

Application Score Sheet

Proposed Project: Gulf Specimen Marine Lab, Infrastructure Upgrades and Operations
Resubmission (#95)

Proposed Project/Program County: Wakulla
Board of County Commission Support:

Total Projected Project Cost: \$10,135,000.00

Match Provided: \$5,540,000

Triumph Funds Requested: \$4,595,000 (47%)

Triumph Funds Recommended by Staff: \$0

Score: C

ROI: Dividing the proposed \$4,595,000 award by 393 CAPE certifications yields a per certificate cost of \$11,692.

Economic Impact Analysis and Score

Gulf Specimens Marine Lab (GSML) is located in Panacea and has been in continuous operation since 1962. GSML has resubmitted an application for funds to expand its existing programs and implement a Master Plan that was designed by a former Vice President of Ripley's Aquariums. The President of GSML notes that "these efforts will transform the region by creating new jobs, increasing existing markets for marine organisms to scientific and educational institutions, and become a destination for ecotourism. The application notes that GSML hosts hundreds of school trips annually, provides live marine animals for thousands of research laboratories and universities globally and is referenced as a marine specimen source in over 700 scientific publications.

While the applicant has requested that three component parts of the document (education, business infrastructure improvements, and tourism) be read together, the Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc., guiding statute does not allow for that due to the differing nature of the three components. By statute s.288.8017, F.S., Triumph Gulf Coast may award grants for, among other things: *public infrastructure projects, grants that prepare students for future occupations or careers at K-20 institutions that have campuses in the disproportionately affected counties, and grants to the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation for advertising and marketing purposes.*

The application does not identify a public partner that would own or lease the improvements proposed to be installed using Triumph Gulf Coast funds. Triumph's General Counsel has opined that the Triumph Board cannot by law make an award for infrastructure improvements to a private entity, not-for-profit status notwithstanding. Neither does the application propose use of funds for the statutorily allowable tourism marketing component.

However, a Triumph award to a private entity could be considered if it were to provide career and technical education (CTE) for students from the region if it is affiliated with a K-20 institution that has a campus in the affected region.

The proposal states (p27): “Gulf Specimen Marine Laboratory and Aquarium will be implementing a Gulf Education and Marketing of Marine-Life Specialist (GEMMS) Certification program designed to provide independent third-party certification of individuals who complete our unique intern/trade program. Although our certification is novel, components of our certification will meet or exceed three nationally and internationally recognized standards. The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Taxon Advisory Group (Aquatic Invertebrate TAG, Freshwater Fishes TAG, and Marine Fishes TAG) Unified Supplier Reference Process, AALSO (Aquatic Animal Life Support System Operators) and the National Project for Excellence in Environmental Education (NAAEE).” The proposal notes further (p27) that: “We will also apply to the Florida Department of Education for licensing as an independent certification program in order to comply with the state’s robust education accountability system.”

Because the proposal does not propose to award an industry-sponsored, externally validated certificate approved by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE), it is dissimilar to other CTE projects funded by Triumph. Triumph has funded CTE start-up programs intended to then become self-sustaining through tuition or payments from other sources (e.g., Career and Professional Education (CAPE) bonus money from FDOE). To date, the maximum ramp-up and implementation time for delivery of certificates has been seven years. Here, it would be reasonable to use this maximum timeline because of Hurricane Michael damage and the rural status of Wakulla County. The program proposes to deliver 165 certificates in the first three years and 57 per year in following years (page 2 of February 2019 submission), summing to 393 certificates over 7 years. Dividing the proposed \$4,595,000 award by 393 yields a per certificate cost of \$11,692. However, the applicant has not yet gotten the proposed certificate approved by the FL DOE.

Because of the lack of an industry-sponsored, externally validated certificate approved by FDOE, the high cost per certificate for the proposed but not yet licensed training program, the lack of an affiliation with a qualified K-20 institution, the failure to include a public partner to receive funds and take responsibility for infrastructure improvements, and failure to provide meaningful information related to specific performance metrics related to the creation of new high paying jobs in the region, staff score this project as a “C” and do not recommend further consideration by the Triumph Board at this time.

Project Summary (based on information provided by the applicant)

Gulf Specimen Marine Lab (GSML) is requesting a \$4,595,000 grant from Triumph Gulf Coast to be used as capital to invest in an expansion of the current facility and programs. GSML will provide \$5,540,000 toward the expansion using income derived from specimen sales, aquarium membership, SeaMobile, school field trips, and donations, etc.

Gulf Specimen is a 56-year-old nonprofit environmental education center located in Panacea, FL that markets marine life to schools, research laboratories and aquariums. Each year GSML hosts over 500 school field trips, operates a public touch tank aquarium, a certified sea turtle rehabilitation facility and manages a work experience-based training program.

Since 1962, GSML has provided live marine animals to thousands of the research laboratories and universities in the United States, Canada, Europe and Japan. Over 700 scientific publications cite GSML as their source of research specimens. GSML presently collects and markets over 300 marine invertebrates, fish and algae to over 1300 scientific and educational institutions.

The applicant's proposal addresses three branches of the facility; Training/Education, Biological Supply, and Tourism and has requested that all three components be considered together for the purpose of Triumph reviewing the financial support requested. The applicant further states that "All components are interconnected and work together."

The Training/Education project component includes improvements to the existing intern/practical work experience training program including formalization of the program to comply with three national and one state level recognized certification programs. The proposal seeks to create a new aquaculture/aquarium technician/aquariologist trade that does not currently have a formal industry certification but is expected by the applicant to become more important and needed as Florida aquaculture grows.

This proposed Gulf Education and Marketing of Marine-Life Specialist (GEMMS) Certification program will be designed to provide independent third-party certification of individuals who complete the unique intern/trade program at GSML. The applicant notes that the certification is novel, and that components of it will meet or exceed three nationally and internationally recognized standards. Meeting and exceeding these three standards are expected to ensure that the certification is immediately recognizable and verifiable by industry and employers. GSML would also apply to the Florida Department of Education for licensing as an independent certification program.

The Biological Supply component of the project includes provision to expand the current market. The United States is GSML's primary market. However, to meet goals stated in the financial plan GSML plans to expand into Canada, Europe and Asia. Marketing to foreign entities with live marine animals requires extensive permitting and associated costs, which GSML stated it has not been able to do thus far due to lack of manpower and funds for the investment.

As this time, GSML has not been able to expand their marine life harvest to include items like algae-based products or seaweed but believes investments in this program will increase and enhance the available market requiring more staff be hired to meet the demand.

The Tourism component of the project will allow GSML to expand its ecotourism program. Ecotourism includes a wide range of outdoor recreation activities. At GSML it would also include visiting scientists and visiting artists. This proposed expansion requires additional employees and funds for investment into enhanced facilities and equipment.

In 1980, Gulf Specimen Company became Gulf Specimen Marine Laboratories, Inc. (GSML), a not-for-profit corporation with a tax-exempt IRS 501(c)(3) status. GSML is a licensed sea turtle rescue and rehabilitation center with a specially equipped hospital and turtle ambulance. All required permits and licenses from the FWC, Florida Department of Agriculture, and NOAA fisheries are maintained, as well as a 2-acre offshore lease for culturing live rock for aquariums.

Funding and Budget (as provided by the applicant)

5. Please provide a Project/Program Budget. Include all applicable costs and other funding sources available to support the proposal.

A. Project/Program Costs:

Example Costs (Note: Not exhaustive list of possible Cost categories.)

Total Project Costs: \$10,135,000.00

B. Other Project Funding Sources:

Example Funding Sources (Note: Not an exhaustive list of possible Funding Sources.)

Total Other Funding \$5,540,000.00

Total Amount Requested: \$4,595,000.00

Funding from Triumph are \$3,950,000 year 1, \$650,000 year 2 and \$350,000 in year 3
Matching GSML funds are \$1,087,000 year 1, \$1,455,000 year 2, \$1,789,000 year 3