

# March 2021

## East Central Iowa Council of Governments

[ecicog.org](http://ecicog.org)

### Newsletter

#### [Learn More About ECICOG's Business Loan Program](#)

ECICOG is excited to announce a webinar on its [Revolving Loan Fund \(RLF\) program](#) on March 24 at 1 pm. Business owners and economic development partners in Benton, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington counties are invited to learn about the program, including opportunities to borrow funds with no interest for two years. Loans through the RLF program can help with COVID-19 recovery, development, and expansion. Attendees will learn about program qualifications and requirements, hear directly from participants about their experiences with the RLF, and ask questions of ECICOG's economic development experts. [Click here](#) to register for this webinar! Contact ECICOG Senior Planner / Economic Development Specialist [Adam Bentley](#) with questions.

#### [ECICOG Secures Funding for New Transportation Facility](#)

ECICOG helped Benton County secure a \$318,000 Iowa Public Transit Infrastructure Grant (PTIG) to build a new bus storage and administrative building in Vinton. Benton County Transportation moved into the new building March 8, 2021. At 9,600 square feet, the building houses nearly all Benton County's CorridorRides buses indoors. It also includes office space, a wash bay, and space for light maintenance. ECICOG has previously secured similar funding for a transportation facility in Jones County. Contact Transit Administrator / Planner [Brock Grenis](#) for more information about our transit services.

#### [Restore Your Community's Tree Canopy](#)

Does your community need help with tree replanting efforts following the Derecho? Community Disaster Recovery Coordinator Nick McGrath is working on behalf of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Trees Forever to help Iowa communities with their tree recovery. Nick's services include identifying funding opportunities, assisting with tree health assessments, securing trees and coordinating volunteers. Community representatives are strongly encouraged to complete the [Community Derecho Recovery Needs survey](#), which will provide baseline information the Iowa DNR and Trees Forever can use to offer the best support to each community and help assess needs moving forward. Contact Nick McGrath at (515) 291-6555 or [nick.mcgrath@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:nick.mcgrath@dnr.iowa.gov) for more information.

#### [Housing Trust Funds Granted \\$445,500 for Housing Rehabilitation](#)

ECICOG submitted applications for Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB) grants on behalf of the three housing trust funds in our region: East Central Iowa Housing Trust Fund, Housing Fund for Linn County, and Housing Trust Fund of Johnson County. All three grants were rewarded, totaling \$445,500. This will fund rehabilitation on 10 owner-occupied homes in each trust fund area. At least \$15,000 will go toward each home. For more information about our housing services, contact Housing & Community Development Director [Tracey Achenbach](#).

## [Thank you ECICOG Board!](#)

ECICOG is governed by a board of directors comprised of elected officials and private citizens. These dedicated public servants keep us true to our mission of serving our communities and bettering our region. We would like to thank the following board members who stepped down in 2020: Les Beck (Linn County), Meghann Foster (City of Coralville), Al Havens (City of Tiffin), Randy Laubscher (Johnson County citizen) and Janice Weiner (City of Iowa City). And a big welcome to the following new board members: Louise From (City of University Heights), Rod Sullivan (Johnson County), Lauren Whitehead (City of Solon), David Connolly (City of Cedar Rapids), Mary Audia (Washington County Economic Development Group), Bethany Sarazin (City of Alburnett), and Adam Griggs (City of Central City). We would like to extend a special thank you to Don Gray, former mayor of Central City, who served on the ECICOG Board for over 15 years. ECICOG also wishes to recognize the outstanding contributions of Dean Spina. Dean was instrumental in the formation of the Housing Fund for Linn County (HFfLC) in 2007 and served on the board for many years. ECICOG provides staff services to the HFfLC. For more information about our board members, visit [our website](#) or contact Executive Director [Karen Kurt](#).

## **Funding Opportunities**

### [Rural Housing Assessment Grant Program](#)

*Due April 16, 2021*

In partnership with Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach's Rural Housing Readiness Assessment workshops, the Rural Housing Assessment Grant empowers communities to assess the current development environment and enact changes resulting in the creation of policies and procedures attractive to potential developers. Grant amounts are \$10,000 with a cash match of \$5,000. Eligible cities have a population of 20,000 or fewer and are not contiguous to a city with a population of 40,000 or greater. Visit the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) [Rural Housing Assessment Program website](#) or contact Community Development and Housing Director [Tracey Achenbach](#) for more information.

### [Rural Innovation Grant Program](#)

*Due April 16*

The Rural Innovation Grant program supports creative, non-traditional ideas about rural communities' current issues or challenges associated with the themes of community investment, growth and connection. Iowa businesses, colleges, universities, city and county governments, and private 501(c)3 nonprofit agencies and foundations are eligible. Maximum grant amount is \$20,000 with a 1:1/2 cash match requirement. Visit the IEDA [Rural Innovation Grant Program website](#) or contact ECICOG Senior Planner / Economic Development Specialist [Adam Bentley](#) for more information.

### [AARP Community Challenge](#)

*Due April 14, 2021*

The AARP Community Challenge provides small grants to fund quick-action projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages. Applications are accepted for projects to improve public spaces, housing, transportation, civic engagement, coronavirus recovery, diversity and inclusion, and more. Grants can range from several hundred dollars for smaller, short-term activities to several thousand or tens of thousands of dollars for larger projects. Government entities and non-profits are eligible to apply. For more information and to apply, visit the [AARP Challenge website](#).

## [Community Heart & Soul Seed Grant](#)

Community Heart & Soul announced a new funding opportunity for small cities and towns nationwide. The Community Heart & Soul Seed Grant Program provides startup funding of \$10,000 for resident-driven groups in communities of 2,500 to 30,000 to implement the Community Heart & Soul model. The model engages the entire population of a town to identify what they love most about their community, what future they want for it, and how to achieve it. For more information and to apply, visit the Community Heart & Soul [Seed Grant Program website](#).

## [2020 Annual Report](#)

*Due February 12*

While 2020 dealt some unexpected challenges in the form of a pandemic and unprecedented windstorm, the ECICOG team remained steadfast in our commitment to serving our region and local communities. Our 2020 annual report highlights some of ECICOG's work during the last year. [Click here](#) to download it!