

Poetry Out Loud: Program Guidelines

POETRY OUT LOUD PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Fiscal Year 2026

BACKGROUND

[Poetry Out Loud](#) in Iowa is an arts education program that encourages 9th-12th grade students to study great poetry and compete in a recitation competition at local, state and national levels. Poetry Out Loud (POL) was launched by the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) and is supported by the [Poetry Foundation](#). The Poetry Out Loud Grant is administered by the Iowa Arts Council, which exists within the [Iowa Economic Development Authority](#) (the IEDA). Through the program, the IEDA provides financial incentives to nonprofit and tax-exempt organizations to support a Regional Poetry Out Loud competition. Applicants must comply with federal requirements, including but not limited to [2 CFR Part 200](#).

Operating and grant policies and definitions set out at 261 Iowa Administrative Code Chapter [305](#) and rules pertaining to organization and operation of the Iowa Arts Council found at 261 Iowa Administrative Code Chapter [304](#) apply to the program. Rules specific to the program can be found at 261 Iowa Administrative Code Chapter [307](#). Additional eligibility requirements and priorities are set out in these guidelines published by the IEDA.

QUESTIONS

Potential applicants, especially first-time applicants, are encouraged to review all published material, including the administrative rules and published guidelines, and contact Arts Program Coordinator at brooke.rogers@iowaeda.com well in advance of application deadlines if they have any questions regarding the program.

ACCESSIBILITY

The IEDA is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to eligible applicants. For technical support submitting the online application, please contact the Accessibility Coordinator, Elizabeth Ferreira, at 515-348-6325 or elizabeth.ferreira@iowaeda.com, at least two weeks in advance of the application deadline.

TIMELINE

October 24, 2025 | Fiscal Year 2026 Application Opens

Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. Typically, applicants are notified of funding decisions within eight weeks after the application deadline.

October 1, 2025 –January 23, 2026| Eligible Funding Period

The Eligible Funding Period is October 1, 2025 – January 23, 2026. All grant project expenses must be incurred, and activities must be completed within the eligible funding period.

April 1, 2026 | Final Report Deadline

Grant recipients are required to complete a final report by April 1, 2026.

POETRY OUT LOUD CALENDAR

August 1, 2025 | [School registration](#) opens

October 10, 2025 | 2025-2026 Poetry Out Loud Anthology available.

Contests may start and take place any time between October 10, 2025 - January 23, 2026.

December 1, 2025 | School registration deadline

January 23, 2026 | Deadline to hold all local and regional contests and to notify the Iowa Arts Council of the finalist representing your school or organizations

February 14, 2026 | Finalists invited to participate in state contest in Des Moines

March 8, 2026 | State contest in Des Moines at the State Historical Building

March 12, 2026 | State Champion and Chaperone National Finals Registration Deadline

April 27-29, 2026 | National Finals in Washington, D.C.

GRANT AMOUNTS AND DISBURSEMENT

One-Time Project Expenses

Applicants may request funding for eligible one-time grant project expenses that are incurred and expended during the eligible funding period

- Grant request up to \$5,000

The IEDA reserves the right to adjust funding levels based on the quality of submitted applications and available funding.

Grant Payment

Grant recipients will receive the full grant amount award upon full execution of the grant agreement. Recipients will need to complete a final report at the end of the eligible funding period outlining how the grant funds and matching funds were spent, providing documentation of expenditures and proof of purchase on forms provided by IEDA . Any unspent grant funds will need to be returned to the IEDA within 30 days after the final report deadline.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants must be one of the following types of entities. Entities who do not fall into one of these categories are not eligible to apply.

- An active Iowa nonprofit organization registered with the [Iowa Secretary of State](#) that is exempt from federal taxes pursuant to Internal Revenue Code § 501(c)(3) and maintains a staffed office physically located within the State of Iowa.
- A nonprofit organization physically located within a [Border City](#), but otherwise meets the eligibility requirements in these guidelines, that is applying for a project that will service Iowa audiences.
- A nonprofit organization that has not yet achieved federal tax-exempt status, but otherwise meets the eligibility requirements in these guidelines, that is applying through a [Fiscal Agent](#).
- Educational institution, organization or K-12 school whose primary orientation, mission and purposes are education and/or awarding academic credits.

Accessibility - Americans with Disabilities Act

Applicant must demonstrate that it is in compliance or actively working to be in compliance with [Section 504](#) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#). These laws prohibit discrimination against individuals with physical and/or mental disabilities. Both programmatic and structural accessibility must be addressed in the application.

Universal Entity Identifier (SAM-UEI)

Entities applying for the IEDA's programs must be registered with the U.S. Government's System for Award Management (SAM), at www.sam.gov. Entities that register in SAM.gov are assigned a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), which is required for doing business with the federal government. All applicants for the IEDA's programs except for individual applicants are required to have a UEI and maintain a SAM.gov registration for the duration of the application process and, if awarded a grant, for the life of the award.

Ineligible Applicants

Ineligible applicants include individual applicants, who are eligible to apply through the IEDA's Poetry Out Loud Grant program, and the following types of entities.

- Unit of local, county, state or federally recognized tribal government physically located in Iowa.
- For-profit corporation or business.
- Political party.
- National service/professional organization.
- Organization that has received grants, loans or other incentives through the Iowa Arts Council or other program administered by the IEDA that are not in compliance with reporting or other requirements or that are listed on the IEDA's funding moratorium list.

POETRY OUT LOUD REQUIREMENTS

Regional Host Program Requirements

As a Poetry Out Loud (POL) regional host, you're at the heart of bringing poetry performance to life in your community. Below are the key responsibilities and standards, aligned with national guidance

1. Organization & Logistics

- **Format Options:** Coordinate competitions in-person or virtually, based on local context and needs. [Poetry Out Loud Organizing A Competition](#)
- **Early Planning:** Begin early to maximize participation—leverage POL's PR Toolkit, social media materials, and sample media advisories. [Poetry Out Loud PR Toolkit](#)
- **Lead Coordinators:** Assign one or two local organizers (teachers or community leaders) to handle recruitment, staffing, material distribution, event communication, and coordination with state-level contacts.
- **Venue Preparation (In Person):** Secure a suitable space—school auditorium, theatre, or other venue with stage and seating. Provide amplification if needed.
- **Recruitment:** Must recruit students to participate in the competition from at least three different local schools or homeschools.

2. Staffing & Roles

- **Team Composition:** Recruit and assign:
 - **Emcee** — introduces recitations and maintains flow, including during transitions or scoring delays.

- **3–5 Scoring Judges** — use official POL rubrics to evaluate performances. [Judging A Competition](#), [Judge's Guide](#), & [Evaluation Criteria and Tips](#)
- **1 Accuracy Judge** — notes any deviations from the poem text. [Accuracy Judge](#)
- **1 Prompter** — supports any student who hesitates or forgets a line.
- **1 Score Tabulator** — enters scores, preferably using [POL Scoring Template](#); test the system before the event using the [Digital Score Sheet Instructions](#).
- **Materials:** Provide all judges and staff with necessary tools—evaluation rubrics, accuracy sheets, judge's guides, tally sheets, and digital templates. [Judging Webinar](#).

3. Participant & Poem Management

- **Poem Source:** Competitors must select poems from the official POL anthology (updated each summer, available after October 10). [Poetry Out Loud Anthology](#)
- **Submission Deadline:** Collect titles, authors, and recitation order ahead of time. No changes allowed later—essential for accuracy judging, prompter prep, and printed materials.
- **Recitation Standards:** Students must recite from memory. Epigraphs are required; translators need proper credit. Footnotes are excluded—improper inclusion affects scoring.

4. Evaluation & Scoring Criteria

Judges evaluate using official [rubrics](#), splitting focus between performance and accuracy:

- **Performance Aspects:**
 - Physical presence: posture, stage presence, composure
 - Voice and articulation: projection, pace, intonation, pronunciation
 - Interpretation: natural, nuanced delivery without excess emotion or gestures
 - Evidence of understanding: conveying meaning, tone, allusions
 - Overall performance: cohesiveness, compelling delivery, range of recitation choices
- **Accuracy:**
 - Accuracy Judge tracks errors and omissions; perfect recitation adds eight bonus points per judge's sheet. Reliance on prompter results in deductions.
 - Accuracy is weighed slightly more heavily along with overall performance.

Summary Table: Regional Host Responsibilities

Area	Expected Actions
Organization & Planning	Secure venue or virtual platform; early promotion; appoint lead coordinators
Staffing & Roles	Recruit Emcee, Judges, Accuracy Judge, Prompter, Tabulator; train using POL tools
Materials & Logistics	Distribute rubrics, evaluation sheets, anthology guidance, and digital scoring tools
Participant Coordination	Ensure poem eligibility, manage submissions, and enforce memorization rules
Fair & Accurate Judging	Implement rubric-based scoring and accuracy tracking according to POL standards

BUDGET REQUIREMENTS**Eligible Grant Request Expenses**

Poetry Out Loud Grants support project expenses that are essential to the completion of the proposed project. The grant request must be dedicated to eligible one-time, direct project expenses, and legitimate parts of the proposed project and must be incurred and expended within the eligible funding period. Expenses identified in the grant request should be based on competitive, current market pricing.

Expenses eligible for reimbursement include direct project costs such as:

- Access accommodations (e.g., audio description, sign-language interpretation, closed or open captioning, large-print brochures/labeling)
- Judges stipend (e.g. preparation, time at event judging)
- Domestic travel (e.g. mileage, accommodation, per diem)
- Marketing (e.g. print material, ad buys, design fees)
- Materials (e.g. microphone, speakers, projector)
- Overhead and Administrative Costs that are directly allocable to the project (e.g. a percentage of space/facility costs, the percentage of staff time for the administrative support of a project)*
- Personnel time dedicated to the project** (e.g. planning, execution, evaluation time)
- Portion of Space/Facilities costs such as mortgage principal, rent, and utilities, as allocable to the project

- Professional services (e.g. printer, graphic designer, security)
- Rentals (e.g. stages, lighting/sound, scissor lift, portable restrooms)

* Overhead and Administrative Costs must be reasonable and consistent with best practices in financial management. It should not simply be a percentage of the project budget. Applicants must be able to calculate the actual costs included in the line item.

**Applicant must demonstrate how personnel time is specifically dedicated to the proposed project.

Indirect Costs

Applicants who are unable to calculate direct Overhead and Administrative Costs associated with the proposed project can include indirect costs instead.

Indirect Costs are overhead, administrative, or general operating expenses that are not readily identifiable with or are difficult to assign to a specific project. Examples of Indirect Costs include the expenses associated with operating and maintaining facilities and equipment, rent, utilities, supplies, and administrative salaries. The indirect cost rate is either the current and appropriate indirect cost rate negotiated with the applicant's Cognizant Federal agency or a de minimis rate of 15%.

The indirect cost rate is applied to the Modified Total Direct Costs noted in the grant budget, which include project expenses like salaries and wages, materials and supplies, services, and travel. Modified Total Direct Costs do not include project costs like purchasing equipment, rental costs, among others.

REVIEW PROCESS

Eligibility Review

Submitted applications are reviewed by staff for completion, eligibility, and adherence to published guidelines. Applications are reviewed as submitted, provided that the IEDA may contact applicants if any additional information is required. New application information or subsequent application clarification submitted after a program deadline is not considered unless requested by an IEDA program manager. Staff will also review an applicant's record of compliance and good standing with the Iowa Arts Council, the IEDA, other state agencies, including but not limited to the Iowa Department of Revenue, and federal government agencies or departments. Applications or applicants determined by staff to be ineligible or incomplete will not move forward. A determination as to eligibility or completeness is final agency action.

Staff Review

Eligible applications will be reviewed by staff for compliance with program guidelines and requirements. Recommendations are submitted to the IEDA Director for consideration and funding approval.

Decision Notification

Applicants are typically notified of funding decisions, including decisions to decline to fund applications, within eight weeks after the application submission. Applicants are encouraged to refrain from contacting staff for application status updates during the funding decision process.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION

Applicants must submit applications via the Iowa Arts Council's SlideRoom, an online application portal. Applications will not be accepted in any other format. Late, incomplete or ineligible applications will not be accepted. Applicants can access the current online application requirements at iowaartscouncil.slideroom.com. Applicants must create a login to view the full application requirements for the program. Applicants can visit help.liaisonedu.com for assistance related to the online submission.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

The following application questions are provided for reference only. Applicants must review and complete application requirements in the [SlideRoom portal](#).

Poetry Out Loud Grant Narrative

Grant Activities

Describe the applicant's plans for hosting a Regional Poetry Out Loud Competition, including:

- When and where the regional competition will take place
- How you will do your outreach to schools to participate in the competition and the schools you are planning to reach

Budget

Project Budget

Direct Project Expenses

Itemize the eligible direct grant project expenses covered by the requested Iowa Arts Council funds in the table below. These are costs that are expended specifically for the project during the period of performance. Review the list of eligible and ineligible expenses found in the grant program guidelines. Do not include expenses that will be incurred outside the eligible funding period. Include a brief description of each expense and place the numeric dollar amount for that expense in the next column. Round to the nearest dollar. Do not include dollar signs, decimals or commas.

Total Indirect Costs

Enter the amount of indirect costs being applied to the Grant Project. Only include this number if the applicant has an appropriate indirect cost rate negotiated with the applicant's Cognizant Federal agency.

Alternatively, you can use a de minimis indirect cost rate of up to 15% of your modified total direct costs if you do not have a federally negotiated rate and did not include Overhead and Administrative Costs under the Direct Project Expenses. Modified Total Direct Costs include salaries and wages, materials and supplies, services, and travel. Modified Total Direct Costs excludes equipment, capital expenditures, rental costs, among others.

Total Project Costs/Expenses

Enter the total direct costs and indirect costs (if applicable) outlined in the tables above. Round to the nearest dollar. Do not include dollar signs, decimals or commas.

Additional Project Budget Notes

Provide information to clarify any line item included in the project budget, or to provide further details on the scope of your project budget.

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

Applicants should refer to the [glossary](#) for clarification of program terms and definitions.