



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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\$1.9 Million Awarded for Economic Development Support Through Northern Border Regional Commission, USDA Rural Development Partnership

Investments to benefit Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont Communities

FRANCONIA, NH, July 18, 2024 – Today, the [Northern Border Regional Commission \(NBRC\)](#) and [U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development \(RD\)](#) announced \$1.9 million in funding for economic-development projects in Maine, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont. The awards being made through this partnership will support community-driven initiatives in each state with a particular focus on outdoor recreation, business support and workforce development efforts. Congress has provided funds to the NBRC since 2019 for this partnership, which advances the strategic objectives of both agencies.

“With these awards NBRC and USDA are making investments that will increase rural vitality and economic opportunity throughout the region. These projects will result in new career opportunities, telecommunications infrastructure and place-based investments that increase rural vitality for residents and visitors alike,” said **Chris Saunders, Federal Co-Chair of the NBRC**.

“These investments are an example of the creative side of federal funding, because they are the result of a unique partnership that truly benefits those who need our help the most in rural communities,” said **USDA Rural Development State Director for Vermont and New Hampshire Sarah Waring**, “The Northern Border Regional Commission, through USDA Rural Business Development Grants, are finding new ways to help people live happier, healthier lives through innovative infrastructure that promotes learning, recreation, arts and entertainment, and community gathering opportunities. The Biden-Harris Administration has always understood, and acted upon, the idea that these essential facilities and spaces start, strengthen and sustain the connections that keep community together.”

Funds will support the following efforts across NBRC's four-state region:

University of Maine System-Farmington (Farmington, ME): **\$475,000**

The University will build on its existing Outdoor Recreation Business Administration program (ORBA), which will become a workforce hub of excellence for Western Maine. ORBA will create a streamlined, degree-granting program to generate qualified, skilled workers for existing and new external employer partners in the Maine outdoor recreation sector.

Franconia Rink Project (Franconia, NH): **\$475,000**

Grant funds will support the construction of a year-round recreation facility for key activities like an outdoor refrigerated ice rink and pickleball and basketball courts. The project will diversify outdoor activity options, attract tourists year-round to the town center, and provide a recreational resource for the local community.

Lake Champlain-Lake George Regional Planning Board (Lake George, NY): **\$250,000**

Funds will support a regionwide planning project that will assess the availability of cell service and conduct an in-depth analysis of deployable technology options in the Adirondacks. The Regional Planning Board is partnering with the New York State ConnectALL Office to hire a consulting firm to gather signal availability data through drive tests on all state and county roads in Clinton, Essex, Hamilton, Warren, and Washington Counties. This effort will also include the purchase of cell availability data gathered through an online app platform to determine the accuracy and validity of each dataset, with the purpose of informing future work statewide.

Hudson Valley Community Foundation (Troy, NY): **\$225,000**

Grant funds will support the development of a new Mechatronics Education and Training Lab (METL). The METL project aims to establish a state-of-the-art mechatronics laboratory. This laboratory will serve as a hub for interdisciplinary learning, workforce development training, and innovation in four interconnected disciplines: mechanics, electrical/electronics, motor control systems, and computer science/information technology.

Catamount Film & Arts Co. (St. Johnsbury, VT): **\$475,000**

Support the renovation and revitalization of the property to include roofing, structural, HVAC, and energy efficiency improvements. Energy efficient upgrades are a top priority as the project will adapt the high-profile property in the center of St. Johnsbury to changing climate conditions and serve as a model for future energy efficient upgrades in the region.

“Thank you, to the state of New Hampshire, to Northern Border Regional Commission and to the United States Department of Agriculture for believing in the positive impact of this amazing ice rink revitalization project. We are excited to continue our fundraising efforts and to exceed the match for our community. We will turn this generous award into a beautiful, refrigerated ice skating rink in the winter and pickleball, basketball, and even roller skating in the summer. As a small town of 1,100 residents, it would be impossible for us to do this without you,” **said Jennifer Opalinski of the Franconia Rink Project**

“Catamount Arts has worked with USDA and NBRC for the past decade to bring vitality and prosperity to the region through Creative Sector community and economic development initiatives,” said **Executive Director Jody Fried**. “We are thrilled to be working together on the exciting new Creative Campus project in downtown St. Johnsbury as we further integrate arts, culture and creativity into the fabric of our community.”

For more information about future grant programs and partnership opportunities through the NBRC, please visit nbrc.gov.

About the NBRC

Created in 2008, the Northern Border Regional Commission is a federal-state partnership whose mission is to catalyze community vitality and economic prosperity in Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont through flexible funding and strategic support.

About USDA Rural Development

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, Rural Development provides loans and grants to help expand economic opportunities, create jobs and improve the quality of life for millions of Americans in rural areas. This assistance supports infrastructure improvements; business development; housing; community facilities such as schools, public safety and health care; and high-speed internet access in rural, tribal and high-poverty areas. For more information, visit www.rd.usda.gov. If you'd like to subscribe to USDA Rural Development updates, visit our [GovDelivery subscriber page](#).