

RURAL BOOST GRANT GUIDELINES



The Rural Building Ownership and Organization by Strengthening Teams (BOOST) program, administered in consultation with the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative task force, brings together a team of experts to help passionate community and business leaders create intentional plans for next-step growth. This strategic planning grant is designed for rural communities and nonprofits that are ready to take bold steps toward long-term economic vitality. The program provides expert guidance, structured planning support and targeted resources to help a community chart a clear path forward.

Whether a community is facing challenges, barriers or stagnation points, the BOOST program is designed to help build momentum toward new growth. Warning: This program is not for the faint of heart. Successful applicants must be fully committed to leading meaningful change and sustaining momentum long after the planning period ends.

Managed by the Center for Rural Revitalization, a division of the Iowa Economic Development Authority, the BOOST program sends a team of three to five experts to meet with a local committee and assess existing conditions, community assets and emerging needs. Based on these discussions, the Center for Rural Revitalization and supporting partners will develop a customized action plan and offer targeted financial support to help implement key next steps.

Understanding that no two communities are the same, the BOOST program supports flexible planning tailored to local needs — and encourages adaptability as new opportunities emerge.

TIMELINE

January 5, 2026

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

February 13, 2026

Application deadline is 4 p.m. CDT.

Spring 2026

Applicants will be notified of funding decisions.

Spring 2026 – June 30, 2027

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.

PROGRAM DETAILS

Rural challenges rarely exist in a silo — and neither should the solutions. The BOOST program helps communities leverage their unique assets while encouraging local leaders to identify priorities and set realistic goals for economic and business development. Participating communities commit to creating innovative strategies that foster collaboration, strengthen community design and support a resilient business economy. Experts will look holistically at each community's strengths and weaknesses, then partner with local leaders to identify practical, implementable strategies grounded in local realities.

Drawing on the expertise of Empower Rural Iowa task force members, Iowa Economic Development Authority staff and Iowa Rural Development Council partners, each community is matched with a mentoring team to help shape and advance its next steps.

Selected communities receive:

- An in-person meeting with their customized BOOST team of three to five external experts.
- Follow-up meetings (in person or virtual).
- A clear, customized action plan with recommendations and resources for securing additional funding and partnerships to support implementation.
- Identification of early stage projects or quick wins that build momentum.
- A \$10,000 grant award to support implementation of identified next steps.

BOOST STEERING COMMITTEE

Applicants are required to establish a BOOST steering committee willing to commit time, energy and decision-making authority. It is recommended that the committee be comprised of seven to 10 individuals representing a diverse cross section of the community — including elected officials, city staff, major employers, nonprofit leaders, students and other local doers — who are actively engaged in community development. The committee should demonstrate a strong desire to pursue transformational change rather than incremental adjustments, along with an acknowledgment that the process may challenge existing assumptions and require bold action.



FUNDING

Grant Amount

Each BOOST grantee will receive \$10,000 to support implementation of eligible one-time project expenses. All expenses must be incurred and funds expended within the designated funding period.

Match Requirement

Applicants must demonstrate commitment to their project by providing a minimum cash match of \$5,000. This 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 Iowa Economic Development Authority funds.

While \$5,000 is the minimum requirement, 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: spring 2026 through June 30, 2027.

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

Grant funds will be disbursed on a reimbursement basis. Each disbursement claim must be for a minimum of \$1,000 and submitted through IowaGrants.gov.

When submitting a claim, the following items are required:

- A detailed description of the expenditures and corresponding amounts.
- Product invoices and proof of payment for equipment, supplies or materials.
- Receipts for any Iowa travel expenses.
- Invoices and proof of payment for subcontractor services.
- A status report for the claim period.

The Iowa Economic Development Authority may request additional documentation as needed to verify expenses.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Submitted applications must include a project timeline along with clearly defined goals and objectives that will be used to measure project success. Progress will be evaluated based on the applicant's achievement of these stated goals and objectives.

Biannual Reports

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

- The percentage of completion for each goal or objective.
- A narrative summary of activities completed in support of each goal or objective.
- A description of any deviations from the approved timeline, tasks and objectives.

If any deviation is expected to impact the remainder of the project, recipients must also notify the program manager via email.

Final Report

The final report must be submitted through IowaGrants.gov within 30 days of project completion. The Iowa Economic Development Authority may withhold 5% of project funds until the final report is received and approved by the program manager.

The final report must include the following components:

- Executive summary.
- Timeline showing the completion of each goal or objective.
- 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.
- Budget narrative detailing how funds were spent in support of the project.
- Explanation of any deviations from the original budget, timeline or grant activities.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To apply for the BOOST program, applicants must fall into one of the following categories and meet all related eligibility criteria. Entities that do not meet these requirements are not eligible to apply.

Eligible Applicants

Nonprofits

- Must be a federally tax-exempt nonprofit organization incorporated and physically located in Iowa.
- The physical location is defined as maintaining a current home office and registered agent address in Iowa, as defined by Iowa Code 490.501, as well as having a primary staff presence physically located and working in Iowa.

Communities

- Must be a unit of local, county or federally recognized tribal government physically located in Iowa.

To be eligible, programs must be located in and serve a community in Iowa with a population of 20,000 or fewer that is not adjacent to a city with a population of 40,000 or more. For countywide programs, the county must rank among the 88 least populous counties in the state.

Eligible Application Requirements

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

- Applicant must demonstrate eligibility.
- Applicant must demonstrate capacity to administer the grant.
- Applicant must be a local government entity or provide a letter of support from the mayor or a resolution from the city council.
- Application must identify and describe all other sources of funding for the proposed activities.
- Applicant must provide a \$5,000 cash match.

Eligible Funding Examples

Below are examples of programs or initiatives that may qualify for funding after the in-person BOOST team meeting. This is not a comprehensive list; it illustrates the range of eligible uses. Additional resources and guidance will be provided by the BOOST team following the meeting.

- Services provided by a professional engineer or design firm for a specific community project.
- Consulting services from the University of Northern Iowa's Institute for Decision Making, such as strategic planning, applied research, marketing or business retention and expansion.
- Business assistance from the Iowa State University Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS) in areas such as leadership, technology, workforce development, productivity or growth.
- Equipment or supplies to support local community engagement initiatives.

INELIGIBLE PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND EXPENSES

Projects without a strategic planning component are ineligible. The program does not support ongoing expenses for existing programs or projects. Ineligible expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Construction or physical build-out of projects
- Expenditures related to a project that has already been identified and is underway
- Repairs or maintenance
- Budget shortfalls

Eligible Use of Funding

BOOST grant funds are intended to help communities begin executing key strategies, build capacity, plan strategically for the future or develop local skills.

Funding may be used for a variety of purposes, including but not limited to:

- Engineering
- Planning
- Design costs
- Training programs
- Certification programs
- Marketing strategies
- Succession planning
- Economic development training
- Grant writing training (not grant writing itself)

ONLINE APPLICATION SUBMISSION

All applications must be submitted through [IowaGrants.gov](https://iowagrants.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.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Sacha Wise, director of Empower Rural Iowa, to discuss their proposal in advance of submission to ensure alignment with BOOST program goals.



REVIEW PROCESS

Applications will first be reviewed by program staff for completion, eligibility and adherence to published guidelines. Applications are reviewed as submitted. Additional materials or clarifications submitted after the deadline will not be considered unless specifically requested by the review panel. Eligible applications will then move to a competitive review conducted by a volunteer grant review committee, which will include Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative task force members, Iowa Rural Development Council members and expert professionals. The grant review committee will submit funding recommendations to the director of the Iowa Economic Development Authority for final approval. Award notifications will be sent to the applicant's authorized official. All funding decisions are final.

Review Criteria

Applications must demonstrate evidence of the following:

- A clear explanation of the community's need.
- A demonstrated understanding of current challenges.
- A well-defined and diverse steering committee.
- Past success and organizational capacity.
- Enthusiasm for the BOOST program.

SCORING RUBRIC

Applications will be evaluated using the BOOST program 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 55-point scale.

1 – ECONOMIC NEED: 10 points possible

10	5	1
Proposal clearly describes the community's existing economic challenges and needs, demonstrating a strong understanding of gaps and opportunities for improvement.	Proposal describes the existing challenges of the community, including some 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. Committee includes an elected or city official.	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 clearly defined.

3 – RECENT ACTIVITY AND PRIORITY AREAS: 10 points possible

10	5	1
Proposal clearly identifies recent momentum or successes, including capacity for program management. Selected priority areas align with economic need, desired outcomes and recent activity.	Proposal identifies recent momentum or successes, including capacity for program management. Priorities may not align with economic need, desired outcomes and/or recent activity.	Proposal does not clearly identify recent momentum, successes or capacity for program management. Priorities do not align with economic need, desired outcomes and/or recent activity.

4 – DESIRED OUTCOMES: 5 points possible

5	3	1
Proposal demonstrates enthusiasm for the program, identifies clear goals or anticipated outcomes, and signals openness to feedback and input from the BOOST team.	Proposal demonstrates some enthusiasm for the program and identifies goals or anticipated outcomes.	Proposal does not demonstrate enthusiasm for the program and does not identify clear goals or anticipated outcomes.

5 – BUDGET: 5 points possible

5	3	1
Proposal exceeds the required \$5,000 cash match, with secured contributions from a variety of sources.	Required \$5,000 cash match is met, with secured contributions from one or more sources.	Required \$5,000 cash match is not met or not secured. Match contribution is from one source.

6 – LETTERS OF SUPPORT AND MEDIA SUPPORT: 5 points possible

5	3	1
Support material is highly relevant to the pilot program, is of high quality and clearly supports the project's need. Letters of support are included from all steering committee members.	Support material is relevant to the project and of average quality. Letters of support are included from some steering committee members.	Support material is not relevant to the project, is of poor quality or does not clearly support the project's need. Few or no letters of support are included.

7 – GRANTSMANSHIP AND CASE FOR SUPPORT: 5 points possible

5	3	1
Application is clear, concise and well-composed. Case for support is exemplary and merits investment from the state.	Application is clear and adequately written. Case for support is acceptable.	Application is unclear or poorly composed. 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.