

Town of Richmond

Request for Special Appropriations

Request for Fiscal Year: July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027

Organization's Name: Vermont Adult Learning

Address: 77 College Street, Ste 100

City, State, Zip: Burlington, VT 05401

Website address: www.vtadultlearning.org

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Program Name: Adult Basic Education and Literacy
2. Contact Person/Title: Janine Fleri, Director of Development & Communications
Telephone Number: 802-735-1670
E-mail address: jfleri@vtadultlearning.org
3. Total number of individuals served in the last complete fiscal year by this program:
1500
4. Total number of the above individuals who are Town residents: .2 Please attach any documentation that supports this number.

Percent of people served who are Town residents: 0.14%

5. Amount of Request: \$500

6. Total Program Budget: \$5,357,594.17 Percent of total program budget you are requesting from the Town of Richmond: 0.009%

7. Please state or attach the mission of your agency: Vermont Adult Learning's mission is to create an innovative, inclusive, and equitable learning environment that provides personalized opportunities for education and career development for Vermont residents by building relationships, strengthening communities, and fostering lifelong learning.

8. Will the funding 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? To my knowledge, this is our first request.

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.

N/A

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

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?

Historically, learners come to VAL having experienced barriers in their public schools or having been displaced from their homelands due to poverty and/or political turmoil. For those born in the United States, intergenerational poverty, learning disabilities, family violence, mental health issues, or substance use disorder are common. Some of our students experienced bullying at their public high schools and no longer felt safe; these students often represent minority status in their schools based on socioeconomics, gender, race, country of national origin, etc. Others simply need to work or feel better equipped to learn in an “adult” environment in which students are making an active choice to participate. Those arriving in the United States as immigrants or refugees may experience barriers of residual trauma from economic/political turmoil in their homeland while also trying to learn English and navigate a new culture. Since the pandemic, we have seen a steady increase in students coming to us with lower skills and a greater need for services to support them on their paths toward higher education and/or employment. Despite these setbacks, our students know they can come to VAL and receive personalized education tailored to their individual needs, delivered by compassionate, culturally competent instructors. For all the barriers our students face, they share a drive and motivation toward growth and self-improvement. Our work is rigorous, important, and 100% worth it.

Vermont Adult Learning (VAL) offers a variety of learning opportunities to help adults 16 years and older achieve their education and career goals to enhance their quality of life and become more active and engaged members of their families, workplaces, and communities. We offer high school completion and GED testing/tutoring, basic literacy and numeracy, classes for English Language Learners (ELL), job readiness support, and workforce development programming. Our services empower individuals to be self-sufficient, in turn contributing to greater local economic engagement and stimulation. Our programs are free, and there is no upper age limit to enroll with us. Richmond residents can access classes in person at the Chittenden County Learning Center in Downtown Burlington, or remotely via the Online Learning Center.

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.

VAL serves Vermont learners ages 16 and older with no upper age limit for enrollment. In our Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024- June 30, 2025) student demographics were: 58% female, 41% male, 1% Non-Binary, 48% unemployed, and 55% non-white. In our Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025), 80% of students who shared their financial

status reported low income, 20% reported having a disability, 50% reported linguistic/cultural barriers, and almost 100% reported low literacy. VAL students strive toward academic/career goals, despite these barriers. Notably, many of our students leave traditional school systems due to bullying precipitated by differences in race, appearance, sexual identity, etc. We anticipate serving 2-5 Richmond residents in our Fiscal Year 2026 based on the previous fiscal year records.

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?

Education provides the building blocks for self-sufficiency, economic stability, and individual as well as community well-being. Learners who work with VAL receive intensive, individualized instruction tailored to meet their unique learning needs and overcome barriers to meeting their academic and career goals. Our staff provides students with personalized Adult Learning Plans (ALPs). VAL assesses each student's academic skills and, whenever appropriate, conducts career interest surveys and learning style inventories with new students. Career exploration and career plans are also embedded in learners' PLPs whenever appropriate. VAL works closely with local high schools and community partners to engage students in addition to traditional advertising (print, radio, social media, etc.) VAL actively fosters robust partnerships with a variety of community providers (e.g., ReSource YouthBuild, Spectrum Youth & Family Services, Vermont Works for Women, VSAC, Mercy Connections, United Way, etc.), providing additional academic support for low-skilled individuals needing intensive wrap-around services. Members of our Leadership Team and direct service staff are actively engaged in committee work centered on ensuring a safe environment for learners of all backgrounds and walks of life. This work includes updating and maintaining student-facing materials such as the Student Handbook, intake materials, the VAL website, and curriculum development through a lens of justice, equity, diversity, belonging, and inclusion. Staff are also provided with professional development opportunities to enhance their service delivery. Recent training topics have included mental health first aid, trauma responsiveness, cultural humility, and LGBTQ+ issues.

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 put towards our general operating budget, which has recently been impacted by changes to the VT Agency of Education's funding formula. While these changes will increase funding for the organization and allow us to serve more students, new restrictions exist on how these funds can be used, impacting critical roles within the organization, mainly operational and administrative functions that the funds provided by the AOE cannot fund. In addition, an extension of federal funding for our workforce programming was denied, and future federal opportunities have been drastically reduced. Town funds will help fill these critical gaps to help VAL sustain services for underserved Vermonters.

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?

VAL is supported by state and federal grants, regional United Way funding, town funds, foundation grants, business sponsorships, and individual donations cultivated through direct fundraising campaigns (e.g. newsletter mailings, appeal letters, social media campaigns, etc.). Much of our grant funding comes with tight restrictions, making community investment in our work ever more important and appreciated.

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.

VAL has served tens of thousands of adult learners, ages 16 years and older, since our founding in 1980. Our no-cost programs include basic education and literacy, high school completion, GED tutoring and testing, courses for English Language Learners, workforce readiness and development, and transition to post-secondary education. Our leadership team is comprised of an Executive Director, Senior Director of Programs, Associate Director, Development and Communications Director, Director of Curriculum, Director of Advising, HR Manager, Grants and Data Manager, and four Regional Directors overseeing seven physical locations and an Online Learning Center. Our direct services staff is comprised of compassionate teachers/instructors, advisors, student support specialists, and a workforce development team who all work to ensure learners are fully supported in overcoming complex and overlapping barriers to attaining their education and career goals.

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).

Each student who enrolls in Vermont Adult Learning is assessed. This process helps measure their current skill level, including reading, writing, math, and English language skills. We then administer a progress assessment after 40 plus hours of instructional services in order to determine their skills gains. According to the Agency of Education guidelines, our target should be that 30% of our students achieve a measurable skill gain throughout the year. We are pleased to say that we consistently reach this goal, which is sometimes very challenging, considering our students are usually raising families and are working, in addition to attending classes and completing assignments.

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

- Number of students served at all VAL learning centers (FY24 = 1,388, FY25 = 1,500),
- Percent of students who show measurable skill gains on federally approved standardized assessments (FY24 = 29%, FY25 = 30%),
- Number of students who earn a high school diploma or GED (FY24 = 93, FY25 = 58*),

Additionally, data collection conducted by our Burlington Learning Center in the last two years has indicated a 15% increase in employment for our Chittenden County learners.

*Please note this drop in high school credential recipients is directly related to the shift from the High School Diploma Program to the Adult Diploma Program, as it took several months longer than originally indicated by the Agency of Education to implement the new program.

4. Does your organization have a strategic plan and a strategic planning process in place? _____ If yes, please attach your plan.

VAL engaged with SPARC Insights at the start of FY26 to develop a new strategic plan with additional focus on Board development and organizational culture. This work is actively in progress and focused on the following strategic pillars:

1. Organizational Alignment and Development
 - Leadership and Decision-making
 - Systems and Processes
 - Culture - One Val
2. Financial Sustainability
 - Development/Advancement Operations
 - Entrepreneurialism
 - Public Value
3. Public Awareness and Image
 - Branding and Visibility - One Val
 - Storytelling - Impact
4. Partnership Development
 - Workforce
 - Technical Centers
 - Etc.
5. Board Development and Governance
 - Capacity for public messaging and advocacy
 - Capacity for meaningful and appropriate oversight
 - Capacity for strategic leadership

5. What is the authorized size of your board of directors? 9-15 members

How many meetings were held by the board last year? 6

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. I also understand that I must adhere to all rules outlined in the **Town Of Richmond Discretionary Funding Policy, which appears as a cover sheet to this application.**

Signature of Applicant Janine Fleri Date 10/22/2025

Janine Fleri, Director of Development and Communications
Print Name of Applicant and Title