



Fiscal Year 2025 – Application Instructions Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund

Overview: The Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF), administered by the Rural Maryland Council (RMC), provides grants to rural-serving nonprofit organizations that promote statewide and regional planning, economic and community development, and agricultural and forestry education. Rural community colleges that support small and agricultural businesses through enhanced training and technical assistance.

MAERDAF’s goal is to increase the overall capacity of rural-serving nonprofit organizations and community colleges to meet a multitude of rural development challenges and to help them establish new public/private partnerships for leveraging non-state sources of funding. **For Fiscal Year 2025, the RMC is particularly interested in proposals that address the following focus areas:**

Agriculture & Forestry	Energy	Rural Broadband	Youth Engagement & Leadership Development	Economic Development	Community Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural Education • Regional Food System Development • Forest Industry Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combined Heat Power • Energy Efficiency • Biomass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Broadband Expansion Efforts, including municipal broadband • Digital Inclusion Programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career Technology Centers • Youth Enrichment Programs, including summer programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development • Education & Workforce Development • Regional Marketing Efforts & Tourism Projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Transportation • Housing repairs • Housing counseling • Poverty Alleviation Efforts

Regardless of the project area of focus, the Grant Review Board will consider any eligible application that is submitted.

Important FY2025 Grant Cycle Dates:

- Grant Process Opening: Monday, April 15, 2024
- Phase 1 - Call for Letter of Intent Deadline: Friday, May 17, 2024
 - Grantees will be notified the week of June 2, 2024, on the Phase 1 decision.
- Phase 2 - Full Application Deadline: Friday, July 12, 2024
- Awards announced the week of August 12, 2024

Fact Sheet and Guidelines for FY2025 MAERDAF Grant Applicants

- The MAERDAF grant process is a **TWO-PHASE ONLINE APPLICATION PROCESS**. Phase 1 consists of a Letter of Intent (LOI) format. The Grant Review Board will review these LOIs and determine whether an applicant may move forward into Phase II. Phase II is by invitation only. Grant awardees will be announced in August.
- **ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS** must be a 501(c)(3) IRS tax designation or similar and serve a regional or statewide rural constituency. Trade associations are not eligible. The applicant does not have to be located in a rural area or in the area it serves.

- **ELIGIBLE PROJECTS** must serve **more than one** rural county and be completed between August 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025.
- **ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS** must be in “Good Standing” with the State of Maryland. To check your status, go to <https://egov.maryland.gov/BusinessExpress/EntitySearch>.
- **STATE DESIGNATED RURAL COUNTIES:** Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Garrett, Harford, Kent, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, Wicomico and Worcester.
- **THE MAXIMUM GRANT AMOUNT** is \$45,000.
- **PREFERENCE IS GIVEN** to applicants who have secured matching funds (cash match preferred to in-kind) from non-state sources. Federal funds are considered matching funds. Locally serving community-based organizations have preference.
- **ONLY VERY MINOR CHANGES IN SCOPE** are allowed after a grant has been awarded. Some project timelines can also be modified.
- **UNUSED GRANT FUNDS MUST BE RETURNED** to the Rural Maryland Council before July 31, 2025.
- **PAST AND CURRENT GRANTEES ARE ELIGIBLE** for an FY2025 grant IF they have met all the requirements of their previous grant agreements, including reporting deadlines.
- **THE MAERDAF GRANT REVIEW BOARD** comprises representatives appointed by six state agencies. Decisions are final and binding. Those agencies are the Rural Maryland Council Board Chair, the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Commerce, the Department of Health, the Department of Housing & Community Development, and the Department of Natural Resources.

Application Process

❖ **Phase 1: Letter of Intent Proposals – Due Friday, May 17, 2024, 11:59 pm**

- (1) Phase 1 of the RMC grant process consists of a Letter of Intent (LOI). The purpose of the LOI component is to summarize a project proposal from the organization that is applying for the grant.
- (2) Grant Applications will only be accepted through the RMC online grant portal, located by clicking this link- <https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=ruralmaryland>. You can also access the portal from the RMC website under the Grant Opportunities Page. Simply click on the RMC logo icon to access the grant portal and create an account or access an existing account. Please have the following information on hand to create your organization’s account.
- (3) An email address will act as your username and you can make up your password. Please retain a record of your login information as you will need it in the future to access your in-progress applications and your online application history. If at any time you forget your password, simply click ‘Forgot Password’ and you can easily generate a new one.
- (4) It is recommended that you work on your project summary in Word or Google Docs and copy and paste it into the document once finalized. An application can be saved throughout the process.
- (5) Information needed for the LOI is the following:
 - a. Grant Opportunity Selection – Choose the MAERDAF Grant program that fits best for your project:

- i. The Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (**MAERDAF**) provides grants to rural-serving nonprofit organizations that promote statewide and regional planning; economic and community development; and agricultural and forestry education. Community colleges that provide enhanced training and technical assistance to support agricultural and small businesses are also eligible to apply. The goal of MAERDAF is to increase the overall capacity of rural serving nonprofit organizations and community colleges to meet a multitude of rural development challenges and to help them establish new public/private partnerships for leveraging non-state sources of funding.
- b. Choose your grant program focus area: Agriculture & Forestry, Energy, Rural Broadband, Youth Engagement & Leadership Development, Economic Development, Community Development, or Other.
- c. Organization Mission Statement
- d. Is your organization a 501(c)3 as designated by the IRS?
- e. Has your organization received grant funding from RMC in the past 5 years?
- f. If your organization has received grant funding in the past 5 years, you will select the awarded years.
- g. Organization legislative district
- h. Project name, project point of contact name, project point of contact email, fiscal point of contact name, fiscal point of contact title, fiscal point of contact email, fiscal address
- i. Grant amount requested
- j. Total match
- k. Total project budget
- l. Project start date and end date
- m. Project narrative (575 words or 1 page single-spaced)
- n. Project goals and anticipated outcomes
- o. Partnerships
- p. Rural geographic area served
- q. Population served

❖ **Applicants of submitted proposals will be notified the week of June 2, 2024, by email of their grant status (accepted or declined). Accepted applicants will have access to Phase II- Full application process only. Grant Review Board decisions are final and binding.**

(6) The Grant Review Board and RMC staff understand that changes may occur between Phase I and Phase II of the grant application process. For example, your budget may have changed, or maybe your focus area. You can make these changes on the full application.

(7) Information needed for the Phase II – Full Application is the following:

- a. Amount requested
- b. Total cash match
- c. Total project budget
- d. Project narrative – Full application: Your LOI submission will carry over into the full application. Space is provided to expand on the narrative provided in the LOI. (1,600 words or 3.5 pages single-spaced). It is recommended that you expand your narrative for the full application.
- e. Project summary – The project summary will be used to highlight your project in RMC grant-related reporting. This should be 1 paragraph and contain information about your organization, information about your project, and the project goals and outcomes.
- f. Project start date and end date

- g. Population served
- h. Rural geographic area served
- i. Forms to upload - Applicants must use forms provided by RMC
 - i. Goals and Measurable Objectives Chart
 - ii. Proposed Operational Budget and Line-Item Budget
 - iii. Vendor/Cost Documentation Form
 - iv. SDAT Organization Status
 - v. Form 990
 - vi. W-9 Form (the address on this form must match the address on the application for your organization)
 - vii. IRS Determination Letter
 - viii. Supportive Materials
- j. Matching funds explanation
- k. Population served

❖ **Don't let your proposal be declared ineligible on a technicality:**

- Proposals received after the deadline will not be accepted and will be deemed ineligible.
- Proposals must be submitted electronically through the RMC grant portal.
- Email notifications that the form has been received will be submitted to the Applicant Point of Contact (POC) email addresses, provided on the form, upon submission. The POC should check their email regularly the week of June 2, 2024, for the RMC grant decision notification.

❖ **Helpful Tools**

- 'Collaborator' Feature: The Collaborator feature allows applicants to work together on a single request. Once an applicant has started the grant process, they will see the Collaborate button at the top of the page. This can be used to invite other people to work on this request. Please see the tutorial in the online platform once the user creates an account. A tutorial is available on the application.
- RMC Grant Writing Workshop – click [here](#) for the recording.

If you have any questions, please contact **Charlotte Davis, Executive Director of the Rural Maryland Council** at: charlotte.davis@maryland.gov or (410) 841-5774.

Thank you for applying.