

Governor's Budget Recommendation Conforming Bill
Rural Development

1 A bill to be entitled

2 An act related to rural development; amending s. 288.018,
3 F.S.; eliminating the grant match requirements under the
4 Regional Rural Development Grants Program; amending s. 288.065,
5 F.S.; removing a match requirement from the Rural Community
6 Development Revolving Loan Fund under specified conditions;
7 amending s. 288.0655, F.S.; revising provisions related to the
8 Rural Infrastructure Fund; increasing the percentage of grants
9 that the Department of Economic Opportunity may award; revising
10 criteria for awarding grants; removing the local match
11 requirement; providing an effective date.

12
13 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

14
15 Section 1. Subsections (1) and (2) of section 288.018,
16 Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

17 288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

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

22 (b) The department shall establish a ~~matching~~ grant program
23 to provide funding to regional economic development
24 organizations for the purpose of building the professional
25 capacity of those organizations. Building the professional
26 capacity of a regional economic development organization
27 includes hiring professional staff to develop, deliver, and
28 provide needed economic development professional services,

Governor's Budget Recommendation Conforming Bill
Rural Development

29 including technical assistance, education and leadership
30 development, marketing, and project recruitment. ~~Matching~~ Grants
31 may also be used by a regional economic development organization
32 to provide technical assistance to local governments, local
33 economic development organizations, and existing and prospective
34 businesses.

35 (c) A regional economic development organization may apply
36 annually to the department for a ~~matching~~ grant. The department
37 is authorized to approve, on an annual basis, grants to such
38 regional economic development organizations. The maximum amount
39 an organization may receive in any year will be \$50,000, or
40 \$250,000 for any three regional economic development
41 organizations that serve an entire region of a rural area of
42 opportunity designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(7) if they are
43 recognized by the department as serving such a region.

44 ~~(d) Grant funds received by a regional economic development~~
45 ~~organization must be matched each year by nonstate resources in~~
46 ~~an amount equal to 25 percent of the state contribution.~~

47 (2) In approving the participants, the department shall
48 consider the demonstrated need of the applicant for assistance
49 and require the following:

50 (a) Documentation of official commitments of support from
51 each of the units of local government represented by the
52 regional organization.

53 ~~(b) Demonstration that each unit of local government has~~
54 ~~made a financial or in-kind commitment to the regional~~
55 ~~organization.~~

56 ~~(c) Demonstration that the private sector has made~~

Governor's Budget Recommendation Conforming Bill
Rural Development

57 ~~financial or in-kind commitments to the regional organization.~~

58 (d) Demonstration that the organization is in existence
59 and actively involved in economic development activities serving
60 the region.

61 (e) Demonstration of the manner in which the organization
62 is or will coordinate its efforts with those of other local and
63 state organizations.

64 Section 2. Paragraph (c) of subsection (2) of section
65 288.065, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

66 288.065 Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund.—

67 (2)

68 (c) All repayments of principal and interest shall be
69 returned to the loan fund and made available for loans to other
70 applicants. However, in a rural area of opportunity designated
71 by the Governor, and upon approval by the department, repayments
72 of principal and interest may be retained by the applicant if
73 such repayments are dedicated ~~and matched~~ to fund regionally
74 based economic development organizations representing the rural
75 area of opportunity.

76 Section 3. Subsection (1), paragraphs (b), (c), and (e) of
77 subsection (2), and subsection (3) of section 288.0655, Florida
78 Statutes, are amended to read:

79 288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

80 (1) There is created within the department the Rural
81 Infrastructure Fund to facilitate the planning, preparing, and
82 financing of infrastructure ~~projects~~ in rural communities which
83 will encourage job creation, capital investment, and the
84 strengthening and diversification of rural economies by

Governor's Budget Recommendation Conforming Bill
Rural Development

85 promoting tourism, trade, and economic development.

86 (2)

87 (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural
88 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic
89 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the
90 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States
91 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of
92 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural
93 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate
94 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the
95 department may award grants for up to ~~50~~ 75 percent of the total
96 infrastructure project cost, or up to 100 percent of the total
97 infrastructure project cost for a project located in a rural
98 community as defined in s. 288.0656(2)(e) or a rural area of
99 opportunity as defined in s. 288.0656(2)(d), and is also located
100 in a fiscally constrained county as defined in s. 218.67(1).
101 ~~Eligible projects must be related to specific job creation or~~
102 ~~job-retention opportunities.~~ Eligible uses of funds ~~projects~~ may
103 also include improving any inadequate infrastructure that has
104 resulted in regulatory action that prohibits economic or
105 community growth, reducing the costs to community users of
106 proposed infrastructure improvements that exceed such costs in
107 comparable communities, and improving access to and the
108 availability of broadband Internet service. Eligible uses of
109 funds shall include improvements to public infrastructure for
110 industrial or commercial sites, upgrades to or development of
111 public tourism infrastructure, and improvements to broadband
112 Internet service and access in unserved or underserved rural

Governor's Budget Recommendation Conforming Bill
Rural Development

113 communities. Improvements to broadband Internet service and
114 access must be conducted through a partnership or partnerships
115 with one or more dealers, as defined in s. 202.11(2), and the
116 partnership or partnerships must be established through a
117 competitive selection process that is publicly noticed.

118 Authorized infrastructure may include the following public or
119 public-private partnership facilities: storm water systems;
120 telecommunications facilities; broadband facilities; roads or
121 other remedies to transportation impediments; nature-based
122 tourism facilities; or other physical requirements necessary to
123 facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development activities
124 in the community. Authorized infrastructure may also include
125 publicly or privately owned self-powered nature-based tourism
126 facilities, publicly owned telecommunications facilities, and
127 broadband facilities, and additions to the distribution
128 facilities of the existing natural gas utility as defined in s.
129 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric utility as defined in s.
130 366.02, or the existing water or wastewater utility as defined
131 in s. 367.021(12), or any other existing water or wastewater
132 facility, which owns a gas or electric distribution system or a
133 water or wastewater system in this state where:

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

138 2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able to
139 provide such service.

140 (c) ~~To facilitate timely response and induce the location~~

Governor's Budget Recommendation Conforming Bill
Rural Development

141 ~~or expansion of specific job creating opportunities, The~~
142 department may award grants of up to \$300,000 for infrastructure
143 feasibility studies, design and engineering activities, or other
144 infrastructure planning and preparation activities. ~~Authorized~~
145 ~~grants shall be up to \$50,000 for an employment project with a~~
146 ~~business committed to create at least 100 jobs; up to \$150,000~~
147 ~~for an employment project with a business committed to create at~~
148 ~~least 300 jobs; and up to \$300,000 for a project in a rural area~~
149 ~~of opportunity.~~ Grants awarded under this paragraph may be used
150 in conjunction with grants awarded under paragraph (b), ~~provided~~
151 ~~that the total amount of both grants does not exceed 30 percent~~
152 ~~of the total project cost.~~ In evaluating applications under this
153 paragraph, the department shall consider the extent to which the
154 application seeks to minimize administrative and consultant
155 expenses.

156 (e) To enable local governments to access the resources
157 available pursuant to s. 403.973(18), the department may award
158 grants for surveys, feasibility studies, and other activities
159 related to the identification and preclearance review of land
160 which is suitable for preclearance review. Authorized grants
161 under this paragraph do not require a local match and may not
162 exceed \$75,000 each, except in the case of a project in a rural
163 area of opportunity, in which case the grant may not exceed
164 \$300,000. ~~Any funds awarded under this paragraph must be matched~~
165 ~~at a level of 50 percent with local funds, except that any funds~~
166 ~~awarded for a project in a rural area of opportunity must be~~
167 ~~matched at a level of 33 percent with local funds. If an~~
168 ~~application for funding is for a catalyst site, as defined in s.~~

Governor's Budget Recommendation Conforming Bill
Rural Development

169 ~~288.0656, the requirement for local match may be waived pursuant~~
170 ~~to the process in s. 288.06561.~~ In evaluating applications under
171 this paragraph, the department shall consider the extent to
172 which the application seeks to minimize administrative and
173 consultant expenses.

174 (3) The department, in consultation with Enterprise
175 Florida, Inc., the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing
176 Corporation, the Department of Environmental Protection, and the
177 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, as
178 appropriate, shall review and certify applications pursuant to
179 s. 288.061. The review shall include an evaluation of the
180 economic benefit ~~of the projects~~ and ~~their~~ long-term viability.
181 The department shall have final approval for any grant under
182 this section.

183 Section 4. This act shall take effect July 1, 2023.