

The Rural Innovation Grant program supports creative solutions to the challenges facing rural communities. This grant opportunity aims to expand the housing stock in rural Iowa by leveraging funding programs, encouraging private investment and rewarding innovative approaches. The goal is to provide funding to communities that have shown significant progress on housing initiatives and that propose forward-thinking ideas with a measurable outcome.

The 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 is available 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 contracted funding period. Funding is awarded on a reimbursement basis after expenses have been incurred for approved project activities.

FUNDING

Grant Request Amount

Each applicant may request up to \$50,000 to support eligible one-time project expenses. All funds must be incurred and expended within the designated funding period.

Match Requirement

Applicants must demonstrate a commitment to their projects by providing a minimum of 1:1/2 cash match. For example, a \$50,000 grant request requires at least \$25,000 in cash match. The match 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.
- State government funds already committed as a match for another program, including other IEDA funds.

While the minimum match requirement is 1:1/2, competitive proposals will show broad financial support, particularly by leveraging public dollars to attract private investment.

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 and paid for approved project activities during the designated time frame.

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



Disbursement of Funds

Grant funds will be disbursed on a reimbursement basis. Each claim must total at least \$1,000 and be submitted through [iowaGrants.gov](https://iowagrants.gov). Applicants must be in good standing with the Iowa Department of Revenue to receive funds.

Each reimbursement claim must include:

- A detailed description of the expenditures and corresponding amounts.
- Invoices and proof of payment for equipment, supplies or materials.
- Invoices and proof of payment for subcontractor services.
- A status report for the claim period.

IEDA may request additional documentation to verify expenses.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligible Applicants

The following entities are eligible to apply:

- City and county governments or federally recognized tribal governments physically located in Iowa.
- Federally designated nonprofit agencies and foundations.

The applicant must submit all required materials and, if awarded, will be legally obligated to the terms of the funding agreement. Partnering or collaborating entities are not subject to eligibility requirements but may be reviewed financially and programmatically during the selection process.

Projects/programs must be located 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 more, or be in an Iowa county that is one of Iowa's 88 least populous counties.

Each eligible applicant may submit one application per funding round. An entity serving as the lead applicant may also be listed as a partner on other applications but may not serve as the lead on more than one.

Eligible Use of Funding

The Rural Innovation Grant supports innovative solutions to housing stock challenges in rural areas and seeks models that can be replicated elsewhere in Iowa. Eligible uses of funds include, but are not limited to:

- Construction and land acquisition
- Major renovations and repairs of buildings or appurtenant structures
- Site development, including demolition or property preparation
- Professional services such as engineering, planning, technical assistance, architectural design, consulting and grant writing
- Personnel time dedicated to the project (Personnel benefits are not eligible. Applicants must demonstrate how time is specifically dedicated to the project.)

INELIGIBLE PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND EXPENSES

Existing projects or programs without a significant expansion component are ineligible. The program does not support ongoing expenses for existing programs or projects.

Ineligible expenses include, but are not limited to:

- International or domestic travel outside of Iowa
- Insurance
- Employee benefits
- Conference or training expenses for grant recipients
- Routine or reoccurring maintenance
- Ongoing utility costs
- Budget shortfalls
- Fundraising or benefit event activities
- Lobbying activities

ONLINE APPLICATION SUBMISSION

Applications must be submitted via lowagrants.gov. No other formats will be accepted. Late, incomplete or ineligible applications will not be reviewed. Applicants must create an account on lowagrants.gov to access the full application.

REVIEW PROCESS

Applications will be reviewed for completion, eligibility and adherence to published guidelines. All materials are reviewed as submitted — new information or clarifications provided after the program deadline will not be considered unless requested by the review committee. Then eligible applications move to a competitive review conducted by a volunteer grant committee, which includes members of the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative task force, IEDA staff and expert professionals. The committee reserves the right to recommend conditional or partial funding.

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

Competitive applications will demonstrate the following:

- A project that is unique in design or implementation.
- A model that can be replicated in other rural communities of similar size or need.
- Engagement of multiple partners contributing to the project's success.
- A solution that is either entirely new or a new application of an existing idea to address a known challenge.

SCORING RUBRIC

Eligibility Review

Applications must demonstrate evidence of the following:

- Applicant is an eligible candidate.
- Funding request meets eligible project and expense requirements.
- Request is for no more than \$50,000.
- Request includes proof of 1:1/2 cash match.
- Project duration does not exceed contract period.
- Application is complete and submitted through lowagrants.gov.
- Applicant has included a letter of support from the local city or county government.
- Primary applicant is not named as primary applicant on any other applications; however, can be named as a partner on additional applications.

Application Review

The scoring rubric will be used to evaluate applications. Each section has criteria and corresponding point values to ensure a fair review process. Extra consideration — five points — is awarded to projects located in a community with a population of 10,000 or fewer. The rubric is based on a 120-point scale.

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

Applicant clearly identifies strategic priorities and project appropriateness 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.

2 – TIMING AND NEED: 10 points possible**10**

Proposal details significant progress and implementation of specific measures resulting from a recent housing assessment. Clearly demonstrates recent momentum, excellent timing and strong commitment to active engagement in addressing housing needs.

5

Proposal identifies recent momentum and commitment to participation and engagement in addressing housing needs. Community does not have a recent housing assessment. Demonstrates use of acceptable data sources to evaluate housing needs.

1

Proposal does not clearly or adequately identify recent momentum or demonstrates inappropriate timing and commitment. Community does not have a recent housing assessment or accurate data to assess housing needs.

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

Proposal clearly identifies an active steering 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. Roles and responsibilities are not well-defined.

4 – INNOVATION: 30 points possible**30**

Proposal presents clear, specific, and well-defined goals that demonstrate strong planning and readiness. Clearly articulates the expected impact on housing stock, supported by data, examples, or projected outcomes. Introduces an innovative and creative solution that meaningfully addresses local housing challenges and demonstrates a strong likelihood of success.

15

Proposal identifies goals, but they may be general, incomplete, or lack measurable detail. Explanation of the potential impact on housing stock is limited or not well-supported. Includes an innovative or creative component, but is less developed, less distinctive, or not fully aligned with the identified housing challenges.

1

Proposal lacks clear or specific goals. Does not describe the anticipated impact on housing stock in a meaningful way. Fails to present an innovative or creative solution, includes vague concepts or approaches not tailored to local housing needs.

5 – IMPLEMENTATION: 10 points possible**10**

Proposal clearly outlines how the project will be completed within the eligible funding period. Includes a detailed project timeline, clear objectives and defined deliverables.

5

Proposal describes how the project will be completed within the eligible funding period. Includes a general timeline and some objectives and deliverables.

1

Proposal does not describe how the project will be completed within the eligible funding period. Timeline, objectives and deliverables are missing or unclear.

6 – REPLICATION: 5 points possible**5**

Proposal describes how the project can be replicated in rural Iowa and includes plans to share replication materials, experiences and best practices.

3

Proposal generally supports replication in rural Iowa and includes plans for dissemination and knowledge sharing.

1

Proposal does not describe or support replication in rural Iowa.

7 – IOWA PROFILE: 5 points possible**5**

Proposal directly addresses future community needs as identified in the Iowa Finance Authority's Iowa Profile. The Iowa Profile report(s) strongly support the proposed project.

3

Proposal references the Iowa Finance Authority's Iowa Profile data and community needs, with some connection to the proposed project.

1

Proposal does not address future community needs identified by Iowa Finance Authority's Iowa Profile. Report(s) do not support the proposed project. Reports are not included, or do not support, the proposed project.

8 – SUSTAINABILITY: 10 points possible**10**

Proposal clearly describes how momentum will be sustained beyond the funding period, including a well-defined plan for ongoing operation and/or maintenance.

5

Proposal addresses sustainability and ongoing project operation, with a general plan in place.

1

Proposal does not adequately address sustainability or future operation and maintenance.

9 – MEASUREMENT: 10 points possible**10**

Proposal clearly describes how project outcomes will be evaluated. Includes both qualitative and quantitative measures tied to project goals and outlines methods for data collection.

5

Proposal articulates defined measures and provides some explanation of methods for data collection.

1

Proposal does not articulate measurable goals or provide a clear plan for evaluating outcomes.

10 – BUDGET: 10 points possible**10**

Project budget and intended use of requested funds are clear and appropriate. Exceeds the required 1:1/2 cash match with a variety of match sources. A majority of the applicant match is from local sources, including county and city government or private partners.

5

Project budget and intended use of requested funds are identified and adequate. At least half of the applicant match comes from local sources, including county and city government or private partners.

1

Project budget and intended use of requested funds are unclear or inadequate. Less than half of the applicant match comes from local sources, including county and city government or private partners.

11 – LETTERS OF SUPPORT & SUPPORT MATERIAL: 10 points possible**10**

Support material is highly relevant, is of high quality and clearly reinforces the strength and excellence of the proposed project.

5

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

1

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

12 – GRANTSMANSHIP AND CASE FOR SUPPORT: 5 points possible**5**

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

3

The application is clear. Case for support is adequate.

1

Application is unclear or poorly written. Case for support is weak or does not justify state investment.

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 the application deadline.