



Program Description:

The Elevate Iowa Tourism: Education Scholarship aims to empower Iowa's tourism professionals through financial assistance, facilitating their participation in regional and national educational conferences. Administered by Iowa Travel Industry Partners (iTIP), with funding support from the Iowa Tourism Office (Iowa Economic Development Authority).

Program Goals

The program strives to:

- Enhance Professional Development by enabling tourism professionals to access high-quality learning experiences.
- Increase Representation of Iowa's tourism workforce at national industry events, elevating Iowa's presence in the tourism sector.
- Empower the Workforce by equipping participants with industry insights and best practices to benefit their communities and organizations.

Funding Details:

- The scholarship covers 60% of event registration costs and associated travel expenses, up to a maximum of \$2,250 per person.
- Eligible expenses include airfare, rental cars, mileage reimbursement, hotels, and transportation during the event, see the list of eligible expenses below.
- Up to \$40,000 is available for the 2026 year of the program.

Eligibility

- Employment Status: Applicants must be employed in the hospitality or tourism industry for a minimum of 6 months.
- iTIP Members: Priority consideration will be given to iTIP members, but the program will remain open to all employees of the Iowa tourism industry.
- Organization Limit: A maximum of two individuals from a single organization can receive funding per fiscal year, with no more than one individual per organization funded for the same event.
- Eligible Expenses: Event registration fees, travel (airfare, rental car, mileage reimbursement, etc.), lodging, and associated costs (gasoline, parking fees, baggage fees, etc). Meals are considered non-eligible expenses.
- Event Requirements: The scholarship will support attendance at professional development or education events relevant to tourism, excluding trade shows and sales events. Applicants are allowed to use the funding to support a conference they have attended in the past, as long as their application supports their reasoning why the conference provides value to them.

- Additional Scholarships: Priority consideration will be given to applicants who are not receiving other scholarships for the same event. Receipt of additional scholarships will result in a notable reduction to the applicant's overall Elevate Iowa score.
- Event Location: Event must be hosted by a regional/national level organization, most likely hosting in another state. Events hosted by Iowa based organizations are ineligible.

Eligible Expenses

Scholarship funds cover:

- Conference Registration Costs: Include a screenshot of registration pricing. Applicants encouraged to complete registration prior to early-bird pricing ending (if offered).
- Travel Expenses: Including airfare, mileage, gas, car rental, or other transportation. In-destination travel needs are eligible (i.e. Uber/Lift/Taxi) as well as mileage should the applicant need to drive to an airport prior to departure.
- Lodging: Hotel costs during the event.
- Other costs: Including baggage fees, airport/hotel parking fees. Airline seat selection / seat upgrade fees are non-eligible.
- Note: Meals are not reimbursable.
- Recipient has until December 31, 2026 to spend the funds.

Application Process

1. Submission: Applicants must provide a detailed budget, event relevance, and their commitment to covering the 40% match.
2. Scoring Criteria: Applications will be evaluated on event relevance, impact potential, membership status, and alignment with Iowa's strategic tourism goals.

Sponsorship Award Process

1. Initial Payment: Upon approval of the application, iTIP will reimburse the applicant for registration costs.
2. Reimbursement: Following the event, recipients will submit receipts for eligible travel expenses for reimbursement.
3. Required Reporting: All materials, including post-event evaluations and receipts, must be submitted within 45 days of the event's conclusion.

Post-Event Evaluation

Participants will be required to provide feedback on their experience, including:

- Key Takeaways: What they learned and how it can be applied within their work and community.
- Future Participation: Whether they plan to attend the event again and why.
- Session Insights: A brief summary of their favorite session and how the lessons can benefit other industry colleagues.

Administration

- Application Review Committee: A five-member volunteer committee, including iTIP staff, Travel Iowa staff, and industry professionals, will review applications. Committee members can apply for funding but will abstain from voting on their own applications. If you are interested in serving on this committee, please reach out to [Chelsea Lerud](#).

- Applicant Changes: In the event organizational/employment changes take place with the applicant that impacts the applicant from attending the conference, any funds paid to the point of notice will be expected to be returned to iTIP. Depending on circumstances, funds may be transferred to another individual of the same organization for the same conference with prior written approval from iTIP.
 - In the event the hosting organization cancels the conference after funds have been awarded to the applicant, funds may be allowed to be used towards a similar conference with prior written approval from iTIP.
- Reimbursement of Funds: Applicant may submit receipts for eligible expenses that were not included in the original application budget. The reimbursement cannot exceed the original awarded amount.

To apply for the Elevate Iowa Tourism: Education Scholarship, please complete the Google Form: [Application Form](#).

Program Questions:

Chelsea Lerud

Executive Director, iTIP

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Examples of Eligible Conferences

Explore the list of potential educational conferences below that you may consider applying to attend. Please note that applications are not restricted to these options; this list is designed to inspire your search for a conference that aligns with your interests and goals.

- American Alliance of Museums & Association of Midwest Museums
- American Association for State & Local History
- American Hotel & Lodging Association
- Destination Capitol Hill
- Destinations International Summits
- Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO)
- Institute for Organization Management (U.S. Chamber of Commerce)
- Meeting Planners International World Education Congress (MPI WEC)
- Midwest Fairs Association
- National Festival & Events Conference
- National Restaurant Association Conferences
- Sports Events & Tourism Association (Sports ETA) Summits
- SportsTravel Leadership Forum
- Travel & Tourism Research Association (TTRA) & CenStates Conference
- Upper Midwest Convention & Visitors Bureau (UMCVB)