

Vermont First Innovation Grant FAQ

Q: I move a lot of product, or I anticipate to. I don't want to go through a distributor; can I be an independent vendor for Sodexo?

A: We encourage most producers to work through a distributor. There is a pathway to becoming an independent approved Sodexo vendor, but it is evaluated on a case-by-case basis and typically requires first establishing operations through a distributor. Please note that becoming an approved Sodexo vendor can be costly for smaller producers and time intensive.

Q: I'm having a hard time spending the entire grant amount. What are some suggestions?

A: The application requires a detailed budget, and awards are matched to proposed activities. Each expense should have a clear, traceable impact. If your needs are below \$10,000, you are still encouraged to apply—applications are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Q: What can Prize funding be used for? Is there anything that funding cannot be used for?

A: Funding may be used for: equipment and packaging, technical assistance, audits or certifications, infrastructure investment. Funding may *not* be used for: events and marketing, transportation, general overhead costs, recurring purchase of food. Further expenses may be evaluated case-by-case.

Q: Do you consider food items from New England “local”?

A: No, to be considered “local” for Vermont First, they need to meet [Vermont's Act 129](#) definition, grown/manufactured in Vermont.

Q: How do I get a letter of support from one of the approved distributors?

A: We encourage you to check out the contact information on the websites for Sodexo Approved Vendor (Black River, Produce, Intervale Food Hub, Food Connects, Farrell Beverage, UNFI). If you need help connecting with a representative, please contact Sydney.Howard@sodexo.com.

Q: Can I apply if I am not currently working with a distributor?

A: Yes. The minimum requirement to apply is a letter of support from an approved distributor stating that they are willing to partner on the project.

Q: Can the grant fund ongoing operational costs (e.g., labor, inputs/ingredients)?

A: No. The grant is intended for one-time or capacity-building investments, not ongoing operational expenses.

Q: What counts as a “measurable outcome”/ How can I measure the impact of my prize idea?

A: You can select from many different kinds of data or metrics to measure your project’s impact. Measurable data or metrics include number of farmer relationships built, dollar amount of local food procured, pounds of local product distributed, but are not limited to these points.

Q: Do I need to already have meet all food safety requirements? At the time of application, does my operation need to meet all food safety requirements?

A: No. Grant funds may be used to support technical assistance, audits, and certifications needed to meet food safety requirements.

Q: Can I reapply if I am not selected?

A: Yes. All applicants, regardless of if they are awarded prizes or not, will receive back their scoring rubric for their application. We encourage applicants not selected to review feedback and reapply in the next cycle.