Vermont Better Places Program FAQs

1. **What organizations are eligible?**
   Municipalities, local community groups, and nonprofit entities with municipal support may apply. Municipalities must partner with community groups and have a plan to involve the broader public. Nonprofits and community-based organizations must have permission from the property owners (city/town or private owner) where the project is proposed. Nonprofits must be registered with the Vermont Secretary of State. Community groups may use a fiscal sponsor and must abide by Vermont Community Foundation's fiscal sponsor agreement.

2. **What is the role of the municipality and are they required to be involved on any project?**
   Municipalities can have varying roles in a Better Places project. They can apply as the lead applicant, be a project partner, or simply provide support or any needed permissions for a community-led project.

   If the land or building is <u>not</u> owned by the municipality, we recommend project teams connect with town officials and request a letter of support for the project. This provides an opportunity to build momentum for the project, explore what permissions or permitting that is needed for the project, and understand other relevant projects or public events happening in proximity. Depending on the size of your municipality, a letter of support could come from a town clerk, town administrator, town planner, city manager, or selectboard chair, and does not require a public hearing process.

   If the land or building needed for a Better Places project is owned by the municipality, the applicant must have permission for use of the land/building to proceed with a Better Places application. Permission must be submitted in the form of a signed legally binding agreement authorizing permission and include letters of support from town manager/administrator, letter of support from the selectboard and/or village trustees, or meeting minutes or a formal resolution from a selectboard meeting expressing support for the project.

   If the municipality is the lead applicant, they must demonstrate they are working in collaboration with a community partner, and meet the eligibility criteria focused on community-led placemaking as outlined in the Better Places Program Guide.

3. **What counts as a municipality?**
   For the purposes of the Program, a municipality is defined by 24 V.S.A §4303 (12). Under this definition, an incorporated village is not considered a separate municipality unless the village adopts its own village plan and one or more bylaws either before, concurrently with, or subsequent to such action by the town.

4. **How can community groups apply that aren't a nonprofit or municipality?**
   Community groups may use a fiscal sponsor to accept Better Places funds. The entity that acts as the fiscal sponsor will be considered by the Vermont Community Foundation (VCF) as the program grantee and must abide by the fiscal sponsor agreement. As the grantee, the fiscal sponsor must sign the grant agreement for the grant funds to be released. Any understanding or agreement between the fiscal sponsor and the entity managing the project is between those organizations alone; the only agreements VCF have will be with the fiscal sponsor, as the program applicant.

5. **What is the application process?**
   Projects are accepted on a rolling basis while funding is available. Applicants must first complete a project preflight form, then a project campaign page prior to receiving project approval. Applicants should plan for approximately three to five weeks to complete their application which includes the build out of a crowdfunding page, project review and feedback, and the State approval process. DHCD and Patronicity will provide technical support to all applicants during this time. See Better Places Program Guide for details.

6. **What is the preflight form?**
   The preflight form asks some basic details regarding your project in order to assess if the project is eligible, ready to start a crowdfunding campaign, and if the Better Places program is a good fit for your

project. It's possible to click on the preflight form and read through the questions with no commitment to answer them at that time. Upon completion of the preflight form, DHCD will reach out to schedule a call to discuss your project and determine whether your project aligns with the Better Places program goals and eligibility criteria.

7. **Are there any deadlines?**
There is no deadline to apply to Better Places. Projects are accepted on a rolling basis while funding is available. The State anticipates offering two rounds of Better Places funding in 2022. Projects must be completed within one year of an executed grant agreement.

8. **How can we connect with others in our community to understand if there are opportunities to collaborate?**
We encourage interested participants to reach out to networks in their community, municipality, and/or organizations, particularly if you have similar project goals. Once you fill out the preflight form, Better Places staff will let you know if others in your municipality have contacted them, providing participants from the same municipality the opportunity to connect and potentially collaborate prior to proceeding with the application.

9. **How can we crowdfund in low-income areas where many are without the means to pre-finance?**
Your campaign coach will work with you to identify where and how to market your crowdfunding campaign in a way that is appropriate and aligns with your community. Donations can come from outside of the immediate community, from businesses, and supporting organizations. The crowdfunding campaign is a way to get the word out about great, locally led projects that need both financial support and advocacy from the broader community to succeed. No donation is too small. Visit Patronicity's supported programs to learn about other successful crowdfunded projects and explore their Crowdfunding Strategy Guide to learn more about building successful campaigns.

10. **Where can the project be located?**
Projects must be located in, connected to, or in direct safe walking distance to a state designated downtowns, village centers, new town centers, or neighborhood development areas. To determine if your community has a state designation, visit the Vermont Planning Atlas. Projects must have proper site control secured prior to applying to ensure permission to use or invest in the space during the project grant period. See Better Places Program Guide for further details.

11. **What if we don't have one of the state designations, listed above?**
If you would like to know more about the designations listed above, please visit the state designation program webpage and explore the designation guide. These programs work together to provide incentives, align policies, and give communities the technical assistance needed to encourage new development and redevelopment in Vermont's compact, designated areas. There are currently 245 designated centers in Vermont communities. If your community, currently does not have a state designation, we are happy to work with you and explore village center, downtown, new town center, or neighborhood development area designation.

12. **What is considered 'a safe walking distance' as noted above?**
This will be determined on a project-by-project basis during the pre-flight check-in with DHCD and will depend on site conditions and context. Projects must be located in, connected to (adjacent), or in direct safe walking distance to a state designated downtown, village centers, new town centers, or neighborhood development areas.

13. **What are the requirements regarding site ownership and control?**
Projects must have proper site control secured prior to applying to ensure permission to use and/or invest in the space during the project grant period. In addition:
- If an applicant does not own the land or building on which the project will take place, additional documentation will be required, including an explanation for why the property owner is not the applicant. Site control must be in the form of a signed legally binding agreement authorizing grant use from the owner of the project location that includes one of the following:

- municipal owned property with selectboard, trustees, or city council approval, or
- private lease or ownership of the property or building, or
- MOU granting permission from the property owner, etc.
- If an applicant does not own the building in which its project will take place, there must be a lease in place with a minimum 12-month term or for the duration of the project.

14. Can these be inside or outside projects?
Better Places projects can be outdoor or indoor projects. If an applicant does not own the building in which its project will take place, there must be a lease in place with a minimum 12-month term or for the duration of the project. For any indoor public spaces, regular public programming must be included in the plans and a portion of the grant (up to $10,000) may be used to provide such programming.

15. What are the requirements if the applicant does not own the building where the project will take place?
If an applicant does not own the building in which its project will take place, there must be a lease in place with a minimum 12-month term or for the duration of the project.

16. What are the requirements for projects that are proposed on the State (VTrans) right-of-way?
For projects proposed in the State (VTrans) ROW, applicants must provide a letter of support or similar communication from their applicable VTrans District Office demonstrating that the district is aware of and in support of the proposed project. Applicants will also need to contact VTrans Permitting Services to obtain a Section 1111 permit. A traffic control plan may be required as part of the Section 1111 permit stipulations. In addition, the project shall be in compliance with VTrans demonstration projects guidance document, application, and permitting process. In addition, for public art installations on state transportation facilities, the project shall be in compliance with the Art Installations on State Transportation Facilities Guidance Document.

17. What are the amounts of funding available?
Eligible projects must have a minimum grant award of $5,000 (for $2,500 crowdfunded), up to a maximum grant award of $40,000 (for $20,000 crowdfunded). A detailed budget must be included in the application. Budgets should identify total project cost, grant funding request, in-kind support, and any other funding sources outside of the requested grant dollars. Eligible projects shall also include and demonstrate in-kind support. However, in-kind contributions will not be counted as part of the 33% crowdfunding local match requirement, but may, of course, be accepted towards the overall project.

18. What are some examples of eligible uses of the funds?
Eligible projects must demonstrate they will create, revitalize, or activate (programming) a public space that is open to and accessible to all people, with no charge of admission. Eligible projects will or have establish/ed project partners, public awareness, community support, and local momentum.
Examples of eligible projects include, but not limited to:
- Public gathering spaces (e.g., parks, village greens, libraries, schools, town halls, community centers, other public spaces)
- Streetscape improvements and beautification
- Improvements to recreation amenities (e.g., riverwalks, trails, greenways)
- Temporary or experimental (pop-up) parks, pocket parks, and public parklets
- Temporary or experimental (pop-up) spaces, market spaces, and maker and coworking spaces
- Activation/programming of vacant properties, parking lots, and vacant storefronts
- Creating or enhancing farmers' markets, community gardens, and access to healthy food
- Alleyway improvements and activations
- Bike or walking path improvements
- Public art that engages the community
- Creation of performing art spaces that serve the community
- Winter placemaking activities (ice rinks, community fire pits, lighting installations, etc.)

- Relevance to continued COVID-19 response for public space adaptations
- Temporary, pilot, or demonstration projects ($10,000 grant maximum)
- Public space programming, events, and other temporary activations ($10,000 grant maximum and minimum of three (3) events in no less than three (3) months and/or have a three-month duration.)

19. **Where can we find examples of projects that have worked well in partnership with their municipality, and what that process looks like.**
Successful placemaking projects require early conversation with municipal staff and/or your selectboard, planning commission, or city council (depending on the size of your municipality) to determine roles, responsibilities, permitting, and insurance requirements. Visit these examples of successful Vermont placemaking projects, explore the Better Places Placemaking Toolkit, and watch the Better Places placemaking 101 presentation.

20. **What kind of support are project teams given?**
The preflight process will provide the applicant an opportunity to work with DHCD to determine if your project is a good fit and ready to proceed with the application process. During the crowdfunding campaign, participants will be provided one-on-one coaching to create, launch, and manage the campaign. DHCD will provide educational webinars, outreach materials, and resources for all project teams. Project teams can use up to 25% of their grant funds for non-capital costs, including design and technical assistant services. See question 17 for a full list of eligible expenses.

21. **Can we hire someone to help implement the project?**
Yes, teams can hire someone to help implement their project, but need to adhere to the capital and non-capital eligible use of funds shown below.

22. **What counts as capital and non-capital eligible use of funds?**
At least 75% of the total Better Places project budget must be used to fund capital costs and implementation. For example, for a project with a total grant award of $20,000, only $5,000, or less can be used for non-capital cost. Artist fabrications and design-build projects are considered as part of the implementation cost and may exceed the 25% budget threshold. A breakdown of eligible capital (minimum of 75%) and non-capital costs (maximum of 25%) may include:

Eligible expenses for the 75% capital cost may include, but not limited to:	Eligible expenses for the up to 25% non-capital cost may include, but not limited to:
Construction and implementation cost including labor and materials	Design services and fees (artists, architects, landscape architects, engineers, etc.)
Equipment, site furnishings, landscaping, and other public space amenities and improvements	Project management assistance, technical support services, event management and coordination, and construction oversight
Events, programming, and cultural activities (limited to $10,000 matching grant)	Marketing, communication, and outreach activities
Artist fabrications, design-build, and installations	Public outreach, translation services, and community engagement activities

23. **Are there any restrictions on grant awards?**
Municipalities must partner with community groups and have a plan to involve the broader public. Only one (1) implementation grant will be funded per calendar year within a municipality. Nonprofits and community-based organizations must have permission from the property owners (municipality or private owner) where the project is proposed. Nonprofits must be registered with the Vermont Secretary of State. Community groups must use a fiscal sponsor and abide by VCF's fiscal sponsor agreement. Please see the Better Places Program Guide for a list of ineligible projects, or programming, and grant award terms.

24. Can funds be re-granted or distributed to a single business?
    No. Grant funds cannot be used or re-granted for the purpose that promote a single for-profit entity or its products/services. Grant funds can be used to support a commercial district, downtown, or a group of businesses and organizations that activate, revitalize, or create a public space. For example, grant funds could be used for a farmers' market or holiday pop-up market that serves more than one business or organization; or for a group of outdoor public parklets that serve multiple restaurants and the general public.

25. How will matching grant funds be awarded?
    Once the crowdfunding campaign goal has been met, applicants will be notified of their grant award and initiate a grant agreement. Prior to receiving grant funds, applicants must:
    1. Provide necessary materials for fund disbursement and execute grant agreement with VCF
    2. Upon grant execution, VCF will disburse 85% of grant funds to grantee
    3. Provide quarterly updates on project as requested
    4. Provide the necessary closeout materials after the project is completed (report, budget, expenses, metrics, and before and after photos).
    5. Upon project completion and submission of complete close-out report, VCF will disburse remaining 15% of grant funds.
    6. Participate in future opportunities to share best practices and lessons learned with Better Places partners and local communities.

26. How should the project engage the broader public and partners?
    Placemaking projects are more successful: 1) when there is sustained public outreach, partner, and community engagement throughout the project, 2) when they begin with strong community support and leadership, and 3) when they are done in partnership with organizations outside the municipal government. Resources regarding community engagement and the community-led process can be found in the Better Places Toolkit.

    The application must share how the project engages and serves community members and partners in an equitable and inclusive process connecting with diverse socioeconomic groups, historically marginalized, and underrepresented populations in the community. The application should explain how community members are engaged in the decision making regarding the project, the outreach strategies conducted, support from stakeholders, neighboring property owners, and residents, and how the project brings people together, and provides benefits to the community.

27. What are the requirements regarding project maintenance and ongoing management?
    A commitment and plan for long term maintenance and management of the project site must be included for the project, if applicable, including the responsible parties, allocated funding, resources, and partners to support the ongoing maintenance and management of the public space.

28. What type of permits may be required?
    Most projects require some type of local or state review or permit. Please check in with your municipality regarding what local and state permits your project may need. For projects proposed within the state right-of-way, the applicant must be the municipality and the project must comply with VTrans demonstration projects guidance document, application, and permitting process. In addition, the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) Permit Navigator is a good resource to understand what ANR permits you may need to obtain for the project.

    Projects that may affect properties (individual buildings/structures/sites or historic districts) listed in the State or National Registers of Historic Places may require additional review from the Vermont Division of Historic Preservation. Additional information about the historic preservation review process and exempt project types are shared in Appendix 1 of the Program Guide.

29. Can you apply for a Better Places grant if you are applying/have applied for a different planning grant?
    Yes, teams can apply for other grants concurrently or prior to applying for a Better Places grant. However, Better Places funds cannot be used as a match to 'prior committed funds' in order to secure other grant

funding. Better Places grants can be used in conjunction with another grant only for a phase of the project that allows the project to be open and accessible to the public after this phase is complete.

30. **Can the same organization apply twice? One year and the following year (to continue an event series for example).**
Yes, applicants can apply a second time, in the following year, so long as funds remain available, and they meet all other eligibility requirements.

31. **Can Better Places funds be used toward a federal grant (if the placemaking project is a part of a bigger federally funded project)?**
Yes, only if the Better Places funds are used in the final phase of the project that allows it to be open and accessible to the public after this phase is complete. All other prior committed funding sources, including other federal or state grants must be secured prior to application. Better Places funding may be used to fill the remaining and final gap in project costs. Prior committed funding is considered separate from the crowdfunding campaign and will NOT be matched by DHCD. The funding secured through the Better Places program must be the FINAL portion of funds needed to complete, and activate, or improve the public space.

32. **What states currently run similar crowdfunding and crowdgranting placemaking programs?**
Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Michigan are some of the states that run similar crowdfunding and crowdgranting programs. Visit Patronicity's supported programs to learn about these other state programs.

33. **How long is a typical campaign?**
Campaigns are typically 30-60 days in length. Projects must meet their crowdfunding goal within sixty (60) days of the crowdfunding campaign launch to receive the Better Places matching grant funds.
If the crowdfunding goal is not met within sixty (60) days, the project will not receive matching grant funds. Your Patronicity Coach will work with you to plan a campaign length that best serves your fundraising goal.

34. **What if you don't meet your campaign goal?**
If the project is unsuccessful in reaching its crowdfunding goal, it will not qualify for a Better Places matching grant. An additional Better Places campaign will not be considered on the same project in the future. However, project leaders have the option to choose "all or nothing" (pledges) or "partial funding" campaigns. If a project leader chooses partial funding, the project will receive all funds they raise (even if they don't meet the crowdfunding goal required to receive a state grant).

35. **Is there a minimum number of donors needed to comply?**
There is no set minimum number, but your campaign must reflect broad outreach and support for your project. The number of donors will vary from project to project depending on your campaign goal, the size of your project, and the size of your community. Your campaign coach will work with you to reach a broad donor base.

36. **Can volunteering or donated items count toward the campaign match?**
The community match is met by monetary campaign donations only. Volunteering or donated items do not count toward the campaign match; however, you may use the Patronicity platform to also sign-up new volunteers to support your efforts. In-kind contributions will not be accepted as part of the 33% match requirement. However, applicants shall include any in-kind support for the project to demonstrate community support.

37. **Who can donate to the campaign and what is the maximum they can donate?**
Anyone can donate to your campaign, except the project lead applicant and/or organization. Project team members and supporting organizations may donate to support the campaign. The maximum donation by any one donor or entity to any one campaign is either $7,000 or 35% of the campaign goal (whichever is

the lesser amount). Any amount raised above the approved crowdfunding goal is not subject to this requirement.

38. **How many hours should the community expect to dedicate to the campaign effort?**
This varies depending on the project, community, and scope and scale of the project. Patronicity's project coaches will help you every step of the way to be efficient and effective with your time supporting the campaign.

39. **Will materials be provided to solicit donations offline?**
Donations can be taken offline. Your campaign coach will determine the best ways to solicit donations, including options for offline donations. Materials/supplies will not be provided for offline donation efforts.

40. **For a multi-phase project, can we fundraise for a select phase of our project?**
Yes, if this is the final phase and final portion of funding of a multi-phase project or if this phase of the project can be open and accessible to the public after this phase is complete, you may fundraise for a select phase of the project.

41. **Will we be able to collect names of donors?**
Yes. Patronicity's platform keeps track of all donors and their donations. However, donors have the option to be anonymous and if so, the project team will not have access to these names or contact information.

42. **Who is maintaining or updating the campaign page and what are the roles and responsibilities of the community team?**
The applicant will work with a project coach to maintain and update the campaign page. A detailed checklist will also be provided which helps describe some of the roles and responsibilities related to the crowdfunding campaign. Project teams can also anticipate supporting the project and the campaign's outreach efforts.

43. **Who is collecting the money from the crowdfunding campaign?**
Funds raised through the crowdfunding campaign are initially collected by Patronicity. Once project teams are under a grant agreement, Patronicity provides the raised funds to the team either by check or by direct deposit. If a project has not reached their campaign goal and previously chose to do a "partial funding" campaign, the project team is given the funds from their funding campaign (with no matching grant, meaning no grant agreement is necessary).

44. **Would a town need to set up an account for these funds?**
The town would deposit the funds from the crowdfunding campaign and matching state grant as they would with any other grants they receive and manage.

45. **Does Patronicity charge a percentage for their crowdfunding services?**
Patronicity collects a standard 5% fee on all funds raised. In addition, Patronicity's credit card processing company, Stripe, collects a 2.6% + $0.30 processing fee for all online contributions. Uniquely on Patronicity, donors have the option to cover all fees at checkout. Donors would then be charged additionally, on top of their contribution amount, if they select to do so. We find on average 80% of online donors tend to do so, thus typically reducing overall fees charged to the campaign to under 4%. These fees are calculated based only on donations received; there is no fee on the Better Places grant dollars awarded for the project.

46. **Is there flexibility to adapt a project if there is a smaller campaign turnout?**
Project leaders have the option to choose "all or nothing (pledges) or "partial funding" campaigns. If a project leader, chooses partial funding, the project will receive any funds they raise (even if they don't meet their crowdfunding goal and receive state grant).

47. What if my project is located in a historic district or listed in the State Register of Historic Places?
Better Places projects that are listed in the State Register of Historic Places may require additional review from the Vermont Division of Historic Preservation (VDHP), as required with the use of State funds. This extra step does not apply to all Better Places projects. The first step is to find out if your project area is listed in the State Register of Historic Places. Please visit the State's Online Resource Center or contact Devin Colman to learn if your project is located within or impacts a historic district or property.

If Historic Preservation (HP) review is required, please plan for allowing additional time for HP project review and consultation prior to receiving project approval and launching a Better Places campaign. Please do not be dissuaded by working on projects located in historic districts; the Better Places team and the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation are committed to helping advance your community project. We encourage you to be proactive and reach out to the Better Places team and VDHP early in your project planning so that we can work together and reduce the opportunity for delay because of this additional requirement. See Appendix 1 in the Better Places program guide.

48. Can I use Better Places fund for general operating support for my organization?
Better Places grants are intended to support discrete placemaking projects and cannot be used to provide general organizational support or funding for maintaining ongoing programs. The crowdfunded and matching grant funds shall not be used to pay for the applicant's organizational operating funds, general administration, or for programming and uses not related to implementing the Better Places project.

49. What if a donor wants to contribute by check rather than online?
Absolutely, that is fine. The Better Places program does not require that check or other offline donations be sent through Patronicity in order to be reflected in your crowdfunding dollars raised. If a donor wishes to donate by any offline method, they can simply contribute to you directly. To register that donation, and have it reflected on your project's crowdfunding page you'll have to log an offline donation through Patronicity. Then, before closing out your campaign you'll need to authenticate the donation by sending Patronicity a photo of the check (if applicable) and a copy of the bank deposit slip.

50. Who can we contact for more information or if we have additional questions?
Please reach out to Richard Amore (802.585.0061), Better Places program manager, with the Department of Housing and Community Development for any additional questions or to discuss local project ideas. In addition, you can learn more about Better Places on DHCD's Better Places webpage and the check out Patronicity's Better Places webpage for local project campaigns.