of Commerce and Community
16 Development, in consultation with the Department of Taxes, and with approval
17 of the Joint Fiscal Committee, to allocate for additional emergency economic
18 recovery grants pursuant to Secs. 2–3 of S.350 (2020), as enacted, subject to
19 the following:

20 (A) The Agency and Department may issue grants to businesses that
21 have suffered a 50 percent or greater reduction in revenue in a monthly or

1 quarterly period from March 1, 2020 to September 1, 2020 as compared to the
2 same period in 2019.

3 (B) The Agency shall allocate not less than \$10,000,000 for grants to
4 nonprofit organizations.

5 (C) If on or before August 1, 2020 the Agency and the Department
6 have not expended all of the funds appropriated in S.350 (2020), as enacted,
7 the Agency and Department shall combine and distribute those funds with the
8 amounts appropriated in this act.

9 (8) \$1,500,000 to the Agency of Natural Resources for grants through
10 the Outdoor Recreation Business Assistance Program.

11 (9) \$100,000 to Vermont Public Radio and \$100,000 to Vermont Public
12 Television.

13 (10) \$5,000,000 to Southeastern Vermont Community Action to act as
14 fiscal agent for a program, Restaurants and Farmers Feeding the Hungry, the
15 purpose of which is to feed Vermonters who are food insecure by engaging
16 Vermont restaurants that have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis
17 to prepare meals using foodstuffs purchased from Vermont farms and food
18 producers.

19 (A) SEVCA shall collaborate with the Agency of Commerce and
20 Community Development; the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets; the
21 Agency of Human Services; the Department of Public Safety; the Community

1 Action Agencies; the Vermont Food Bank; Hunger Free Vermont; the
2 Vermont Hunger Council; the Sustainable Jobs Fund/Farm to Plate; the
3 Vermont Community Foundation; the Downtown Brattleboro Alliance;
4 Shiftmeals; Mama Sezz; and others.

5 (B) Under the Program SEVCA and partners shall:

6 (i) establish 12 community-scale hubs across Vermont to
7 coordinate restaurant engagement and distribution of 18,500 meals per week;

8 (ii) engage more than 50 restaurants of various sizes to produce
9 meals;

10 (iii) purchase not less than 10 percent of ingredients from local
11 farms and producers; and

12 (iv) augment the existing food distribution network to meet the
13 increased food insecurity of residents.

14 (c) Administration of funds. A recipient of an appropriation to administer
15 grants and other assistance in this section:

16 (1) may use not more than six percent of the funds for the cost of
17 administration;

18 (2) shall require a recipient of a grant to attest to the intended use of a
19 grant award and to commit to expending grant funds before December 20,

20 2020; and

1 (3) shall disclose to applicants that all expenditures of funding from the
2 Coronavirus Relief Fund are subject to audit by the State and may be recovered
3 by the State if the recipient uses the funding for an illegible purpose under the
4 CARES Act.

5 Sec. 2. OUTDOOR RECREATION BUSINESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM;

6 COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

7 (a) Purpose. The purpose of this section is to provide financial assistance
8 to outdoor recreation businesses in the State to assist with compliance with or
9 implementation of COVID-19 public health precautions.

10 (b) Definitions. As used in this section:

11 (1) “Outdoor recreation business” means any person conducting a
12 business or a service within the State that offers outdoor recreation as the
13 principle part of the business or service, including outdoor outfitters, fishing
14 guides, snowmobile tours, ski tours, and other eligible activities approved by
15 the Secretary. An “outdoor recreation business” includes for-profit businesses,
16 not-for-profit businesses, and charitable organizations organized under 26
17 U.S.C. § 501(c)(3).

18 (2) “Secretary” means the Secretary of Natural Resources.

19 (c) Program establishment.

20 (1) The Secretary shall establish an Outdoor Recreation Business
21 Assistance Program (Program) to provide grants to outdoor recreation

1 businesses for costs or expenses necessary to comply with or implement
2 COVID-19 public health precautions, including costs or expenses related to
3 one or more of the following:

4 (A) cleaning or disinfection services or equipment;

5 (B) personal protection equipment for staff, customers, or
6 participants;

7 (C) symptom monitoring or diagnosis to ensure safe participation by
8 customers or participants;

9 (D) signage or informational material to inform staff, customers, and
10 participants of necessary public health precautions;

11 (E) temporary staff housing necessary to maintain public health
12 precautions;

13 (F) maintenance or repair of trails where damage is caused by
14 increased usage during the declared COVID-19 public health emergency; and

15 (G) other improvements necessary to address public safety needs due
16 to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

17 (2) In order to qualify for assistance under the Program, an outdoor
18 recreation business shall:

19 (A) be currently operating or providing services; and

20 (B) accurately demonstrate to the Secretary or the Secretary's
21 designee eligible costs or expenses that the outdoor recreation business

1 incurred or will incur on or after March 1, 2020 and before December 20,
2 2020.

3 (e) Implementation and administration.

4 (1) The Secretary shall administer the Program and may implement the
5 Program by:

6 (A) contracting with an independent public or private entity;

7 (B) contracting for or hiring up to two temporary positions at the
8 Agency of Natural Resources; or

9 (C) reallocating existing Agency of Natural Resources staff positions
10 to work exclusively on the Program or other CARES Act, Pub. L. No. 116-136
11 eligible activities.

12 (2) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the Secretary
13 may enter into a contract with an independent public or private entity as
14 authorized under this section without the need to competitively bid the
15 contract. For the purposes of the Program, the public health risk posed by
16 COVID-19 shall be deemed to be an emergency situation that justifies the
17 execution of a sole source contract pursuant to Bulletin 3.5, the State's
18 Procurement and Contracting Procedures.

19 (e) Application; processing.

20 (1) The Secretary or the Secretary's designee shall create an application
21 form that outdoor recreation businesses shall utilize when applying for an

1 award. Applicants shall certify that all information they provide is truthful and
2 accurate to the best of their knowledge, information, and belief.

3 (2) The Secretary or the Secretary's designee shall, based on the amount
4 of cost or expense documented by the outdoor recreation business on the date
5 the application is received, provide up to the maximum award authorized under
6 this section. Applications shall be processed in the order received, but an
7 application shall not be ready for evaluation until the Secretary or the
8 Secretary's designee determines that the application is administratively
9 complete and includes required proof of costs or expenses incurred in response
10 to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

11 (3) Once an outdoor recreation business submits a complete application
12 and demonstrates eligible costs or expenses, the Secretary or the Secretary's
13 designee shall promptly issue a payment, provided that the appropriated funds
14 have not been expended. The last payment may be a partial payment
15 consisting of the remaining available funds.

16 (4) Each award under this section shall be a direct payment from the
17 State of Vermont to an eligible outdoor recreation business. Outdoor
18 recreation businesses shall not submit more than one application.

19 (f) Payment; maximum. The maximum amount of an award that may be
20 awarded under this section shall be \$30,000.00.

21 (g) Program terms and limitations.

1 (1) The Secretary shall attempt to award grants equitably on a
2 geographic basis across the State. After equity of geographic distribution is
3 accounted for, grant payments under the Program shall be issued on a first-
4 come, first-served basis until all funds are awarded or December 20, 2020,
5 whichever occurs first, provided that the costs or expenses are incurred and the
6 funds fully expended on or before December 30, 2020.

7 (2) The name of an outdoor recreation business that receives an award
8 under the Program and the amount of the award are public records subject to
9 inspection and copying under the Public Records Act.

10 (3) Any application documents of an outdoor recreation business
11 containing federal identification numbers and sales amounts are subject to the
12 confidentiality provisions of 32 V.S.A. § 3102 and are return information
13 under that section.

14 (4) Data submitted by an outdoor recreation business under this section
15 to demonstrate costs or expenses shall be a trade secret exempt from public
16 inspection and copying under 1 V.S.A. § 317(c)(9), provided that the Secretary
17 may use and disclose submitted information in summary or aggregated form
18 that does not directly or indirectly identify an outdoor recreation business.

19 Sec. 3. 24 V.S.A. § 2799 is added to read:

20 § 2799. BETTER PLACES PROGRAM; CROWD GRANTING

1 (a)(1) There is created a Better Places Fund under 32 V.S.A. chapter 7,
2 subchapter 5.

3 (2) The purpose of the Fund is to utilize crowdfunding to spark
4 community revitalization through collaborative grantmaking for projects that
5 create, activate, or revitalize public spaces.

6 (3) The Department of Housing and Community Development may
7 administer the Fund in coordination with and support from other State agencies
8 and nonprofit and philanthropic partners.

9 (b) The Fund is composed of the following:

10 (1) State or federal funds appropriated by the General Assembly;

11 (2) gifts, grants, or other contributions to the Fund;

12 (3) proceeds from the issuance of general obligation bonds; and

13 (4) any interest earned by the Fund.

14 (c) As used in this section, “public space” means an area or place that is
15 open and accessible to all people, generally with no charge for admission, and
16 includes village greens, squares, parks, community centers, town halls,
17 libraries, and other publicly-accessible buildings and connecting spaces such as
18 sidewalks, streets, alleys, and trails.

19 (d)(1) The Department of Housing and Community Development shall
20 establish an application process, eligibility criteria, and criteria for prioritizing
21 assistance for awarding grants from the Fund.

1 (2) The Department may award a grant to a municipality or nonprofit
2 organization for a project that is located in a designated downtown, village
3 center, new town center, or neighborhood development area that will create a
4 new public space or revitalize or activate an existing public space.

5 (3) The Department may develop matching grant eligibility
6 requirements, such as requiring that to be eligible for a grant, a project shall
7 use matching funds raised through a crowdfunding approach that includes
8 multiple donors and other appropriate requirements to ensure a broad base of
9 community and financial support for the project.

10 (e) The Department of Housing and Community Development, with the
11 assistance of a fiscal agent, shall distribute funds under this section in a manner
12 that provides funding for projects of various sizes in as many geographical
13 areas of the State as possible.

14 (f) The Department of Housing and Community Development may use up
15 to 15 percent of any appropriation to the Fund from the General Fund to assist
16 with crowdfunding, administration, and technological needs of the Better
17 Places Program.

18 (g) Beginning on January 15, 2021, and annually thereafter, the Department
19 of Housing and Community Development shall submit to the Senate
20 Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs and the
21 House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development an annual report

1 regarding the activities and progress of the Better Places program. The report
2 shall:

3 (1) summarize the program activities in the preceding year, and report on
4 the number of awarded grants and the total grant funds allocated;

5 (2) report on partner resources and contributions to the program; and

6 (3) report on any measurable economic activity that may include number of
7 jobs created, number of visitors, the approximate number of square feet to be
8 activated or redeveloped, and the number of volunteers engaged in the project.

9 Sec. 4. WORKERS' COMPENSATION RATE OF CONTRIBUTION

10 For fiscal year 2021, after consideration of the formula in 21 V.S.A.
11 § 711(b) and historical rate trends, the General Assembly determines that the
12 rate of contribution for the direct calendar year premium for workers'
13 compensation insurance shall remain at the rate of 1.4 percent. The
14 contribution rate for self-insured workers' compensation losses and workers'
15 compensation losses of corporations approved under 21 V.S.A. chapter 9 shall
16 remain at one percent.