ELEVATE IOWA TOURISM
Education Scholarship

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Program Description

The Elevate Iowa Tourism: Education Scholarship invests in the people who make Iowa tourism stronger. By helping tourism professionals attend regional and national educational conferences, the program opens doors to new ideas, meaningful connections, and professional growth.

Administered by Iowa Travel Industry Partners (iTIP), with funding support from the Iowa Tourism Office (Iowa Economic Development Authority), the scholarship focuses on three goals:

- **Enhance Professional Development:** Expand access to quality educational opportunities and industry expertise.
- **Increase Iowa's Representation:** Strengthen Iowa's presence at regional and national tourism industry events.
- **Empower the Workforce:** Equip tourism professionals with new ideas and best practices they can bring back to their organizations and communities.

Funding Details

The Elevate Iowa Tourism: Education Scholarship covers 60% of eligible conference registration and travel expenses, up to $2,250 per recipient. The recipient's organization is responsible for the remaining 40%.

Eligible expenses include conference registration, transportation, lodging, and other approved travel costs. A complete list appears below.
A total of $40,000 is available for the 2027 funding year.

Eligibility

- **Employment:** Applicants must have worked in Iowa's tourism or hospitality industry for at least six months.
- **iTIP Membership:** The scholarship is open to all Iowa tourism professionals, with priority consideration given to iTIP members.
- **Organization Limit:** Up to two individuals from the same organization may receive funding each year. Only one individual per organization may receive funding for the same event.
- **Eligible Events:** Conferences must focus on tourism education and skill development and be offered at a regional or national level.
    - **Ineligible Events:** State-level programs primarily serving an Iowa audience; trade shows and sales-focused events; and conferences primarily focused on industries outside tourism.
- **Previous Attendance:** Applicants may request funding for conferences they have attended previously but must explain the continued educational value.
- **Application Timing:** Applications must be submitted before attending the event.

- **Additional Scholarships:** Applicants receiving other scholarships for the same event will receive lower priority during the review process.

Timeline

- **Applications Open:** October 14, 2026
- **Application Deadline:** November 13, 2026, at 5:00 PM
- **Award Notifications:** By December 11, 2026
- **Funding Usage Period:** January 1 – December 31, 2027

Eligible Expenses

- **Conference Registration:** Registration fees for approved educational events. Applicants are encouraged to take advantage of early-bird pricing when available.
- **Travel:** Airfare, train fare, mileage reimbursement, rental cars, and ground transportation (Uber, Lyft, taxis, etc.). Mileage to and from the airport is also eligible.
- **Lodging:** Hotel accommodations during the conference.
- **Additional Expenses:** Baggage fees and airport or hotel parking fees.
- **Not Eligible:** Food and beverage, airline seat selection fees, and upgrades.

Scholarship Award & Reimbursement Process

1. **Initial Payment:** Following award approval, iTIP will provide the initial reimbursement for conference registration costs based on the approved application budget.
2. **Post-Event Reimbursement:** Following the conference, recipients will submit receipts for eligible travel and lodging expenses.
3. **Required Reporting:** All receipts and post-event evaluation materials will be submitted within 30 days of the conference's conclusion. Final reimbursement will not be issued until these materials have been submitted and reviewed.

Funding Acknowledgment: Recipients are required to recognize the financial support of Travel Iowa and iTIP in any public promotional materials, including social media posts, related to their conference attendance. Failure to acknowledge both organizations may impact the final reimbursement amount.

Administration

- **Application Review Committee:** Applications are reviewed by a five-member volunteer committee representing iTIP, the Iowa Tourism Office, and Iowa's tourism industry. Committee members may apply for funding but will not participate in reviewing or scoring their own applications. Interested in serving on the committee? Contact Chelsea Lerud at clerud@iowatravelindustry.org.
- **Changes in Employment:** If a recipient is unable to attend their approved conference due to employment or organizational changes, any scholarship funds already distributed must be returned to iTIP. With prior written approval, funding may be transferred to another individual within the same organization for the same conference.
- **Conference Cancellations or Inability to Attend:** If a conference is canceled or a recipient is unable to attend, iTIP must be notified. Any scholarship funds already distributed will be subject to review and may need to be returned. Recipients wishing to attend a different conference will need to submit a new application for consideration during a future funding round.

- **Reimbursement Adjustments:** Recipients may submit eligible expenses not included in their original application proposed budget. Total reimbursement will not exceed the original scholarship award.

Post-Event Evaluation

After your conference, you'll have 30 days to complete the Post-Event Survey and submit your reimbursement materials. Once everything has been submitted and reviewed, iTIP will process your final scholarship reimbursement.

The Post-Event Survey includes three questions:

1. **What was your biggest takeaway from the conference?** How will you apply what you learned?
2. **What was your favorite session?** Share an insight that could benefit other Iowa tourism professionals.
3. **Would you recommend this conference to other Iowa tourism professionals?** Why or why not?

Reimbursement Documentation

Before completing the Post-Event Survey:

1. Download and complete the Post-Event Reimbursement Form.
2. Gather receipts for all eligible expenses.
3. Combine your completed reimbursement form and receipts into one PDF file.
4. Upload the PDF when completing the Post-Event Survey.

Examples of Eligible Conferences

Looking for professional development opportunities? These conferences are a few examples of events that may qualify for Elevate Iowa Tourism funding. You're not limited to this list!

- American Alliance of Museums & Association of Midwest Museums
- Destinations International Summits
- Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO)
- Institute for Organization Management (U.S. Chamber of Commerce)
- Meeting Professionals International World Education Congress (MPI WEC)
- National Festival & Events Conference
- Sports Events & Tourism Association (Sports ETA) Summits
- Travel & Tourism Research Association (TTRA) Conferences

Program Questions:

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Program webpage: https://iowatravelindustry.org/funding-programs/elevate-iowa-tourism-education-scholarship/