

RURAL BOOST PROGRAM GUIDELINES



GOVERNOR'S
EMPOWER RURAL IOWA
INITIATIVE

The Rural Building Ownership & Organization by Strengthening Teams (BOOST) program aims to provide a team of experts to assist passionate community and business leaders in developing intentional plans for next step growth. The program is designed for rural communities and nonprofits to receive personalized technical assistance for identifying and implementing action steps to launch into the next stage of success. Rural BOOST is designed to assist communities which have plateaued or hit an unexpected challenge to gain momentum for new growth. *Warning: Rural BOOST is not for the faint of heart.* Applicants and steering committee must be committed to leading a transformation in their community.

Rural BOOST, managed by the Center for Rural Revitalization, will dispatch 3-5 experts to meet with a local committee and discuss the existing conditions, assets, and anticipated needs. The Center for Rural Revitalization and supporting partners will then create an action plan and provide targeted financial support to launch next steps.

The Center for Rural Revitalization, within the Iowa Economic Development Authority, understands that not all community needs are the same and each journey will be different. For this reason, the Rural BOOST program will assist to develop a flexible plan to meet local needs and allow for new opportunities that present themselves along the way.

Rural BOOST 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

January 6, 2025 | Application Opens

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

January 9, 2025 | Informational Webinar

[Register](#) for the Thursday, January 9 webinar at 9am CT. This webinar will be recorded and posted on the grant website.

February 28, 2025 | Application Deadline

Deadline to submit an application for funding is 4:00pm CT, February 28, 2025.

Spring 2025 | Funding Decision Notification

Applicants notified of funding decisions by early Spring 2025.

Spring 2025 - June 30, 2026 | Funding Period

All project activities and incurred expenses must occur within the eligible contracted funding period of Spring 2025 - June 30, 2026. Funding is awarded on a reimbursement basis after expenses have been incurred for approved project activities.

CONTACT

Potential applicants are encouraged to review all published material and contact Empower Rural Iowa Director Robin Bostrom at 515.348.6176 or rural@iowaeda.com, with questions well in advance of application deadline.

PROGRAM DETAILS

Recognizing that rural challenges do not exist in a silo, this program helps a community utilize its unique assets and challenges its leaders to set realistic goals to advance their economic and business development vision. A community that participates in Rural BOOST is committed to the creation of innovative strategies that promote partnerships, community design, and a strong business economy. Experts will look holistically at the strengths and weaknesses of a community and partner in the development of solutions. Leveraging the expertise of Empower Rural Iowa task force members, IEDA staff, and Iowa Rural Development Council partners, each community will work with a team to mentor and develop next steps.

Participants in Rural BOOST receive the following:

- In-person meeting with the individualized Rural BOOST Team and local committee
- Follow-up in person or virtual meetings as needed
- Recommendations resource document from the Center for Rural Revitalization
- Grant Award: \$10,000



RURAL BOOST STEERING COMMITTEE

Applicants are required to establish a Rural BOOST steering committee to guide the process. It is recommended that the committee be comprised of seven to 10 individuals, including elected officials, city staff, major employers, nonprofits, students, and local doers. Additional guidance can be provided by the Rural BOOST Team.

FUNDING

Grant Amount

Grantees will receive \$10,000 for eligible one-time project expenses incurred and expended within the eligible funding period.

Match Requirement

Applicants are required to demonstrate investment in projects by providing a minimum of \$5,000 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 \$5,000 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. While the minimum match requirement is \$5,000, competitive proposals will demonstrate broad-based financial support for the project and public funding sources 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 already being used as match from another program, including other funds from the IEDA, cannot be used to meet the match requirement.

Funding Period

All project activities and incurred expenses must occur within the eligible contracted funding period of Spring 2025 - June 30, 2026. 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.



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 IowaGrants.gov. When submitting a claim, the following items are required:

- A claim 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
 - IEDA may request additional documentation as needed
- A status report for the claim period.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Submitted applications must include a timeline, and the goals and objectives by which to measure the success of the project. The recipient's success will be measured based on the progress towards the completion of each goal or objective as outlined in the application.

Biannual Reports

Biannually, each April and October of the contract period, 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

- The final report will be submitted via IowaGrants.gov within 30 days of the project completion date.
- The IEDA may withhold 5% of project funds until the final report is received and approved by the program manager.
- The final report shall contain the following information:
 - Executive Summary
 - Timeline of the completion of each goal or objective
 - Narrative description of grant activities undertaken to support the project
 - Narrative description of the achievements of the project
 - The 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

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants must be one of the following types of entities and must meet all of the related requirements. Entities who do not meet these requirements are not eligible to apply.

Nonprofits

- 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.

Communities

- Unit of local, county or federally recognized tribal government physically located in Iowa.

Programs must exist in and benefit a community in Iowa with a population of 20,000 or fewer and not contiguous to a city with a population of 40,000 or greater or if it is a county-wide program, must be one of the 88 least populous counties in Iowa.

Eligible Application Requirements

Project Requirements for Rural BOOST grant awards include, but are not limited to the following:

- Applicants must demonstrate they are an eligible applicant.
- Applicants must demonstrate the capacity for grant administration.
- Applicant is local government entity or applicant has included letter of support from the mayor or resolution from the city council.
- Application shall identify and describe any other sources of funding for the proposed activities.
- Applicants must provide a \$5,000 cash match.

Eligible Use of Funding

Funding from Rural BOOST is intended to be used to increase capacity, plan for the future, or develop additional skills within the community. Eligible use of funds for Rural BOOST grant includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Engineering
- Planning
- Design Costs
- Training Program
- Certification Program
- Marketing Strategies
- Succession Planning
- Sustainability of Services
- Economic Development Training
- Grant writing training (not grant writing)

Eligible Funding Examples

The following are examples of programs or initiatives that would be eligible for funding following meeting with the Rural BOOST Team. This list is not exhaustive but reflects the variety of ways the funding can be utilized. Additional resources will be provided by the Rural BOOST Team following the in-person meeting.

- Services provided by a professional engineering or design firm for an identified community project.
- UNI Institute for Decision Making consulting services targeting strategic planning, applied research, marketing, or Business Retention Expansion Academy.
- Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS) business assistance in the areas of leadership, technology, workforce, productivity, and growth.
- Equipment or supplies to further support local community engagement.
- **PLEASE NOTE:** BOOST Grant funds cannot be used for construction or buildout of physical projects.

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 considered. 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 application clarification submitted after a program deadline is not considered unless requested by the review panel. Eligible applications will be referred to a competitive review by a volunteer panel that will include Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative task force members, Iowa Rural Development Council members, and expert professionals (Grant Review Committee). Funding recommendations will be submitted by the Grant Review Committee to the director of the IEDA for consideration and approval. The applicant's authorized official will receive award notification. All funding decisions are final.



Review Criteria

Applications must demonstrate evidence of the following:

- Clear explanation of the need.
- Demonstrated understanding of the current challenges.
- Well-defined and diverse steering committee.
- Demonstration of past success and capacity.
- Enthusiasm for Rural BOOST potential.

SCORING RUBRIC

Application Review

The Rural BOOST Program 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 45 points.

| I – ECONOMIC NEED: 10 points possible | | |
|---|---|--|
| 10 | 5 | 1 |
| Proposal clearly describes the existing challenges/needs of the community, including exemplary understanding of gaps and opportunities for improvement. | Proposal describes the existing challenges of the community, including understanding of gaps and opportunities for improvement. | Proposal does not clearly describe the existing challenges of the community. |

| 2 – STEERING COMMITTEE: 10 points possible | | |
|--|---|---|
| 10 | 5 | 1 |
| Proposal clearly identifies an active steering committee with multiple, diverse partners. Key partner roles and responsibilities are well defined and will enhance the success of the process. | Proposal identifies a steering committee with multiple, diverse partners. Key partner roles and responsibilities are defined. | Proposal does not identify an active steering committee with multiple, diverse partners. Key partner roles and responsibilities are not well defined. |

| 3 – RECENT ACTIVITY: 5 points possible | | |
|--|--|---|
| 5 | 3 | 1 |
| Proposal clearly identifies recent momentum or successes, including capacity for program management. | Proposal identifies recent momentum or successes, including capacity for program management. | Proposal does not clearly identify recent momentum or successes or capacity for program management. |

| 4 – DESIRED OUTCOMES: 5 points possible | | |
|--|---|---|
| 5 | 3 | 1 |
| Proposal demonstrates enthusiasm for the pilot program and identifies clear goals or anticipated outcomes. | Proposal demonstrates some enthusiasm for the pilot program and identifies goals or anticipated outcomes. | Proposal does not demonstrate enthusiasm for the pilot program and does not identify clear goals or anticipated outcomes. |

| 5 - BUDGET: 5 points possible | | |
|---|---|--|
| 5 | 3 | 1 |
| Project budget and intended use of requested funds are clear and appropriate. Exceeds required \$5,000 cash match with a variety of match sources. Majority of the applicant match is from local (including county and city government) or private sources. | Project budget and intended use of requested funds are identified and adequate. Over half of the applicant match is from local (including county and city government) or private sources. | Project budget and intended use of requested funds are unclear or inadequate. Less than half of the applicant match is from local (including county and city government) or private sources. |

| 6 – LETTERS OF SUPPORT & MEDIA SUPPORT: 5 points possible | | |
|--|---|--|
| 5 | 3 | 1 |
| Support material is highly relevant to the pilot program, of high quality, and clearly supports the project's need. Letters of support are included from all steering committee members. | Support material relates to the project and is of average quality. Letters of support are included from some of the steering committee members. | Support material is not relevant to the project, of poor quality or does not support the projects' need. Minimal letters of support of included. |

| 7 - GRANTSMANSHIP & CASE FOR SUPPORT: 5 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. |