



**RMC**  
Rural Maryland Council

## Fiscal Year 2026 Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund Grant Guidelines and Criteria

**Overview:** 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. Also eligible are rural community colleges that provide enhanced training and technical assistance to support agricultural and small businesses. The Fund'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. The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) serves as the administrative agency in receiving the applications and disbursing the grants to the successful applicants.

**Decisions:** Grant award determinations are made by the independent MAERDAF Grant Review Board set by law and consisting of the Secretaries (or their designee) of the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Health, Housing and Community Development and Natural Resources as well as the Chair (or the designee) of the Rural Maryland Council. Decisions by the MAERDAF Grant Review Board are final and binding. At the discretion of the Grant Review Board, RMC staff may reach out to applicants for additional information.

**Fiscal Year 2026:** For Fiscal Year 2026, the State has allocated \$599,735 in General Funds for the MAERDAF program. Grant awards are subject to funding availability, with a maximum award amount of \$45,000. Due to high demand, the number of applicants consistently exceeds available funding, making the application process highly competitive.

For Fiscal Year 2026, the RMC, as the administrative agent, is encouraging applications that address the following:

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

Regardless of the project area of focus, the Grant Review Board will give full consideration to any eligible application that is submitted. For examples, please refer to our website at [rural.maryland.gov](http://rural.maryland.gov).

**Important Dates:**

- Grant Process Opening: Monday, April 21, 2025
- Call for Letter of Intent Deadline: Friday, May 16, 2025
  - *Grantees will be notified the week of June 9, 2025, on the Phase 1 decisions.*
- Full Application Deadline: Friday, July 11, 2025
- Awards announced the week of August 18, 2025

**Guidelines and Criteria for Fiscal Year 2026 MAERDAF Grant Applications**

**Eligible Applicants:** 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. 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.

The State Rural Recognized Regional Councils are eligible entities to apply for RMPIF competitive funds. These projects are encouraged to have co-applicants and multiple sources of funds.

All applicants must include an official IRS-issued W-9 form with their application, allowing RMC to verify the organization's name, address, and tax identification number. The address on the W-9 must match the organization's grant award address. If they do not match, payment processing may be delayed.

Applicants must be in "Good Standing" with the State of Maryland. To check your organization's status, visit [Maryland Business Express](#). We do not require a copy of the certificate; it is sufficient to provide a screenshot and attach it with your application AS LONG AS IT SHOWS WHETHER THE ENTITY IS CURRENTLY IN GOOD STANDING. An explanation for an entity not in good standing must be included with the application otherwise, the application will be rejected.

**Eligible Projects:** To be eligible, **proposals must serve more than one rural county** and be completed between August 1, 2025 and June 30, 2026.

**Rural counties:** State-determined rural counties are Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Garrett, Harford, Kent, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, Wicomico and Worcester. Regional projects may include non-rural counties but the majority of service must be provided in rural areas.

**Grant Amounts:** *GRANT AWARDS ARE SUBJECT TO FUNDING AVAILABILITY.* Past and current grantees are eligible for an FY2026 grant if they have met all the requirements of their previous grant agreements, including reporting deadlines.

**Eligible Expenditures:**

- MAERDAF grant funds **do not generally fund ongoing staff positions**, as these are considered unsustainable beyond the grant period. However, staff time may be included as part of indirect costs, up to a maximum of 15%. MAERDAF does allow funding for consultant services that are essential to the success of the project.
- Construction and renovation of buildings are eligible expenses. Acquisition of land is not. Please include quotes of expenditures and be shovel-ready.
- The purchase or rental of vehicles are eligible expenses.

- Meals are allowable if the costs are reasonable and a justification is provided that such activity maintains the continuity of the meeting and to do otherwise will impose arduous conditions on the meeting participants.
- Indirect administrative costs are capped at 15%

#### **Ineligible Expenditures:**

- MAERDAF does not generally fund staff salaries or wages for employee positions.
- Contributions, donations, or subsequent sub-awards to third parties are ineligible expenses. Gift cards are also ineligible.
- Organized fundraising including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts or bequests, or similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions regardless of the purpose for which the funds will be used are ineligible. Advocacy and lobbying activities are also ineligible.
- Grant funds may not be used to purchase live animals, as the Rural Maryland Council cannot assume responsibility for their care and well-being.
- Grant funds may not be used for the purchase of commodities.

**Preferences:** Preferences are 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.

**Changes and Unused Funds:** Only very minor changes in the scope of work 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 no later than July 15, 2026.

**Ranking Criteria:** The Grant Review Board uses the following criteria in reviewing applications.

- **Basic Criteria:** Applicant meets all basic eligibility requirements – it serves a regional (multi-county) or statewide rural constituency (or is a community college) and holds an appropriate IRS tax designation.
  - Applicant has clearly identified a well-substantiated need and developed a Scope of Work that clearly describes specific project activities and how a MAERDAF grant will be used.
  - Specific goals and measurable objectives were clearly stated and appear to be achievable. Its Mission Statement is included and lends itself to the activities and goals addressed in the proposal. **Goals are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound.**
  - The organization has the experience, expertise, and resources to deliver on this scope of work. Operational and line-item budgets were included and seem reasonable.
  - The applicant has equal matching funds from non-state sources.
  - If there are no matching funds, the applicant seems likely to leverage additional financial resources to match the grant. **Priority is given to applicants with in-kind and funding matches.**
  - The applicant is locally serving and community based.

- Other organizations, businesses, agencies, and/or other community-based entities have expressed strong support for the organization's work and planned grant activities. Letters of support that complement the project narrative are encouraged. Letters of support and other supportive materials (newspaper articles, etc.) were included.
- Project/proposal falls under one or more of the following priorities: Agriculture, Forestry, Youth Engagement, Broadband, Renewable Energy/Biomass Energy, Workforce Development/Entrepreneurship, and Health.

**Grant agreements:** Awardees are required to execute a grant agreement. A sample blank grant agreement is included in Attachment A.

**Record keeping:** Grantees are required to record expenditures and file an interim and final report with the RMC. Reporting guidelines are included in Attachment B.

#### **Application Process:**

- **Phase 1: Letter of Intent – Due Friday, May 16, 2025, at 11:59 pm**
- Access to the online grant platform:  
<https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=ruralmaryland>
- **Submitted Proposals will be notified the week of June 9, 2025, of acceptance status.** An invitation to submit a full application and materials to Phase 2 will be provided to accepted proposal applicants only.
- Awards will be announced the week of August 18, 2025.
- 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 to be received.

Please contact the Rural Maryland Council's Executive Director, Charlotte Davis at (410) 841-5772 or [charlotte.davis@maryland.gov](mailto:charlotte.davis@maryland.gov) for any administrative guidance or questions.



RURAL MARYLAND COUNCIL GRANT AGREEMENT FOR DISBURSEMENT OF FISCAL YEAR 2026  
[INSERT RMC GRANT PROCESS] AWARD

**Project Name:** Project Name

**Grantee Name:** «Organization\_Name»

**Address:** «Organization\_Address\_1» «Organization\_Address\_2»  
«Organization\_City», «Organization\_State» «Organization\_Postal\_Code»

**Federal ID Number:** «Organization\_TaxId»

Grantee Contact Information			
<b>Fiscal Contact:</b>	Fiscal Point of Contact Person	<b>Project Contact:</b>	Project Point of Contact Name
<b>Title:</b>	Fiscal Point of Contact Title	<b>Title:</b>	Project Point of Contact Title
<b>Organization:</b>	«Organization_Name»	<b>Organization:</b>	«Organization_Name»
<b>Address:</b>	«Organization_Address_1» «Organization_Address_2»	<b>Address:</b>	«Organization_Address_1» «Organization_Address_2»
<b>City:</b>	«Organization_City»	<b>City:</b>	«Organization_City»
<b>State:</b>	«Organization_State»	<b>State:</b>	«Organization_State»
<b>Zip Code:</b>	«Organization_Postal_Code»	<b>Zip Code:</b>	«Organization_Postal_Code»
<b>Phone:</b>	«Organization_Phone»	<b>Phone:</b>	«Organization_Phone»
<b>Email:</b>	Fiscal Point of Contact Email	<b>Email:</b>	Project Point of Contact Email

The [Insert RMC Grant Process] (the “Fund”) provides funding to rural regional planning and economic development organizations, rural community development programs and advanced technology centers at community colleges, as described in State Finance and Procurement Article, Section 2-206 Annotated Code of Maryland (the “Act”). Under the Act, the Rural Maryland Council (“RMC”) (the “Grantor”) has designated the Maryland Department of Agriculture (the “Administering Agency”) to administer the grant with the above named organization. The Administering Agency has designated the following to be its official contact: Charlotte Davis, Executive Director, Rural Maryland Council, 50 Harry S. Truman Parkway, Annapolis, MD 21401 or charlotte.davis@maryland.gov. The following conditions apply.

Grantor and Grantee agree as follows:

**The purpose of this Agreement** is to provide a grant of Amount Awarded Written dollars (Amount Awarded) to Grantee to assist in achieving the overall project and/or programmatic goals set forth in the Grantee’s Fiscal Year 2026 [Insert RMC Grant Process} Grant Application and referenced in the Scope of Work and Deliverables (“Exhibit 1”) attached to this Agreement and incorporated herein. Specifically, these funds are to be used for those Deliverables as outlined in Exhibit 1.

Significant changes in the scope of work are not permitted. Minor changes that adhere to the original intent of the grant and maintain the essential integrity of the grant’s purpose may be allowed provided the Grantor and the Administering Agency agree that such changes are consistent with the Board’s intent.

Performance under this Agreement commences on **August 1, 2025** and continues until agreed upon services are completed, but in any case no later than **June 30, 2026**.

Upon execution of this Agreement and receipt of "Request for Disbursement" ("Exhibit 2"), the Administering Agency will approve **100 percent** of the Grant funds to Grantee.

**Reporting:** The Grantee shall provide an interim programmatic and financial report no later than **January 31, 2026** to the Administering Agency. The Grantee shall provide a final programmatic and financial report to the Rural Maryland Council and the Administering Agency Representative no later than **July 15, 2026**. [Regional Councils Grant Agreement will be dated July 31, 2025]

- Interim and final reports shall include **original documentation or certification verifying all grant fund expenditures**, to date. Interim reports shall include a forecast of expenses for the remainder of the grant period. Any overpayment or unspent funds shall be returned to the Grantor in conjunction with the final grant report.
- Interim and final reports must be submitted through the Grant Portal located here <https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=ruralmaryland>.

**By signing this agreement, the Grantee certifies that it:**

- Complies with all applicable federal, state, and local law, including laws relating to discrimination in employment; and,
- Complies with Maryland's policy concerning drug and alcohol-free workplaces, as set forth in COMAR 01.01.1989.18 and 21.11.08 and shall remain in compliance throughout the term of this agreement.

#### **General Provisions:**

1. If Grantee's annual revenue exceeds \$750,000.00 during the preceding fiscal or calendar year, Grantee shall provide to the RMC and the Administering Agency a copy of a certified financial audit report. If Grantee's annual revenue does not exceed \$750,000.00 during the preceding fiscal or calendar year, Grantee shall provide a detailed statement of annual revenues and expenditures.
2. **Inspection of Records.** Grantee shall allow any duly authorized representative of the Administering Agency or the State of Maryland (the "State") to inspect and audit, at reasonable times, all records and documents of the Grantee relating to this Grant, which records shall be retained by Grantee for at least three years after the termination of this Agreement. Grantee shall also submit such other reports or information as the Administering Agency requires.
3. **Acknowledgement.** Grantee shall use the RMC logo to credit and acknowledge the RMC in all programs and promotional materials relating to activities of the project supported by this Grant Funding Agreement to include publications and ads on the web and in print. Any organization receiving funds from the RMC shall give credit to the RMC whenever and wherever credit is being given, including written, oral, broadcast and internet. To ensure proper credit to the RMC Grantees shall:
  - (a) Use the RMC's name and logo on printed materials related to the grant;
  - (b) Link to the RMC website from your organization's website;
  - (c) Include the RMC logo on event signage or publications at your events;
  - (d) Acknowledge our support in Power Point presentations, videos or reports;

- (e) Make an announcement at one of your regular/special events or meetings;
  - (f) Mention the RMC's support in print, radio or television interviews you give about the organization, program or project; and,
  - (g) Grantee shall notify local and state legislators of grant award received, and consider participating in, or sending an organization representative, to the annual legislative event, Rural Maryland Day in February 2026.
4. Grantee's Certifications. As an inducement to Administering Agency to make the Grant, Grantee hereby certifies and warrants that:
- (a) Grantee has all requisite power and authority to enter into this Agreement.
  - (b) This Agreement has been executed and delivered by Grantee in such manner and form as to comply with all applicable laws to make this Agreement the valid and legally binding act and agreement of Grantee.
5. Amendment. This Agreement, or any part hereof, may be amended from time to time only by written instrument executed by the Grantee, the RMC and the Administering Agency.
6. Assignment. Without the prior written approval of Administering Agency, the Grantee may neither assign all or any of the benefits of, nor delegate all or any of the duties imposed by this Agreement.
7. Default. A default shall consist of any breach of any of Grantee's covenants, agreements, warranties or certifications in this Agreement.
8. Remedies Upon Default.
- (a) Upon the occurrence of any default, the Administering Agency shall have the right to terminate this Agreement by written notice to Grantee. In the event of termination, Grantor may require Grantee to repay to [Insert RMC Grant Process] within thirty days of receipt of written notice of default all Grant funds which have been disbursed to Grantee, and Grantee shall have no right to receive any undisbursed Grant Funds.
  - (b) In addition to the rights and remedies contained in this Agreement, the Administering Agency may at any time proceed to protect and enforce all rights available to Administering Agency by suit in equity, action at law, or by any other appropriate proceedings, which rights and remedies shall survive the termination of this Agreement.
9. Indemnification. Grantee releases the Administering Agency, Grantor and the State, and its employees or agents from, agrees that the Administering Agency, Grantor and the State, and its employees or agents shall not have any liability for, and agrees to protect, indemnify and save harmless the Administering Agency, Grantor and the State, and its employees or agents from and against any and all liabilities, suits, actions, claims, demands, losses, expenses and costs of every kind and nature incurred by, or asserted or imposed against, all or any of them, as a result of or in connection with the Grant. All money expended as a result of such liabilities, suits, actions, claims, demands, losses, expenses or costs, together with interest at a rate not to exceed the maximum interest rate permitted by law, shall constitute an indebtedness of Grantee and shall be immediately and without notice due and payable by Grantee to Grantor, Administering Agency, or the State, and/or its employees or agents, as their interests may appear.
10. Entire Agreement. This Agreement represents the complete, total and final understanding of the parties and no other understanding or representations, oral or written, regarding the

subject matter of this Agreement shall be deemed to exist or to bind the parties hereto at the time of execution.

**WITNESS: «Organization\_Name»**

_____	By: _____
Witness Signature	Organizational Representative Signature
_____	Printed Name: _____
Witness Printed Name	Title: _____

**WITNESS: Rural Maryland Council**

_____	By: _____
Witness Signature	Organizational Representative Signature
_____	Printed Name: <u>Charlotte Davis</u>
Witness Printed Name	Title: <u>Executive Director</u>

**Fiscal Year 2026 [Insert RMC Grant Process]  
Grant Agreement**

**Exhibit 1**

**Name of Grantee Organization:** «Organization\_Name»

**Amount Awarded:** Amount Awarded

**Amount Requested:** Amount Requested

**Scope of Work Summary:**

Scope of Work summary

**Deliverables:**

Funded deliverables

**Fiscal Year 2026 [Insert RMC Grant Process]  
Grant Agreement**

**Exhibit 2: Request for Disbursements**

**Type: Disbursement**

**Company/Grantee Name:** «Organization\_Name»

**Federal Tax I.D.#:** «Organization\_TaxId»

**Send Check To:** Fiscal Point of Contact Person  
Fiscal Point of Contact Title  
«Organization\_Name»  
«Organization\_Address\_1» «Organization\_Address\_2»  
«Organization\_City», «Organization\_State» «Organization\_Postal\_Code»

<b>FUNDS REQUESTED FOR FIRST DISBURSEMENT:</b> «Installment_Amount_1»
---

Administrative Agency Representative: Charlotte Davis

Grant Period: 08/01/2025 to 06/30/2026  
Period Covered: Fiscal Year 2026

I certify the above to be a true and accurate accounting of our costs.

Grantee Representative	RMC Representative
	Charlotte Davis
Name (please print above)	Name (please print above)
	Executive Director
Title	Title
Date	Date
Signature	Signature
	PCA
	Obj

## Grant Portal

### Grant Reporting Guidelines

- All grant items must be submitted through RMC's Grant Portal, found here: <https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=ruralmaryland>
- There are two reports due during the grant cycle. The interim is due January 31 and the final report is due July 15.
- A report is in the form of a 'Follow-up' in the RMC grant system. You will be assigned these 'Follow-ups' by email once your grant agreement is processed. You will receive email notices before the report is due. To Access the report, simply log into your grantee dashboard and scroll down to the application. A Follow-up with the associated report will be available in this section by clicking the word 'edit' to the right of the report form.

## Interim Report Narrative

The purpose of the Interim Report is to assess your organization's status of project timelines and completion of the awarded project by June 30. We understand that grant awards are still being processed and project outcomes may be minimal. Please complete the Interim report to the best of your ability by January 31.

This report asks that you refer to the *Goals and Anticipated Outcomes* and the *Table of Goals and Measurable Objectives* outlined in your organization's initial LOI and referenced in the *Scope of Work and Deliverables* (Exhibit 1) of your Grant Agreement to answer the following questions.

1. Do you think you need an extension for this project? RMC staff can approve extensions for up to 6 months. If you do need an extension, please reach out to RMC staff by phone and email closer to the June 30 end date.
2. What progress have you made toward achieving the results you described in your proposal during this period? What evidence do you have to demonstrate your success? If you are experiencing difficulty in your progress, please explain?
3. Have there been any significant changes in your organization or the project since the grant was awarded (i.e., executive leadership, staff, facilities, location)?

## Final Report Narrative

The purpose of the Final Report is to show the completion of the grant project and to help us understand how it has benefited your organization. Please refer to the *Goals and Anticipated Outcomes* and the *Table of Goals and Measurable Objectives* outlined in your organization's application and referenced in the *Scope of Work and Deliverables* (Exhibit 1) of your Grant Agreement to answer the following questions.

1. Did you achieve the results you described in your proposal during this grant period? What evidence do you have to demonstrate your success?

2. What do you consider to be the greatest strength(s) of your work? What do you consider to be the most important concern(s) – apart from finances – currently facing your organization (or project, if you received project support)?
3. What are the organization's two (2) most significant financial challenges and how are you planning to address them?
4. Have there been any significant changes in your organization or the project since the grant was awarded (i.e., executive leadership, staff, facilities, location)?
5. As applicable, describe any plans for moving forward. What, if anything, will you do differently?

The report narrative should tie back to the scope of work outlined in your original application and referenced in the Scope of Work and Deliverables ("Exhibit 1") listed in your Grant Agreement. It should also address the "Table of Goals and Measurable Objectives" outlined in your original application. An example of a previously submitted *Goals and Measurable Objective Table* is provided below.

Goal	Measurable Objectives
Connect with X number of new individuals	Conducted three (3) community information sessions (give dates of number of individuals in attendance). How many have continued in the program?
Reduce attrition from program	No less than 85% attend at least 8 of 10 sessions
Achieve diverse participation in program	A minimum of 50% women, 25% minority Maryland demographics: 49% Male, 51% Female 76% White, 20% Black, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian/Other
Establish new businesses in the region	3 new businesses per course, 6 total for year
Create new jobs in the region	6 new jobs per course, 12 total for year
Return on investment	1 new job per ≈ \$5,000.00 spent on program overall 1 new job per \$1,243.54 of MAERDAF funding

Managing for Results (MFR) is a strategic planning, performance measurement, and budgeting process that emphasizes use of resources to achieve measurable results, accountability, efficiency, and continuous improvement in the State's government programs. RMC has been reporting on Grantee MFRs accomplishments since 2019. While grant projects are not required to meet each MFR listed below, we ask that grantees complete those that are applicable, typing 0 (zero) is an acceptable answer. *New for FY2026, we are requesting that applicants complete the MFRs during the Phase II application process to provide the Grant Review Board with better insight into the project's goals and expected outcomes. If awarded, the Grantee will be asked to complete the MFRs in the final report as well.*

- Matching Funds Secured
  - Match Breakdown: State Dollars Secured
  - Match Breakdown: Private Dollars Secured
  - Match Breakdown: Local Dollars Secured
- Number of Jobs Created or Retained

- Number of Loans Made
- Number of Individuals Trained
- Number of Individuals Served
- Number of Individuals Reached
- Number of Instructional Hours Delivered
- Number of Research Projects
- Number of Tools Created (e.g., survey and assessment instruments; training modules; toolkits and guides; data dashboards; software or applications; templates and checklists)
- Number of Services Delivered
- Amount of Funds Invested in Capital Items

## Financial Information and Attachments

As outlined in the grant agreement, interim and final reports shall include **original documentation or certification verifying all grant fund expenditures, to date**. Interim reports shall include a forecast of expenses for the remainder of the grant period. Any overpayment or unspent funds shall be returned to the Grantor in conjunction with the final grant report.

*For general support grants:*

- Organization budget as submitted in the original proposal and actuals for this period. Explain any significant variances
- List the organization's three largest funding sources during this period

*For project support grants:*

- Organization and project budgets as submitted in the original proposal and actuals for this period. Explain any significant variances
- List other funding sources and amounts received for this project during this period

### Attachments

Feel free to include copies of press releases, articles, event announcements that demonstrate or support the information outlined in the report narrative. These can be uploaded through the Grant Portal.

Additionally, as outlined in the original Grant Agreement, interim and final reports should provide documentation to demonstrate the Grantee has acknowledged funding by the RMC. Refer to item number three Acknowledgement under the section titled General Provisions, which states in part, "...the Grantee shall use the RMC logo to credit and acknowledge the RMC in all programs and promotional materials relating to activities of the project supported by this Grant Funding Agreement ..."

**Please call our offices at (410) 841-5772 with any questions or comments**