Commonwealth of Massachusetts
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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FY27 Community One Stop for Growth
Program Information and Guidelines

Rural Development Fund

Table of Contents

Introduction....2
Community One Stop for Growth Application....3
Program Eligibility and Requirements....4
Application Evaluation....6
Other terms and conditions....7
APPENDIX 1: RURAL EVALUATION CRITERIA....8
APPENDIX 2: ACCESSING THE ONLINE APPLICATION....9

Introduction

The Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED) is pleased to announce the availability of funding from the Rural Development Fund (RDF), through the FY27 Community One Stop for Growth. The RDF is a competitive grant program created to provide financial support for a variety of activities related to the unique economic and community development needs in rural communities and small towns throughout the Commonwealth, which sometimes face difficulty competing against larger cities/towns for grant resources. The overall goal of the program is to support projects that will help communities increase their capacity to leverage local assets and partake more directly in the state's growing economy. EOED is committed to helping small communities be part of the long-term strength and sustainability of the state.

Eligible municipalities and other public entities are invited to submit project proposals to be considered for funding. 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. Generally, the most competitive applications demonstrate "ready" characteristics, such as: clearly defined goals and objectives, local priorities with robust public input and community support, and some design and permitting underway for construction projects.

What's New in FY27: Overall, the general scope and goals of the program remain the same for this round. However, EOED has made several changes of which applicants should take note. The Rural Development Fund now considers in-kind matches an eligible form of matching funds. For further information, please see the Match Funding section of this document. Additionally, updates have been made to the evaluation criteria and scoring. These changes are meant to clarify evaluation priorities for applicants, to improve program understanding and focus this resource on areas that are of highest need for rural and small towns.

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. 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
- Form 3 – Certification of Application Submission Authority

In order to be considered for Rural Development Fund funding, applicants must include complete responses to all required 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). 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 Planning & Zoning, Site Preparation, Buildings, or 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. The Rural Development Fund will typically fund no more than one project per municipality per year.
- 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.
- EOED reserves the right to request additional information from the applicant or external sources as may be necessary in order to complete the application review. EOED also reserves the right to recommend partial grant awards, as deemed appropriate.

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 500 or fewer persons per square mile) and/or a Small Town (having a total population of 7,000 or fewer 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 are eligible applicants if the project is located within and benefits one or more eligible public 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). Joint applications where one or more applicants are ineligible may not be considered by the Rural Development Fund.

Eligible Projects: The program will consider a variety of projects for funding support under the Development Continuum categories listed below. There are numerous appropriate projects within each category, with some examples included in the list below.

Planning and Zoning Category (generally, grant requests are for consulting services)

- Create or update a comprehensive plan to better understand community needs and identify strategies to implement change.
- 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 development.
- Create a feasibility study or site master plan for an underutilized or decommissioned municipal building, with the intent to create commercial or mixed use (such as housing and commercial space OR coworking space, municipal use, and community meeting space).
- 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 commercial, housing, or mixed-use redevelopment.

Buildings (generally entails hiring of consultants, engineers, and/or contractors)

- Conduct design, engineering, permitting, and/or construction activities to address ADA accessibility requirements for public buildings and resources in municipalities that have a Massachusetts Office on Disability-approved Self-Evaluation and/or Transition Plan.
- Conduct design, engineering, permitting, and/or construction activities of an underutilized or decommissioned municipal building, with the intent to create mixed use (such as housing, shared workspace, municipal use, and/or community meeting space).
- Rehabilitate town-owned underutilized property for intended disposal to a developer.

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, permitting, and construction of alternative transportation infrastructure between residential areas and/or commercial areas and/or community resources to address ADA accessibility requirements or to improve connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Conduct design, engineering, permitting, and/or construction 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 further plans to consolidate water districts for an area served only by wells.

Ineligible Projects: The following projects are examples of ineligible applications to the Rural Development Fund.

- Projects submitted as pass-through applications on behalf of a non-public entity, in which the non-public entity would be the presumptive grantee.
- Joint applications that include ineligible non-rural/small town applicant(s).
- Projects on buildings with primary municipal use (except for ADA improvement projects).

Timeline of funds: FY27 grants are expected to be awarded in the fall of 2026 and funded projects must be completed no later than June 30, 2028.

Maximum Award Amount: Rural Development Fund grants will likely be in the $50,000-$500,000 range. Projects submitted under the "Planning and Zoning" category will be limited to no more than $110,000 per application. Grants in all other categories will be limited to a maximum of $500,000. At its discretion, EOED may make awards for an amount less than requested by an applicant or more than $500,000, as appropriate. Projects that far exceed the $500,000 threshold will not be considered for the Rural Development Fund. 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. The Rural Development Fund is a reimbursable grant, meaning awardees must incur expenses prior to receiving funds. 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 match funding of 10% or more of the total project budget will receive additional consideration in the review process and be more competitive. Eligible forms of match funding include:

- Cash funding support (grants) from other government and/or private sources.
- Local funds appropriated to the project.
- Staff time, valued at the employee's actual hourly rate of pay for the number of anticipated hours to be dedicated to the scope of work.
- Volunteer time, valued at $34.79 per hour for the number of anticipated hours to be dedicated to the scope of work.
- Actual cost of materials donated.

In order to be eligible, match funding or in-kind matches must be contributing to the proposed scope of work in the application. Funds contributed to prior phases of the project and/or contributed prior to the grant period are not considered eligible match funding and should not be included in the project budget.

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)

- **Project Plan and Need:** Has the applicant clearly described the local issues or opportunities that the project aims to address? Has the applicant explained why the project is critical to enhance community, housing, and/or economic development? Has the applicant provided a detailed description of the proposed work that would be carried out using the requested funds? Evaluation will consider factors such as the project's responsiveness to clearly defined and documented local priorities; how it will catalyze community and economic development; its impact on targeted populations (the specific populations, neighborhoods, or census blocks 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); its alignment with the state's climate change and resiliency and environmental justice policies and goals, as applicable.
- **Project Readiness:** Has the applicant described the timeline to implement the project, including any tasks that would need to be completed before expending grant funds, if awarded (i.e. local approvals, procurement, hiring contractors, etc.), and notable project dates or milestones? Is the project ready to begin by January 2027, and can it reasonably be completed by June 30, 2028? Has public engagement been conducted, resulting in public support for the project? Evaluation will consider factors such as whether any work related to the project has already been completed or initiated (including approvals, permits, public engagement, planning, or design/engineering, as relevant to the project); any steps outside of the scope of the project necessary to be completed prior to the grant-funded project kick-off; readiness to implement the project as described in the application upon contracting.
- **Leadership and Capacity to Succeed:** Has the applicant described the team that will lead the project and explained why they are well-positioned to execute it successfully? Evaluation will consider factors such as appropriate leadership with the requisite experience and ability to manage the project (including experience with state procurement policy, grant management, and project management).
- **Budget:** Is the project's budget detailed, reasonable, and realistic? Evaluation will consider factors such as the budget corresponding clearly with the scope of work; inclusion of justifiable line items; inclusion of recent (less than 1 year old) quotes or estimates to back up proposed expenses; inclusion of a match of 10% or more of total project costs; and whether the project is fully or partially funded.
- **Rural Focus Areas:** Does the project address certain criteria pertaining to the 2019 Rural Policy Advisory Commission Policy Plan? Evaluation will consider whether the project furthers one or more of the Plan's recommendations related to service sharing, water and sewer, transportation mobility, economic development, and 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 by a review team. 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.

Each eligible application will be thoroughly evaluated and scored by an EOED review panel based on the criteria outlined below. *It is recommended to review the Application Evaluation section of the Guidelines for additional detail on each of the criteria.* The review process will be led by the Rural Affairs Team in consultation with its various agency partners and regional planning agencies.

Overall Project Plan and Need:

- Applicant has clearly described a locally identified and documented issue or opportunity that the project aims to address. Applicant has explained why the project is critical to enhance community, housing, and/or economic development.
- Applicant has provided a detailed description of the proposed work that would be carried out using the requested funds.

Project Readiness:

- Applicant has described a detailed timeline to implement the project, including any tasks that would need to be completed before expending grant funds, as well as notable project dates or milestones.
- The project is ready to begin no later than January 2027 and can reasonably be completed by June 30, 2028.
- Substantial public engagement has been conducted and there is strong public support for the project (Site Preparation/Infrastructure/Building projects) OR public engagement is part of the project (Planning & Zoning projects).

Leadership and Capacity to Succeed:

- Applicant has staff available with the requisite experience and ability to execute the project and/or has identified potential consultants or contractors to procure to carry out the project.

Project Budget:

- Applicant has provided a detailed, reasonable, and realistic budget that corresponds clearly with the scope of work.
- Current estimates or quotes (less than one year old) are provided for all line items, and the source of the estimates or quote is clear.
- Project has secured matching cash or in-kind funds of 10% or more of total project costs.

Rural Policy Plan Focus Areas:

Scoring based on the extent of the alignment with 1 or more 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 involves more than one community.
- Project will directly relate to water and sewer infrastructure and to the design, enhancement or provision of water and sanitary sewer infrastructure.
- Project will create safer roads, greater multimodal transit access, greater opportunity for economic development or connectivity between homes and businesses.
- 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.
- 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.

APPENDIX 2: ACCESSING THE ONLINE APPLICATION

All applications to the Rural 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 EOED, 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 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 – Once accounts are registered and/or approved, a Grant Administrator can create a Full Application(s), from the "Start New Document" 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 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.