



RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION COMMUNITY PROJECT (RRCP) POLICY AND GUIDELINES *(revised March 2025)*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Recruitment and Retention Community Project (RRCP) is a state initiative to compliment, enhance and build on the existing scholarship and loan repayment programs designed to recruit and retain primary care providers in rural West Virginia communities.

State grant awards will be given to employers in Medically Underserved Communities (MUC) for the sole purpose of increasing the availability of qualified primary care providers in rural areas. Grant awards up to \$10,000.00 are available to employers who meet the minimum requirements in these guidelines. There is a maximum of four years of support for any candidate through this program, but a fifth-year award will be considered if funding is available.

Applications are reviewed and awarded by committee and are SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS. The funding period for RRCP is July 1 through June 30 each year. Nothing in these guidelines will be construed as granting or guaranteeing any employer/community any right to such a grant award.

II. DEFINITIONS

Department: The West Virginia Department of Health, Bureau for Public Health, Office of Community Health Systems, Division of Rural Health and Recruitment/State Office of Rural Health.

Candidate: A primary care provider, pharmacist, dentist, etc. that will be obligated under the Recruitment and Retention Community Project if an award is made.

Community: A group of local businesses, or a consortium, that will provide the matching requirement of a grant award to a candidate in return for their obligation to that community.

Dentist: A general practice dentist who is licensed by the West Virginia Board of Dental Examiners to provide dental services in West Virginia.

Emergency Medicine: Physicians who are board certified in emergency medicine and physician assistants who have successfully completed a master's level program and are certified to practice emergency medicine.

Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA): An area designated by the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) with a shortage of health professional(s).

Medically Underserved Community (MUC): Federally designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA), Medically Underserved Areas (MUA), Medically Underserved Populations (MUP), and other geographic areas approved by the Department.

Locum Tenens: A health professional who temporarily takes the place of another health professional and who is licensed to practice in West Virginia.

Pharmacist: A healthcare professional, who is board certified and practicing in pharmacy, the field of health sciences focused on safe and effective distribution of medicines.

Primary Care Provider: This category consists of allopathic (MD) or osteopathic (DO) who are board eligible/board certified in family practice, pediatrics, internal medicine, psychiatry, or OB/GYN, and primary care nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, and physician assistants. Board certified emergency medicine physicians and certified physician's assistants who have successfully completed a master's level program in emergency medicine are also eligible for RRCP.

Residency Stipend: An award made to an allopathic (MD) or osteopathic (DO) physician during training for an obligation after they finish their residency.

Rural: Geographic areas not classified as urban by the Office of Technology Assessment, Congress of the United States.

Sign-on Incentive: An award made to a candidate to accept a position at the employer's facility.

Employer: Refers to, but is not limited to, primary care centers, small rural hospitals, local health departments, or private practitioners, that will provide the matching requirement of a grant award to a candidate in return for their obligation to practice their profession in their facility.

Qualifying Health Professional Education Loans: The amount of the principal, interest, and related expenses of a student loan received from any government or commercial lender for the sole purpose of advanced health professional education. The loans can include tuition, reasonable educational expenses, and reasonable living expenses.

III. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR EMPLOYER

To be eligible for grant funds the Employer must meet the following requirements:

Physical location

The facility where the candidate will practice must be in a medically underserved community as defined by these guidelines. If the geographic area is not a HPSA or MUA and there are unusual or severe circumstances, the employer may request a waiver of this federal designation. (See Section XV for instructions on how to request a waiver).

Continuum of care

The facility where the candidate will practice must meet the following criteria:

- 1) Provide services to all patients regardless of the patients' ability to pay and utilize a sliding fee schedule based on the current year's federal poverty income guidelines;
- 2) Accept payment of health services under the Medicare insurance program;
- 3) Accept payment of health services under the Medicaid insurance program;
- 4) Accept payment of health services under the WV Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP);
- 5) Provide services for a minimum of forty (40) hours a week; and
- 6) Have arrangements for after-hour and acute care.

Matching dollars

The employer/community must provide evidence of cash matching dollars of an equal amount in the form of a signed statement from the administrator or chief financial officer of the healthcare facility. The matching funds cannot be from State or Federal allocated funds.

IV. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR HOSPITALS

Hospitals that meet the following criteria are eligible to participate in the RRCP:

- 1) The hospital has fewer than 100 acute-care beds; and
- 2) The hospital is in a rural area; and
- 3) The hospital is federally designated by Medicare as a Critical Access Hospital; or
- 4) The hospital's emergency room is federally designated by Medicare as a Rural Health Clinic and meets (1) and (2) above.

The following West Virginia hospitals currently meet the above criteria:

- Boone Memorial Hospital
- Braxton County Memorial Hospital
- Broaddus Hospital
- Grafton City Hospital
- Grant Memorial Hospital
- Hampshire Memorial Hospital
- Jackson General Hospital
- Jefferson Medical Center
- Minnie Hamilton Health Care Center
- Montgomery General Hospital
- Plateau Medical Center
- Pocahontas Memorial Hospital
- Potomac Valley Hospital
- Preston Memorial Hospital Corp.
- Roane General Hospital
- Sistersville General Hospital
- St. Joseph's Hospital, Buckhannon
- Summers County ARH Hospital
- War Memorial Hospital
- Webster County Memorial Hospital
- Summersville Regional Medical Center

V. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR CANDIDATES

- 1) Must be a U.S. citizen; naturalized citizens must attach proof of citizenship.
- 2) Must be a healthcare provider, pharmacist, or dentist as defined in these guidelines, licensed to practice in West Virginia; and
- 3) Must agree to the terms and conditions listed in these guidelines.

VI. CATEGORIES AVAILABLE FOR RECRUITMENT GRANTS

The Bureau for Public Health, Office of Community Health Systems and Health Promotion, Division of Rural Health and Recruitment will award up to \$10,000 for any one candidate within each fiscal year.

Grants are available in the following categories: Loan Repayment, Sign-on Incentive, Residency Stipend, and Locum Tenens. Other categories will be reviewed if a strong justification is attached to the application. The candidate must agree to practice for the employer at the location(s) specified in the RRCP application. The candidate must provide primary care services during the dates specified in the Service Obligation Agreement. A candidate's service obligation may run concurrently with other State scholarships and/or loan programs, if allowed by the other program(s). A Candidate with an obligation to a federally sponsored program is not eligible for the RRCP.

The employer may have multiple candidates listed on one grant agreement, subject to availability of funds. However, no more than five candidates per year will be awarded to the employer. A candidate is only eligible to receive funding once per fiscal year.

The loan repayment category is solely for the repayment of qualified medical or health professional training educational loans. It is the employer's responsibility to provide the Department with required documentation verifying the candidate's loans.

Recognizing that loan repayment is not the sole approach to all recruitment and retention activities, the Department is prepared to offer grant agreements to employer/communities to recruit primary care providers. Examples of these grants include:

- 1) *Residency or training program stipend*: Grant funds to be given to a primary care provider during training in exchange for agreeing to practice at employer's facility for one year for each year of funding upon completion of training. A maximum of two stipends may be awarded per primary care candidate;
- 2) *Sign-on bonus*: A one-time bonus given to a candidate at the beginning of his/her employment;
- 3) *Moving expense (other)*: A one-time award to assist an employer/community in providing costs associated with relocating a candidate to their facility;
- 4) *Retention*: A one-time award for the retention of a candidate that is considering leaving at the end of their contract; and
- 5) *Other*: The Department will evaluate other categories on a case-by-case basis and provide the employer/community with the appropriate conditions. This request must have a detailed description of how the funds will be used.

Grant awards **cannot** be used for the following:

- 1) Private recruiting firms (headhunters);
- 2) Legal fees associated with the recruitment of international medical graduates;
- 3) Salary supplementation;
- 4) Loan repayment to a family member or any other entity not included under the loan repayment category listed above; and
- 5) Payment of candidate's personal income tax.

Grant funds are available to allow providers time away from their practice for vacation, sick leave, or continuing education and ensure that services will continue to be provided in their absence. The employer/community must provide the Department with a copy of its agreement with the locum tenens or locum tenens agency. The locum tenens must have an unencumbered license to practice medicine in West Virginia, have unencumbered U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration authority for prescribing controlled substances, and have professional liability insurance coverage of at least one (1) million dollars per person per incident and a minimum of three (3) million dollars per incident. It will be the duty and responsibility of the employer to obtain documentation of these requirements.

VII. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCESS

All requests for funding must be in a format provided by the Division of Rural Health and Recruitment. Grant applications will be reviewed by a committee and are subject to the availability of funds. No application for extension of a current candidate is guaranteed an award. **An incomplete application will not be considered.**

The employer and candidate will be notified of the approval or denial by the Division of Rural Health and Recruitment. A formal Sub-Recipient Grant Agreement between the Department and the employer/community will be initiated. The obligation period with the candidate will not start until the grant agreement is encumbered in the Department.

Payment will be made by the Department to the employer after the signed, original invoice is received by the Department. The invoice will not be processed until the Service Obligation Agreement is received.

VIII. DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS

Upon receipt of the grant funds from the Department, the employer must:

- 1) Within 14 days make a check or electronic payment for the full amount of the grant award, plus the employer's matching dollars, payable to the:
 - a. Appropriate lending institution(s), if the grant is designated loan repayment;
 - b. Candidate if the grant is designated other than loan repayment; or,
 - c. Locum tenens physician or locum tenens agency.
- 2) Within 60 days, provide the Department with a copy of the above-specified payment; and
- 3) Failure to provide the copy of the payment to the Department within 60 days will constitute a default and void any future applications for any state loan repayment programs.

IX. CANDIDATE SERVICE OBLIGATION

The candidate must agree to provide one year of service in exchange for each year of funding from the Recruitment and Retention Community Project and the employer. The Division of Rural Health and Recruitment will send the Service Obligation Agreement to the candidate. The obligation must be signed by the candidate and employer, with the original signed document mailed back to the Department. The Department will sign the obligation and send copies to both candidate and employer.

X. SERVICE OBLIGATION WAIVER

The basis for a service obligation waiver would be a medical condition or personal situation that results in the candidate's inability to serve the obligation or would involve a permanent extreme hardship to the candidate and would be against equity and good conscience to enforce the service obligation.

The following conditions will be considered by the Department as a waiver from the default provisions:

- 1) The candidate becomes physically impaired to the degree that he/she can no longer function in his/her assigned duties;
- 2) The candidate becomes mentally impaired to the degree that he/she can no longer function in his/her duties; and
- 3) Death of the candidate.

Documentation of the candidate's inability to complete his/her obligation must be provided by the employer and a licensed practitioner giving evidence of the candidate's inability to continue employment. The Department must grant the waiver before the candidate and/or employer is not considered in default of the obligation.

XI. DEFAULT

The employer will be considered in default for the following situations:

- 1) Failure to comply with the requirements outlined in the Grant Agreement Exhibit A - Statement of Work;
- 2) Candidate fails to begin or complete the service obligation. candidate fails to meet Service Obligation Agreement requirements;
- 3) Candidate fails to accept Medicare/Medicaid/CHIP assignments;
- 4) Candidate is terminated by the site for a clearly documented cause, such as inappropriate conduct or clinical incompetence;
- 5) Candidate voluntarily resigns or terminates employment for personal reasons where no extenuating circumstances exist which would warrant reassignment; and

- 6) Candidate will also be reported to the appropriate licensing board and federal government as being in default.

XII. SUSPENSION

Suspension is a temporary status decided by the Department. The basis for suspension would be a medical condition or personal situation that:

- 1) Would make it temporarily impossible to continue the service obligation or payment of a monetary debt;
- 2) Would temporarily involve extreme hardship for the individual and would be against equity and good conscience to enforce the service or payment obligation.

At the end of the suspension, a new obligation will be signed to extend the amount of time unserved on the obligation.

XIII. PENALTIES FOR DEFAULT

It is the sole responsibility of the Employer to collect any default funds from the Candidate. The penalties require the Employer to repay the Department the full amount of the grant award plus twenty-percent (20%) within sixty (60) days of the default. The Employer must contact the Department in writing within thirty (30) days of the default. If the Candidate starts but fails to complete the period of obligated service, a prorated repayment schedule may be substituted at the Department's discretion. Failure to comply with the repayment will result in the Employer's responsibility for any additional fees associated with collection of the default payment. The Employer will also be ineligible to sponsor a Candidate through any recruitment and retention program for a period of two years from the date of the default if payment is not received by the due date.

XIV. CANCELLATION

The RRCP Sub-recipient Grant Agreements will not be cancelled to allow an individual to participate in the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment. The basis of cancellation would be limited to death of the RRCP candidate. Documentation must be provided by the employer and a licensed practitioner giving evidence of the candidate's death (i.e. copies of the death certificate). Prior to the formal Sub-recipient Grant Agreement being encumbered, the Candidate may withdraw his/her application.

XV. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF HPSA/MUA/C

An employer/community that does not meet the definition of MUA/C, but is experiencing a recruitment crisis, may submit an application to the Department along with a request to grant a waiver of the federal designation. A cover letter to the Department with the following information must be included with the application:

- 1) Description of the rational service area defined by Census Tracts, Magisterial Districts, Block Numbering Areas, or County;
- 2) The population of the rational service area;
- 3) List of each physician, his/her primary care specialty, and the number of hours he/she devotes to direct patient care each week;
- 4) Detailed description of the access barriers that exist in the service areas;
- 5) Other factors that can be used to evaluate the request; and
- 6) Narrative detailing the recruitment crisis in the community. Describe all recruitment activities, how many candidates were interviewed, and why these candidates did not accept the position.

The Department will determine if the community meets the criteria for a temporary Medically Underserved Community based on the information provided in the application. This designation, if approved, is only valid for the purpose of this RRCP application and for the period of this grant agreement.

XVI. PROGRAM MONITORING

The Department's approach to RRCP program monitoring is to verify that participants are serving individuals who lack access to primary care services. The candidate and practice site must agree to prepare and submit quarterly reports reflecting the requirements of their contract with the Department.

Monitoring includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- 1) Quarterly reports;
- 2) Telephone surveys;
- 3) Review of annual reports; and
- 4) Site visits as determined necessary.

Information the participant/practice site is required to submit includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- 1) Financial and other records documenting health services are being provided to patients unable to pay; and
- 2) Financial and other records documenting participation in the Medicaid, Medicare, CHIP, and other insurance plans

Applications must be completed in full and include all attachments. Incomplete applications will be denied.

For questions about the application, contact the Loan and Grant Coordinator at:

WVDH/BPH/OCHSHP
Division of Rural Health & Recruitment
350 Capitol St., Room 515
Charleston, WV 25301
Phone: 304-352-6035

APPLICATIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR REVIEW STARTING MARCH 1 EACH YEAR.