



RURAL RETURN PROGRAM

GRANT GUIDELINES

The Rural Return Grant program seeks to support creative programming that attracts new residents to move and/or work in rural communities. Grant funding supports the development and implementation of incentive programs. Across the state, there are small towns losing population or witnessing an aging population. This funding opportunity is aimed at addressing that challenge by empowering communities to develop a program to attract the new residents to locate within their community to live and/or work. Incentive programs can be targeting a specific profession, such as teachers or dentists; supporting a specific demographic, such as veterans; or celebrating local assets, such as providing recreation packages or business gifts.

This program is a result of the [Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative's 2020 Recommendations](#). 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

October 1 | Application Window Opens

Application available through IowaGrants.gov

December 1 | Application Deadline

Deadline to apply for funding is 11:59 p.m.

December 22 | Funding Decision Notification

Applicants notified of decisions by Dec. 22

January 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023 | Funding Period

All project activities and incurred expenses must occur within the eligible contracted funding period of January 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023. Funding is awarded on a reimbursement basis after expenses have been incurred for approved project activities.

Project Examples

The Rural Return Grant program supports innovative ideas that attract citizens to locate to their community or region to live and/or work. The following are examples of existing incentive programs:

- Rural Teacher Corps: Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque
 - The Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque identified the need for recruiting teachers to their counties.

Through an incentive scholarship program, the new program will not only attract teachers, but will develop them into community leaders through development of a mentoring cohort for ongoing support.

- Clinton County Community Student Loan Assistance Program: City of Clinton, Clinton County, School District
 - The program was created to help ease the financial burden of student loans while recruiting and retaining top talent into Clinton County through a progressive debt relief initiative. Individuals enrolled in the program can receive up to \$30 a month towards the direct payoff of their student loan debt for up to five years.
- Home Base Iowa: Scott County
 - Home Base Iowa connects military-friendly companies with qualified veterans, transitioning service members who are in search of career opportunities. Scott County is going a step further by providing closing cost reimbursement to qualifying veterans and interview expenses.

Funding

Grant Request Amount

Applicants may request funding for eligible project expenses incurred and expended within the eligible funding period.

- Minimum Request: \$1,000
- Maximum Request: \$20,000

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. Cash match constitutes actual cash contributed to direct project expenses by the applicant or other funding sources. 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 the project and public funding sources adequately leveraged to seek and obtain private dollars.

Funding Period

All project activities and incurred expenses must occur within the eligible contracted funding period of January 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023. 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 incurred before or after the eligible funding period are not eligible for reimbursement or for match requirements.

Disbursement of Funds

Disbursements will be made on a reimbursement basis. Disbursement claims must be for an amount equal to or greater than \$500 per request. All claims must be made through 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.

Eligibility Requirements

Eligible Applicants

Iowa businesses; schools; 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 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. If a county-wide application, must be within one of the 88 least-populous counties in Iowa.
- 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 period. 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.
 - Applicant must be a local government entity (mayor, city council or county commission) or applicant has included letter of support from the mayor or resolution from the city council.
 - Federally tax exempt 501(c)3 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 and private schools that serve grades pre-K through 12 that are 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 or authorized to do business in the state of Iowa.
- Applications shall identify and describe any other sources of funding for the proposed activities.
 - Applications must provide a 1:1/2 cash match (grant can be up to 66% of total project cost).

Eligible Use of Funding

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

- Planning and research costs
- Community training program development and implementation
- Materials
- Equipment and electronics
- Marketing
- Personnel time dedicated to the program
(Applicant must demonstrate how personnel time is specifically dedicated to the proposed project. Personnel benefits are not eligible.)

Ineligible Use of Funds

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

Ineligible expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Payment or incentives to recipients
- International or domestic travel (outside of Iowa)
- Insurance
- Routine, reoccurring maintenance
- Ongoing utilities
- Budget shortfalls
- Fundraising or benefit event activities
- Lobbying activity
- Prizes and awards

Eligible Program Requirements

Program Requirements include, but are not limited to the following:

- Applicants shall demonstrate how the program incentivizes citizens to locate in their community.
- Applicants shall demonstrate eligibility.
- Applicants shall demonstrate the capacity for grant administration.
- Applications shall demonstrate the feasibility of completing the proposed activities with the funds requested and contract period.
- Applicant is local government entity (mayor, city council or county commission) or applicant included a letter of support from the mayor or resolution from the city council.

Reporting Requirements

In the application, the applicant shall provide a timeline and the goals and objectives by which to measure the success of the project. The recipients' success will be measured based on the progress towards the completion of each goal or objective as outlined in the application.

Quarterly Reports

Each quarter, the recipient must provide an update on the percentage towards completion of each goal or objective and a narrative of the activities taken place in support of the goal or objective.

Recipients shall also provide a narrative description of any deviations from the proposed timeline, tasks and objectives during the reporting period. If the reported deviations will have an impact on the remainder of the project, the recipient must also notify the program manager via email.

Final Report

- Final report will be submitted via [IowaGrants](#) within 120 days of project completion date.
- IEDA will withhold 5% of project funds until the final report is received and approved by the program manager.
- The final report shall contain the following:
 - Executive Summary
 - Timeline for completion of each goal or objective
 - Narrative description of grant activities undertaken to support the project
 - Narrative description of the project achievements
 - Benefit the end product provides or will provide
 - Budget narrative, detailing how funds were spent in support of the project
 - Narrative description of any deviation from the original budget, timeline or any grant activity

Online Application Submission

Applicants must submit applications via IowaGrants.gov, the 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 by staff for completion, eligibility and adherence to published guidelines. Applications are reviewed as submitted. New application information or subsequent clarification submitted after a program deadline is not considered. Eligible applications will be referred to a competitive review by a volunteer panel, including 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. 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:

- Applicant is an eligible candidate
- Funding request meets eligible program and expense requirements
- Request is for no less than \$1,000 or more than \$20,000
- Request includes proof of 1:1/2 cash match
- Project duration does not exceed contract period
- Application is complete and submitted through [IowaGrants.gov](#)
- Applicant is a local government entity or applicant 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

Application Review

The Rural Return 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 65 points.

1 – Description: 5 points possible		
5	3	1
Proposal clearly describes the proposed program and identifies well the goals this program will achieve.	Proposal adequately describes the proposed program and identifies some of the goals this program will achieve.	Proposal did not clearly describe the proposed program and/or did not identify the goals this program will achieve.

2 - INNOVATION: 5 points possible		
5	3	1
Proposal is a creative approach of incentivizing citizens to locate in the applicant area and uniquely leverages additional resources in the area.	Proposal is a smart approach of incentivizing citizens to locate in the applicant area and leverages additional resources in the area.	Proposal is an adequate approach to incentivizing citizens to locate in the applicant area but does not leverage additional resources in the area.

3 – TARGET RECIPIENT: 5 points possible		
5	3	1
Proposal clearly identifies target recipient, how recipients are marketed to and selected, and expectations. Alternatively, the proposal clearly identified how the target audience will be determined.	Proposal identifies target recipient, how recipients are marketed to and selected, and expectations. Alternatively, the proposal identified how the target audience will be determined.	Proposal did not clearly identify the target recipient, how recipients are marketed to and selected, and expectations. Alternatively, the proposal did not clearly identify how the target audience will be determined.

4 – PARTNERS: 5 points possible		
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.

5 – IMPLEMENTATION: 5 points possible		
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.

6 – APPLICANT PROFILE: 5 points possible		
5	3	1
Applicant demonstrates a strong record of progress through relevant notable achievements and strategic priorities.	Applicant identified relevant notable achievements or strategic priorities.	Applicant did not adequately identify relevant notable achievements or strategic priorities.

7 - RESEARCH: 5 points possible		
5	3	1
Proposal clearly identifies completed research or clearly identifies necessary research.	Proposal identifies completed research or identifies necessary research.	Proposal did not adequately identify completed research or necessary research.

8 – EVALUATION: 5 points possible		
5	3	1
Proposal articulates clearly defined, measurable goals.	Proposal articulates defined, measurable goals.	Proposal does not articulate measurable goals.

9 – SUSTAINABILITY: 5 points possible		
5	3	1
Proposal clearly identifies how this program will be sustained in the future.	Proposal identifies how this program will be sustained in the future.	Proposal did not adequately identify how this program will be sustained in the future.

10 - BUDGET: 5 points possible		
5	3	1
Project budget and intended use of funds are clear and appropriate.	Project budget and intended use of requested funds are identified and adequate.	Project budget and intended use of requested funds are unclear or inadequate.

11 – BUDGET LOCAL SUPPORT: 5 points possible		
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.

12 - SUPPORT MATERIAL: 5 points possible

5	3	1
Support material is highly relevant to the project, of high quality and clearly supports the projects' need.	Support material relates to the project and is of average quality.	Support material is not relevant to the project, of poor quality or does not support the projects' need.

13 - GRANTSMANSHIP & CASE FOR SUPPORT: 3 points possible

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, with questions well in advance of application deadlines.