



— GOVERNOR'S —
EMPOWER RURAL IOWA
— INITIATIVE —

ANNUAL REPORT

December 2022

WELCOME FROM CHAIRS

Since its inception in 2018, the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative has made significant progress in the areas of investing, growing and connecting rural Iowa. From investing historic amounts in broadband across the state, to revitalizing main street second-story housing, to finding and shaping the next generation of small town leaders, our rural communities have been well-served by the work of this initiative. Many advancements have been made, but our mission has remained the same: to make our rural communities vibrant places to build a life.

Iowa is a better place because of the service of the task force members from across the state. They work consistently to share new ideas, discuss innovative solutions, and dream bigger about what life in Iowa can and should be. We appreciate the opportunity to serve as the Co-Chairs of the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative and look forward to continuing our efforts on behalf of Iowa's rural communities!



Lt. Governor Adam Gregg



Sandy Ehrig

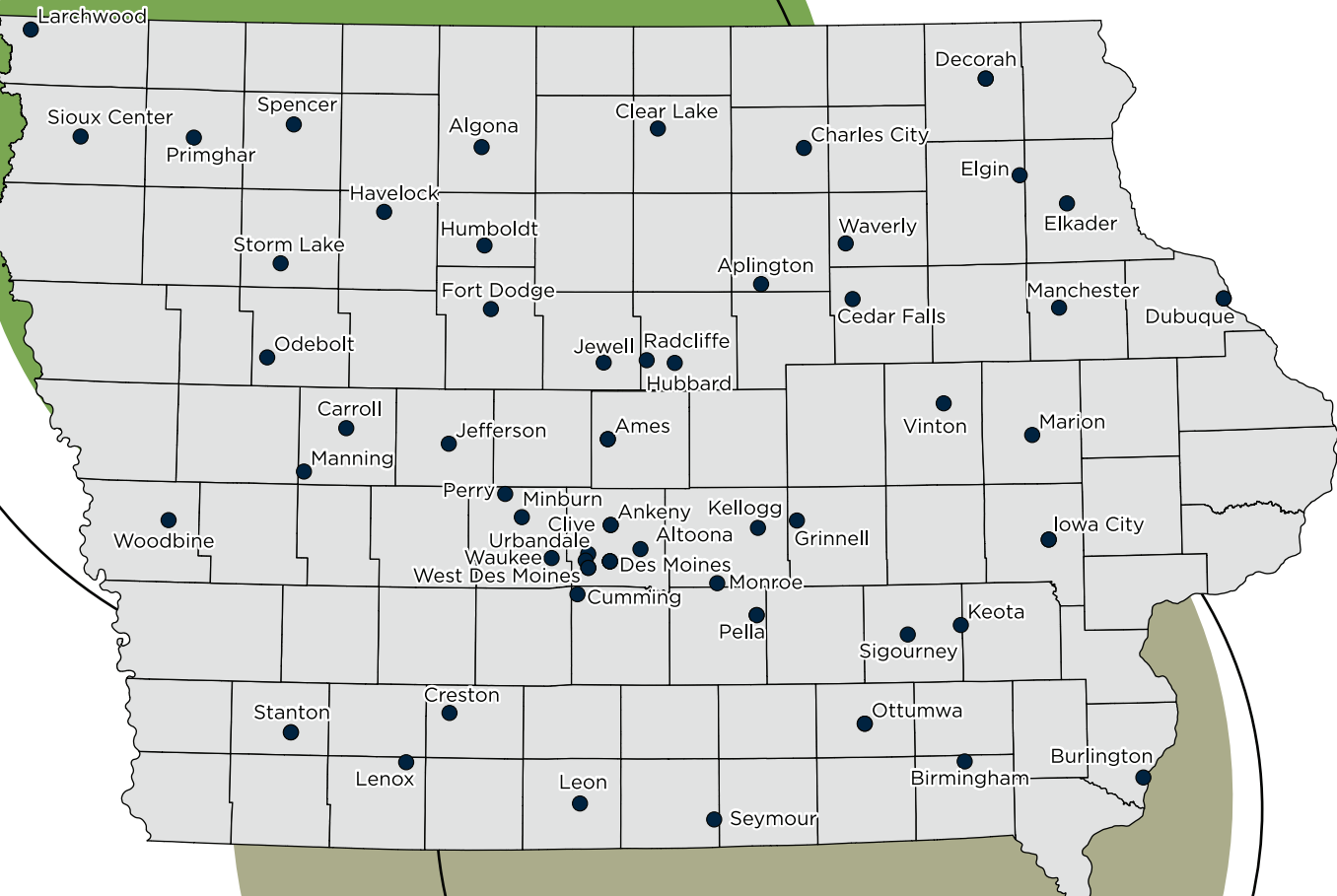


Grow Task Force meeting
on August 26, 2022

Convergence CiderWorks
Decorah, IA

TASK FORCE MEMBER LOCATIONS

66
MEMBERS



55
COMMUNITIES

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Lt. Governor Adam Gregg
Co-Chair
Des Moines

Sandy Ehrig
Co-Chair
Nevada

Investing in Rural Iowa Task Force

Jim Thompson - Chair
Ankeny

Kimberly Tiefenthaler
Carroll

David Barker
Iowa City

Growing Rural Iowa Task Force

James Hoelscher - Chair
Cedar Falls

Jenae Sikkink
Pella

Emily Schmitt
Clear Lake

Connecting Rural Iowa Task Force

Dave Duncan - Chair
Clive

Deb Lucht
Minburn

Katie LaBree
Aplington

Staff

Liesl Seabert - Program Lead
Iowa Economic Development Authority

Amy Kuhlers
Iowa Economic Development Authority

Jessi Carver
Iowa Economic Development Authority

Sacha Wise
Iowa Economic Development Authority

EMPOWER RURAL IOWA INITIATIVE

The Governor’s Empower Rural Iowa (ERI) Initiative was formed by Governor Kim Reynolds through the signing of Executive Order No. 3 on July 18, 2018. The order created a partnership with the Iowa Rural Development Council (IRDC) and tasked Lt. Governor Adam Gregg and IRDC Chair Sandy Ehrig with co-chairing the initiative. The executive order also created three task forces, which develop policy recommendations for Gov. Kim Reynolds’ consideration. Over the years, the task forces have addressed the following topics:



Investing in Rural Iowa Task Force – rural housing shortage, derelict and dilapidated buildings, online business presence, business transition planning and entrepreneurship.



Growing Rural Iowa Task Force – leadership development in rural communities, creating welcoming communities, and attracting and retaining residents or workers.



Connecting Rural Iowa Task Force – financing broadband connectivity, leveraging connectivity and remote worker readiness.

The Center for Rural Revitalization, housed within the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), is responsible for the day-to-day operations of ERI, implementing ERI task force recommendations, acting as a liaison to rural communities, and helping small communities access programs that support rural areas. In addition to providing funding assistance for projects and initiatives across the state, the Center for Rural Revitalization also provides technical assistance to rural communities in a variety of ways. Technical assistance options include community visits for discussion on projects, challenges, and opportunities; “scale-up” conversations with a team of partners focused on a specific initiative for a community, organization, or business that is taking that next step; or a “Strategic Doing” facilitation process for groups looking to generate innovative solutions and collaborative outcomes. The Center also supports existing rural leadership programs through the Rural Leadership Exchange, an annual in-person opportunity for leadership programs to learn and collaborate as well as ongoing training and support through webinars and resources.

TASK FORCE OBJECTIVES

In FY21, the Center for Rural Revitalization funding allocation was increased from \$400,000 to \$700,000 and included the creation of leadership grants, childcare market study grants, reverse scholarship pilot grants, and additional programming related to business succession planning. ERI task force members shifted their focus from development of annual recommendations to implementation. Committees developed, marketed, and reviewed new grant programs; improved processes on existing programs; and worked to identify gaps in funding resources for projects across rural Iowa.

In FY22, the focus was to “scale up” on the successes over the past four years. Outreach and programming included providing targeted technical assistance to past grantees based on successes and challenges, guidance to expand best practices across the state, and continued leadership development opportunities.

Historically, the grant funding has been fully utilized, with only \$998 reverting in FY21, and a carryover of \$37,006 (of \$700,000) in FY22. In the first year of the Rural Enrichment Grant (FY23), only 20% of applications were funded (\$207,000 of \$1,009,061 requested) due to funding limitations.

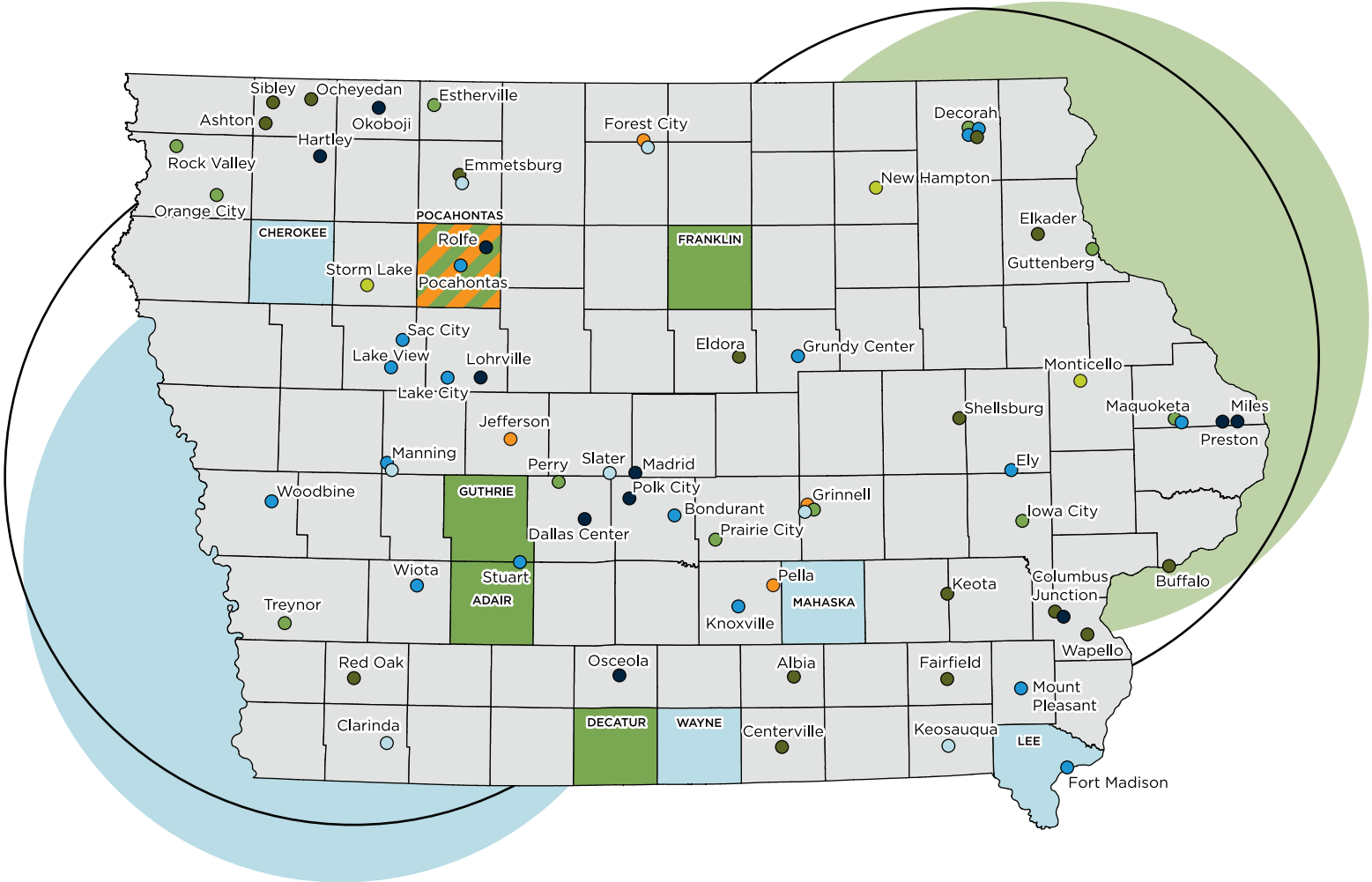
Task force meetings provide the opportunity for a rural community to be in the spotlight. Task force members participate in a walking tour, visit local businesses, and past projects highlighted by the community. Thirteen communities hosted task force meetings between July 2021 and December 2022.

Task Force Meeting Locations








YEAR	COMMUNITY
2021	Atlantic
2021	Greenfield
2021	Iowa Falls
2021	Newton
2021	Oskaloosa
2021	Storm Lake
2022	Decorah
2022	Fort Madison
2022	Jefferson
2022	Knoxville
2022	Monticello
2022	Nevada
2022	Walnut
2022	Winterset

GRANT PROGRAMS ASSISTED

FY22 - FY23



GRANT TYPE

-  Rural Child Care Market Study
-  Rural Enrichment Grant
-  Rural Housing Assessment Grant
-  Rural Innovation Grant
-  Rural Leadership Bootcamp
-  Rural Return Grant
-  Rural Scale Up Grant

RURAL INNOVATION GRANT PROGRAM

17
GRANTS

\$345,620
AWARDED

\$2.3 MILLION
TOTAL PROJECT
COSTS

The Rural Innovation Grant program supports creative, non-traditional ideas that focus on current issues and challenges faced by rural communities associated with the themes of community investment, growth, and connection. The word “innovation” is derived from the Latin verb innovare, which means to renew. 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. Recipients of this grant include:



Fresh Out of the Box, Ramsey LLC – Fresh Out of the Box is a home and locker delivery service for fresh groceries and hardware. Home Delivery is available in dozens of rural Iowa communities (in town and out in the country). They also deliver to refrigerated lockers in select communities without a local grocery store. Funds were used to develop the online ordering system.

Sunflower Child Development and Discovery Center, Decorah – Community-led child care facility project coupled with a tourism-focused Discovery Center. The Innovation Grant funding supports an interactive children’s exhibit to help kids understand Iowa agriculture and agricultural careers through active play. Objectives are to educate and inspire residents and children to understand and pursue an ag career in Iowa and contribute to the vibrancy of rural Iowa.



IGNITE Pathways, Woodbine – The IGNITE Pathways program enrolls more than 130 9-12th grade students. IGNITE Gives Back is a strand of the work being done where students identify a community need and provide an innovative solution to the problem set. Funding will address the nonexistent automotive maintenance and care options available in their rural community.



RURAL ENRICHMENT GRANT PROGRAM

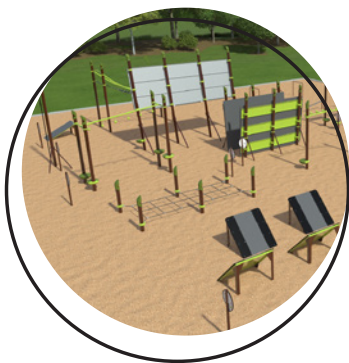
11
GRANTS

\$207,000
AWARDED
(FY23 ONLY)

\$1.1 MILLION
TOTAL PROJECT
COSTS

The Rural Enrichment Grant Program supports small, quality of life projects that create meaningful results in rural communities. Developing quality spaces where people want to live, work, play, and engage will support the vibrancy of Iowa’s rural places.

The Spirit of Okoboji – The OkoboTree project is an effort to extend the longevity and beauty of trees in the Iowa Great Lakes through visual art preservation. The project will identify expired trees in the area with local partners, then secure donors and contract with artists to sculpt those trees into natural art that can be publicly viewed for years to come. The goal is to have a variety of sculptures that depict nature and the history of the area throughout the lakes area for both residents and tourists to enjoy.



City of Preston – Funding from the grant supports the installation of a fitness/agility course. The first project of Preston’s Healthy Hometown is powered by Wellmark and will include approximately 15 pieces of equipment. The location for the project is Preston’s city-owned Westside Park.

Osceola Chamber Main Street – This year marks the 25th Anniversary of Osceola Chamber - Main Street becoming a Main Street community. To enrich their community’s vibrant spirit, they are focusing on downtown lighting. The organization is responsible for bringing holiday cheer downtown with courtyard tree lighting and Christmas decorations. With this initiative they are getting a two for one project; creating a sense of place downtown to enjoy all year long and taking holiday lights to the next level.





“ We are so grateful for the grants as we would not have been able to complete these projects without them. **They served as the catalyst for other funding.** The pocket parks add beauty to Main Street and have inspired many business owners to spruce up or update their facades. They are great gathering spaces and provide al fresco dining spaces for nearby eateries and coffee shops.”

- **Sheila O’Riley**

*City of Lenox, Leading Ladies of Lenox
Recipient of two Rural Innovation Grants*

Flagship community of
The Creative Adventure
Lab rural network

Downtown
Lansing, IA

Lansing, Iowa
100/200 Block Main St. Southside
Commercial Enterprises, Services, Retail and Hospitality
150 Years in 2017

200 Block Main Street Southside
National Register of Historic Places

Life In Lansing

The educational sign is made possible by The Allamakee County Community Foundation and by Curtis Snitker in loving memory of Mary Carroll.

RURAL SCALE-UP GRANT PROGRAM

3 GRANTS	\$60,000 AWARDED (FY23 ONLY)	\$902,327 TOTAL PROJECT COSTS
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Over past funding cycles, Rural Innovation Grant recipients have illustrated creative and unique solutions to address issues and challenges facing rural communities. The Rural Scale-Up Grant program aims to support the replication and spread of these creative solutions by funding other communities to implement similar solutions.



The Creative Adventure Lab, Idea Bright – The Creative Adventure Lab is creating a network of coworking spaces that foster innovation and entrepreneurship in rural communities. Every Innovation Lab offers coworking space, innovation services, meeting space, and team building activities. Everything they do helps businesses launch, grow, and remain competitive. Funding supports the ability to build capacity to amplify their efforts to support rural entrepreneurs, with a specific focus on increasing access for under-represented entrepreneurs.

Iowa Central Community College – Communities and school districts in the western part of Iowa Central’s service region lack access to the same quantity and quality of career technical education (CTE) programs that are offered in other communities in our region and across the state. The Storm Lake Regional Center will enhance learning opportunities, provide equitable access to high-quality CTE programming, and help close opportunity gaps that exist in the region.



New Hampton Parks & Recreation – This inclusive playground will take the place of an older city playground within a city park. Inclusive playgrounds are a place for laughter and fun where all persons regardless of their abilities can play, laugh, and imagine together.

RURAL HOUSING ASSESSMENT GRANT PROGRAM

16
GRANTS

\$160,000
AWARDED

\$240,000
TOTAL PROJECT
COSTS

The Rural Housing Assessment Grant program supports the use of publicly available, online information through the “Profile of Iowa” tool and rural community efforts to interpret publicly available hard data to implement changes through development codes, local ordinances, and housing incentives specific to individual community needs. In partnership with ISU Extension and Outreach’s Rural Housing Readiness Assessment workshops, program funding empowers communities to assess the current development environment and enact changes resulting in the creation of policies and procedures attractive to potential developers.

City of Livermore – This project started with a goal to remove a home and clear the property so that it could be sold to someone who would like to build a home in Livermore. The ISU Rural Housing Readiness Action Plan expanded the committee’s eyes to the community needs and possible action to improve housing. This funding made it possible to clear the foundation from a corner lot which has alleviated that existing blight and opened opportunities for new development.



City of Keokuk – The grant and facilitation process with Iowa State University Extension & Outreach led to the development of the Keokuk Housing Steering Committee, which ultimately was the best mechanism for building relationships, trust and confidence before moving forward in addressing very difficult housing issues. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, the community can now see a path forward. Keokuk hired a housing intern with the funds and are now working towards establishing programs and adopting ordinances that will allow them to address nuisance issues.

RURAL CHILD CARE MARKET STUDY

11 GRANTS	\$110,000 AWARDED	\$165,000 TOTAL PROJECT COSTS
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The Rural Child Care Market Study Grant program supports the use of data and analysis by rural communities to determine the specific needs and solutions for child care in their area. Child care is a challenge across rural communities in Iowa, however, the solutions are often more complicated than the construction of a new facility. Through greater understanding of their geographic market, demographics, competition and other factors, communities can be armed with the information needed to take proactive steps towards addressing child care challenges. Funding from the program empowered communities to assess their current child care market environment and develop strategies.



City of Keosauqua & Van Buren County – The Child Care Market Analysis of Keosauqua and Van Buren County was complete in October 2022 and the results will be presented in November. The key findings state that parents prefer a licensed center (41%) and care located in Keosauqua (61%). The child care gap estimates there are 337 children ages 0 to 11 in Van Buren County that are from families that would prefer to use a DHS regulated child care setting. According to Iowa DHS there are 76 spaces available full time, year-round, that means the child care gap could be as high as 261 spaces. The strategic planning process for Engage Keosauqua will kick-off in November with the final Strategic Plan for Child Care for Keosauqua and Van Buren County expected to be finalized in February 2023.

Lee County – The Child Care Market Analysis of Lee County was complete in July 2022 and two public presentations were held in August. The key findings state that parents prefer a licensed center (55%), with the most preferred location as Fort Madison (46%) followed by Keokuk (28%) and Donnellson (13%). The child care gap estimates there are 2,646 children ages 0 to 11 in Lee County that are from families that would prefer to use a DHS regulated child care setting. According to Iowa DHS there are 1,035 spaces available full time, year-round, that means the child care gap could be as high as 1,611 spaces. During September and October a series of strategic planning meetings were held in which strategic planning participants engaged in exercises to develop a vision for child care, and goals and strategies to address the child care challenges identified through the child care market analysis. The Strategic Plan for Child Care for Lee County, Iowa will be finalized in November 2022.



RURAL LEADERSHIP GRANT PROGRAM

15
GRANTS

\$15,000
AWARDED

\$22,500
TOTAL PROJECT
COSTS

The Rural Leadership Grant program provides training, mentorship and funding to rural communities and regions initiating leadership programs. Many rural communities have created effective leadership programs, as have various Iowa industries. Leveraging these efforts as examples and partners, this program targets rural communities who want to start a local leadership program and work to engage participants in community leadership roles. Grantees participate in a two-day bootcamp resulting in a work plan and a one-year mentorship.



Pocahontas Leadership Program – After participating in the 2021 Leadership Bootcamp, the local committee continued to meet monthly to develop the curriculum and application for the inaugural year. The leadership series kicked off in November 2022 with 20 participants, including four sessions and a service project. The participants will hear from speakers on topics related to leadership skill development.

Leadership Maquoketa – The Community Leadership Program is designed to foster the growth of leaders in the Maquoketa area. They developed a five-month program curriculum that offers a view of Maquoketa from different vantage points, heightens participant awareness of current community conditions and issues, enhances individual and group leadership skills, helps participants see themselves as partners for change, and provides them with tools focused on developing themselves.





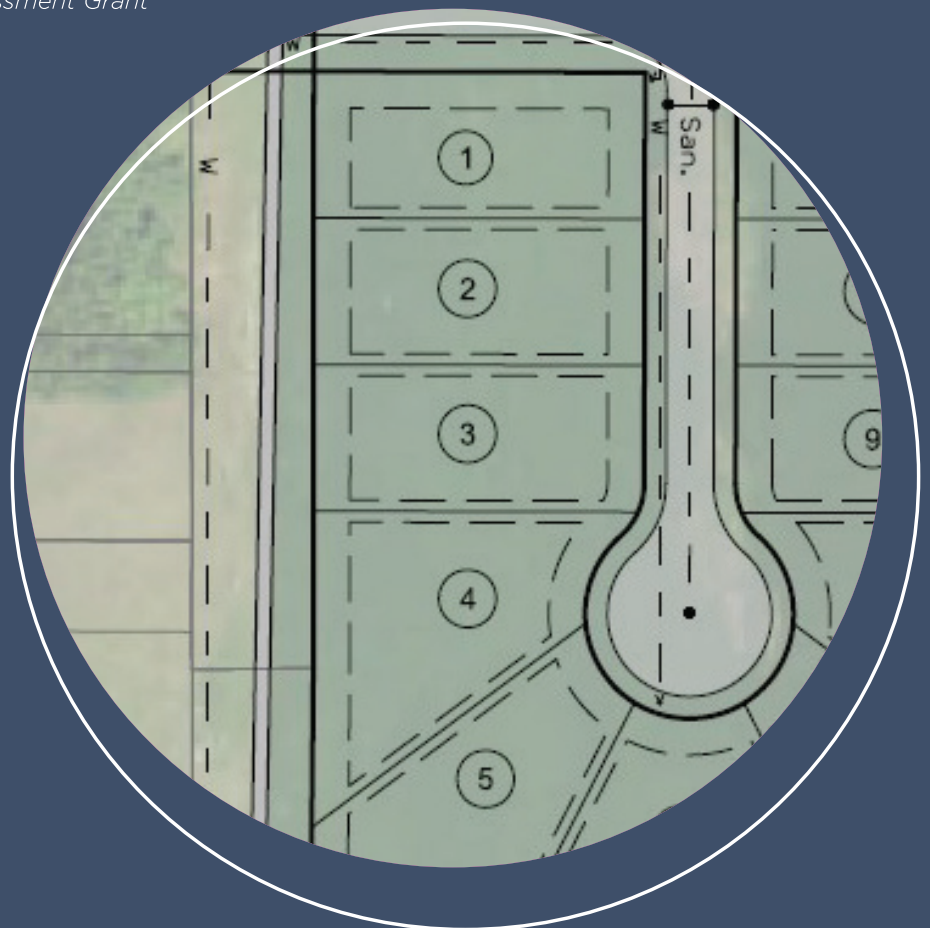
Leadership Exchange
2021

Newton, IA

“**The Empower Rural Iowa funding for our project changed its trajectory.** With the additional funding, we were able to take our time, utilize experts and explore new and unique ideas. Instead of just building what a handful of people around the Council table wanted, we are moving forward with building the neighborhoods that will appeal to a variety of residents from a variety of backgrounds. Although it’s early, we’re finding that developers are more willing to talk to us because we’ve done the work and have public input to back up what we’re saying.”

- **Dawn Meyer**

*City Clerk/Administrator, City of Manning
Recipient of Rural Housing Assessment Grant
and Rural Innovation Grant*



RURAL RETURN GRANT PROGRAM

<p>5 GRANTS</p>	<p>\$100,000 AWARDED (FY22 ONLY)</p>	<p>\$164,500 TOTAL PROJECT COSTS</p>
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The Rural Return Grant program was developed to support creative programming to address the challenges of population loss by empowering communities to develop a program to attract new residents. The funding opportunity aims to support the development and implementation of an incentive program to target a specific profession, support a specific demographic, or celebrate local assets.

“Jefferson Wants You” – The City of Jefferson took a two-tiered approach to the development of an incentive program. First, they hired a local marketing specialist to coordinate the program, manage the website, and develop promotional videos and materials. The launch materials were finalized in time for the 2022 Bell Tower Festival in June. Second, they leveraged local sponsorships to develop an incentive fund, targeting entrepreneurs interested in the development of business plans or needing seed funding. Two awards have already been made to local start-ups.



Forest City – The “Come Back to Your Roots in Forest City” campaign kicked off with an alumni tournament hosted by the Parks and Recreation Department in April, 2022. The community used coasters and flyers with a QR code that landed users on the webpage with reasons to “move home”. The committee also launched a Facebook ad campaign and is tracking total users of the QR code and clicks on the ads. As part of a phase two, the first ten families to move to Forest City during this campaign will receive robust welcome packages from local businesses.

HIGHLIGHTS OF EMPOWER RURAL IOWA CONNECTED INITIATIVES

Rural Emergency Response Pilot

Following a visit to Israel in early 2022, the Lt. Governor invited a representative from United Hatzalah to a joint Empower Rural Iowa / Iowa Rural Development Council meeting in July, 2022 to introduce their program which leverages technology and volunteers to decrease emergency response time throughout the country. This launched the development of a committee to assess the potential for a rural model of the program in Iowa, using an app-based platform to dispatch volunteers who can stabilize emergency situations while waiting for EMS or Paramedic response. A pilot program is currently under development by a committee of task force members.

Center for Rural Revitalization Technical Assistance Program

Working with Empower Rural Iowa Task Force members and partner organizations, the Center for Rural Revitalization has formed a committee to develop a technical assistance grant program for communities and businesses. Identified as a continued missing resource within state government, this program will create specific teams to send to grantees, providing technical expertise, guidance, and resources. Grant funds will be used to support training, planning, or design projects. This program is expected to launch in early 2023.

Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant Program

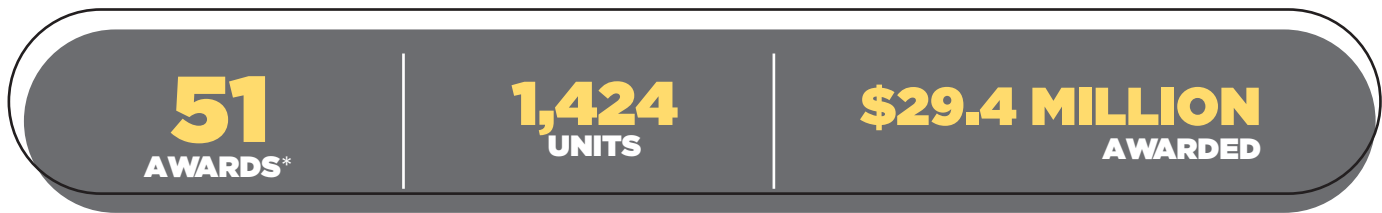


The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) administers the Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant Program designed to reduce or eliminate areas of the State of Iowa that are unserved or underserved by broadband service, leveraging federal funds and public and private partnerships where possible, by awarding grants to communications service providers that reduce or eliminate targeted service areas by installing broadband infrastructure that facilitates broadband service in Targeted Service Areas.

* FY 21 and FY22 Awards



Workforce Housing Tax Incentive Program



In 2019 the Iowa Economic Development Authority’s Workforce Housing Tax Incentive program had a cap increase from \$20 million to \$25 million and the set aside for small cities was increased to \$10 million. In 2021, that amount was increased to \$40 million in FY22, and \$35 million in FY23 and beyond. The rural set aside was increased to \$12 million in FY22 and \$17.5 million for FY23 and beyond.

Community Catalyst Building Remediation Program



Through the Community Catalyst Building Remediation Program, the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) provides grants to communities for the redevelopment, rehabilitation, or deconstruction of buildings to stimulate economic growth or reinvestment in the community. 40% of funds are awarded to cities with populations under 1,500 (16 awards totaling \$1.6 million).

APPENDIX

Annual Appropriation for Empower Rural Iowa Initiatives

FY'22	\$700,000 APPROPRIATED	\$663,994 OBLIGATED	\$37,006 UNOBLIGATED/CARRYOVER
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Child Care Market Study Grants	\$90,000
Enrichment Grants	N/A
Housing Assessment Grants	\$110,000
Innovation Grants	\$245,620
Leadership Bootcamp Grants	\$12,000
Rural Return Grants	\$100,000
Scale-Up Grants	N/A
UNI Advance Iowa (Business Succession Support)	\$100,000
Other ERI Programming	\$5,374

FY'23	\$737,006 APPROPRIATED	\$461,000 OBLIGATED	\$276,006 RECOMMENDED
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Child Care Market Study Grants	\$40,000 / \$20,000 Recommended
Enrichment Grants	\$207,000
Housing Assessment Grants	\$50,000 / \$30,000 Recommended
Innovation Grants	\$100,000
Leadership Bootcamp Grants	\$4,000
Rural Return Grants	N/A
Scale-Up Grants	\$60,000
Business Succession Support	\$100,000 Recommended
Technical Assistance Program	\$20,000 Recommended
Rural Emergency Response Pilot Grants	\$100,000 Recommended
Leadership Programming	\$6,006 Recommended

Empower Rural Iowa Task Force

[Task Force Member List](#)



IT'S GOOD

TO BE HERE.

• ATLANTIC, IOWA •



IOWA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Center for Rural Revitalization

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