RURAL MARYLAND COUNCIL

# 2025

*Fiscal Year*

# ANNUAL REPORT

RMC
Rural Maryland Council

To Our Fellow MARYLANDERS

# Letter from the RMC Chair and Executive Director

***We are pleased to share the Rural Maryland Council's Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report.***

As an independent state agency, the Rural Maryland Council (RMC) reports each year to the Governor, budget leaders, and the Maryland General Assembly on our activities and grant expenditures. The State's Fiscal Year began on July 1, 2024, and ended on June 30, 2025. This report documents all grant awards and program activities during that period.

Thanks to the continued support of Governor Wes Moore, Senate President Bill Ferguson, Speaker Adrienne Jones, and members of the Maryland General Assembly, RMC received funding for the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) totaling $9,010,479 and $118,485 for the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) in the State's FY2025 Operating Budget. However, mid-year budget reductions resulted in a $2.25 million cut, creating difficult choices across our programs. Despite these challenges, RMC remained steadfast in supporting projects that invest in rural communities, create economic opportunities, and improve quality of life.

During Fiscal Year 2025, the Council awarded 65 grants totaling $6,129,837. Through RMPIF, RMC distributed $3,000,000 to the five Regional Councils, along with 17 Health Care grants ($810,288), 11 Entrepreneurship grants ($817,542), and 6 Infrastructure grants ($739,621). Under MAERDAF, RMC awarded 26 grants totaling $762,386. Additionally, RMC received $750,000 for general operating expenses, the majority of which supported staff salaries and benefits.

## OUR WORK IN ACTION

**Strategic Plan Update**

The RMC 2025–2027 Strategic Plan builds on past accomplishments and establishes a focused agenda to strengthen economic sustainability, expand access to resources, and ensure the long-term vitality of rural Maryland. Developed through a collaborative process that included stakeholder interviews, a facilitated planning retreat, and Board work sessions, the plan identifies six strategic priorities:

1. Ensure long-term financial sustainability through diversified funding, legislative partnerships, and expanded collaborations.
2. Increase member and board engagement to strengthen leadership and organizational continuity.
3. Demonstrate RMC's value through effective communication and data-driven reporting.
4. Enhance data collection and analysis to inform policy and advocacy.
5. Develop transition and emergency succession plans for long-term stability.
6. Promote evidence-based advocacy and cross-sector collaboration to address economic, infrastructure, health, and workforce challenges.

*Header Image - Western Farm oil on canvas by Crystal Moll.*

Speaker Adrienne Jones, Delegate Stuart Schmidt, Charlotte Davis Executive Director of RMC, Susan O'Neill President of RMC, Delegate Edith Patterson and Delegate Todd Morgan on Rural Maryland Day. The Rural Maryland Council was presented with a House proclamation to commemorate Rural Maryland Day on February 13, 2025.

The plan reaffirms RMC's commitment to collaboration, innovation, and accountability—ensuring that Maryland's rural communities continue to thrive with strong economies, vibrant resources, and healthy, connected residents.

- **Rural Economic Impact Analysis**
  The RMC continues to be a driving force in rural economic development, working with Maryland's five Rural Regional Councils to strengthen communities through business growth, workforce development, and infrastructure investment. Since 2018, RMC's grant programs have generated $301.2 million in economic output, supported 2,152 jobs, and contributed over $102 million in wages, according to the Regional Economic Studies Institute at Towson University. These results represent more than data—they reflect meaningful progress, opportunity, and lasting impact across rural Maryland.
- **Grant Mapping Project**
  RMC is partnering with the Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative to develop an interactive Grant Mapping Dashboard that visualizes RMC-funded projects from 2003 to 2024 through MAERDAF and RMPIF. This tool will provide a dynamic, data-driven view of the Council's grantmaking history—enhancing transparency, supporting evidence-based decisions, and highlighting areas of need. By clearly showing where and how RMC's investments have been made, the dashboard strengthens our ability to measure impact, demonstrate equity in funding, and communicate the long-term benefits of rural investment.

The Rural Readiness Program is a new initiative of the Rural Maryland Council designed to help communities across the state strengthen their capacity, collaboration, and competitiveness for future funding. Building on RMC's RMPIF and MAERDAF grant programs, the program uses the Rural Resilience Toolkit to guide participants through hands-on training in leadership, economic development, emergency preparedness, and youth and workforce readiness. Through regional workshops and technical assistance, communities will identify local needs, build partnerships, and develop project concepts aligned with RMC funding priorities. The goal is to ensure Maryland's rural communities are "Rural Ready" - prepared to plan, apply, and successfully implement high-impact projects that enhance resilience, prosperity, and quality of life across the state.

As a collaborative partnership, RMC operates in a nonpartisan and inclusive manner. Policymakers and leaders from government, business, and community organizations at all levels are valued partners in this work. Wherever possible, RMC strives for consensus-based decision-making, ensuring that every voice is heard.

Real change happens when we go directly to the source—listening to the people who live and work in rural Maryland and collaborating with them to create solutions that last. We invite you to join us in this important work by becoming an RMC member at rural.maryland.gov. All RMC meetings and events are open to anyone who shares our vision of building strong, resilient rural communities.

With appreciation for your continued partnership,

Sincerely,

**SUSAN O'NEILL**
RMC Board Chair

**CHARLOTTE DAVIS**
RMC Executive Director

# Recognizing RMC Board Members *and* Staff

## RMC OFFICERS

**Susan O'Neill**
Chair, *Executive Director of Upper Shore Regional Council*

**Greg Padgham**
First Vice-Chair, *Executive Director of Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland*

**Dr. Heidi Anderson**
Second Vice-Chair, *President of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore*

## REPRESENTING MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

The Honorable **Sheree Sample-Hughes** – *Delegate, District 37A*
The Honorable **Brian Crosby** – *Delegate, District 29B*

## REPRESENTING MARYLAND SENATE

The Honorable **Katie Fry Hester** – Senator, District 9

## RMC STAFF

**Charlotte Davis** – Executive Director
**Megan D'Arcy** – Program Administrator
**Molli Cole** – Program Coordinator
**Leeza DeCheubel** – Administrative Assistant

*This year, the Rural Maryland Council welcomed Leeza DeCheubel as our new Administrative Assistant. Leeza's exceptional organization skills and positive energy have quickly made her an invaluable part of our daily operations. Megan D'Arcy was recognized with a certificate for five years of service, reflecting her dedication and leadership in advancing RMC's mission. Molli Cole transitioned from a contractual position to a full-time employee after receiving a State PIN, strengthening the Council's capacity for long-term success. We are proud of our talented and committed team!*

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**Jamie Williams**
Nominating Committee, *Director of Kent County Economic Development, Representing District 4 (Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's Counties)*

**John Hartline**
Joint Planning and Development Committee, *Executive Director of Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland*

**Kurt Fuchs**
Legislative Committee, *Manager of External Affairs of Easton Utilities*

**Matthew Teffeau**
Agriculture Committee, *Government Affairs Manager of Choptank of Electric Cooperative*

**Scott Warner**
Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund Chair, *Executive Director of Mid-Shore Regional Council*

**Daniel Rider**
Representing Rural Maryland Foundation, *Maryland Forest Program Director of Maryland Department of Natural Resources*

**John Hartline**
Immediate Past Chair, *Executive Director of Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland*

## EXECUTIVE BOARD

**Kelsey Keadle**
Representing District 1 (Garrett, Allegany, and Washington Counties), *Washington County Economic Development*

**William Reid**
Representing District 2 (Frederick, Carroll, and Harford Counties), *Asian American Center of Frederick*

**Chris Kaselemis**
Representing District 3 (Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary's Counties), *St. Mary's County Office Department of Economic Development*

**Jaelon Moaney**
Representing District 5 (Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties), *Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience, Washington College*

**Danny Thompson**
Representing District 6 (Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset Counties), *Somerset County Economic Development*

**D'Shawn Doughty**
Representing For-Profit Organizations, *Green Street Housing, LLC*

**Chris Abell**
Representing Nonprofit Organizations, *Patuxent Partnership*

**Bill Valentine**
Representing State At-Large, *Retired, Allegany County Commissioner*

**The Honorable Carl Anderton**
Representing the Governor's Office, *Director, Rural Economic Strategy, Maryland Department of Commerce*

**Cassie Shirk**
Representing Maryland Department of Agriculture, *Assistant Secretary, Office of Marketing, Animal Industries, and Consumer Services*

**Anne Hairston-Strang**
Representing Maryland Department of Natural Resources, *Director and State Forester, Maryland Forest Service*

**Cindy Stone**
Representing Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, *Director, Community Development Block Grant*

**Sara Seitz**
Representing Maryland Department of Health, *Director, Office of Rural Health*

**Jinhee Kim**
Representing University of Maryland Extension, *Professor and Assistant Director*

**Elizabeth Stahlman**
Representing Tri-County Council for Western Maryland, *Executive Director*

**Craig Hartsock**
Representing Western Maryland Resource Conservation and Development Council, *President*

Representing the Maryland Municipal League - **John Kinnaird**, *Mayor, Town of Thurmont and* **Zack Tyndall**, *Mayor, Town of Berlin*

Representing the Maryland Association of Counties - **Jack Wilson**, *Board of Commissioners, Queen Anne's County and* **Keasha Haythe**, *President and CEO, Foundation of Hope, Inc.*

**Elizabeth Hulett**
Representing Maryland Association of Public Library Administration, *Director, Western Maryland Regional Library*

**Chris Mullett**
Representing Maryland Association of Community Action Agencies, *President and CEO, Garrett County Community Action Committee*

**Alston Shipley**
Representing Maryland Farm Bureau

**Grayson Middleton**
Representing Delmarva Chicken Association, *Government Affairs Manager*

**Lindsay Thompson**
Repenting Maryland Grain Producers, *Executive Director*

**Beth Hill**
Representing Maryland Forest Association, *Executive Director*

**Brandon Rosario**
Representing Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, *Program Specialist*

**Kurt Fuchs**
Representing Easton Utilities, *Manager of External Affairs*

**Steve McHenry**
Representing Special Appointment, *Executive Director, Maryland Agricultural & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO)*

**Jerry McLaurin**
Representing Special Appointment, *President, People for Change (PFC) Black Chamber of Commerce*

**Daniel Schneckenberger**
Representing Special Appointment, Director of Administration, *Cecil County Office of the County Executive*

**Letitia Nichols**
Representing Special Appointment, *Acting State Director of the Delaware and Maryland State Office, USDA Rural Development*

# History, Mission, Vision

***In 1994, the Rural Maryland Council (RMC) was initiated by the Governor as the Maryland Rural Development Council (Executive Order 01.01.1994.14) and then codified by statute in 1995 as the FORVM for Rural Maryland. In July 2003, the FORVM was restructured as the Rural Maryland Council.***

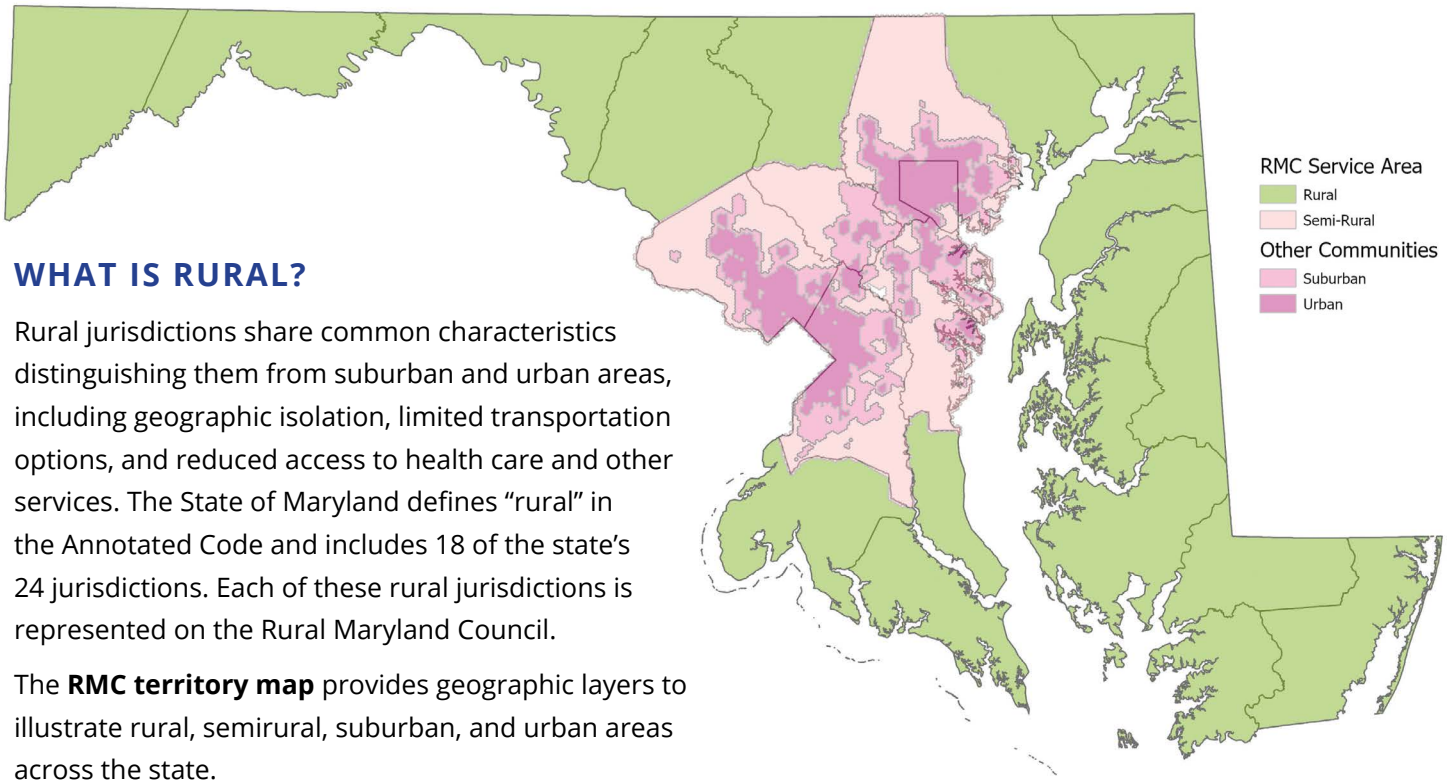
**OUR MISSION** is to bring together citizens, community-based organizations, federal, state, county, and municipal government officials, and representatives from the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to collectively address the needs of rural Maryland.

The RMC is an independent state agency housed within the Maryland Department of Agriculture. We serve as a venue where members of agriculture and natural resource-based industries, health care providers, educational institutions, businesses, economic and community development organizations, nonprofit entities, and government agencies can cross traditional boundaries, share information, and address the special needs and opportunities in rural Maryland holistically.

**OUR VISION** is a future where all of Rural Maryland is prosperous with thriving resources, vibrant economies, and healthy, connected communities.

## OUR GOALS

- **Encourage healthy, connected communities** across Rural Maryland through the convening of stakeholders, education, public awareness, and advocacy.
- **Support the development and growth of vibrant rural economies** and foster responsible stewardship of Maryland's natural resources.
- **Strengthen RMC's capacity and impact** by maximizing outreach, resources, and organizational development.




## WHAT IS RURAL?

Rural jurisdictions share common characteristics distinguishing them from suburban and urban areas, including geographic isolation, limited transportation options, and reduced access to health care and other services. The State of Maryland defines "rural" in the Annotated Code and includes 18 of the state's 24 jurisdictions. Each of these rural jurisdictions is represented on the Rural Maryland Council.

The **RMC territory map** provides geographic layers to illustrate rural, semirural, suburban, and urban areas across the state.

# 2024 Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony

*The Rural Maryland Council and its membership convened at the Yellowfin Steak & Fish House in Edgewater on Wednesday, December 4, 2024, from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. for its Executive Board Meeting and Rural Impact Awards Ceremony. This annual event highlights upcoming initiatives for the year ahead and recognizes outstanding advocates who are making a difference in Maryland's rural communities.*

*Board Chair Susan O'Neill served as the master of ceremonies for the evening, sharing, "Celebrating our Rural Community Advocates was truly inspiring. Each honoree demonstrates how leadership, service, and collaboration can transform communities. Their work reminds us that when rural Maryland thrives, our entire state is stronger."*

**This year, five awards were presented for the 2024 Rural Impact Award Ceremony:**

*Outstanding Rural Community Volunteer went to Rick Nelson for his leadership, dedication, and noteworthy volunteer achievement beyond the call of his professional duties to help improve his community.*

**Rick Nelson** received the ***Outstanding Rural Community Volunteer Award*** for his extraordinary service and leadership with Chesapeake Housing Mission. Since 2012, he has volunteered as Chief Operations Officer and Board Member, leading over 120 wheelchair ramp projects and engaging more than 1,800 volunteers to restore safety, dignity, and independence for low-income families across Maryland's Lower Shore. His dedication reflects the profound difference one individual can make in strengthening rural communities.

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*Outstanding Rural Community Volunteer went to Sara Visintainer for her leadership, dedication, and noteworthy volunteer achievement beyond the call of one's professional duties to help improve their community*

**Sara Visintainer** received the ***Rural Community Volunteer Award*** for her exceptional leadership in expanding access to care on Maryland's Eastern Shore. As Board President of Choptank Community Health System (2018–2023), she helped extend services to more than 30,000 patients annually and advanced initiatives in behavioral health, prenatal and pediatric dental care, new health centers, mobile units, and expansion into Kent County. Her vision and advocacy have left a lasting impact on families across the region.

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*Outstanding Rural Community Development went to Buck Browning for leadership, dedication, and noteworthy achievement to help improve rural communities.*

**Buck Browning** received the ***Rural Community Development Award*** for his visionary leadership in revitalizing the Fort Ritchie Community Center into a thriving hub for Cascade residents. As Executive Director, he expanded health, wellness, and recreation programs—from youth camps and kids' clubs to a full-service fitness center—while partnering with local health departments and hospitals to bring education and wellness resources directly to the community. His work has strengthened access to services, encouraged healthy living, and created a welcoming space that enriches rural life.

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*Outstanding Rural Economic Development to the Maryland Area Health Education Center West, "AHEC West," for leadership, dedication, and noteworthy achievement to help improve economic development opportunities in rural communities.*

**Area Health Education Center West (AHEC West)** received the ***Rural Economic Development Award*** for its leadership in the 2024 Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) program, which brought vital healthcare services to residents across the Tri-State area. Held July 26 through August 7 at the Allegany County Fairgrounds, the effort united the Department of Defense, local agencies, and community partners to provide more than 28,000 free medical, dental, optometry, and veterinary procedures for over 4,000 patients - saving the community an estimated $1.2 million. The program strengthened public health, connected residents to ongoing care, and showcased the power of collaboration in building rural economic resilience.

*Rural Champion to Senator Jack Bailey for his outstanding leadership and public service in promoting legislation and policy solutions to benefit rural communities.*

**Senator John "Jack" Bailey** received the ***Rural Champion Award*** for his outstanding leadership in advancing policies that strengthen rural communities in Southern Maryland and across the state. Since joining the Senate in 2019, he has championed agriculture, conservation, public safety, and community well-being—drawing on his background as a Maryland Natural Resources Police officer. His leadership with the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission, support for local fisheries, and advocacy on homelessness reflect his collaborative, forward-thinking commitment to rural Maryland.

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*Rural Champion Award to Mayor Darlene Taylor for her extraordinary efforts in combating the causes and effects of poverty by supporting families and individuals, allowing them to gain economic security and a better quality of life throughout his work in rural Maryland.*

**Mayor Darlene Taylor of Crisfield** received the ***Rural Champion Award*** for her visionary leadership and transformative impact on her community. As the first African American woman elected mayor, she secured more than $36 million in FEMA funding for flood mitigation, $2 million to elevate the City Dock, and $500,000 to launch a business incubator. Through her nonprofit It Takes a Village to Help Our Children, she has also supported over 200 youth with after-school, enrichment, and college access programs. Her leadership has strengthened infrastructure, expanded opportunity, and exemplified the power of local action in advancing rural Maryland.

Awardees pictured from left to right Susan Stewart, Melissa Clark, Rick Nelson, Charlotte Davis, Santo Grande, Buck Browning, and Mayor Darlene Taylor

*Rural Legacy Award to Santo Grande for his unwavering commitment to fostering dignity, respect, and independence for all. His dedication has left an enduring legacy that uplifts and strengthens Maryland's rural communities.*

**Santo Grande** received the ***Rural Legacy Award*** for his decades of visionary leadership, advocacy, and transformative service to Maryland's Eastern Shore. As Executive Director of Delmarva Community Services for more than 20 years, he advanced transportation, housing, and essential support for individuals with disabilities, seniors, and underserved residents, ensuring that those in remote areas had access to critical services. His unwavering commitment to equity and inclusion strengthened rural infrastructure, elevated community priorities at every level of government, and improved quality of life for countless families. Through his compassion and dedication, Santo leaves a lasting legacy of impact across rural Maryland.

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*Rural Legacy Award (posthumously) to Leanne Dawn Bowman-Bodes in lasting recognition of her visionary leadership and dedication to economic development in the rural communities of Western Maryland. Leanne's tireless work and commitment have left an enduring legacy, enriching the lives and future of countless individuals.*

**Leanne Dawn Bowman-Bodes** received the ***Rural Legacy Award*** posthumously for her exceptional leadership, vision, and lifelong dedication to Western Maryland. As Executive Director of the Tri-County Council for Western Maryland from 2000 until her passing in August 2024, she championed programs that expanded economic opportunity and strengthened rural communities. A passionate advocate, she testified before Congress to protect key initiatives like EDA and ARC and served in leadership roles with regional and national development organizations. Known for her compassion and authenticity, Leanne's advocacy and mentorship left an enduring legacy that continues to uplift Western Maryland and inspire future rural leaders.

# 2025 Legislative Sessions

***The Maryland General Assembly adjourned Sine Die on April 7, 2025, concluding its 447th legislative session after approving the Fiscal Year 2026 Operating Budget and major legislation addressing energy policy, solar siting, transportation infrastructure, and criminal justice reform.***

For Fiscal Year 2026, the Rural Maryland Council (RMC) and its associated grant programs—the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) and the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF)—received a reduced appropriation of $6,000,000. This represents a significant decrease from the previous year's funding level of over $9 million. In July 2024, RMC experienced a $2.25 million mid-year budget reduction to its competitive grant programming, making the FY2026 grant cycle especially challenging.

Maryland lawmakers faced one of the most difficult sessions in more than a decade as they worked to close a $3.3 billion budget shortfall, prompting extensive debate over cost shifts, spending reductions, and tax policy changes. Despite these fiscal constraints, RMC successfully advocated to prevent several severe proposals—including the full transfer of teacher pension cost increases to counties and the elimination of key rural economic development tools such as Enterprise Zones and Program Open Space support.

However, land preservation programs sustained major setbacks. Funding for the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) and the Rural Legacy Program was reduced by 69 percent, significantly hindering the state's ability to protect farmland, stabilize agricultural economies, and safeguard long-term food security in rural areas.

RMC's FY2026 allocation remains at $6 million, with no additional cuts recommended at this time. Notably, the Council achieved a critical milestone this session: the inclusion of a permanent State PIN in the first supplemental budget, authorizing the creation of four full-time State positions. This advancement ensures long-term organizational stability and strengthens RMC's capacity to support rural economic development, infrastructure, health, and entrepreneurship across Maryland.

## Legislative Highlights

**5**

**EVENTS HELD**

**Welcome Breakfast, 1/10**
**Rural Maryland Day, 2/13**
**Legislative Luncheon, 2/26**
**Maryland Day, 3/25**
**Spring Executive Board Meeting, 4/4**

**9**

**LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS**

**The Legislative Committee met this session to discuss bills, testimonies, and other legislative matters**

**40**

**POSITION STATEMENTS**

**Position statements submitted to the legislators in support of bills**

**142**

**BILLS MONITORED**

**Total bills monitored throughout the legislative session**

## Advancing Rural Business Succession Through Worker Cooperatives

The Rural Maryland Council championed House Bill 15/ Senate Bill 144, the Maryland Limited Worker Cooperative Association Act, which authorizes the formation of worker-owned cooperatives in Maryland. While state law previously permitted other cooperative models, it did not specifically recognize worker ownership. This legislation helps address rural challenges such as business succession and population decline by creating a pathway for retiring business owners—especially in agriculture—to convert their enterprises into worker-owned cooperatives, preserving local jobs and essential services in rural communities.

## Legislative Committee

The Legislative Committee is a standing committee of the Rural Maryland Council. The Legislative Committee met nine times throughout the 2025 Session to review bills, coordinate testimony, and advise on key policy issues affecting rural Maryland. The Committee plays a vital role in ensuring rural voices are represented in Annapolis by analyzing proposed legislation, identifying potential impacts to rural communities, and recommending advocacy positions for the Council. Through regular communication with legislators, partner organizations, and agency leadership, the Committee helps shape policy priorities, supports informed testimony, and strengthens RMC's role as a trusted convener on rural issues.

### RMC Budget Priorities Achieved Under House Bills 350 and 352

**Rural Maryland Council**

- **$6 million** for the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund & RMC Operations **($3M Reduction from FY2025)**
  FY2026 Breakdown:
  - $1,925,000 split between 5 Rural Regional Councils ($385,000/Council)
  - $981,250 RMPIF Infrastructure
  - $981,250 RMPIF Entrepreneurship
  - $981,250 RMPIF Rural Health
  - $650,000 RMC Operating

**Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission**

- **$1 million**

**Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation**

- Approximately **$6.6 million** **($15M from FY2025)**

**Rural Legacy Program**

- Approximately **$4.4 million** **( $10M Reduction from FY2025)**

## Position Statements

The Council submitted 40 position statements during the 2025 legislative session, reflecting an active and engaged advocacy presence on behalf of rural communities. Position statements are an important tool for communicating the Council's stance on proposed legislation, providing lawmakers with context on how bills may uniquely impact Maryland's rural residents, economies, and service providers. These statements help elevate rural priorities in policy discussions, ensure that rural perspectives are part of the legislative record, and guide decision-makers as bills move through committees and floor votes. By submitting position statements on a wide range of issues - including broadband, agriculture, healthcare, workforce development, housing, and infrastructure - the Council plays a critical role in shaping legislation and protecting the long-term interests of Rural Maryland.

## Bills Monitored

The Rural Maryland Council monitored 142 bills during the 2025 legislative session to track policy proposals that could affect rural communities across a wide range of issue areas. Bill monitoring is a core part of the Council's legislative advocacy work because it allows RMC to identify opportunities, risks, and emerging trends early in the lawmaking process. By closely following legislation as it moves through committees and floor votes, the Council can determine when to submit position statements, provide testimony, or mobilize partners for support or opposition. This proactive monitoring ensures that rural interests are not overlooked in fast-moving debates and that lawmakers have timely information about how proposed policies may impact agriculture, healthcare, economic development, infrastructure, and quality of life in rural regions.

# Elevating Rural Voices in Annapolis

### Legislative Breakfast

The Legislative Welcome Breakfast was held on January 10, 2025. RMC hosted a legislative welcome breakfast to take the opportunity to welcome new and returning legislators back for a new term. This event was held at the Maryland Inn and had a successful turnout with nearly 120 participants. Several notable legislators from across the state joined the event and met with several participants to learn about RMC's legislative priorities for the 2025 Session. The event was sponsored by the Maryland Forestry Foundation, Maryland Tech Council, and Maryland Association of Counties (MACo).

### Rural Maryland Day

This event was celebrated in person on February 13, 2025. The event allowed over 80 rural advocates to meet with 40 key legislators to discuss the strengths and challenges experienced living in rural Maryland.

### Legislative Luncheon

The Quarterly Executive Board Meeting and Legislative Luncheon was held on February 26, 2025, at the Rams Head Tavern venue with approximately 95 participants in attendance. Senator Ben Cardin made a surprise visit and addressed the audience. The business spotlight featured Barry Pritchard, Foundation of SunX Analytical in Cambridge, Maryland.

### Maryland Day

This celebration was held on March 25, 2025. RMC held an event for the Legislators on the Lawyer's Mall in downtown Annapolis. Approximately 200 lunches were distributed to legislators and stakeholders. This event is sponsored by Upper Shore Regional Council, Maryland Broadband Cooperative, Southern Maryland Agriculture Development Commission, Maryland Department of Agriculture, MARBIDCO, Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition, Horse Industry Board, Maryland Forest Association, Delmarva Chicken Association, and Choptank Electric.

### Spring Quarterly Executive Board Meeting

The Spring Quarterly Executive Board Meeting was held on April 4, 2025, at the Historic Banneker-Douglas Museum in downtown Annapolis, with approximately 70 participants in attendance. Guest speakers included LeRonn Herbert from the Banneker-Douglas Museum and Michael Pokorny, CEO of the MCIC. Jose Prieto of the Bay Mushroom was the business spotlight.

# Quarterly Board Meetings

**Friday, September 27, 2024**

**BUILDING AFRICAN AMERICAN MINDS, EASTON**

In September, the Council hosted its Fall Quarterly Board meeting on Friday, September 27, 2024, at the Building African American Minds (BAAM) Athletic Center in Easton, Maryland. The guest speaker for this meeting was Secretary Flora with the Maryland Department of Planning and Dina Daly, Executive Director of BAAM. There were 36 registrants in attendance.

**Wednesday, December 4, 2024**

**YELLOWFIN STEAK & FISH HOUSE, EDGEWATER**

According to the Council's bylaws, the organization's annual meeting is held at the last meeting of the calendar year. In Fiscal Year 2025, the Annual Meeting and Rural Impact Awards were held on Wednesday, December 4, 2024, at Yellowfin Steak & Fish House in Edgewater, Maryland. There were 68 participants in attendance.

**Wednesday, February 26, 2025**

**RAMS HEAD TAVERN, ANNAPOLIS**

The Winter Quarterly Executive Board meeting and Legislative Luncheon occurred on Wednesday, February 26, 2025, at Rams Head Tavern in downtown Annapolis, Maryland. During this meeting, updates from the RMC Legislative Committee and events for the new year were shared. The business spotlight featured Barry Pritchard, Foundation of SunX Analytical in Cambridge, Maryland. There were 95 participants in attendance.

**Friday, April 4, 2025**

**BANNEKER-DOUGLASS-TUBMAN MUSEUM, ANNAPOLIS**

The Spring Quarterly Executive Board meeting was held on Friday, April 4, 2025, at the Banneker-Douglass-Tubman Museum in downtown Annapolis, Maryland. LeRonn Herbert, Administrative Manager and Special Assistant at the Banneker-Douglass-Tubman Museum, served as the guest speaker, and the business spotlight highlighted Jose Prieto, Owner and Operator of the Bay Mushrooms in Cambridge, Maryland. There were 95 registrants in attendance.

# Partnering Events

### CYBER AG

The Cybersecurity in Agriculture Forum, held July 17, 2024 at Cecil College, convened farmers, agricultural organizations, technology professionals, and state leaders to explore the cybersecurity challenges facing modern agriculture. Speakers and panelists discussed how increased reliance on precision equipment, data systems, and networked infrastructure has created new vulnerabilities for producers and rural supply chains. Participants heard expert guidance on preventing ransomware attacks, protecting sensitive data, and strengthening digital readiness in agricultural operations.

The forum concluded with a site visit to SunMed Growers, Maryland's largest cannabis cultivator, where attendees saw firsthand how advanced greenhouse technologies, compliance systems, and cybersecurity protections are integrated into large-scale production.

### STATE'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

The Rural Maryland Council serves as Maryland's State Rural Development Council under the National Rural Development Partnership and is a member of Partners for Rural America (PRA). PRA supports State Rural Development Councils nationwide, which work with federal and state partners to strengthen rural communities through research, collaboration, and leadership. SRDCs meet annually to share strategies on key priorities such as workforce development, infrastructure, broadband, transportation, and rural health.

Partners for Rural America (PRA) held its 2024 Annual Meeting from September 11–13, 2024 in Des Moines, Iowa, bringing together rural development leaders from across the country to share best practices and discuss emerging priorities for rural communities. The three-day convening combined policy discussions with on-the-ground learning, featuring site visits to Knoxville, Pella, Newton, and Colfax that highlighted successful models of redevelopment, rural housing strategies, and corporate and philanthropic partnerships.

Participants toured revitalized hospital and industrial campuses, downtown redevelopment efforts, and community-led projects demonstrating economic resilience and workforce innovation. The meeting concluded on September 13 with panel discussions on rural wealth-building, childcare solutions, philanthropy, and corporate support for State Rural Development Councils, followed by PRA's Annual Business Meeting and strategy-setting for 2024–2025.

### THE FEDERAL RESERVE OF RICHMOND - RURAL INVESTMENT COLLABORATIVE WORKGROUP

The Rural Investment Collaborative™ brings together community leaders from Maryland, North and South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C. to strengthen access to capital and support rural prosperity. Through shared learning and technical assistance, the Collaborative helps leaders develop strong, fundable project proposals that advance community priorities. The Richmond Fed partners with rural hubs, including the Rural Maryland Council, to support this work. RMC staff Charlotte Davis and Megan D'Arcy serve on a workgroup that helps guide the Collaborative's programming and community engagement.

The Fall Retreat, held September 16–17, 2024 in Charlotte, focused on approving the 2025 Community Investment Training Cohort, selecting recipients for technical assistance awards, and shaping the development of a long-term Alumni Network. Participants also explored new engagement strategies such as office hours, guest speakers, and pitch sessions to deepen support for cohort communities.

The retreat concluded with planning for the 2025 schedule and shared priorities, as well as reflections on lessons learned and commitments to collaborative next steps that will continue strengthening rural investment capacity across the region.

In 2024–2025, the Rural Maryland Council hosted two educational webinars designed to expand awareness of statewide resources that improve access to reading and literacy services in rural communities.

- **Rural Infrastructure Funding Webinar**
  *October 1, 2024*
  Hosted by the RMC Rural Housing Working Committee, this webinar highlighted funding opportunities to support rural infrastructure projects. RMC staff participated and shared information on the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF) Infrastructure Grant Program. Presentations also featured the Maryland Department of the Environment's Water Quality Financing Administration and the Maryland Environmental Finance Center, which provided guidance on financing and technical assistance for rural communities.
- **Unlock the World of Reading: The Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled**
  *May 8, 2025*
  This webinar introduced participants to statewide services and adaptive technologies available for individuals who are blind, low-vision, or print disabled, with a focus on increasing access for rural residents.

Together, these webinars helped connect rural partners with tools and funding that promote literacy, inclusion, and equitable access to library services across Maryland.

## RMC SPONSORED EVENTS

**Maryland Commodity Classic**
July 24, 2024, Queen Anne's County 4-H Park, Centreville, MD

**Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) Summer Conference: Turning the Tide**
August 14-17, 2024, Roland Powell Convention Center, Ocean City, MD

**2024 Maryland Land Conservation Conference - Forever Maryland**
September 4-5, 2024, Crowne Plaza, Annapolis, MD

**Maryland Folk Festival**
September 20-22, 2024, Salisbury, MD

**J. Millard Tawes Crab and Clam Bake,**
September 25, 2024, Somers Cove Marina, Crisfield, MD

**Harford Land Trust: Party to Preserve**
October 5, 2024, Aberdeen, MD

**Maryland Rural Health Association Conference**
November 3-5, 2024, Crowne Plaza, Annapolis, MD

**Chesapeake Charities: Celebration of Charity**
November 21, 2024, Chesapeake Bay Beach Club, Stevensville, MD

**2024 Maryland Farm Bureau Conference**
December 7-10, 2024, Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa, and Marina, Cambridge, MD

**2024 Cultivating Innovation in Maryland's Agriculture and Technology Conference**
December 12, 2024, Crowne Plaza, Annapolis, MD

**Maryland's Best Expo**
January 7, 2025, Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium, Annapolis, MD

**Cultivate + Craft Value-Added Agriculture Summit**
January 16, 2025, Silver Spring Civic Center, Silver Spring, MD

**2025 Mountain Maryland PACE Event**
January 16-17, 2025, Westin Annapolis, Annapolis, MD

**2025 MEDA Winter Conference**
January 9, 2025, Governor Calvert House, Annapolis, MD

**Chicken Day in Annapolis 2025**
February 4, 2025, Governor Calvert House, Annapolis, MD

**2025 Taste of Maryland Agriculture Dinner**
February 6, 2025, Live! Casino & Hotel Maryland, Hanover, MD

**Taste of the Eastern Shore**
February 13, 2025, Graduate Annapolis Hotel, Annapolis, MD

**Southern Maryland Reception**
February 20, 2025, Graduate Annapolis, Annapolis, MD

**MRHA Legislative Luncheon**
February 27, 2025, Treasury Building, Assembly Room, Annapolis, MD

**Forestry Day in Annapolis**
March 12, 2025, Governor Calvert House, Annapolis, MD

**2025 Upper Shore STRT1UP Road Show Pitch Competition**
April 15, 2025, Washington College, Chestertown, MD

**DelFest**
May 22-25, 2025, Allegany County Fairgrounds, Cumberland, MD
Maryland Crafted, June 7, 2025, Courthouse Centreville, MD

**Maryland Municipal League Summer Conference 2025**
June 22-25, 2025, Roland E. Powell Convention Center, Ocean City, MD

# Rural Maryland Foundation

The Rural Maryland Foundation supports the economic and social well-being of rural communities and strengthens statewide philanthropic investment in rural priorities. The Foundation exists to advance the work of the Rural Maryland Council and, if needed, may serve as the State Rural Development Council in its place. Its initiatives include the Transfer of Wealth Study and the Rural Maryland Philanthropic Development Strategy, as well as storytelling and outreach efforts such as the We Are Maryland and Aspire Maryland video series. The Foundation also helps cultivate rural leadership through support for LEAD Maryland Foundation Fellowships. The Foundation is led by a Board of Trustees that includes President Dan Rider, Vice President Kurt Fuchs, Secretary Charlotte Davis, and Trustees Andrew Cassilly, Steve McHenry, Rick Pollitt, Scott Warner, Roseanna Vogt, Jennifer Walsh, Mel Litter, and Susan O'Neill.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Dan Rider,** *President*
**Kurt Fuchs,** *Vice President*
**Charlotte Davis,** *Secretary*
**Andrew Cassilly**
**Steve McHenry**
**Rick Pollitt**
**Scott Warner**
**Roseanna Vogt**
**Jennifer Walsh**
**Mel Litter**
**Susan O'Neill**

# Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund

## MAERDAF OVERVIEW

MAERDAF was established in 2000 with the purpose of increasing the overall capacity of rural-serving nonprofit organizations and community colleges to meet a multitude of rural development challenges and to help them establish new public/private partnerships for leveraging non-state sources of funding. This grant has the following focus areas: **Agriculture & Forestry Education, Community & Economic Development, Rural Broadband, Energy, Youth Engagement and Leadership Development.**

The Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) provides capacity-building support to rural-serving nonprofit organizations and community colleges. In Fiscal Year 2025, the maximum award was capped at $45,000. While no match is required, matching funds are strongly encouraged due to the competitiveness of the program. MAERDAF is funded through the State of Maryland's Annual Operating Budget, with $118,485 (PCA 39101) allocated in line-item appropriations and additional funding provided through the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF). At the start of FY2025, the Rural Maryland Council received level funding of just over $9 million; however, a mid-year budget reduction of $2.25 million to competitive grant programs created significant challenges and made funding decisions particularly difficult. Starting award funds for MAERDAF totaled $869,358, with the Grant Review Board approving an allocation of $106,972 from MAERDAF to RMPIF, leaving $762,386 in total MAERDAF award funds.

In FY2024, this program received 111 applications totaling $3,374,140 in requests. Of these requests, 26 grants totaling $762,386 were awarded.

## GRANT DECISIONS

The Rural Maryland Council serves as the administrative agency in receiving the applications and disbursing the funds. Grant award determinations are made by the independent MAERDAF Grant Review Board set by law and consisting of the Secretaries (or their designee) of the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Health, Housing and Community Development and Natural Resources as well as the Chair (or the designee) of the Rural Maryland Council. Decisions by the MAERDAF Grant Review Board are final and binding. Fiscal Year 2024 Grant Review Board Members were **Mindie Burgoyne**, Senior Regional Business Development Representative, Commerce; **Karen Fedor**, Senior Agricultural Marketing Specialist, Maryland Department of Agriculture, **Dan Rider**, Forest Stewardship & Utilization Program Manager, Maryland Department of Natural Resource Forest Service, **Sara Seitz**, Director, State Office of Rural Health, Maryland Department of Health, **Dona Sorce**, Project Manager, Division of Neighborhood Revitalization, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, **Joyce Bowlsbey,** RMC Board Chair Designee. **Charlotte Davis** is the MAERDAF Coordinator and Rural Maryland Council Executive Director.

## MAERDAF FY2025 AWARDS AT-A-GLANCE BY FOCUS AREA

| MAERDAF Focus Area | Grants Awarded | Amount Awarded | Amount Moved |
|---|---|---|---|
| Agriculture & Forestry | 6 | $169,400 | |
| Community Development | 11 | $381,600 | |
| Economic Development | 4 | $106,191 | |
| Energy | 0 | $0.00 | |
| Youth Development & Leadership | 5 | $105,195 | |
| **Total:** | **26** | **$762,386** | **$106,972 moved to RMPIF** |

## MAERDAF FY2025 AWARDS AT-A-GLANCE BY FOCUS BY REGION

| Region | Grants Awarded | Amount Awarded | Details |
|---|---|---|---|
| Western | 8 | $199,400 | |
| Southern | 1 | $35,000 | |
| North East | 3 | $118,995 | |
| Eastern Shore | 13 | $405,491 | |
| Baltimore City | 1 | $3,500 | -United Covenant Union (serving Eastern Shore) |
| **Total:** | **26** | **$762,386** | |

## MAERDAF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY FOCUS AREA

### Appalachian Farm and Food Alliance

**Amount Awarded: $24,900**

***Project Name:*** *Improving the Efficiency of Local Food Systems*

***Project Summary:*** The Appalachian Farm and Food Alliance, in partnership with the Garrett Growers Cooperative and Summit Custom Designs, is developing a web-based food hub management software to strengthen the regional food system. The platform will automate the ordering process, allow farmers to easily update product availability, and enable customers to access fresh produce within 24 hours of harvest. By streamlining operations, the program increases efficiency and ensures farmers retain a greater share of final sale dollars. This initiative supports the Alliance's mission to build a resilient, sustainable, and equitable food system across the region. *The MAERDAF grant award, together with matching funds, were used to contract a Summit Custom Designs to build the software and integrate functions such as farmer availability, billing, record keeping, and accounting.*

During the early phase of development with Summit Custom Designs, Garrett Growers faced challenges in securing sufficient funding to sustain ongoing development and expansion. To accommodate these delays, the project has been granted a six-month extension for continued development and activation of the site. The final report is due January 31, 2026.

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### Evergreen Heritage Center Foundation

**Amount Awarded: $22,500**

***Project Name:*** *AmeriCorps Support for Climate Resilience*

***Project Summary:*** The Evergreen Heritage Center (EHC) Foundation, established in 2008 and now serving 18,000 participants annually, leverages its historic farm to deliver award-winning, hands-on programs that raise student science literacy by 25 to 50 percent. Through this project, two full-time and one part-time AmeriCorps members, guided by EHC leaders, created and piloted a Climate Resilience program that included five education modules rated "very good" or "excellent" by teachers and tested with 5,000 students, increasing climate literacy by 25 percent. Overall, 6,583 students participated in programming, with 38 percent showing measurable literacy gains, while public workshops engaged 72 attendees, one-third of whom improved their knowledge and all committed to new environmental practices. Although the AmeriCorps program ended in May, most activities were completed, ensuring lasting impact. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported stipends for the AmeriCorps members as well as the purchase of a multiparameter water quality meter and an ambient air particulate sampler.*

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### Forever Maryland

**Amount Awarded: $13,000**

***Project Name:*** *Land Use & Conservation Education AmeriCorps/ShoreCorps Member*

***Project Summary:*** Forever Maryland promotes land conservation through education, advocacy, and outreach to protect working landscapes and healthy ecosystems. This project funded a full-time ShoreCorps AmeriCorps member through Salisbury University to build capacity by planning an education series, hosting a conservation bus and boat tour, and expanding public awareness. Due to leadership changes, staffing shortages, and fundraising challenges in 2024, these activities were not completed. Instead, the AmeriCorps member shifted focus to essential communications and organizational support, including newsletters, website management, and donor records, which ensured continuity during a transitional period. Forever Maryland, now led by the Board Chair, is seeking capacity-building resources to strengthen staffing and rebuild momentum. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported the stipend for the full-time AmeriCorps member.*

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### LEAD Maryland Foundation, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $35,000**

***Project Name:*** *Leadership Foundations: Strengthening Capacity and Growing Servant Leaders for Rural Maryland*

***Project Summary:*** The Foundation implemented six multi-day seminars for its Class XIII cohort of 23 LEAD Fellows, developed a new strategic plan with an external facilitator, and conducted a stakeholder needs assessment survey. Despite challenges such as the loss of Maryland Department of Agriculture funding and limited staff capacity, the organization successfully advanced the project Leadership Foundations: Strengthening Capacity and Growing Servant Leaders for Rural Maryland during a period of transition that included onboarding new trustees and preparing for staff retirements. Project outcomes positioned the Foundation to implement its strategic plan, update its program logic model, strengthen fundraising, and address staffing needs. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported the implementation of the six seminars and the development of the strategic plan.*

### Maryland Nursery, Landscape, and Greenhouse Association, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $39,000**

***Project Name:*** *Maryland Horticulture Industry Statistical Profile and Economic Summary*

***Project Summary:*** With a mission to serve and promote Maryland's diverse ornamental horticulture industry, the Maryland Nursery, Landscape, and Greenhouse Association, Inc. commissioned a *2024 Maryland Horticulture Industry Statistical Profile and Economic Summary*. The report will provide business owners, financiers, policymakers, and regulators with data on industry statistics and economic impacts, enabling thorough analysis of growth, strength, and opportunities across the sector. The Schaefer Center is actively engaged in the project; however, work was delayed when the survey was paused during the spring, the busiest season for respondents. Data collation is scheduled for summer, with the final report due January 15, 2026. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supports the survey contract with the University of Baltimore Schaefer Center.*

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### The Greater Cumberland Committee (TGCC)

**Amount Awarded: $35,000**

***Project Name:*** *Woody Biomass Cost-Benefit Analysis for Rural Counties in Maryland*

***Project Summary:*** The Greater Cumberland Committee (TGCC) advances projects of regional importance in transportation, education and workforce development, energy and natural resources, and leadership. In partnership with the Maryland Clean Energy Center, this project analyzes the environmental and economic costs and benefits of increased biomass utilization in rural counties. TGCC received a six-month extension after delays in retaining a consultant through the request for proposals process, with the final report due January 15, 2026. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, were used to procure a contractor with expertise in clean energy, environmental, and economic research to complete the cost-benefit analysis.*

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## MAERDAF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOCUS AREA

### Chesapeake Culinary Center

**Amount Awarded: $45,000**

***Project Name:*** *Healthy Kitchens & Happy Homes-mobile demo kitchen*

***Project Summary:*** The mission of the Chesapeake Culinary Center is to create healthy, economically independent families through job training, food security, and support for local farmers and watermen. As part of its Food Connection Project, the organization is launching a mobile demonstration kitchen to address food insecurity at the household level while strengthening regional food resiliency through value-added use of local produce and blue catfish. The program will bring cooking classes directly to communities, teaching participants how to prepare nutritious meals. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, will support the purchase of a demonstration kitchen trailer and a pickup truck to transport it.* Chesapeake Culinary was granted an eight-month extension as bids are being sought for the trailer, with the final report due March 15, 2026.

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### Community Mediation Maryland

**Amount Awarded: $35,000**

***Project Name:*** *Community Mediation Corps - Rural Maryland Centers*

***Project Summary:*** Community Mediation Maryland (CMM) advances collaborative conflict resolution across the state through education, training, research, and innovative applications of mediation. Its AmeriCorps program, Community Mediation Corps, is central to this mission. CMM placed seven AmeriCorps members in centers serving Cecil, Harford, Queen Anne's, Kent, Washington, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester Counties, where they conducted intake, mediated cases, and supported schools and correctional facilities. Outcomes included steady intake levels statewide, with Cecil County and Hagerstown Re-entry members surpassing the 25% growth goal; a 17% increase in mediation sessions overall, with Community Mediation Upper Shore and Tri-Community exceeding the 25% goal; and a 58% increase in outreach hours, far above target. The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported seven AmeriCorps stipends and travel expenses. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported seven AmeriCorps stipends and travel expenses.*

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## Frostburg Fire Department No. 1, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $45,000**
***Project Name:*** *Student Firefighter Residence*

***Project Summary:*** The all-volunteer Frostburg Fire Department (FFD), with 30 active members across two stations, serves 9,000 Frostburg residents, 4,000 Frostburg State University students, and 3,500 nearby residents within a 12-square-mile area, including 10 miles of I-68. To strengthen recruitment and retention, FFD is rehabilitating a student firefighter residence near Station 1 to house up to five FSU students who will serve as volunteer firefighters. Upgrades include individual bathrooms, new appliances, a hot water tank, drywall, paint, carpet, and lighting to create safe, modern housing. The grantee was approved a 3-month extension to complete the project by October 15, 2025. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, will support the remodel of the two-story brick residence to accommodate the student firefighters.*

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## Habitat for Humanity Choptank, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $45,000**
***Project Name:*** *Home Repair Program*

***Project Summary:*** Habitat for Humanity Choptank (HFHC) serves low-income families in Talbot and Dorchester Counties through its Critical Housing Repair Program, which provides essential health and safety repairs so homeowners can live with pride and dignity in their homes. During the project period, HFHC completed 15 home repairs, installed 16 smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and added 15 handrails or grab bars for safety. Additionally, 18 homeowners participated in Home Repair Sweat Equity Hours, contributing through hands-on repair work, financial education classes, and homeownership workshops. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported a subcontractor to complete the home repairs.*

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## Habitat for Humanity Susquehanna

**Amount Awarded: $45,000**
***Project Name:*** *Develop Rural Communities & Workforce; Promote Leadership; & Engage Youth through Habi-Tech Program*

***Project Summary:*** Habitat for Humanity Susquehanna serves low-income families in Harford and Cecil Counties through its Home Ownership, Home Repair, and Financial Literacy programs. In partnership with Harford Technical High School and Cecil County School of Technology, Habitat launched the "Habi-Tech" program to expand affordable, energy-efficient housing while giving students hands-on training in modern construction. During the 2024–2025 school year, 339 rural STEM students gained marketable construction skills by contributing to homebuilding projects, resulting in the completion of one home at 109 Booth Street in Elkton and the first-year build phase of a second home at 113 Booth Street in Elkton. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported construction materials, including lumber, doors, windows, concrete, hardware, flooring, paint, insulation, drywall, cabinets, fixtures, and lightbulbs.*

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## Interfaith Housing Alliance

**Amount Awarded: $25,000**
***Project Name:*** *Purchase-Repair Homeownership Program*

***Project Summary:*** Through its Purchase-Repair Homeownership Program, Interfaith Housing Alliance (IHA) advances affordable housing for very low- to low-income families in rural Frederick, Carroll, and Washington Counties. The program helps participants achieve housing costs below 30% of household income by improving credit, reducing debt, and building assets. During the grant period, IHA exceeded all projected outcomes by providing housing counseling to 199 clients and supporting six new homeowners. Financial stability outcomes also surpassed targets, with 71.43% of participants improving credit scores, 71.43% reducing debt or monthly expenses, and 34.69% increasing assets. The program demonstrated strong return on investment, with counseling services costing $796.91 per client overall and $125.63 per client with MAERDAF funds, and new homeowner support costing $26,430.96 per client overall and $4,166.67 with MAERDAF funds. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported staff travel for trainings, specialty power tools for participants, website and software for e-signatures and interpretation, office phone, video and payroll support, and annual National Rural Self-Help Housing Association dues.*

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## MidShore Meals Til Monday

**Amount Awarded: $38,100**
***Project Name:*** *Drive Out Hunger to Deliver Much More than Meals til Monday*

***Project Summary:*** Midshore Meals Til Monday fights food insecurity in the Mid-Shore region by providing weekend food bags to children who rely on school meals and by distributing fresh and frozen meals to families in need, ensuring households don't go hungry between school weeks. To expand food access for low-income residents in Dorchester, Wicomico, and Caroline Counties, the organization purchased a refrigerated box truck. The truck has been essential in scaling summer meal deliveries to 200–250 children and families weekly, up from about 125, providing more than 13,000 fresh and frozen meals in summer 2024 alone in partnership with local school food service departments. It also enabled safe transport of perishable items, delivery of Meals Til Monday weekend food bags, and direct service to families in food deserts. Collaborations with partners such as the Wicomico County Library and 411 Kitchens expanded outreach, distributed gleaned produce, and supplied frozen items from local sources, bringing an additional 8,500 meals based on total poundage. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported the purchase of a new 12-foot refrigerated box truck with a lift gate and custom signage wrap.*

### Rebuilding Together Eastern Shore

**Amount Awarded: $45,000**
***Project Name:*** *Safe & Healthy Homes*

***Project Summary:*** Rebuilding Together Kent County and Rebuilding Together Queen Anne's County provide free critical home repairs and accessibility modifications to income-eligible homeowners, including seniors, veterans, families, and individuals with disabilities, helping them remain safe and independent. During the grant period, the organizations met their overall ls goals by completing projects at seven homes in both counties, though one property fell short due to rising construction costs. Instead, larger investments were made in two Queen Anne's County homes: installing a new roof for a grandmother raising three grandchildren and completing major structural repairs and new windows for another homeowner. Typical projects included roof replacements, ramps and grab bars, and repairs to floors and plumbing—improvements that reduce hazards, prevent costly health complications, and preserve affordable housing for vulnerable residents. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported the purchase of construction materials to complete critical home repairs for 7 homes.*

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### Salisbury Neighborhood Housing Services

**Amount Awarded: $45,000**
***Project Name:*** *Pear Street Project*

***Project Summary:*** Salisbury Neighborhood Housing Services' mission is to create affordable housing solutions and empower communities. In partnership with the Wicomico County Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, students gain hands-on construction experience by building single-family homes that are transported to Crisfield for permanent placement. During the grant period, 124 CTE students built two homes on Pear Street in Crisfield. The first home was completed and is listed for sale, while the second was moved to its permanent location on July 15, 2025, and is undergoing finish work, with listing anticipated this fall. This initiative expands affordable housing while equipping local students with valuable workforce skills. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported construction materials and water and sewer hookup on Pear Street.*

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### The United Covenant Union

**Amount Awarded: $3,500**
***Project Name:*** *Informal Employment Outreach Project*

***Project Summary:*** The United Covenant Union engages clergy, fixed-income seniors, and cash economy workers (primarily domestic workers) to address the dual challenges of poverty and social isolation. Its Informal Employee Outreach Project was designed to support two chapters in Chestertown and Crisfield through monthly community dinners, the launch of a thrift store, and training for domestic workers on drafting contracts to prevent wage theft and reduce poverty. By fostering peer group relationship-building, the initiative seeks to develop a holistic approach to addressing chronic poverty. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, will support the cost of meals served at the monthly dinners for the Informal Employee Outreach Project.* The grantee has not been in communication with RMC, and the project is not yet complete. RMC will continue efforts to work with the grantee to support project progress..

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### Washington County Historical Society, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $10,000**
***Project Name:*** *Curating Community Internship Program*

***Project Summary:*** Founded in 1911, the Washington County Historical Society (WCHS) preserves and promotes the history of Washington County, Maryland, maintaining key sites such as the Hager House, Burnside Bridge, Dunker Church, Washington Monument State Park, and the Miller House Museum. With grant support, WCHS advanced its Curating Community Internship Program, providing five college students with hands-on training in museum operations and archival research. Interns gained marketable skills in research, cataloging, public o outreach, archival practices, and National Register of Historic Places documentation, while assisting with cataloging textile and art collections, producing social media content with thousands of views, writing newsletter articles, and supporting events and membership outreach. The program exceeded expectations, with one intern leveraging her experience into a National Park Service internship. Progress was tracked through journals, interviews, and evaluations, showing measurable growth and meaningful contributions to WCHS operations and community engagement. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported stipends for up to five Curating Community Interns.*

## MAERDAF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOCUS AREA

### Beach to Bay Heritage Area

**Amount Awarded: $22,911**
***Project Name:*** *Beach to Bay Indian Trail*

***Project Summary:*** The Beach to Bay Heritage Area (BBHA), a state-certified Heritage Area serving Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore, works to promote, preserve, and protect the region's cultural, historical, and natural assets. In partnership with the Pocomoke Indian Nation, BBHA is reimagining the Beach to Bay Indian Trail to more accurately interpret Native American history through 12 outdoor interpretive signs and a companion publication. What began as a brochure evolved into a 6" x 9" full-color, magazine-style guide - 15,000 copies of which will be distributed across the region. Additionally, all 12 interpretive signs have been designed and fabricated and will be installed at key locations along the National Recreation Trail. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds,*

*was expended to support consultant services with the Pocomoke Indian Nation for technical assistance and guidance, design and fabrication of the outdoor interpretive signs, and printing of the companion brochure.*

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### Building African American Minds, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $44,000**
***Project Name:*** *BAAM Workforce Development Connection Initiative*

***Project Summary:*** Building African American Minds (BAAM), Inc. equips underserved children and adults with the academic, social, and workforce skills needed to reach their potential as responsible and productive citizens. Through the Workforce Development Connection Initiative, BAAM provides workforce education, employability training, and job coaching to adults in Opportunity Zones in Easton, Denton, and Federalsburg. During the grant period, the initiative achieved measurable outcomes: eight individuals secured employment with an average annual salary of $35,000; 35 individuals received case management services; and a Business Resource Summit engaged 24 small businesses and entrepreneurs. The program also advanced financial stability through a Financial Freedom Class with 20 participants, including 12 individuals or couples who received personalized financial counseling. In addition, BAAM strengthened its partnership with Chesapeake College, which now offers General Educational Development (GED) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at the BAAM Academic Center, along with referrals to Commercial Driver's License (CDL) and trades programs, expanding educational and career pathways for participants. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support a consultant to serve as a Job Coach and purchase materials and supplies, including a career exploration computer software program, e-sports and job center technology, and administrative supplies.*

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### Germantown School Community Heritage Center

**Amount Awarded: $27,280**
***Project Name:*** *Germantown School Structural Preservation and Interpretation*

***Project Summary:*** The Germantown School Community Heritage Center preserves the history, heritage, and culture of its historic Rosenwald school through a museum, heritage walking tour, and community events. This project completed exterior restoration of the school by repairing and painting the cedar siding and installing new Rosenwald-style windows. Interpretive programming was expanded with the development of a Rosenwald Architectural station for the outdoor tour and a companion indoor exhibit, supported by compiled construction documents and graphic design work for signage. Key purchases included a 13x19 printer for display materials and window sashes, with receipts and invoices documented. Despite weather delays, all contracted work has been completed, strengthening the Center's role as a place of cultural connection and education. The Center has been approved for a three-month extension to complete indoor displays, with the final report due October 31, 2025. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported restoration of the building's exterior, replacement and installation of a window sash, signage design and production, an Epson printer, paper for printing handouts, flyers, and display posters.*

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### Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $12,000**
***Project Name:*** *America 250 GeoTour*

***Project Summary:*** The Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, a certified Maryland Heritage Area covering Carroll, Frederick, and Washington Counties, works with partners to preserve and promote historic sites, towns, cultural landscapes, and diverse stories. With grant support, the US 250 GeoTour is being developed to guide geocachers through the region, engaging them with local history while boosting heritage tourism, visitor spending, and overnight stays. To maximize impact, the GeoTour will launch in coordination with a Maryland Geocaching Block Party at Utica Park in September 2025, with an official release planned at the Westminster Branch of the Carroll County Library on September 19, 2025. A six-month extension has been approved, and the final report is due January 15, 2026. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported the purchase of thirty cache kits and 400 geocoins, website hosting and maintenance, travel for geocache placement, geocaching consultant services, marketing and promotion materials, and the launch event.*

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## MAERDAF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP DEVLOPMENT FOCUS AREA

### Alpha Genesis Community Development Corporation

**Amount Awarded: $21,000**
***Project Name:*** *Youth Intern Initiative*

***Project Summary:*** Alpha Genesis CDC (AGCDC) builds authentic, creative communities by integrating arts and culture. Its Youth Intern Initiative at Minty's Ice Cream, Treats & More, located at 428 Race Street in Cambridge, develops entrepreneurial skills for 12 youth ages 15–24 in Talbot and Dorchester Counties, with a focus on economically disadvantaged and minority students. The 13-week program provides paid internships, mentorship, soft skills training, and workforce preparation, supported with transportation and uniforms. With grant funding received in December 2024, AGCDC purchased a 13-passenger 2013 Ford E-450 shuttle bus with a handicap lift in January 2025 to support the youth intern program. After completing repairs and registration, the vehicle is ready for use and will be wrapped with AGCDC branding and Rural Maryland Council acknowledgment, further connecting youth with community history, civic organizations, and pride of place. *The MAERDAF grant award,*

*along with matching funds, supported the purchase of a 12-passenger van to transport youth and uniforms.*

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## Chesapeake Audubon Society-Pickering Creek Audubon Center

**Amount Awarded: $17,700**
***Project Name:*** *Leadership on Wheels: Driving Environmental Connections in Youth*

***Project Summary:*** Pickering Creek Audubon Center conserves natural habitats on Maryland's Eastern Shore by engaging the community through education, exploration, and stewardship. Programs include school partnerships in Dorchester, Caroline, Talbot, and Wicomico Counties; habitat plantings with organizations such as Habitat for Humanity; Summer Science Camp; and public education programs. With grant support, the Center purchased a used pickup truck. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, was used to acquire this vehicle, which is essential for transporting materials, staff, and students to field sites, supporting restoration projects, and maintaining the Center's 400-acre property.*

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## Harford County 4-H Clubs, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $34,995**
***Project Name:*** *4H Camp Transportation Renovation*

***Project Summary:*** The Harford County 4-H Camp, founded in 1925, provides quality youth development experiences while preserving the 4-H camping tradition for future generations. Serving about 10,000 youth and adults annually, the camp undertook a project to enhance safety, accessibility, and operational efficiency by rehabilitating camp roads, reconstructing the parking lot, and purchasing a small utility vehicle. The improvements have exceeded expectations: the main road and parking lot, once unlined rock, are now clearly marked, improving traffic flow without requiring volunteer direction, and the enhanced aesthetics are immediately noticeable to visitors. The new utility vehicle has proven essential for tours and daily operations, while the older cart has been repurposed for staff mobility. These capital improvements significantly strengthen the camp's ability to serve the community and ensure a welcoming, functional, and sustainable facility for years to come. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported 40 loads of millings and labor for grading and spreading the camp road and parking area, as well as the purchase of a utility vehicle.*

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## The Child and Family Foundation (1 Year to Empowerment)

**Amount Awarded: $6,500**
***Project Name:*** *1 Year to Empowerment*

***Project Summary:*** 1 Year to Empowerment, founded in 2014, is a free year-long program serving 30 middle and high school girls in Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset Counties. Based in Salisbury, the program offers more than 12 annual activities focused on mental and physical health, life skills, and career exploration. The current participant group includes 22 middle school and 8 high school girls, predominantly African American. The program provides mentorship, community service opportunities, and a supportive environment for girls facing anxiety and self-esteem challenges, with future plans to partner with Salisbury University ShoreCorps to strengthen operations. In FY25, the AmeriCorps member completed over 900 hours of service, providing mentorship across program activities and representing the organization at community events, significantly contributing to participant growth and program vvisibility. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support the stipend of the part-time ShoreCorps AmeriCorps member.*

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## Western Maryland Area Health Education Center (dba AHEC West)

**Amount Awarded: $25,000**
***Project Name:*** *ECHO- Exploring Careers in Health Occupations*

***Project Summary:*** Western Maryland Area Health Education Center (AHEC West), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, works to improve healthcare access and quality through education and collaboration. Its Exploring Careers in Health Occupations (ECHO) program addresses healthcare provider shortages in rural Western Maryland by engaging high school students from Allegany, Garrett, Washington Counties (MD), and Mineral County (WV). With a 19-year history and more than 600 participants, ECHO offers a weeklong summer camp featuring hands-on medical experiences, facility tours, and aging simulations. The program has proven highly effective, with 89% of students reporting it helped guide career decisions and many alumni pursuing healthcare fields with the goal of returning to serve their rural communities. In June 2025, 24 students, exceeding the target of 20, took part in immersive facility visits, activities, and career education sessions, along with discounted SAT/ACT prep. The group was diverse, including African American, Asian, and Hispanic participants, and predominantly female. Nearly 75% of participants reported ECHO significantly increased their interest in health careers, while others reported some increased interest, noting the value of exploring healthcare fields, making peer connections, and enjoying the overall experience. *The MAERDAF grant award, along with matching funds, supported salary, wages, and fringe benefits of the part-time Program Coordinator, travel for the Coordinator, and transportation, lodging, and meals during field trips.*

# Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund

## RMPIF OVERVIEW

The Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF), authorized by the Maryland General Assembly in 2006, first received funding in 2016 with an appropriation of $2 million. Since then, funding has steadily increased, reaching $9 million in Fiscal Year 2024. In Fiscal Year 2025, the Rural Maryland Council was allocated level funding of just over $9 million; however, a mid-year budget reduction of $2.25 million to its competitive grant programs in July created significant challenges and made grant funding decisions especially difficult. The RMPIF program is funded through the State of Maryland's Annual Operating Budget. In FY2025, the Grant Review Board awarded 39 RMPIF grants totaling $5,367,451.

The goal of RMPIF is to help raise the overall standard of living in rural areas to a level that meets or exceeds statewide benchmark averages by 2030, while preserving the best aspects of a pastoral heritage and rural way of life. Resources provided to RMPIF are designed to facilitate significant targeted investments in important economic and community development programs and promote regional and intergovernmental cooperation. These investments also enable local and regional public and nonprofit organizations to leverage additional non-state financial and human resources to facilitate the realization of sustainable rural development objectives.

RMPIF supports the Rural Maryland Council's operations and activities ($750,000), the state's five rural Regional Councils at $3,000,000 ($600,000 per Council), as well as competitive grant projects awards that focus on **rural entrepreneurship development, rural health care, and rural infrastructure** projects. Rural entrepreneurship was expanded under House Bill 695 from 2023 to include workforce development, cooperative development, and agricultural development. Additionally, RMPIF supports the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF). MAERDAF provides capacity building grant funds to rural nonprofit service providers and community colleges. Refer to the FY2025 MAERDAF Annual Report for a list of MAERDAF grant projects funded by RMPIF. Due to the high demand in RMPIF grant applications, the Grant Review Board approved an additional allocation of $106,927 from MAERDAF to RMPIF for a total of $2,367,451 in grant awards In FY2025, the RMPIF program received 88 applications totaling $13,460,262 in requests. Of these requests, 34 grants totaling $2,367,451 were awarded.

## GRANT DECISIONS

The Rural Maryland Council serves as the administrative agency in receiving the applications and disbursing the funds. Grant award determinations are made by the independent MAERDAF Grant Review Board set by law and consisting of the Secretaries (or their designee) of the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Health, Housing and Community Development, and Natural Resources, as well as the Chair (or the designee) of the Rural Maryland Council. Decisions by the MAERDAF Grant Review Board are final and binding. Fiscal Year 2024 Grant Review Board Members were **Mindie Burgoyne**, Senior Regional Business Development Representative, Commerce; **Karen Fedor**, Senior Agricultural Marketing Specialist, Maryland Department of Agriculture, **Dan Rider**, Forest Stewardship & Utilization Program Manager, Maryland Department of Natural Resource Forest Service, **Sara Seitz**, Director, State Office of Rural Health, Maryland Department of Health, **Dona Sorce**, Project Manager, Division of Neighborhood Revitalization, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, **Joyce Bowlsbey**, RMC Board Chair Designee. **Charlotte Davis** serves as the MAERDAF Coordinator and the Rural Maryland Council Executive Director.

## RMPIF FY2025 AWARDS AT-A-GLANCE BY FOCUS AREA

| Focus Area | Grants Awarded | Amount Awarded | Amount Moved |
|---|---|---|---|
| Entrepreneurship | 11 | $817,542 | |
| Infrastructure | 6 | $739,621 | |
| Rural Health | 17 | $810,288 | |
| **Total:** | **34** | **$2,367,451** | **$106,972 moved from MAERDAF** |

## RMPIF FY2025 AWARDS AT-A-GLANCE BY REGION

| Focus Area | Grants Awarded | Amount Awarded | Details |
|---|---|---|---|
| Western | 11 | $880,028 | |
| Southern | 7 | $300,500 | |
| North East | 2 | $116,261 | |
| Eastern Shore | 9 | $789,730 | |
| Central | 3 | $155,932 | -Chesapeake Flower Exchange (serving statewide)<br>-Maryland Rural Water Association (serving statewide)<br>-Partners in Care, Inc (serving Eastern Shore and Western) |
| Baltimore City | 2 | $125,000 | -Family & Children's Services of Central MD (serving North East)<br>-University of Maryland, School of Medicine (serving Eastern Shore) |
| **Total:** | **34** | **$2,367,451** | **$106,972 moved from MAERDAF** |

### RMPIF INFRASTRUCTURE: 6 GRANTS = $739,621

| Awardee | Total Award |
|---|---|
| Easton Day Care Center, Inc dba Critchlow Adkins Children's Centers | $300,000 |
| Town of Millington | $100,000 |
| Meritus Healthcare Foundation | $199,596 |
| St. Mary's Nursing Center | $80,000 |
| Town of Williamsport | $42,525 |
| Washington County Department of Business Development | $17,500 |

### RMPIF RURAL HEALTH: 17 GRANTS = $810,288

| Awardee | Total Award |
|---|---|
| Bay Community Support Services, Inc. | $50,000 |
| Caring Carroll Inc. | $45,000 |
| Channel Marker, Inc. | $50,000 |
| Chesapeake Housing Mission Inc. | $22,500 |
| Coalition for a Healthier Frederick County | $74,202 |
| Family & Children's Services of Central Maryland dba Springboard Community Services | $50,000 |
| For All Seasons, Inc. | $45,000 |
| Fort Ritchie Community Center, Inc. | $34,000 |
| Friends Aware, Inc. | $30,000 |
| Habitat For Humanity of Wicomico County, Inc. | $131,795 |
| Hospice of Chesapeake | $75,000 |
| Ivy and Pearls of Southern Maryland Community Charities, Inc. | $8,500 |
| Partners In Care Maryland, Inc. | $37,500 |
| Salisbury Fire Department SWIFT | $13,791 |
| The Jude House | $28,000 |
| University of Maryland School of Medicine | $75,000 |
| Westminster Rescue Mission | $40,000 |

### RMPIF ENTREPRENEURSHIP (INCLUDES WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT, AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT): 11 GRANTS = $817,542

| Awardee | Total Award |
|---|---|
| Chesapeake Flower Exchange | $55,432 |
| Allegany College of Maryland | $250,000 |
| Asian American Center of Frederick | $27,580 |
| Cecil College | $66,261 |
| Frostburg State University - Office of Regional Development & Engagement | $119,625 |
| Maryland Rural Water Association | $63,000 |
| Shore Legal Access | $89,344 |
| Stella's Girls Inc. | $30,000 |
| The Benedictine School for Exceptional Children Foundation Incorporated | $37,300 |
| The Patuxent Partnership | $29,000 |
| Vehicles for Change, Inc. | $50,000 |

## RMPIF ENTREPRENEURSHIP (COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT) FOCUS AREA

### Chesapeake Flower Exchange

**Amount Awarded: $55,432**

***Project Name:*** *Growing a Rural Maryland Flower Cooperative*

***Project Summary:*** Chesapeake Flower Exchange's mission is to provide customers with high-quality, fresh, local flowers while supporting small farms. Through collaboration, its 11 member farms offer a consistent supply, simplified ordering, and education on the benefits of local flowers, from reducing environmental impact to strengthening the local economy. This project focuses on expanding wholesale sales, launching retail sales, educating the community, and building a strong business foundation. A key component of the grant supported hiring a Market Manager; while the right candidate was identified, she was not able to begin until April 2025, leaving unspent funds available for current use. A one-year extension has been approved to allow the Exchange to complete the project, with the final report due July 31, 2026. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, is being expended to support salaries and wages for the Market Manager; travel for customer delivery and delivery van maintenance and repairs; registration and travel to the Rooted Farmers Conference; member trainings and support, promotional materials, and administrative supplies; consultant services for insurance, accounting, and bookkeeping; and the Maryland SDAT Annual Filing Fee.*

## RMPIF ENTREPRENEURSHIP (WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT) FOCUS AREA

### Allegany College of Maryland

**Amount Awarded: $250,000**

***Project Name:*** *Clearing the Air: Ventilating Safety and Efficiency of Workforce Development and Makerspace at WMW*

***Project Summary:*** Allegany College of Maryland (ACM), the community's college serving Western Maryland and the surrounding region, is a leader in education, workforce development, and training. Its Western Maryland Works (WMW) Training Center and Makerspace is a 33,000-square-foot facility equipped with over $5 million in state-of-the-art technology. This project focuses on upgrading the ventilation and dust collection systems in the WMW welding lab and woodshop to create safer, healthier, and more productive training areas for nearly 600 students over the coming years. Due to changes in the Appalachian Regional Commission match timeline, a six-month extension has been approved, with the project now scheduled for completion by December 31, 2025, and the final report due January 31, 2026. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, is being expended to support the installation of the new ventilation system and dust collection system at Allegany College of Maryland's Western Maryland Works, located at 37 Lane Avenue, La Vale, Maryland.*

### Asian American Center of Frederick

**Amount Awarded: $27,580**

***Project Name:*** *The Achieving Tri-County Community Health Workforce Initiative Phase II*

***Project Summary:*** The Asian American Center of Frederick (AACF) led Phase II of the Achieving Tri-County Community Health Workforce Initiative to address rural healthcare workforce shortages in Frederick, Washington, and Carroll Counties. The initiative expanded access to training and apprenticeships for underserved populations, strengthened healthcare delivery, and created economic opportunities. A key element included engaging AmeriCorps VISTA members as community outreach workers, who identified population needs, connected individuals to vital services, and increased community engagement. During the grant period, more than 133 individuals participated, with 94% completing the Community Health Worker program to earn Maryland Department of Health certification. Many graduates secured employment, advanced into apprenticeships, or pursued additional training. The initiative also launched a Career Readiness/Pre-Apprenticeship program, expanded employer partnerships, and reached new rural populations through outreach and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. The national elimination of the AmeriCorps program significantly impacted the project, as much of its success relied on two AmeriCorps members who had to end their service. To sustain support, AACF hired a full-time case manager to assist workforce development participants, a role that will continue beyond the project period. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, supported stipends for the AmeriCorps VISTA members and a Project Coordinator position.*

### Cecil College

**Amount Awarded: $66,261**

***Project Name:*** *Spark the Future: Bridging camps and certification programs to unlock careers in renewable energy*

***Project Summary:*** Cecil College provides a supportive learning environment focused on innovation, student success, and workforce development. This project supports Spark the Future programming, which includes Hybrid and Electrical Vehicles Automotive

Service Excellence (ASE) L3 training, an Alternative Energy Summer Camp, and an entry-level Solar Technician Training program. Outcomes are expected to include at least 10 youth completing the summer camp, 8 students completing the EV module, and 15 students completing the solar installer program. Implementation has faced delays due to late delivery of the EV Trainer/Simulator, the departure of the solar program instructor, and low enrollment in the camp despite extensive outreach. To address these challenges and ensure success, Cecil College has been approved for a one-year extension, with the final report due January 31, 2026. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, is being expended to purchase equipment for the Spark the Future program, including one ASE L3 Hybrid and Electric Vehicle trainer/simulator and textbooks; educational kits and solar pumped hydroponic gardens for the Alternative Energy Summer Camp; and one solar panel and mount, a solar kit program, and textbooks for the Solar Technician Training program.*

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## Frostburg State University - Office of Regional Development & Engagement

**Amount Awarded: $119,625**
***Project Name:*** *FOREI Outdoor Entrepreneurs Initiative*

***Project Summary:*** The Frostburg Outdoor Recreation Economy Institute (FOREI) supports rural entrepreneurship and innovation through outdoor recreation initiatives, in partnership with Frostburg State University's Center for the Advancement of Natural and Outdoor Experiences (FSU CANOE) and other departments. The project fosters an entrepreneurial culture by offering training, networking, education, technical services, and outdoor experiences to strengthen the outdoor rrecreation business ecosystem in western Maryland. Due to unforeseen challenges with the original proposal, FOREI requested and received a project amendment, which delayed access to funds until February 2025. Since then, significant progress has been made, and with a six-month extension approved, the project is on track for completion by the end of 2025, with the final report due January 31, 2026. *The RMPIF award, along with matching funds, is supporting salary and fringe benefits for the FOREI Executive Director, Program Coordinator, and interns; materials and supplies for office construction, renovations, and upfitting for conferencing and webinar capabilities; consulting and technical services to support entrepreneur programming, direct support, and technical workshops; event expenses; marketing; and indirect costs.*

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## Maryland Rural Water Association

**Amount Awarded: $63,000**
***Project Name:*** *MRWA Apprenticehip Development Grant*

***Project Summary:*** The Maryland Rural Water Association (MRWA) improves quality of life in rural Maryland by supporting members in providing safe drinking water and proper wastewater treatment. MRWA advanced the National Rural Water Apprenticeship Program, a two-year pathway combining coursework and hands-on training leading to Maryland Department of the Environment certification. Funding covered Related Technical Instruction for 10 apprentices, two more than planned, helping rural facilities hire and train future operators. A cross-media campaign generated over 905,000 impressions, leading to more than 50 contacts with prospective apprentices. Outreach in rural and underserved areas through job fairs, community events, and school presentations is building a stronger pipeline of skilled water and wastewater operators for the future. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, supported the related in-person and online apprenticeship coursework for up to eight apprentices, program advertising and marketing, and materials and supplies to administer the program.*

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## Shore Legal Access

**Amount Awarded: $89,344**
***Project Name:*** *Record Expungement Workforce Development Initiative*

***Project Summary:*** Shore Legal Access (SLA) provides free expungement services to help low-income individuals, particularly communities of color, remove barriers to employment and stability. During the reporting period, SLA reached more than 200 people through community events, town halls, and media campaigns, ultimately serving 243 clients and closing 263 cases. Of these, 134 clients (51%) had one or more charges expunged, benefiting nearly 200 people at the household level. The program also created workforce opportunities by hiring a Maryland Service Year member into full-time staff and supporting six paid interns. Alongside direct services, SLA continues to advocate for statewide reforms to expand and simplify access to expungement. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support salaries, wages, and fringe benefits for the Shore Legal Access legal team; two contract attorneys; five community partner stipends for hosting and assisting with outreach; and the development of a website knowledge base and video explainer.*

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## Stella's Girls Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $30,000**
***Project Name:*** *Youth Innovators Hub*

***Project Summary:*** Stella's Girls, Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to educating and empowering youth through leadership, academic excellence, and community service, expanded its Youth Apprenticeship Program across Southern Maryland and Frederick County through the Youth Innovators Hub. With a focus on African American boys and girls, the program addressed educational and professional gaps by creating increased apprenticeship opportunities for youth of color. Stipends were provided for 30 apprentices, helping to build a skilled workforce, stimulate local economic growth, and foster empowered community leaders for lasting impact. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support the stipends for these 30 apprentices.*

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### The Benedictine School for Exceptional Children Foundation Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $37,300**

***Project Name:*** *Providing Essential Transportation for Supported Employment*

***Project Summary:*** Benedictine Programs and Services supports children and adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities and autism in achieving their greatest potential. Grant funding was used to purchase a minivan to provide transportation to employment-related activities in Caroline, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot Counties, expanding opportunities for individuals to participate in and contribute to their communities. Benedictine purchased one van and, with matching funds, acquired a second. Together, the vehicles replaced vans with over 200,000 miles and now provide safe, reliable transportation for 16 individuals each week to job training or job-related activities. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support the purchase of one minivan.*

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### The Patuxent Partnership

**Amount Awarded: $29,000**

***Project Name:*** *SoMD 2030 Workforce Development*

***Project Summary:*** The Patuxent Partnership (TPP), a nonprofit that collaborates with government, industry, and academia on education and workforce development initiatives, leads the Southern Maryland (SoMD) 2030 Workforce Development program to strengthen the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) pipeline and expand career opportunities. On March 13, 2025, more than 700 students from 17 schools in St. Mary's, Calvert, and Charles Counties attended the 3rd annual SPARK! Student Career Awareness Fair at the University System of Maryland at the Southern Maryland Autonomous Research and Technology (SMART) Building. The fair featured 40 exhibitors, including Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Divisions, higher education institutions, healthcare providers, skilled trades, and local employers. Through hands-on exhibits and activities, students gained exposure to careers in STEM, finance, healthcare, and public service, while 24 volunteers helped connect students with industry professionals. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support the SPARK! Fair, including venue*

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### Vehicles for Change, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $50,000**

***Project Name:*** *Vehicles for Change- Salisbury Location*

***Project Summary:*** Vehicles for Change (VFC), founded in 1999 to address transportation barriers for low-income families, has awarded nearly 8,000 cars to families in Maryland and Virginia, impacting more than 26,000 lives. In 2015, VFC launched the Full Circle Auto Repair and Training Center, a paid internship and reentry program that equips justice-involved and underemployed individuals with marketable auto mechanic skills. With FY2025 RMC support, the Salisbury location trained 48 interns by June 30, 2025, with 39 completing the 12-week program (an 81% completion rate). Of these, 24 graduates secured unsubsidized automotive employment at starting wages of $18–$20 per hour. Graduates received uniforms, toolkits, and training materials, and were prepared for ASE Entry-Level Certifications through classroom, hands-on, and Virtual Reality (VR) instruction. More than $20,000 in stipends were distributed to reduce financial barriers, and participants trained 40 hours per week under the guidance of an instructor, case manager, and program director. Employer partnerships further supported mock interviews, job fairs, and placements, resulting in strong workforce outcomes and successful community reentry for rural Maryland residents. *The RMPIF award, along with matching funds, was expended to support 40 interns for training eight hours a day, five days a week, over a four-month period, and to purchase 40 basic tool kits, uniforms, books, and training materials for each intern.*

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## RMPIF INFRASTRUCTURE FOCUS AREA

### Easton Day Care Center, Inc dba Critchlow Adkins Children's Centers

**Amount Awarded: $300,000**

***Project Name:*** *Critchlow Adkins Children's Centers Cordova Site Childcare Expansion Project*

***Project Summary:*** Critchlow Adkins Children's Centers (CACC) provides quality, affordable childcare for more than 350 children through preschool, before- and after-school care, and summer programs across five Talbot County sites. CACC renovated and expanded its Chapel District Elementary School location, completing three new classrooms by June 2025. These purpose-built spaces replaced the use of the cafeteria, improved safety, and created dedicated environments for preschool and extended care. The expansion increased capacity from 45 to 80 children during the school year and added space for 80 more children in summer camp. Families on the waiting list were enrolled, and new staff were hired and trained to meet Maryland State Department of Education licensing and EXCELS Level 5 standards. This project directly addressed the region's childcare shortage and advanced the goals of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future by expanding access to high-quality early childhood education and care in a rural community. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, will be expended to support construction costs for two childcare rooms, one office, and one teacher workroom.*

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### Town of Millington

**Amount Awarded: $100,000**

***Project Name:*** *Millington Community Resource Center*

***Project Summary:*** Millington Elementary School, located at 172 Sassafras in Millington, Maryland, closed in 2017. Kent

County assumed ownership in 2019 and later transferred the 24-acre property, including the 36,277-square-foot building, to the Town of Millington in May 2022 for $1. The property has since been annexed into the Town and designated as both a Sustainable Community and a Priority Funding Area, and is now being transformed into the Millington Community Resource Center. Once complete, the Center is expected to serve 1,000 rresidents and surrounding community members by offering vital services such as a food pantry, daycare, library, resource center, and healthcare providers. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was utilized for the design and engineering of a new roof and fire suppression system.*

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### Meritus Healthcare Foundation

**Amount Awarded: $199,596**

***Project Name:*** *Meritus School of Osteopathic Medicine- Student Housing*

***Project Summary:*** Meritus Health, Western Maryland's largest healthcare provider, established the Meritus School of Osteopathic Medicine (MSOM) to address the critical shortage of physicians in rural Maryland. To support MSOM and its residency programs, Meritus Health launched Meritus Commons, a student housing project designed to include 340 apartments and amenities that ensure safety and foster community. In 2025, Meritus Health completed the first phase, consisting of three residential halls and a student clubhouse. In July, the inaugural class of students moved into the new housing, and by July 28, 2025, they officially began coursework, marking the start of a new chapter in medical education and advancing Meritus Health's mission to train the next generation of physicians for rural Maryland. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, supported the equipment costs for security hardware at Meritus Commons, including emergency call stations, security cameras, door access control hardware, and head-end network equipment.*

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### St. Mary's Nursing Center

**Amount Awarded: $80,000**

***Project Name:*** *St. Mary's Nursing Center - Backup Power Generator Replacement*

***Project Summary:*** St. Mary's Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, a 160-bed facility in St. Mary's County, provides long-term care, short-term rehabilitation, and respite services. The Center has frequently experienced weather-related power outages and has relied on an 18-year-old backup generator to power essential functions, including lighting, elevators, and life-supporting medical equipment. This project will replace the outdated generator to ensure uninterrupted care for residents. A six-month extension has been approved due to delays in equipment delivery, with project completion anticipated in fall 2025 and the final report is due January 31, 2026. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, is being expended to support the purchase and installation of a generator.*

### Washington County Department of Business Development

**Amount Awarded: $17,500**

***Project Name:*** *Rehabilitation of Historic Miller Lumber Building and Cline House (Phase I – Cline House)*

***Project Summary:*** In partnership with the National Park Service (NPS) and the Maryland Economic Development Corporation, Washington County undertook the rehabilitation of the historic Cline House, located at the Chesapeake and Ohio National Historic Park headquarters in Williamsport, Maryland. Once restored, the Cline House will provide temporary housing for 4 to 5 NPS seasonal employees, allowing them to live near the Park and better support its operations. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, support the rehabilitation of the Cline House, including architecture and interior design as well as structural, mechanical, plumbing, and electrical work.*

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## RMPIF RURAL HEALTH FOCUS AREA

### Bay Community Support Services, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $50,000**

***Project Name:*** *Program support of new managerial position due to unfunded shift in state mandated billing process*

***Project Summary:*** Bay Community Support Services (Bay-CSS) is a nonprofit providing customized care to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Maryland Long-term Services and Support System (LTSS), a new participant-centered system for service and case management, supported the salary of a dedicated LTSS Manager to implement the system. This position has streamlined billing processes, corrected Person-Centered Plans (PCPs), resolved pending claims, and reduced flagged entries, resulting in fewer exceptions, quicker payments, and less staff time spent on rework. Since the grant's inception, Bay-CSS has recovered over $2 million in receivables previously held up in the LTSS program and anticipates eliminating all backlogged payments past 30 days by the end of the grant period, dramatically improving financial stability and service delivery. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, supported the salary and wages of the Long-term Services and Support System Manager position to implement the system.*

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### Caring Carroll, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $45,000**

***Project Name:*** *Caring Carroll Regional Senior Non-emergency Medical Transportation*

***Project Summary:*** Since 2007, Caring Carroll's mission has been to support a network of volunteers who meet the non-medical needs of adults age 60 and older living at home, providing services such as transportation, errands, friendly visits, social calls, and light housekeeping. During the grant period, Caring Carroll served 145 Care Receivers

(just shy of the 150 goal), registering 30 new participants while 39 transitioned to assisted living or passed away. As of June 30, 2025, 94 volunteers were active, completing 1,859 trips (including 70 out-of-county) and 2,925 total services. Volunteers contributed 2,688 hours and drove 31,286 miles, an estimated value of nearly $100,000, benefiting both Care Receivers and volunteers themselves. Beyond transportation, volunteer interventions proved lifesaving in at least two cases where seniors in distress were discovered during scheduled pickups. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support the salary and wages of the Program Service Coordinator and the Program Director to provide over 2,000 trips.*

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## Channel Marker, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $50,000**

***Project Name:*** *Channel Marker Behavioral Health Service Expansion*

***Project Summary:*** Founded in 1982, Channel Marker, Inc. fosters a healthy community by providing integrated care that promotes health and wellness. To expand services for intensive-level residential clients requiring 24/7 supervision, three full-time Residential Rehabilitation Specialists were hired, meeting retention goals and strengthening clinical services. The transport van, delivered June 10, 2025, has improved operational efficiency, safety, and comfort for staff and clients, including those with mobility challenges. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to hire the new employees to expand clinical services and to purchase a van to transport clients.*

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## Chesapeake Housing Mission, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $22,500**

***Project Name:*** *Chesapeake Housing Mission Healthcare Access Equality*

***Project Summary:*** Chesapeake Housing Mission (CHM) provides critical home repairs for low-income families in the Chesapeake Region. Through the Healthcare Access Equality Project, CHM completed 23 wheelchair ramp projects, directly benefiting 23 clients and 40 household members across Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester Counties. These ramps removed barriers to mobility, enabling safe access to medical care and improving independence. The results were significant: 60% of clients were over 65, 52% lived alone, and seven households were veteran families. More than 370 volunteers contributed 1,900 hours, and additional funding from partners leveraged the total project value to $55,147. Six-month follow-up surveys showed a 76% decrease in falls, 59% fewer Emergency Room (ER) visits, 73% fewer hospital admissions, and 100% of clients reporting improved outlooks on life. This project not only enhanced health and safety but also built stronger community connections. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support the costs of lumber, building materials, tools, and volunteer supplies for the home repairs.*

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## Coalition for a Healthier Frederick County

**Amount Awarded: $74,202**

***Project Name:*** *Support for Increasing Health Equity through Community Health Assessment, Planning & Collaboration*

***Project Summary:*** The Coalition for a Healthier Frederick County unites more than 200 partners to advance health equity, managing the county's Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) and Local Health Improvement Plan (LHIP). With this project, the Coalition expanded engagement, hired staff, and completed the 2025 CHNA using the Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) 2.0 process. Community input included 2,441 survey responses, targeted focus groups, and a public session with 160 participants. Four priorities were selected for the 2025–2028 Local Health Improvement Plan cycle: affordable healthy food, affordable housing, mental health awareness and stigma reduction, and institutional/systemic racism. New partnerships are already driving initiatives such as expanding Veggie Van access to produce, developing affordable housing units, and planning Adult Mental Health First Aid trainings, advancing health equity for rural and underserved residents. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support salaries, wages, and fringe for additional staff to expand capacity; promotional supplies and food services for events; a communications and marketing consultant; and three workgroups focused on adverse childhood experiences, mental health, and Type 2 diabetes.*

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## Family & Children's Services of Central Maryland dba Springboard Community Services

**Amount Awarded: $50,000**

***Project Name:*** *Springboard Community Services Behavioral Health Services Expansion*

***Project Summary:*** Springboard Community Services (SCS), whose mission is to transform lives by fostering self-confidence, resilience, and hope, completed phase two renovations of its Family Support Center at West End Place in Westminster, Carroll County. The project expanded behavioral health services for youth by converting space formerly used for adult day care into a counseling and intervention center, creating six new counseling offices and two group activity spaces. With this additional capacity, 180 new clients can be served, 7,200 individuals reached, and 144 group sessions held annually. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support the construction costs of six counseling offices and two group activity spaces.*

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## For All Seasons, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $45,000**

***Project Name:*** *Expanding Mental Health Access in Dorchester and Kent Counties*

***Project Summary:*** For All Seasons, Inc., a nonprofit behavioral health and rape crisis center serving five Maryland counties, provides trauma-certified mental health and victim support services through therapy, advocacy, education, and psychiatric care. The organization expanded its footprint in Kent and Dorchester Counties to improve access for rural and underserved residents. During the grant period, essential renovations were completed at both sites, including flooring, painting, electrical upgrades, safety installations, and technology infrastructure. In Chestertown, the new office opened in March 2025 with Open Access appointments, providing 27 intake sessions between March and June and hiring a new clinician to meet demand. In Cambridge, a renovated site is ready to launch pending final licensure. Despite funding limitations, the investment enabled For All Seasons to open in Chestertown and prepare Cambridge for service, advancing its *Bringing Mental Health to Main Street* initiative to expand access and visibility of behavioral health care in rural communities. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support the expansion project, including salaries, wages, and fringe benefits for the Project Manager, Chief Operating Officer, and Director of Administration; office leases; office supplies and furniture; IT equipment and hardware, telephone services, printe and photocopier lease, projector and display, and security cameras; moving costs, cleaning services, HVAC service, utilities, and internet services; and safety and compliance inspections.*

## Fort Ritchie Community Center, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $34,000**

***Project Name:*** *Rural Health Initiative 4.0*

***Project Summary:*** The Fort Ritchie Community Center (FRCC) serves rural residents in Washington and Frederick Counties and, through its Rural Health Initiative 4.0, works to improve health equity, expand access to screenings and education, increase food availability, and promote physical fitness for all ages. During the grant period, FRCC hosted community forums with partners such as the University of Maryland, Washington County Parks & Recreation, and local homeschool groups to gather input, partnered with health coalitions to support community health assessments, and engaged county and state leaders on rural health needs. The Center also conducted four surveys to guide programming and launched a four-week women's wellness program serving 30 participants. In total, FRCC provided 200 health screenings, 300 blood pressure and diabetes checks, hosted a health fair with 17 agencies and 150 attendees, and offered four mental health seminars. It further operated 20 food banks serving 50 families, delivered eight nutrition and cooking sessions, and expanded fitness opportunities through free training, classes, passes, and 53 youth recreation sessions—improving health, nutrition, and wellness access for hundreds of rural residents. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, supported the salary, wages, and fringe benefits of the Rural Health Coordinator; travel costs for the Coordinator to attend meetings and educational events; promotions and marketing materials; and supplies for events and participation incentive prizes.*

## Friends Aware, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $30,000**

***Project Name:*** *Friends Aware ADA Handicap Compliant Van*

***Project Summary:*** Friends Aware, Inc. (FAI), a nonprofit in Allegany County, provides people with diverse abilities the opportunities and support to live their best lives as valued members of the community. In addition to operating 13 group homes, FAI offers social, occupational, and residential opportunities through its Meaningful Day Services (MDS), which help individuals build skills, pursue employment, and participate fully in community life. Transportation is essential to this mission, as handicap-accessible vans enable staff to provide daily transport for individuals who are not ambulatory, ensuring access to medical appointments, work, and community activities. FAI purchased a Ford Transit 350 ADA-compliant van, replacing an aging vehicle at one of its residential housing facilities. The new van now assists two individuals in wheelchairs with safe, reliable transportation, strengthening FAI's ability to deliver vital services and expand community engagement for individuals with disabilities. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, supported the purchase of a new 2024 Ford Transit T350 Passenger Van with full conversion and additional equipment for two wheelchairs with security tie downs, and three ambulatory passenger seats.*

## Habitat For Humanity Of Wicomico County, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $131,795**

***Project Name:*** *Safe Homes, Healthy Seniors*

***Project Summary:*** Habitat for Humanity of Wicomico County's Safe Homes, Healthy Seniors project serves rural Wicomico and Somerset counties by providing critical home repairs of up to $30,000 per household to support safe and healthy living as a key social determinant of health. The project successfully served 28 low-income seniors, exceeding initial plans, with a total investment of $435,802.62, including $131,795 from the Rural Maryland RMPIF and $541,991.72 in matching funds, and an estimated $2.24 million in healthcare system savings. Despite challenges such as reduced individual giving and staff housing insecurity, the initiative engaged 23 local vendors, strengthened financial tracking, and demonstrated strong collaborative problem-solving. Future efforts will focus on more frequent partner meetings, improved grant reporting, and securing additional flexible funding to sustain the program. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, supported the construction costs for the 28 critical home repair projects.*

## Hospice of the Chesapeake Foundation

**Amount Awarded: $75,000**

***Project Name:*** *Addressing Dementia in Rural Communities: Dignity, Care, and Support for Patients and Caregivers*

***Project Summary:*** Hospice of the Chesapeake Foundation (HOC) advanced its *Addressing Dementia: Dignity, Care, and Support for Patients and Caregivers* initiative to expand evidence-based dementia care for county residents, including in rural areas. During the grant period, HOC reached 1,255 individuals through therapies such as robotic pets, integrative arts, Dementia LIVE! training, and enhanced staff and volunteer skills. The program strengthened care navigation, expanded respite and caregiver supports, and partnered with health and aging experts to uphold high standards of care. These efforts improved access, safety, and quality of life for dementia patients and caregivers, especially in underserved communities. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, supported salaries and wages for the Care Navigation team; consultant fees to help develop and evaluate programming; patient supports including clinical, medical, and respite care; and caregiver training, education, and non-medical program support.*

## Ivy and Pearls of Southern Maryland Community Charities, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $8,500**

***Project Name:*** *Addressing Mental Health and Chronic Disease Disparities in Minority Communities*

***Project Summary:*** Ivy and Pearls of Southern Maryland Community Charities, Inc. (IPSMCC) supports Charles and St. Mary's County communities through educational, charitable, financial, cultural, and health-focused initiatives. This project addressed mental health and chronic disease disparities in minority communities by raising awareness, reducing food insecurity, and promoting wellness. IPSMCC hosted a Mental Health Town Hall, a Community Health and Wellness Fair, and partnered with schools and organizations to sponsor programming, reaching more than 4,000 residents through 18 events. A new community hub was established in Waldorf, MD, and despite funding challenges, the organization implemented a sponsorship strategy that secured multi-year support. Project strengths included strong community partnerships, culturally competent care, and a focus on prevention and early intervention, with future goals centered on expanding programming, improving access to services, and deepening community connections. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support consultant services (including panelist fees, music services, program organization, and technology assistance); food insecurity initiatives such as catering for events, holiday baskets, and food assistance to local schools; three venue rentals; materials and supplies; marketing and event promotion; and travel expenses for consultants, speakers, and program participants.*

## Partners In Care Maryland, Inc.

**Amount Awarded: $37,500**

***Project Name:*** *Ride Partners*

***Project Summary:*** For over 30 years, Partners In Care Maryland, Inc. (PIC) has empowered older adults to age in place with dignity through volunteer-driven programs including transportation, home maintenance, service navigation, and social engagement. Serving more than 2,500 members across six counties, many in rural areas and at or below the poverty level, PIC's Ride Partners Program addresses critical transportation needs by ensuring seniors can access medical appointments, groceries, and social activities. This project aimed to expand coordination and capacity to meet the growing demand. By June 30, 2025, Ride Partners volunteers provided 5,859 rides (just 22 short of the FY25 goal of 5,881), logged 6,697 volunteer hours, and drove 86,942 miles. Membership remained stable at 2,583, narrowly missing the 5 percent growth target but demonstrating strong retention at a time when many organizations are experiencing declines. PIC successfully met its goal of a 95 percent fulfillment rate for ride requests, ensuring seniors' needs were met. While the target driver-to-rider ratio of 1:2 was not achieved (206 drivers to 326 riders), PIC continued recruiting new drivers and still maintained its strong fulfillment rate. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, will be expended to support the salary, wages, and fringe benefits of seven full-time staff for program management for Partners In Care's four sites serving Frederick, Caroline, Talbot, and Anne Arundel Counties.*

## Salisbury Fire Department SWIFT

**Amount Awarded: $13,791**

***Project Name:*** *RapidTest and Treat Response: On-Scene Diagnostics for Efficient Emergency Care to Prevent ED Visits*

***Project Summary:*** The Salisbury Fire Department is committed to protecting community health and safety, including through its Minor Definitive Care Now (MDCN) program, a nurse practitioner-led community paramedicine initiative that delivers non-urgent medical care directly to patients' homes. To expand MDCN's diagnostic capacity, the project focused on acquiring advanced portable laboratory devices (i-STAT) to provide immediate lab results, reducing wait times of four or more hours. The department has purchased an i-STAT handheld blood analyzer and is completing training and procurement steps to place the device into service. In partnership with the local hospital, MDCN will purchase test cartridges in bulk at a lower cost, ensuring sustainability and long-term community benefit. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support the purchase of an i-STAT handheld blood analyzer and training for the Medical Director and Team to use the device.*

## The Jude House

**Amount Awarded: $28,000**

***Project Name:*** *Behavioral Health Transportation*

***Project Summary:*** The Jude House provides evidence-based treatment and services to support long-term recovery for individuals with substance use disorder. The organization updated its fleet by purchasing three vehicles, ensuring that clients with physical disabilities can fully access treatment, healthcare, and supportive services. This investment expands equitable access to care and strengthens the Jude House's ability to support successful reentry and recovery for patients across Maryland communities. As of June 30, 2025, the Jude House acquired three SUVs that are used daily to transport more than 40 residential patients, including those with limited mobility and individuals transitioning to recovery residences. Since the award, an estimated 110 patients have been served, with over 1,300 documented trips to medical, legal, therapeutic, and recovery-related appointments. Reliable transportation has enabled more than 100 patients in the past year to access comprehensive supportive services such as healthcare, peer support, legal assistance, and job readiness programs. The project also strengthened collaboration with regional partners, including Veterans Court and healthcare providers, and the award was publicly acknowledged through flyers, newsletters, social media, and on-site recognition. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, will be expended to purchase a wheelchair-accessible transit van.*

## University of Maryland School of Medicine

**Amount Awarded: $75,000**

***Project Name:*** *Rural Health Equity and Access Longitudinal Elective (R-HEALE) - Core Physician Engagement*

***Project Summary:*** The Rural Health Equity and Access Longitudinal Elective (R-HEALE) at the University of Maryland School of Medicine addresses healthcare disparities in Maryland's rural communities, particularly on the Eastern Shore, by preparing medical students for rural health careers through immersive experiences that encourage graduates to practice in underserved areas. The Rural-MD Scholars Program has generated strong enthusiasm among students, Core Physicians, and partners, with five Core Physicians providing mentorship, shadowing opportunities, and leadership. Partners such as the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), Area Health Education Centers (AHEC), local health departments, and clinical sites have contributed research mentorship, shadowing placements, and curriculum support, recognizing the program's potential to address rural provider shortages. While challenges include physician aand staff time constraints, long-term pipeline outcomes, and potential funding cuts to partner organizations, the program is gaining momentum, building cross-sector partnerships, and offering a promising model to expand rural healthcare capacity. The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support stipends for five R-HEALE Core Physicians.

## Westminster Rescue Mission

**Amount Awarded: $40,000**

***Project Name:*** *Addiction Healing Center: Expanding Access to Services for Better Health*

***Project Summary:*** The Westminster Rescue Mission provides clinical, physical, and spiritual resources to heal the addicted and feed the hungry through its accredited Addiction Healing Center and Mission Food Program. The Addiction Healing Center expanded access to holistic substance use disorder treatment for low-income and uninsured individuals, particularly those in rural communities, with project funding supporting case management, workforce development, and transportation services to help clients enter and sustain recovery. Through this initiative, 98 individuals received integrated treatment and wraparound supports, with the program on track to serve 110 by fiscal year-end. All residential patients received case management and workforce development services, with 90% reporting satisfaction with case management and 100% of employment-eligible patients securing jobs upon completing treatment. Transportation was fully available, ensuring no patient missed services due to lack of access. Overall, the project reduced barriers to treatment, strengthened recovery supports, and improved long-term stability for rural and low-income Marylanders. *The RMPIF grant award, along with matching funds, was expended to support salaries, wages, and fringe benefits of a Case Manager, the Director of Workforce Development, and the Addiction Technician.*

# Rural Regional Councils

Maryland has five regional councils that serve as cooperative planning and economic development agencies for the state's rural regions. Each council brings together local government, business, and community leaders to identify regional priorities, coordinate planning efforts, and implement projects that promote economic growth, workforce development, and quality of life. They serve as vital conveners, providing a platform for collaboration across county lines and leveraging state and federal resources to support local needs.

The five rural regional councils are:

- **Tri-County Council for Western Maryland** (TCCWMD) – Serves Allegany, Garrett, and Washington Counties, with a focus on economic development, small business financing, and regional planning.
- **Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland** (TCCSMD) – Serves Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties, with initiatives in workforce development, transit, and regional agriculture.
- **Upper Shore Regional Council** (USRC) – Serves Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's Counties, supporting agriculture, workforce education, small business, and transportation initiatives.
- **Mid-Shore Regional Council** (MSRC) – Serves Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties, with programs in entrepreneurship, workforce training, and regional planning.
- **Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland** (TCCLES) – Serves Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester Counties, focusing on workforce development, economic growth, infrastructure, transit, and regional planning.

Per Statute, one-third of the RMPIF fund is distributed to the State's five rural regional planning and development councils:

| Awardee | Total Award |
|---|---|
| Mid-Shore Regional Council | $600,000 |
| Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore | $600,000 |
| Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland | $600,000 |
| Tri-County Council for Western Maryland | $600,000 |
| Upper Shore Regional Council | $600,000 |
| **Total:** | **$3,000,000** |

Students enrolled in the Somerset Technical High School Drive On Time program supported by the Rural Maryland School and the Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore.

## SUMMARY OF PROJECTS

### Mid-Shore Regional Council

**Amount Awarded: $600,000**

The Mid-Shore Regional Council (MSRC), a cooperative regional planning and development agency that serves Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties, utilized the RMPIF award to implement the following collaborative projects:

**Project 1. Capacity Building Coordinator**

- Capacity support provided with hours varying per week. Support increased in the spring/summer to accommodate increased activities including support of the Summer Career Enrichment Program (including project management and support; fundraising support; reporting and data tracking)

- Conducted research and developed recommendations on updated outcome tracking for MSRC programs and activities to demonstrate impact

- Overall return on investment (ROI) has been developed for MSRC projects and activities. An infographic was developed and disseminated to communicate the findings to key stakeholders. Additional monitoring and evaluation tools and techniques are in discussion.

- Reviewed and revised materials for communicating MSRC activities and impact to stakeholders including the informational packet and corresponding website content. Developed and integrated additional content into existing materials. Designed, developed, and updated program-specific materials as requested.

- Reduced time burden on Executive Director of tasks outlined above allowing for increased capacity for program development and delivery

**Project 2: Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center (ESEC):**

***Objective 1:*** Employment support of Executive Director to provide leadership and administrative management for the operation of ESEC and its programs and projects
*Reported Outcomes:*

- The F3 Tech Agbiotech Manufacturing Facility's opening is delayed until November 2025. However, two companies are confirmed to occupy lab spaces. A total of $1,625,000 was raised to complete the facility to include all five labs and equipment.
- Chesapeake Food Safety Training Program continues and is meeting all of its performance measurements as reported to the United States Department of Agriculture/ National Institute of Food and Agriculture.
- The Chesapeake Ag Innovation Center submitted another semi-annual report to the United States Department of Agriculture, exceeding the projected performance measurements and has widened its engagement with farmers and Value- Added Producers throughout Maryland, Delaware, Virginia and Washington, D.C.
- Chesapeake Harvest continues its efforts to develop the produce processing and aggregation facility, with zoning work underway at the planned location. An equipment inventory has been completed with quotes in hand, and a $500,000 USDA RFSI award toward the project is still pending.

***Objective 2:*** Technical Assistance – provide mentoring and coaching to entrepreneurs and startups
*Reported Outcomes:*

- ESEC through its programs, has mentored 53 entrepreneurs during the grant period.

***Objective 3:*** Plan, schedule, recruit, and execute Investor Pitch training programs
*Reported Outcomes:*

- Program delivered pitch training to 31 startups.

***Objective 4:*** Assist in planning and execution of Shore Hatchery investment competition at Salisbury University
*Reported Outcomes:*

- Shore Hatchery event held in May 2025.

***Objective 5:*** Assist in execution of Bernstein Competition at Salisbury University
*Reported Outcomes:*

- Competition was scheduled for Spring 2025. Salisbury University is making major changes to the competition, impact on ESEC's future participation is in question. ESEC judged poster competition.

***Objective 6:*** Manage and promote ESEC's portfolio of Revolving Loan Funds
*Reported Outcomes:*

- Received a total of three loan requests during the grant period, none of which were funded.

**Project 3: Shore Gourmet/Chesapeake Culinary Center**

***Objective 1:*** Improving value-added food product development and marketing in the region by building a food business network with other non-profits, businesses, and government entities
*Reported Outcomes:*

- Over 140,000 ready meals have been prepared and sold from the Shore Gourmet Market and Sho-Go Mobile Unit.
- Partnered with Eat Sprout to provide ready meals for Upper Shore Aging, now produced on the Eastern Shore. Seniors prefer these meals over the previous vendor, and the account exceeds $500,000.
- Chesapeake Culinary Center prepares meals for the Caroline County Senior Center weekly.
- Collaborating with Bay Mushrooms in Dorchester County to expand mushroom and substrate production, while engaging urban growers from Baltimore to tour and

replicate the model. UMES brought 50 small- to mid-size farmers to tour the facility, and a new Baltimore site in vacant commercial space is now partnering with Bay Mushrooms to begin production. The projected 30% increase in substrate production has already reached 50%, with three farmers purchasing substrate to launch mushroom cultivation in their own controlled environment agriculture operations.
- To sustain momentum in mushroom development, Shore Gourmet (SG) is building a network with CAIC, Bay Mushrooms, Falls Road Mushrooms (now operating in Baltimore), and Kennett Square producers to form a group modeled after SG's Blue Catfish network.
- Over 140,000 ready meals were produced and distributed across the Mid-Shore, employing cafeteria workers through the summer and supporting partnerships such as Meals Til Monday in Dorchester County, purchased a refrigerated vehicle (funded through RMC competitive grant program) to expand community meal delivery in 2025. Building on this success, Dorchester County Public Schools will increase USDA summer meal production for children, creating additional cafeteria jobs and boosting local food usage.
- University of Maryland Eastern Shore organized farmer tours at Bay Mushrooms to e explore not only mushroom cultivation but also value-added opportunities such as tinctures, dehydrated, and freeze-dried products. Verlina also provided tours for small entrepreneurs from Queen Anne's County on spirulina and mushrooms, highlighting additional value-added potential. With substrate equipment supplied through a TEDCO grant to SG, Bay Mushrooms has expanded mushroom production and sales, enhanced laboratory analysis, and enabled farmers to purchase substrate locally. As the program grows, a dedicated high-capacity substrate facility, estimated at $1 million, may be warranted to further reduce costs and support regional demand.

***Objective 2:*** Improving the development of agritourism and direct marketing opportunities in the region.
*Reported Outcomes:*
- Bay Mushrooms toured Verlina to learn about mushroom chamber design and have since created a spawning chamber at their farm. Small Business Development Centers from across the state toured the Chesapeake Culinary Center to see the incubator kitchen, ready meal production, and value-added products featured in Shore Gourmet Market. In addition, Bay Mushrooms hosted tours, seminars, and small-group trainings on mushroom production.

***Objective 3:*** Research the economic feasibility and agricultural viability of growing niche products to diversify local crops. Improving strategic planning and management among agriculture businesses in the region.
*Reported Outcomes:*
- Domestically grown functional mushrooms currently cannot meet U.S. demand, creating an opportunity for Maryland farmers—both rural and urban—to supply niche products locally. Bay Mushrooms test high-demand varieties such as cordyceps and has expanded value-added production, including tinctures, dehydrated, and freeze-dried products. With no local substrate facility and high shipping costs limiting small farmers, Bay Mushrooms has increased both substrate and spawning production, enabling new growers to enter the market while demonstrating the potential need for a larger, dedicated substrate facility as a value-added product to coffees, chocolates, and other food products. Lion's Mane has been researched and is being grown.
- Tilghman Island Seafood continues to provide year-round income for watermen and has outgrown its current facility, with four million pounds of Blue Catfish harvested. To further increase value and market opportunities, the company has expanded into value-added products such as smoked Blue Catfish, USDA-approved dips, fish cakes, and soon to launch, a USDA-approved Blue Catfish taco. In addition, the success of Blue Catfish has boosted sales of other seafood harvested by the company.

***Objective 4:*** Research the economic feasibility and agricultural viability of growing niche products to diversify local crops. Improving strategic planning and management among agriculture businesses in the region.
*Reported Outcomes:*
- At least five businesses and individuals have received assistance or consultation on business development and planning, including Evelin's (transitioning from a food truck to a restaurant in Greensboro, Maryland), Bay Mushrooms in Dorchester County, Verlina, Blades Orchards, and Tilghman Island Seafood.
- Since June 2024, the incubator kitchen has had 12 potential users, with four actively utilizing the space, along with 14 food trucks making use of the facility.
- The aggregation warehouse has been completed to put Savor Maryland boxes with local producers and as a centralized center for products and produce.
- Shore Gourmet Market has become a destination for producers, attracting businesses such as the Gluten Free Bakery, chocolate and spice makers, mocktail producers, and coffee roasters.

***Objective 5:*** Problem solving the extraction of the invasive blue catfish (BC) in the bay.
*Reported Outcomes:*
- **Broad Partnerships:** Collaborations with DNR, Maryland Department of Agriculture, Caroline County Public Schools, Coastal Conservation Association, Salisbury University, and others.
- **Nationwide Reach:** USDA-approved recipes have opened new markets, with products now distributed nationwide.
- **School Engagement:** Tastings promoted at public school nutrition exhibits; schools are eager to add Blue Catfish to menus.

- **Value-Added Products:** Orders for Blue Catfish cakes underway; smoked Blue Catfish products in production.
- **Industry Growth:** Tilghman Island Seafood developing its own fleet of boats and exploring a larger facility to meet demand.
- **Support for Watermen:** Guaranteed per-pound price ensures continued harvesting and provides stable income for local watermen.

***Objective 6:*** Tracking the number of new products developed, viable opportunities for niche products, number of meals produced with local products, pounds of produce processed for farm to school,and increased employment of all objectives.
*Reported Outcomes:*

- USDA ready meal programs have produced over 140,000 meals for children using local, seasonal produce. Ready meals from Shore Gourmet Market and the Sho-Go Mobile Unit incorporated local farmers and producers in nearly every meal. The initiative has also provided year-round employment for Caroline County Public Schools cafeteria workers, with Dorchester County cafeterias expanding their workforce in 2025. At the same time, ready meal production and ESEC's development of an aggregation/Individually Quick Frozen (IQF) facility has shifted priorities, resulting in a scale-back of produce grown exclusively for freezing.

**Project 4: Delmarva Index**

***Objective:*** Support and further development of the Delmarva Index website to include more functionality and updated resources.
*Reported Outcomes:*

- Engagement with stakeholders has remained a priority alongside the ongoing development and maintenance of data tools and dashboards. Key updates include the State Parks Dashboard (July 2024), Workforce Infographics (August 2024), Public Safety Dashboard (December 2024), and the Mid-Shore CEDS Dashboard (January 2025). Results from the July and December Business Sentiment Surveys (EDA Tools) have been incorporated into dashboards, with a new infographic created. The Economic Dashboard was updated in July 2025, and the Healthcare Facilities Map is scheduled for completion in July 2025. Mid-Shore Hires also continues to be actively maintained.

**Project 5: GIS Circuit Rider**

***Objective:*** Provide on-location GIS assistance to Mid-Shore counties and jurisdictions.
*Reported Outcomes:*

- The ESRGC has continued broad support for regional projects across the Eastern Shore. Highlights include work on the *Invasive Blue Catfish: From Problem to Plate* initiative, which showcases Maryland's response to the invasive species, and ongoing development of the GIS Circuit Rider Program Funding Impact Dashboard to highlight fiscal year 2025 projects. The team also supported multiple mapping and planning tools, including the Eastern Shore Chicken Houses and Operation Status Explorer, the Caroline County 911 and First Responder Viewer, The Hill Community StoryMap, the Frederick Douglass Driving Tour StoryMap, the Talbot County School Board and Election District Viewer, and the St. Michaels Explorer.

  In response to local requests, the ESRGC provided GIS training for the Town of Denton with a four hour in-person workshop at Salisbury University on March 20, developed a regional ditch dataset, and continued updating the web map viewers for Trappe and St. Michaels. Updates for Trappe included working with DBF, Inc. to create water infrastructure data supporting the Lead and Copper Rule Revisions (LCRR) with MDE, while in St. Michaels updates included mapping the town's boat slips. The ESRGC also applied a pretrained machine learning building footprint model to extract footprints for Caroline County and supplied data and maps to support the Town of Oxford's comprehensive plan update.

**Project 6: Agricultural Census Dashboard**

***Objective:*** Provide leaders and decision makers with data driven tools to visualize agricultural data on the Eastern Shore.
*Reported Outcomes:*

- The project advanced through a structured process that included stakeholder engagement, extensive data research and preparation, and the design of a dashboard prototype. The team evaluated dashboard functionality, implemented a fully operational platform using agriculture-related Census data, and conducted multiple stakeholder review sessions, incorporating feedback along the way. The scope of data to be included was finalized, and nine additional dashboard pages were implemented, including a highlights page and overview and trend pages for demographics, crops, livestock, and agricultural practices.

**Project 7: Delmarva Index Website Upgrade**

***Objective:*** Upgrade the Delmarva Index website to incorporate user input and committee f feedback to deliver a data-centric design and streamlined user experience..
*Reported Outcomes:*

- The project engaged stakeholders and developed visual mockups to communicate the new website design and functionality. A new backend was built within a content management system (CMS), and the approved mockup designs were fully implemented. As part of content development, 60 Delmarva Index resources were reviewed, with an "about" page created for each, and all resources were added into the Delmarva Index CMS.

**Project 8: Annie's Project**

***Objective 1:*** Conduct a farm tour visiting three farms in the region.
*Reported Outcomes:*
- 41 participants, photos, and press release.

***Objective 2***: Convene planning committee.
*Reported Outcomes:*
- Met with full planning committee on conference and program details.

***Objective 3:*** Conducted two winter workshops on recordkeeping and QuickBooks.
*Reported Outcomes:*
- One session was conducted on January 10, 2025, with 41 participants.

***Objective 4:*** Conduct Annie's Project.
*Reported Outcomes:*
- A total of 16 attendees, including 3 FSA borrowers, participated in the training. Reported outcomes included: 79% planning to change insurance policies, 60% planning to review property titles and lease agreements, 95% intending to write business and marketing plans, 97% planning to use computers to increase farm efficiency, 88% planning to check credit reports, 90% intending to prepare financial statements, 90% planning to update or create estate plans, and 90% aiming to improve communication and family relations.

***Objective 5:*** Administration
*Reported Outcomes:*
- Created marketing pieces.
- Communication with participants.
- Follow up with presenters to include thank you cards, evaluations, and class materials.

**Project 9: Summer Career Enrichment Program**

***Objective 1:*** Recruit and enroll 300 middle school students to participate in the program
*Reported Outcomes:*
- The program registered 377 students and enrolled 236. Outreach included the design of promotional flyers in three different languages and the delivery of three Zoom information sessions for school system personnel and parents. A database was developed to track enrollment and student activity, and three Canva presentations were created to support program engagement.

***Objective 2:*** Equip students with skills and knowledge to increase their awareness of cybersecurity, robotics, app development, and drone technology
*Reported Outcomes:*
- Students participated in team-based exercises across multiple tracks, including exploring cyberattacks in rural areas and the financial industry; creating films while learning about media roles, costume design, and special effects; practicing problem-solving through chess; troubleshooting and programming drones and robots; using gaming software to support decision-making on community issues; and incorporating artificial intelligence to develop innovative presentation designs..

***Objective 3:*** Reduce attrition from program.
*Reported Outcomes:*
- To support retention, attendance was tracked at all workshop trainings with a target of no less than 75% student attendance per session. Results by track were as follows:
  - Animation: 78%
  - App Development: 50%
  - Chess: 76%
  - Cyber: 64%
  - Drones: 71%
  - Media Arts: 89%
  - Presentation Design: 67%
  - Robotics: 71%

***Objective 4:*** Expose students to career paths in computer science, engineering, programming, cyber, robotics, aviation, media and video production, and project management .
*Reported Outcomes:*
- Students were introduced to diverse career opportunities in computer science, engineering, programming, cyber, robotics, aviation, media and video production, and project management. For each track, students researched and discussed more than five different career paths, including engineering, cyber, media and film design, computer science, and project management. In addition, students engaged with over 30 career professionals and guests representing small businesses, educators, technology professionals, elected officials, and nonprofit and community leaders.

***Objective 5:*** Program Evaluation
*Reported Outcomes:*
- Program evaluation included multiple measures to assess student knowledge and experience. At the end of each session, students completed tests to evaluate concepts learned, with the program goal of achieving an average score of 80% or above. Students also delivered presentations before guests, and performance was measured through applied activities such as participation in chess tournaments, film roles, group projects, and troubleshooting exercises. Feedback surveys highlighted student interest in more hands-on activities, outside breaks, opportunities to visit other classes, and tours of local businesses and nonprofits.

***Objective 6:*** Incorporate the Program *Introduction to Careers in Health Care (ITCH)* into the Summer Career Enrichment

Program (SCEP)
*Reported Outcomes:*

- The ITCH program was integrated into the Summer Career Enrichment Program with full administrative and promotional support. Activities included marketing and registration, design of enrollment and activity reports, and capturing video and photography. Evaluation and feedback were also provided to identify ways to make the program more engaging for participants.

**Project 10: Entrepreneurship Training Program**

***Objective 1:*** Recruit 45 businesses (15 from each county – Caroline, Talbot and Dorchester).
*Reported Outcomes:*

- The program aimed to recruit 45 established business owners (15 from each of Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot Counties) to participate. Each county was responsible for recruiting, interviewing, and selecting its cohort. Final participation included 15 business owners from Talbot County, 10 from Caroline County, and 14 from Dorchester County.

***Objective 2:*** Conduct 8-week training program, 1 session per week.
*Reported Outcomes:*

- Participants completed an eight-week training program covering topics such as building sustainable organizational infrastructure; leading people and planning for growth; marketing and selling B2G, B2B, and B2C; accounting, human resources, legal, taxes, and insurance; and preparing for capital and essential financial documentation. Training sessions were delivered by county as follows:
  - Talbot County: Tuesdays, February 4 – March 25
  - Caroline County: Tuesdays, April 15 – June 3
  - Dorchester County: Mondays, May 5 – June 23

***Objective 3:*** Companies completion of the program.
*Reported Outcomes:*

- As a capstone to the program, companies created business growth plans and were recognized at county-level certificate events celebrating their achievements. Graduations were held as follows:
  - Talbot County – April 8, with 14 graduates
  - Caroline County – June 9, with 8 graduates
  - Dorchester County – July 9, with 6 graduates

**Project 11: Regional Marketing**

***Objective 1:*** Promote government and business entities to a statewide audience.
*Reported Outcomes:*

- The Taste of the Eastern Shore is an annual showcase that brings together government leaders, legislators, and businesses to highlight the region's agricultural, seafood, and local products while promoting networking and economic development opportunities. To support this year's event, scheduled for February 13, 2025, staff worked with the Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore (TCCLES) to promote the event and assisted with organizational efforts as requested.

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## Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland

**Amount Awarded - $600,000**

The Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland (TCCLESMD), a cooperative regional planning and development agency that serves Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester Counties, will utilize the RMPIF award to implement the following collaborative projects:

**Project 1: Organization Name: Worcester County Office of Tourism and Economic Development - Worcester County STATT (Skilled Trades, Agriculture, Technology and Tourism**

Worcester Co. Skilled Trades, Agriculture, Technology, and Tourism (STATT) is a work-based learning experience that will provide high school students and recent graduates from Worcester County an opportunity to explore Skill Trades, Agriculture, Technology (STEM) or Tourism related careers via paid in-and-out of school internships for motivated students. STATT aims to support local employers in the skilled trades agriculture, technology, and tourism sectors of Worcester County's economy by sponsoring these students for subsidized employment positions. This program also includes a summer academics component for middle and highschool students to explore various aspects of these industries and get hands on expereinces.

*Goals and Outcomes:*

1. STATT Out-of-School Internship Program: Six interns were matched students with STATT employers for internships at no cost to the employer, with the intent of continuing

employment beyond the 160-hour internship.

2. Summer STATT Camp: Provide 12 hands-on summer camps to Worcester County 8th–12th graders with hands-on exposure to local skilled trades and technology businesses. Only 90% of participating students scored 80% or higher on their skills assessment at the end of their STATT Camp.
3. WCPS Afterschool Academies: Extended hands-on exploration of skilled trades and technology pathways throughout the school year in three 8-week sessions. Two out of three afterschool programs met their goal of 100% of students scoring 80% or higher, and the third was close at 92%.
4. Forestry Internship Program: Identified and placed a qualified Worcester County candidate for an internship with the Regional Forester and Programs Manager, ensuring a positive and rewarding career experience.

**Project 2: Lower Shore Workforce Alliance: Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)**

- 44 students across Somerset, Worcester, and Wicomico Counties gained summer work experiences through the SYEP, with enrollment remaining stable compared to last year (45 students). Each student received workplace readiness training and a work-based learning experience, resulting in 90 total services delivered. Training included c communication, time management, and professional behavior, with a combined 48 hours of classroom instruction provided across the three counties.
  - Worcester County: Students excelled in placements; one was hired full-time as a camp counselor, and another's contributions led to a request for continued employment.
  - Wicomico County: Two IT students continued work beyond the program; three students completed a second year and earned academic credit.
  - Somerset County: 19 students participated, with 84% completing successfully. All employers reported positive experiences, with 100% returning and two new worksites added. One employer retained their student after program completion.

Overall, the SYEP continues to deliver strong outcomes by combining classroom instruction with hands-on employment, ensuring both students and employers benefit while sustaining long-term workforce partnerships.

**Project 3: Somerset County Technical High School**

Somerset County Technical High School's strengths include strong Career and Technology Education (CTE) programming, dedicated staff, and an active Apprenticeship Maryland Program facilitator who has expanded business partnerships and student opportunities, with high achievement evident in SkillsUSA competitions and workplace experiences. Challenges remain with transportation barriers, uncertainty around summer school scheduling that reduced enrichment camp enrollment, and budget pressures from inflation and rising wages. These financial challenges have been addressed through early purchasing, vendor comparisons, and adjusted scheduling, while free Driver's Education has provided critical relief for low-income families and increased student employability.

Student growth opportunities included the following:

**Driver's Education**

- ***Goal:*** Provide 130 students with free access to Driver's Education.
- ***Outcome:*** Five cohorts were held; **130 students participated and 100% passed** the 30-hour course. High demand continues, with over 140 requests received.

**Student Apprenticeships/Internships**

- ***Goal:*** Place at least 5 students in apprenticeships with potential for employment.
- ***Outcome:*** **Two students completed formal apprenticeships** (maintenance and culinary), and **four additional students** are continuing apprenticeships through the summer. Each student is on track to complete their 450-hour apprenticeship experience by the end of the first quarter.

**SkillsUSA**

- ***Goal:*** Increase participation to 30 students and achieve placements in competitions.
- ***Outcome:*** **30 students participated.** At the state level, three gold medals and one bronze were earned; **three students advanced to nationals**. One placed seventh in carpentry nationally, and the robotics team placed 14th.

**Summer Enrichment Camps**

- ***Goal:*** Increase student participation in enrichment opportunities.
- ***Outcome:*** Although camp participation was low, student youth employment increased. Approximately **70 students were employed through the school system** between SYC and DORS programs.

**Project 4: Project Opportunity**

Project Opportunity is a free entrepreneurship training program for veterans, active duty, and reserve/guard personnel who wish to start a small business. Between Fall 2024 and Spring 2025, seven class cohorts were conducted across Baltimore, Harford, Southern Maryland, Prince George's, Montgomery, and Howard Counties. Across all cohorts, 89 volunteers contributed more than 153 hours of subject matter expert presentations, and 50 veterans participated as students. Instruction required a combined over 444 hours of preparation and delivery time, with each cohort completing a 30-hour class culminating in a Business Pitch Competition at Graduation.

The Project Opportunity website recorded 13,168 page views, 8,200 user engagements, and 6,700 total users. Traffic acquisition was led by direct sessions (1,670 sessions, 20,583 events) and organic search (1,358 sessions, 12,627 events), followed by referrals (847 sessions, 6,691 events), social media (189 sessions, 1,457 events), and email (20

sessions, 358 events). Overall search visibility reached 42,610 impressions, with "Project Opportunity" generating 2,053 impressions and 657 clicks, representing 87.72 percent of all organic clicks. Other top terms included Dapper Dog LLC, The Laundry Basket LLC, Jimmy Maldonado, and Jubilee Financial.

Program engagement also increased year over year, with Annual Business Pitch Competition applications rising from 23 in 2024 to 25 in 2025, and veteran and military spouse participation in professional development activities growing from 172 to 184.

**Project 5: Delmarva Makerspace**

This Maker Space provides Science, Technology, Environment, and Mathematics (STEM)- oriented education and training to youth and adults that included but was not limited to providing a mobile "makerspace" to introduce STEM Careers to K-12 during the school period; provided hands-on educational activities in STEM technologies during after school/summer periods; and, provided training to appropriate use as well as skill training on STEM technologies to adults.

Over the past year, Delmarva Makerspace has continued to face challenges with membership growth despite active outreach through social events, partnerships with VFW organizations, and regular participation at Third Fridays. Funding from the Rural Maryland Council allowed the organization to sustain its open hours and training courses at consistent levels for the third consecutive year, while maintaining visibility at 10 local events to raise public awareness. A key strength of the Makerspace remains its dedicated volunteers and board members, who manage open hours, training, and outreach, though recruiting new members continues to be the most pressing concern. A major positive development was the addition of a new metal shop, supported by a grant from the Community Foundation, which included upgraded electrical capacity, new equipment, and a training curriculum. Financially, the Makerspace faces challenges in keeping up with rising rent and the need for new technology, but it is addressing these through additional grant writing and community partnerships, with hopes that increased membership will help offset future costs.

**Project 6: Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative**

- Agricultural Census Dashboard: The ESRGC successfully delivered the Agricultural Census Dashboard within the grant period, providing leaders with a data-driven tool to visualize agricultural trends and opportunities on the Eastern Shore. The project included extensive stakeholder engagement, research on best practices, and careful review of census data to determine what was most relevant for the dashboard audience. A prototype focused on economic data was developed, reviewed with stakeholders, and refined based on feedback before expanding into nine pages covering highlights, demographics, crops, livestock, and agricultural practices. The completed dashboard was presented to the Mid-Shore Regional Council and the Tri-County Council in June 2025, with additional presentations scheduled at statewide and regional conferences. The dashboard is publicly available through the Delmarva Index Agricultural Census Dashboard page: https://delmarvaindex.org/resources/agricultural-census-dashboard.

- Circuit Rider: The ESRGC's GIS Circuit Rider completed multiple mapping and data projects, including web map viewers for Crisfield, Princess Anne, and the Salisbury-Wicomico MPO, as well as a stable web viewer for Somerset County. Regional imagery services were developed with three inch and six inch mosaics for Worcester County and the Lower Shore to support 911 dispatch, municipal planning, and internal projects. The Circuit Rider also supported Delmar and Willards with Sustainable Community data, delivered a four hour GIS training at Salisbury University, and presented the program to the Maryland Municipal League. All FY 2025 projects have been completed, and the GIS Circuit Rider Program Funding Impact Dashboard will be updated in FY 2026 to reflect these outcomes.

- Delmarva Index: Delmarva Index is an online platform that provides leaders, policymakers, and community members with access to regional data and visualization tools to support planning and decision-making. The following two projects were completed:
  - Updated the Delmarva Index website to include more functionality and updated resource by June 30, 2025, the ESRGC completed five of six Delmarva Index update tasks, with the final Health Facilities Map delayed due to late federal data release and scheduled for completion by July 2025. Updates included the Maryland Outdoor Recreation Dashboards (state and national park visitation and economic impact), Workforce Infographics (100+ updated for 13 counties and 127 municipalities), the Eastern Shore Economic Resiliency Toolkit (with 2024 Business Sentiment Survey data), the Public Safety Dashboard (with 2023 FBI NIBRS data), and the Economic Dashboard (updated May 2025). These updates ensure the Delmarva Index continues to provide current, reliable data resources to stakeholders. ESRGC also participated in Delmarva Index committee meetings in March and November 2024.

- o Upgraded the Delmarva Index website to incorporate user input and committee feedback to deliver a data-centric design and streamlined user experience. The ESRGC engaged stakeholders throughout the project, beginning with design mockups to gather feedback before developing the website in a Payload content management system (CMS). All 60 existing Delmarva Index resources were reviewed, updated, and given dedicated about pages with images, descriptions, p partners, data sources, and related resources, then integrated into the CMS. The completed Delmarva Index website, presented to stakeholders in May 2025, is now live and accessible at https://delmarvaindex.org/.

**Project 7: Maintaining Active Citizens (MAC)**

MAC's Aging and Dementia Training Program provides the latest research and care strategies, with emphasis on Alzheimer's and dementia care inclusive of continuing education units for licensed professionals (social work and other related).

- MAC delivered monthly health and wellness programs for seniors, achieving a 2% increase in knowledge among an average of 43 participants. Outreach efforts led to a 74% increase in overall enrollment and an 81% increase in minority participation. All Care Provider Training Program participants reported improved knowledge and confidence in recognizing senior health issues. Key challenges include meeting rising demand with limited staff and space, underscoring the need for additional resources.

**Project 8: Project-Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore Administration and Marketing**

- ***Updated Regional Economic Development Guide:*** Completed a full-color, 36-page magazine-style publication available in both print and online formats. The guide highlights regional assets, with new features on the Patricia and Alan Guerrieri Technology Center at Wor-Wic Community College and the proposed School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

- ***Regional Promotion and Outreach Events:*** Represented the region with booth presence at the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) 2024 Summer Conference, the J. Millard Tawes Crab & Clam Bake, and the Maryland Municipal League (MML) 2025 Summer Conference. These events allowed direct interaction with hundreds of attendees, distribution of the Economic Development Guide, and promotion of the Lower Eastern Shore region.

- ***Taste of the Eastern Shore Legislative Event:*** Served as lead coordinator for the 2025 event in Annapolis. Responsibilities included event design and branding, vendor and sponsor coordination, guest list management, and logistics. Outreach included mailing over 250 invitations to state leadership, hand-delivering guides to all Maryland Delegates and Senators, and overseeing day-of setup, coordination, and cleanup.

- ***Digital Access to Services:*** Supported regional transit and workforce initiatives by serving as project manager and web developer for new websites for Shore Transit (ShoreTransit.org) and the Lower Shore Workforce Alliance - Lower Shore American Job Center (Lowershoreajc.org). Work included content migration, layout design, and ongoing technical support to enhance usability for rural residents.

- ***Creative and Communications Support:*** Provided ongoing support for the Tri-County Council and its divisions through website updates, brand design, photography, videography, press release development, project management, and print design.

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## Upper Shore Regional Council

**Amount Awarded - $600,000**

The Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC) serves Cecil, Queen Anne's, and Kent Counties. RRMPIF funds are strengthening small business growth, agricultural expansion, and workforce development across the region. Key initiatives include advancing the regional small business mentoring program, awarding Micro Ag-Grants to 30 agricultural enterprises, supporting oyster restoration efforts for commercial watermen, and promoting the Agricultural Equity Incentive Matching Fund. Workforce efforts emphasize agricultural career education for students, highlighted by Maryland Agriculture Day for 7th graders. Regional planning projects provide updated DataStory dashboards, GIS support, and transportation and housing studies. Grant funds also support administration, operations, and advocacy, including sponsorship of regional events.

In FY2025, the Upper Shore Regional Council completed the following projects:

1. **Project - Business Development, Retention, and Expansion:**
   - Created marketing pieces and conducted website updates for the new small business mentoring program.
   - Aided 16 agricultural businesses from Cecil, five from Kent and 14 from Queen Anne's, for a total of 34 for the region utilizing the Upper Shore Micro Ag-Grant program.
   - Supported small commercial watermen restoration of silt-covered oyster bars project by allowing oyster larvae to attach to clean shells to increase the oyster population.
   - Provided funding for Creator kits housed at Counties' libraries. The objective is to provide video/photo equipment needed for businesses to produce quality videos, photos, etc. to market their enterprises and grow their businesses.
   - Partnered to host a Cybersecurity in Agriculture Forum. It featured expert speakers, insightful discussions, and

networking opportunities focused on protecting our agricultural systems. Cybersecurity is critically important in protecting Maryland's food and agriculture industry.

- Support of Maryland 5 Star event at Fair Hill. As one of only two 5 Star events in the United States, and seventh worldwide, the prestigious 5 Star (CCI5*) designation is the pinnacle of the sport of Eventing, which is comprised of three phases, Dressage, Cross-Country and Show Jumping.
- Partnered with Washington College to showcase regional entrepreneurship at the 2025 Upper Shore STRTUP Roadshow. Aspiring entrepreneurs from Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties pitch their innovative business ideas for a chance to win significant cash prizes.
- Sponsored the 5th Annual Rooted in Our Community event at Cecil College. The primary purpose of this event is to educate the community about the significance of agriculture, dispel negative perceptions surrounding it, and enhance understanding of modern agricultural practices.

**2. Project - Address the Workforce Needs of the Upper Shore Region**

- Awarded $14,400 in Career Technology Education Scholarships to 121 students in need of equipment to complete their studies.
- Supported two successful Maryland Ag days in the spring of 2025: one in Cecil and one in Queen Anne's Counties for 7th graders.
- Assisted Cecil County Public Library to launch an upgraded Bookmobile bringing internet access and tech support to rural communities.

**3. Project - Regional Planning**

- Supported the ESRGC GIS Circuit Rider program assisting Kent County's review of building footprint data developed using a pretrained model for building footprints. This data is the first data update to the County in two decades.
- Continue to support neighboring Regional Councils to assist in extending the reach of the ESRGC program.
- Provided gap funding to the Town of Rock Hall and Kent County to help provide a shuttle during the tourism season.
- Attended and supported the Maryland Upper Shore Transportation meetings.
- Supported the Development of an ESRGC application (MART)that will provide an alternative workflow to producers that will streamline and enhance record keeping and will help compile information for state and federal reporting requirements.
- Assist the Town of Rock Hall with a feasibility study for marine trades training.

**4. Project - Upper Shore Regional Council Coordination and Advocacy**

- Provided administrative support and held meetings related to the USRC initiatives that Executive Board meetings, and meetings with economic development staff and pertinent partners.
- Fostered relationships with individual elected representatives to assist with regional matters.
- Engaged in legislative related events and delegation meetings during the legislative session.
- Actively attended and participated in Rural Maryland Council meetings and work.

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## Tri-County Council for Western Maryland

**Amount Award - $600,000**

The Tri-County Council for Western Maryland, Inc. (TCCWMD or TCC) operates as a regional planning and economic development agency focused on improving economic conditions in Maryland's Western Region (Allegany, Garrett, and Washington Counties). Through its Summit Financing Solutions program, TCCWMD manages loan funds that provide gap-financing and direct lending using federal, state, and local dollars. The organization was granted a six-month extension and has not yet submitted a final report, but RMPIF funding has already supported salaries and benefits for seven staff, continuity in financial management, professional development training, and office renovations at its Cumberland office. Funding continues to allow the operation and expansion of our lending programs which annually seems to eclipse the benchmarks we set at the beginning of the grant. In addition, resources are supporting technical assistance services for small businesses, marketing, and outreach through brochures and e-newsletters, and new equipment and software to strengthen operations. These investments position TCCWMD to enhance lending programs, sustain business development, and drive long-term economic growth in Western Maryland.

*Outcomes*

- The Council approved a total of 25 loans, of which three have yet to be disbursed. The total amount approved is $4.8 million which leveraged an additional $2.4 million. From these loans, 55 jobs will be created and 66 will be retained. Of the 25 loans approved, three are still waiting to be closed in the amount of $1.7 million.
- Seven of the loans were done under a special program designed to help businesses impacted by the severe flooding which occurred in May of 2025. These loans were completed with a quick turn-around, no application fee, no interest and with a cap of five years and $20,000. Jobs created or retained for these loans were not calculated as that was not a condition of the borrowing and did not impact the lending decision.
- The lending database for newsletters remains consistent at just over 110 individuals. Newsletters continue to be sent at least twice per month.

- The Technical Assistance Program received eight inquiries which resulted in three applications and a total request of $13,525 in professional services. To date, TCCWMD has paid $5,787 toward these services. Payments are made as services are rendered.
- Office Renovation: No renovations have been made under the 2025 grant, but a new copier was purchased for the agency after approval was obtained.
- Paid salaries for seven staff in support of economic development activities related to TCCWMD and Summit Development Corporation, including fringe benefits. During this grant period both and Executive Director and Finance Director were added as positions.
- Supported travel and training costs associated with professional development. Training included Abila, Portfol, and Sageworks. Both in person and virtual training were included.
- Provisions made for indirect costs relative to the Council's office and overhead, which included utilities, office maintenance, insurance, audit, supplies, postage, travel, and training. These indirect charges are calculated each month utilizing a third-party consultant for financial services.
- Technical Assistance was provided to six TCC loan clients totaling $20,749 in professional services.
- Funds from both FY 2024 and FY 2025 were utilized to provide a subgrant to the Maryland Broadband Cooperative to install 26 miles of fiber from Keyser's Ridge to LaVale, Maryland. The project was bid and awarded and should begin installation in the spring.
- The Council contracted with a consultant to provide a review of our lending pprograms including branding and marketing. Recommendations were made and will be followed up on in the future.
- An RFP (Request for Proposals) was issued to apply for a regional EPA Brownfields grant. The successful bidder (Montrose Environmental) will create and submit the application on behalf of TCC. Should TCC be awarded, Montrose will manage the $1.5 million grant for projects across the region.

## Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland

**Amount Awarded: $600,000**

The Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland (TCCSMD), a cooperative regional planning and economic development agency serving Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties, will utilize the RMPIF award to implement the following collaborative projects:

**Project 1: Workforce Programs**

- **Skillup® Southern Maryland** - Job seekers explored career pathways, view local job postings, register for free online learning, and receive workforce services. Employers searched for qualified candidates, post jobs, and received in-depth consulting to address hiring and training needs. Registered users increased by 8%. Completed courses increased by 10%. The average score will be at least 92%, exceeding the Metrix average of 91%.

| SkillUp Southern Maryland Training | Jun. 30, 2024 | Jun. 30, 2025 | Increase of: | Percentage Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Registered Users | 2,513 | 3,096 | 583 | 23.2% |
| Completed Courses | 18,682 | 21,647 | 2,965 | 15.9% |
| Average Score: (Metrix National Average 91%) | 92% | 92% | - | Remained unchanged |

- **JobSource Website Updates and Maintenance** – Entered a maintenance agreement with the vendor for southernmarylandjobsource.org; two updates to website capabilities were completed.

- **Workforce Team Professional Development** – Held a one-day staff retreat and six half-day leadership team sessions for team building, strategy development, and action plan implementation.

- **Discretionary Grants** – Contracted a consultant to identify and apply for funding. Two grants were awarded: an Employment Advancement Right Now (EARN) grant in mmanufacturing for a total of $150,000, no cash match ,and the Road to Careers grant for a total of $36,203 no cash match.

- **Workforce Branding and Outreach** - Contracted with a professional to assist with the branding of several programs through logo design and publication and enhance outreach strategies to saturate the community with newly branded programs and partnership opportunities.

- **The 14th Annual Regional Hiring Event** - Held on May 14, 2025, at the College of Southern Maryland campus in La Plata. As in past years, a Family Resource Fair was held in conjunction with the event, providing additional exposure to community resources and reinforcing our commitment to supporting families holistically, recognizing that individuals seeking employment may also need access to other services. This year's event featured 62 hiring businesses and drew 1,146 attendees.

- **Virtual Reality Career Exploration** – Renewed licenses for VR headsets for the TCCSMD Youth Program and two local school districts to support classroom-to-career pathways through hands-on simulations.

- **Atlas Virtual File Room** – Renewed the Atlas referral portal, which creates paperless files for WIOA Title I and ARPA participants. Partners continue to be able to refer customers to partner programs. 396 were submitted in FY 2025.

**Project 2: Southern Maryland National Heritage Area (SMNHA):**

SMNHA Management Plan and Structure

- Draft management plan near completion, pending Steering Committee and NPS (National Park Service) review.
- Nonprofit formation for an independent entity progressing, with state registration completed.
- Continued Steering Committee engagement in the planning process.
- The new website launched along with digital and traditional advertising for promotion.

Piscataway Initiatives and Regional Marketing

- Piscataway Conoy Tribal Council acquired the Cedarville property for a cultural center and museum.
- Supported ongoing efforts toward federal recognition.
- Launched the inaugural Piscataway Conoy Indigenous Peoples' Festival in FY25.
- Expanded regional marketing with a new website, brochure, passport program, and sponsorships for key events such as the Southern Maryland Sunflower Festival, Historic Sotterley Heritage Festival, and Smithsonian's SPARK exhibit.

Program and Special Events Internship

- Intern supported major regional events and outreach activities.
- Assisted Executive Director with promotions, social media posts, photography, and drone footage.
- Provided support in web management and grant-related tasks.

**Project 3: Southern Maryland Agriculture Development Commission:**

- Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) Summer Internship Program – SMADC, a division of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland, hosted its Summer Internship Program from May 21 to August 21, 2025. The 12-week program provided college students who are pursuing degrees in agriculture, agricultural business, environmental science and related fields with hands-on experience in agricultural service agency operations, including program development, budgeting, networking, and resource management. Interns participated in commission and board meetings, engaged in SMADC program areas, attended six agricultural workshops, and successfully planned and executed a capstone workshop. They also completed four field site visits across Southern Maryland, gaining direct exposure to vegetable production, urban agriculture, oyster aquaculture, and commodity farming. All program objectives were met, giving interns practical skills and a deeper understanding of regional food systems and sustainable agriculture.

**SMADC Agricultural Workshops:** During the reporting period, six workshops were delivered to support farmers, educators, and professionals. All objectives were met and completed.

- Workshop One: Cultivating Careers (46 attendees) – Trained student career counselors, teachers, and administrators on agricultural education programs and career pathways. Covered college, professional, and non-college tracks and introduced seven student resources (4H, FFA, MNRRS, CASE, Young Farmer Program, MAEF, scholarships).
- Workshop Two: Farmer Welding Skills (20 attendees) – Taught farmers basic welding for farm tools and equipment repair. Participants left with new skills and three useful take-home tools.
- Workshop Three: Small Engine Repair (20 attendees) – Provided farmers with skills to diagnose, repair, and maintain small engines. Each participant repaired and took home a small engine.
- Workshop Four: Tractor Maintenance (20 attendees) – Trained farmers in preventative maintenance and basic tractor repairs, with participants taking home three tools to support their new skills.
- Workshop Five: Veterinary Skills 101 (25 attendees) – Taught farmers basic livestock veterinary care, including routine health checks and early illness detection. Participants received a farm veterinary first aid kit.
- Workshop Six: Agricultural Property Sales for Realtors (11 attendees) – Equipped realtors with knowledge to market and sell farms, ranches, and rural land. Participants left with three key resources to aid in transactions.

**Project 4: Transportation**

- Van Pool Incentive Program: Since the federal Return to Office (RTO) order in February 2025, five new vanpools have been added, helping maintain alternative transportation use, reducing emissions, and decreasing vehicle miles traveled. The program's strength lies in

its partnership with Commute with Enterprise and Commuter Connections. The most significant concern remains continued funding to sustain the program. Due to budget limitations, the vanpool incentive was reduced from $350 to $300 per month. With continued or increased funding in FY26, the program plans to restore the incentive to $350 per month to align with other state and local agency offerings, totaling seven vanpools.

- Wheels to Wellness: In Fiscal Year 2025, while the total number of trips and clients decreased, the program provided longer-distance transportation, with the average miles p per trip increasing from 9.33 in 2023 to 13.01 in 2025. Wheels to Wellness remains a critical stop-gap service for clients who are not eligible for public transportation, the Statewide Specialized Transportation Assistance Program, or Medicare/Medicaid transport, ensuring residents can access essential services when no other options are available.

  The program's two most significant challenges continue to be funding for both operations and administration. Additional program funding would have the greatest impact, enabling better support for hospitals and the potential to contract with additional providers, particularly in St. Mary's County. Both participating hospitals have expressed a growing need for expanded transportation resources.

  This year, the most notable accomplishment was a zero no show rate for participants  and reduced participation from The Center for Life Enrichment and St. Mary's Hospital, both of which face driver shortages that have limited rides in St. Mary's County. If this continues, Wheels to Wellness may explore new partnerships, such as with The Arc or other agencies, under the guidance of the Executive Director.

**Project 5: Regional Planning**

- Regional Infrastructure Advisory Committee (RIAC): Provided ongoing technical and administrative support to the RIAC, that included establishing goals, processes, responsibilities, membership and logistical support, and staff research information. Reviewed transportation needs of all three Counties in accordance with the Chapter 725 requirements and identified top regional priority projects, County projects of regional significance, and multi-jurisdictional projects.

- Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure Advisory Committee (BIAC): Provided ongoing technical and administrative support to the BIAC, that included establishing goals, processes, responsibilities, membership and logistical support and research. Collected and disseminated information on local/statewide bicycle and pedestrian accidents. Discussed recommendations to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety. Reviewed alternative transportation needs of all three Counties with requirements and identified top regional priorities, infrastructure improvements, and regionally significant projects.

- The Gate Crasher Feasibility Study at the Naval Support Facility Indian Head, Maryland, is on schedule for completion in Spring 2026. The study is designed to evaluate potential risks and develop safety measures for the installation's main gate, particularly in the event of an explosion, given its close proximity to the local U.S. Post Office and surrounding community. Consultants hired for this project bring extensive experience working with military bases and neighboring communities across the United States.

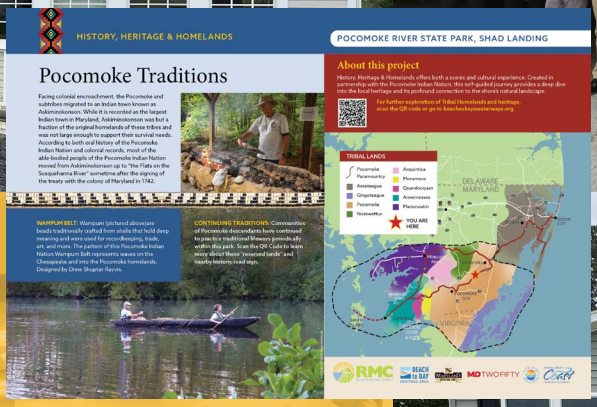
  The primary challenge has been securing timely communication with representatives from the U.S. Postal Service, whose input is critical to addressing safety concerns related to the post office's location near the base's entrance. Despite this, the project remains on track and continues to strengthen collaboration between the military installation, local stakeholders, and the broader community.

**Project 6: Administration, Marketing, and Communications**

- Supported the contract services of Platinum PR Services to assist with functionality of website and assist with press releases, social media, and email communications on an as needed basis.

- Provided fiscal support to manage new programs and partnerships.

# A COLLECTIVE VOICE *for* RURAL MARYLAND



HISTORY, HERITAGE & HOMELANDS

POCOMOKE RIVER STATE PARK, SHAD LANDING

## Pocomoke Traditions

Facing colonial encroachment, the Pocomoke and subtribes migrated to an Indian town known as Askiminokonson. While it is recorded as the largest Indian town in Maryland, Askiminokonson was but a fraction of the original homelands of these tribes and was not large enough to support their survival needs. According to both oral history of the Pocomoke Indian Nation and colonial records, most of the able-bodied people of the Pocomoke Indian Nation moved from Askiminokonson up to "the Flats on the Susquehanna River" sometime after the signing of the treaty with the colony of Maryland in 1742.

**WAMPUM BELT:** Wampum (pictured above) are beads traditionally crafted from shells that hold deep meaning and were used for recordkeeping, trade, art, and more. The pattern of this Pocomoke Indian Nation Wampum Belt represents waves on the Chesapeake and into the Pocomoke homelands. Designed by Oney Shugrue-Ravens.

**CONTINUING TRADITIONS:** Communities of Pocomoke descendants have continued to practice traditional fisheries periodically within this park. Scan the QR Code to learn more about these "reserved lands" and nearby historic road sign.

### About this project

History, Heritage & Homelands offers both a scenic and cultural experience. Created in partnership with the Pocomoke Indian Nation, this self-guided journey provides a deep dive into the local heritage and its profound connection to the shore's natural landscape.

For further exploration of Tribal Homelands and heritage, scan the QR code or go to beachesbayswaterways.org.

TRIBAL LANDS

- Pocomoke
- Paramounick
- Assateague
- Gingoteague
- Pocomoke
- Nottoway
- Acquintica
- Manamese
- Quendecopsen
- Annemessex
- Manoroakin

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