



Rural Readiness Pilot Program

Building Capacity for Stronger Rural Communities

Purpose: To establish the Rural Readiness Program at the Rural Maryland Council (RMC) to:

- Supports small towns and small nonprofits that lack the capacity to compete for funding
- Establishes a capacity-building fund for early planning and predevelopment activities such as strategic plans, building plans, feasibility studies, and market analysis
- Allows the Rural Maryland Council to certify participants, giving them priority in RMC grant funding decisions

Why Rural Readiness Matters

Rural communities face unique challenges that limit their ability to compete for funding and implement projects, including:

- Smaller tax bases and limited access to infrastructure such as broadband and transportation
- Difficulty recruiting and retaining skilled staff to manage projects
- Fewer social and professional networks to support collaboration
- Aging populations and outmigration of younger residents

Without targeted capacity-building support, these challenges lead to ongoing disparities in healthcare, education, infrastructure, and economic opportunity.

What the Program Supports

Funding may be used for:

- Community and organizational assessments
- Collaborative planning and capacity-building initiatives
- Development readiness activities (feasibility studies, site inventories, market studies, land assembly)
- Cross-sector partnerships and stakeholder engagement
- Planning efforts that prepare communities for future investment and revenue-generating projects

Focus areas include: housing, broadband, placemaking, energy, transportation, health, infrastructure, workforce, and economic development.

Program Snapshot

- Program Type: Pilot reimbursement grant program
- Administered by: Rural Maryland Council
- Grant Amount: Up to \$50,000 per community
- Suggested Pilot Funding: \$100,000
- Approach: Direct Council staff support, community assessments, and flexible planning funds

Who Is Eligible

Eligible Applicants

- Tax-exempt organizations (including community foundations)
- Local units of government
- State-recognized Tribes
- Institutions of higher education
- Regional planning, economic, or workforce development organizations

Ineligible

- State agencies
- For-profit operational staffing or non-rural projects

The Rural Readiness Pilot Program is a strategic, low-cost investment that helps rural communities build the capacity needed to plan effectively, compete for funding, and advance sustainable, community-led solutions.