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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.; defining the term "regional  
4           economic development organization"; specifying that  
5           the concept of building the professional capacity of a  
6           regional economic development organization includes  
7           the hiring of professional staff to perform specified  
8           services; providing that matching grants may be used  
9           to provide technical assistance to local governments  
10          and economic development organizations and to existing  
11          and prospective businesses; specifying that a regional  
12          economic development organization that provides  
13          taxpayer-funded incentives is not eligible to  
14          participate in the matching grant program; increasing  
15          the maximum amount of annual grant funding that  
16          specified economic development organizations may  
17          receive; revising the required amount of nonstate  
18          matching funds; requiring that certain information be  
19          included in a contract or agreement involving the  
20          expenditure of grant funds; requiring that contracts  
21          or agreements involving the expenditure of grant  
22          funds, and a plain-language version of certain  
23          contracts or agreements, be placed on the contracting  
24          regional economic development organization's website  
25          for a specified period before execution; deleting an  
26          obsolete provision; increasing the amount of funds the  
27          Department of Economic Opportunity may expend each  
28          fiscal year for certain purposes; amending s.  
29          288.0655, F.S.; increasing the maximum percentage of

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30 total infrastructure project costs for which the  
31 department may award a grant; deleting a provision  
32 authorizing a higher maximum percentage of total  
33 infrastructure project costs for a catalyst site;  
34 providing that deploying broadband Internet service to  
35 certain areas may be included in a project that is  
36 eligible for rural infrastructure grant funds;  
37 defining the term "unserved rural community";  
38 requiring that improvements to broadband Internet  
39 service and access be made through certain  
40 partnerships, which must be established through a  
41 competitive selection process; extending the date by  
42 which the department is required to reevaluate certain  
43 guidelines and criteria; requiring that certain  
44 information be included in a contract or agreement  
45 involving the expenditure of grant funds; requiring  
46 that contracts or agreements involving the expenditure  
47 of grant funds, and a plain-language version of  
48 certain contracts or agreements, be placed on the  
49 contracting regional economic development  
50 organization's website for a specified period before  
51 execution; 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) For the purposes of this section, a "regional

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59 economic development organization” means an economic development  
60 organization located in a rural area of opportunity, as defined  
61 in s. 288.0656.

62 (b) The department shall establish a matching grant program  
63 to provide funding to regional ~~regionally based~~ economic  
64 development organizations representing rural counties and  
65 communities to build ~~for the purpose of building~~ the  
66 professional capacity of those ~~their~~ organizations. Efforts to  
67 build the professional capacity of regional economic development  
68 organizations include the hiring of professional staff to  
69 develop, facilitate the delivery of, and directly provide needed  
70 economic development professional services, including technical  
71 assistance, education and leadership development, marketing, and  
72 project recruitment. ~~Such~~ Matching grants may also be used by a  
73 regional ~~an~~ economic development organization to provide  
74 technical assistance to local governments, local economic  
75 development organizations, and existing and prospective  
76 businesses within the rural counties and communities that it  
77 serves. A regional economic development organization that  
78 provides taxpayer-funded incentives to existing or prospective  
79 businesses is not eligible to participate in the matching grant  
80 program.

81 (c) A regional economic development organization may apply  
82 annually to the department for a matching grant. The department  
83 is authorized to approve an application for a grant of: ~~on an~~  
84 annual basis, grants

85 1. Up to \$150,000 to an organization located ~~to such~~  
86 ~~regionally based economic development organizations. The maximum~~  
87 ~~amount an organization may receive in any year will be \$50,000,~~

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88 ~~or \$150,000~~ in a rural area of opportunity designated pursuant  
89 to s. 288.0656(7).

90 2. Up to \$250,000 to any of the three regional economic  
91 development organizations that serve an entire region of a rural  
92 area of opportunity designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(7) and  
93 that are recognized by the department as serving such a region.

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

99 (3) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the  
100 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section,  
101 including a contract or agreement entered into between another  
102 entity and a regional economic development organization, a unit  
103 of local government, or an economic development organization  
104 substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must  
105 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 (b) At least 14 days before execution, the contracting  
114 regional economic development organization shall post on its  
115 website:

- 116 1. Any contract or agreement that involves the expenditure

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117 of grant funds provided under this section.

118 2. A plain-language version of a contract or agreement with  
119 a private entity, a municipality, or a vendor of services,  
120 supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the purchase  
121 or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties which  
122 involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this  
123 section and which is estimated to exceed \$35,000 ~~The department~~  
124 ~~may also contract for the development of an enterprise zone web~~  
125 ~~portal or websites for each enterprise zone which will be used~~  
126 ~~to market the program for job creation in disadvantaged urban~~  
127 ~~and rural enterprise zones. Each enterprise zone web page should~~  
128 ~~include downloadable links to state forms and information, as~~  
129 ~~well as local message boards that help businesses and residents~~  
130 ~~receive information concerning zone boundaries, job openings,~~  
131 ~~zone programs, and neighborhood improvement activities.~~

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

140 Section 2. Present subsection (5) of section 288.0655,  
141 Florida Statutes, is redesignated as subsection (6), paragraph  
142 (b) of subsection (2) and subsection (4) of that section are  
143 amended, and a new subsection (5) is added to that section, to  
144 read:

145 288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

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146 (2) (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural  
147 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic  
148 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the  
149 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States  
150 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of  
151 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural  
152 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate  
153 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the  
154 department may award grants for up to 50 ~~30~~ percent of the total  
155 infrastructure project cost. ~~If an application for funding is~~  
156 ~~for a catalyst site, as defined in s. 288.0656, the department~~  
157 ~~may award grants for up to 40 percent of the total~~  
158 ~~infrastructure project cost.~~ Eligible projects must be related  
159 to specific job-creation or job-retention opportunities.  
160 Eligible projects may also include improving any inadequate  
161 infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action that  
162 prohibits economic or community growth or reducing the costs to  
163 community users of proposed infrastructure improvements that  
164 exceed such costs in comparable communities, including the costs  
165 associated with improving access to and the availability of  
166 broadband Internet service. Eligible uses of funds shall include  
167 improvements to public infrastructure for industrial or  
168 commercial sites, ~~and~~ upgrades to or development of public  
169 tourism infrastructure, and deployment of broadband Internet  
170 service and access in unserved rural communities. For the  
171 purposes of this paragraph, the term "unserved rural community"  
172 means a geographic area of this state, identified at the census  
173 block level, in which there is not at least one provider of  
174 broadband Internet service which offers a connection to the

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175 Internet that provides capacity for transmission at an actual  
176 speed of at least 10 megabits per second downstream and at least  
177 1 megabit per second upstream. Improvements to broadband  
178 Internet service and access must be made in partnership with one  
179 or more dealers of communications services as defined in s.  
180 202.11(2), and any such partnership must be established by a  
181 publicly noticed competitive selection process. Authorized  
182 infrastructure may include the following public or public-  
183 private partnership facilities: storm water systems;  
184 telecommunications facilities; broadband facilities; roads or  
185 other remedies to transportation impediments; nature-based  
186 tourism facilities; or other physical requirements necessary to  
187 facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development activities  
188 in the community. Authorized infrastructure may also include  
189 publicly or privately owned self-powered nature-based tourism  
190 facilities, publicly owned telecommunications facilities, and  
191 broadband facilities, and additions to the distribution  
192 facilities of the existing natural gas utility as defined in s.  
193 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric utility as defined in s.  
194 366.02, or the existing water or wastewater utility as defined  
195 in s. 367.021(12), or any other existing water or wastewater  
196 facility, which owns a gas or electric distribution system or a  
197 water or wastewater system in this state where:

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

202       2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able to  
203 provide such service.

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204 (4) By September 1, 2020 ~~2012~~, the department shall, in  
205 consultation with the organizations listed in subsection (3),  
206 and other organizations, reevaluate existing guidelines and  
207 criteria governing submission of applications for funding,  
208 review and evaluation of such applications, and approval of  
209 funding under this section. The department shall consider  
210 factors including, but not limited to, the project's potential  
211 for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment, the  
212 demonstration and level of local public and private commitment,  
213 whether the project is located ~~in an enterprise zone~~, in a  
214 community development corporation service area, or in an urban  
215 high-crime area as designated under s. 212.097, the unemployment  
216 rate of the county in which the project would be located, and  
217 the poverty rate of the community.

218 (5) (a) A contract or agreement that includes the  
219 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section,  
220 including a contract or agreement entered into between an entity  
221 and a regional economic development organization, a unit of  
222 local government, or an economic development organization  
223 substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must  
224 include:

- 225 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.
- 226 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for  
227 each entity.
- 228 3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
- 229 4. The value of any services provided.
- 230 5. The projected travel and entertainment expenses for  
231 employees and board members, if applicable.

232 (b) At least 14 days before execution, the contracting

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233 regional economic development organization shall post on its  
234 website:

235 1. Any contract or agreement that involves the expenditure  
236 of grant funds provided under this section.

237 2. A plain-language version of a contract or agreement with  
238 a private entity, a municipality, or a vendor of services,  
239 supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the purchase  
240 or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties which  
241 involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this  
242 section and which is estimated to exceed \$35,000.

243 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2019.