

CREATIVE PLACES ACCELERATOR PROGRAM GUIDELINES

BACKGROUND

The Iowa Creative Places Accelerator is a year long program where cross-sector community teams develop arts-based projects to serve as catalysts for livability, economic development, and community connectedness. Projects developed through this accelerator program will be focused on creative placemaking or placekeeping and will have demonstrated positive impact on their respective communities.

The program is funded through an appropriation by the Iowa Legislature to the IEDA and a grant by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. Applicants must comply with federal requirements, including but not limited to [2 CFR Part 200](#).

Operating and grant policies 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. The program operates within the IEDA's general project-grant framework described in 261 Iowa Administrative Code Chapter [307](#). Additional eligibility requirements and priorities are set out in these guidelines published by the IEDA.

QUESTIONS

Potential applicants are encouraged to review all published material, including the administrative rules and published guidelines, and contact Creative Community Development and Infrastructure Programs Manager Jon Berg at 515.348.6323 or jon.berg@iowaeda.com with questions well in advance of the application deadline.

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

July 15, 2026 | Fiscal Year 2027 Application Deadline

The deadline to submit an online application is 11:59 p.m. on July 15, 2026, for the funding period September 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027.

September 2026 | Funding Decision Notification

Typically, applicants are notified of funding decisions within eight weeks after the application deadline.

September 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027 | Eligible Funding Period

The eligible funding period is September 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027. All expenses must be incurred, and project activities must be completed within the eligible funding period.

April 1, 2027 | Anticipated Project Plan and Implementation and Art Project Grant Application Deadline

Grant recipients are eligible to apply for the Art Project Grant program in Spring of 2027.

August 2, 2027 | Final Report Deadline

Grant recipients are required to complete a final report by August 2, 2027.

GRANT AMOUNTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Grant recipients will receive an initial payment of \$1500 upon full execution of the grant agreement, and up to an additional \$1500 as reimbursement for expenses directly incurred in connection with participating in the in-person workshops, hosting community meetings and project planning. Recipients will be required to provide documentation of expenditures and proof of purchase on forms provided by IEDA.

Grant recipients will be invited to apply for an Art Project Grant in the Spring of 2027. Once the project is awarded funding, upon full execution of the grant agreement, grant recipients will receive a payment of up to \$25,000 for project implementation. Recipients will need to complete a final report outlining how the grant funds and cash match were spent, including providing documentation of expenditures and proof of purchase. Any unspent grant funds will need to be returned to IEDA within 30 days after the final report deadline.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

(September 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027)

The program will focus on professional development through two in-person workshops. Workshops will be facilitated by outside experts with participation from statewide creative placemaking partners and Arts Division staff of the IEDA. Proposed schedule and topics below

- **Weeks of September 28 – October 24, 2026** Local community workshop led by Arts Division staff and partners. Arts Division staff will work with the lead applicant to identify a workshop date. Session topics of the community workshop will include - Arts and Creativity in Economic Development and Quality of Life, Creative Communities, Building an ecosystem of partners.
- **November 13, 2026:** One day In-person session at Iowa Economic Development Authority - Project Development
- **February 2027:** Virtual check-ins with Community Partners on project development.
- **March 1, 2027:** Draft Art Project Grant application due for review and feedback.
- **April 1:** Anticipated Art Project Grant Application deadline
- **June 30:** Final date to host community meetings and planning activities to be covered by grant funding.

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 an office physically located within the State of Iowa; or
- Unit of local, county, state or federally recognized tribal government physically located in Iowa.

Accessibility – Americans with Disabilities Act

Applicant must demonstrate that it complies 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 the following types of entities:

- For-profit corporation or business; political party; or national service/professional organization.
- Fiscal agent whose role is to hold or administer funds but otherwise will have no substantive involvement with carrying out the project.
- Auditorium, arena, convention center or similar type of venue whose primary purpose is related to presenting popular entertainment, sporting, or recreational events.
- Educational institution, organization or K-12 school whose primary orientation, mission and purposes are education and/or awarding academic credits.
- Organization that has not met organizational eligibility requirements.

BUDGET AND USE OF FUNDS

Eligible Grant Request Expenses

Grant funds can be used to offset expenses to participate in the in-person workshops and meetings. This may include mileage, lodging, meals not already covered, and staff time. Additionally, grant funds can be used to support community engagement and planning activities related to the project. Recipients will be required to provide documentation of expenditures and proof of purchase on forms provided by IEDA.

APPLICATION REVIEW AND SCORING 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.

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 to panel review. A determination as to eligibility or completeness is final agency action.

Competitive Panel Review

Applications by eligible applicants that are complete and adhere to program requirements will be referred for a competitive review by a panel of professionals with expertise related to the purpose of the program. Applications will be scored and ranked based on the published scoring rubric. Recommendations for consideration and approval are submitted to the Director of the IEDA.

Decision Notification

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

Application Questions and Scoring Rubric

The Creative Places Accelerator Program scoring rubric will be used by the review panel to evaluate grant applications. The following application questions are provided for reference only. Applicants must review and complete application requirements in the SlideRoom portal. Each section has criteria and corresponding point values to ensure an unbiased review process. The rubric is on a scale of 35 points.

Applicant Profile

Provide a description of the lead organization seeking to be selected for the Creative Places Accelerator including:

- Mission statement
- Types of programs and services offered and how they help the organization accomplish its mission.
- Track record for convening local partners and notable achievements that advance community development and economic development goals and projects

Scoring: 5 points possible

5 points	Applicant demonstrates a strong track record of convening local partners and notable achievements that advance community development and economic development goals and projects.
3 points	Applicant provides some evidence of convening local partners and notable achievements that advance community and economic development goals and projects.
1 point	Applicant does not demonstrate a track record for convening local partners and notable achievements that advance community and economic development goals and projects.

Artistic Excellence in Past Activities and Projects

Describe the applicant's experience in providing exceptional creative placemaking activities and/or arts and cultural programming. This may include projects that have occurred or are in development. The Iowa Arts Council defines creative placemaking as a proven approach to revitalizing communities by putting the arts, culture and heritage at the center of community and economic development efforts.

Scoring: 5 points possible

5 points	Applicant demonstrates a successful history of exceptional arts and culture programming and creative placemaking activities.
3 points	Applicant shows some experience with quality arts and culture programming and/or creative placemaking activities.
1 point	Applicant does not have a record of past arts and culture programming or creative placemaking activities.

Readiness to Engage

Share why the community feels that it is the right time to engage with other communities and experts in a peer-learning environment. How will participating in this program, technical assistance and funding resources increase momentum around existing creative placemaking efforts in your community? Briefly share any anticipated challenges with taking part in multiple in-person meetings.

Scoring: 5 points possible

5 points	Applicant clearly demonstrates the community's readiness to learn and engage and why now is the right time to participate in the program. Its participation is very likely to increase momentum around existing creative placemaking efforts.
3 points	Applicant provides some evidence of how its participation and the program resources may benefit the community and existing creative placemaking programs.
1 point	Applicant does not address why it is the right time to participate and/or the benefit of its participation to the community is unclear.

Community Engagement and Vision Plan

Describe the community's approach to resident and partner engagement. Does the community have a formal community vision plan in place? Include information such as:

- Details about the process for community engagement including ongoing efforts to ensure awareness of stakeholder priorities
- When was the community or vision plan completed? Include any efforts to revise or amend the existing plan.
- Note any creative placemaking goals or projects that are identified in the vision plan.

Scoring: 5 points possible

5 points	Applicant has a demonstrated track record of engaging residents and partners in community development projects and has a community vision plan in place that strongly reflects stakeholder priorities related to creative placemaking.
3 points	Applicant has made efforts to engage residents and partners in community development projects and has a community vision plan in place that adequately reflects stakeholder priorities related to creative placemaking.
1 point	Applicant has not made efforts to engage residents and partners in community development projects. The community vision plan is missing or lacks stakeholder input on priorities related to creative placemaking.

Program Participants

Communities are expected to form a team of 3-4 community leaders who will participate in all the program workshops. Including the applicant organization, teams should include at least one representative from local government, economic development or the business community; one representative from a local arts, cultural or civic organization (Board member, volunteer, staff, etc.); and one local artist or creative. Describe who will be participating in the program, including:

- Who will be participating in the program and how long they have been in their role or occupation
- Role and involvement within greater community
- Their level of commitment to participating in the program, if selected.
- Succession plans to replace team members as needed to ensure project planning continues.
- Demonstrated collaboration among team members and maintaining team functionality, managing team member turnover including succession planning, organizational support and/or backup participants.

Scoring: 5 points possible

5 points	Program participants reflect a cross-section of community leadership and have established roles and involvement in community development efforts. The local leadership team is fully committed to engaging in the program activities. Plans in place to replace team members if there is turnover.
3 points	Program participants represent more than one community sector and are involved in community development efforts. The members of the leadership team are mostly committed to engaging in the program activities. Some plans in place to replace team members if there is turnover.
1 point	The names of the program participants, their roles and involvement in the community, and/or their commitment to participating in the program are unclear. No plans are in place to replace team members if there is turnover.

Overall Application

The following scoring criteria reference the quality of the proposal and application as a whole and not a particular question.

Scoring: 5 points possible

5 points	Value of the project to lowans is clear. The project is relevant to the audience or communities the applicant aims to serve.
3 points	The project may be of value to lowans. The project may be relevant to the audience or communities the applicant aims to serve.
1 point	Value of the project to lowans is unclear. It is unclear if the project will be relevant to the audience or communities the applicant aims to serve.

Case for Support

Scoring: 5 points possible

5 points	The applicant has made a clear case for participation in the program and state investment.
3 points	The applicant has made an adequate case for participation in the program and state investment.
1 point	The applicant's case for participation in the program and/or state investment is unclear or inadequate.

GLOSSARY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

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