

[Dave Gram, Associated Press](#)

A new federal program designed to encourage economic development in four states along the U.S.-Canadian border has begun accepting applications for \$1.3 million in grants, Vermont's congressional delegation announced Wednesday.

The Northern Border Regional Commission is taking applications from Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont. The commission was designed to spur development in 36 low-income counties along the northern borders of the four states.

Rep. Peter Welch and Sens. Patrick Leahy and Bernard Sanders announced the first round of applications in a joint statement.

"As northern Vermont communities work to create jobs and strengthen their local economies, the Northern Border Regional Commission presents important opportunities," the three congressional members said. "We encourage Vermont organizations to explore whether NBRC funding makes sense for them."

Municipalities and nonprofits can apply for funds for projects related to transportation, telecommunications, conservation, renewable energy and other areas. In awarding the grants, priority will be given to counties with higher unemployment and poverty rates. In Vermont, that would mean Essex and Orleans counties.

The \$1.3 million is to be shared among the counties. Officials said they hoped the fledgling program will grow and provide more aid to the economically stressed border areas in the coming year.

"The idea is to muster resources on a regional focus, rather than state-specific," said Leahy aide Greg Cota.