



THRIVE RURAL WISCONSIN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

This document provides answers to common questions about the Thrive Rural Wisconsin program. To view eligibility criteria or submit a community interest form, please reference the information on the [Thrive Rural Wisconsin website](#).

CAN A MUNICIPALITY APPLY?

The Thrive Rural Wisconsin program prioritizes local collaboratives that work across municipalities, counties, and nonprofit organizations. We ask that municipalities collaborate with a county economic development organization, nonprofit, or Tribal organization to identify specific projects and priorities for the work plan and grant funding, then work with that entity to submit an application. Ideally, these collaboratives build off existing working groups and plans that advance local economic development initiatives.

WHAT FACTORS ARE CONSIDERED IN THE SCORING OF THRIVE RURAL WI COMMUNITY INTEREST FORMS?

The community interest forms will be scored on the following criteria:

- A strong case of the issues or priorities you want to address. What and why now? The priorities identified could be considered transformation in nature.
- Clear goals and some initial projects you want to move forward.
- Team reflects collaboration, includes technical expertise and decision-making ability to move local and more regional projects forward.
- Time commitment to working with rural development specialists over two years and apply for state and federal funding opportunities.
- Existing collaboration with regional, statewide, and federal partners or strong interest in collaboration with specific interests.

LOOK FORWARD ➤

WHAT IF MY COUNTY DOES NOT HAVE AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION?

In that case, you should contact your county administrator (or the equivalent position/function, if your county does not have an administrator) to discuss your application and an opportunity to collaborate. Any department or organization at the county level that serves an economic development function is eligible to submit an interest form. Municipalities can also apply with a nonprofit that advances one of the Thrive Rural priority areas, if the focus of the projects and partners contribute to local capacity building.

WHAT MADE A SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION IN 2023 FOR COHORT 1?

Successful applicants in the first cohort of Thrive Rural WI demonstrated an existing collaborative environment within their community that was attempting to advance a transformative community initiative. Leadership teams of successful applicants were from diverse community organizations and the projects identified were of a critical or catalytic nature with the potential to contribute to economic growth. The work plan for each initiative had an element of developing organizational or financial structures that boosted capacity to advance economic development goals beyond the life of the project.

WHAT IF WE ARE A RURAL COMMUNITY BUT A METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREA (MSA) OR COMBINED STATISTICAL AREA (CSA) TOUCHES ANOTHER PART OF OUR COUNTY?

Applicants in a county that contains an MSA or CSA may not be considered rural; this will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis. If your county population is under 50,000 but touches an MSA or CSA, you will be eligible if your grant project is not serving the MSA or CSA. In the "Request for Technical Assistance" portion of the community interest form, indicate your service area, potential project sites, and any other information that demonstrates your rural focus.

WHAT MAKES A STRONG LOCAL LEADERSHIP TEAM?

A strong leadership team has engagement from key decision makers and passionate community advocates. The entire leadership team must be available to meet regularly, participate in community engagement around

the initiative, and contribute knowledge, expertise or skills that help advance the initiative. Each team will select a team lead who will be responsible for ensuring good communication with rural development specialists and the rest of the team. The team lead and team members should be available to work on project tasks. While all team sizes will be considered, the ideal team size is generally between three and eight highly engaged people.

HOW MANY PROJECTS CAN WE WORK ON?

The goal of the Thrive Rural Program is to provide capacity building support toward a transformative initiative. Realistically, a community's work plan may focus on two-three targeted initiatives that are interconnected and have potential to contribute to economic growth. Rural sustainability specialists will work closely with local leadership teams to complete a community assessment and develop a work plan that sets priorities for capacity building grant funding across the leadership team.

HOW MANY APPLICANTS WILL BE SELECTED?

A total of 10 local leadership teams will be selected.

WHAT IS THE TIME COMMITMENT FOR A COMMUNITY SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE THRIVE RURAL WISCONSIN PROGRAM?

Team leads should plan to spend at least three to four hours a week attending planning meetings with rural development specialists and to spend time working on project tasks. There is an onboarding process that the leadership team will participate in to develop a community assessment and a work plan. The work plan will help provide clarity on the time commitment and roles of leadership team members. Typical roles include grant writing and reporting tasks, participation in community engagement, attendance at local board and committee meetings, development of the scope of work for consultants, and leveraging their knowledge and network to help advance the project.

WHAT CAN THE CAPACITY BUILDING GRANTS BE USED FOR?

Capacity Building grants can be used for professional services that advance the community initiative.

- For real estate projects eligible uses include but are not limited to feasibility studies, site assessments, community engagement sessions, architectural renderings, or engineering studies.
- Small business or community development initiatives eligible uses include but are not limited to asset mapping, business plan development for a community initiative, and curriculum design.
- For the development of multi-jurisdictional initiatives eligible uses include but are not limited to research and planning, professional facilitation, or legal fees to create a partnership structure.
- Professional fees for organizational development, grant writing and fundraising feasibility, marketing and legal fees are also eligible for funding across programmatic scope.
- Rural development specialists from WEDC's Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP) will work with each leadership team to develop projects and advise on the eligibility of capacity building grant funds. Ineligible uses include construction costs, past costs, and staffing costs.

WHO CAN APPLY FOR THE CAPACITY BUILDING GRANTS IF INVITED TO DO SO?

Although the lead organization for a local team must be a county, nonprofit, or Tribal organization to be selected for the Thrive Rural Program, any member of the leadership team that is a local economic development organization or municipal government may be the lead applicant for the capacity building grant. Communities selected to participate in the program will work with their rural development specialist to develop a work plan and make decisions about priority projects that are well positioned for funding, and work with the local leadership team to determine the best applicant to apply on behalf of the collaborative.

HOW MANY LETTERS OF SUPPORT ARE NEEDED?

Letters of engagement from participating partners outlining their role and commitment to the program are encouraged. Background on their participation in the issue area and ways they have previously partnered with members of the local leadership team are encouraged.

CAN A REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION (REDO) BE THE LEAD APPLICANT ON BEHALF OF A QUALIFYING COMMUNITY?

No. A REDO generally serves a large area, and the intent of Thrive Rural Wisconsin is to provide support to local leadership teams. We encourage REDOs and RPCs to consider being a part of a local leadership team and leveraging their resources and skills to advance Thrive Rural Wisconsin initiatives.

CAN A COMMUNITY IN A COUNTY THAT IS NOT LISTED AS "DISTRESSED" STILL APPLY?

The intent of Thrive Rural Wisconsin is to provide assistance (both technical and financial) to rural communities with projects they want to develop that will have a positive economic impact. Leadership teams in distressed counties will get additional points in the selection process but all applicants that meet eligibility criteria will be considered.

ARE YOU FOLLOWING THE U.S. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION'S DEFINITION OF DISTRESSED COUNTIES?

No. This program uses WEDC's [distressed counties map](#).

IF A PROJECT IS IN THE VERY EARLY FORMATIVE STAGE, WILL IT BE CONSIDERED COMPETITIVE?

Yes. Project ideas and concepts at any stage are acceptable. Successful applicants will be ready to identify what actions and information are needed to move their projects forward quickly. If internal capacity is an issue, we encourage applicants to select "organizational and financial management" as a focus area.

The most competitive applicants will describe in the community interest form where their project ideas come from and what economic development challenge they wish to address. Sharing the background of how a project

was identified, what community input was received, and what assets exist to support the project demonstrate the preparedness of a community to move a project forward. Sharing what work has already been done to determine the feasibility and what information is needed to further explore the feasibility of projects in the community interest form is also helpful. Answering the questions “Why this project?” and “Why is this project ready to be explored now?” can help identify that context.