



Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

Accelerating the Development of Vermont's Green Economy

Request for Proposal – Public Relations Support

The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund is a statewide, non-profit sustainable development organization whose mission is to identify and fund market driven solutions to Vermont's pressing economic, social, and environmental issues. The VSJF accelerates the development of Vermont's green economy by providing grants and technical assistance to growing enterprises and business networks within Vermont's natural resource and green economy sectors. Between 1997 and 2010, the VSJF granted over \$4.1 million to 178 recipients—who utilized these funds to leverage an additional \$15 million to implement their projects, test their ideas, and to assemble the building blocks of a green economy.

Through a variety of initiatives, VSJF is working with Vermont's entrepreneurs and our partners, to help shape a new, greener economy in Vermont. We are seeking guidance in the promotion and messaging of some exciting new initiatives including the Farm to Plate Investment Program, the Vermont Agricultural Development Program (VADP), the Renewable Energy Atlas, and the launch of a new VSJF Flexible Capital Fund.

The VSJF will require the guidance of public relations professionals over the next 6 months in two areas:

- a. The launch of 3 unique and innovative programs (VSJF Flexible Capital Fund, Farm to Plate Investment Program and Vermont Agricultural Development Program) that will engage and support Vermont entrepreneurs, our partners and the public. Launch will include strategies related to:
 - a. Message framing and content development (as needed) – i.e. press releases, story lines, case studies to a variety of key audiences including the Vermont state legislature, foundation and investment community
 - b. Press placements and expanding our media networks beyond Vermont
 - c. Social media strategies
 - d. Help with coordination of press events, e-news, etc.
- b. General messaging for publicizing ongoing VSJF programs (i.e. Vermont Biofuels grant making, Renewable Energy Atlas, Harvest for Use, Peer to Peer Collaborative) and raising awareness of our role in supporting Vermont's green economy through both traditional media and social media outlets. Services may include items such as:
 - a. Content development – i.e. press releases, story lines, case studies
 - b. Press placements and expanding our media networks beyond Vermont,
 - c. Social media strategies

Overall intent of the work with a prospective PR firm is to help the organization tie all VSJF initiatives together around a common message related to our work, and guide us in establishing systems that will allow VSJF staff to handle ongoing PR activities.

VSJF is soliciting proposals from PR firms who:

- are familiar with and support the mission and work of our organization;
- are well connected to traditional and non-traditional news media in Vermont and greater New England area;
- have the creative capacity to tell the VSJF story so that it is heard by the widest possible audience.

Proposals should include the following information:

- Estimated cost of services, and type of fee structure (retainer, hourly fees, etc);
- Staff and resources to be dedicated to those services, including their qualifications
- Communication strategy that will be used to work with the VSJF (i.e. regularly scheduled meetings, phone calls, etc.);
- Experience working with similar organizations or missions;
- Recommended key messages, primary program elements and evaluation criteria;
- Brief case histories that illustrate ability and experience in [name desired area/s];
- List of current and former clients in [name area/s] or related fields for whom you have worked in a similar vein, including independent contractors – and references;
- Explanation of PR firm's billing procedures including rates, mark-ups, etc.

Proposals should be submitted to janice@vsjf.org by January 28, 2011. To learn more about the VSJF, visit our website www.vsjf.org. If you have questions about this request, call Janice St. Onge at 802-828-0398 or email Janice@vsjf.org.

More About Us

We are a lean organization with 6 staff, and a strong and collaborative network of partners in the non-profit, government, higher education and business sectors that are critical in helping us accomplish our work.

Our customers and audience:

Our customers or stakeholders span a wide range of organization types and market sectors, including but not limited to:

- Our grantees in the agriculture, forest products and biofuels sectors;
- The Vermont state legislature and administration as funders and partners;
- The foundation community as funders and partners;
- Federal government as funders (i.e. US Dept. of Energy, USDA Rural Development, HUD)
- Technical assistance providers like the Vermont Small Business Development Center and Vermont Farm Viability and Enhancement Program, regional development corps;
- Higher education institutions like the University of Vermont Extension program and Vermont Technical College;
- Vermont investment community (angel investors, venture capital)
- Private sector entrepreneurs

Prior media exposure:

Recent media exposure includes the launch of the Renewable Energy Atlas of Vermont (www.vtenergyatlas.com) in April of 2010 which spanned both local and national media coverage.

Our key messages:

Some common message / themes in our work include:

- Accelerating the development of Vermont's Green economy
- Local production for local use
- Market development (see www.vsjf.org/what-we-do/market-development for details)
- Reducing our risk related to peak oil and climate change
- Preservation of the working landscape
- Collaboration / networks

The VSJF tackles the tough sectors—farms and forestry—which makes Vermont special, but are too risky for most investors. We offer seed money and hands-on technical support, but go beyond that to catalyze networks and advocate for second-stage financing and government support. Our goal is to identify, launch, and nurture new business communities, natural-products markets, and sustainable economies, and we've successfully done so in a number of sectors since the legislature passed the enabling legislation in 1995 that brought us to life.

We look over the horizon to anticipate opportunities for traditional and innovative land-based industries. Then we conduct rigorous research and analysis to target those markets that meet the legislature's criteria and have the best chance of success. We incubate fresh ideas, jump-starting entrepreneurs with a passion for sustainable forestry, agriculture, and energy. We strategically target entrepreneurs, technologies, and markets and provide funding, introductions, and advice to bring people and organizations together to form business communities strong enough to stand on their own.

One of our most distinctive and effective services is the Peer to Peer Collaborative program, a CEO advisory program in which accomplished CEOs, COOs, CFOs, and other field-tested executives team up for a year to provide financial, sales and marketing, human resources, and systems audits; in-depth advice; and wise counsel to businesses ready to leap to the next level. We're also known for fostering unusually wide, deep, and diverse networks to create the independent infrastructure to support new markets.

We champion value added farm and forestry products and technologies that create local jobs, support vibrant communities, preserve healthy ecosystems, and fill special niches in the global economy. We give visionary entrepreneurs the chance to build a successful, sustainable economy for Vermont.

Business/public relations priorities:

Our primary PR priorities include:

- Ensuring that we have a common message for staff, board, and stakeholders that help us position the VSJF as experts in the field
- Further solidify funder confidence and trust in our work and educate them on the value of our work. We receive state appropriations for core operating funds and with a new administration and legislature in place, there will be a need to educate some of them on our work to ensure funding remains in place.
- Favorably position the VSJF to increase grant funds raised for project work and the VSJF Flexible Capital Fund to raise remaining \$2.4 million in equity to fully capitalize the Fund Company
- Increase pipeline of potential Peer to Peer Collaborative and VADP clients and Flex Fund prospective borrowers