A bill to be entitled
An act relating to the Regional Rural Development
Grants Program; amending s. 288.018, F.S.; defining
the term "regional economic development organization";
specifying that the concept of building the
professional capacity of a regional economic
development organization includes the hiring of
professional staff to perform specified services;
providing that matching grants may be used to provide
technical assistance to local governments and economic
development organizations and to existing and
prospective businesses; specifying that a regional
economic development organization that provides
taxpayer-funded incentives is not eligible to
participate in the matching grant program; increasing
the maximum amount of annual grant funding that
specified economic development organizations may
receive; revising the required amount of nonstate
matching funds; requiring that certain information be
included in a contract or agreement involving the
expenditure of grant funds; requiring that contracts
or agreements involving the expenditure of grant
funds, and a plain-language version of certain
contracts or agreements, be placed on the contracting
regional economic development organization’s website
for a specified period before execution; deleting an
obsolete provision; increasing the amount of funds the
Department of Economic Opportunity may expend each
fiscal year for certain purposes; providing an
Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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

288.018 Regional Rural Development Grants Program.—

(1)(a) For the purposes of this section, a “regional economic development organization” means an economic development organization located in or contracted to serve a rural area of opportunity, as defined in s. 288.0656.

(b) The department shall establish a matching grant program to provide funding to regionally based economic development organizations representing rural counties and communities to build the professional capacity of their organizations. Efforts to build the professional capacity of regional economic development organizations include the hiring of professional staff to develop, facilitate the delivery of, and directly provide needed economic development professional services, including technical assistance, education and leadership development, marketing, and project recruitment. Such Matching grants may also be used by a regional economic development organization to provide technical assistance to local governments, local economic development organizations, and existing and prospective businesses within the rural counties and communities that it serves. A regional economic development organization that provides taxpayer-funded incentives to existing or prospective businesses is not eligible to participate in the matching grant
program.

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

1. Up to $150,000 to an organization located to such regionally based economic development organizations. The maximum amount an organization may receive in any year will be $50,000, or $150,000 in or contracted to serve a rural area of opportunity designated pursuant to s. 288.0656(7).

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

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

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

1. The purpose of the contract or agreement.

2. Specific performance standards and responsibilities for each entity.
3. A detailed project or contract budget, if applicable.
4. The value of any services provided.
5. The projected travel expenses for employees and board members, if applicable.

(b) At least 14 days before execution, the contracting regional economic development organization shall post on its website:
   1. Any contract or agreement that involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this section.
2. A plain-language version of a contract or agreement with a private entity, a municipality, or a vendor of services, supplies, or programs, including marketing, or for the purchase or lease or use of lands, facilities, or properties which involves the expenditure of grant funds provided under this section and which is estimated to exceed $35,000. The department may also contract for the development of an enterprise zone web portal or websites for each enterprise zone which will be used to market the program for job creation in disadvantaged urban and rural enterprise zones. Each enterprise zone web page should include downloadable links to state forms and information, as well as local message boards that help businesses and residents receive information concerning zone boundaries, job openings, zone programs, and neighborhood improvement activities.

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

Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2020.