



## Fiscal Year 2027 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 2027:** For Fiscal Year 2027, 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 2027, 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 20, 2026
- Call for Letter of Intent Deadline: Friday, May 15, 2026
  - *Grantees will be notified the week of June 8, 2026, on the Phase 1 decisions.*
- Full Application Deadline: Friday, July 10, 2026
- Awards announced the week of August 17, 2026

### **Guidelines and Criteria for FY2027 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 verify 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.

If applicable, applicants must be registered with the Maryland Secretary of State. To verify your organization's registration status, please visit [Maryland OneStop](#). Applicants are required to upload a screenshot of their registration status. If your organization is not registered, you will be asked to provide a brief explanation of your status and any steps being taken to resolve it as part of the application.

**Eligible Projects:** To be eligible, **proposals must serve more than one rural county** and be completed between August 1, 2026 and June 30, 2027.

**Application Limit:** The Rural Maryland Council will accept one application per organization for this grant cycle.

**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 FY2027 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:**

- 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, 2027.

**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. The grant agreement must be fully executed and returned to the Rural Maryland Council (RMC) within ninety (90) days of the date it is initially issued to the Grantee for review. Grant agreements not received within this timeframe will be considered abandoned, and the award may be rescinded. A sample grant agreement is available on the RMC grant opportunities webpage.

**Record keeping:** Grantees are required to record expenditures and file an interim and final report with the RMC. Reporting guidelines are available on the RMC grant opportunities webpage.

**Application Process:**

- **Phase 1: Letter of Intent – Due Friday, May 20, 2026, 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 8, 2026, 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 17, 2026
- 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.