

1. What is Discretionary Funding?

Discretionary funding is a duly-appropriated sum of money in the Town's expense budget allocated to an eligible not-for-profit organization by the Selectboard and approved at Town Meeting.

2. What Types of Organizations May Receive Discretionary Funds?

Discretionary funds may only be allocated to not-for-profit; community-based social services providers. In order to receive discretionary funds directly, an organization must be incorporated as a not-for-profit and registered with the State of Vermont, unless exempt and have a Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN).

3. What Types of Organizations May Not Receive Discretionary Funds?

For-profit entities may not receive discretionary funds, except when the primary non profit contractor subcontracts with a for-profit entity as part of the delivery of services. Such subcontracts, however, must be only an ancillary part of the program to be funded, not the primary basis for the discretionary award, and must be approved by the contracting agency.

4. What are the Restrictions on the Use of Discretionary Funds?

All public funds, however awarded, must be used for a Town purpose. In general, a Town purpose is defined as an activity or service that is open to all members of the public, regardless of race, creed, gender, religious affiliation, etc., without restriction, and which does not promote a particular religion.

Programs and services provided by religious or religiously-affiliated organization must be able to demonstrate that the program is open to non-members, is not a religious program, and does not promote the religion.

Closed membership groups, which are those to which membership is restricted or subject to eligibility based upon prohibited factors, may generally not receive funding.

Groups that serve a particular population, for example, those age 65 and above in a particular community; are not considered a closed membership group, as long as the program is open and accessible to all seniors in the community. Similarly, tenant organizations in public housing may also receive funding, as long as they provide equal access to all residents of the public housing units they serve.

Funds may only be allocated for a public purpose and may not support political activities and private interests.

5. How to Apply for Discretionary Funding?

All organizations that wish to receive discretionary funding must submit a "Request for Special Appropriations" application to the Town Manager. The application elicits information about an organization's experience, qualifications, and integrity, and the project or service for which the organization is requesting support. The form is available on the Town website by clicking on [BOARDS & MEETINGS > SELECTBOARD](#) then scroll down to FY26 Budget and "FY26 Discretionary Funding Policy-for applicants" or by emailing Duncan Wardwell, Assistant to the Town Manager, at:

dwardwell@richmondvt.gov.

Deadline for submission is the end of the day, October 7, 2024.

Town of Richmond

Request for Special Appropriations

Request for Fiscal Year: 2026

Organization's Name: Richmond Farmers Market

Address: PO Box 806

City, State, Zip: Richmond, VT

Website address: www.richmondfarmersmarketvt.org

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Program Name: Richmond Farmers Market

2. Contact Person/Title: Stephanie Choate

Telephone Number: 802-363-2822

E-mail address: choate.stephanie@gmail.com

3. Total number of individuals served in the last complete fiscal year by this program:
It's very difficult to track how many people attend the market, but we estimate 500-900 people come through each week. This year, we had a total of more than 80 vendors rotating throughout the year.

4. Total number of the above individuals who are Town residents: 42 percent

Please, attach any documentation that supports this number.

For two weeks in 2020 we invited market attendees to share their town of residence. Based on information collected, slightly less than half were from Richmond.

Percent of people served who are Town residents:

Estimated 42 percent, based on 2020 survey. In 2024, 16 of our 80 rotating vendors are from Richmond. Two of our three anchor produce farms are Richmond farms, plus the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps and a Richmond dairy farm. Many other vendors are either former Richmond residents or from close neighboring towns, including Huntington, Bolton, Duxbury, Hinesburg, Williston, Jericho and more.

5. Amount of Request: \$2,500

6. Total Program Budget: \$15,919

Percent of total program budget you are requesting from the Town of Richmond:
 15.7%

7. Please state or attach the mission of your agency:

We are dedicated to strengthening the direct connection between producers and consumers by providing an inclusive space for all members of the community to convene over and celebrate local food, artisanal crafts, music and more.

8. Funding will be used to:

Maintain an existing program Expand an Existing Program
 Start a new program

9. Has your organization received funds from the Town in the past for this or a similar program?

In FY25 we received \$2,500 from the town of Richmond. In FY23 and FY24, we received \$1,500. In FY22 we received \$400 from the town Recreation Department. In the past, the town of Richmond has been a market sponsor for generally \$200 - \$400 per year. These were one-time sponsorships from town departments, not part of the town budget.

If yes, please answer the following:

a. Does the amount of your request represent an increase over your previous appropriation? If yes, explain the reason(s) for the increase.

No, but the rate of support remains extremely important to us especially with the challenges we have faced in the last two years. Catastrophic flooding and cuts to state funding for EBT programs widely used at farmers markets have been two major blows to the Richmond Farmers Market this year.

This year, the state slashed funding for its EBT matching program by more than half. This has made the market's own EBT matching program more critical than ever to maintain stability for vulnerable Vermonters who have come to rely on using their EBT benefits to get fresh, local food and be a part of the community the market provides. We also introduced a new market-funded program called Farm Bucks, which incentivizes shoppers to spend more at our farmers' booths. Flooding and cuts to the state's program have disproportionately affected our farmers, and the market is working hard to support them and make sure they can continue.

The cost of living has increased drastically in the last few years, and the market, board members, and shoppers are feeling increased financial pressure. Farmers markets across the state have seen declining sales this year as people tighten their belts, and strong support for markets will be critical as we face these challenges. As the demand for workers and the cost of living continue to increase, we are feeling the pressure in our ability to retain a high-level manager and pay them a fair stipend for the service they provide to residents and visitors. In order to keep the market secure and sustainable, we need to offer a competitive rate to cover the increased labor required. We also introduced an assistant manager position this year in order to provide support for the manager and create a pipeline for manager stability in the future.

With grocery store prices drastically increasing, we need to work harder to draw customers to the market, offering incentive programs and special events like Kids Day. We want to maintain the free family-friendly programming and entertainment we provide for the entire community — live music, kids events, town group representation, and more. Musicians and other entertainment providers often need higher fees to keep up with the increasing cost of living, and we want to ensure that this community asset remains strong as costs rise across the board.

With the extreme flooding the last two years and expected increase in extreme weather events, we also need to invest in additional signage and advertising if the market needs to change locations again. For the second year in a row, we missed a market week due to flooding, and had to spend several weeks at an alternative location in the town center. While we are extremely grateful for the town's help in relocating, we did see a slump in sales. We need to spend funds in making a potential relocation more successful in the future.

b. Were any conditions or restrictions placed on the funds by the Selectboard? ____
If yes, describe how those conditions or restrictions have been met.

No.

B. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

1. Statement of Need: Identify the issue or need that the program will address (use statistical data to justify the need for the program). To what extent does this need, or problem exist in the Town of Richmond?

A strong farmers market is an asset to any town. We provide access to fresh, healthy foods for all locals, strengthening our agricultural economy and local food systems and connecting residents with local producers. In addition, we provide access to local produce for food-insecure Vermonters. Vermonters can swipe their EBT cards at the market and triple their benefits through a combination of the state's Crop Cash program and market incentives.

Since 2021, the board committed to increasing benefits with its own EBT matching program — a program that has become more critical as state funding becomes less secure. Eligible Vermonters can also use Farm to Family coupons at the market, using the state program that aims to get local produce into the hands of families who need it. Food security program use has risen steadily since 2019, peaking at nearly \$19,000 in 2023 — largely due to expanded effort to raise awareness and the market's matching program. However, we do expect these figures to decrease in 2024 since the state did not renew its Crop Cash Plus program (an expanded version of Crop Cash which could be used on more than just fresh produce) this year and reduced funding for Crop Cash.

The market also provides economic opportunity for local businesses and entrepreneurs, creating a solid vending space for established small businesses and an incubator space for new ones. In 2024, we hosted 14 businesses in their first year, including several from Richmond. This year, we have 16 Richmond-based businesses — four of which are farms. Other vendors are former Richmond residents who still feel connected to the

community, or vendors who chose the Richmond Farmers Market specifically because their products are for sale in Richmond stores. The market also draws nearly 60 percent of its clientele from other towns, many of whom visit other Richmond businesses and restaurants after they visit the market. Local kids can also have a free booth at the market to flex their entrepreneurial skills. We had 10 youth booths this year.

We also provide a safe, inclusive social space for residents. Many families attend the market as a family outing, and others catch up with friends and neighbors while there. It's also a safe space for young Richmond residents to recreate, exercise on the playground while their parents shop, and try new healthy food. Many come with their parents, or even walk straight to the market after school. School year afternoons at the market are full of kids! We also welcome many seniors who shop regularly at the market. People of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds gather and socialize at the market.

We also provide free entertainment for all ages, bringing local bands to perform every week. Many of these performers are Richmond residents. We have also provided childrens' activities like juggling and crafts, and a cider press and fall events for families, a grain milling demonstration, and more. This year, we held the first annual Kids Day — a hugely popular family event with kids music, crafts, games and events. The social and entertainment aspects of the market boost Richmond's desirability as a whole — we often see the farmers market listed as an asset of the town in real estate listings.

In addition, we provide a space for other local groups and community organizations to reach out to residents and share their missions through our free Community Booth offering. In 2024, we hosted the Richmond Conservation Committee, the Community Senior Center, the Green Mountain Club, Our Community Cares Camp, a local kids bike team, Lake Champlain Basin Program, FEMA, and more. In recent years, we've also held a First Responder Day, giving locals a chance to connect with the Richmond Police Department, Fire Department, and Richmond Rescue. We've also hosted UVM's Expanded Food & Nutrition Program, a locally organized e-bike test ride program, Richmond Racial Justice Committee, Spectrum Youth and Family Services, the Richmond Historical Society, the Williston-Richmond Rotary, the Richmond Housing Committee, Richmond Climate Action Committee, the Richmond Free Library, Richmond Cub Scouts, community organization Walk to Shop, WIC's Farm to Family program, DCF Foster Parenting representatives, a community art project with Radiate Artspace, Richmond's ARPA fund representatives, PTOs and school boards, Halloween on the Green, and voter awareness groups.

2. Program Summary:

a. Identify the target/recipients of program services. Specify the number of Town residents your program will serve during the fiscal year and explain the basis upon which this number is calculated. Indicate any eligibility requirements your program has with respect to age, gender, income or residence.

Our target recipients are all residents of Richmond and surrounding towns, plus any tourists or visitors. All are welcome!

Exact numbers are extremely tricky, but if we estimate on the low end that 5,000 unique people come through the market during the course of our 20-week season and 42

percent of those are Richmond residents, the market serves 2,100 residents. That's in addition to the Richmond businesses, local kids who have a Youth Booth, and Richmond organizations who have a Community Booth.

The market has no eligibility requirements, whether to attend or vend. We do occasionally have to waitlist or turn away vendors if their products overlap too much with an existing vendor.

b. Identify what is to be accomplished or what change will occur from participating in the program. How will people be better off as a result of participating in the program? Describe the steps you take to make the project known to the public, and make the program accessible and inclusive?

Town residents who attend or vend at the market can benefit from all the benefits we provide for the community listed above — access to fresh, local food; economic opportunity for and connection to local businesses and entrepreneurs; a safe, inclusive social space for all; free entertainment and events; and a space for local organizations and groups to share their missions with residents.

We promote the market each week through an email list, social media channels, signage, direct connection with town groups and residents, newspaper articles, flyers in local businesses and especially places intended to reach those with EBT benefits, and Front Porch Forum.

3. Program Funding:

a. Identify how Town funds, specifically, will be used (i.e., funds will provide “X” amount of units of service.)

Town funds will be used to cover our fixed operating costs and entertainment that we provide for free for the town Richmond. Our operating costs are the non-negotiable, bare-bones costs of running the market: manager stipends; insurance; the town's park use fee; farmers market membership fee; website and domain name costs; EBT equipment processing fees; administration costs for the markets various programs and events; and supplies such as signs. We've cut everything we possibly can from these. Vendor fees cover most of these costs, but always fall short of the total cost of operating the market. The difference must be made up through fundraising. Entertainment includes live music every week, in addition to programming and events for children and for residents of all ages.

In addition, we hope to use town funds to ensure we can provide at minimum a \$15/hour stipend for our manager. Our main source of funding — vendor fees — is somewhat variable, and this support would help us retain skilled, driven individuals even in a challenging season. A market cannot happen without a manager. Our manager is the face of the market, and by extension, of Richmond, to both attendees and vendors. As the demand for workers and the cost of living continue to increase, we are feeling the pressure in our ability to retain a high-level manager and pay them a fair stipend for the service they provide to residents and visitors. Town support helps us to stabilize this area

of our budget and make the market more secure.

We also saw a drastic cut to state funding for EBT matching programs this year, which makes the market's own matching program more critical. Markets across the state — including the RFM — have seen a decline in sales this year. We believe the decreased funding for Crop Cash is part of the reason for this. We also know families are struggling with inflation and higher prices at the grocery store, and we are all feeling the pinch. A strong partnership with the town in a critical way to keep the farmers market strong.

b. List the other agencies to whom you are submitting a request for funds for this program and the amount requested. How would this program be modified should revenues be lost?

Farmers markets often operate on a shoestring budget where boards must fundraise in order to bring in enough money to make the market happen. This is a serious investment of time from volunteers and success is by no means certain. Several towns have struggled to keep their markets going due to a lack of volunteers and funding — Jeffersonville nearly lost its market this year, we have heard that Waterbury is in danger of not returning next year, and Essex has struggled to maintain a market. Richmond's market very nearly ended in 2018 due to a shortage of volunteers and funding capacity. We were able to pull the market together and have since strengthened it, but support from the town would go a long way toward making the market a more secure and dependable presence.

We apply for grants through the state and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT) and the Vermont Farmers Market Association as they come up, but these grants are often one-time offerings and are not always available. We also seek out sponsorships from town businesses who are promoted on our website and marketing. We also hold a silent auction each year, and put out calls for direct donations from customers.

Representatives from NOFA and from the VT Agency of Agriculture have strongly urged us to form a fiscal relationship with our town. They said support from a market's town is one of the best ways to create a stable and strong market. Other towns have this relationship with their farmers markets. For example, the Jericho Farmers Market receives annually \$4,000 from the town of Jericho and \$1,000 from the town of Underhill, covering the majority of its expenses.

C. ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

1. Describe your agency's capability to provide the program including its history, previous experience providing this service, management structure and staff expertise.

Richmond's market was founded in 2003 and is one of the longest running markets in the state. We have an unpaid 5-member volunteer board of directors with a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer, plus two alternate board members in case a voting member can't attend a meeting. Board members are elected by vendors in a vote during our annual vendor meeting. The market employs a manager and assistant

manager who are paid a stipend and are responsible for the day-to-day running of the market.

2. How will you assess whether/how program participants are better off? Describe how you will assess program outcomes. Your description should include: what (what kind of data), how (method/tool for collecting the data), from whom (source of data) and when (timing of data collection).

The board holds annual review and budget meetings to review the successes and problem areas of each year. We also hold an annual vendor meeting where vendors share feedback, ideas and reviews.

Vendor revenue and EBT spending figures are also collected for each week to give an idea of market attendance, as well as trends and changes from year to year.

3. Summarize or attach program and or service assessments conducted in the past two years.

The market collects aggregate vendor revenue, which is a good representation of how many residents and visitors are utilizing the market.

Vendor revenue in 2023 was down 8.8 percent over 2022 figures, which we think was largely due to missing a market due to flooding. Vendor revenue in 2022 increased by 43 percent over 2021's figures. Vendor revenue in 2021 was up 78 percent over 2020. The steady rise and stabilization has been largely due to the sustained efforts of market managers, board, and volunteers to build community and vendor connections. However, we expect revenue to fall this year following the statewide trend, partially due to state program cuts and flooding at our market site.

The market itself does not bring in revenue — this is revenue brought in by our vendors. Any money raised goes directly back into the market or programs for residents, such as our expanded EBT benefit program, Farm Bucks program, and Kids Day.

Food security program spending in 2023 more than doubled over 2022, totaling nearly \$19,000 between EBT purchases, Crop Cash, Farm to Family, and the market's own matching initiative. Food security spending increased by more than a third in 2022 over 2021, totaling nearly \$8,000.

This increase was largely due to a state expansion of the Crop Cash program, which it decided not to renew in 2024. This was a blow to markets and especially farmers across the state. This kind of volatility in state funding is exactly why our relationship with the town of Richmond is critical and why the board is committed to hosting its own EBT matching program as well as initiatives to support farmers. We expect to see food security spending go down this year due to Crop Cash funding reductions, which will also have an impact on total vendor revenue.

4. Does your organization have a strategic plan and a strategic planning process in place? Not a formal strategic plan - If yes, please attach your plan.

The strategic plan should include a mission statement, goals, steps to achieve the goals, and measures that assess the accomplishments of the goals.

5. What is the authorized size of your board of directors?

5 How many meetings were held by the board last year?

Four formal meetings : an end-of-season review, a budget meeting, an annual vendor meeting, and a vendor selection meeting. We had approximately 6 total meetings this year for various issues that arose.

I, the undersigned, confirm the information contained herein is accurate and can be verified as such. I understand and agree that if the requested funds are approved, the disbursement of funds are subject to all conditions established by the Richmond Selectboard.

Signature of Applicant _____



Date 10/5/24

Stephanie Choate, RFM Board President

Print Name of Applicant and Title