

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 the
5 duties of a regional economic development
6 organization; specifying authorized uses of matching
7 grants; revising the required amount of nonstate
8 matching funds; requiring certain information to be
9 included in contracts or agreements involving grant
10 funds; specifying the information that must be posted
11 on a regional economic development organizations
12 website before execution of certain contracts or
13 agreements; deleting an obsolete provision; increasing
14 the amount of funds the Department of Economic
15 Opportunity may expend each fiscal year from the Rural
16 Community Development Revolving Loan Fund for certain
17 purposes; amending s. 288.0655, F.S.; increasing the
18 maximum percent of total infrastructure project costs
19 for which the department may award a grant; repealing
20 a provision addressing increased certain maximum
21 percentages; specifying that improving availability of
22 broadband Internet services is an eligible project for
23 certain grant funds; providing that grants for
24 improvements to broadband Internet service and access
25 must be conducted through certain partnerships;

26 | extending the date by which the department is required
 27 | to reevaluate certain guidelines; requiring certain
 28 | information to be included in contracts or agreements
 29 | involving grant funds; specifying the information that
 30 | must be posted on a regional economic development
 31 | organizations website before execution of certain
 32 | contracts or agreements; providing an effective date.
 33 |

34 | Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

35 |
 36 | Section 1. Subsections (1) and (3) of section 288.018,
 37 | Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

38 | 288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

39 | (1) (a) For the purposes of this section, the term
 40 | "regional economic development organization" means an economic
 41 | development organization located in or contracted to serve a
 42 | rural area of opportunity, as defined in s. 288.0656(2) (d).

43 | (b) The department shall establish a matching grant
 44 | program to provide funding to regional ~~regionally based~~ economic
 45 | development organizations ~~representing rural counties and~~
 46 | ~~communities~~ for the purpose of building the professional
 47 | capacity of those ~~their~~ organizations. Building the professional
 48 | capacity of a regional economic development organization
 49 | includes hiring professional staff to develop, deliver, and
 50 | provide needed economic development professional services,

51 including technical assistance, education and leadership
52 development, marketing, and project recruitment. ~~Such~~ Matching
53 grants may also be used by a regional ~~an~~ economic development
54 organization to provide technical assistance to local
55 governments, local economic development organizations, and
56 existing and prospective businesses ~~within the rural counties~~
57 ~~and communities that it serves.~~

58 (c) A regional economic development organization may apply
59 annually to the department for a matching grant. The department
60 is authorized to approve, on an annual basis, grants to such
61 regional ~~regionally based~~ economic development organizations.
62 The maximum amount an organization may receive in any year will
63 be \$50,000, or \$250,000 for any three regional economic
64 development organizations that serve an entire region of a rural
65 area of opportunity designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(7) if
66 they are recognized by the department as serving such a region.

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

73 (3) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the
74 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section,
75 including a contract or agreement entered into between another

76 entity and a regional economic development organization, a unit
 77 of local government, or an economic development organization
 78 substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must
 79 include:

- 80 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.
- 81 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for
 82 each entity under the contract or agreement.
- 83 3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
- 84 4. The value of any services provided.
- 85 5. The projected travel expenses for employees and board
 86 members, if applicable.

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

- 90 1. Any contract or agreement that involves the expenditure
 91 of grant funds provided under this section.
- 92 2. A plain-language version of any contract or agreement
 93 that is estimated to exceed \$35,000 with a private entity, a
 94 municipality, or a vendor of services, supplies, or programs,
 95 including marketing, or for the purchase or lease or use of
 96 lands, facilities, or properties which involves the expenditure
 97 of grant funds provided under this section and which is
 98 estimated to exceed \$35,000 ~~The department may also contract for~~
 99 ~~the development of an enterprise zone web portal or websites for~~
 100 ~~each enterprise zone which will be used to market the program~~

101 ~~for job creation in disadvantaged urban and rural enterprise~~
 102 ~~zones. Each enterprise zone web page should include downloadable~~
 103 ~~links to state forms and information, as well as local message~~
 104 ~~boards that help businesses and residents receive information~~
 105 ~~concerning zone boundaries, job openings, zone programs, and~~
 106 ~~neighborhood improvement activities.~~

107 Section 2. Subsections (5) and (6) of section 288.0655,
 108 Florida Statutes, are renumbered as subsections (6) and (7),
 109 respectively, paragraph (b) of subsection (2) and subsection (4)
 110 are amended, and a new subsection (5) is added to that section,
 111 to read:

112 288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

113 (2)

114 (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural
 115 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic
 116 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the
 117 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States
 118 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of
 119 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural
 120 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate
 121 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the
 122 department may award grants for up to 50 ~~30~~ percent of the total
 123 infrastructure project cost. ~~If an application for funding is~~
 124 ~~for a catalyst site, as defined in s. 288.0656, the department~~
 125 ~~may award grants for up to 40 percent of the total~~

126 ~~infrastructure project cost.~~ Eligible projects must be related
127 to specific job-creation or job-retention opportunities.
128 Eligible projects may also include improving any inadequate
129 infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action that
130 prohibits economic or community growth, ~~or~~ reducing the costs to
131 community users of proposed infrastructure improvements that
132 exceed such costs in comparable communities, and improving
133 access to and the availability of broadband Internet service.
134 Eligible uses of funds shall include improvements to public
135 infrastructure for industrial or commercial sites, upgrades to
136 or development of public tourism infrastructure, and
137 improvements to broadband Internet service and access in
138 unserved or underserved rural communities. Improvements to
139 broadband Internet service and access must be conducted through
140 a partnership or partnerships with one or more dealers of
141 communications services, as defined in s. 202.11(2), and the
142 partnership or partnerships must be established by a publicly
143 noticed and competitively selected process and upgrades to or
144 ~~development of public tourism infrastructure.~~ Authorized
145 infrastructure may include the following public or public-
146 private partnership facilities: storm water systems;
147 telecommunications facilities; broadband facilities; roads or
148 other remedies to transportation impediments; nature-based
149 tourism facilities; or other physical requirements necessary to
150 facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development activities

151 in the community. Authorized infrastructure may also include
152 publicly or privately owned self-powered nature-based tourism
153 facilities, publicly owned telecommunications facilities, and
154 broadband facilities, and additions to the distribution
155 facilities of the existing natural gas utility as defined in s.
156 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric utility as defined in s.
157 366.02, or the existing water or wastewater utility as defined
158 in s. 367.021(12), or any other existing water or wastewater
159 facility, which owns a gas or electric distribution system or a
160 water or wastewater system in this state where:

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

165 2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able
166 to provide such service.

167 (4) By September 1, 2021 ~~2012~~, the department shall, in
168 consultation with the organizations listed in subsection (3),
169 and other organizations, reevaluate existing guidelines and
170 criteria governing submission of applications for funding,
171 review and evaluation of such applications, and approval of
172 funding under this section. The department shall consider
173 factors including, but not limited to, the project's potential
174 for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment, the
175 demonstration and level of local public and private commitment,

176 whether the project is located ~~in an enterprise zone,~~ in a
177 community development corporation service area, or in an urban
178 high-crime area as designated under s. 212.097, the unemployment
179 rate of the county in which the project would be located, and
180 the poverty rate of the community.

181 (5) (a) A contract or agreement that involves the
182 expenditure of grant funds provided under this section,
183 including a contract or agreement entered into between another
184 entity and a regional economic development organization, a unit
185 of local government, or an economic development organization
186 substantially underwritten by a unit of local government, must
187 include:

- 188 1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.
- 189 2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for
190 each entity.
- 191 3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
- 192 4. The value of any services provided.
- 193 5. The projected travel expenses for employees and board
194 members, if applicable.

195 (b) At least 14 days before execution, the contracting
196 regional economic development organization shall post on its
197 website:

- 198 1. Any contract or agreement that involves the expenditure
199 of grant funds provided under this section.
- 200 2. A plain-language version of a contract or agreement that

201 is estimated to exceed \$35,000 with a private entity, a
202 municipality, or a vendor of services, supplies, or programs,
203 including marketing, or for the purchase or lease or use of
204 lands, facilities, or properties which involves the expenditure
205 of grant funds provided under this section.

206 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2020.