



Fiscal Year 2025 – Application Instructions **Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund**

O **overview:** The Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) is administered by the Rural Maryland Council (RMC). The objective of RMPIF is to help raise the overall standard of living in rural areas to a level that meets or exceeds statewide benchmark averages by 2030 while preserving the best aspects of a pastoral heritage and rural way of life. Resources provided to the Fund are designed to facilitate significant targeted investments in important economic and community development programs and promote regional and intergovernmental cooperation. These investments will also enable local and regional public and nonprofit organizations to leverage additional non-state financial and human resources to facilitate the realization of sustainable rural development objectives. RMPIF has the following focus areas:

FOCUS AREA #1: INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure improvement – from traditional public facilities like roads and sewage treatment plants to such increasingly important amenities as workforce housing – is vital to healthy, flourishing communities. For instance, about half of the State’s major sewage treatment facilities and 90 percent of small community wastewater systems are located in rural areas, and many of these are experiencing difficult problems associated with aging collection and treatment infrastructure.

Rural regional infrastructure projects would provide matching grants for projects that involve two or more units of local government and are related to broadband, water, wastewater, transportation, workforce housing, and commercial/industrial facilities up to 25 percent of the total project cost. Workforce housing is defined as housing targeted to 80 to 120 percent of the median income of the community in which the employees work. Other potential projects could include GIS services to modernize and improve utility infrastructure data and renewable energy facilities such as biomass, solar or wind electricity, or thermal heat generators.

FOCUS AREA #2: RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP, RURAL AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, RURAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, AND RURAL COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP RMPIF promotes entrepreneurship and assists efforts that provide training and technical assistance to entrepreneurs who can help build prosperous and sustainable rural communities by creating jobs, raising incomes, creating wealth, and improving the quality of life. Rural entrepreneurship development would provide matching grants for entrepreneurial development activities of rural-serving nonprofit organizations and higher education institutions. Entrepreneurship, a key economic development strategy, supports existing rural business sectors (including agriculture and tourism), as well as innovation in technology and other economic development areas.

RURAL AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT: Agriculture remains Maryland’s largest commercial economic sector and is incredibly important to our rural areas. Agriculture contributes approximately \$16.5 billion to the state economy supports 73,009 jobs and adds nearly \$610 million in combined state and local tax revenue. The total economic impact of resource-based industries in 2022 equaled \$20.1 billion, supported over 88,610 jobs, and generated over \$755 million in state and local tax revenue. RMC supports programs and policies that will sustain and enhance agricultural production and agritourism.

RURAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: The Council supports apprenticeships and community colleges so young adults can stay in rural areas and become part of the rural workforce. Efforts to improve career and technology education through the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future, including specifically agriculture

education. Examples include but may not be limited to youth apprenticeship programs, STEM education, and summer enrichment programs. *Note – The FY2025 grant period will run from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025. The Council understands that programs that take place during the summer months may fall outside this designated time frame and special consideration will be made to accommodate these programs.*

RURAL COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT: The Council supports programs that improve the economic conditions of rural areas by helping individuals and businesses start, expand, or improve rural cooperatives and other mutually-owned businesses.

FOCUS AREA #3: RURAL HEALTH

Health care access and delivery is a major problem in the State’s rural areas. Residents often need to travel great distances to seek health care services due to health workforce shortages. This problem is in primary care and is particularly acute in specialty care such as surgical specialties, dentistry, mental health, and other medical specialty areas.

Eligible health care projects will range from health care planning to health program implementation and evaluation, and will include projects about the following:

- Improving access to health and medical/dental/behavioral health care
- Recruitment and retention of health care and public health professionals
- Behavioral and mental health
- Chronic disease prevention and management
- Oral and dental health

REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS:

The General Assembly has established five regional planning and development councils to concentrate on the needs of specific rural regions and ensure that those areas are not overlooked in public policy discussions. Each council serves a three-county area that is geographically, culturally, and socio-economically similar. By working together and ignoring jurisdictional lines, when need be, the rural regions have become stronger and more effective in finding solutions to the challenges before them.

Rural regional planning and development assistance will provide grants specifically for projects and activities of the five rural regional planning and development councils and for other multi-county rural improvement efforts. The Councils have established strategic needs within the rural communities which will be reflected in the approved grant agreements.

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 RMPIF Grant Applicants

- The RMPIF 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.
- **GRANT ELIGIBILITY**
 - **INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT ELIGIBILITY:** Applicants must be a local government, institute of higher education, regional council, or be a 501(c)(3) IRS tax designation or similar and serve a regional or statewide rural constituency. Community Colleges, Career Technology Centers, Regional Councils, and Libraries are eligible applicants. The applicant does not have to be located in a rural area or in the area it serves. Project must be intergovernmental (meaning two units of government).
 - **ENTREPRENEURSHIP GRANT ELIGIBILITY:** Applicants must be a local government, institute of higher education, regional council, or be a 501(c)(3) IRS tax designation or similar and serve a regional or statewide rural constituency. Community Colleges, Career Technology Centers, Regional Councils, and Libraries are eligible applicants. The applicant does not have to be located in a rural area or in the area it serves.
 - **RURAL HEALTH GRANT ELIGIBILITY:** Applicants must be a local government, institute of higher education, regional council, or be a 501(c)(3) IRS tax designation or similar and serve a regional or statewide rural constituency. Eligible applicants include federally qualified health centers, area health education centers, local health clinics, and other rural-serving health organizations. The applicant does not have to be located in a rural area or in the area it serves.
 - **REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS ELIGIBILITY:** Tri-County Council of Western Maryland, Tri-County Council of Southern Maryland, Upper Shore Regional Council, Mid-Shore Regional Council, Tri-County Council of the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, and multicounty efforts serving rural communities in areas not served by the regional councils. *A special Access Code is required to access the Regional Council application. Please contact RMC for the Access Code if eligible.*
- **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.
- **GRANT AMOUNT:** *Grant awards are subject to funding availability.*
 - **INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT AMOUNT:** There is no maximum grant amount: The State has budgeted \$1,500,000 in General Funds for the infrastructure portion of the RMPIF program.
 - **ENTREPRENEURSHIP GRANT AMOUNT:** There is no maximum grant amount: The State has budgeted \$1,500,000 in General Funds for the infrastructure portion of the RMPIF program.
 - **RURAL HEALTH GRANT AMOUNT:** There is no maximum grant amount: The State has budgeted \$1,500,000 in General Funds for the infrastructure portion of the RMPIF program.
 - **REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS AMOUNT:** Each Regional Council is eligible to receive \$600,000.

- **MATCH REQUIREMENTS:**
 - **INFRASTRUCTURE MATCH REQUIREMENTS:** Applicants must have secured at least **75% cash match** funds from non-state sources. A match is required for infrastructure projects. Federal funds are considered matching funds. Local, private, and federal funds for the required match are preferred.
 - **ENTREPRENEURSHIP MATCH REQUIREMENT:** Applicants must secure a minimum **25% cash match** funds from non-state sources. Federal funds are considered matching cash funds. A stronger cash match will result in a higher score on the grant evaluation. RMPF funds will not be released until proof of a match is submitted.
 - **RURAL HEALTH MATCH REQUIREMENT:** Applicants must secure a minimum **50% cash match** funds from non-state sources. Federal funds are considered matching cash funds. A stronger cash match will result in a higher score on the grant evaluation. RMPF funds will not be released until proof of a match is submitted.
 - **REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS MATCH REQUIREMENT:** No match requirement.
- **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 GRANTEEES 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 RMPIF Grant Program
 - i. The Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (**RMPIF**) provides grants that help raise the overall standard of living in rural areas to a level that meets or exceeds statewide benchmark averages by 2023 while preserving the best aspects of cultural heritage and rural way of life. Resources provided to RMPIF are designed to facilitate significant targeted investments in important economic and community development programs and promote regional and intergovernmental cooperation.

b. Choose your grant program focus area:

Entrepreneurship (General)	Entrepreneurship-Cooperative Development
Entrepreneurship-Workforce Development	Infrastructure
Entrepreneurship-Agricultural Development	Rural Health

- 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 and region 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 the 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.