

Child care is a growing challenge in rural communities across Iowa and the nation. However, the solutions often extend beyond simply building a new facility. Multiple factors must be analyzed to determine the feasibility of developing of a new child care center, expanding an existing one or supporting in-home providers. By better understanding their geographic market, demographics, competition, financials and other variables, communities can be equipped to take proactive steps toward addressing their child care needs.

Funding from this program empowers communities to assess their current child care landscape and develop actionable strategies.

This program, defined in the 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 force.

TIMELINE

July 1, 2026

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

August 26, 2026

Application deadline is 4 p.m. CDT.

Fall 2026

Applicants will be notified of funding decisions.

Fall 2026 – June 30, 2028

All project activities and incurred expenses must occur within the eligible contract period. Funding is awarded on a reimbursement basis for approved project activities.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligible Use of Funding

Funds may be used for planning initiatives that address child care needs through a professional third-party partner.

Eligible Applicants

The following entities located in Iowa may apply:

- City and county governments, or federally recognized tribal governments.
- Federally designated nonprofit agencies and foundations.
- Public and private schools serving pre-K through 12th grade.
- Higher education institutions.

The study must take place in and benefit an Iowa community with a population of 20,000 or fewer, and not contiguous to a city with a population of 40,000 or greater.

For countywide applications, the applicant must be located in one of Iowa's 88 least-populous counties. Eligible applicants may submit joint applications on behalf of multiple cities or an entire qualifying county.

Eligible Project Requirements

Projects must meet the following:

- Applicants must demonstrate the capacity to administer grants.
- Applicants must provide 1:1/2 cash match.
- Applications must contract with a professional third-party partner to complete a market study or strategic planning.
- The third-party organization must be identified in the application.

FUNDING

Grant Request Amount

Each award is \$20,000.

Match Requirement

Applicants must provide a minimum of \$10,000 in cash match, which must:

- Be secured and dedicated to eligible expenses.
- Represent a legitimate part of the proposed project.
- Be fully expended within the eligible funding period.

The match may come from a mix of public and private sources, but may not include:

- In-kind donations of goods or services.
- Unsecured or pending funding, or loans.
- Funds already committed as a match for another program, including other IEDA funds.

Note: *Cash match refers to actual cash contributions toward direct project expenses, whether from the applicant or external funders.*

Funding Period

All project activities and related expenses must occur within the eligible contracted funding period, which begins on the award letter date and ends June 30, 2028.

Funding is awarded on a reimbursement basis — grant recipients will be reimbursed only after eligible expenses have been incurred for approved project activities during the designated time frame.

Expenses incurred before or after the funding period are not eligible for reimbursement.

Disbursement of Funds

Funds are distributed on a reimbursement basis. Each claim must total at least \$1,000 and be submitted through [iowaGrants.gov](https://iowagrants.gov).

Each reimbursement claim must include an invoice and proof of payment. IEDA may request additional documentation.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Biannual Reports

Recipients are required to submit progress reports twice yearly — in April and October throughout the contract period. Each report must include:

- The percentage of project completion.
- A narrative summary of activities completed.
- Explanation of any deviations from the proposed timeline, tasks and objectives.

If deviations impact the remaining project scope, the recipient must notify the program manager via email.

Final Report

The final report must be submitted through [iowaGrants.gov](https://iowagrants.gov) within 30 days of project completion. IEDA may withhold 5% of project funds until the report is received and approved by the program manager.

The final report must include:

- Executive summary.
- Copy of the final report from the third-party partner.
- Narrative description of grant activities undertaken to support the project.
- Narrative of project achievements.
- Description of the benefit the end product provides or is expected to provide.
- Details of any changes to the original budget, timeline or activities.

ONLINE APPLICATION SUBMISSION

Applications must be submitted through [lowaGrants.gov](https://lowagrants.gov). Applications submitted in any other format will not be accepted.

Applicants must create a user account to access and complete the full application. Late, incomplete or ineligible applications will not be considered.



REVIEW PROCESS

Applications will first be reviewed for completion, eligibility and adherence to published guidelines.

Eligible applications are then competitively reviewed by a volunteer grant review committee that may include:

- Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative task force members
- IEDA staff
- Expert professionals

The grant review committee reserves the right to recommend conditional and partial funding.

Funding recommendations will be submitted by the committee to the director of IEDA for approval. Award notifications will be sent to the applicant's authorized official. All funding decisions are final.

SCORING RUBRIC

Eligibility Review

Applications must show:

- Applicant eligibility.
- Eligible project and expense requirements.
- Proof of required cash match.
- Proposal from a professional third-party partner.
- Project duration within contract period.
- Complete submission through [lowaGrants.gov](https://lowagrants.gov).

Application Review

Applications will be evaluated using the Rural Child Care Planning Grant scoring rubric. Each section includes specific criteria and corresponding point values to ensure a fair and consistent review process. Additional consideration — an extra five points — is awarded to applications for projects located in communities with a population of 10,000 or fewer. The rubric is based on a 50-point scale.

1 — GRANTSMANSHIP AND CASE FOR SUPPORT: 5 points possible

5

Application is clear, concise and well-composed. Case for support is exemplary and merits investment from the state.

3

Application is clear. Case for support is adequate.

1

Application is unclear or poorly composed. Case for support is inadequate or does not merit state investment.

2 – APPLICANT PROFILE: 5 points possible**5**

Applicant clearly identifies strategic priorities and appropriateness in initiating the project and demonstrates a strong record of progress through relevant achievements.

3

Applicant identifies relevant notable achievements or strategic priorities.

1

Applicant does not adequately identify relevant notable achievements or strategic priorities.

3 – TIMING AND NEED: 5 points possible**5**

Proposal clearly demonstrates recent momentum, excellent timing and strong commitment to active engagement in completion of the project.

3

Proposal identifies some recent momentum and commitment to participation and engagement in completion of the project.

1

Proposal does not clearly or adequately identify recent momentum or demonstrates inappropriate timing and commitment to participation and engagement.

4 – STEERING COMMITTEE: 5 points possible**5**

Proposal clearly identifies an active committee with multiple, diverse partners. Key roles and responsibilities are well-defined and positioned to enhance project success.

3

Proposal identifies a committee with multiple, diverse partners. Key roles and responsibilities are defined.

1

Proposal does not identify an active housing committee with multiple, diverse partners. Key roles and responsibilities are not well-defined.

5 – PURPOSE: 5 points possible**5**

Proposal clearly explains the child care challenge, the project's value and how the information will be shared publicly.

3

Proposal adequately explains the child care challenge, the project's value and how the information will be shared publicly.

1

Proposal does not adequately explain the child care challenge or how the information will be shared publicly.

6 – THIRD-PARTY PARTNER: 5 points possible**5**

Proposal identifies professional third-party partner to complete the project. Partner proposal demonstrates exceptional experience and clear objectives.

3

Proposal identifies professional third-party partner to complete the project. Partner proposal demonstrates adequate experience and objectives.

1

Proposal identifies professional third-party partner to complete the market study. Partner proposal includes minimal information.

7 – BUDGET: 5 points possible**5**

Project budget and intended use of requested funds are clear and appropriate.

3

Project budget and intended use of requested funds are identified and adequate.

1

Project budget and intended use of requested funds are unclear or inadequate.

8 – BUDGET LOCAL SUPPORT: 5 points possible**5**

All of the applicant match is from local sources, including county and city government, or private partners.

3

More than half of the applicant match is from local sources, including county and city government, or private partners.

1

Less than half of the applicant match is from local sources, including county and city government, or private partners.

9 – SUPPORT MATERIAL: 5 points possible**5**

Support material is highly relevant to the project, is of high quality and clearly supports the project's need.

3

Support material relates to the project and is of average quality.

1

Support material is not relevant to the project, is of poor quality or does not support the project's need.

CONTACT

Potential applicants are encouraged to review all published materials and contact Sacha Wise, director of Empower Rural Iowa, at 515.348.6156 or sacha.wise@iowaeda.com with questions well in advance of application deadline.