



GRETCHEN WHITMER
Governor

STATE OF MICHIGAN
Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity
Lansing

Susan Corbin
DIRECTOR

2027 Rural Development Fund Guidelines

Updated (August 31, 2026)

The Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP) is offering a grant opportunity to promote the sustainability of land-based industries and support the infrastructure, economies, workforce, and communities in rural Michigan.

Land-based industries include:

- Food and Agriculture
- Forestry
- Mining
- Oil and Gas Production
- Tourism

The grant funds are available for projects that address expansion and sustainability of land-based industries; worker training related to land-based industries; and energy, transportation, communications, water, and wastewater infrastructure to benefit rural communities.

Process:

ORP will be utilizing a letter of intent process through JotForm. Select applicants will then be invited to submit a full application in EGrAMS.

Proposal	
Letter of Intent (LOI) Opens (JotForm)	October 1, 2026
Informational Webinar (link)	October 8, 2026, at 10 a.m.
Letter of Intent (LOI) Due	November 2, 2026, at 5 p.m.
Full Application Submission	
Invitation to Submit Full Application Full Application Opens (EGrAMS)	December 2, 2026
Full Application Due	January 13, 2027, at 5 p.m.
Joint Evaluation Committee (JEC)	
Evaluation Meeting	February 17, 2027
Award Announcement	
Announce Awarded Funding	April 2027



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Funding Areas:

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

Category 1: Community and Business Development (1-year, up to \$100,000)

- Infrastructure & Community Facilities
 - Improvements or development of roadways, bridges, renewable energy, wastewater facilities, municipal and/or community-owned buildings, rural housing, broadband, and other built infrastructure
 - Plans, assessments, or engineering necessary to implement infrastructure improvements above
- Workforce, Community, & Economic Development
 - Projects that improve local and regional workforce and economic development needs such as workforce development programs, housing, childcare, recreation and cultural facilities, tourism, transportation, health, and food access and production.
 - Plans, studies, or assessments necessary to implement workforce, community, and economic development projects
 - Capacity-building activities (e.g., housing specialists, economic development coordinators, planning support roles) that are necessary to implement workforce, community, and economic development projects
- Business Development
 - Plans, assessments, studies, and engineering that will identify opportunities for new investment, markets, and business development, with an emphasis on land-based industries
 - Projects that will ensure long-term creation or retention of jobs with a strong local and/or regional impact.

Category 2: Regional Collaboration (2-year, up to \$200,000)



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- Projects that demonstrate new, formalized shared-service models (i.e. shared administrative costs) that support regional planning, workforce, and economic development and increase the capacity of regional, multi-county organizations to meet local planning, workforce, and economic development needs to increase the sustainability of land-based industries.

Eligible Applicants:

- Individuals
- Organizations
- Businesses
- 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)
- 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

Eligibility: Definition of Rural

A project is considered eligible for funding if it serves or is located within an eligible rural community. Rural eligibility may be established through one of the following methods:

1. Self-Identification as Rural

Applicants must identify the applicable program and include the supporting reference in their Letter of Intent (LOI). ORP may request additional documentation during the application review process.

The following resources may assist applicants in determining whether their project or service area is considered rural.

- **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA):** [Rural Housing Service Property Eligibility Map](#)
- **Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP):** [Rural Health Grants Eligibility Analyzer](#)

The Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP) reserves the right to determine whether a proposed project or service area meets the Rural Development Fund's rural eligibility requirements based on the information provided in the application.



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Grant Criteria

The Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP) has established the following criteria for the Rural Development Fund (RDF) Grant Program.

1. Funding Limits and Match Requirements

- The maximum limit on grant fund requests is \$100,000 for Community and Business Development, and \$200,000 for Regional Collaboration. There is no minimum limit on grant fund requests.
- Applicants must provide a minimum 20% match of the grant amount **requested**.
 - For example, if an applicant requests a \$100,000 grant, the applicant must provide a minimum match amount of \$20,000.
 - Match contributions may consist of cash, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both.
 - Applicants must provide source of their proposed match as part of the Letter of Intent (LOI) process.
 - Applicants should not commit to match funds or contributions that they are unable to fulfill.

2. Eligible Applicants and Projects

- Multi-jurisdictional and multi-sector projects are strongly encouraged.
- Organizations serving rural communities may apply for funding to carry out activities or provide services that directly benefit eligible rural areas.
- Preference will be given to projects located in or primarily benefiting communities in the Upper Peninsula.

3. Application Requirements

- Applicants must first submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) using the form provided by ORP.
- Applicants will be invited to submit a full application based on review of their LOI.
- Applicants must complete all required sections of the LOI to be considered for review.
- Applicants invited to submit a full application must provide:
 - A detailed project budget.
 - A minimum of three (3) letters of support demonstrating local and/or regional support for the proposed project. Applicants are encouraged to provide additional letters of support when appropriate.
 - Documentation supporting the proposed match contribution.
 - Any additional documentation requested by ORP.

4. Application Limitations and Integrity



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- Each eligible organization may submit **only one (1) Letter of Intent and application as the Lead Applicant** during a funding round.
- Organizations may participate as partners on multiple applications and may provide letters of support for other submitted applications.
- Applications determined to have been submitted without the knowledge or authorization of the Lead Applicant may be deemed ineligible and removed from consideration.

5. Project Period and Reimbursement

- Grant awards will have a project period of 18 months for Category 1, 24 months for Category 2, as identified in the Grant Agreement.
- Grantees will be eligible for reimbursement on a monthly basis during the grant cycle at specified reimbursement periods.
- The final reimbursement request must be submitted upon completion of the project and fulfillment of all grant requirements.
- ORP reserves the right to adjust reimbursement schedules based on project timelines, reporting requirements, and grant administration needs.

6. Reporting Requirements

- Each Grantee must submit written progress reports and appropriate financial documentation to ORP as required for reimbursement.
- Progress reports are due every six months.
- Grantees must provide invoices, receipts, proof of payment, general ledger pages, and any additional documentation requested by ORP.
- Grantees may be required to report on project outcomes, impacts, and accomplishments for a period of up to three (3) years following the completion of the grant period.

7. Compliance Requirements

- All Grantees must comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and grant requirements.
- Grantees must maintain records for 7 years, sufficient to demonstrate compliance with all grant requirements and allow ORP to verify project expenditures and outcomes.
- ORP reserves the right to request additional information, clarification, or documentation necessary to determine eligibility, confirm compliance, or administer grant funds.
- ORP reserves the right to determine whether submitted applications, project activities, costs, and documentation meet the requirements of the Rural Development Fund Grant Program.

Ineligible



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The following projects and applicants are not eligible for funding through the Rural Development Fund Grant Program:

- Projects that include telecommunications facilities owned or operated by an educational institution or an affiliate, a local unit of government, or any other government entity.
- The construction of telecommunications facilities or wireless telecommunications facilities in areas where broadband services of at least three (3) Mbps downstream and 768 Kbps upstream are available.
- State agencies are not eligible for grant funding.

Project Criteria and Review

In addition to meeting the grant guidelines, projects will be scored on a **25-point** scale based on demonstration of the following criteria as follows:

Category 1: Community and Business Development	Points
Clearly-defined, measurable, and focused project goals, timelines, benchmarks, and outcomes	0-4
Overall impact of the project on the sustainability of land-based industries and local and regional needs in the eligible rural area, including but not limited to workforce development, housing, business and economic development, infrastructure, public health, job creation or retention, and opportunities for new investment.	0-4
Demonstrated community need and long-term commitment	0-4
The financial viability and long-term sustainability of the project	0-4
The degree of collaboration between organizations, local/county governments, and other agencies and stakeholders (three partner support letters outlining the significant impact of the project are required)	0-4

Category 2: Regional Collaboration	Points
Clearly-defined, measurable, and focused project goals, timelines, benchmarks, and outcomes	0-4
Demonstrated community and regional need	0-4
The financial viability and long-term sustainability of the project	0-4
Formalizes collaboration or partnership with or between regional organizations, local governments, or other agencies and stakeholders	0/4 (YES/NO)
Impact of the project on the ability of the region to plan for and address local and regional needs that support the expansion and sustainability of	0-4



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land-based industries, including but not limited to workforce development, housing, economic development, infrastructure, and public health	
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Bonus points will be awarded to applicants demonstrating the below criteria in their applications.

Demographic Information	
Projects serve 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	1
Project serves communities with households categorized as asset-limited income constrained households above the statewide rate of 38% by the 2025 ALICE Report , available here.	1
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	1
Applicants located (based) in the Upper Peninsula	2

Review Process

ORP will convene a Joint Evaluation Committee (JEC) comprised of individuals with an interest in, and knowledge about, Michigan rural communities and land-based industries. The JEC will score proposals and conduct a review meeting to discuss projects. At the meeting, the JEC will determine the projects they recommend for funding. These projects will be presented to the RDF program staff, who will make the final determination.

All applicants will be notified when final decisions are made in spring 2027. ORP 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 this RFP should be sent via e-mail to: LEO-ORP@michigan.gov.

ORP 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.



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- Is received after the deadline.
- Is incomplete or missing any of the required forms, narrative, and budget.
- Does not follow the outlined application requirements.
- Is determined by ORP to be unsuitable for consideration.

Equal Opportunity

The State of Michigan and Office of Rural Prosperity 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 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

Reasonable Accommodations

The Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP) strives to ensure site accessibility for all its users. Our grant process is inclusive and accessible to all individuals, including those with disabilities. If you require reasonable accommodations, please respond with the following information to LEO-ORP@michigan.gov

When contacting us, please include the following information so that we can respond in a manner that is helpful to you:

- Nature of the accessibility issue
- Web address of the content you are attempting to access
- Your preferred format for the content
- Your contact information

Please submit this request no later than Thursday, October 8, 2026. Please allow up to two weeks for the processing of this request. Thank you!