



Support Rural Wisconsin Creative Economy Grant Program:

*A comprehensive approach to **CREATIVE ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT** in **RURAL WISCONSIN** through plan development, plan implementation, marketing, branding and promotion.*

On behalf of Create Wisconsin, Destinations Wisconsin, League of Wisconsin Municipalities, Wisconsin Towns Association, Wisconsin Counties Association, Wisconsin Restaurant Association, Wisconsin Downtown Action Council, and Wisconsin Rural Partners, we respectfully ask for your support of legislation to establish the **RURAL WISCONSIN CREATIVE ECONOMY GRANT PROGRAM**, authored by Representative Todd Novak (R-Dodgeville) and Senator Romaine Quinn (R-Birchwood). Under the bill, matching grants of up to a maximum \$50,000 would be awarded competitively by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to economic development organizations and municipal, town, county and tribal governments to increase tourism, enhance visitor experiences and/or bolster community development in rural Wisconsin through the development or promotion of creative enterprise. "Rural area" includes a city, village, or town in this state that has a population of less than 10,000 or a county in this state that has a population of less than 55,000.

ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES INCLUDE:

PUBLIC ARTS

- o Performance, to include production costs, artist stipends, and supplies.
- o Exhibition, to include production costs, artist stipends, and supplies.

PUBLIC SPACE

- o Repair or renovation of vacant and underutilized buildings to include construction costs, artist stipends, and supplies.
- o Signage and matching facades.

COMMUNITY-BASED ARTS EDUCATION

- o Community programs that provide non-school arts and creative education and engagement.

BUSINESS ACCELERATOR PROGRAMS

- o Technical assistance for creative enterprises. "Creative enterprise" means a business, product or service having an artistic, cultural, creative, or aesthetic value."

MARKETING, BRANDING AND PROMOTION

The grant program would be administered by WEDC's **OFFICE OF RURAL PROSPERITY (ORP)** whose mission is to *foster vibrant, prosperous and resilient rural communities across Wisconsin*. The Office provides a one-stop shop to help rural stakeholders navigate programs and resources serving rural communities and business.

VIBRANT COMMUNITIES ATTRACT TALENT

Community economic development leaders in Wisconsin and beyond recognize that **arts and culture sustain and attract people and businesses that underpin local economies**. Businesses and workers want to be in communities that have vibrant creative businesses harnessing culture, arts, and sense of place.

Many rural Wisconsin communities have authentic unique cultures to celebrate, yet they have long contended with problems related to an evolving economy, including the loss of industry and outmigration of young and skilled workers. **Wisconsin policymakers should consider a multipronged approach to better attract talent, including bolstering amenities that appeal to young adults**, according to [Moving In? Exploring Wisconsin's Migration Challenges](#).

TRAVEL VISITORS SEEK ARTS AND CULTURE

"Hundreds of thousands of people bring millions of dollars into the economies of Wisconsin's vibrant rural places each year, encouraged as much by arts and culture as by scenic beauty and outdoor assets," according to [Rural Voices for Prosperity: A Report of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity](#). *"Families who used to spend their time off sitting in a cabin taking in nature now also want, and sometimes expect, access to plentiful arts and cultural activities, along with interesting local foods, and unique shopping and lots to do."*

TOURISM BENEFITS STATE ECONOMY

"The travel sector is an integral part of the Wisconsin economy. Visitors generate significant economic benefits to households, businesses, and government alike and represent a critical driver of the state's future. In fact, in 2023, tourism activity generated \$25 billion in total business sales to businesses across the state," according to [Annual study by Tourism Economics](#).



**Tourism is
big business.**

**113 MILLION VISITS
in 2023, up 2 million
visits, or 1.7%, over the
previous year.**

2023 RECORD-BREAKING YEAR WISCONSIN'S TOURISM INDUSTRY

\$15.7B	\$25.0B	178,045	\$1.6B
DIRECT VISITOR SPENDING	TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT	JOBS GENERATED	STATE & LOCAL TAXES GENERATED

Source: Annual study by Tourism Economics commissioned by the Wisconsin Department of Tourism.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

Green County Economic Development Corporation

"There is a huge need in rural communities for something like this. It's a great opportunity to improve the look and feel of our neighborhoods while making them more accessible and enjoyable for everyone."~ Olivia Otte, Director

Langlade County Economic Development Corporation

"Our partners at the City Park and Rec and Langlade County Forestry Department have been enhancing placemaking opportunities throughout the City and County. We would

continue to work with our Artist Groups and focus on ways to continue to bring in more tourism!"~ Angie Close, Director

SW Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

"The one-stop shop approach incorporates aspects of WEDC's Vibrant Spaces and Tourism's GEM grant programs under one roof, providing greater flexibility"~ Troy Maggied, Director

Bayfield County Tourism; City of Washburn Mayor

"This grant program would be extremely helpful for the City of Washburn and Bayfield County as a whole. There is interest in some public art in Washburn and possibly an outdoor stage. I can also envision a guide/promotion for art galleries throughout the county." ~ Mary Motif, Director.

Waupaca Area Convention and Visitors Bureau

"it's refreshing to see a program aimed at development of creative experiences to drive community development/tourism as well as the marketing and promotional side of initiatives." ~ Jeff Anderson, Director.

Destination Driftless, Prairie du Chien

I think it is critical to have this funding to improve the vibrancy and economic well-being of rural communities in Wisconsin. We could use these funds to work with ~ Mark Lee, Director.

Eagle River Revitalization Program

"I think it is a great plan to increase the creative sector in our rural communities. I feel a grant of \$50,000 could really stimulate some projects in our community which would in turn increase tourism & economic development." ~ Karen Margolofsky, Director

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