

Catalyst Cohort from Vermont Foodbank



The purpose of this funding opportunity is to support a select group of Network Partners in a peer-learning cohort, focused on best practices among the Network. During the duration of the cohort, participants are expected to design a plan to increase organizational resiliency, based on the learnings and associated funding from the Cohort. This cohort is designed to help Vermont Foodbank live into one of the primary goals of our new Network Partner Framework- Building Organizational Resiliency for Long-Term Sustainability.

Vermont Foodbank recognizes we play a unique statewide role in convening partners across geography, but we also understand that across our Network there already exists a range of expertise on many of the challenges Vermont Foodbank and our partners grapple with. This cohort is intended to be a shared learning space among a cohort of Network Partners and Vermont Foodbank, to learn and improve together. We intend to use the space to create shared learning around your organization's most pressing needs, as well as leverage existing knowledge and resources already inherent within our partners.

To receive the funding, Network Partners must commit to:

- Completing an initial organization self-assessment with your leadership team
- Submit a full application, answering narrative questions about your organization by the grant deadline of March 20th.
- Cohort learning and convening calls for 1.5 hours each month, April-October 2026
- One mid-point check-in call with Vermont Foodbank staff
- A final 3-hour cohort session in-person at Vermont Foodbank's Barre facility in November 2026, to share organizational learnings and reflections.

To get the most out of this experience and ensure shared learning across the group, we ask that your organization's representative commit to engaging fully in all Catalyst Cohort sessions and activities. While we understand that emergencies happen, consistent engagement is crucial to a strong cohort experience, and multiple absences

may impact your organization's ability to continue in the Cohort and to receive the associated grant funding.

Funding Would Support:

Funding will be utilized at the discretion of individual Network Partners, but the core focus should be on strengthening organizational resilience at the organization. **All partners who participate will receive a \$20,000 award.** A portion of this funding is expected to be used to cover transportation and other administrative overhead related to participating in the cohort and implementing your project. At the end of the grant cycle, partners will be expected to present their organization's plan for increasing organizational resilience.

Along with funding support, the Vermont Foodbank's cohort coordinator will facilitate a learning space for Network Partners during monthly cohort calls and is available to provide 1-on-1 technical assistance for partners throughout the grant period.

Some examples of acceptable uses of funding include:

- Creating or refining an annual food purchasing budget or plan
- Efforts to coordinate or share organizational assets (such as staff, procedures, transportation, volunteers, etc.) among Network Partners in a partner's region or thematic programming area.
- Increasing fundraising capacity or donor development
- Strengthening organizational "people capacity" through improved staffing models or a volunteer recruitment plan
- Developing a succession plan for your organization's leadership team
- Developing a strategic plan that addresses the other themes listed above

Some examples of items funding is **not** intended to support includes but is not limited to:

- Food purchasing
- Site accessibility upgrades
- Infrastructure purchases (such as fridge, freezer or kitchen equipment)

This opportunity is designed to build sources of peer support and organizational transformation among the cohort. If you are accepted into the 2026 cohort, your organization will not be eligible for participation in a 2027 or 2028 cohort cycle.

For this year's cohort, we are looking to engage with partners who embody these key organizational characteristics:

- Mission-Driven and Ready to Reflect
- Mid-Sized, Resourced Organizations (generally at least 1 staff or a consistent leadership volunteer base; with some administrative structure in place)
- Poised for a Resiliency Push
- Collaborative Leadership
- Committed to the Full Experience with Buy-In for Meaningful Implementation

2026 Catalyst Cohort- Key Dates

- **Application opens:** February 13th
- **Application Deadline:** March 20th
- **Funding Decisions Announced:** Early April
- **First cohort convening (virtual):** April 29th, 2026
- **Monthly cohort sessions (virtual):** monthly, April – October 2026
- **Final, convening (in-person in Barre, VT):** Early November 2026
- **Final reporting** on impact due by July 2027

Commitment	April – November 2026
7 virtual monthly meetings, 1.5 hours	10.5 hours
Pre-meeting prep (30 mins/each)	3.5 hours
1 check-in call with VT Foodbank staff to assess progress	1 hour
1 final cohort gathering in Barre, VT	3 hours
Pre/Post-Cohort prep (ex. Feedback interviews, availability surveys, Org Self-Assessment, etc)	2 hours
Total Required	20 hours
Travel	up to 4 hrs (travel to and from Barre, VT)
<p>NOTE: The time estimated above does <u>not</u> reflect the time required by Cohort participants to strategize and actualize their project. This will vary greatly depending on the scope.</p>	