



Strengthening Rural Maryland Families Direct Services Grants Program, 2007-08

*An Initiative of the Rural Maryland Council
With funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Call for Proposals -- Deadline: August 17, 2007

The Rural Maryland Council and the Annie E. Casey Foundation are pleased to announce the third year of a direct services grants program. A limited number of grants will be awarded to fund not-for-profit, community-based or community-serving organizations that work to help disadvantaged families living in rural Maryland enhance their economic success. Eligible counties are: Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Garrett, Harford, Kent, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester.

Grantees may begin programming upon receipt of funds (**October 1, 2007**) for a period of nine months, to end no later than **June 30, 2008** -- unless a circumstance such as programming through a school year justifies an extension. Reporting requirements include a three-month progress report due **December 1, 2007** and a final report due **June 30, 2008**. Grant recipients will be required to attend the annual Maryland Rural Summit, October 17-19, 2007 on Solomons Islands in Calvert County.

Program Purpose: Family Economic Success

Children do well when their families do well; families do better when they live in supportive communities. However, many families living in rural areas are disconnected from the opportunities and supports they need to succeed. This grants program is committed to helping families in rural Maryland gain access to economic opportunities, find support through formal and informal networks, and have access to effective services that meet their needs. The Family Economic Success (FES) initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation helps low-income working families build strong financial futures by integrating three key components:

1. Workforce development – helping families obtain the skills and education necessary to get good jobs and build careers;
2. Family economic support – information, resources, policies and strategies to help families stabilize their income and build wealth assets; and
3. Community investment – investments and grant making in housing, facilities and business, and commercial development

Family Strengthening Orientation

The Family Economic Success approach is grounded in a family-strengthening orientation toward service delivery. This orientation is captured in the statement that

children do well when their families do well; families do better when they live in supportive communities. Program activities emphasize helping vulnerable families become self-reliant and succeed over time. The family strengthening orientation highlights the importance of family, location and connection in providing services to families, as described below.

- **Families Matter:** Families are the focus of service and educational activities which are designed to help families acquire the confidence, capacity and opportunities they need to achieve aspirations for themselves and their children. This principle is demonstrated by program activities that embrace parents as partners, to help those parents achieve the goals they have for their families. Project directors should also involve targeted families in planning, executing, reporting and evaluating the proposed initiative.
- **Place Matters.** The circumstances and conditions in which rural families live, including the availability and access to appropriate opportunities, supports and services, influence the ability of families to succeed. This principle is demonstrated by program activities that are “place-based” and located in, or clearly tied to, the targeted rural community it is designed to serve. Activities should also address for specific barriers of accessing services in the target community.
- **Connections Count.** Families need connection to economic opportunities and to jobs that provide income, assets, and an economic future; to the social networks of kin, neighborhood groups, and other informal ties; and to high-quality, effective services and formal supports. This principle is demonstrated by program activities that help families build a solid base of support and a web of connections to formal and informal supports that can help them be self-sustaining.

Core Results: Earn it, Keep it, Grow it

Programs funded by the Strengthening Rural Maryland Families grants program must strive toward any of the following core results of the Annie E. Casey Foundation Rural Family Economic Success (RuFES) initiative. This initiative pays particular attention to the unique and specific needs of rural families living in Maryland and across the nation. Applicants should focus their proposals to these core results and propose an evaluation plan that will use indicators of progress and achievement consistent with the core results.

1. Earn it – families have increased income
2. Keep it – families have more stable financial lives
3. Grow it – families acquire assets and build wealth

Family Economic Success (FES): Proven Programs

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has identified several model programs for helping families achieve economic success. These include the: Centers for Working Families, Working Poor Families Project, Jobs Initiative, and EITC/Free Tax Assistance. Applicants can learn more about these programs and the Family Economic Success and

Rural Family Economic Success initiatives on the Annie E. Casey Foundation website:
<http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/FamilyEconomicSuccess.aspx>

Eligibility Criteria:

To be eligible for consideration for the Strengthening Rural Maryland Families grants program, an applicant must be not-for-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, community-based or community-serving organization or agency.

- A "community-based organization or agency" is located in the rural community or neighborhood it serves with local, rural residents playing an active part in the governance and operation of the organization.
- A "community-serving organization or agency" may or may not be located in the rural community it serves. However, families and their children from disadvantaged rural communities must have access to, and benefit from, the services and programs being offered, and must be the primary beneficiaries of the programs or services to be supported by the grant.

Application Materials:

Letter of Intent to Apply: All applicants should submit an electronic Intent to Apply to Dr. Bonnie Braun at bbraun@umd.edu before completing the entire application process. It should contain your intention to apply for funds and a brief statement of your proposed program. Letters of Intent are due by **July 16, 2007**.

Grant Application Form: Applicant organizations must complete the 2007-08 Grant Application Form, found at: <http://www.rural.state.md.us>. The application should be submitted via email to RMC@mda.state.md.us. Competitive applicants will:

- 1) Convincingly demonstrate need for service in their community
- 2) Propose goals and objectives which correspond to the needs identified in the needs assessment
- 3) Direct program activities toward attaining the program goals & objectives
- 4) Use a family-strengthening orientation to improve the lives of disadvantaged families in rural Maryland
- 5) Have a strong track record of helping families succeed
- 6) Be able to demonstrate effectiveness through evaluation results

Letters of Support: Three letters of support from collaborating agencies and three letters of support from families in the target population should be mailed (in one envelope) to:

Rural Maryland Council
c/o Strengthening Rural Families
50 Harry Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401
410-841-5772

The 2007-08 Grant Application Form and six (6) letters of support are due no later than 5 p.m. on **August 17, 2007**. Letters from collaborative organizations and families will not be scored as part of the review panel but will be used in making final funding decisions. The application and letters of support will be kept confidential except for members of the review panel.

Questions about the grants program or application process should be directed to the Rural Maryland Council at: 410-841-5772.

Review Process and Selection Criteria:

The application review process will be coordinated by Grant Director Bonnie Braun, who is a member of the Rural Maryland Council Board and a Cooperative Extension faculty member of the Department of Family Studies, University of Maryland in College Park. The review panel will consist of members of the Rural Maryland Council and faculty and doctoral students in the Department of Family Studies.

Applications will be screened to determine if they meet the eligibility criteria and for completeness of application. Specific criteria are found on the Scoring Criteria Form, found at <http://www.rural.state.md.us>. General criteria for selection and their weight include:

- Needs assessment (10 points)
- Aims/objectives (10 points)
- Program description (20 points)
- Family strengthening orientation (35 points)
- Organizational capacity (10 points)
- Evaluation (15 points)

A reasonable effort will be made to assure geographic balance among grantees.

A Note to Current Grantees:

Current grantees that have excelled in meeting their targets are encouraged to reapply for funds to: (1) continue their demonstrably successful projects and/or programs and (2) share their knowledge, experiences and lessons learned with new grantees who are involved in similar or related projects. Potential and selected grantees will have three structured opportunities to meet and share knowledge during the 2007-08 grant cycle.

1. A Technical Assistance Workshop will be held for all organizations interested in applying for a 2007-08 grant. This session will be held by webcast, conference call or a combination of both, depending on the technological capabilities of participants. During this session, current and past grantees will be asked to share their application experiences with, and give advice to, other applying organizations.

2. Continuing grantees will be paired with new grantees to share curriculum, problems, insights, etc. as both projects begin. This communication may take place in person or by conference call.
3. All grantees, current and new, will be required to attend the Maryland Rural Summit, October 17-19, 2007 in Solomons Island. A special grantee-only meeting will be held during the Summit to provide all grantees an opportunity to learn from one another.

A small honorarium will be provided to cover costs of mentoring organizations.

Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Workshops

All applicants are also invited to attend complimentary workshops which will be offered via webcast. You will need a high-speed internet connection to participate. Applicants who submit a letter of intent by **July 16** will be sent an email invitation and registration details.

Grant Writing Workshop: This interactive online workshop will guide participants through the application process for the Strengthening Rural Maryland Families grants program. Tips and techniques for writing competitive grant applications will be introduced through the workshop, providing participants with grant writing skills that can be applied to this or other funding opportunities.

Program Planning and Evaluation Workshop: This interactive online workshop will introduce logic models as a tool for clearly linking a needs assessment to program goals to program activities, and identifying necessary supports for enacting programs as designed. Examples of how logic models can be used for program evaluation are provided along with how program evaluation results can be used to fuel future program planning.

This call for proposals and associated materials are available at:

Rural Maryland Council
www.rural.state.md.us

For instance, please call: 410-841-5772