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Making rural housing development possible *New Office of Rural Prosperity initiative will build capacity for housing development in rural Wisconsin communities*

MADISON, WI. MARCH 17, 2026 – A new initiative designed to build local capacity for rural housing development will support communities across Wisconsin through a new fellowship program made possible with funding from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Chicago. This initiative is being led by the Office of Rural Prosperity at the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and sponsored by the Bank of Luxembourg.

The Emerging Rural Developer Fellowship will place fellows in rural communities to work on housing development projects, gain hands-on experience, and help local partners move forward new housing opportunities. The initiative aims to expand the pipeline of developers working in rural Wisconsin while helping communities overcome barriers that often stall housing projects.

"Meeting rural housing needs often poses special challenges for community leaders and developers," said John W. Miller, secretary and CEO of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. "Smaller communities may not have the resources or staff capacity to support housing development, while developers may struggle to make smaller projects financially viable. This initiative helps address both challenges by building local capacity and creating new pathways for rural housing development."

The first group of fellows will be hosted by three organizations working to advance housing development in their regions: **Bayfield County, NeighborWorks Green Bay** (which will focus on housing development in Door County), and **Platteville-based Prosperity Southwest**.

Fellows will work as independent contractors embedded with these host organizations, where they will gain professional experience while supporting housing development activities such as project planning, financing strategies, and partnerships with local stakeholders. Leaders in the pilot communities say the program will help accelerate housing solutions in their regions.

"The Emerging Developer Pilot is helping rural communities like ours build the relationships and capacity needed to shape our own future. It is about creating opportunity from within, giving people the tools and connections to bring projects to life that meet real community needs," said Olivia Otte, president of Prosperity Southwest.

"With the Emerging Rural Developer Fellowship, we can accelerate rural housing projects, grow homegrown talent, and deliver quality homes that benefit our area workforce," said Bayfield County Administrator Mark Abeles-Allison. "This initiative will help us move housing projects forward while strengthening our local development capacity."

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"We are excited to partner on an effort that helps bring new development expertise to our region," said Noel Halvorsen, president and CEO of NeighborWorks Green Bay. "Fellows will gain real-world experience navigating the unique challenges of rural housing markets while helping communities advance projects that are urgently needed."

Funding for the initiative comes from a grant through the Community First® Developers Program of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Chicago. The Bank of Luxemburg is partnering with the Office of Rural Prosperity to support the fellowships.

"Affordable housing is a key to driving economic development in rural and tourist-centric communities that Bank of Luxemburg serves, said Darren Voight, president and CEO of the Bank of Luxemburg. "We are proud to partner with the Office of Rural Prosperity to support development of affordable housing in rural communities across Wisconsin, including a focus within the bank's footprint in Door County."

Applications are now being accepted for fellows who will work with the three host sites. Fellows will serve as independent contractors supporting housing development efforts in rural Wisconsin communities. The fellowship term is expected to run from **May 2026 through April 2027**.

Applicants should have experience or training in real estate development, community development, planning, or a related field and a strong interest in advancing housing solutions in rural communities.

More information about the fellowship and application details can be found here: <https://ruralwi.com/rural-priorities/housing/#EDF>

Additional information may also be obtained by contacting **Jim Cleveland** of WEDC's Office of Rural Prosperity at james.cleveland@wedc.org.

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