

**Division of Community Development
Bureau of Small Cities and Rural Communities
Rural Infrastructure Fund
FY 2020-2021 Program Guidelines**



Overview

The Rural Infrastructure Fund is a reimbursement grant program 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 2020 Florida Legislature passed legislation amending certain sections of the Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF) statute (Section 288.0655, F.S.) and appropriating funding for the FY 2020-2021 RIF program.

FY 2020-2021 RIF appropriation - \$8.6 million

- \$3.6 million in RIF base funding
- \$5 million in Florida Panhandle Specific Appropriation

Program Summary

The RIF program is intended to facilitate access of rural communities to infrastructure funding programs, such as those offered by the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development (USDA-RD) and the U.S. Department of Commerce-Economic Development Administration (EDA).

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

- 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.

Grant Categories

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-creating 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 amount of capital investment provided by the Participating Party. Applications should demonstrate the need of the infrastructure project in attracting job creation and capital investment.

Eligible uses of funds include:

- 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; requirements include
 - Internet service and access must be conducted through a partnership(s) with one or more dealers registered with the Department of Revenue as a provider of communications services in Florida.
 - Partnership(s) must be established through a competitive selection process that is publicly noticed.
- Improvements to inadequate infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action (does not require job creation/participating party).

Project Planning and Preparation Grants: To facilitate 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 employment project with a business committed to create at least 100 jobs;
- \$150,000 for 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
- 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.

FY 2020-2021 Grant Application Submission Requirements

A Notice of Funding Availability will be published in the Florida Administrative Register and posted on the DEO website (www.floridajobs.org/RIF) prior to the opening of the application cycles.

\$3.6 million RIF base funding appropriation: The application cycle will open September 30, 2020 and is open-ended through June 30, 2021 or until all funds are awarded. Applications will be accepted and reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis. Awards will be recommended based on application completeness, eligibility, and statutory factors for funding consideration.

Eligible Applicants are units of local government within an area designated as a Rural Area of Opportunity or a rural county or community as defined by the Rural Economic Development Initiative (pursuant to Section 288.0656, Florida Statutes).

\$5 Million Florida Panhandle Specific Appropriation: The competitive application cycle will open September 30, 2020 and will close on November 30, 2020. Applications will be reviewed upon closing of the application cycle and awards will be recommended based on application completeness, eligibility and statutory factors for funding consideration. Any remaining funds will be made available for additional application cycles, if necessary.

Eligible Applicants are local governments of Calhoun, Gadsden, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty and Washington counties and all municipalities within their boundaries.

Specific application completion and submission instructions are available at www.floridajobs.org/RIF.

Additional Information

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

Contact the RIF program for questions or requests for technical assistance regarding the RIF program, proposed projects, or completion and submission of applications by emailing RIF@deo.myflorida.com or calling (850) 717-8481.