Commonwealth of Massachusetts
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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FY25 Community One Stop for Growth
Program Information and Guidelines

Rural Development Fund

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Introduction

The Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED) is pleased to announce the availability of funding from the Rural Development Fund (RDF), through the FY25 Community One Stop for Growth. The RDF is a competitive grant program created to provide financial support for a variety of activities related to economic and community development in rural communities and small towns throughout the Commonwealth.

Eligible municipalities and other public entities are invited to submit project proposals to be considered for funding. The program is designed to support projects that address the unique economic needs and challenges faced by smaller communities, which sometimes includes difficulty competing against larger cities/towns for grant resources. RDF offers grants for a variety of project types, including community planning efforts, predevelopment activities, and/or construction.

These Guidelines have been developed to describe the current requirements and expectations for the program. This document is intended to assist prospective applicants with understanding of the program and to provide guidance on EOED's administration of the program. The overall goal is to support projects that can help communities increase their capacity to leverage their own assets and opportunities to partake more directly in the state's growing economy. EOED is committed to helping small communities prepare for success and be part of the long-term strength and sustainability of the state.

Generally, the most competitive applications demonstrate "ready" characteristics, such as: clearly defined goals and objectives, locally vetted initiatives that have received robust public input, construction projects with some design and permitting underway, and if relevant, identified private development that is also advanced in design and engineering.

What's New in FY25: As part of the Governor's Article 87 reorganization in 2023, establishing a separate housing secretariat, the Rural and Small Town Development Fund was transitioned and is now managed by the Executive Office of Economic Development as the Rural Development Fund. Overall, the general scope and goals of the program remain the same for this round. However, EOED has reduced some of the options for eligible project types, based on the low demand from previous rounds, and reorganized the evaluation criteria and scoring. These changes are meant to further streamline the process and focus this resource to areas that are of highest need for rural and small towns, and better align with the updated program design.

Community One Stop for Growth Application

The Rural 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 information on the One Stop, including key dates, frequently asked questions, and instructions on submitting an Expression of Interest and/or Full Application, please visit www.mass.gov/onestop.

The FY25 One Stop Full Application is organized into the following sections:

- Form 1 – Applicant Information: Identification and contact information for lead applicant
- Form 2 – Project Information: Selection of project category and scope of work details
- Form 3 – Certification of Application Submission Authority

Additional Information

- 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). Visit the One Stop Expression of Interest webpage for more information and access to the Expression of Interest form.
- 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 project in the same round. However, each discrete project will require submission of its own separate application. Each application will be evaluated independently 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.

Program Eligibility and Requirements

Eligible Applicants: A municipal government, or other public entity, from any Massachusetts town that meets (based on the 2020 Census data) the definition of a Rural Community (having less than 500 persons per square mile) and/or a Small Town (having a total population of 7,000 or less persons). Other public entities may include a Public Housing Authority, Redevelopment Authority, Water/Sewer District, Economic Development Industrial Corporation, a public body created by legislative act, etc. Regional Planning Agencies may also be eligible applicants if applying on behalf of a clearly identified and eligible public entity or entities within their assigned region, with clear and evident support from those communities. Applications must be submitted by a single lead applicant. However, a lead applicant may submit a joint application in partnership with one or more other eligible applicant(s).

Eligible Projects: The program will consider a variety of projects for funding support. Examples of project types that may be submitted for considered include, but may not be limited to the following (projects listed under the corresponding Development Continuum categories):

Planning and Zoning Category (generally, grant requests are for consulting services)
- 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.
- If applicable, create a multi-family zoning district near a transit station to comply with M.G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 3A.
- Conduct a zoning review to identify and remove language that hinders economic growth, such as housing and/or commercial development.
- Create a plan to update zoning rules to unlock potential housing production and economic development growth.

Site Preparation Category (generally entails hiring of consultants, engineers, and/or contractors)
- Create a site master plan, including predevelopment activities, on an underutilized commercial property with the intent to create mixed use that may include affordable housing.
- Conduct design, engineering, and/or permitting activities to address changes to existing water, sewer and stormwater in a prospective development site.
- Demolish a blighted building that cannot be recovered to prepare a portion of a parcel or an entire parcel for mixed-use redevelopment that may include affordable housing.

Buildings (generally entails hiring of consultants, engineers, and/or contractors)
- Conduct design, engineering, and/or permitting activities to address ADA accessibility requirements for public buildings and resources.
- Rehabilitate housing to bring an underutilized property back onto the market.
- 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.

Infrastructure (generally entails hiring of engineers and contractors)
- Conduct design, engineering, permitting, and construction for road improvements, including projects that address public safety concerns, such as dangerous road conditions and/or imminent collapse of a bridge or culvert.
- Conduct design, engineering, and/or permitting activities to address improvements to existing water, sewer and stormwater infrastructure.
- Conduct design, engineering, and/or permitting activities to address 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.
- Conduct design, engineering, permitting, and construction of alternative transportation infrastructure to address ADA accessibility requirements for pedestrians and cyclists between residential and/or commercial areas.

Timeline of funds: FY25 grants are expected to be awarded in the fall of 2024 and funded projects must be completed no later than June 30, 2026.

Maximum Award Amount: Grants in this category will likely be in the $50,000-$500,000 range. Projects that apply under the "Planning and Zoning" category will be limited to no more than $100,000 per application. Grants in all other categories will be limited to a maximum of $500,000. At its discretion, EOED may make partial awards, for an amount less than requested by an applicant or make grants over $500K, as appropriate. All funding for this program is subject to annual appropriation.

Allowable Use of Funds: Funding is available through the above identified categories of the Community One Stop for Growth Development Continuum. Grants will generally reimburse for any costs related to consultants, architect/engineering firms, and/or general contractors, as applicable.

Match Funding: Match funds are not required. However, applications that have secured funding support from other government and/or private sources (particularly local funds) will be more competitive. In order to be counted, match funds must be contributing to the direct costs of the proposed scope of work in the application.

NOTE: If your community is designated as a Housing Choice Community, you may also be eligible to apply for grant funding from that program. Review the Housing Choice Program guidelines for details.

Application Evaluation

Overview of Evaluation Criteria: Applications will be scored for the responsiveness and alignment to the following criteria: (See Appendix 1 for full Evaluation Criteria and Scoring)

- **Project Plan and Need:** What community needs are met by the project? Evaluation will consider factors such as responsiveness to clearly defined local priorities, 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 Empowerment and/or Latino Empowerment Councils; environmental justice; and alignment with the state's climate change and resiliency policies and goals, as applicable.
- **Leadership and Capacity to Succeed:** Is the project reasonable and achievable within the 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 Readiness:** Is the project's budget reasonable? Evaluation will consider factors such as whether the project is fully or partially funded and reasonability of cost estimate. Projects with a cash match over 10% of total project cost will receive special consideration.
- **Rural 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.

Award Decisions: After the close of the application period, all submitted applications will be reviewed for eligibility and evaluated based on the program criteria. Once all applications have been fully vetted and assessed, the strongest project proposals will be provided to the EOED Secretary for further review, adjustment, and/or final approval. All applicants will be notified in writing about the decision made on their application.

Applicants that are approved for funding will receive a commitment letter outlining the grant amount and any conditions of the award. Grantees will need to verify the project's readiness and address any related conditions at the time of award. Grantees will also be expected to demonstrate that they possess the administrative management capacity to oversee the proposed project and to comply with applicable regulations and reporting requirements. All awards are subject to annual budget appropriation and are contingent upon full execution of a contract between the Commonwealth and the public entity.

Applicants that are not selected to receive funding during the round will have the opportunity to request feedback on their proposal. Request must be made through the Community One Stop process and will be available after the round is closed and all award decisions have been announced.

Other terms and conditions

- Successful applicants, upon notification of award, will be required to enter into a grant contract agreement with EOED prior to the disbursement of any grant funds. All scope of work items, timelines, and project outcomes will be negotiated and incorporated into the contract. Grantees are not authorized to expend any grant funds until a contract is fully executed. All grant funds must be expended in accordance with the drawdown schedule outlined in the contract.

- Grantees will also be required to enroll in EFT as a contract requirement if it has not done so already. Enrollment is done by completing and submitting the Authorization for Electronic Funds Payment Form for filing with the Office of the Comptroller. Because the Authorization for Electronic Funds Payment Form contains banking information, this form, and all information contained on this form, shall not be considered a public record and shall not be subject to public disclosure through a public records request.

- The Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development complies with all Commonwealth of Massachusetts' procurement laws and regulations set forth and overseen by the Commonwealth's Operational Services Division when awarding contracts as well as the state's award requirements as mandated and overseen by the Office of the State Comptroller when dispersing these funds. All responses and information submitted in response to this RFP are subject to the Massachusetts Public Records Law, M.G.L. c. 66 § 1 and to c. 4, §7(26).

- During the term of a contract agreement and for a period up to seven years thereafter, if the Executive Office of Economic Development is audited, the grantee will be required to make all records relating to this grant available.

APPENDIX 1: RURAL EVALUATION CRITERIA AND SCORING

Each eligible application will be thoroughly evaluated and scored by an EOED review panel, **on a 100-point scale,** based on the criteria outlined below. The review process will be led by the Rural Programs Team in consultation with its various agency partners, including representatives from the Mass. DOT, EOHLC, EOEEA, MassDevelopment, and corresponding regional planning agencies.

Overall Project Plan and Need (up to 25 points):

- Project narrative is clear and concise and outlines a well-defined project scope of work that clearly aligns with the applicant's economic development goals. **(0-10 points)**
- Applicant clearly describes a locally identified and documented community development need, as well as a strong case for why it requires state investment. **(0-10 points)**
- The application provides a clear and detailed budget that is reasonable and directly related to the proposed project. **(0-5 points)**

Leadership and Capacity to Succeed (up to 25 points)

- Project leadership has requisite experience and ability to execute the project. **(0-5 points)**
- Project has made significant progress in its preparation and has included substantial public engagement to date. **(0-5 points)**
- Project outlines a clear and reasonable timeline that demonstrates a pathway for launching and completing within the grant timeline. **(0-5 points)**
- Application outlines a project that is expected to result in significant outcomes related to the town's economic and community development goals. **(0-10 points)**

Project Readiness (up to 25 points)

- Project is ready to start and has identified a consultant that provided a cost estimate (for Planning and Zoning projects), and/or Project is well advanced in design and permitting and can be ready to bid the project within 90 days of award. **(0-20 points)**
- Project has secured matching funds contributing to the direct costs of the proposed scope of work. **(0-5 points)**

Rural Policy Plan Focus Areas (up to 25 points): *Scoring based on the extent of the alignment with each of the focus areas identified in the Mass. Rural Policy Commission's 2019 Rural Policy Plan for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.*

- Project will develop municipal capacity and incentives for service sharing and involve more than one community. **(0-5 points)**
- Project will directly relate to water and sewer infrastructure and to the design, enhancement or provision of water and sanitary sewer infrastructure. **(0-5 points)**
- Project will create safer roads, greater multimodal transit access, greater opportunity for economic development or connectivity between homes and businesses. **(0-5 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. **(0-5 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. **(0-5 points)**

APPENDIX 2: ACCESSING THE ONLINE APPLICATION

All applications to the Rural Development Fund must be submitted electronically through the Community One Stop for Growth online application portal. 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 or public entity should activate a primary account with the 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, 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 EOED. 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 other 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 a 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. However, only a Grant Administrator will have the ability to create and then submit the 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 selecting 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.