



OFFICE of COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

# FLORIDA COMMUNITIES QUARTERLY

Division of Community Development  
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity



Fall 2019

## A Letter from Director Mario Rubio

As the Director of the Division of Community Development, I want to ensure that we are engaging Florida's small and rural communities. I created the Office of Community Partnerships to include three specific programs focused on developing small and rural communities: the Competitive Florida Partnership (CFP) Program, the Regional Rural Development Grant (RRDG) and the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI).

Communities with fully developed economic visions are better positioned to attract new businesses, create jobs and contribute to the well-being of residents. This results in viable and thriving communities for future generations.

By engaging communities through these programs, we can assist with devising unique economic development strategies utilizing various programs within the Division of Community Development (DCD) and the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to energize economic growth.

This newsletter will serve as an informational resource for communities and regional economic and tourism

development organizations. By providing this resource, we hope to create opportunities for collaboration among our local community leaders, partners, state and federal agencies and the private-sector partners that are seeking to build on their community assets and economic development visions.

The Office of Community Partnerships has started identifying rural communities that may benefit from the Competitive Florida Partnership program and is matching them to programs focused on Florida's rural areas through various REDI agencies. Our goal is to raise awareness and increase collaboration between our rural communities and state agencies using a wholistic approach to rural economic development leading to dynamic and sustainable communities.

I invite you to stay engaged with DEO and continue to collaborate with partners to help build more resilient Florida communities.

**Mario Rubio**

*Director, Division of Community Development*



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## Rural Economic Development Initiative

The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) addresses needs and challenges faced by Florida's rural communities that experience economic distress differently than their urban counterparts. REDI coordinates programs, services and technical assistance provided by more than 17 state and regional agencies. Over the years, federal agencies have actively engaged REDI and partnered on many projects. REDI has addressed a number of challenges and maximized opportunities in Florida's rural communities for two decades. REDI agencies have combined resources for:

- Franklin County during the Florida Gulf Coast Oyster Disaster in 2013 to assist area fisherman in economic distress;
- The Sebring Airport Authority in 2015 to support the expansion of two large employers, CitraPac, Inc. and Everglades Foods, Inc., who provide goods nationally;
- Suwannee and Dixie counties in 2017 to build necessary infrastructure and provide development support creating hundreds of jobs in their communities.

Through partnerships with regional economic and tourism development organizations, state and federal agencies and community partners, rural communities can access the resources they need to remain economically diverse, competitive, sustainable and resilient.

For more information, visit: [www.FloridaJobs.org/RuralEconomicDevelopmentInitiative](http://www.FloridaJobs.org/RuralEconomicDevelopmentInitiative).

## Did You Know?

The Division of Community Development offers the Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF). The RIF is intended to facilitate the planning, preparing and financing of infrastructure projects, which will encourage job creation, capital investment and the strengthening and diversification of rural economies.

The RIF application cycle is currently open for the 2019-20 State Fiscal Year.

For more information or to apply, please visit: [www.FloridaJobs.org/RIF](http://www.FloridaJobs.org/RIF).

# Competitive Florida Partnership

The Competitive Florida Partnership program provides grant funding for rural communities to develop and enhance their economic development strategy.

Communities participating in the Competitive Florida Partnership program identify their unique assets and opportunities and receive guidance on setting achievable goals for advancing economic development visions. Communities also receive technical assistance involving innovative strategies that promote partnerships, community design and viable economies.

In the 2018-19 year, the City of Sopchoppy was selected as a grant recipient. Sopchoppy was originally founded as an important stop on a major railway through Florida, Georgia and Alabama. The city is now known for their annual Worm Grunting Festival and the Sopchoppy Opry. Sopchoppy is a city of about 500 people and is located in Wakulla County along Florida's Forgotten Coast.

Through the Competitive Florida Partnership, DEO worked with the Apalachee Regional Planning Council to develop their strategy and update the city's land development code. Sopchoppy may continue to utilize tools and resources available to take advantage of the opportunities that make the city a gem among Florida's many rural communities.

For more information, please visit: [www.FloridaJobs.org/CompetitiveFlorida](http://www.FloridaJobs.org/CompetitiveFlorida).



## Regional Rural Development Grant

The Regional Rural Development Grant (RDG) assists regional economic development organizations (EDO) with business recruitment and marketing of the rural counties they represent. These regional economic development organizations must serve two or more contiguous rural counties and can apply for up to \$150,000 on a 1-for-1 matching basis.

Ecotourism is a major economic engine in many of Florida's rural communities and tourism development groups are eligible to utilize the funds under the same criteria. RDG recipients focusing on ecotourism have on-going marketing campaigns that have led to increased tourism development tax revenue in the counties they serve.

Grant funds have been used for marketing, technical assistance, and professional development and training of both economic development and

elected officials. Since the inception of the program, more than \$7 million dollars has been awarded to 20 grantee organizations.

RDG recipients have provided technical assistance that has been instrumental in bringing major employers to Florida's rural communities. The EDO serving Suwannee County assisted in a project that led to the creation of over 150 jobs for the area. An example of how EDOs creatively use RDG funds is an organization that brought community leaders and elected officials to the State of Mississippi to meet with executives of the Golden Triangle, a rural area whose economic recovery has been featured on the national CBS news program, "60 Minutes". Participants were able to visit and consult with some of the nation's most cutting-edge industries including steel mills and national defense contractors.

For more information, please visit: [www.FloridaJobs.org/RDG](http://www.FloridaJobs.org/RDG).

# Calendar *of* Events



## **REDI Meetings**

October 18, 2019 | Calhoun County

November 15, 2019 | Union County

\* No December meeting; REDI meetings will resume in January.

## **The Future of Florida Forum, Florida Chamber of Commerce**

October 28-29, 2019 | Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress, One Grand Cypress Blvd., Orlando, FL

## **Legislative Session**

January 14 - March 13, 2020 | Tallahassee, FL

Florida House & Florida Senate Committee Meeting Schedule: October 14-18 • October 21-25

November 4-8 • November 12-15 • December 9-13

## **Governor's Hurricane Conference**

May 17-22, 2020 | Hilton West Palm Beach, 600 Okeechobee Blvd., West Palm Beach, FL

## **Florida Association of Counties**

June 9-12, 2020 | Hyatt Regency Orlando, 9801 International Dr., Orlando, FL

## **Florida League of Cities**

August 13-15, 2020 | The Diplomat Beach Resort by Hilton, 3555 S. Ocean Dr., Hollywood, FL

The Office of Community Partnerships meets with communities just like yours to help find resources available to address opportunities and obstacles...

## **Contact Us to Connect!**

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