



2023 Office of Rural Development Rural Readiness Grant Guidelines

Grant Overview

The Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (MDARD) Office of Rural Development (ORD) is offering the Rural Readiness Grant Program (RRGP), a funding opportunity designed to empower community-specific solutions that build capacity and readiness in rural communities and regions across Michigan. This reimbursement grant program provides eligible communities with up to \$50,000 to support collaborative planning and capacity initiatives.

Eligible Areas

Rural communities and tax-exempt organizations serving rural communities are eligible to apply for grant funds designed to **support collaborative planning and capacity building initiatives** that advance efforts to address local needs including, but not limited to, housing, broadband, placemaking, energy, transportation, health, infrastructure, economic development, and workforce. Multi-jurisdictional and multi-sector projects are encouraged.

Communities may apply as a 1) Rural Readiness Grant Program (RRGP) Eligible Rural Area or 2) a self-identified rural area.

1. **RRGP Eligible Rural Area:** Communities located in an eligible rural area, as defined in the [guidance available online here](#), **are not** required to reference additional programs or definitions.
2. **Self-identified Rural Area:** Communities may self-identify as rural if they can provide an example of another state or federal program that classifies them as rural. Applicants must specifically reference the state or federal program in their Letter of Intent.

Grant Program Timeline

Monday, July 24, 2023: Release of grant guidelines and invitation to submit Letter of Intent

Thursday, August 31, 3 p.m. EDT: Letter of Intent due

Week of September 25, 2023: ORD issues invitation to submit full grant applications based on Letter of Intent review. All applicants will receive guidance as to the status of their Letter of Intent and project resources regardless of invitation status.

Thursday, November 2, 2023: 3 p.m. EDT: Full applications due

Week of December 15, 2023: ORD notifies applicants of award status

Eligible Activities

Funding will be focused on the following types of projects in rural areas:

- **Rural Capacity Building.** Eligible activities include new, enhanced, or scaled fellowship programs or community-based internship programs, development of training curricula, leadership development programs, and shared services or staff dedicated to specific project or planning needs. Projects must demonstrate an innovative, collaborative approach to building long-term capacity.
- **Development Readiness.** Projects include activities that prepare communities or key properties for development or investment, including development of property inventories, site development studies, site material development, site implementation or land assembly activities, feasibility or market studies, and more.
- **Partnerships and Planning.** Activities include development of plans and implementation structures that build readiness for future projects, collaborative initiatives, development, and investment.
- **Cross-sector Collaboration.** Activities include various forms of community and stakeholder engagement that foster planning and dialogue across sectors, governments, and agency types.

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

Letter of Intent Criteria

- A Letter of Intent is required before grant applications will be accepted (see Appendix for Letter of Intent form). The Letter of Intent must contain a basic summary of the proposed project, how the proposed project meets the ORD's Rural Readiness Grant goals, and a total estimated project cost. Applicants with projects determined to be eligible and competitive for grant funding, based on review of the Letter of Intent, will be invited by the ORD to submit a full grant application.
- *Letters of Intent are **not** required for applicants that were invited to submit a full application in Round 1 of RRGF funding. Projects not awarded in Round 1 will be automatically invited to re-submit an application in Round 2.*
- Letters of Intent must be submitted via email to witalam@michigan.gov by 3:00 p.m. (EDT) on **Thursday, August 31, 2023**. Confirmation emails are manually sent, so you will not receive an instant confirmation. If you do not receive a confirmation of receipt from our office within two business days, please e-mail MDARD-ORD@michigan.gov.

Grant Criteria

The maximum limit on grant fund requests is \$50,000. (Please submit budget in whole dollar amounts and round to the nearest \$100.). Applicants must provide a minimum 20% match.

- The match is 20% of the grant amount you are requesting. For example, if you are requesting a \$50,000 grant, you must provide a match amount of at least \$10,000. Overmatch is encouraged.
 - Match can be cash, in-kind contributions, or a combination thereof. The funds being provided under this grant require the Grantee to provide a funding match in order to secure a disbursement of funding. Project costs, grant amount, and match amount committed by the Grantee are identified in the Project Budget included in the Grant Agreement. If a Grantee fails to provide the match amount identified in the Grant Agreement, or if the total project cost for a completed project is less than the amount identified in the Grant Agreement, which leads to a reduction of the match amount, the Grantor may reduce the grant amount. The amount of this reduction will be communicated to the Grantee before a final grant payment is made to the Grantee. If total project costs are less than what is included in the Project Budget in the Grant Agreement, the Grantor will typically reduce the grant payment amount to a level that equals the percentage of the project identified in the proposed Project Budget that would have been funded by the grant payment. Under no circumstances will a grant payment be made if the Grantee fails to provide at least a 20% match.
- Projects must benefit eligible rural areas, as defined above.
 - Organizations may serve as a partner on multiple applications.
 - Applicants are invited to apply based on review of their Letter of Intent. Applicants must:
 - use the provided application form, and all sections must be complete in order to be considered for review.
 - include a detailed budget in the application. For a sample budget, please see the Appendix.
 - submit minimum of three support letters demonstrating local and/or regional support for the project
 - This grant is a cost-reimbursement program. Grantees are responsible for costs until proper reports/invoices/receipts are received and reviewed. Grantees are required to show proof of payment.
 - Grantees will be eligible for reimbursement up to three (3) times, at specified dates, during the 18-month grant cycle, with the final reimbursement provided at the completion of the project.
 - Each grantee will be required to submit written reports and appropriate financial documentation to MDARD for payment.
 - All Grantees must be in compliance with applicable state laws.
 - State agencies are not eligible applicants.
 - These grant funds may not be used to reimburse employee salary & wage, benefits, or indirect costs of applicant organizations, **unless** such activities and expenses are specifically related to the project for which grant funds are awarded. The grantee is responsible for keeping detailed records to document this and submit them in order to be reimbursed for such cost(s).

Project Criteria and Review

In addition to meeting the grant guidelines, projects will be scored upon a 100-point scale based on demonstration of the following criteria in applications:

Category	Possible Points	Review Points
Clearly-defined and focused project goals, timelines, and benchmarks	15	
Overall impact of the project on local and regional needs in the eligible rural area, including <u>but not limited to</u> workforce development, housing, economic development, infrastructure, and public health	20	
The ability of the project to prepare rural communities for future investment and grant funding	15	
Demonstrated community need and long-term commitment	10	
The financial viability of the project	10	
The long-term sustainability of the project	15	
The degree of collaboration between organizations, local/county governments, and other agencies and stakeholders	15	
Total Score	100	

Bonus Points

Bonus points will be awarded to applicants demonstrating the below criteria in their applications.

Category	Possible Bonus Points	Actual Bonus Points
Preference will be given to projects demonstrating collaboration and partnerships across multiple rural communities.	5	
Preference will be given to projects that serve at least one rural community with a population density less than 1,000 people per square mile.	5	
Preference will be given to communities with capacity below the national median as measured by the Headwaters Economics Rural Capacity Index, available online at https://headwaterseconomics.org/equity/rural-capacity-map	5	
Preference will be given to communities with households categorized as asset-limited income constrained households above the statewide rate of 38% by the 2023 ALICE report, available online at 2023 ALICE in the Crosscurrents: COVID and Financial Hardship in Michigan (liveunitedm-i.org)	5	
Preference will be given to projects serving an area(s) that has experienced any decrease in population from the 2010 Decennial Census to the 2020 Decennial Census	5	
Total Score	25	

Total Overall Score

Category Points + Bonus Points	Total Possible Points	Total Actual Points
	100	

Review Process

MDARD will convene a Joint Evaluation Committee comprised of representatives from state agencies with an interest in, and knowledge about, Michigan rural community needs to review full Rural Readiness Grant Program applications. The committee will score proposals, and recommendations will be made to the Office of Rural Development and the MDARD Director, who will make the final determination. All applicants will be notified when final decisions are made. MDARD may ask for additional information or clarification of a proposal and may award funding at a lesser amount than requested in a grant application. All communications and inquiries concerning applications should be sent via e-mail to: MDARD-ORD@michigan.gov.

MDARD reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to reject an application if it:

- Does not meet the program requirements including scope, eligibility, and allowable grant dollar use.
- Is received after the deadline.
- Is incomplete or missing any of the required forms, narrative, and budget.
- Does not follow the outlined application requirements.

For more information on the program, please go to www.michigan.gov/mdardgrants.

Equal Opportunity

The State of Michigan and the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, height, weight, marital status, partisan considerations, or a disability or genetic information that is unrelated to the person's ability to perform the duties of a particular job or position.

To file a complaint of discrimination, please contact: MDARD Office of Legal Affairs, 525 West Allegan, Lansing, MI 48909, or call 517-284-5729. You may also contact the Michigan Department of Civil Rights at: Phone: 313-456-3700 Fax: 313-456-3701 Toll-Free: 800-482-3604 TTY: 877-878-8464 Email: MDCRServiceCenter@michigan.gov

Appendix

Rural Readiness Grant Program – Application Sample Budget

Project Title	Increasing Community Capacity Study
Organization	Any City, Michigan

EXPENSES	ITEM(S)	RATE/HR or COST/UNIT	# OF HOURS OR UNITS	TOTAL COST
	Salary	\$30.00/HR	40	\$1,200
	Fringes	\$10.00/HR	40	\$400
	Consultant (ABC Consulting, Any City, MI, 49999)	\$25,000	1.0	\$25,000
	Travel	\$400.00	1.0	\$400.00
			TOTAL PROJECT COST	\$27,000

INCOME	SOURCE	SECURED Y/N		AMOUNT
	MDARD ORD	N		\$22,500.00
	Any City, MI	Y		\$2,500.00
	XYX Foundation	Y		\$2,000.00
			TOTAL PROJECT INCOME	\$27,000.00



**Office of Rural Development (ORD)
Letter of Intent for Rural Readiness Funding Grant**

LEAD APPLICANT				
MAILING ADDRESS	CITY	COUNTY	STATE	ZIP CODE
CONTACT PERSON	TELEPHONE NO.		E-MAIL ADDRESS	

CO-APPLICANT/PARTNER ORGANIZATION(S) (IF APPLICABLE) – ATTACH SHEET FOR ADDITIONAL CO-APPLICANT(S)/PARTNER(S)				
MAILING ADDRESS	CITY	COUNTY	STATE	ZIP CODE
CONTACT PERSON	TELEPHONE NO.		E-MAIL ADDRESS	

INDICATE ELIGIBILITY FOR RURAL READINESS GRANT FUNDING (CHECK ONLY ONE):

- PROJECT IS LOCATED IN A RURAL READINESS GRANT ELIGIBLE AREA (PER GRANT PROGRAM GUIDANCE)
- SELF-IDENTIFIED RURAL AREA (IF SELECTING THIS OPTION, PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE OF A FEDERAL OR STATE PROGRAM THAT CLASSIFIES YOUR AREA AS RURAL:

INDICATE THE COUNTY OR COUNTIES THAT THE RURAL READINESS GRANT PROJECT WILL SERVE:

TYPE OF ORD RURAL READINESS GRANT PROJECT (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY):

- Cross-sector collaboration
- Partnerships and Planning
- Development Readiness
- Rural Capacity Building

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF RURAL READINESS GRANT PROJECT

STREET ADDRESS OR PROJECT LOCATION DESCRIPTION (IF THERE ARE MULTIPLE SITES, PLEASE ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEETS(S))

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE HOW THE PROPOSED PROJECT MEETS THE GRANT GOALS (REFER TO "ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES" IN THE GRANT GUIDELINES)

BUDGET: THE BELOW SECTION MUST BE COMPLETED (a more detailed budget will be requested if invited to submit a full application)

TOTAL PROJECT COST (inclusive of the below Rural Readiness funding request and 20% match)	\$	ANTICIPATED SOURCE(S) OF MATCH:
RURAL READINESS FUNDING REQUEST	\$	
TOTAL MATCH	\$	