



Office of Rural Development Rural Readiness Grant Program (RRGP) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This document will be regularly updated to reflect additional questions.

Definition of “Rural”:

What is the definition of “Rural”?

For the purposes of the RRGF, eligible rural areas are defined as follows:

For counties designated by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as non-metropolitan counties, including those located within micropolitan statistical areas.

In addition to the above-mentioned counties, census tracts with a Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) score between 4-10, as identified by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, are also considered rural for the RRGF.

Eligibility Based on Type of Organization:

Who is eligible to apply?

Projects must serve RRGF eligible rural areas. The following entities are eligible applicants:

- Tax-exempt organizations/nonprofits, including community foundations and statewide associations.
- Local units of government (county, city, township, village, school district; any authority composed of counties, cities, townships, villages and school districts or combination of these entities). NOTE: Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) and Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs) are eligible.
- Federally Recognized Tribes.
- Educational institutions (i.e., universities, community colleges). Note: while the educational institution applying for funding may be in an urban area, the project itself must serve one or more eligible rural areas.
- Regional planning agencies and economic or workforce development organizations.

For a list of eligible rural areas, please see the guidelines and eligibility map online at:

<https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/business-development/grantfund/rural-readiness-grant-program>.

Are child-care organizations available (eligible) if it’s a for-profit status?

The RRGF application criteria currently specifies that this grant program is focused on tax-exempt organizations. A for-profit business would not qualify for a grant. However, there is the potential for partnership(s) between a for-profit business and a tax-exempt organization.

If we provide regional services to ten counties - can we be the applicant or does that need to be county specific?

The regional organization can be the applicant for these grant funds if the project serves an eligible rural area.

What criteria do communities need to meet to receive services/grants?

Eligible activities, eligible geography, and match requirements are included in the RRGP grant guidelines, which are available on the Office of Rural Development (ORD) webpage at:

<https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/business-development/grantfund/rural-readiness-grant-program>.

Available Funding, Funding Maximums/Minimums and Match Requirements:

What is the total amount of funding available for the first round of the Rural Readiness Grant Program?

\$500,000 in total grant funds, which are available through funding appropriated for ORD during the 2022-2023 state budget year, will be awarded in the first round of funding. ORD will be announcing the next round of funding this summer. The funding available for future rounds may increase if there are future appropriations for the grant program.

What are the *maximum* and *minimum* grant requests?

The maximum grant request is \$50,000. The minimum grant request is \$10,000.

Are matching funds required?

Yes, a 20 percent minimum match (of the total requested *grant amount*) is required. This can be in-kind or cash, or a combination thereof. For more information about calculating an in-kind match, please see the RRGP Grant Guidelines at: <https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/business-development/grantfund/rural-readiness-grant-program>.

Can volunteer time be included as match?

Yes, volunteer time can be included as a form on in-kind match to an RRGP grant request.

Will there be additional funding cycles for the Rural Readiness Grant Program?

Yes. The next funding round will be announced in summer 2023.

Eligibility Based on Project Type:

Beyond the types of projects mentioned in your grant guidelines, could you provide a few more examples of types of projects that may be competitive for funding?

The Rural Readiness Grant Program is focused on activities that are preparing your community or organization for longer term solutions, future investment, or larger funding opportunities for priority issues in your community. A list of eligible project types is available online at:

<https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/business-development/grantfund/rural-readiness-grant-program>.

Some examples of potential projects for this funding include:

- predevelopment work, like land assembly activities around a particular housing project in a community or doing feasibility work or the market studies that are needed to attract investment to those key properties in a community
- a community/business incubator
- leadership development or governance programs
- A shared grant writing or project management model, supported by/available to multiple organizations
- planning for infrastructure needs within a particular neighborhood

This is not an exhaustive list and is based on project concepts that have been identified by communities to date.

Can a community apply for a grant with a concept? How worked out does the project need to be to apply? Most grants tend to lean towards shovel-ready, but this is intended more for planning. We would like to know what level of detail will be needed for the application.

Yes, you can apply with a concept, but the proposed concept and the project should have a clear focus and outcomes. The program is intended to support planning for early phase development activities, understanding that concepts can sometimes require additional organization and collaboration around it to move forward.

If you have questions about whether your project is ready for an application, please feel free to reach out to ORD to talk through your idea. If this grant program has triggered some ideas and you have some concepts that have come about as a response to this funding opportunity, please note that another round of funding will be announced in the summer, which will provide some additional time to potential applicants to further develop new and emerging concepts and structure a stronger application in the future. If additional support is needed to further develop a concept, ORD staff is available for discussion on possible resources or next steps to help clarify a potential project or future application.

We want to repair roads. If we ask for too much, can you offer a smaller amount of grant funding?

This grant is intended to focus on planning and capacity building activities rather than bricks and mortar projects. Planning work around road repairs or design or engineering costs may however be eligible.

If combined successful grant applications exceed available funds, we could negotiate with some applicants for a reduced amount of grant funding.

Are you focused primarily on planning for rural economic development, or are projects focused on conservation, land use, and/or climate resilience planning also welcome?

The Rural Readiness Program is intended to help communities address locally- and regionally-identified priorities, which may also include activities like conservation, land use, and climate resiliency planning.

Eligibility Based on Geographic Location:

My organization/community is located outside the listed eligible areas, but has a rural focus: are we still eligible?

Yes, your organization/community *may* be eligible through intentional partnerships. Organizations or communities located outside of designated rural areas may apply if 1) your application includes a formal partnership with an organization or community in an eligible area, **and** 2) if the outcome of the project will address issues in an eligible rural area.

For example, Barry County is considered an eligible rural county, but Eaton County is not. A **joint application** submitted by an organization or community in Barry County and an organization or community in Eaton County providing benefits to communities in both counties is allowable and would be considered for funding.

My community is not included in the designated rural areas, but we are working collaboratively with a community located within the eligible areas and would like to be the lead co-applicant. What constitutes as proof of a ‘formal partnership’?

A memorandum of understanding or resolution can demonstrate the formal nature of the partnership.

My community is in both a designated rural area and non-rural area. Based on this situation, would we still be able to apply for funding?

Yes. Since a portion of the community is located within an eligible rural area, your community is eligible.

Can a project span multi counties?

Yes. Collaboration and regional/multi-jurisdictional planning and partnerships are a strong emphasis of the program.

Letter of Intent:

What are the requirements for the Letter of Intent? Number of pages, font, font size, margins, etc.

Please consult the grant guidelines. The Letter of Intent is a very simple form – a little over one page. There are no minimum or maximum requirements. There are no requirements specific to number of page(s), font, font size, margins, etc. When completing the Letter of Intent, please focus on ensuring that the project and its intended outcomes are *clear* and *focused*.

We did not submit a Letter of Intent during the Letter of Intent phase. Are we still eligible to submit a full application?

No, but you could consider applying in a future grant round.

If we submit a letter of intent, does this automatically mean we can submit a grant application?

No. ORD staff will be reviewing submitted letters of intent for eligibility and competitiveness. Submitters will be notified, via e-mail, if they have been recommended to submit a full grant application or not.

Are we required to submit letters of support with the Letter of Intent, or should we wait until we are invited to submit a full application?

Letters of support are not required to be submitted with a Letter of Intent. If you are selected and invited to submit a full application, then letters of support are required.

After the Letter of Intent is submitted will you send the full application?

Yes, but only to applicants who are invited to submit a full application. We will notify all applicants as to the status of their application and whether they've been selected to move forward with a full application or not. If they are selected for that next round of consideration, we will provide the full application to those applications.

For the Letter of Intent should we include letters of support as "co-applicant/partner organizations"?

Please identify co-applicants in the Letter of Intent. Letters of support are required for the full application, but not for the Letter of Intent.

Reimbursement Grant Program:

Can you clarify what is meant by a "reimbursement grant program" in the grant guidelines? Can we seek funds for work that is already completed?

A reimbursement grant program is one where the grant funds are a reimbursed for the work completed under the grant. Grant recipients pay for the up-front costs/activities in an approved grant application and would be reimburse per a grant agreement between MDARD and your organization.

Please note that the program cannot provide a grant for work that has already been completed outside of the grant program and where an agreement doesn't already exist. Under a grant agreement, your organization completes specified activities, and the grant is provided once invoices and receipts are received showing that the work was done for the grant according to a specified grant agreement.

Collaborations/Multiple Application Submission(s):

Can a community receive more than one grant, even if there are multiple applicants...as an example can an Intermediate School District (ISD) receive one, and the city government receives another grant for the same community?

Multiple organizations within a community could submit for multiple grants for different projects, but because the program includes a strong focus on collaboration across organizations and communities, there is the potential that it could be a stronger application if those organizations work together (versus submitting individual applications). There is not a requirement to collaborate, but it is strongly encouraged.

When collaborating with another organization, can Organization A and Organization B apply individually with the funding used for the same project (i.e., each request \$50,000 to total \$100,000 for the overall project)? Thank you.

With a program focus on collaboration between organizations, it will be a stronger application if that collaboration is shown within the application. Because of the limited amount of funding available through the program, two grants will not be awarded to a single project.

Can one organization, working in multiple rural areas, apply for multiple grants with different regional partners? Ex. Otsego with X partners and Y org and then Lake with Z partner and Y org.

Yes. Multiple partners can act as an applicant or co-applicant in multiple projects. Because some regional partners work with and provide some capacity to multiple counties on multiple projects, ORD expects that they may appear on multiple applications because of those partnerships.

What types of partnerships are preferred?

Different communities have different types of relationships between organizations, and the program is open to partnerships that present important opportunities for communities and regions.

Can we include other organizations that are broader in focus than the priority areas that we have identified?

Yes.

Grant Application Selection/Scoring:

How are grantees selected? Is there a scoring system or other criteria to keep in mind when choosing your project to apply for?

Yes. There is a scoring system, and it is included in the grant guidelines, available online at: <https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/business-development/grantfund/rural-readiness-grant-program>.

Is equitable geographic distribution throughout the state a factor? I don't see that addressed in scoring.

The scoring criteria prioritizes underserved communities, rather than geographic parity.

Grant Timeline/Implementation:

How long do grant recipients have to complete their program/use funds?

Funds must be expended by the end of 2024.

If we are awarded a planning grant, will we be given priority for future grants to implement the projects?

The primary goal of this grant program is to develop readiness, rather than implementation. However, the projects may better prepare your community or organization for funding from other agencies or sources in the future.

Future Grant Funding Rounds:

Do you think this opportunity may be repeated in Fiscal Year 2024 and beyond?

Yes. The next round of funding will be announced in the summer. If additional appropriations are received in the future, we will continue to offer the program beyond fiscal year 2024.

ORD Staff and Resources:

I'm a new member of our organization, who do I contact first to get more information on how to proceed if I'm not in an "eligible" county?

Matt Wiitala, our Capacity and Grant Program Specialist. His contact information is found at the end of this presentation, or you can contact him at: WiitalaM@michigan.gov or 517-927-5847.

**Is ORD staff available to meet with potential applicants to discuss project scope(s)? (coaching)
Especially applicants with limited capacity may need some back and forth on fleshing out a competitive project.**

Yes. Please contact Matt Wiitala, our Capacity and Grant Program Specialist at: WiitalaM@michigan.gov or 517-927-5847. He will work with fellow ORD staff so we can arrange to meet with you.