

Rural Infrastructure Fund FY 2023-2024 Program Guidelines



Background

The Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF) is a grant program within the Department of Commerce (FloridaCommerce), 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 \$20 million for the Rural Infrastructure Fund Statewide Program and \$5 million for the Panhandle Specific Appropriation funds for a total of \$25 million.

Eligible Applicants and Technical Assistance

RIF funds are available to units of local government within an area designated as a Rural Area of Opportunity (RAO) or a rural county or community as defined by s. 288.0656, Florida Statutes.

- “Rural area of opportunity” means a rural community, or a region composed of rural communities, designated by the Governor, which has been adversely affected by an extraordinary economic event, severe or chronic distress, or a natural disaster or that presents a unique economic development opportunity of regional impact.
- “Rural community” means:
 - A county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
 - A county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
 - A municipality within a county described in the two bullets above.
 - An unincorporated federal enterprise community or an incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or fewer and an employment base focused on traditional agricultural or resource-based industries, located in a county not defined as rural, which has at least three or more of the economic distress factors identified in s. 288.0656(1)(c) and verified by the FloridaCommerce.

The following counties, including municipalities within the counties, are eligible applicants:

- Baker County
- Bradford County
- Calhoun County
- Columbia County
- Desoto County
- Dixie County
- Flagler County
- Franklin County
- Gadsden County
- Gilchrist County
- Glades County
- Gulf County
- Hamilton County
- Hardee County
- Hendry County
- Highlands County
- Holmes County
- Jackson County
- Jefferson County
- Lafayette County
- Levy County
- Liberty County
- Madison County
- Nassau County
- Okeechobee County
- Putnam County
- Suwannee County
- Taylor County
- Union County
- Wakulla County
- Walton County
- Washington County

Additionally, the following local governments are eligible applicants:

- City of Astatula
- Town of Century
- Town of Dundee
- City of Fellsmere
- City of Fort Meade
- City of Frostproof
- City of Hawthorne
- Village of Indiantown
- Town of Jay
- City of Lake Wales
- City of Umatilla

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

Eligible Activities

Eligible activities for RIF funds include planning and construction projects for:

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

Authorized infrastructure may include the following public-private partnership facilities:

- storm water systems;
- telecommunications facilities;
- roads or other remedies to transportation impediments;
- nature-based tourism facilities; or
- other physical requirements to facilitate tourism, trade, and economic development activities in the community.

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 75 percent of the total infrastructure project costs, or up to 100 percent of the total infrastructure project cost for a project located in a rural community as defined in s. 288.0656(2), F.S. which is also located in a fiscally constrained county as defined in s. 218.67(1), F.S., or a rural area of opportunity as defined in s. 288.0656(2), F.S.

Project Planning and Preparation Grants

FloridaCommerce may award grants of up to \$300,000 for infrastructure feasibility studies, design and engineering activities, or other infrastructure planning and preparation activities. Grants awarded under this category may be used in conjunction with Total Project Participation grants.

Preclearance Review Grants

To enable rural communities to access the resources available under the Expedited Permitting – Preclearance Review Process (s. 403.973(18), F.S.), 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 award amounts and local match requirements:

- Projects located outside a RAO - \$75,000 with 50 percent local funds match;
- Projects located within a RAO - \$300,000 with no local funds match required; and

- Projects located within a catalyst site (as defined in s. 288.0656, F.S.) - maximum amounts same as above depending on RAO status. However, the local funds match requirement may be waived pursuant to the process in s. 288.06561, F.S., for projects located outside of a RAO.

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.

Application Evaluation Review Criteria

RIF grant application review will include an evaluation of the economic benefit and long-term viability. In addition, FloridaCommerce will consider factors including, but not limited to:

- An evaluation of the economic benefit of the project and its long-term viability.
- The project's potential for enhanced job creation or increased capital investment.
- The demonstration and level of local public and private commitment.

Additional consideration will be given to projects located within counties impacted by Hurricane Idalia, as listed in the Governor's Executive Order 23-175.

Grant administrative and consultant expenses should be minimized to the extent possible.

Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring may be conducted 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 s. 112.3143, F.S., 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

RIF grant funds may not be used to pay for administrative fees or costs. At FloridaCommerce'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 FloridaCommerce 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@Commerce.FI.gov.