

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes - Approved 3/19/2025

February 19, 2025 – 8:30 am

Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87661939646?pwd=VXpMYkRJSUtGYjRuTFJTa041bWMMyUT09>

Agenda

1. Welcome (Rick)
2. Review and approve January meeting minutes (Clare)
3. Grant Proposals, Approvals, and Updates
 - o Core Services One-Time Funding - Update (Clare)
 - o Other grants updates, as needed
4. Statute & Admin Updates (Clare)
 - o Update on NRCC Statute Committee (Rick & Clare)
 - o Conflict of Interest Policy - For Discussion (Clare)
 - o Update on State Insurance (Clare)
5. Impact of Federal Executive Orders and Changes to Federal Funding (Clare)
6. VACD Report
 - o Organizational Development Work (Jill & Jess)
 - o Action Circles Contract & Legislative Work (Jill & Clare)
 - o Jill's Retirement & ED Recruitment (Jill & Jess)
7. Other business, as required

Attendance

Voting Members: Rick Hopkins, Richard Noel, and Bill Manner, Kate Willard

Rick left the meeting at 9:30.

Other attendees (non-voting):

Jill Arace, VACD Executive Director

Clare Ireland, Administrator

Jessica Miller, Grants & Finance Manager

Lina Smith, Grants & Finance Manager

Emily Nummer, Agriculture Programs Manager

Welcome

Rick welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m.

Approve Minutes of January Meeting

Bill made the motion, seconded by Richard to approve the minutes of January 15th. Upon a call for a vote, all voted in favor.

Rick welcomed Kate Willard to the committee. Rick has appointed Kate to be part of the committee, and Kate is a voting member.

Grant Proposals, Approvals, and Updates

Core Services One-Time Funding

Agreements have been sent out to most districts and Clare noted there were some mistakes on the initial spreadsheet. When corrected, it lowered both the Bennington and Franklin awards. She also noted that Bennington asked the board to reconsider their request for a walk-behind tractor. They have identified it as a priority. Given this, Clare asked for flexibility to reallocate awards to Bennington and White River to consider their identified priorities. After further discussion, Bill made the motion, seconded by Richard to allow Clare to renegotiate with districts and make adjustments to the award as discussed. Upon a call for a vote, all voted in favor.

The balance of \$6,685 is being held in reserve and Clare suggested it be used to help districts move away from federal systems (i.e. email etc.). This will be decided at the March meeting.

Statute & Admin Updates

Update on NRCC Statute Committee

Clare reported that she has sent out an invitation for statute committee members but has not been able to schedule their first meeting. Currently, possible members are Rick Hopkins; Clare Ireland; District Managers Jennifer Byrne and Dan Koenemann; Nina Gage as Agency of Ag Rep; Travis Thomason in an advisory role as the USDA NRCS Rep; supervisors Willie Nickerson and Kate Willard; and associate supervisor Henry Bonges. Clare will be following up with a new poll to try to set a first meeting date.

Conflict of Interest Policy

Clare is in the process of reviewing Conflict of Interest policies and will bring a draft to the board for approval at a future meeting.

Update on State Insurance

Clare has met with the Agency of Administration regarding both NRCC and Districts being covered under the State insurance policy. It has been agreed that statutes allow for this but how this happens is still a question. Usually, all covered entities are responsible for paying their portion.

A separate question is how Districts qualify for coverage. In State statutes Districts are treated as State agencies for this purpose. AOA will be asking for information from Districts to move this forward.

Once resolved the types of insurance coverage available will be General Liability, Auto, Workers Comp and Professional Liability and will hopefully be a cheaper option with more relevant coverage.

VACD Report

Organizational Development Work

Jill reported that the consultants have completed the initial review, synthesized their findings with nine focus areas, and the Capacity Building Committee is working on next steps. She noted that the current government funding uncertainty puts all this work at risk, and staff is over extended with everything going on.

Action Circles Contract & Legislative Work

Clare reported that Advocacy Day on Feb 13th had great representation from districts. There was general education about districts since there are many new legislators, and districts gave testimony to four committees: House Ag, House Environment, Senate Ag, and Senate Natural Resources & Environment. She noted that she will be following up with an analysis of districts' return on investment from the current Core Services award.

Rick asked if there is still interest in revising the statute. Clare replied that some legislators have asked about our statute, and a housekeeping bill to address basic issues might be possible through VAAFM for the beginning of next session.

Clare gave an update on various initiatives:

- The County and Regional Governance Study Committee is on hold. Dan and Clare are involved in this.
- Council was named to serve on the Act 250 Tier 3 working group which has not begun yet. She would like to find someone to serve on this committee.
- She is continuing to work on Act 59 Phase II (30 x 30). This initiative is also still in early stages.

Impact of Federal Executive Orders and Changes to Federal Funding

Jill reported that all federal payments were frozen for a period of three days, and IRA and BIL funds are still frozen. LCBP has said BIL funds are going ahead and so are planning to move forward with payments and contracts. Council & VACD both have grants pending with LCBP. Essex has a \$1.1M agreement through Fish & Wildlife pending, which is the single largest impact we've seen. Other impacts include:

- NACD is canceling White River and Bennington's Climate Corps program effective mid-March.
- VACD has about \$1M tied up in IRA funds.
- Farmers' contracts under NRCS are frozen.

We anticipate IRA payments will be made until the budget expires, but that IRA might be terminated after that.

In addition to the funding freeze, USDA employees have been laid off. We've heard that fourteen employees from NRCS in Vermont were let go during the initial round of layoffs. There is also a potential federal government shutdown looming at the end of the current federal continuing resolution, March 13.

Other Business

The NRCC full board meeting is next week on February 27th at 10:00 am.

Bill made the motion, seconded by Richard to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned at 10:04 a.m.

The next finance committee meeting will be March 19th at 8:30 am.