

261—34.4(72GA, HF540) Pilot projects. The department is authorized by 1987 Iowa Acts, House File 540, to establish site locations for a welcome center pilot project.

34.4(1) Site categories. A welcome center may be located in any of the following sites for the pilot project:

- a. In proximity to interstate highways,
- b. In proximity to primary highways,
- c. In or near communities with populations of 5000 or less.

34.4(2) Eligible applicant. An applicant must either be an Iowa resident, a political subdivision of the state, or a business authorized to do business within the state to be eligible to apply under the pilot project.

34.4(3) Project eligibility. Eligible projects are those which expand the state's economy through the provision of facilities and programs where travelers can:

- a. Obtain information about travel and hospitality services, tourism attractions, park and recreation opportunities, cultural and natural resources, lodging and other support information.
- b. Have access to needed and convenient services, such as: restrooms; lodging information and event reservation services; souvenirs, crafts, arts, and food products originating in the state; food and beverages; and fishing, hunting, and other permits and licenses needed for recreation.
- c. Be welcomed to the state in a high quality manner that presents a positive, lasting image of the state of Iowa.

34.4(4) Assistance.

a. *Assistance amount.* Assistance will be available not to exceed 50 percent of the total project cost. Projects with local matches greater than 50 percent will receive priority, other things being equal.

b. *Assistance match.* The local match may take the form of, but is not limited to: funds; donations; private foundation grants; any federal or state grant not administered by the department of economic development, the department of natural resources, the department of cultural affairs, or the department of transportation; land, buildings, and other types of in-kind services, such as long-term operation and maintenance costs, including personnel, management or other related supports. Assistance applicants shall provide evidence of local match sources and document all in-kind services. The department maintains the authority to verify the value of all forms of local matches, including independent, approved real estate appraisals.

34.4(5) Application submission.

a. Applications shall be on the forms provided by the department and contain the information specified in the application materials.

b. Applications shall be received by the date and time specified by the department in the application materials. Late applications will not be reviewed by the department.

c. All application materials submitted shall be deemed to be sealed bids.

d. The department will not, directly or indirectly or in any manner whatsoever, at any time other than as provided in the pilot project application materials, open any sealed bid or convey or divulge to any person any part of the contents of a sealed bid.

e. After submission of a completed application, applicants may be requested to present their project proposal to the project review committee.

f. Two or more eligible applicants may submit a joint proposal. One of the coapplicants must be designated as the lead applicant.

34.4(6) Project review and selection.

a. *Review committee.* The role of the review committee will be to evaluate, by site category, applications that are submitted based on information provided and make recommendations to the director of the department of economic development. The director will make recommendations to the IDED board who will approve the final selection decision. The review committee will consist of representatives from the department of economic development, the department of natural resources, the department of cultural affairs, the department of transportation, the Iowa chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Iowa chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects and the Iowa travel council.

b. Consideration withheld. The committee will not consider any application which is not complete upon submission and for which additional information was requested and not received, or which was not presented in an interview session as requested by the committee.

c. Rating criteria. Rating of the applications will be based upon the following criteria and total points:

1. Project/program cost and budget 80 points
Evaluation of project/program cost and budget items includes development costs, operation costs, source of funding, and potential for self-sufficiency over time.

2. Project/program economic impact 200 points
Evaluation of project/program economic impact includes job creation; the local, regional, and state level economic benefits; current project visitation; increased visitation; impact of new center upon existing center; types and presentation of information provided; types of service provided; and electronic data telecommunication systems.

3. Project/program feasibility 200 points
Evaluation of project/program feasibility includes marketing and promotion, ownership, operation, average daily traffic, infrastructure availability, and project timing.

4. Project/program image quality 200 points
Evaluation of project/program image quality includes concept plans, project/program image, plans for quality, potential for success, natural features, visual quality, and provision of a planning team.

34.4(7) Project contract.

a. Selected pilot projects shall be required to enter into a contract with the department. Terms and conditions will be as negotiated with the department.

b. Following the negotiation of a contract, applicants selected for assistance shall commence project planning within 30 days and commence construction within 12 months after the signing of the contract.

c. In the event there are funds remaining after the initial pilot projects are selected; or if the applicant(s) selected fails to sign a contract with the department; or if a contract is terminated before all contract funds are expended, the department reserves the right to negotiate a site contract with the next highest ranked applicant in that category that meets the established criteria.

34.4(8) Record keeping. Recipients of financial assistance shall keep adequate records relating to the welcome center project. These records are subject to audit by the department or the auditor of state.

34.4(9) Project reviews. The department may monitor and inspect the funded welcome center projects as deemed necessary by the department.