

Rural Infrastructure Fund FY 2022-2023 Panhandle Specific Appropriation Program Guidelines



Background

The Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF) is a reimbursement grant program within the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), created to facilitate the planning, preparing, and financing of infrastructure projects in rural communities, which will encourage job creation, capital investment, and the strengthening and diversification of rural economies. The Florida Legislature appropriated \$5 million in state funds to the Rural Infrastructure Fund Panhandle Specific Appropriation.

Eligible Applicants and Technical Assistance

RIF Panhandle Specific Appropriation funds are available to the following counties and all municipalities within their boundaries:

- Calhoun County
- Gadsden County
- Holmes County
- Jackson County
- Liberty County
- Washington County

DEO staff are available to provide support throughout the application process. Applicants are strongly encouraged to attend all scheduled webinars and trainings provided by DEO. Applicants can find current information about the RIF program at www.FloridaJobs.org/RIF. Questions regarding the RIF program should be sent to RIF@deo.myflorida.com.

Eligible Activities

Eligible activities for RIF Panhandle Specific Appropriation include planning and construction projects for:

- Improvements to public infrastructure for industrial or commercial sites;
- Upgrades to or development of public tourism infrastructure;
- Improvements to access and availability of broadband internet service; or
- Improvements to inadequate infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action.

Grant Categories and Maximum Award Amounts

Total Project Participation Grants

To facilitate access and maximize the use of state, federal, local, and private resources, grants may be awarded for up to 50 percent of the total infrastructure project costs related to specific job creation or job retention opportunities. Applicants will be required to provide information from the job-creator (Participating Party) that includes the number of new jobs and the amount of capital investment provided by the job creator. Applications should demonstrate the need for infrastructure projects to attract job creation and capital investment in their communities.

Project Planning and Preparation Grants

To facilitate a timely response and induce the location or expansion of specific job creating opportunities, grants may be awarded for infrastructure feasibility studies, design and engineering activities, or other infrastructure planning and preparation activities. Grant application criteria includes the extent to which administrative and consultant expenses are minimized. Grants awarded under this category may be used in conjunction with Total Project Participation grants, provided the total amount of both grants does not exceed 30 percent of the total project cost.

Maximum amounts of grants:

- \$50,000 for an employment project with a business committed to create at least 100 jobs;
- \$150,000 for an employment project with a business committed to create at least 300 jobs; and
- \$300,000 for a project in a rural area of opportunity.

Preclearance Review Grants

To enable rural communities to access the resources available under the Expedited Permitting – Preclearance Review Process (Section 403.973(18), Florida Statutes), grants may be awarded for surveys, feasibility studies, and other activities related to the identification and preclearance review of land which is suitable for preclearance review. Grant application criteria includes the extent to which administrative and consultant expenses are minimized.

Maximum amounts and match requirements:

- Projects located outside a Rural Area of Opportunity - \$75,000 with 50 percent local funds match;
- Projects located within a Rural Area of Opportunity - \$300,000 with 33 percent local funds match; and
- Projects located within a catalyst site (as defined in Section 288.056, Florida Statutes): maximum amounts same as above with local funds match requirement waived.

Broadband Internet Infrastructure Requirements

Internet service and access must be conducted through partnership(s) with one or more dealers registered with the Department of Revenue as a provider of communications services in Florida and the partnership(s) must be established through a competitive selection process that is publicly noticed. (Florida Statutes, [Section 288.0655\(2\)\(b\)](#)).

Job Creation and Capital Investment

The purpose of RIF funding is to attract job creation and capital investment in rural economies. Applications submitted under all grant categories should demonstrate the need of the infrastructure project in attracting job creation and capital investment. Applications submitted under the Total Project Participation grant category will be required to provide information from a Participating Party that includes the number of new jobs they expect to create and the amount of capital investment they will provide.

Application Evaluation Review Criteria

RIF grant applications should clearly demonstrate the economic benefit of the project and its long-term viability. In evaluating RIF grant applications, DEO will consider factors including, but not limited to:

- The applicant's capacity to administer the funds;
- The project's potential for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment;
- Whether the project is located in a community development corporation service area;
- The [unemployment rate](#) of the county in which the project is located; and
- The poverty rate of the community.

Monitoring and Reporting

DEO will monitor its recipients to ensure program compliance. DEO will monitor each project throughout its lifecycle. Monitoring may be conducted when about 15% of the awarded funds have been disbursed to ensure that the recipient has systems in place to properly comply with program requirements. Recipients will be required to submit quarterly status reports that detail the progress that has been made on the project and to detail what steps will be taken in the next quarter.

Compliance

Conflicts of Interest

Pursuant to Section 112.3143, Florida Statutes, the following people or their immediate family members shall not have any direct or indirect financial interest in any contract, subcontract, or the proceeds thereof for work to be performed in connection with the grant during their tenure or for one year thereafter: 1) employees or agents of the recipient who exercise any function or responsibility for the RIF project and 2) officials of the recipient including members of the governing body.

Additional Information

The RIF Panhandle Specific Appropriation grant funds may not be used to pay for administrative fees or costs. At DEO's discretion, funding may be approved for a lower amount than requested in the application. Additional resources and other RIF program information can be found on the DEO website at www.FloridaJobs.org/RIF.

Questions or requests for technical assistance regarding the RIF program, proposed projects, or how to complete and submit an application should be addressed to: RIF@DEO.MyFlorida.com or call 850-717-8405.