



# RURAL INNOVATION GRANT GUIDELINES

The Rural Innovation Grant program aims to support creative ideas that address current issues and challenges faced by rural communities associated with the themes of community investment, growth and connection. This program is a result of the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative's 2018 Recommendations.

The word "innovation" is derived from the Latin verb *innovare*, which means to renew. So, at its root, innovation means to improve or to replace something, such as a process, a product, or a service. It is the concept of bringing creativity into implementation with a definitive outcome. This grant is designed to support the implementation stage of projects.

The program, defined in [Iowa Administrative Code](#), is administered by the [Center for Rural Revitalization](#), a division of the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), in consultation with the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative Task Forces.

## TIMELINE

### June 28, 2023 | Application Window Opens

Application available through [iowagrants.gov](https://iowagrants.gov)

### July 19, 2023 | Grant Informational Webinar

[Register for the webinar](#) to be held on Wednesday, July 19 at 10 a.m. CT. This webinar will be recorded and posted on the grant website.

### August 30, 2023 | Application Deadline

Deadline to submit an application for funding is 11:59 p.m., September 1, 2022.

### October 15, 2023 | Funding Decision Notification

Applicants notified of funding decisions by October 15.

### October 15, 2023 – June 30, 2025 | Funding Period

All project activities and incurred expenses must occur within the eligible contracted funding period of October 15, 2023 – June 30, 2025. Funding is awarded on a reimbursement basis after expenses have been incurred for approved project activities.



## FUNDING

### *Grant Request Amount*

Applicants may request funding for eligible one-time project expenses that are incurred and expended within the eligible funding period.

Minimum Grant Request: \$10,000

Maximum Grant Request: \$50,000

### *Match Requirement*

Applicants are required to demonstrate investment in projects by providing a minimum of 1:1/2 cash match. The cash match must be secured, dedicated to eligible expenses, a legitimate part of the proposed project and must be expended within the eligible funding period. The 1:1/2 match requirement may be raised through a combination of public and private sources but may not include in-kind donations of goods or services, unsecured funding, or loans. For example, an applicant that requests \$10,000 in grant funds must have at least \$5,000 in cash match. While the minimum match requirement is 1:1/2, competitive proposals will demonstrate broad-based financial support for their project and that public funding sources have been adequately leveraged to seek and obtain private dollars.

- Cash match constitutes actual cash contributed to direct project expenses by the applicant or other funding sources.
- Funding from state government that is already being used as match from another program, including other funds from the Iowa Economic Development Authority, cannot be used to meet the match requirement.

### *Funding Period*

All project activities and incurred expenses must occur within the eligible contracted funding period, October 15, 2023 – June 30, 2025. Funding is awarded to grant recipients on a reimbursement basis after expenses have been incurred for approved project activities within the eligible funding period. Expenses that are incurred before or after the eligible funding period are not eligible for reimbursement.

### *Disbursement of Funds*

Disbursements will be made on a reimbursement basis. Disbursement claims must be for an amount equal to or greater than \$1,000 per request. All claims must be made through [lowagrants.gov](http://lowagrants.gov). When submitting a claim, the following items are required:

- An invoice including:
  - A detailed description of the expenditures and the corresponding amounts
  - Product invoices and proof of payment for any equipment, supplies or materials purchased
  - Receipts for any Iowa travel expenses
  - Invoices and proof of payment for any subcontractor payments
  - Timesheets for any personnel time requested
  - The IEDA may request additional documentation as needed
- A status report for the claim period. Status reports must be received once a quarter. If no funds are requested, recipients should still file a status report.
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## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

### *Eligible Applicants*

Iowa businesses, colleges and universities, city or county government, and private 501(c)3 nonprofit agencies and foundations are eligible to apply. A single entity must be selected to serve as the primary applicant for grant funding applications; however, the project should include collaboration between a consortium of partners. The selected primary applicant must meet the definition of eligible applicant. The applicant will be responsible for submitting eligible material during the funding application process and will be the entity legally obligated to the terms of an agreement if awarded funding. Partners and collaborating entities are not subject to the eligibility requirements but may be subject to financial and programmatic review during the selection process.

- Projects/programs must exist in and benefit a community in Iowa with a population of 20,000 or fewer and not contiguous (sharing a common border) to a city with a population of 40,000 or greater.
- Any eligible applicant may submit an application that includes one or more partners.
- Any eligible applicant will be allowed to submit one application per funding announcement. An applicant who has applied as the principal entity for an application may also be named as a partner on additional applications submitted but may not be named as a primary entity.
- Federally tax exempt nonprofit organization incorporated and physically located in Iowa.
  - Physical location of the organization is defined as maintaining a current home office and registered agent address in Iowa defined by Iowa Code 490.501, as well as maintaining a primary staff presence physically located and working in Iowa.
- Public or private school serving grades pre-K through 12 and physically located in Iowa.
- Nonprofit institution of higher education physically located in Iowa.
- Unit of local, county or federally recognized tribal government physically located in Iowa.
- For-profit corporation or business located in Iowa.
  - A business will be considered an Iowa business if the business is incorporated in the state of Iowa or authorized to do business in the state of Iowa.

### *Eligible Project Checklist*

Eligible and competitive projects must fulfill the following criteria:

- Project is unique in its design or implementation.
- Project can be replicated in other rural communities of similar size and situation.
- Project has multiple partners engaged in its success.
- Project has not been implemented in other communities in Iowa.
- Project will have local impact beyond an individual business or organization.
- Project is either a new solution to an existing challenge or a new application of an existing solution.

If your project does not fall into one of these criteria, attend the informational webinar, contact the program manager at [rural@iowaeda.com](mailto:rural@iowaeda.com), or consider another grant opportunity through the [Center for Rural Revitalization](#).

### *Eligible Use of Funding*

Eligible use of funds for awards include, but are not limited to the following:

- Construction
- Land acquisition
- Major renovation and repair of buildings or appurtenant structures
- Park, trail or permanent design exhibits
- Site development
- Engineering, planning and design costs
- Community training program development and implementation
- Materials
- Equipment and electronics
- Marketing
- Personnel time dedicated to the project (Applicant must demonstrate how personnel time is specifically dedicated to the proposed project. Personnel benefits are not eligible.)

## ELIGIBLE PROJECT EXAMPLES

The Rural Innovation Grant program supports innovative ideas that address challenges faced by rural communities associated with the themes of community investment, growth and connection and can serve as a model for other rural communities across Iowa. The following are examples of previously funded projects. Please note this list is not exhaustive but reflects the variety of ways the funding can be utilized:

**Shared-Use Kitchen** – Funding for a community shared-use kitchen for startup entrepreneurs. The kitchen is licensed and available for rent to individuals to test the restaurant business without the initial investment of a storefront.

**Business Accelerator Program** – This project established a jumpstart accelerator fund to assist new startup businesses in gaining capital to open their doors and succeed. In addition to providing seed funding to businesses, the program offered business training classes through a partner community college.

**Rural Grocery Lockers** – This project created a viable rural grocery delivery system to address the challenging grocery needs of rural Iowa, reducing transportation costs and increasing convenience and social distancing for rural residents. Two rural grocery stores acted as miniature fulfillment centers for refrigerated lockers/freezers located in rural communities without a grocery store.

**Satellite Coworking and Training Space** – Creative Adventure Lab out of Dubuque initiated a satellite location in a rural community downtown building. Funds were used for the rehabilitation work to prepare the structure for use as a hub for entrepreneurs.



## INELIGIBLE PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND EXPENSES

Funding for existing projects or programs that do not include significant expansion of the project or program are ineligible. The Rural Innovation Grant Program does not support ongoing expenses for existing programs or projects.

Ineligible expenses include, but are not limited to:

- International or domestic travel (outside of Iowa)
- Insurance
- Conference or training expenses for program providers
- Routine, reoccurring maintenance
- Ongoing utilities
- Budget shortfalls
- Fundraising or benefit event activities
- Lobbying activity
- Prizes and awards

## ONLINE APPLICATION SUBMISSION

Applicants must apply via IowaGrants.gov, an online application portal. Applications will not be accepted in any other format. Late, incomplete, or ineligible applications will not be accepted. Applicants must create a login to view the full application for the program.

## REVIEW PROCESS

Applications will be reviewed for completion, eligibility, and adherence to published guidelines. Applications are reviewed as submitted. New application information or subsequent application clarification submitted after a program deadline is not considered. Eligible applications will be referred to a competitive review by a volunteer panel that includes the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative Task Force members and expert professionals (grant review committee). The grant review committee reserves the right to recommend conditional funding and partial funding of projects. Funding recommendations will be submitted by the committee to the executive director of the IEDA for consideration and approval. The applicant's authorized official will receive award notification. All funding decisions are final.

## SCORING RUBRIC

### *Eligibility Review*

Applications must demonstrate evidence of the following:

- Applicant is an eligible candidate.
- Funding request meets eligible project and expense requirements.
- Request is for no less than \$10,000 or more than \$50,000.
- Request includes proof of 1:1/2 cash match for grant request.
- Project duration does not exceed contract period.
- Application is complete and submitted through IowaGrants.gov.
- Applicant is a local government entity (mayor or city council) or applicant has included a letter of support from the mayor or resolution from the city council.
- Primary Applicant is not named as Primary Applicant on any other applications; however, can be named as partners on additional applications.

Extra consideration is provided to projects that have been endorsed by the Iowa Great Places Citizen's Advisory Board (additional 5 points added to score total), as well as those located in a community of 5,000 or fewer (additional 5 points added to score total).



## Application Review

The Rural Innovation Grant Scoring Rubric will be used to evaluate applications. Each section has criteria and corresponding point values to ensure a fair review process. The rubric is on a scale of 75 points.

<b>1 – MISSION ALIGNMENT: 5 points possible</b>		
5	3	1
Proposal aligns with the Empower Rural Iowa Initiative by developing a creative, concrete solution to increase rural community vibrancy.	Proposal may align with the Empower Rural Iowa Initiative by developing a concrete solution to increase rural community vibrancy.	Proposal does not align with the Empower Rural Iowa Initiative by developing a solution to increase rural community vibrancy.

<b>2 - INNOVATION: 15 points possible</b>		
15	8	1
Proposal clearly addresses rural challenges through exceptional and creative solutions.	Proposal addresses rural challenges through creative solutions.	Proposal does not clearly address rural challenges through creative solutions.

<b>3 - REPLICATION: 5 points possible</b>		
5	3	1
Detailed proposal documentation provides clear opportunity for successful replication in rural communities across Iowa.	Proposal documentation provides potential for replication in rural communities across Iowa.	Proposal documentation does not provide clear opportunity for replication in rural communities across Iowa.

<b>4 – IMPLEMENTATION: 5 points possible</b>		
5	3	1
A viable timeline with clear milestones for measuring progress is included.	A timeline with milestones for measuring progress is included.	A vague timeline with unclear milestones for measuring progress is included.

<b>5 - EVALUATION: 5 points possible</b>		
5	3	1
Proposal articulates clearly defined, measurable goals.	Proposal articulates defined, measurable goals.	Proposal does not articulate measurable goals.

<b>6 – PUBLIC VALUE: 5 points possible</b>		
5	3	1
Target population for project is well-defined and its relevance to project evident. Plans to disseminate project and provide equitable access to project activities are exemplary.	Target population for the project is identified. Plans to disseminate project and provide equitable access to project activities are satisfactory.	Target population for the project is not identified. Plans to disseminate project and provide equitable access to project activities are inadequate.

<b>7 – COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: 5 points possible</b>		
5	3	1
Proposal identifies and describes in detail the roles of a variety of partners.	Proposal identifies and briefly describes the roles of a variety of partners.	Proposal does not adequately identify or describe the roles of partners.

<b>8 - BUDGET: 5 points possible</b>		
5	3	1
Project budget and intended use of requested funds are clear and appropriate. Exceeds required 1:1/2 cash match with a variety of match sources.	Project budget and intended use of requested funds are identified and adequate.	Project budget and intended use of requested funds are unclear or inadequate.

<b>9 – BUDGET LOCAL SUPPORT: 5 points possible</b>		
5	3	1
Majority of the applicant match is from local, including county and city government, or private sources.	Over half of the applicant match is from local, including county and city government, or private sources.	Less than half of the applicant match is from local, including county and city government, or private sources.

<b>10 - MEDIA SUPPORT MATERIAL: 5 points possible</b>		
5	3	1
Support material is highly relevant to the projects, of high quality and clearly supports the projects' excellence.	Support material relates to the projects and is of average quality.	Support material is not relevant to the projects, of poor quality or does not support excellence of projects.

<b>11 - GRANTSMANSHIP &amp; CASE FOR SUPPORT: 5 points possible</b>		
5	3	1
The application is clear, concise and well-composed. Case for support is exemplary and merits investment from the State.	The application is clear. Case for support is adequate.	Application is unclear or poorly composed. Case for support is inadequate or does not merit State investment.

## CONTACT

Potential applicants are encouraged to review all published material and contact Rural Community Revitalization Program Manager Liesl Seabert at 515.348.6154 or [rural@iowaeda.com](mailto:rural@iowaeda.com), with questions well in advance of application deadlines.