



Rural and Small Town Development Fund

Program Information and Guidelines FY2024

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Rural and Small Town Development Fund FY2024

Introduction

Rural and Small Town grants may be used for a variety of activities related to community planning, zoning revisions, feasibility, engineering, designs and construction of physical infrastructure and of existing and new buildings, rehabilitation, due diligence, plan designs, market studies, pre-permitting/permitting, engineering, acquisition, demolition, and site-related upgrades of future development sites. For FY24, approximately \$3 Million is available in grants.

Grants in this category will likely be \$50,000-\$500,000.

Examples of these projects include, but are not limited to:

Planning and Zoning

- Create a housing production plan to better understand housing needs of the community and identify strategies to reduce gaps in existing housing relative to identified needs.
- Create a multi-family zoning district near a transit station to comply with M.G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 3A.
- Create a corridor study of a commercial area that seeks land use alternatives to promote multi-modal access, introduce mixed-use, and achieve more compact commercial development.
- Review current zoning to identify and remove language that excludes certain housing types.
- Develop 40R/40Y Smart Growth or Starter Home districts.
- Review zoning ordinances and create a plan to update zoning rules to unlock potential housing production and economic development growth.

Site Preparation

- Conduct permitting and prepare engineering plans to address changes to existing water, sewer and stormwater in a development site.
- Conduct pre-development site master plan on an underutilized commercial property with the intent to create mixed use that includes affordable housing.
- Demolish a blighted building that cannot be recovered to prepare a portion of a parcel or an entire parcel for mixed-use redevelopment that includes affordable housing.

Buildings

- Address town infrastructure through public building improvements that addresses a local need.
- Provide further subsidies to an affordable housing project to directly create affordable housing units or increase the number of affordable units in a new housing project.
- Rehabilitation of housing to bring an underutilized property back onto the market.

Infrastructure

- Conduct permitting, and construction to existing water, sewer and stormwater.

- Build pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure near public transit stations that connect residential and commercial areas to each other through alternative transportation modes.
- Create engineering designs to replace an existing sewer pump station that will increase capacity to build additional housing.
- Design or construction of a new water line connection to an adjacent town or making plans to consolidate water districts for an area served only by wells.
- Improve an intersection near newly built or permitted mixed-use project that will yield new affordable housing.
- Physical infrastructure improvements to increase safety and mobility between residential and commercial areas that increases and promotes alternative modes of transportation.

These Program Information and Guidelines have been developed for implementation by Rural and Small Town Development Fund grantees. Throughout the program year, DHCD may issue additional guidance, clarification, or revisions which shall be incorporated by reference into these Guidelines. This document is intended to assist grantees in administering the various aspects of the Rural and Small Town Development Fund. It is intended to clarify, interpret, and explain existing program requirements, and to provide guidance on DHCD's administration of the program. It is not intended to be exhaustive.

Eligibility and Criteria

Eligible Applicants: Massachusetts' [municipalities that meet the definition of a Rural or Small Town](#) (population of 7,000 or less as of the 2020 US Census or with less than 500 persons per square mile), Regional Planning Agencies, and related municipal entities (Public Housing Authority, Redevelopment Authority, Water/Sewer or Service District, Economic Development Industrial Corporation, body created by legislative act to serve a municipality) serving a currently rural and small town, are eligible for consideration of an FY24 Rural and Small Town grant. Applications may be submitted by a single applicant, two or more eligible applicants in a joint application with one lead entity, and applications from a regional entity for projects in rural and small towns only. Further eligibility criteria for the Rural and Small Town Development Fund are as follows:

- **Regional Planning Agencies and Related Municipal Entities:**
 - * Related Municipal Entities must be within, serve, plan to serve, and/or continue to serve a currently rural and small town.
 - * Applications submitted directly by a Regional Planning Agency or Related Municipal entity must provide clear and evident support for their project by the rural and small town.

Use of Funds: Funding is available through the "Planning and Zoning," "Site Preparation," "Buildings," and "Infrastructure" categories of the Community One Stop for Growth development continuum. Grants will fund a variety of activities related to community planning, zoning revisions (as defined in the FY24 Community Planning Grant Program Guidelines), feasibility, engineering, designs and construction of physical infrastructure and of existing and

new buildings, rehabilitation, due diligence, plan designs, market studies, pre-permitting/permitting, engineering, acquisition, demolition, and site-related upgrades of future development sites. Construction projects should consider whether their budget should contain a contingency line item.

Timeline of funds: FY24 grants are expected to be awarded in the fall of 2023 and funded projects **must be completed by June 30, 2025.**

Maximum Award Amount: Rural and Small Town grants are limited to up to \$500,000 in funding for projects that fall under the “Site Preparation,” “Buildings,” and “Infrastructure” One Stop development continuum categories. Projects that fall under the “Planning and Zoning” One Stop development continuum category are limited to no more than \$100,000 in funding for single entities. Funding over this limit will only be considered for joint and regional applications on a case-by-case basis based on project need, outcomes, impact, and scope of engagement plan and implementation. DHCD reserves the right to reduce the amount of the award from the original request, and to deny award to communities who owe funds to DHCD. Funding availability is subject to approval of state budgets.

Community One Stop for Growth Application

The Rural and Small Town Development Fund is part of the [Community One Stop for Growth](#), a single application portal and collaborative review process of community and economic development grant programs that make targeted investments based on a Development Continuum. It is designed to allow applicants to apply for consideration of multiple sources of funding to support multiple phases and facets of a project. For more information, including key dates, frequently asked questions, and instructions on submitting an Expression of Interest and Full Application, please visit www.mass.gov/onestop.

The One Stop Full Application is organized into the following sections:

- Form 1 – Applicant Information
- Form 2 – Project Information, and Site Information (if applicable)
- Form 3 – Development Continuum Category Questions (Sections 3 through 7)
Based on the development continuum, project type and project focus selected by the applicant
- Form 3a – Special Designation General Questions
Only for municipalities designated as a Housing Choice Community and/or Rural/Small Town
- Form 4 – Certification of Application Submission Authority
- Form 5 – Other Attachments

Rural and Small Town Development Fund Full Application

In order to be considered for the Rural and Small Town Development Fund funding, applicants must include complete responses to all required questions. **Please see the Rural and Small Town**

Development Fund page at www.mass.gov/how-to/rural-and-small-town-development-fund for a program specific Full Application template for required sections and questions.

Additional Information

- For information on the One Stop, including key dates, frequently asked questions, and instructions on submitting an Expression of Interest and Full Application, please visit www.mass.gov/onestop.
- The Expression of Interest is an optional, but highly recommended form that allows an applicant to seek guidance from the One Stop partner agencies. Applicants are encouraged to submit an Expression of Interest prior to starting their Full Application(s).
- All applications must be submitted electronically. The online application portal, IGX, can be accessed at <https://eohed.intelligrants.com>. An online webinar outlining the use of the system will be available on the site. The application form template and link to the portal will also be available on the [One Stop webpage](#).
- Eligible applicants may submit funding requests for more than one Planning and Zoning, Site Preparation, Buildings, and Infrastructure project in the same round. However, a separate application is required for each project. Each proposal will be evaluated independently against the criteria and will be competing directly with all other proposals.
- It is the responsibility of the applicant to be aware of all requirements and deadlines, and to ensure that their application is complete and submitted on time. All applications will be logged as to date and time received and kept on file as public record. Late submissions will not be considered.
- DHCD reserves the right to request additional information from the applicant or external sources as may be necessary in order to complete the application review. DHCD also reserves the right to recommend partial grant awards, as deemed appropriate.



If your community is designated as a Housing Choice Community, you are eligible to apply for consideration by that grant program. If you choose to do so, please review the Housing Choice Grant Program guidelines.

Rural and Small Town Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be scored for the responsiveness to the following criteria. See [Appendix 1](#) for full Evaluation Criteria and Scoring:

- **Project Need:** What community needs are met by the project? Evaluation will consider factors such as impact on housing production; economic development; targeted populations (the specific population(s), neighborhood(s), or census block(s) that will be served and how they will be supported by the outcomes of the project including alignment with recommendations by the Governor's Black Advisory and/or Latino Advisory Commissions and focus on Black and/or Latino communities); environmental justice; and responsiveness to clearly defined local priorities.

- **Project Readiness:** Is the project reasonable and achievable within proposed timeline? Evaluation will consider factors such as appropriate leadership with the requisite experience and ability to execute the project; implementation readiness; reasonable timeline and tasks identified in scope of work; steps needed to be taken outside of scope to kick-off project; plans to complete the project upon funding.
- **Project Financial Feasibility:** Is the project's budget reasonable? Evaluation will consider factors such as whether project is fully or partially funded; reasonability of cost estimate. Projects with a cash match over 10% of total project cost will receive special consideration. In-kind contributions are not match eligible.
- **Progress & Commitment to Date:** Does the applicant show commitment to the project through past activity and investment? Evaluation will consider factors such as progress to date; prior state/federal funding; leadership involvement to date.
- **Rural and Small Town Focus Areas:** Does the project address certain criteria pertaining to the [2019 Rural Policy Advisory Commission Policy Plan](#)? Evaluation will consider factors such as service sharing, water and sewer, transportation mobility, economic development, climate change and resiliency.

Grant Award Process

Contract with DHCD and Award of Funds: Successful applicants must be ready to enter into a contract with DHCD within 30 days after receiving contract documents. Funding is subject to approval of the DHCD operating and capital budgets. Grant projects will begin upon the execution of the contract. If selected, the grantee will be required to submit the following forms to complete a contract:

- Commonwealth Standard Contract Form, filled out and signed by the Respondent.
- Commonwealth Scope and Budget Form (available from DHCD).
- Completed Contractor Authorized Signature Verification Form.

Grant Distribution and Invoicing: Granted funds will be disbursed on a reimbursement basis. Only work completed during the period of the executed contract will be eligible for reimbursement. Upon receipt of all required deliverables the community will be reimbursed for the balance of any outstanding grant funds.

APPENDIX 1: RURAL AND SMALL TOWN EVALUATION CRITERIA AND SCORING

Applications to the Rural and Small Town grant program will be eligible to receive a **maximum of 215 points** through a panel review process.

Rural and Small Town Scoring Criteria (maximum 215 points)

Project Need (maximum 50 points):

Project Need will be scored based on demonstration of one or more of the following:

Overall Project Need (Project will receive one of the following scores below)

- Project responds to recent 40A reforms (MBTA Communities or simple majority zoning votes), promotes an increase in housing production, or promotes housing and economic development. **(25 points)**
- Project responds to other municipally identified and documented need supporting housing, economic development, or local transportation options. **(20 points)**
- Project responds to other municipally identified and needs. **(15 points)**

Priority Project Need (Projects that meet the following criteria will receive bonus points)

- **BONUS:** The community does not have a full-time planner or project related full-time municipal staff assistance that addresses municipal staffing capacity to complete this project and unlock further housing or economic development potential. **(5 points)**
- **BONUS:** Project includes opportunities to promote equity through impacts on targeted populations. **(up to 10 points)**
- **BONUS:** Project is located within an Environmental Justice census block group. **(10 points)**

Project Readiness (maximum total 25 points):

Readiness will be scored based on demonstration of the following:

Overall Project Readiness (Project will receive one of the following scores per criteria below)

- **Scope and Timeline:**
 - Project scope and timeline are feasible and within the grant timeline. **(5 points)**
 - Project may face scope and timeline challenges. **(3 points)**
 - Project is not achievable within proposed timeline or goes beyond allowed timeline. **(0 points)**
- **Leadership:**
 - Project leadership has requisite experience and ability to execute the project. **(5 points)**
 - Project leadership has some experience to lead the project. **(3 points)**
 - Project leadership has little to no experience leading a similar project. **(0 points)**
- **Timely project implementation:**
 - Project is ready to start and has identified a consultant that provided a cost estimate. **(5 points)**
 - Project is ready to release an RFP upon award. **(3 points)**
 - Project is not ready to bid upon award. **(0 points)**

- **Community engagement & implementation plan (for planning and zoning only):**
 - Project includes a comprehensive public engagement plan and has identified a feasible path towards implementation. **(10 points)**
 - Project includes a limited public engagement plan and/or may not have a feasible path towards implementation. **(5 points)**
 - Project is missing a public engagement plan and/or does not have a feasible path towards implementation. **(0 points)**
- **Construction readiness (for site readiness/building/infrastructure projects):**
 - Project is eligible for feasibility, design and/or engineering, or construction services by a contractor already under contract with the applicant. **(10 points)**
 - Project can start within 2 months of award using established purchasing consortia, municipal material and equipment bid results or other immediately available sources for capital items and the project has complete design and/or specifications and will proceed to bid upon grant award. **(5 points)**
 - Project is not ready to commence as steps outside of the scope of this project are needed to be completed prior to start. **(0 points)**

Project Financial Feasibility (maximum 20 points):

Financial Feasibility will be scored based on demonstration of one or more of the following:

Overall Project Financial Feasibility (Project will receive one of the following scores)

- The project request fully funds the project or fills the last funding gap in an otherwise fully funded project. **(15 points)**
- The project request includes a draft warrant article or other recommended community funds request to pursue remaining funding with a funding award schedule that allows for project completion by grant deadline. **(10 points)**
- The project requests a portion of the funds necessary to complete the project and evidence of other grant applications and potential award schedule is provided. **(5 points)**

Priority Project Financial Feasibility (Projects that meet the following criteria will receive bonus points)

- **BONUS:** The project includes more than 10% local funding match. Note that only cash (including DLTA, ARPA, and other municipal appropriations) counts as a match, staff time does not count as a match. **(5 points)**

Progress & Commitment to Date (maximum 25 points):

Progress and Commitment to Date will be scored based on the following:

Priority Project Progress Commitment to Date (Projects that meet the following criteria will receive bonus points)

- Project is the result of another previously identified plan or community-based initiative/project that accomplished a previously set community goal. **(10 Points)**
- Project has been previously supported by DHCD and application follow-up on ongoing commitment from other state/federal agencies and or grants. **(5 Points)**

- Project leadership has been involved in previous related project or in the lead up to this project. **(5 points)**
- Project is either a first-time tool used by the community or addresses a long known need that has not been addressed for a long period of time due to lack of resources. **(5 points)**

Project Outcomes & Impact (maximum 45 points):

Outcomes & Impact will be scored based on demonstration of one or more of the following:

Overall Project Outcomes & Impact (Project will receive one of the following scores)

- Project will result in change in zoning rules/further housing and economic development and opportunities for tangible outcomes and clearly outline how public engagement and/or implementation strategies/development/infrastructure improvements will yield tactics/strategies/tools that will directly support increased housing production, economic development, and infrastructure improvements, and clearly solves the identified project need. **(25 Points)**
- Project may result in recommendations or tactics/strategies/tools that may eventually lead to housing, economic development, or infrastructure improvements, but may face significant challenges to tangible implementation due to limited public engagement and/or implementation strategies/limited development/limited infrastructure opportunities and to meet identified project need. **(20 Points)**
- Project will not result in tangible improvement to increased housing production, economic development, infrastructure improvements, but may improve the quality of life and wellbeing of current residents. **(15 Points)**

Priority Project Outcomes & Impact (Projects that meet the following criteria will receive bonus points)

- **BONUS:** Project will develop materials for compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 3A. **(10 Points)**
- **BONUS:** Project is the result of a partnership between two or more municipalities or eligible entities through a joint or regional application. **(5 Points)**
- **BONUS:** Project impacts a district/area that has a significant effect to the community. **(5 Points)**

Rural Policy Plan Focus Areas (maximum 50 points):

The [2019 Rural Policy Plan for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, prepared by the Rural Policy Advisory Commission](#) identified several focus areas pertinent to this grant program.

Criteria below will be scored based on how well the project achieves or implements the focus area up to 10 points in total each:

- Project will develop municipal capacity and incentives for service sharing and involve more than one community allowing for shared services and peer to peer learning opportunities related to infrastructure, housing, shared economic development, or other local impact that both communities will experience, and has significance to the region and partnering communities. **(up to 10 points)**

- Project will directly relate to water and sewer infrastructure and to the design, enhancement or provision of water and sanitary sewer infrastructure, affecting housing, businesses, residents, consumers, workers, students, and has significance to the region. **(up to 10 points)**
- Project will create safer roads, greater multimodal transit access, greater opportunity for economic development or connectivity between homes and businesses, and has significance to the region. **(up to 10 points)**
- Project will develop or implement targeted economic development strategies for rural sectors and small towns and support economic development specific to rural communities and small towns, including but not limited to job growth and/or retention, land use and working lands, population trends, and has significance to the region. **(up to 10 points)**
- Project will equip the municipality with the resources to address the impacts of climate change and or improve resiliency for the health and safety of residents, and has significance to the region. **(up to 10 points)**

APPENDIX 2: ACCESSING THE ONLINE APPLICATION

All applications to the Rural and Small Town Development Fund must be submitted electronically through the Community One Stop for Growth application process. The application will be available and accepted through the IGX Platform, accessed at <https://eohed.intelligrants.com>. A user account is required. Below are the steps for getting into the system.

The municipality should activate a primary account with the municipal CEO and/or designee(s) as a "Grant Administrator". This person(s) can then add other users, as necessary.

Current Admin Users – Municipal CEOs and/or designees who have used the IGX system in past rounds may use their existing usernames to access the system. Applicants that have forgotten their username and/or password must use the "Forgot Username/Password" function on the IGX login page.

New Organizations – If your organization has not accessed the system in the past, a new registration is required. This should be done by the municipal CEO and/or a designee. Click the "New Organization? Register Here" link to complete and submit a registration request. When that account is approved by EOHEd, an email notification will be sent from the system confirming designation as a Grant Administrator.

NOTE: All new requests for Grant Administrator must be approved by EOHEd. These will be reviewed as they are received. Applicants will get an email notification from the system confirming the approval. If confirmation not received after 48 hours, please contact onestop@mass.gov to request assistance.

New User in Existing Organizations – Once a Grant Administrator is established for your organization, that user(s) may then create and/or approve additional accounts for municipal staff and/or consultants, such as grant writers, engineers, etc. Requests for access to IGX should be made directly to your community's Grant Administrator.

Creating a new Full Application or Expression of Interest – Once accounts are registered and/or approved, a Grant Administrator can create an Expression of Interest or Full Application(s), from the "My Opportunities" panel, and following the prompts in the portal. Any designated user may access, edit, and/or save an application on behalf of their organization, and are encouraged to save their work often, particularly after completing each section. Only a Grant Administrator will be able to create and submit the Expression of Interest and Full Application(s).

Submitting an application – Applications may be edited in IGX at any time up until the deadline. Official submissions to the Community One Stop for Growth will only be accepted during the posted dates. During that timeframe, Grant Administrators may submit the Full Application by selection the "Submit Full Application" option at the bottom of the left side menu, to officially submit an application. Applicants will receive an email confirming receipt within 24 hours. If an email is not received after 24 hours, please contact onestop@mass.gov for assistance.

NOTE: If an application is erroneously submitted, the applicant may contact onestop@mass.gov to reopen the application for further editing and completion, as long as it is before the deadline. Staff will try to accommodate these requests as they are received but may not be able to respond to all requests immediately. Once reopened, it is the responsibility of the applicant to resubmit prior to the deadline.