**19 DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

**499 OFFICE OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

**Chapter 303: RULES FOR THE RURAL WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION GRANT PROGRAM**

**Summary:** This chapter outlines the procedures, criteria and program review requirements governing the Rural Workforce Recruitment and Retention Grant Program.

**SECTION 1. PURPOSE AND DEFINITIONS**

**A. Purpose**

The Rural Workforce Recruitment and Retention Grant Program is a program to provide grants for local economic development initiatives in rural regions of the State that will assist rural businesses in those regions in locating, recruiting and retaining qualified staff to meet workforce needs. The purpose of the rule is to define the criteria and proposal process for applications for grant funding.

**B. Definitions**

**Commissioner.** “Commissioner” means the Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development.

**Economic Development Organization.** “Economic Development Organization” means an economic development entity that services Aroostook, Piscataquis, Somerset, or Washington counties.

**Department.** “Department” means the Department of Economic and Community Development.

**Fund.** “Fund” means the Rural Workforce Recruitment and Retention Grant Program established in 5 MSRA §13056-I.

**Grantee.** “Grantee” means an Economic Development Organization awarded a grant from the fund.

**Grant Selection Committee.** “Grant selection committee” means a committee designated by the Commissioner to review and make recommendations regarding proposals.

**Leveraged match.** “Leveraged match” means monies or services leveraged through Economic Development Organizations. The match may be in the form of cash, staff time and overhead expense directly attributable to workforce and talent attraction. Grant funds cannot be used to supplant existing organizational funds and can only be used to supplement funds leveraged for the program purposes.

**Program.** “Program” means the Rural Workforce Recruitment and Retention Grant Program.

**Rural Regions.** For this program, rural regions mean Aroostook County, Piscataquis County, Somerset County and Washington County.

**Workforce Needs.** Gap in labor market, which for this program is a quantifiable demand for workers engaged in a specific activity or enterprise within the Rural Regions.

**SECTION 2. APPLICATION PROCESS**

The Department shall issue a request for proposals for grant applications from Economic Development Organizations. All proposals will be reviewed by the Grant Selections Committee and amounts, if any, will be awarded on quality of the Economic Development Organization’s application. Criteria for the grant selection committee’s evaluation of proposals consistent with this rule will be set forth in the request for proposals. The commissioner shall make the final decision on grant awards based on recommendations from the grant selection committee. Award decisions may be appealed to the Director of the Bureau of General Services under 18-544 CMR Chapter 120, *Rules for Appeal of Contract and Grant Awards*.

Grants will be awarded for a maximum of$100,000 per county. More than one Economic Development Organization may be a Grantee for a county they service, but only if they submit a joint application. Grants may be used over a two-year period starting upon contract date.

**SECTION 3. CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY**

Proposals must detail plans describing the tactics that will be used to attract and retain qualified workers to the Economic Development District’s respective counties. All proposals for grant funds must include the following:

 A viable plan to launch a workforce and talent attraction marketing program;

 Evidence that the market or target population for proposed service is under served;

 Evidence of broad-based support from the community that the organization serves, including description of key partners;

 Evidence of adequate and committed sources of operating capital;

 Description of the need for funding to provide support for workforce attraction efforts;

 A proposed budget for the funds and budget narrative outlining the use of funds;

 Evidence of 100% Leveraged Match required and sources and access to and allocation of matching funds;

* If using in-kind match, a description of the activity, including identity of personnel assigned to work on in-kind project specific to this grant, and value of match;

 A detailed scope of work identifying measurable outcomes that will be achieved as a result of receiving funds;

* Identification of target metrics -- how will the applicant organization measure performance.

**SECTION 4. PROGRAM REVIEW**

**A. Department Responsibilities**

By January 15 of each year, the Department shall submit a report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over economic development matters. The report must include the following:

* An accounting of the use of all program funds received and expended since the program’s inception;
* A summary of the status of any approved projects; and
* A summary of the results of any completed projects;

**B. Grantee Responsibilities**

Economic development organizations receiving grants under this program shall report to the Department with semiannual reports due on December 1st and June 1st. In reporting to the Department, grant recipients must include the following organizational performance and outcome measures for their programs:

* An accounting of the use of all program funds received and expended;
  + Summary of activity;
  + Summary of expenses;
  + Budget breakdown;
  + Changes to original application/intended use of funds;
  + Update on target metrics.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY:

5 MRS §13056-I

EFFECTIVE DATE:

January 15, 2023 – filing 2023-006