



CREATIVE PLACES ACCELERATOR PROGRAM GUIDELINES



BACKGROUND

The Iowa Creative Places Accelerator is a multi-year program where cross sector community teams develop arts-based projects to serve as catalysts for livability, economic development, and community connectedness. Projects developed through this accelerator program will be focused on creative placemaking or placekeeping and will have demonstrated positive impact on their respective communities.

The program is funded through an appropriation by the Iowa Legislature to IEDA.

Operating and grant policies and definitions set out at 261 Iowa Administrative Code Chapter [305](#) and rules pertaining to organization and operation of the Iowa Arts Council found at 261 Iowa Administrative Code Chapter [304](#) apply to the program. Additional eligibility requirements and priorities are set out in these guidelines published by IEDA.

Questions

Potential applicants are encouraged to review all published material, including the administrative rules and published guidelines, and contact Creative Community Development and Infrastructure Programs Manager Jon Berg at 515-348-6323 or jon.berg@iowaeda.com with questions well in advance of the application deadline.

Accessibility

The IEDA is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to eligible applicants. For technical support submitting the online application, please contact the Accessibility Coordinator, Elizabeth Ferreira, at 515-348-6325 or elizabeth.ferreira@iowaeda.com at least two weeks in advance of the application deadline.

Timeline

August 26, 2025 | Fiscal Year 2026 Application Deadline

The deadline to submit an online application is 11:59 p.m. on August 26, 2025, for the funding period October 1, 2025 – June 30, 2027.

September 2025 | Funding Decision Notification

Typically, applicants are notified of funding decisions within eight weeks after the application deadline.



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October 1, 2025 – June 30, 2027 | Eligible Funding Period

The eligible funding period is October 1, 2025 – June 30, 2027. All expenses must be incurred, and project activities must be completed within the eligible funding period.

June 19, 2026 | Project Plan and Implementation Grant Application Deadline

Grant recipients must complete a project plan proposal and an implementation grant application by June 19, 2026.

August 2, 2027 | Final Report Deadline

Grant recipients are required to complete a final report by August 2, 2027.

GRANT AMOUNTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Grant recipients may receive a total award of \$23,000, as follows:

In year one (October 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026), grant recipients will receive an initial payment of \$1500 upon full execution of the grant agreement, and up to an additional \$1500 as reimbursement for expenses directly incurred in connection with participating in the in-person workshops and hosting community meetings. Recipients will be required to provide documentation of expenditures and proof of purchase on forms provided by IEDA.

In year two (July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027) grant recipients will be invited to apply for an implementation grant for a project included in their submitted project plan. Once the project is approved, upon full execution of the grant agreement, grant recipients will receive a payment of up to \$20,000 for project implementation. Recipients will need to complete a final report outlining how the grant funds and cash match was spent, including providing documentation of expenditures and proof of purchase. Any unspent grant funds will need to be returned to IEDA within 30 days after the final report deadline.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Year One (October 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026)

The first year of the program will focus on professional development through a site visit and three workshops. Participants will be surveyed after being selected to determine their greatest needs to develop the agenda for the workshop days. Workshops will be facilitated by outside experts with participation from statewide creative placemaking partners and Iowa Arts Council staff. Proposed schedule and topics below:



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- **Weeks of October 13-24, 2025** Community site visit from Iowa Arts Council staff and partners
- **November 14 or 19, 2025:** In-person session - Arts and Creativity in Economic Development and Quality of Life, Creative Communities, Building an ecosystem of partners
- **Week of February 2-6 or February 23-27, 2026:** (one day in-person session) Project Development
- **May 7 or May 14, 2026:** Year one wrap up and project presentations
 - Teams are highly encouraged to attend the 2026 Creative Places Exchange the following day.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants must be one of the following types of entities. Entities who do not fall into one of these categories are not eligible to apply.

- Nonprofit organization incorporated and physically located in Iowa, registered and in good standing with the Iowa Secretary of State, that is exempt from federal taxes pursuant to US Revenue Code section 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(6); or
- Local, county, state and federal government agencies physically located in Iowa

Accessibility – Americans with Disabilities Act

Applicant must demonstrate that it complies or actively working to be in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. These laws prohibit discrimination against individuals with physical and/or mental disabilities. Both programmatic and structural accessibility must be addressed in the application.



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Ineligible Applicants

Ineligible applicants include the following types of entities:

- Organization that uses a fiscal agent or the nonprofit or federal tax-exempt status of another organization.
- For-profit corporation or business; religious organization; political party; or national service/professional organization.
- Auditorium, arena, convention center or similar type of venue whose primary purpose is related to presenting popular entertainment, sporting, or recreational events.
- Educational institution, organization or K-12 school whose primary orientation, mission and purposes are education and/or awarding academic credits.
- Organization that has not met organizational eligibility requirements.

BUDGET AND USE OF FUNDS

Eligible Uses of Grant Funds

First Year of the Accelerator

Grant funds received during the first year of the program can be used to offset expenses to participate in the in-person workshops and meetings. This may include mileage, lodging, meals not already covered, and staff time. Additionally, grant funds can be used to support community engagement activities related to the project. Recipients will be required to provide documentation of expenditures and proof of purchase on forms provided by IEDA.

Second Year of the Accelerator (implementation)

The grant received during the second year of the Accelerator program can support expenses that are essential to the completion of the proposed project. The grant request must be dedicated to eligible one-time, direct project expenses, and legitimate parts of the proposed project and must be incurred and expended within the eligible funding period. Expenses identified in the grant request should be based on competitive, current market pricing.

Expenses eligible for reimbursement include direct project costs such as:

- Access accommodations (e.g., audio description, sign-language interpretation, closed or open captioning, large-print brochures/labeling)
- Artist fees (e.g. creation, preparation, performance time)
- Costs of items created through project activities (e.g. publishing books or exhibition catalogs, music recordings, films for distribution)



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- Domestic travel (e.g. mileage, accommodation, per diem)
- Marketing (e.g. print material, ad buys, design fees)
- Materials (e.g. paint, costumes, props)
- Overhead and Administrative Costs that are directly allocable to the project (e.g. a percentage of space/facility costs, the percentage of staff time for the administrative support of a project)*
- Personnel time dedicated to the project** (e.g. planning, execution, evaluation time)
- Portion of Space/Facilities costs such as mortgage principal, rent, and utilities, as allocable to the project
- Professional services (e.g. printer, graphic designer, security)
- Rentals (e.g. stages, lighting/sound, scissor lift, portable restrooms)
- Shipping costs (e.g. to transport artwork, instruments)
- Supplies the cost of which is less than \$10,000 per unit (e.g. camera, computers/software, kiln)

** Overhead and Administrative Costs must be reasonable and consistent with best practices in financial management. It should not simply be a percentage of the project budget. Applicants must be able to calculate the actual costs included in the line item.*

***Applicant must demonstrate how personnel time is specifically dedicated to the proposed project. Personnel benefits, such as health insurance and paid time off, are not eligible for reimbursement. State of Iowa agencies cannot include personnel costs in the grant request, but such expenses may be included as part of the cash match requirement.*

Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

Expenses that fall outside of the identified eligible expenses for the project may not be included as part of the grant request.

Ineligible grant request expenses include:

- Acquisition/purchase of artwork.
- Budget shortfalls.
- Capital expenditures, including the purchase of fixed assets or tangible personal property, including information technology systems, having a useful life of more than one year and a per unit cost that is equal to or greater than \$10,000.
- Collection maintenance or restoration expenses.
- Commercial (for-profit) enterprises or activities, including concessions, food, T-shirts, artwork, or other items for resale (this includes online or virtual sales/shops).
- Costs for the creation of new organizations.



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- Deficit or debt reduction.
- Donations or contributions to other organizations.
- Expenses incurred prior to or after the funding period.
- Food, beverage, and alcohol. Food and beverage may be included if they have a clear programmatic purpose.
- Foreign travel.
- Funding cash reserve or endowment accounts or instruments.
- Fundraising or benefit activity expenses.
- General miscellaneous or contingency costs.
- Home studio/office costs or expenses, including utilities and mortgage payments.
- Lobbying activities.
- Personnel benefits.
- Prizes and awards.
- Project costs supported by any other state funding.
- Property maintenance, restoration, or renovation expenses.
- Purchase and/or use of gift cards and gift certificates to support project costs.
- Purchase of one or more vehicles.
- Tuition, fees, or project activity that results in undergraduate or graduate course credit, degree, or certification for an employee of the applicant.
- Unrealized ticket or event revenue, including providing free tickets or scholarships to attend an event.

Match Requirement

Applicants are required to demonstrate investment in the implementation project by providing one to one matching funds to the project implementation funds provided from the IEDA for the second year of funding. Applicants should match project implementation grant funds of up to \$20,000.

The required matching funds must be dedicated to one-time project expenses that are legitimate parts of the proposed project. Matching funds may be all cash or a combination of cash and in-kind contributions. Applicants will need to include any in-kind contributions as direct costs in the project budget to balance the budget. The applicant is not required to secure the matching funds at the time of application but must secure them by the end of the eligible funding period and identify them in the final report due August 2, 2027.

- Cash match is actual cash, like cash donations, grants, organizational reserves, and revenues that are received for the project.



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- In-kind match is non-cash goods or services provided at no charge to the project by a third party. The use and value of third-party contributions must be properly documented. All third-party contributions must be necessary and reasonable for the project.
- Expenses used for matching funds must adhere to the same expense eligibility requirements as detailed in the budget requirements section of these guidelines.
- State funds cannot be used to meet match requirements.
- Funds provided by units of local, county or federal government may be used to meet the match requirement

APPLICATION REVIEW AND SCORING PROCESS

Application Submission

Applicants must submit applications via the Iowa Arts Council's SlideRoom, an online application portal. Applications will not be accepted in any other format. Late, incomplete, or ineligible applications will not be accepted. Applicants can access the current online application requirements at iowaartscouncil.slideroom.com. Applicants must create a login to view the full application requirements for the program. Applicants can visit help.liaisonedu.com for assistance related to the online submission.

Eligibility Review

IEDA staff will review applications for completion, eligibility, and adherence to published guidelines. Applications are reviewed as submitted, provided that the IEDA may contact applicants if any additional information is required. New or additional information or subsequent application clarification submitted after a program deadline is not considered unless requested by an IEDA program manager. Staff will also review an applicant's record of compliance and good standing with the Iowa Arts Council, IEDA and State and Federal government, including but not limited to the Iowa Department of Revenue and the Iowa Finance Authority. IEDA will not move forward to panel review applications or applicants determined by staff to be ineligible or incomplete. Determinations as to eligibility or completeness are final agency actions as defined in The Iowa Administrative Procedure Act, Iowa Code Chapter 17A.

Competitive Panel Review

Eligible applications will be referred for a competitive review by a panel of professionals with expertise related to the grant program's purpose. Applications will be scored and ranked based on the published scoring rubric. Recommendations are submitted to the IEDA Director for consideration and funding approval.

Application Questions and Scoring Rubric

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The Creative Places Accelerator Program scoring rubric will be used by the review panel to evaluate grant applications. The following application questions are provided for reference only. Applicants must review and complete application requirements in the SlideRoom portal. Each section has criteria and corresponding point values to ensure an unbiased review process. The rubric is on a scale of 25 points.

Applicant Profile

Provide a description of the lead organization seeking to be selected for the Creative Places Accelerator including:

- Mission statement
- Types of programs and services offered and how they help the organization accomplish its mission.
- Track record for convening local partners and notable achievements that advance community development goals and projects
- History of creative placemaking activities or projects that have occurred or are in development. The Iowa Arts Council defines creative placemaking as a proven approach to revitalizing communities by putting the arts, culture and heritage at the center of community and economic development efforts.

APPLICANT PROFILE: 5 Points Possible		
5	3	1
Applicant demonstrates a strong track record of convening local partners and notable achievements that advance community development and creative placemaking goals. Applicant demonstrates a successful history of creative placemaking activities.	Applicant provides some evidence of convening local partners and notable achievements that advance community development and creative placemaking goals. Applicant shows some experience with creative placemaking activities.	Applicant does not demonstrate a track record for convening local partners and notable achievements that advance community development and creative placemaking goals. Applicant does not have a record of past creative placemaking activities.

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Readiness to Engage

Share why the community feels that it is the right time to engage with other communities and experts in a peer-learning environment. How will participating in this program, technical assistance and funding resources increase momentum around existing creative placemaking efforts in your community? Briefly share any anticipated challenges with taking part in multiple in-person meetings.

READINESS TO ENGAGE: 5 Points Possible		
5	3	1
Applicant clearly demonstrates the community's readiness to learn and engage and why now is the right time to participate in the program. Its participation is very likely to increase momentum around existing creative placemaking efforts.	Applicant provides some evidence of how its participation and the program resources may benefit the community and existing creative placemaking programs.	Applicant does not address why it is the right time to participate and/or the benefit of its participation to the community is unclear.

Community Engagement and Vision Plan

Describe the community's approach to resident and partner engagement. Does the community have a formal community vision plan in place? Include information such as:

- Details about the process for community engagement including ongoing efforts to ensure awareness of stakeholder priorities
- When was the community or vision plan completed? Include any efforts to revise or amend the existing plan.
- Note any creative placemaking goals or projects that are identified in the vision plan.

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND VISION PLAN: 5 Points Possible		
5	3	1
Applicant has a demonstrated track record of engaging residents and partners in community development projects and has a community vision plan in place that strongly reflects stakeholder priorities related to creative placemaking.	Applicant has made efforts to engage residents and partners in community development projects and has a community vision plan in place that adequately reflects stakeholder priorities related to creative placemaking.	Applicant has not made efforts to engage residents and partners in community development projects. The community vision plan is missing or lacks stakeholder input on priorities related to creative placemaking.

Program Participants

Communities are expected to form a team of 3-4 community leaders who will participate in all the program workshops. Including the applicant organization, teams should include at least one representative from local government, economic development or the business community; one representative from a local arts, cultural or civic organization (Board member, volunteer, staff, etc.); and one local artist or creative. Describe who will be participating in the program, including:

- Who will be participating in the program and how long they have been in their role or occupation
- Role and involvement within greater community
- Their level of commitment to participating in the program, if selected.

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PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS: 5 Points Possible		
5	3	1
Program participants reflect a cross-section of community leadership and have established roles and involvement in community development efforts. The local leadership team is fully committed to engaging in the program activities	Program participants represent more than one community sector and are involved in community development efforts. The members of the leadership team are mostly committed to engaging in the program activities.	The names of the program participants, their roles and involvement in the community, and/or their commitment to participating in the program are unclear.

Case for Support

CASE FOR SUPPORT: 5 Points Possible		
5	3	1
The applicant has made a clear case for participation in the program and state investment.	The applicant has made an adequate case for participation in the program and state investment.	The applicant's case for participation in the program and/or state investment is unclear or inadequate.

GLOSSARY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Applicants should refer to the [glossary](#) for clarification of program terms and definitions.