



**HIGH MEADOWS  
FUND**

*at the Vermont Community Foundation*

## **Building Resilience in Vermont's Watersheds**

### **Request for Proposals**

Issued by the High Meadows Fund

[www.highmeadowsfund.org](http://www.highmeadowsfund.org)

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## Summary

Vermont is continuing to experience intense storms and severe flooding due to climate change. Since 2000, our state has had at least one federally-declared disaster *every year*. In some parts of the state Vermonters have experienced two 100-year floods in the past 10 years. Research and patterns we've seen on the ground demonstrate that these events are no longer an "if" but a "when." Watershed-level planning and floodplain protection can reduce or even eliminate the damage that has devastated our physical, economic and social communities.

Flooding does not follow municipal boundaries. In 2015, to inspire and encourage creative and inclusive building of resilience at a watershed level, the [High Meadows Fund](#) (HMF) awarded funds to six watershed teams around the state that focused on multi-community, watershed-level resilience projects. Visit [HMF's website](#) for more info and videos about the accomplishments and work of these six teams. Buoyed by the short-term successes and long-term opportunities developed in this first round, HMF is issuing this RFP to support a second round of watershed-level collaboration and action. HMF has allocated \$180,000 for four to six proposals in which multiple municipalities within a watershed engage and mobilize their residents on this issue.

In this packet of materials you'll find more information on why HMF is dedicating money and time to this kind of work, its goals, and the questions applicant teams must address. HMF seeks proposals that aim to accomplish outcomes at different scales (from hyper-local to across-the-watershed) and durations (short-, medium-, and long-term), and to involve participants from many sectors. The project requires engagement, thought, planning, AND action.

Applicants will benefit from attending the Leahy Center for Lake Champlain's (ECHO) summit, which provides an opportunity for watershed teams to envision and design resilience projects.

*Full details about the RFP's opportunities and requirements begin on the next page.*

*Key dates to remember:*

- February 10, 2017: Optional Letters of Intent due
- March 24-25, 2017: ECHO Summit
- June 1, 2017: Applications due
- July 3, 2017: Finalists chosen, with site visits following
- September 1, 2017: Site visits completed; grant awards; projects commence

*Keep an eye on [HMF's website](#) for updates!*

# Building Resilience in a Vermont Watershed

## Request for Proposals—General Description

Issued by the High Meadows Fund

### Statement of Intent

The effects of climate change demand that Vermont communities prepare in new ways for flooding, rising temperatures, and extreme weather. Building resilience requires partnerships, creativity, diverse voices and hard choices. The High Meadows Fund seeks proposals in which multiple municipalities within watersheds: (1) creatively and inclusively engage their residents to build understanding about the forces of their shared watercourse(s) and the inter-connected nature of watershed planning, and (2) produce actions that strengthen the participating communities and their watershed’s resilience in the face of foreseeable, more frequent, and more intense storm events.

### Background

The High Meadows Fund’s (HMF) mission is to promote vibrant communities and a healthy natural environment while encouraging long-term economic vitality in Vermont. Policy decisions and investment choices such as how and where to farm, harvest timber, or build structures should make communities stronger, more vibrant and equitable, and more resilient to the changing climate. Too often, the decisions made instead make us more vulnerable.



*A river washes out Route 100 during Tropical Storm Irene.*

For the High Meadows Fund, resilience means the capacity not just to bounce back from stresses and disruptive events, but also to plan and act ahead of those events in the face of risks, challenges and opportunities. High Meadows helps Vermonters mitigate climate change and adapt to its consequences by supporting innovation in land use, sustainable agriculture, food and forest enterprises, and clean energy use.

HMF supports Vermont communities taking creative steps to guide change and build more resilient futures. Climate change requires work in two areas: (1) *carbon emission reduction*—reducing our reliance on carbon, natural gas and methane fuels and the related damaging emissions; and (2) *climate change adaptation*—taking steps to prepare for, reduce, or even eliminate damages caused by climate change-related weather events. This RFP focuses on the adaptation side of this essential work.

In Vermont, where flooding and sudden, erosive water surges are two of our most significant climate impacts, the success of this *adaptation* work depends on cross-sector, local leadership that looks beyond traditional geographic and cultural boundaries and addresses challenges and opportunities within a *watershed* context. Watershed planning demands that communities work together in ways that go beyond conventional municipal planning. To be effective, communities

must share experiences, understand commonalities and ‘downstream’ impacts, and work collaboratively to build resilience.

High Meadows recognizes philanthropy is only one piece of the funding and action puzzle necessary to build watershed- and climate- resilience. Support, engagement and funding from local, state, and the federal government will be critical over the long term. In recent years, the state has passed legislation and municipalities have adopted provisions intended to protect infrastructure and reduce risk. Vermont’s 2015 Clean Water Act created a state government Clean Water Fund as part of a statewide strategy to safeguard the public’s access to clean and safe water. State transportation funds have been available to improve roads, culverts, and other transportation infrastructure. Federal funds have been available to reduce the risk of soil erosion (e.g. through the Lake Champlain Basin Program and Natural Resource Conservation Districts).

In general, state and federal dollars support local *action* to build resilience. HMF’s funds fill a gap in funding support for watershed *community engagement, planning and shorter-term action*. Our investment is meant to illustrate the value of watershed planning, jumpstart more significant action, and position watersheds to compete for state and federal funds to implement future resilience projects. We also hope to learn from the on-the-ground work of the teams we fund.

In 2015, HMF funded six teams working to build resilience within their watersheds. Summaries of the work funded in Phase 1 can be found on [HMF’s website](#). These teams involved their communities, engaged with local governments, built local watershed identities, and implemented on-the-ground projects. In that first phase of this initiative we learned:

- Successful community engagement happened when projects focused on specific issues and action items. For instance, as one project team narrowed its focus from generally improving flood resilience to prioritizing culvert replacement projects, “Partners supported the project unanimously and got involved in more meaningful ways.”
- Language was key to establishing local relevancy. One project replaced the generic word “watershed” with a locally specific one, “Quintown,” with great success. Friends of the Mad River chose the project title “From Ridge to River” to emphasize the importance of upland, forested headwater areas to watershed resilience.
- Community engagement requires community organizing. Successful projects brought projects or initiatives to community members, selectboards or local contractors, rather than expecting these groups to come to their events. These outreach efforts continued during the entire project.



*Residents of the Mad River Valley plan to adopt stormwater mitigation actions.*

HMF produced a [discussion paper](#) about working at a Watershed Level that you may find helpful.

Encouraged by the diverse participation, deep engagement and resulting short-term actions and long-term opportunities, HMF is issuing this second RFP. For more on Phase 2, read on!

## **Purpose of RFP**

This RFP aims to promote new thinking, partnerships, and action within Vermont’s watersheds. During the extensive stakeholder engagement process utilized to develop [Vermont’s Roadmap to Resilience](#), the Institute for Sustainable Communities heard “community members voice great concern over the development allowed by their neighbors upstream...; on the other hand, many of the same stakeholders were consistently hesitant about new regulation and about the sort of state- or region-wide regulations (as opposed to local regulations) implied by creating these upstream/downstream linkages” (p.31). As part of a multi-level strategy to address resilience in Vermont, the Roadmap recommends:

*[Using] regional networks to support watershed-scale planning and enable municipalities to collaborate across jurisdictions to set priorities and make cost-effective investments that reduce hazards for downstream communities and development. (p. 38)*

**The purpose of this RFP is to fund projects of 18-months or less that are devoted to building resilience within a Vermont watershed.** Each watershed has its own challenges and opportunities. HMF has faith in the deep knowledge and creativity that exist at the local levels; thus, this RFP articulates necessary elements and goals but asks applicants to describe anticipated project approaches and outcomes. Outcomes could include but are not limited to:

- Adoption of local ordinances (such as floodplain, river corridor, shoreland, stormwater, low impact development, etc.) or non-regulatory approaches that are developed collaboratively by adjoining towns and account for upstream actions and downstream consequences;
- Collaborative, proactive, and inclusive engagement, communication, education, and planning amongst adjoining communities that identify shared vulnerabilities and produces votes or other local commitments to new land use regulations or infrastructure improvements, particularly green infrastructure;
- Joint land conservation or river/wetland restoration projects aimed at creating or retaining flood-attenuating attributes (e.g. improving river access to its floodplain in one community thereby reducing flooding and erosion downstream; protecting floodplains up/downstream of vulnerable areas);
- Inter-related strategies among communities for addressing or living with low flooding;
- Strategic buy-outs and removals of structures in highly susceptible locations (e.g. replacing culverts or removing defunct dams or berms to increase a river’s access to its floodplain);
- Building collaborative solutions for managing flood or storm waters, including innovative arrangements that tap beneficiaries in one jurisdiction to help finance projects in another.



*Windham County kids learn about upstream and downstream relationships from a stream table.*

HMF seeks projects that move beyond planning to actions and that materially advance the resilience of the watershed. We envision the work in these projects will focus on building a shared understanding of the watershed’s vulnerabilities, risks, natural flood attenuation assets, and the

opportunities to restore and protect those assets. An inclusive, flexible and transparent *process* will be important to generate excitement and involvement and to produce accepted and effective actions. Applicants must demonstrate a commitment to broad and meaningful community engagement with opportunities for people of varying social and economic backgrounds and ages to come together with the goal of building watershed resilience. HMF views creative, engaging and effective process as a necessary - but not sufficient - outcome of this RFP.

We also expect the proposals to be oriented to designing short- and longer-term solutions and achieve progress on some short-term *action objectives*. HMF recognizes the complexity and long-term nature of watershed planning and will look to applicants to define specific actions and outcomes for their watershed. Proactive and tangible actions (even if small) will catalyze further work and also position participating communities and their watersheds for future funding from other sources. At the end of the projects, High Meadows will offer additional support for grantees to apply for public sources of implementation funding.

### **What High Meadows is Offering**

HMF is dedicating \$180,000 to building resilience in Vermont watersheds. HMF will choose up to six proposals in different watersheds for projects requiring up-to-18 months to complete. For example, we could choose three \$40,000 projects and two \$30,000 projects or four \$40,000 projects and one \$20,000. We envision a maximum of \$40,000/project unless presented with a compelling circumstance. Funds can be used to support new or existing staff, consultants, events, communications, project design, construction, and other expenses directly related to the project. HMF will not fund a study or model without at least 50% matching funding for it.

HMF asks project participants to provide additional cash funding for this work. The amount of matching funds is not prescribed but should be significant enough to show and ensure buy-in to this watershed project as well as to help achieve material success on the ground. In-kind contributions will only be considered if there is an easily documentable cash value and HMF can be confident the in-kind contribution will actually occur. One example of a documentable, in-kind match is allocating a percentage of time of a salaried employee to the project.

HMF will support successful applicants beyond providing a grant check. In Phase 1, we provided teams with coaching, information, and additional resources. We hosted two in-person convenings and two cross-project calls to support information exchange across all 6 teams. Similar resources will be available in Phase 2. Additionally, project leaders from Phase 1 will share their expertise with Phase 2 projects.

### **What High Meadows is Looking For**

For the purposes of this RFP a watershed is defined as an area of land drained by a river, river system, or group of rivers or water bodies that converge to a single point at a lower elevation. Watersheds can be defined at multiple scales - from an area of less than 10 acres draining to a small upland stream to the Lake Champlain Basin, which contains nearly half the state of Vermont. We expect that most projects will encompass a somewhat smaller sub-watershed within one of Vermont's [17 drainage basins](#).

Projects must involve more than two towns (with an exception stated below), as cross-border

collaboration is a major goal of this initiative. For small watersheds, a project might seek representation from every town. For larger watersheds, a demonstration project might start out with a small selection of towns that are linked by water flowing from one to another (an upstream/downstream connection). Applicants may propose multiple actions or one larger, high-value project. HMF expects applicants to build their projects on existing information, such as tactical basin plans, river corridor plans, local and multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plans, Vermont’s bridge and culvert inventory, the [Flood Ready Vermont website](#), etc.

**Multi-stakeholder, cross-government collaboration and commitment:** HMF anticipates projects that seek to accomplish outcomes at different scales (from hyper-local to across-the-watershed), durations (short, medium, and long-term), and that involve participants from multiple sectors (government, business, planning, nonprofit, community groups). HMF understands roles and responsibilities can change with elections, life-events, and the like, but will look hard at commitments to this project by local officials. HMF will also inquire about an upstream community’s willingness to participate. While projects and collaborations vary by watershed, issue, and scope of work, HMF believes participation by the following entities is critical:

- a. *Municipalities:* Each project should involve a minimum of three municipalities within a single watershed that are linked by a shared watercourse. An application from two municipalities will be considered where the majority of the watershed is within the control of the two municipalities, or under other compelling circumstances. An application involving communities from bordering states will be eligible, but at least two communities should be in Vermont. Representation of the municipalities should at a minimum include:

- The selectboard/city council;
- The planning commission;
- Members of relevant local government committees. For instance, in towns that have a local Hazard Mitigation Committee, Conservation Commission and/or Energy Action Committee, representation by members of these entities are highly recommended; and
- Local emergency management directors, road commissioners, basin planners, river corridor managers or green infrastructure coordinators.



*Elementary schoolchildren plant riparian buffer trees along the Saxtons River.*

- b. *Regional Planning Commissions:* The relevant regional planning commission for these municipalities should be included in the project. If the watershed crosses RPC boundaries, then each RPC should be included in the project.
- c. *State and Federal Agencies:* Various state and federal agencies have worked hard to help the State and its municipalities recover from Tropical Storm Irene and other natural disasters. Staff expertise and the information available from these agencies have proven invaluable. You should consider their continued involvement, whether on your team or in a less direct, supportive role.

- d. *Non-profits*: If there is an active local, regional, or statewide non-profit (or academic institution) with interests in the watershed that would play a role in the project (or help carry the project outcomes forward in the future), **it should be included**. The nature of interests and concerns in a watershed planning project will have scientific, economic, and social aspects, **so multiple non-profits should be considered** to ensure a comprehensive understanding of these different influences and that this work continues beyond HMF’s grant. Please think inclusively and expansively in this regard.
- e. *Local Businesses*: The business community often plays an active role in helping communities guide and build their futures. Representatives of this important sector (whether individual employers or leaders in a local business organization) should be included. This includes farmers, also noted below as important landowners.
- f. *Private landowners*: Vermont’s forestland plays an important role in slowing, sinking, and storing stormwater. Many communities have farms or mobile home parks facing river corridor challenges. A community’s private landowners, and particularly farm, forestland, and mobile home park owners, should be explicitly invited into the conversation.
- g. *Other civic representation*: HMF would like to see participation beyond “the usual suspects.” Think about the demographics of your community: which people should be included that often aren’t or don’t show up? Often there are community members with important perspectives who have been active in the community but don’t sit on a municipal body. Including a community’s younger populations will be viewed as a plus. The broader your inclusion in this project, the better, so long as it remains manageable and realistic. The engagement process is not easy and requires attention throughout the project, but it is absolutely essential to your success.

**ECHO’s Environmental Summit, March 24-25, 2017:**

The Leahy Center for Lake Champlain ([ECHO](#)) recognizes the critical importance of multi-sector, watershed-scale thinking and action. ECHO will host a 2-day summit and workshop on March 24-25, 2017. HMF is timing its RFP in concert with this capacity-building summit. This summit will engage Vermont community groups and clean water networks to share their vision and progress in building resilience at the watershed level and improving water quality. The summit will inspire and support multi-sector, regional teams to develop plans and projects that engage their community to address social and structural resiliency for flooding and stormwater issues related to climate change. This Summit provides an excellent and important opportunity for potential respondents to HMF’s RFP to envision and design qualifying projects. Attendance at the Summit will be considered a plus when applications are reviewed by HMF. If you are not able to attend, your application to HMF is still encouraged. For further Summit info, contact [Barry Lampke](#).



*A 2015 ECHO summit participant spoke about how the summit allowed her team of stakeholders (who don’t often work together) to develop a unified vision for action in their watershed.*

**Letter of Intent:** We encourage interested applicants to submit a letter of intent by February 10, 2017. This will not only improve your watershed's chances for being selected, but will also allow HMF to provide coaching to applicants about their eligibility. More info in the RFP application.

### Key Timelines

- Optional Letters of Intent due February 10, 2017; HMF responds w/ comments by March 1
- ECHO Summit March 24-25, 2017 (attendance is not required for an RFP award but will be considered a plus; successful applicants for HMF's last round of funding brought teams of 3-5 to the Summit; if you cannot attend, applications to HMF are still encouraged)
- Applications due June 1, 2017
- Finalists chosen July 3, 2017, with site visits following
- Grant awards by September 1, 2017
- Project completed within 18 months

Submission requirements are contained in the following grant application. Questions should be emailed to [hmfwatershedrfp@vermontcf.org](mailto:hmfwatershedrfp@vermontcf.org). Keep an eye on HMF's website for updates!

We look forward to reviewing your applications. Thank you for your work to build models for other watersheds in Vermont and around the country!



*A road culvert replacement project in the Mad River Valley.*



## **Building Resilience in a Vermont Watershed Grant Application**

This application should be read and interpreted with the RFP

### Letter of Intent (due February 10, 2017)

**In no more than 300 words** please describe your concept(s) for building resilience in your watershed, who would be involved, the challenges and opportunities, and the short and long-term outcomes (with the potential funding in mind). Please keep your letter at a higher conceptual level than what is required in the full application; HMF will review your letter and provide feedback on the objectives and possible budget by March 1. *Submission of a letter of intent is optional, but will be considered a plus when full applications are reviewed. It also gives you a chance to test the waters with HMF.*

### Attending ECHO's March 24-25 Climate Change Summit

This 2-day Summit provides an important opportunity to refine the vision and design of your proposed projects. Scholarship funding to attend the Summit is available through ECHO. For information about the Summit and how to apply, contact [Barry Lampke](#). *Attendance at the Summit is not a pre-requisite, but will be considered a plus when full applications are reviewed by HMF.*

### **Full Application (due June 1, 2017) must include the following elements:**

#### 1. Watershed

The RFP has provided a working definition of a watershed for purposes of this grant.

In no more than 150 words, please answer the following questions:

- What is the watershed within which the participating communities are located?
- How do participating communities relate to each other? Have they worked together before?
- **Please provide a map** and other helpful descriptive material.

#### Lead Organization(s)

Lead applicants must be a 501(c)(3) organization or municipal body. Participating municipalities and their partner organizations are expected to play the primary role in project design, management and implementation. The lead partners must demonstrate that they have the leadership and capacity to ensure successful community engagement and carry out project activities. *Projects with strong, committed co-leadership are encouraged.*

- In no more than 400 words, please describe the “Lead Organizations” and “Supporting Partners” and their respective roles, responsibilities and capacities. Lead organizations are those that take primary responsibility for the success of this project and will be involved throughout; supporting partners are those organizations that play smaller or episodic roles. Lead organizations/applicants should demonstrate the capacity to provide the following key resources to conduct a successful project:
  - a) Effective and representative leadership;
  - b) Project management and coordination;
  - c) Communication abilities;
  - d) Implementation roles and responsibilities; and
  - e) Structural and financial commitments to the project and to stewarding its results.
- If the lead organization is a non-profit, **letters of commitment** from the selectboards and planning commissions of all participating municipalities should be presented as part of this application.
- Who should HMF communicate with regarding questions or feedback?

### Project Narrative

This is your chance to wax eloquent about the project and to provide greater detail about what the project will look like and how you anticipate it will play out.

- In **200 words or less**, please provide a summary statement of your project.
- Now, in no more than **750 words**, go into greater detail to describe this project by addressing the following questions:
  - **What are the issues your watershed faces** as it works towards greater resiliency?
  - **Why are the participating communities and this watershed ready** for this project—in other words, what is the need, what have you already accomplished, and why is this project timely?
  - **Please describe the inclusive process you envision** for gathering voices and perspectives on the watershed’s vulnerabilities and opportunities. How will you make decisions within this inclusive process? How have you or will you fulfill the multi-sector representation discussed in the “Multi-Stakeholder” section above? If you believe you’ve already completed the type of process described in the RFP and are ready to dive into implementation, please describe the process already utilized.
  - **What constraints or challenges do you anticipate** in this project (either with inclusive process or action)? What factors could impede success (e.g. outcomes may hinge on local ballot items)? Are there ongoing environmental issues in your communities that may impede this project’s success?
  - **How will you communicate** with your communities and others within the watershed?

### Outcomes

In 250 words or less, **what are the short-term local and watershed-scale outcomes** you'll accomplish during this grant? **What longer-term local and watershed-scale outcomes** will you make progress against? In other words, how will you specifically define success in your work? **How will you monitor progress** during and after this project?

### Budget

Explain how you project the grant monies will be used:

- Please provide a complete budget for the project (a mid-level amount of detail is acceptable) clearly indicating which elements of work HMF would be paying for.
- What will be the financial contribution by participating municipalities and partners (see “What We’re Offering” section)? The amount of matching funds is not prescribed but should be significant enough to show and ensure buy-in to this watershed project as well as to help achieve material success on the ground.

### Additional Information

If you believe there is other relevant information, please provide it in no more than 150 words.

### Submission Requirements

Proposals must be submitted **as a single PDF**. Letters which document commitments to the project or otherwise support your application are encouraged. These letters and any other supporting materials should be included in **this single PDF**. Your application should be emailed to: [hmfwatershedrfp@vermontcf.org](mailto:hmfwatershedrfp@vermontcf.org) no later than **5:00 p.m. on June 1, 2017**.

*Questions should be emailed to [hmfwatershedrfp@vermontcf.org](mailto:hmfwatershedrfp@vermontcf.org). Keep an eye on HMF's [website](#) for updates!*