

Cooperative Funding Initiative Guidelines for Submittal of Projects for Which a Waiver or Reduction in Matching Fund Requirements is Requested Pursuant to the Rural Economic Development Initiative

The following is provided as guidance for applicants to the District's Cooperative Funding Program who intend to request a reduction or waiver in matching funding requirements under the State's Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) provisions.

The REDI is established by s. 288.0656, Florida Statutes (copy attached). This program was amended in the 2001 legislative session to allow for the waiver or reduction in matching fund requirements for all agency participants of REDI. The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD or District) is a participating agency in the REDI, pursuant to s. 288.0656(6)(a), Florida Statutes (F.S.).

Section 288.06561, F.S., provides that, notwithstanding any other law, member agencies and organizations of the REDI shall review the financial match requirements for projects in rural areas. Counties and communities that meet certain statutory criteria may request a waiver or reduction of the match requirements for such projects.

To be eligible to request a waiver or reduction of matching requirements, a county or community must meet the statutory definition of "rural" (s. 288.0656 (2) (b) F.S.) and such county or community must have three or more of the "economic distress" conditions identified in s. 288.0656(2) (a) F.S.

Section 288.0656(2)(e), F.S., defines a rural community as:

1. A county with a population of 75,000 or less.
2. A county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
3. A municipality within a county described in subparagraph 1. or subparagraph 2.
4. An unincorporated federal enterprise community or an incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or less 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 paragraph (c) and verified by the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development.

For purposes of this paragraph, population shall be determined in accordance with the most recent official estimate pursuant to s. 186.901.

Section 288.0656(2)(c), F.S., defines "economic distress" conditions as:

conditions affecting the fiscal and economic viability of a rural community, including such factors as low per capita income, low per capita taxable values, high unemployment, high underemployment, low weekly earned wages compared to the state average, low housing values compared to the state average, high percentages of the population receiving public

assistance, high poverty levels compared to the state average, and a lack of year-round stable employment opportunities.

All counties and communities who meet the statutory requirements enumerated above are eligible to request a waiver or reduction in matching fund requirements pursuant to the District's Cooperative Funding Policy.

For questions as to whether a local government qualifies under the REDI program to request a waiver or reduction in matching fund requirements, contact:

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Attachment:

- s. 288.0656, Rural Economic Development Initiative, F.S.
- s. 288.06561, Reduction or Waiver of Financial Match Requirements

Cooperative Funding Initiative
Guidelines for Submittal of Cooperative Funding Projects for Which a
Waiver or Reduction in Matching Fund Requirements is Requested
Pursuant to the Rural Economic Development Initiative

Attachment

288.0656 Rural Economic Development Initiative.--

(1)(a) Recognizing that rural communities and regions continue to face extraordinary challenges in their efforts to significantly improve their economies, specifically in terms of personal income, job creation, average wages, and strong tax bases, it is the intent of the Legislature to encourage and facilitate the location and expansion of major economic development projects of significant scale in such rural communities.

(b) The Rural Economic Development Initiative, known as "REDI," is created within the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development, and the participation of state and regional agencies in this initiative is authorized.

(2) As used in this section, the term:

(a) "Catalyst project" means a business locating or expanding in a rural area of critical economic concern to serve as an economic generator of regional significance for the growth of a regional target industry cluster. The project must provide capital investment on a scale significant enough to affect the entire region and result in the development of high-wage and high-skill jobs.

(b) "Catalyst site" means a parcel or parcels of land within a rural area of critical economic concern that has been prioritized as a geographic site for economic development through partnerships with state, regional, and local organizations. The site must be reviewed by REDI and approved by the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development for the purposes of locating a catalyst project.

(c) "Economic distress" means conditions affecting the fiscal and economic viability of a rural community, including such factors as low per capita income, low per capita taxable values, high unemployment, high underemployment, low weekly earned wages compared to the state average, low housing values compared to the state average, high percentages of the population receiving public assistance, high poverty levels compared to the state average, and a lack of year-round stable employment opportunities.

(d) "Rural area of critical economic concern" means a rural community, or a region composed of rural communities, designated by the Governor, that 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.

(e) "Rural community" means:

1. A county with a population of 75,000 or less.

2. A county with a population of 125,000 or fewer which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or fewer.
3. A municipality within a county described in subparagraph 1. or subparagraph 2.
4. An unincorporated federal enterprise community or an incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or less 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 paragraph (c) and verified by the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development.

For purposes of this paragraph, population shall be determined in accordance with the most recent official estimate pursuant to s. 186.901.

(3) REDI shall be responsible for coordinating and focusing the efforts and resources of state and regional agencies on the problems which affect the fiscal, economic, and community viability of Florida's economically distressed rural communities, working with local governments, community-based organizations, and private organizations that have an interest in the growth and development of these communities to find ways to balance environmental and growth management issues with local needs.

(4) REDI shall review and evaluate the impact of statutes and rules on rural communities and shall work to minimize any adverse impact and undertake outreach and capacity building efforts.

(5) REDI shall facilitate better access to state resources by promoting direct access and referrals to appropriate state and regional agencies and statewide organizations. REDI may undertake outreach, capacity-building, and other advocacy efforts to improve conditions in rural communities. These activities may include sponsorship of conferences and achievement awards.

(6)(a) By August 1 of each year, the head of each of the following agencies and organizations shall designate a deputy secretary or higher-level staff person from within the agency or organization to serve as the REDI representative for the agency or organization:

1. The Department of Community Affairs.
2. The Department of Transportation.
3. The Department of Environmental Protection.
4. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
5. The Department of State.
6. The Department of Health.
7. The Department of Children and Family Services.
8. The Department of Corrections.
9. The Agency for Workforce Innovation.
10. The Department of Education.
11. The Department of Juvenile Justice.
12. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
13. Each water management district.
14. Enterprise Florida, Inc.
15. Workforce Florida, Inc.
16. The Florida Commission on Tourism or VISIT Florida.

17. The Florida Regional Planning Council Association.
18. The Agency for Health Care Administration.
19. The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS).

An alternate for each designee shall also be chosen, and the names of the designees and alternates shall be sent to the director of the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development.

(b) Each REDI representative must have comprehensive knowledge of his or her agency's functions, both regulatory and service in nature, and of the state's economic goals, policies, and programs. This person shall be the primary point of contact for his or her agency with REDI on issues and projects relating to economically distressed rural communities and with regard to expediting project review, shall ensure a prompt effective response to problems arising with regard to rural issues, and shall work closely with the other REDI representatives in the identification of opportunities for preferential awards of program funds and allowances and waiver of program requirements when necessary to encourage and facilitate long-term private capital investment and job creation.

(c) The REDI representatives shall work with REDI in the review and evaluation of statutes and rules for adverse impact on rural communities and the development of alternative proposals to mitigate that impact.

(d) Each REDI representative shall be responsible for ensuring that each district office or facility of his or her agency is informed about the Rural Economic Development Initiative and for providing assistance throughout the agency in the implementation of REDI activities.

(7)(a) REDI may recommend to the Governor up to three rural areas of critical economic concern. The Governor may by executive order designate up to three rural areas of critical economic concern which will establish these areas as priority assignments for REDI as well as to allow the Governor, acting through REDI, to waive criteria, requirements, or similar provisions of any economic development incentive. Such incentives shall include, but not be limited to: the Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund Program under s. 288.106, the Quick Response Training Program under s. 288.047, the Quick Response Training Program for participants in the welfare transition program under s. 288.047(8), transportation projects under s. 288.063, the brownfield redevelopment bonus refund under s. 288.107, and the rural job tax credit program under ss. 212.098 and 220.1895.

(b) Designation as a rural area of critical economic concern under this subsection shall be contingent upon the execution of a memorandum of agreement among the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development; the governing body of the county; and the governing bodies of any municipalities to be included within a rural area of critical economic concern. Such agreement shall specify the terms and conditions of the designation, including, but not limited to, the duties and responsibilities of the county and any participating municipalities to take actions designed to facilitate the retention and expansion of existing businesses in the area, as well as the recruitment of new businesses to the area.

(c) Each rural area of critical economic concern may designate catalyst projects, provided that each catalyst project is specifically recommended by REDI, identified as a catalyst project by Enterprise Florida, Inc., and confirmed as a catalyst project by the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development. All state agencies and departments shall use all available tools and

resources to the extent permissible by law to promote the creation and development of each catalyst project and the development of catalyst sites.

(8) REDI shall submit a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives each year on or before September 1 on all REDI activities for the prior fiscal year. This report shall include a status report on all projects currently being coordinated through REDI, the number of preferential awards and allowances made pursuant to this section, the dollar amount of such awards, and the names of the recipients. The report shall also include a description of all waivers of program requirements granted. The report shall also include information as to the economic impact of the projects coordinated by REDI, and recommendations based on the review and evaluation of statutes and rules having an adverse impact on rural communities, and proposals to mitigate such adverse impacts.

History.--s. 97, ch. 99-251; s. 79, ch. 2000-165; s. 12, ch. 2001-201; s. 13, ch. 2009-51.