

By the Committees on Appropriations; and Commerce and Tourism;
and Senators Montford and Gainer

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1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to regional rural development grants;
3 amending s. 288.018, F.S.; providing that regional
4 rural development grants may be used to hire regional
5 economic development organization professional staff;
6 authorizing the use of matching grant funds to provide
7 technical assistance to certain entities; increasing
8 the annual maximum amount of grant funding that
9 specified economic development organizations may
10 receive; revising the amount of nonstate matching
11 funds required; increasing the amount the Department
12 of Economic Opportunity may expend each fiscal year
13 for the program; requiring that contracts or
14 agreements involving the expenditure of grant funds be
15 placed on a certain website for a specified time
16 period; requiring that certain information be included
17 in a contract or agreement involving the expenditure
18 of grant funds; requiring that a plain language
19 version of certain contracts or agreements be placed
20 on a certain website; deleting an obsolete provision
21 authorizing the Department of Economic Opportunity to
22 contract for the development of certain enterprise
23 zone web portals or websites; amending s. 288.0655,
24 F.S.; increasing the maximum percent of total
25 infrastructure project costs for which the department
26 may award a grant; repealing a provision for increased
27 maximum percent of total infrastructure project costs
28 that may be awarded for a catalyst site; providing
29 that improving access to and availability of broadband

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30 Internet service may be included in a project that is
31 eligible for rural infrastructure grant funds;
32 providing that grants for improvements to broadband
33 Internet service and access must be conducted through
34 certain partnerships; extending the date by which the
35 department is required to reevaluate certain
36 guidelines and criteria; requiring that contracts or
37 agreements involving the expenditure of grant funds be
38 placed on a certain website for a specified time
39 period; requiring that certain information be included
40 in a contract or agreement involving the expenditure
41 of grant funds; requiring that a plain language
42 version of certain contracts or agreements be placed
43 on a certain website; requiring the department to
44 review best practices and methods and make
45 recommendations to establish a site readiness program
46 for rural communities; requiring the department to
47 identify certain requirements and standards and
48 provide options for the implementation of the program;
49 requiring the department to submit a report of its
50 findings to the Legislature by a specified date;
51 providing an effective date.

52
53 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

54
55 Section 1. Subsections (1), (3), and (4) of section
56 288.018, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

57 288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

58 (1) (a) The department shall establish a matching grant

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59 program to provide funding to regional ~~regionally based~~ economic
60 development organizations representing rural counties and
61 communities to build for the purpose of building the
62 professional capacity of such regional economic development
63 ~~their~~ organizations. Building the professional capacity of
64 regional economic development organizations includes hiring
65 professional staff to develop, facilitate the delivery of, and
66 directly provide needed economic development professional
67 services, including technical assistance, education and
68 leadership development, marketing and project recruitment, and
69 other services that are important for rural economic
70 development. ~~Such~~ Matching grants may also be used by a regional
71 ~~an~~ economic development organization to provide technical
72 assistance to local governments, local economic development
73 organizations, and existing and prospective businesses within
74 the rural counties and communities that it serves.

75 (b) A regional economic development organization may apply
76 to the department for a matching grant each year. The department
77 is authorized to approve an application for a grant up to, ~~on an~~
78 ~~annual basis, grants:~~

79 1. Fifty thousand dollars to a regional economic
80 development organization;

81 2. One hundred fifty thousand dollars to an organization
82 located to such regionally based economic development
83 organizations. ~~The maximum amount an organization may receive in~~
84 ~~any year will be \$50,000, or \$150,000 in a rural area of~~
85 ~~opportunity~~ designated pursuant to s. 288.0656; or

86 3. Two hundred fifty thousand dollars to any of the three
87 regional economic development organizations that serve an entire

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88 region of a rural area of opportunity designated pursuant to s.
89 288.0656 and that are recognized by the department as serving
90 such regions.

91 (c) Grant funds received by a regional economic development
92 organization ~~recommended by the Rural Economic Development~~
93 ~~Initiative and designated by the Governor,~~ and must be matched
94 each year by an ~~equivalent amount of~~ nonstate resources in an
95 amount equal to 25 percent of the state contribution.

96 (3) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the
97 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section must be
98 placed on the contracting regional economic development
99 organization's website at least 14 days before execution.

100 (b) A contract or agreement that involves the expenditure
101 of grant funds provided under this section, including a contract
102 or agreement entered into between another entity and a regional
103 economic development organization, a unit of local government,
104 or an economic development organization substantially
105 underwritten by a unit of local government, must include:

- 106 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.
- 107 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for
108 each entity.
- 109 3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
- 110 4. The value of any services provided.
- 111 5. The projected travel and entertainment expenses for
112 employees and board members, if applicable.

113 (c) A plain language version of a contract or agreement
114 with a private entity, a municipality, or a vendor of services,
115 supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the purchase
116 or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties which

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117 involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this
118 section and which is estimated to exceed \$35,000 must be posted
119 on the contracting regional economic development organization's
120 website ~~The department may also contract for the development of~~
121 ~~an enterprise zone web portal or websites for each enterprise~~
122 ~~zone which will be used to market the program for job creation~~
123 ~~in disadvantaged urban and rural enterprise zones. Each~~
124 ~~enterprise zone web page should include downloadable links to~~
125 ~~state forms and information, as well as local message boards~~
126 ~~that help businesses and residents receive information~~
127 ~~concerning zone boundaries, job openings, zone programs, and~~
128 ~~neighborhood improvement activities.~~

129 (4) The department may expend up to \$1,000,000 ~~\$750,000~~
130 each fiscal year from funds appropriated to the Rural Community
131 Development Revolving Loan Fund for the purposes outlined in
132 this section. The department may contract with Enterprise
133 Florida, Inc., for the administration of the purposes specified
134 in this section. Funds released to Enterprise Florida, Inc., for
135 this purpose shall be released quarterly and shall be calculated
136 based on the applications in process.

137 Section 2. Subsection (5) of section 288.0655, Florida
138 Statutes, is redesignated as subsection (6), paragraph (b) of
139 subsection (2) and subsection (4) of that section are amended,
140 and a new subsection (5) is added to that section, to read:

141 288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

142 (2)(b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural
143 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic
144 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the
145 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States

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146 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of
147 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural
148 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate
149 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the
150 department may award grants for up to 50 ~~30~~ percent of the total
151 infrastructure project cost. ~~If an application for funding is~~
152 ~~for a catalyst site, as defined in s. 288.0656, the department~~
153 ~~may award grants for up to 40 percent of the total~~
154 ~~infrastructure project cost.~~ Eligible projects must be related
155 to specific job-creation or job-retention opportunities.
156 Eligible projects may also include improving any inadequate
157 infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action that
158 prohibits economic or community growth or reducing the costs to
159 community users of proposed infrastructure improvements that
160 exceed such costs in comparable communities, which includes
161 improving access to and the availability of broadband Internet
162 service. Eligible uses of funds shall include improvements to
163 public infrastructure for industrial or commercial sites, and
164 upgrades to or development of public tourism infrastructure, and
165 improvements to broadband Internet service and access in
166 unserved or underserved rural communities. Improvements to
167 broadband Internet service and access must be conducted through
168 a partnership or partnerships with one or more dealers of
169 communications services, as defined in s. 202.11(2), and the
170 partnership must be established by a publicly noticed and
171 competitively selected process. Authorized infrastructure may
172 include the following public or public-private partnership
173 facilities: storm water systems; telecommunications facilities;
174 broadband facilities; roads or other remedies to transportation

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175 impediments; nature-based tourism facilities; or other physical
176 requirements necessary to facilitate tourism, trade, and
177 economic development activities in the community. Authorized
178 infrastructure may also include publicly or privately owned
179 self-powered nature-based tourism facilities, publicly owned
180 telecommunications facilities, and broadband facilities, and
181 additions to the distribution facilities of the existing natural
182 gas utility as defined in s. 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric
183 utility as defined in s. 366.02, or the existing water or
184 wastewater utility as defined in s. 367.021(12), or any other
185 existing water or wastewater facility, which owns a gas or
186 electric distribution system or a water or wastewater system in
187 this state where:

188 1. A contribution-in-aid of construction is required to
189 serve public or public-private partnership facilities under the
190 tariffs of any natural gas, electric, water, or wastewater
191 utility as defined herein; and

192 2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able to
193 provide such service.

194 (4) By September 1, 2019 ~~2012~~, the department shall, in
195 consultation with the organizations listed in subsection (3),
196 and other organizations, reevaluate existing guidelines and
197 criteria governing submission of applications for funding,
198 review and evaluation of such applications, and approval of
199 funding under this section. The department shall consider
200 factors including, but not limited to, the project's potential
201 for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment, the
202 demonstration and level of local public and private commitment,
203 whether the project is located ~~in an enterprise zone~~, in a

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204 community development corporation service area, or in an urban
205 high-crime area as designated under s. 212.097, the unemployment
206 rate of the county in which the project would be located, and
207 the poverty rate of the community.

208 (5) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the
209 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section must be
210 placed on the department's website at least 14 days before
211 execution.

212 (b) A contract or agreement that includes the expenditure
213 of grant funds provided under this section, including a contract
214 or agreement entered into between an entity and a regional
215 economic development organization, a unit of local government,
216 or an economic development organization substantially
217 underwritten by a unit of local government, must include:

218 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.

219 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for
220 each entity.

221 3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.

222 4. The value of any services provided.

223 5. The projected travel and entertainment expenses for
224 employees and board members, if applicable.

225 (c) A plain language version of a contract or agreement
226 with a private entity, a municipality, or a vendor of services,
227 supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the purchase
228 or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties which
229 involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this
230 section and which is estimated to exceed \$35,000 must be posted
231 on the department's website.

232 Section 3. In order to enhance and fortify the

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233 competitiveness of rural communities in this state for new
234 businesses and job creation, the Department of Economic
235 Opportunity is directed to review best practices and methods and
236 make recommendations for the establishment of a site readiness
237 program to assist rural communities in evaluating property in
238 their jurisdictions, promoting the availability and benefits of
239 such sites, and other related issues. The department must
240 identify technical requirements and quality control standards
241 that would best benefit such a program, and must provide options
242 for the implementation of such a program. The department must
243 seek the input of stakeholders and persons, groups, and
244 organizations that are knowledgeable about rural areas and site
245 readiness issues. The department must submit a report to the
246 Legislature by December 1, 2018, of its findings.

247 Section 4. This act shall take effect July 1, 2018.