



Resilient Florida Program: Creating a pipeline for funding resilience projects

Introduction

Flooding, sea level rise, storm surge, and severe storms take a sizable toll on Florida's infrastructure and economy. From 1980–2024, Florida experienced [94 extreme weather events](#) with losses of \$1 billion or more. To reduce costs incurred after disasters, Florida developed a pipeline to fund resilience projects, such as vulnerability assessments, living system and natural systems restoration, stormwater projects, and transportation infrastructure and evacuation projects. Through each step of the pipeline, Florida strengthens the state's infrastructure, protecting its economy and the safety of its residents.

In recent years, Florida has emerged as a leader in investing state funds to strengthen community flood resilience. In May 2021, the Florida legislature and Governor Ron DeSantis created the Resilient Florida Program ([SB 1954](#)),¹ managed by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). This program resulted in “the largest investment in Florida's history to prepare communities for the impacts of sea level rise, intensified storms and flooding.”²

Program structure

The Resilient Florida Program provides planning grants, which allow grant recipients to collect data and conduct vulnerability assessments. Then, DEP prioritizes projects for construction, following a detailed and transparent methodology. With grants for both [planning and project implementation](#), the program “ensures a coordinated approach to Florida's coastal and inland resilience.”³ DEP selects projects that are likely to have the greatest impact in reducing flood risk in Florida. This approach promotes responsible pre-disaster investments over more expensive post-disaster spending.

Planning grants

DEP awards planning grants to counties, municipalities, and regional entities that represent one or more counties or municipalities. Funding requirements and permitted uses differ depending on the entity applying:

- Counties and municipalities may use grants to fund vulnerability assessments; critical asset inventories; studies on water management systems; adaptation plans; and similar efforts that allow communities to understand, structure, and prioritize resilience work.
- Regional entities and local governments may use grants to improve data or modeling, and Water Management Districts may use grants to fill critical data gaps identified by the state.

¹ The language enacting the Resilient Florida Program has since been [updated](#).

² <https://floridadep.gov/rcp/resilient-florida-program>.

³ <https://floridadep.gov/ResilientFlorida>.



Planning grant applications from counties and municipalities must focus on one of the following types of plans, policies, or projects:

1. Community resilience planning and data collection, including comprehensive plan amendments and analyses.
2. Vulnerability assessments that identify or address risks of flooding and sea level rise.
3. Updates to critical asset inventories to reflect all assets subject to impacts from flooding currently or within the next 50 years.
4. The development of preparatory measures to address flooding and sea level rise.
5. Feasibility studies and permitting for nature-based solutions.
6. Activities for pre-construction projects, such as project design, surveys and data collection, solicitation, public hearings, local funding sources establishment, local code or comprehensive plan amendments, land acquisition, or site development. This grant option is only applicable to municipalities with a population of 10,000 or fewer, or counties with a population of 50,000 or fewer.

Since planning grants, on average, have substantially lower costs than implementation grants, DEP does not follow a strict prioritization procedure to award grants. Instead, the department works with applicants on a rolling basis to provide funding. There is no local match requirement for planning grants, allowing communities with limited resources to access planning resources.

Implementation grants

DEP releases a [Statewide Flooding and Sea-Level Rise Resilience Plan](#) (Statewide Plan) every year on December 1, which ranks implementation projects on a three-year planning horizon. Implementation grants support construction projects that protect critical assets and strengthen resilience to flooding or sea level rise. These grants are only available once a community has completed a vulnerability assessment or similar evaluation. Eligible applicants include counties, municipalities, and regional entities that represent one or more counties or municipalities.

Applicants who receive implementation funding must bear 50% of the cost share. Exceptions exist for disadvantaged communities, which are eligible to receive 100% state funding. Disadvantaged communities include counties and municipalities with income levels equal to or less than 75% of the state's per capita annual income.

Project prioritization criteria for implementation grants

As required by legislation, once DEP determines that an implementation project meets eligibility criteria, it scores the project and then ranks it for inclusion in the Statewide Plan. Though eligible projects are scored and ranked, not all will receive funding, as total requested grant funds may exceed available program funding.

The ranking system that DEP uses to prioritize projects includes four weighted tiers, totaling 100 points. The points available are equal to the percentage they are worth in the overall score. DEP awards points through the following criteria:



Tier	Criteria	Components of criteria	Points available
Tier 1 (40% of the total score)	Addresses risk in a vulnerability assessment or a comprehensive statewide flood vulnerability and a sea level rise assessment.	Risk of flooding and sea level rise to critical assets and	4
		Risk of compound flooding to critical assets.	4
	Reduces risk to a regionally significant asset.		8
	Reducing risk in areas with a higher percentage of vulnerable critical assets.		8
	Contributes to existing flooding mitigation projects that reduce upland damage by incorporating new or enhanced structures or restoration and revegetation projects.	Contributes by incorporating natural systems restoration or	4
		Contributes by incorporating natural system restoration and revegetation or	4
		Contributes by incorporating a new or enhanced structure and incorporating natural systems restoration and revegetation.	8
	Degree to which the project reduces the flood risk and thereby increases the credits awarded to a community participating in the NFIP Community Rating System.		8
Tier 2 (30% of the total score)	Flooding and erosion currently affect the location of the project.		7.5
	The project is ready to proceed.		7.5
	The project considers habitat enhancements or nature-based solutions.		7.5
	The project is cost effective.		7.5
Tier 3 (20% of the total score)	There are available local, state, and federal matching funds.		6.5
	Previous state funding has been awarded for preconstruction activities.		6.5
	Construction requirements related to flooding exceed the Florida Building Code and local floodplain regulations.		7
Tier 4 (10% of the total score)	The project includes plans to use innovative technologies to reduce costs and increase regional collaboration.		5
	The project helps financially disadvantaged communities.		5



The [scoring criteria](#) include additional details on points DEP will award a project based on specific scenarios.

The program's scoring criteria provide a breadth of considerations for the effective use of taxpayer dollars. DEP not only prioritizes projects that address flood risk but also has a pipeline to complete the most impactful projects, from planning through construction. By evaluating a range of considerations in the ranking criteria, **DEP ensures that funds go to projects that most effectively protect the state from future damages.**

By making scoring criteria accessible to applicants, DEP also provides a layer of transparency. With clearly articulated project expectations from the state, all communities develop project proposals with the same information and, therefore, have the **same opportunity to tailor their projects to receive funding.**

Funding

Because of Resilient Florida's detailed criteria to prioritize projects, the state has an effective pipeline to funnel funding to its top priorities. The [Resilient Florida Trust Fund](#) provides a **dedicated funding mechanism** to support Florida's flood resilience, including the Resilient Florida Program, the State Plan, the operational costs of the Florida Flood Hub, and other adaptation priorities.

The Resilient Florida Trust Fund is currently made up of revenue from the [documentary stamp tax](#) and a [gaming compact with the Seminole Tribe](#):

- The Trust Fund receives about 6.85% of the remainder of documentary stamp tax revenues, after distributions are made to the Land Acquisition Trust Fund, the Department of Revenue Administration, and the General Revenue Service Charge.
- In 2024, the Trust Fund received an initial \$100 million to implement State Plan projects through a compact with the Seminole Tribe.⁴

Impact

Local governments across Florida are starting to see the impacts of the Resilient Florida Program through projects that DEP prioritized to receive funding. In fact, Resilient Florida **planning grants will make it possible for about 96% of counties and municipalities in Florida to complete vulnerability assessments by 2026.**

Among the recipients of Resilient Florida planning and implementation grants are Fort Lauderdale, St. Augustine, and Cutler Bay, which are also AFC members.

⁴ See [Senate Bill 1638](#).



Case study: Fort Lauderdale

The city of Fort Lauderdale received a Resilient Florida planning grant for Fiscal Year 2021–2022 to conduct a vulnerability assessment, which the city completed at the end of 2024. Fort Lauderdale used these funds to [identify risks](#) associated with flooding and sea level rise and develop resilience plans, projects, and policies to prepare for those risks. Specifically, the city developed a Partial Flood Adaptation Plan, which lays out steps to achieve greater resilience.

Case study: St. Augustine

In Fiscal Year 2021–2022, the city of St. Augustine received an implementation grant to address concerns raised in a previous local vulnerability assessment. With this grant, the community will install a network of [monitoring devices](#) to track the impact of sea level rise on critical infrastructure, addressing a key data gap identified in its vulnerability assessment. The grant will also support the city’s efforts to explore the connection between the rate of sea level rise and saltwater intrusion. During project prioritization, DEP awarded points to St. Augustine for demonstrating a history of state funding initiatives through its sea level rise and storm surge assessment in 2021.

Case study: Cutler Bay

The town of Cutler Bay is using its implementation grant from Fiscal Year 2021–2022 to conduct a [canal bank restoration](#) project. The town is reducing upland damage costs by installing erosion protection and nature-based stabilization measures along the canal basin. While the state had not funded any planning efforts, the project follows insights gained from the town’s local mitigation strategy, flood mitigation plan, and watershed action plan.

Key takeaways

The Florida legislature and DEP have shaped the Resilient Florida Program into an effective pipeline that identifies eligible projects, funds planning for future construction, chooses implementation projects that align with state goals, and then funds those projects.

This pipeline approach, with its details and transparent criteria for prioritizing projects, is helpful for the state and applicants alike. While the state incentivizes potential projects to reflect its priorities, applicants understand how to best align their projects with the state’s expectations.

Stable recurring funding through the Resilient Florida Trust Fund allows the state to proactively address vulnerabilities and risks by **investing in preparation for future extreme weather events, instead of recovery after the fact**. With these grants, the state can save money and avoid damage in the long run, creating a safer, stronger, and more resilient Florida.