



**Research Administration
and Engagement**
UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA

Request for Participation

Fiscal Year 2025-2026

**Northwest Florida Regional Economic Development Initiative:
Industry Resilience and Diversification Fund Grant Program**

*A Grant Program of the Governor and the Legislature of the State of
Florida, administered by the University of West Florida to aid Northwest
Florida's Regional Economy.*

December 14, 2020

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SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Part 1: Background

Chapter 2011-142, *Laws of Florida* (“Chapter 2011-142”), is an important piece of legislation intended to aid the Disproportionally Affected Counties of Northwest Florida in their economic recovery from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill of 2010. For the purposes of this law, the term “Disproportionally Affected County” is defined as Bay County, Escambia County, Franklin County, Gulf County, Okaloosa County, Santa Rosa County, Walton County, or Wakulla County.¹

Part 2: Purpose

Section 498, Chapter 2011-142, appropriated the sum of \$30 million to foster economic recovery in those areas hit hardest by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. The law requires that the funds be used “for the charitable purpose of developing and implementing an innovative economic development program for promoting research and development, commercialization of research, economic diversification, and job creation in a Disproportionally Affected County.”²

Pursuant to the implementation of Section 498, Chapter 2011-142, the University of West Florida (UWF) has engaged educational entities, economic development organizations, local governments, and relevant state agencies to create a framework and strategy for implementing the innovative economic development program. The end result of those engagement activities is the Northwest Florida Regional Economic Development Initiative, central to which is the Industry Recruitment, Retention, and Expansion Fund (IRREF) grant program. While the IRREF program was successfully administered for many years, the contemporary economic climate demonstrates once again the fragility of Northwest Florida’s economy to man-made and natural disasters. Hence, there is a strategic need to revitalize this legacy program. Building on the success of IRREF, the Industry Resilience and Diversification Fund (IRDF) will once again focus on building a resilient regional economy in Northwest Florida, remaining true to the intent and purpose of the original enabling legislation.

As a matter of principle, UWF will award grants under the Initiative via a fair, equitable, and transparent solicitation process. Each application for funding will be judged, in part, on the project’s ability to create new, sustainable, private-sector job opportunities for residents of the Disproportionally Affected Counties. All applications for funding under the IRDF Grant Program will be considered only after all applicable state and/or local economic development incentives have been formally proposed or denied. UWF will make the final decision on IRDF grant approvals and awards. IRDF grant awards will be tailored to the amount of funding provided by Section 498, Chapter 2011-142, subject to the availability of such funds. Moreover, the law requires that a funding preference be given for:

any Disproportionally Affected County and any municipality within a Disproportionally Affected County which provides for expedited permitting in order to promote research and development, commercialization of research, economic diversification, and job creation within their respective jurisdictions. The criteria for the expenditure of funds shall, at a minimum, also require a funding preference for any Disproportionally Affected County and any municipality within a Disproportionally Affected County which combines its permitting processes and expedites permitting in order to promote research and development, commercialization of research, economic diversification, and job creation within their respective jurisdictions.³

¹ Section 497(1) – 497(3), Chapter 2011-142, *Laws of Florida*.

² Section 498(1), Chapter 2011-142, *Laws of Florida*.

³ Section 498(3), Chapter 2011-142, *Laws of Florida*.

SECTION II: INDUSTRY RESILIENCE AND DIVERSIFICATION FUND GRANT PROGRAM

PART 1: DETAILS

1-1 REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION (RFP)

The intent of this Industry Resilience and Diversification Fund (IRDF) Grant Program RFP is to solicit candidate projects for consideration for funding.

1-2 TIMETABLE

All applications for funding will be reviewed, and funding decisions rendered, on a rolling basis. Applications will be accepted beginning January 1, 2021, and will remain open until available funds are expended.

1-3 APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

The availability of funds, and the completeness of an application, is not a guarantee of an award. Applicants must meet the eligibility criteria, and applications shall be judged against the specific selection criteria contained in this RFP.

Funding under the IRDF Grant Program is limited to businesses considering locating or expanding in a Disproportionally Affected County of Northwest Florida, and for which there is significant interstate or international competition that cannot be met by other State and local economic development incentives. The IRDF Grant Program is intended to **supplement** state and local economic development incentives when attempting to entice **medium and large enterprises** – particularly those in Florida’s **targeted industry clusters** or **strategic areas of emphasis**⁴ – to locate, retain or expand their business operations within a Disproportionally Affected County. The IRDF Grant Program is not intended to **substitute** for state and local economic development incentives.

To be eligible for the IRDF Grant Program, the applicant(s) must commit to providing from sources other than Florida taxpayer funding, at a minimum, 75% of total project costs (including capital outlays and operating expenses) required to bring the project into fruition. Capital investment must be in the form of cash contributions, which may include cash contributions from the grantee, and cash outlays from outside sources that are directly applied to eligible project-related activities. Cash contributions to the project may include, but are not necessarily limited to, facility construction, renovation, and other improvement expenses; acquiring materials and supplies; and purchasing manufacturing equipment, research and development equipment, and other equipment (e.g., computer equipment, office furniture).

Each application submitted to the UWF must:

⁴ Florida’s targeted industry clusters are defined by Enterprise Florida, Inc., as Clean Technology; Life Sciences; Information Technology; Aviation/Aerospace; Homeland Security/Defense; and Financial/Professional Services. Florida’s strategic areas of emphasis are defined as Manufacturing; Corporate Headquarters; Research & Development and Global Logistics. See Enterprise Florida, “Qualified Targeted Industries for Incentives,” <https://www.enterpriseflorida.com/wp-content/uploads/SI_Targeted_Industries.pdf> Accessed March 23, 2020.

- A. Represent a business entity or consortium. If a consortium, application must identify a single point of contact for the entirety of the project.
- B. Demonstrate that the project in support of which IRDF funds are being requested is, or will be, located in a Disproportionally Affected County.
- C. Demonstrate active participation, or lack thereof, from relevant state and local economic development authorities.
- D. Demonstrate that the project is supported by the local community in which the project is to be located.
- E. Demonstrate the creation and sustainability (i.e., permanence) of new, private sector, full-time equivalent direct project jobs, or the retention of existing jobs that otherwise would be relocated outside of the State of Florida.⁵ The minimum number of jobs that must be created or retained for a project that is 10, whether to be located in a designated rural area, brownfield zone, or enterprise zone, or not designated rural areas, brownfield zones, or enterprise zones. If the application is submitted on behalf of a business consortium, the total number of new, private sector, full-time equivalent direct project jobs to be created or retained must meet the minimum numbers as prescribed herein.

1-4 **AWARD INFORMATION**

Awards from the IRDF Grant Program shall not exceed \$2,000,000.

1-5 **INELIGIBLE USES OF FUNDS**

Activities for which state funds awarded under the IRDF Grant Program may not be spent are:

- A. Lobbying any branch of the government of the State of Florida (i.e., executive, legislative, or judicial), pursuant to Section 216.347, Florida Statutes.
- B. The employment of unauthorized aliens, by any contractor or subcontractor, as described by Section 274A(e) of the Immigration and Nationalization Act.
- C. Any activity involving the relocation of jobs from one Florida community to another.

⁵ Full-time equivalent **direct** jobs for the project may be counted as (a) all direct employees working full time (at least 35 hours a week) on the project, such as production or related work, assigned to and working exclusively on the project described in this Agreement or (b) the total of the hours of direct production or related work assigned to the project divided by 35. Full-time equivalent jobs may be counted as new full-time equivalent jobs only if they result in a net increase in full-time equivalent jobs at the IRDF business over the average full-time equivalent jobs for the base period, unless otherwise specified in this Agreement. In no case may jobs or job functions be counted as new, full-time equivalent project jobs if they are moved from a related business in Florida (including a business related by virtue of a merger, purchase, or any form of acquisition) to the IRDF Awardee, from another Florida location of the IRDF Awardee to the project location, or from any other Florida business unit. In addition, no temporary construction jobs involved with the construction of facilities for the project nor any jobs which have been previously included in any approved application for annual certification or claims under Sections 288.104, 288.1045 288.106 or 288.1088, Florida Statutes, may be included in full-time equivalent project jobs.

1-6 ACCEPTANCE AND TYPE OF CONTRACT

Following the selection of award recipients, a performance-based contract will be negotiated between UWF and the grantee outlining the responsibilities of each party. The contractual grant agreement will be implemented on the basis of performance as measured against specific terms established in the contract.

Each grant recipient must agree to conduct financial operations and maintain support documents in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, which include accounting for the receipt and expenditure of both grant funds, and any and all match activities, allocated to the project. These records shall be available at all reasonable times for inspection, review, or audit by UWF personnel, its designated representatives, or State of Florida officials. The grant recipient must agree to timely submission of reports defined in the contract, including progress reports on incomplete activities. Failure to submit required reports may be cause for delay of payment or termination of the grant.

Applicants are advised that, should an award be granted, all work must be completed prior to the contract end date. Actual contract performance period will commence on the date the contract is fully executed by UWF and the grant recipient. Requests for extensions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The grant recipient must agree to specific provisions for the repayment of funds in the event that the terms of the contract are not met within the performance period. Additional rules and restrictions may apply, depending on the size and scope of the award.

1-7 AUDIT REQUIREMENTS

Each grant recipient will be a “sub-recipient” within the meaning of the Florida Single Audit Act, and will be required to agree that it will comply with the provisions thereof, as well as the rules of the Executive Office of the Governor, the Comptroller, and the Auditor General of the State of Florida. For that reason:

- A. The grantee shall allow UWF, the Comptroller, the Offices of the Chief Inspector General, and the Auditor General access to the Grantee’s records and the Grantee’s independent auditor’s working papers as necessary to comply with the requirements of the Florida Single Audit Act.
- B. The grantee shall notify UWF if it becomes subject to a state single audit or project-specific audit pursuant to the Florida Single Audit Act.
- C. The grantee shall comply with the other requirements of the Florida Single Audit Act including providing to UWF a copy of every fiscal year audit conducted during the term of this Agreement.

PART 2: APPLICATION PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**2-1 APPLICATION PROCESS**

All applicants are required to participate in a pre-application conference call, the purpose of which is to discuss the project and pre-determine the applicant(s) eligibility to apply for IRDF incentives. For more information, please contact:

Research Administration and Engagement
University of West Florida

(p) 850.857.6378

(e) mshatu@uwf.edu

Please note that Florida has a broad public records law. Pursuant to Section 288.075, upon written request, information held by an economic development agency concerning plans, intentions, or interests of such private corporation, partnership, or person to locate, relocate, or expand any of its business activities in this state is confidential and exempt from Section 119.07(1), Florida Statutes and Section 24(a), Article I of the State Constitution for a specified period. In addition, any information submitted that constitutes trade secrets or proprietary confidential business information is eligible for protection from disclosure; and Section 1004.22, Florida Statutes, offers certain protections relating to materials that relate to methods of manufacture or production, potential trade secrets, potentially patentable material, actual trade secrets, business transactions, or proprietary information. Accordingly, if your application includes information that is described in this paragraph, and if you desire for this information to be held in confidence, please request that this information be held in confidence.

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2-2 APPLICATION CONTENTS AND REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

A. Application Materials

The complete application must include the following:

- A. A comprehensive description of the project, to include the estimated ability of project to promote and support research and development, commercialization of research, economic diversification, and/or job creation within one or more Disproportionately Affected County; the number of net new, sustainable, private sector, full-time equivalent jobs to be created; the estimated average wages to be paid for each new job created; and an account of which, if any, of Florida's targeted industry clusters or strategic areas of emphasis that the project involved, and/or the extent to which the project addresses an export industry.
- B. A clear statement of financial need, to include the requested level of IRDF grant funding in relation to all other applicable state and local economic development incentives.
- C. Copies of all application materials submitted in pursuit of state and local economic development incentives, along with copies of all funding awards and/or notices that state and/or local economic development incentives have been denied. In the event that the acceptance of state and/or local economic development incentives by an applicant would suppress, hinder, delay, or otherwise negatively impact the applicant's pre-established future plans for capital investment, job creation, retention or expansion in, or the business' relocation to, a Disproportionately Affected County, but where IRDF funds could be leveraged in conjunction with private funding sources to enable timely job creation activities that are part and parcel of the applicant's said pre-established plans, the applicant must demonstrate the specifics of such an instance and provide documentary evidence of said pre-established future plans, including a specific timetable of benchmark events.
- D. Copies of any projected pro forma income statements, balance sheets, and cash budgets.
- E. Copy of the latest audit of the company's or consortium's financial statement and the related auditor's management letter(s).
- F. Copy of the company's or consortium's business plan(s).
- G. Copies of articles of incorporation.
- H. Summary resumes for management team.
- I. List of investors that hold 5% or more interest in the applicant company/consortium.
- J. List of any customers that represent more than 10% of annual sales.
- K. The application must address the community's commitment and support for the proposed plan of action. The application must explain clearly the interaction between the applicant, local government, the local economic development organization, and the public.

B. State, Local Incentive Documentation

Applicants must report on the number of new, private sector, full-time equivalent direct project jobs that would be created or retained should grant funding be approved. Applicant must further

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demonstrate the sustainability of all new eligible jobs created, as well as the desirability of wages to be paid for each new eligible job created.

Applicant must submit copies of all materials relevant to the applicant's pursuit of state and local economic development incentives, along with copies of all funding awards and/or notices that state and/or local economic development incentives have been denied. Match documentation must include amounts and sources of state and local match, or note the absence of such incentives in the project proposal.

2-3 ATTACHMENTS

Application attachments and appendices should be kept to a minimum. Where these items are included, they should be referenced within the body of the application and be clearly labeled on their face with an identifying number, which corresponds to the reference in the application.

2-4 INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS

UWF staff will review all applications for completeness and eligibility. An incomplete application is one that does not contain each of the required elements as listed in this RFP. UWF will inform the originator of the application's flaws as soon as such faults are identified. Incomplete applications could hinder or delay final award decisions.

Part 3: EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

3-1 EVALUATION METHOD

UWF shall review all applications and render any and all determinations concerning eligibility, ranking and amount of awards. In so doing, UWF will apply various selection criteria (listed in Section 3-2) to arrive at a grant decision. All applications will be subject to an economic feasibility and/or economic impact assessment in order to determine the project's estimated return on investment (ROI), as well as an appropriate award amount (if applicable).

3-2 SELECTION CRITERIA

In making grant awards, the following factors will be considered:

- A. Projected ability of project to promote and support research and development, commercialization of research, economic diversification, and/or job creation within one or more Disproportionally Affected County.
- B. Number of new, private sector, full-time equivalent direct project jobs created or retained.
- C. Sustainability (i.e., permanence) of new, private sector, full-time equivalent direct project jobs created or retained.
- D. Wages to be paid for each new, private sector, full-time equivalent direct project job created or retained as compared to comparable prevailing wages in the county in which the project is to be located.
- E. Return on taxpayer investment.
- F. Applicant's proposed capital expenditures.

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- G. Project addresses one or more of Florida's targeted industry clusters or strategic areas of emphasis, or project addresses an export industry (i.e., a minimum of 51% of project revenues are generated from outside of the State of Florida).
- H. If applicable, whether the county or municipality within which the project will be located expedites and/or combines its permitting processes in order to promote research and development, commercialization of research, economic diversification, and job creation within their respective jurisdictions

All proposals will be reviewed and evaluated based upon project and community needs, private sector participation, and all other proposed project-related activities.

[END DOCUMENT]