



444 Appleyard Drive  
Tallahassee Florida 32304-2895  
850.201.6200 | [www.tcc.fl.edu](http://www.tcc.fl.edu)

---

August 1, 2019

Florida Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc.  
P.O. Box 12007  
Tallahassee, FL 32317

Chairman Gaetz,

I am writing in response to the letter received by Tallahassee Community College from Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc. on June 21, 2019 stating our application of the Oyster Ocean Shellfish Nursery/Hatchery/Processing project would not be funded.

The College was incredibly disappointed to learn of this decision, especially since many of the reasons listed were factually inaccurate and had not been discussed with us previously. The letter surprised us and we were given no warning or opportunity to respond to any of the concerns by Triumph staff.

This has been a very frustrating process for the College. Over the course of many meetings and conversations we have had with multiple individuals since we submitted a pre-application in 2017, we have been met only with inconsistent communications and guidance. Meanwhile, we stood by and watched as other projects were funded that did not adhere to the same directions that were imposed upon us.

TCC's oyster program has been a game changer for Wakulla County. It is unfortunate that Triumph did not see fit to help us continue to grow jobs and support economic development in our region.

Included herein you will find our responses to each of the reasons for denial provided within the letter to TCC, as well as a timeline of our interactions with Triumph staff and board members.

Sincerely,

Jim Murdaugh  
President

CC: Susan Skelton, Executive Director  
CC: TCC Board of Trustees

## Responses to Triumph Gulf Coast Staff Comments

*“The FSAA letter to Triumph notes that the projects would result in direct competition by a publicly funded entity with an industry that already has numerous private business currently producing oyster spat.”*

This is incorrect. At the time our original proposal was submitted in 2017 there were only two places (Auburn University and Southern Cross Sea Farms in Cedar Key) where our students could obtain seed. Auburn has since stopped providing seed to the private sector leaving a void where there was once a stable source of seed for our students to access, and Southern Cross has proven unreliable. Since 2017, the landscape has changed, though it is no more reliable. The Apalachicola Oyster Company hatchery had to temporarily close their doors because of salinity problems for growing oysters, and the Pensacola Oyster Hatchery, which just recently opened, does not provide sufficient volume of seed.

There currently does not exist a reliable, stable environment where you can purchase oyster seed in the quantities that are needed. While our students and graduates currently have approximately 12 million oysters in the water, their capacity is around 50 million with a goal by year seven of up to 500 million oysters in the water. One of the goals of our project was to create a stable and reliable supply of seed so the oyster industry could grow.

*“The FSAA letter notes hatcheries are not labor-intensive operations and will not generate substantial employment in the facility itself.”*

The intent was never to create jobs in the nursery/hatchery. Our primary purpose with this project was to supply our students with a sufficient, reliable and cost-effective source of seed. Our secondary purpose was educational, to create a training facility where we could show and teach students and visitors about the seed cultivation process.

*“While the TCC/WEI proposal discusses using a pasteurization process, the Panacea Co-op/FAMU proposal discusses a similar process for which the university has applied for patents and exclusively licensed to a specific company. It is not clear from the TCC/WEI proposal if this is the same or a different process and if TCC would have to pay FAMU (a potential competitor) for the use of the technology.”*

As was previously communicated to Triumph staff, TCC is no longer associated and in partnership with the Panacea Oyster Co-op. TCC has an agreement with Microsystems First, which licensed the pasteurization process from FAMU. Therefore, TCC would not be paying FAMU, TCC would pay Microsystems First for use of the pasteurization technology.

*“TCC/WEI states that it has trained over 100 “entrepreneurs” per year over the past five years of operation. When Triumph Gulf Coast staff asked for the names of those businesses, the applicant provided a list of oyster harvesting licenses. Of the 138 license numbers provided, 44 were licenses to operate in areas of the state outside of the Triumph Gulf Coast region.”*

As we stated in the grant application, TCC's work through WEI has already led to the creation of over 100 new businesses with 150 new employees in sustainable seafood farming. To clarify, this was over the life of the program, not per year.

*“The State of Florida does not require any specific training for entry into the oyster aquaculture business and it is unclear how funding this training would create any new direct jobs that could not already be created with no additional training or cost.”*

Our Oyster Aquaculture Training Certification program provides hands-on training and experience as well as access to the industry and state partners our students will need in order to be successful in starting their business. For example, they receive firsthand knowledge from the Florida Department of Agriculture, Division of Aquaculture on issues like disease, bay closures, and correct processing methods, vital information for future oyster farmers. Learning growing methods and how to set up a lease along with connecting our farmers with equipment distributors are immeasurable advantages to this program over an individual attempting trial and error on their own.

Also, though a training program is not technically required for obtaining a lease, training for the safe processing of shellfish is required by the State of Florida and is part of our program.

Our proposal includes everything needed to create, teach, and help sustain the oyster aquaculture industry. We are proposing a nursery/hatchery to have enough seed for our students and our community, a certificate training program to train our students in Nursery/Hatchery and Fisheries Management, and a processing facility so our students and other oyster farmers have a mechanism in place so they can sell their oysters. This type of end-to-end facility (Nursery/Hatchery, Processing and Distribution Facility) does not exist – anywhere.

*“It appears that most, if not all, of the funding requested from Triumph Gulf Coast would go towards the construction of a commercial hatchery and processing facility, with very little funding focused on measurable training outcomes.”*

All of the funding in the proposal is focused on measurable training objectives which are provided throughout our application. For example, on page 31 we list the creation of 529 direct jobs, between 6,000 and 15,00 indirect and imbued forms of employment, and \$294 million in additional personal GDP.

On page 36 we state that the WEI Hatchery and Processing Center will collect data on direct impacts, including:

1. Number of trainees graduated;
2. Number of resultant businesses startups;
3. Number of employees per business;
4. Quantity of larval oysters produced yearly;
5. Quantity of mature oysters processed yearly, by business and for total facility; and,
6. Yearly estimated gross revenues, per participating business and as processed by the facility.

On page 39 we discuss what we will cover in our Formative and Summative Evaluation. Some specifics include:

1. Student enrollment
2. Program completion rates;
3. Number of new jobs created;
4. GDP change for select Triumph counties
5. Median Household Income change for select Triumph counties; and
6. Average Annual Wage Rate changes for select Triumph counties.
7. Environmental survey of species diversity, water quality, and benthic regions of project area.

On page 41 we discuss the measurable economic impacts and wage growth. On page 49 we list our measurable metrics over the first 18 months. On pages 51 and 52 we provide a timeline of what will be accomplished and when.

*“Triumph staff see a need to have input from the oyster science project previously funded for FSU before embarking on major expansions of oyster hatchery capacity.”*

FSU’s project is focused on re-seeding Apalachicola Bay through research. However, our proposal was designed to expand the oyster aquaculture industry in Wakulla. The purpose of FSU’s project is to generate research; the purpose of our project is create jobs. Though both proposals involve oysters, they are truly different.

## Timeline of Interactions with Triumph Staff and Board Members

- November 15, 2017 - TCC submitted a pre-application to Triumph for \$15 million to create a Wakulla Environmental Institute Training Center of Excellence.
- January 31, 2018 – TCC Director of Grants and Special Projects Steven Solomon emailed Triumph staff to request a meeting to discuss submitting a formal application after the pre-application was accepted.
- February 8, 2018 - TCC staff met with Triumph staff member Dr. Rick Harper at WEI. He indicated his pleasure with the project and discussed the potential of adding exporting industries like boat building.
- May 9, 2018 - Based on the information that received from the prior meeting, TCC submitted a formal application for \$15 million dollars that included 28 different job training programs housed under three centers that included an Education Aquaculture Development and Training Center, an Environmental and Technical Training Center and a Tourism and Recreation Center.
- May 17, 2018 - Steven Solomon followed-up with Triumph staff by email requesting a timeline for when TCC's proposal might be heard.
- May 17, 2018 - Triumph staff replied:

*"Steven, the only certainty I can provide about the timeline is that I don't expect the application to be considered at the June 12 meeting. As you know, the issues surrounding the oyster industry are sensitive and include a large number of stakeholders. We are making every effort to be inclusive of all ideas and thorough in our review of the different proposals. I've included Dr. Harper in case he has any additional insight."*

- May 17, 2018 - Steven responded:

*"Thanks so much for the information. I would also ask you to consider that in addition to continuing to add to the success of the oyster program we will also be creating over 20 different education and workforce programs unrelated to oyster industry that will have a tremendous impact on our region. We see our proposal as a transformative workforce education and job training program, and not necessarily specific to the oyster industry. Further, what we are proposing is in no way competition, and only supplements existing industry efforts."*

No response was received thereafter.

- June 8, 2018 - Steven emailed Triumph staff regarding the June 12, 2018 Triumph Board meeting agenda item to discuss the oyster industry proposals:

*"I hope this email finds you well. I was looking at the just released agenda for Tuesday's Triumph Gulf Coast meeting and it states that there will be a discussion of oyster industry proposals. Would that include our proposal, and if so do we need to have our leadership team present?"*

Triumph staff responded:

*"Steven, I'll let Dr. Harper comment as well, however our intent is to discuss the issues surrounding oysters at a high level. There have been a number of different proposals submitted and we are looking forward to the Board Members being able to speak with each other about how Triumph can participate in this important issue for the region. You are of course welcome to attend."*

- July 2018 - Jerry McDaniel, on behalf of TCC, reached out to Triumph staff member Cori Henderson who advised that the Triumph Board members were not interested in construction of a building. Prior to this, there was no mention from Triumph Board members and/or staff about not wanting to fund construction projects. Triumph had, and continues to fund construction projects of all sizes.
- August 2018 – TCC President Jim Murdaugh contacted Triumph Board member Jason Shoaf who advised him that the Triumph Board members would be meeting in August to discuss oyster proposals.
- August 27, 2018 – Steven Solomon emailed Triumph staff to ask if there were any updates on our proposal.

Staff responded:

*"Steve, thank you for your email. I understand both you and your project partner's interest in an update. We are working through the projects we've received and there are a number of large education proposals that tackle multiple fields of study within a single application. We are starting to see updated applications with more streamlined grant requests and I anticipate we will see this trend continue. All of that is to say that I don't have a time line that I can share with you and your partners today but we are hopeful to have reviewed everything we have currently received over the next few months."*

- September 12, 2018 – Steven Solomon attended the Triumph Board meeting where staff told him that TCC's application would now need to be split into multiple applications. Staff indicated Triumph Board members were not interested in funding proposals that had multiple job training programs, contradicting previous guidance given about having "truly transformative proposals." Steven requested a phone meeting with the Triumph staff to discuss this change.

- September 21, 2018 – Via a conference call, TCC staff verified Triumph staff were directing them to submit separate proposals for oyster aquaculture and for any other specific job training programs instead of the one grant proposal that the College had already been told to submit.
- September 25, 2018 - TCC staff attended the Triumph Oyster Industry Working Group meeting during which the College invited Triumph Board Member Jason Shoaf to visit TCC's oyster lease.
- October 3, 2018 - TCC staff provided Jason Shoaf with a tour of WEI's oyster lease and an overview of the College's proposal. He expressed his enthusiasm for the project and indicated its likelihood of funding. He also indicated the Triumph Board would like to see one comprehensive oyster proposal made up of all of the individuals who had submitted oyster proposals.
- October 5, 2018 - Triumph staff reached out to TCC to confirm that the College would be submitting multiple proposals.
- October 19, 2018 - TCC met with FSU who stated they would not be interested in partnering with anyone for any oyster projects and would not be changing their oyster proposal application.
- November 5, 2018 – Triumph staff member Dr. Frank Fuller requested a meeting with TCC staff to discuss the College's application.
- November 9, 2018 - Dr. Fuller confirmed Board member Jason Shoaf's and staff member Cori Henderson's direction to split TCC's proposal into an oyster-only application and then separate proposals for each job training program. Dr. Fuller stated TCC did not have to wait until a decision was made about the oyster proposal to submit any job training proposals, and would like the job training proposals to be submitted by December. He also stated he would be the one reviewing them and that they would not interfere with the oyster proposal as that would be reviewed by Dr. Harper.
- November 28, 2018 - TCC submitted the Ocean Shellfish Nursery / Hatchery and Processing Facility application to Triumph for \$13.5 million dollars. In the proposal, the College stated that this facility would directly enable the creation of over 500 jobs, and indirect employment may exceed 15,000 jobs by year seven of project implementation. Area GDP will be augmented by \$480 Million, and the GDP-to-project ROI is \$36:\$1.

Jason Shoaf indicated to TCC staff that they submit all of the College's remaining applications immediately in order to be on the agenda for December's 2018 meeting. Accordingly, TCC submitted an Unmanned Systems Training proposal on November 28, an Elevated Technology Training proposal on November 29, and a Marine Service Occupational Training proposal on December 13. Though none of these proposals were on the agenda for the December 7 Triumph Board Meeting, FSU's oyster research proposal was included and approved unanimously. At that meeting, Shoaf again stated that we should all be prepared to be on the agenda for the next board meeting in January.

- January 7, 2019 - Steven followed up with Triumph staff by email to ask if TCC's proposals would be considered at the January Board meeting.

Triumph staff responded:

*"Good morning Steven, thank you for checking in. We don't anticipate taking up new items at this meeting but look forward to this spring."*

- January 11, 2019 - Triumph staff emailed Steven to schedule a conference call to discuss TCC's four applications.
- January 22, 2019 – TCC staff provided detail to Triumph staff about each grant application. Triumph staff asked specific questions regarding the operational aspects of each grant program. College staff stressed the importance of the funding for TCC to create new programs and jobs that meet the needs of our students, community, and industry partners. Triumph staff indicated their satisfaction with all of the programs, and stated they were just starting to review the workforce and higher-ed proposals. They also apologized that they have been spending so much time with awarding previous proposals, like the airport. When College staff requested a timeline, none was provided.
- January 25, 2019 - Dr. Fuller visited TCC to discuss the unmanned systems training proposal and provide TCC staff with feedback and guidance moving forward. Dr. Fuller stated that he hoped to have the application heard at the February meeting, and that Triumph would not be interested in our Linemen/Cellular Tower proposal as Triumph was already working with Gulf Power, now FPL.
- February 8, 2019 – TCC submitted a revised unmanned systems training proposal, based on Dr. Fuller's suggestions.
- February 25, 2019 – At the Triumph Board meeting, Dr. Fuller stated he would like TCC to make more additional changes to the unmanned systems training proposal.
- March 14, 2019 - Steven Solomon spoke with Triumph staff member Cori Henderson at a mutual meeting that they both attended, and asked her about the status of the oyster proposal. She stated that the Triumph Board members now wanted to hear back on FSU's oyster project first, and the listening tour that they were conducting as part of the grant, before making any decisions. This was the first time that TCC was made aware of this change, as there was no prior discussion of this. Solomon explained how closely TCC works with FSU, and the differences between the projects. Staff member Henderson also stated it could be three years before the Triumph Board takes up any other oyster proposals.
- March 18, 2019 – On behalf of TCC, Jerry McDaniel reached out to Triumph Board member Allan Bense who agreed to reach out to Triumph staff member Dr. Harper with the goal of having our oyster proposal heard at a Triumph Board Meeting.
- March 28, 2019 – TCC submitted an updated version of the unmanned systems training proposal to Dr. Fuller based on his suggestions.

- April 9, 2019 - Associate Director of WEI Albert Wynn received a phone call from Dr. Fuller that informed Albert that three (Ocean Shellfish Nursery/Hatchery, Marine Manufacturing /Small Engine Repair Tech, Unmanned Vehicle Systems) of TCC proposals would be recommended by staff for funding to the Board. He suggested the projects would be discussed at the April Board meeting.
- May 2019 - Dr. Fuller visited TCC to discuss additional changes to the unmanned systems training proposal application.
- May 31, 2019 - TCC submitted a revised unmanned systems training proposal, based on Dr. Fuller's suggestions. Dr. Fuller indicated it would be heard at the June Triumph Board meeting.

That same day, Triumph staff emailed TCC staff to request a meeting for questions they had related to the College's proposals.

- June 4, 2019 – Via conference call, TCC staff spoke with Triumph staff and answered questions related to the unmanned systems training proposal. Per Triumph staff request, the College sent additional documentation related to our unmanned drone proposal on June 4 and again on June 12.
- June 19, 2019 - Albert Wynn spoke with Dr. Fuller who indicated that the other Triumph staff members (Dr. Harper and Cori Henderson) said that they would like us to make some more changes to the budget for the unmanned systems training proposal. Steven emailed Cori to ask for clarification about the changes. She responded:

*"We've been focused on the Board meeting this week and hope get back to application review next week."*

- June 20, 2019 - TCC's proposals were not heard at the Triumph Board meeting in Wakulla County. However, Wakulla County Schools, which submitted an unmanned drone proposal in May 2019 for the first time, were approved at this meeting for a \$1.7 million project to educate 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders on how to fly drones.
- July 22, 2019 – Albert Wynn spoke with Dr. Fuller about final version of Gulf Triumph Unmanned Vehicle Systems application and his intention to have us on August agenda.
- July 23, 2019 – Albert Wynn submitted a rebuttal to Gulf Triumph in response to question about the number of students in our drone classes at WEI and asked by Dr. Fuller to submit final version by Friday July 26, 2019 to Gulf Triumph Staff.
- July 24, 2019 – Albert Wynn submitted final version of Gulf Triumph Unmanned Vehicle Systems application to Gulf Triumph Staff and received confirmation from Cori Henderson.
- July 26, 2019 – Triumph Staff emailed TCC and asked to place the Unnamed Systems Training Proposal budget into a new budget template for Triumph.

- July 29, 2019- TCC submitted the budget on the new template form.