

By the Committee on Appropriations; and Senators Montford,
Albritton, and Stewart

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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; increasing the maximum
12 amount of annual grant funding that specified economic
13 development organizations may receive; revising the
14 required amount of nonstate matching funds; requiring
15 that certain information be included in contracts or
16 agreements involving grant funds; requiring that
17 contracts or agreements involving the expenditure of
18 grant funds, and a plain-language version of certain
19 contracts or agreements, be placed on the contracting
20 regional economic development organization's website
21 for a specified period before execution; deleting an
22 obsolete provision; increasing the amount of funds the
23 Department of Economic Opportunity may expend each
24 fiscal year from the Rural Community Development
25 Revolving Loan Fund for certain purposes; amending s.
26 288.0655, F.S.; revising the maximum percentage of
27 total infrastructure project costs for which the
28 department may award grants; specifying that improving
29 access to and availability of broadband Internet

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30 services is an eligible project for certain grant
31 funds; providing that grants for improvements to
32 broadband Internet service and access must be
33 conducted through certain partnerships; requiring the
34 department to reevaluate certain guidelines by a
35 specified date; requiring that certain information be
36 included in contracts or agreements involving grant
37 funds; requiring a regional economic development
38 organization to post contracts or agreements involving
39 the expenditure of grant funds, and a plain-language
40 version of certain contracts or agreements, on the
41 organization's website for a specified period before
42 execution; providing an effective date.

43
44 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

45
46 Section 1. Subsections (1), (3), and (4) of section
47 288.018, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

48 288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

49 (1) (a) For the purposes of this section, the term "regional
50 economic development organization" means an economic development
51 organization located in or contracted to serve a rural area of
52 opportunity, as defined in s. 288.0656(2) (d).

53 (b) The department shall establish a matching grant program
54 to provide funding to regional ~~regionally based~~ economic
55 development organizations ~~representing rural counties and~~
56 ~~communities~~ for the purpose of building the professional
57 capacity of those ~~their~~ organizations. Building the professional
58 capacity of a regional economic development organization

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59 includes hiring professional staff to develop, deliver, and
60 provide needed economic development professional services,
61 including technical assistance, education and leadership
62 development, marketing, and project recruitment. ~~Such~~ Matching
63 grants may also be used by a regional ~~an~~ economic development
64 organization to provide technical assistance to local
65 governments, local economic development organizations, and
66 existing and prospective businesses within the rural counties
67 ~~and communities that it serves.~~

68 (c) A regional economic development organization may apply
69 annually to the department for a matching grant. The department
70 is authorized to approve, on an annual basis, grants to such
71 regional ~~regionally based~~ economic development organizations.
72 The maximum amount an organization may receive in any year will
73 be \$50,000, or \$250,000 for any three regional economic
74 development organizations that serve an entire region of a rural
75 area of opportunity designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(7) if
76 they are recognized by the department as serving such a region.

77 (d) Grant funds received by a regional economic development
78 organization ~~\$150,000 in a rural area of opportunity recommended~~
79 ~~by the Rural Economic Development Initiative and designated by~~
80 ~~the Governor, and must be matched each year by an equivalent~~
81 ~~amount of nonstate resources~~ in an amount equal to 25 percent of
82 the state contribution.

83 (3) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the
84 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section,
85 including a contract or agreement entered into between another
86 entity and a regional economic development organization, a unit
87 of local government, or an economic development organization

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88 substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must
89 include:

- 90 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.
- 91 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for
92 each entity under the contract or agreement.
- 93 3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
- 94 4. The value of any services provided.
- 95 5. The projected travel expenses for employees and board
96 members, if applicable.

97 (b) At least 14 days before executing a contract or
98 agreement, the contracting regional economic development
99 organization shall post on its website:

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

102 2. A plain-language version of any contract or agreement
103 that is estimated to exceed \$35,000 with a private entity, a
104 municipality, or a vendor of services, supplies, or programs,
105 including marketing, or for the purchase or lease or use of
106 lands, facilities, or properties which involves the expenditure
107 of grant funds provided under this section ~~The department may~~
108 ~~also contract for the development of an enterprise zone web~~
109 ~~portal or websites for each enterprise zone which will be used~~
110 ~~to market the program for job creation in disadvantaged urban~~
111 ~~and rural enterprise zones. Each enterprise zone web page should~~
112 ~~include downloadable links to state forms and information, as~~
113 ~~well as local message boards that help businesses and residents~~
114 ~~receive information concerning zone boundaries, job openings,~~
115 ~~zone programs, and neighborhood improvement activities.~~

116 (4) The department may expend up to \$1 million ~~\$750,000~~

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117 each fiscal year from funds appropriated to the Rural Community
118 Development Revolving Loan Fund for the purposes outlined in
119 this section. The department may contract with Enterprise
120 Florida, Inc., for the administration of the purposes specified
121 in this section. Funds released to Enterprise Florida, Inc., for
122 this purpose shall be released quarterly and shall be calculated
123 based on the applications in process.

124 Section 2. Present subsection (5) of section 288.0655,
125 Florida Statutes, is redesignated as subsection (6), a new
126 subsection (5) is added to that section, and paragraph (b) of
127 subsection (2), subsection (4), and present subsection (6) of
128 that section are amended, to read:

129 288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

130 (2)

131 (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural
132 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic
133 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the
134 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States
135 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of
136 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural
137 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate
138 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the
139 department may award grants for up to 50 ~~30~~ percent of the total
140 infrastructure project cost. ~~If an application for funding is~~
141 ~~for a catalyst site, as defined in s. 288.0656, the department~~
142 ~~may award grants for up to 40 percent of the total~~
143 ~~infrastructure project cost.~~ Eligible projects must be related
144 to specific job-creation or job-retention opportunities.
145 Eligible projects may also include improving any inadequate

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146 infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action that
147 prohibits economic or community growth, ~~or~~ reducing the costs to
148 community users of proposed infrastructure improvements that
149 exceed such costs in comparable communities, and improving
150 access to and the availability of broadband Internet service.
151 Eligible uses of funds shall include improvements to public
152 infrastructure for industrial or commercial sites, and upgrades
153 to or development of public tourism infrastructure, and
154 improvements to broadband Internet service and access in
155 unserved or underserved rural communities. Improvements to
156 broadband Internet service and access must be conducted through
157 a partnership or partnerships with one or more dealers, as
158 defined in s. 202.11(2), and the partnership or partnerships
159 must be established through a competitive selection process that
160 is publicly noticed. Authorized infrastructure may include the
161 following public or public-private partnership facilities: storm
162 water systems; telecommunications facilities; broadband
163 facilities; roads or other remedies to transportation
164 impediments; nature-based tourism facilities; or other physical
165 requirements necessary to facilitate tourism, trade, and
166 economic development activities in the community. Authorized
167 infrastructure may also include publicly or privately owned
168 self-powered nature-based tourism facilities, publicly owned
169 telecommunications facilities, and broadband facilities, and
170 additions to the distribution facilities of the existing natural
171 gas utility as defined in s. 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric
172 utility as defined in s. 366.02, or the existing water or
173 wastewater utility as defined in s. 367.021(12), or any other
174 existing water or wastewater facility, which owns a gas or

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175 electric distribution system or a water or wastewater system in
176 this state where:

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

181 2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able to
182 provide such service.

183 (4) By September 1, 2021 ~~2012~~, the department shall, in
184 consultation with the organizations listed in subsection (3),
185 and other organizations, reevaluate existing guidelines and
186 criteria governing submission of applications for funding,
187 review and evaluation of such applications, and approval of
188 funding under this section. The department shall consider
189 factors including, but not limited to, the project's potential
190 for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment, the
191 demonstration and level of local public and private commitment,
192 whether the project is located ~~in an enterprise zone~~, in a
193 community development corporation service area, or in an urban
194 high-crime area as designated under s. 212.097, the unemployment
195 rate of the county in which the project would be located, and
196 the poverty rate of the community.

197 (5) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the
198 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section,
199 including a contract or agreement entered into between another
200 entity and a regional economic development organization, a unit
201 of local government, or an economic development organization
202 substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must
203 include:

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- 204 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.
- 205 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for
 206 each entity.
- 207 3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
- 208 4. The value of any services provided.
- 209 5. The projected travel expenses for employees and board
 210 members, if applicable.
- 211 (b) At least 14 days before execution, the contracting
 212 regional economic development organization shall post on its
 213 website:
- 214 1. Any contract or agreement that involves the expenditure
 215 of grant funds provided under this section.
- 216 2. A plain-language version of a contract or agreement that
 217 is estimated to exceed \$35,000 with a private entity, a
 218 municipality, or a vendor of services, supplies, or programs,
 219 including marketing, or for the purchase or lease or use of
 220 lands, facilities, or properties which involves the expenditure
 221 of grant funds provided under this section.
- 222 ~~(6) For the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the funds appropriated~~
 223 ~~for the grant program for Florida Panhandle counties shall be~~
 224 ~~distributed pursuant to and for the purposes described in the~~
 225 ~~proviso language associated with Specific Appropriation 2314 of~~
 226 ~~the 2019-2020 General Appropriations Act. This subsection~~
 227 ~~expires July 1, 2020.~~
- 228 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2020.