



# BOOST REPORT

## Creston

## OVERVIEW

The following report summarizes the observations and recommendations resulting from the BOOST Team visit conducted in Creston, Iowa. The visit was a result of the City of Creston's successful BOOST grant application, a program administered by the Center for Rural Revitalization, a division of the Iowa Economic Development Authority. In preparation from the in-person visit and of this report, the BOOST Team reviewed the city's BOOST grant application, the 2019 Downtown Assessment report from the Iowa Downtown Resource Center, 2018-2019 Creston Uptown Update, Creston's Strategic Plan Summary, 2018 Walkability Assessment Report, and the 2040 Comprehensive Plan appendix with public response components.



The Creston BOOST Application requested a focus on Maple Street corridor and Uptown/Adams Street to McKinley Park. This report will emphasize findings on those areas as well as provide recommendations and feedback on additional target areas which will contribute to the overall health and vitality of the community. The visit included a driving and walking tour of the community and specific assets as well as a meeting with the local Steering Committee. Based upon these activities and the BOOST Team's extensive working knowledge in economic and community development, this report summarizes their findings and recommendations for Creston.

The Creston Steering Committee included:

Gabe Carroll  
Francis Ide  
David Marroquin  
Taylor McClellan  
Matt McCutchan

Jeremy Rounds  
Austin Smith  
Mindy Stalker  
Brian Zachary

The BOOST program aims to provide teams of experts to assist passionate community and business leaders in developing intentional plans for next step growth. The program is designed for rural communities, nonprofits, or employers to receive personalized technical assistance for identifying and implementing action steps to launch into the next stage of success. Recognizing that rural challenges do not exist in a silo, this program helps a community utilize its unique assets and challenges its leaders to set realistic goals to advance their economic development visions. A community that participates in this opportunity is committed to the creation of innovative strategies that promote partnerships, community design, and a viable economy. Experts will look holistically at the strengths and weaknesses of a community and partner in the development of solutions. Leveraging the expertise of Empower Rural Iowa task force members, IEDA/IFA staff, and Iowa Rural Development Council partners, each community works with a team to mentor and develop next steps.

The BOOST Program is designed to assist businesses or communities which have plateaued or hit an unexpected challenge to gain momentum for new growth. BOOST is not for the faint of heart. Grantees are committed to leading a transformation in rural Iowa if only in their own community, organization, or business. BOOST dispatches a team of experts to meet with a local steering committee and discuss the existing conditions, assets, and anticipated needs. The Center for Rural Revitalization and supporting partners then create an action plan and provide targeted financial support to launch next steps.

## BOOST TEAM

### DAVID BARKER

David is a partner in Barker Companies, which owns, manages, and develops apartments and other real estate. He is also a Regent on the Board of Regents of the State of Iowa, which oversees the three public universities in Iowa, and serves on the Governor of Iowa's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative. He is a Visiting Scholar at the University of Iowa and has been an Adjunct Professor at the University of Chicago, where he taught real estate investment and urban economics.

Barker has published articles in academic journals, and his research has been covered in publications such as Time Magazine, The New York Times, and The Economist. Barker was previously an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, where he conducted research on the banking industry. He holds a B.A. degree from the University of California at Berkeley, a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Chicago, and is an honorary Colonel of the Iowa State Militia. He lives in Iowa City, Iowa.



#### Areas of Expertise:

Finance  
Economics  
Housing

### DEREK FOLDEN

Derek is the Tax Credit Director for the Iowa Finance Authority and Iowa Economic Development Authority and oversees the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, Workforce Housing Tax Credit, State Historic Tax Credit and Redevelopment Tax Credit programs. Prior to his current role, he served as an IFA Multifamily Underwriter for more than a decade and as a Senior Underwriting Analyst for PNC Multifamily Capital for the HUD Multifamily Accelerated Program.

Derek has a Bachelor of Science degree from Minnesota State University, Mankato, a Master of Arts degree from the University of Minnesota, and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Iowa.



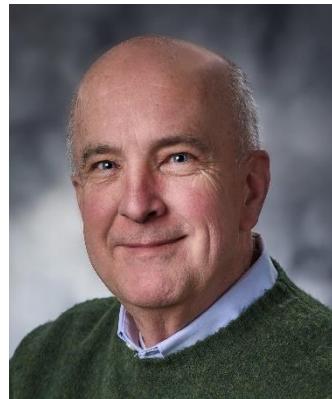
#### Areas of Expertise:

Housing Tax Credits  
Affordable Housing  
Multifamily Finance

---

## BILL MENNER

Bill is the founder of The Bill Menner Group, a consulting firm focused on community development, rural partnerships, and economic vitality. His work includes contract executive leadership of the Iowa Rural Development Council and the Iowa Housing Partnership. Prior to the creation of his company, Menner served the Obama Administration as Iowa's state director of USDA Rural Development. In that position, he oversaw an organization providing support for housing, community facility, energy and businesses across rural Iowa. Between 2009 and 2017, Rural Development invested more than \$5 billion in loans and grants in rural communities in Iowa. Before his White House appointment, Menner was economic development director in Grinnell, Iowa. There he also led downtown development, historic preservation and tourism efforts. He started his career as a public radio reporter in Ohio and Iowa. Menner is an active volunteer, serving on numerous boards and commissions. He currently serves as president of Partners for Rural America, chairs the American Hospital Association's Committee on Governance, is treasurer of the Grinnell Area Chamber of Commerce board and serves on the boards of the Grinnell Area Arts Council and the UnityPoint Health-Grinnell Regional Medical Center Foundation. A native of the Cleveland, Ohio-area, Menner is a graduate of Ohio State University with a BA in journalism and an MA in political science.



### Areas of Expertise

- Rural development
- Downtown development
- Historic preservation

---

## KILEY MILLER

Kiley is a nonprofit leader and economic development professional. He most recently served as President & CEO of Trees Forever, a volunteer-driven nonprofit based in Marion, Iowa that plants and cares for trees in communities across Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin. He was previously President & CEO of the Iowa Lakes Corridor Development Corporation, a four-county economic development organization in northwest Iowa, and Executive Vice President of the Mount Pleasant (Iowa) Area Chamber Alliance, his hometown chamber of commerce and economic development organization. He has supported industrial expansion and location projects that yielded more than \$700 million in capital investment and created or retained more than 600 jobs. Kiley has also been a print journalist and served in the US Army. He and his wife, Carry, live in Shueyville, Iowa. They have three adult children and a sheepadoodle named El Mago.



### Areas of Expertise

- Economic Development
- Community Development
- Placemaking

---

## MARK REINIG

Mark joined the Community and Economic Development group with Iowa State University Extension & Outreach in 2022 after 18 years at the Center for Industrial Research and Service in the College of Engineering as their Economic Development Program Manager. He has a B.S. in Business from Iowa State University and is a Certified Economic Developer. Mark develops strategies to strengthen ties between economic development organizations, communities and decision makers in Iowa and ISU. Mark sits on the Iowa Entrepreneurial Roundtable, and the Iowa Rural Development Council Board of Directors currently serving as the President. He is a member of the Governors Empower Rural Iowa Task Force. He is a member of the Professional Developers of Iowa serving as President during 2016 and the International Economic Development Council. Prior to his appointment at Iowa State University, Mark served as the Economic Development Program Director for the City of Ames for 15 years prior to his employment at Iowa State University.



### Areas of Expertise

- Community Development
- Economic Development
- Regional Development
- Disaster Recovery

---

## AMBER RODGERS

Amber is a lifelong Iowan who lives in her hometown of Corydon, a community of 1,600 in south central Iowa. She has a background in marketing communications, business development, and entrepreneurship and has worked across the private, non-profit, and public sectors. Amber works as a Business Development Manager at IEDA. In this role, she is responsible for developing and maintaining a portfolio of active prospects and projects, assisting with domestic and global company recruitment and job creation efforts, assisting with development and implementation of IEDA marketing efforts to position Iowa competitively, and promoting Iowa's business location advantages and economic development programs. Amber also works to identify expanding firms in need of assistance and actively works with community economic developers in Iowa to assist growing existing industries. Amber served as a city council member for 4 years in addition to leading many organizations in her community including the community foundation, economic development corporation, Chamber, and non-profit theatre board. She serves as a board member of the Professional Developers of Iowa, holds a BS from Iowa State University in Marketing and is currently completing her Master of Public Administration from Drake University.



### Areas of Expertise

- Business Development
- Rural Entrepreneurship
- Community Development

---

## NICK SORENSEN

Nick is a Downtown Real Estate Specialist with the Iowa Downtown Resource Center. In this role, he provides technical assistance to communities that focuses on real estate development issues in Iowa downtowns. Nick is currently the Program Manager of the Iowa Economic Development Authority Downtown Housing and Challenge Grants. Prior to joining the Iowa Downtown Resource Center team, Nick was a Peace Officer for 13 years, a Building Official, Zoning Official, Code Enforcement, Special Projects Coordinator for 5 years, Greene County Conservation Board member for 3 years, Midwest Partnership board member for 2 years, and Economic Vitality Chair for Jefferson Matters: Main Street for 2 years. In his role with many hats, Nick was project manager for a Community Development Block (Downtown Revitalization) Grant that rehabilitated 13 facades, acquiring, and rehabilitating 9 storefront buildings on behalf of the city, applying for, and receiving Iowa Economic Development Authority Catalyst and Challenge Grants and assisted Region XII Council of Governments with the installation of the first two Homes for Iowa homes. Nick currently is a member of the Iowa Rural Development Council.



### Areas of Expertise

Downtown Development  
Housing  
Historic Real Estate Finance  
Funding Mechanisms

---

## LIESL SEABERT

Liesl is a Florida native who moved to Iowa in 2016. She has a background in community development, consensus building, land use, and placemaking. Liesl works as the Rural Community Revitalization Program Manager within the Center for Rural Revitalization in the Iowa Economic Development Authority. In this role, Liesl is responsible for managing the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative, focused on developing policy recommendations addressing rural Iowa concerns through three task forces and implementing outcomes. She manages eight grant programs, hosts an annual leadership program summit, and provides technical assistance to rural communities across the state. Liesl serves as an ex-officio executive member of the Iowa Rural Development Council, Vice President of the APA Iowa Chapter, Secretary of the Keep Iowa Beautiful Board, serves on the Main Street Iowa Advisory Council, is a member of the Florida Bar and Georgia Bar, holds a BA from the College of William and Mary, JD from Florida State Law School, and MSP from Florida State University College of Urban and Regional Planning.



### Areas of Expertise:

Community Development  
Consensus Building  
Grant Management

## BOOST TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

The BOOST Team's recommendations have been grouped into seven areas with identified first steps and resources within each section.

- Community Buy-In & Communications
- Connecting Uptown to McKinley
- Creating a Marketing & Communications Strategy
- Streetscaping, Wayfinding, and Placemaking
- Downtown Building Improvements
- Housing Opportunities
- Volunteer Development

It is important to take one step at a time and understand that the longer-term recommendations are not of much consequence until the shorter-term recommendations are addressed. The BOOST Team hopes Creston will assess each recommendation and develop a plan to implement what is right for Creston. As the process gains momentum, community leadership will need to determine additional strategies and develop approaches that are more sophisticated.



## COMMUNITY BUY-IN & COMMUNICATIONS

The Creston steering committee identified two primary focus areas in their proposal: the Maple Street Corridor and the corridor between the historic depot and McKinley Park. The priority areas addressed convey a strong understanding of necessity to create a cohesive plan for visitors and residents to enjoy and experience community amenities. A necessary step in this process will be to ensure there is strong community buy-in for the end vision throughout the process.

## CHALLENGES

The BOOST team sensed that, while there is changing energy in the community, there is also continued division. It appears that the majority of the population is interested in progress and change, evidenced by such projects as the recent daycare center, historic rehab of downtown buildings, and implementing the rental inspections program, however there is still some resistance and lost cooperation due to misunderstandings of intent, goals, and organizational roles.

It will also be necessary to get those on the outer ring of Creston, including the highway businesses, to feel connected to the improvements happening in the downtown core. Currently there appears to be a divide between the two commercial hubs, but both attract different kinds of businesses and need to see each other's successes as beneficial to all in order for Creston to thrive.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The BOOST team sensed that, while there is changing energy in the community, there is also continued division. It appears that the majority of the population is interested in progress and change, evidenced by such projects as the recent daycare center and historic rehab of downtown buildings. If there is continued public support for implementing a rental inspections program, it could also lead to downtown improvement. However, there is still some resistance to change and lost cooperation due to misunderstandings of intent, goals, and organizational roles.

One of the keys to effective city leadership for downtown revitalization is communication. The city needs to proactively, on an ongoing basis, involve the entire community and strategic partners to develop and communicate the vision for downtown. That vision for downtown must be supported with the tools—policies, programs, and funding—to bring the vision to life.

Creston sometimes has a challenge with clear communication, in a way that reaches a broad audience. Based off of discussions during the visit, this often results in either missed opportunities or extensive leg-work by individuals to ensure messages are received. One consideration would be to have a single person working to coordinate the various groups and have a common location for updates, events, etc. Appointing a “point person” for all organizations to work through will benefit the entire community through easing of communication, ensuring there are fewer overlaps, and recognizing opportunities for synergies.

How does the city connect and communicate with the community? How does the city communicate on the development and implementation of programs, incentives, and policies? Is the city using high touch (one-on-one conversations, focus groups, public meetings, etc.) and high-tech (social media, digital surveys, website, scannable QR codes in public spaces, etc.) approaches? How can the city collaborate with its partners to communicate more effectively with the community, businesses, organizations, etc.?

Another recommendation is to take that a step further and consider consolidating/merging some common interest or function organizations. This will have the combined benefits of centralized communication, streamlining point of contacts for the community, and improving collaboration opportunities in addition to addressing capacity challenges. This process should be led and managed by an outside organization to provide an unbiased perspective on the roles and responsibilities of each organization.

Some initial questions to ask for each organization include:

- Who does what?
- Who has the authority?
- Who is responsible for implementation?
- What are the voids?
- Is there overlap?
- Is there confusion?
- Are there partnership opportunities?



## FIRST STEPS

1. Consider a strategic planning session or sessions to develop a corridor plan that will create buy-in from both those within the downtown area and those outside of it.
  - a. Strategically invite key stakeholders who have not engaged in previous downtown discussions.

- b. Determine metrics for success.
- 2. Gather the doers.
  - a. On a regular basis (bi-monthly or quarterly), invite all the various organizations throughout Creston to gather to informally share what each organization is working on, plans to be working on, areas in which each organization is in need of assistance and also would like to be of assistance in the community. If facilitated effectively, these regular meetings could really lay the foundation for better community collaboration and greater impact for each of the involved organizations.
- 3. Get the word out.
  - a. Working with the same groups gathered above, identify a lead entity for developing and overseeing the maintenance of a community news and events calendar site. Keep in mind the spirit of community partners and connections and that community news and events should not only be shared in a high-tech manner, but in a high-touch manner as well. That may mean hanging posters around town, community mailers, door hangers, listing events on the downtown square boulevard, advertisements in local news media, and putting on sandwich boards with event information on sidewalks and in key intersections.
  - b. Leverage high school students to interview businesspeople and share stories in print, on Facebook, websites, etc.
  - c. Ensure that there is cross-marketing happening on city-wide organization's websites and social pages. This should include sharing both existing projects and marketing opportunities.
- 4. If ready to consider consolidation - consider working with a consultant agency to conduct an analysis and action plan for merging multiple organizations.
  - a. Contact other communities who have gone through a similar combining of resources and agencies to learn best practices.
    - i. Centerville/Appanoose County has recently undergone a merging of organizations under one title. Mike Matthes – [economicdevelopment@pactiowa.org](mailto:economicdevelopment@pactiowa.org)
    - b. [UNI Institute for Decision Making](#) – Drew Conrad, [andrew.conrad@uni.edu](mailto:andrew.conrad@uni.edu)
- 5. Consider applying to Main Street Iowa for designation. The community is in a strong position with progressive leadership and should investigate the opportunity for designation.
  - a. [Main Street Iowa | Iowa Economic Development Authority \(iowaeda.com\)](#)
  - b. Michael Wagler, Main Street Iowa State Coordinator, [michael.wagler@iowaeda.com](mailto:michael.wagler@iowaeda.com)

## CONNECTING UPTOWN TO MCKINLEY

Visit almost any thriving downtown district and chances are it is a walkable neighborhood. Walkability is, by definition, "The extent to which the built environment is friendly to the presence of people living, shopping, visiting, enjoying or spending time in an area." In a walkable downtown, people can safely navigate from place to place, it is aesthetically pleasing, and guests are drawn to visit on foot. The goal is for visitors to "park once" and walk to multiple destinations during their stay.

Architecture and Design magazine identifies the following characteristics of a walkable city:

- Coherence – clear and organized sidewalk, street, and land use system consistent with the scale and function of the urban context. (sidewalk and street should link points of interest and activity, provide clean lines of sight and include simple, instructive signage)
- Continuity – pattern of design and usage that unifies the pedestrian system (complimentary streetscaping along perpendicular and parallel streets)
- Equilibrium – a balance of transportation modes that accommodate and encourage pedestrian usage

- Safety – pedestrians are protected from automobiles and bicycles. (bump outs, crosswalks, bike lanes, etc.)
- Comfort – sidewalks should provide a variety of uses and activities characteristic to an urban environment (benches, bike racks, etc.)
- Accessibility – individuals are able to utilize the environment as fully as possible (wheelchair, stroller, audio at crosswalks)
- Efficiency – simple and cost effective in design and function (use budget wisely)
- Attractiveness – clean, efficient, well-maintained surroundings with adjacent storefronts and activities that provide sidewalk interest.

Creston completed a walkability study in August, 2018 and many of those findings remain the same today. That study did not consider the walkability to the city park, but the outcomes are unaffected. According to Walkscore.com, Creston has a Walkability score of 73, which means most errands can be accomplished on foot. Bikeability is also measured, and it is noteworthy that Creston's Bikeable score ranks at 58, which indicates the community has some bike infrastructure. This is a great starting point for the downtown and indicates that it is not the lack of amenities that would be keeping people out of the downtown.

Challenges identified by the BOOST team related to walkability in the downtown and the connection to McKinley included:

- Lack of sidewalks/condition of sidewalks
- Crosswalk safety for pedestrians
- Unattractive or nonexistent streetscape
- Inconsistent pedestrian pathways

The big vision of creating a clear, enjoyable, and safe connection from Uptown to McKinley Park will require an intentional short-term and long-term approach to development and maintenance of pedestrian and cyclist pathways. The BOOST Team applauds that goal and has developed the following recommendations for next steps to accomplish it.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Most importantly, this project should not exist in a silo. It is important that the plan and strategy moving forward incorporates the other recommendations in this report. For example, wayfinding needs to be part of the plan but that should not be developed before branding decisions have been made. Additionally, while the street should not be renamed, the corridor should be something distinctive.

Ensuring that residents are able to safely access existing parks, trails, and commercial areas by walking and biking will help encourage more activity and support of expanding these connectivity resources. Creston has a foundational network of trails on the western edge of the city that is somewhat disconnected from the larger community, this would be addressed by the proposed linear park to Uptown from McKinley. Improving



accessibility to these trails by connecting them to nearby neighborhoods and the Uptown business district will open up a new outlet for residents of Creston.

Some existing sidewalks along Adams Street are 8 feet wide, making them suitable for trail use today. However, these sidewalks begin to narrow and eventually disappear as they move west from Uptown Creston. Widening the sidewalks to a uniform width of 8 feet along Adams Avenue would establish a safe and comfortable trail connecting Uptown with McKinley Park and the existing trails that are already in place.

As recommended in the Wellmark Assessment, consider putting Sumner Avenue on a “road diet”. This would both increase the perception of safety for cyclists and pedestrians as well as free up potential space for a robust connection from Uptown to McKinley.



---

## FIRST STEPS

- Establish and enforce an annual sidewalk inspection and repair program throughout the city.
  - Connect with the League of Cities for example ordinances or policies on sidewalk inspection and repair programs. Mickey Shields, [mickeyshields@iowaleague.org](mailto:mickeyshields@iowaleague.org)
- Consider conducting another walking audit of Maple Street to Adams Street and all the way to McKinley Park, reviewing the street widths and other characteristics, including those that seem to work well, as a first step in understanding where immediate improvement is needed.
- Work with a consultant to develop a vision plan for Maple Street to the Adams Corridor and Linear Park to McKinley.
  - Incorporate a bike/pedestrian plan into the corridor plan to identify ways to make walking and bicycling safer and more appealing.
  - Incorporate a placemaking/arts strategy into the corridor plan. Consider partnering with Southwestern Community College or the local high school for functional art along the corridor – such as benches, trash bins, or signage.
- Contact DOT about next steps in narrowing Sumner Avenue.



## CREATING A MARKETING & BRANDING STRATEGY

During and after the in-person meeting, the BOOST Team and local Creston Steering Committee talked through some of the ways Creston could or should be marketing themselves. How are you telling your story?

### CHALLENGES

Marketing and communications are woven throughout the community conversation with the BOOST team. There are many unique elements to Creston, the challenge will be to encapsulate them into an identity that the community can embrace.

The railroad bisects the community, Creston is named so as it was on the “crest” of the railroad line between the Missouri and Mississippi river basins. It was the division point for the railroad who built machine shops, a roundhouse, and a construction camp in the new town. The community should be embracing the railroad rather than seeing it as an impediment.

- Increase awareness of the outdoor amenities, including McKinley Park
- How to get and keep people excited and engaged in the community
- Connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists among assets

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### BRANDING

As previously mentioned, Creston has many unique attributes that could be considered when developing a brand. Just to name a few:

- Center for the arts
- Outdoor activities
- “High Lakes Country”
- Railroad/train depot/Amtrak
- Hot Air Brewing



Creston could bring in public input on this effort in a variety of ways – assistance with the development of and then voting on a slogan or brand or logo. This could then be printed on shirts, posters, stickers, etc. to spark community pride and a sense of place.

#### PEDESTRIANS, CYCLISTS & MOTORISTS

Start by taking an inventory on signage. What signage is there and where is it pointed to? Do not just put signs up to put them up but plan out how you want people to engage with your community and what businesses or assets you are wanting to be a part of this as well.

Consider the following:

- What will be the experience once people arrive?
- Does main street have storefronts that are inviting? Is it safe to cross the street?

- Are there bike racks downtown and at the park? Are they located in a spot that is convenient?
- How can you encourage people to linger?
  - The proposed virtual mural tour would be an excellent method to encourage visitors and residents to stay longer downtown to experience the tour and other offerings.
    - [Iowa Tourism Grants | Travel Iowa Industry Partners](#)
    - Lora Friest, Tourism Liaison, [lora.friest@iowaeda.com](mailto:lora.friest@iowaeda.com)

---

## BUSINESSES

- Marketing Message
  - If they are not already, send some community and business members to the Iowa [Downtown Conference](#)
  - Reach out to local high school and see how students are engaging with the community – does the school partner with the community?
  - Analyze how people in the community receive their information.
    - Work to put together a marketing and communication plan.
      - Reach out to Southwestern Community College for opportunity to use Creston as a class project for creating a branding or marketing plan for the community. Or a design class for the logo.
      - Additionally, [ISU Extension](#) has a group that can assist with that.
      - [Community and Economic Development](#) has a listing of services that they can help a community with – these are fee based but reasonable.
- Success Stories
  - Share who you are and why people need to visit
  - Do write-ups of the success you have
  - Get local students to do the articles – this also engages them in the conversation.
  - Incorporate city/county/local businesses and get them engaged – photos for the articles
  - Contact alumni from the schools



## STREETSCAPING, WAYFINDING & PLACEMAKING

A community's downtown and the main roads leading to downtown serve as a welcome mat and as the front porch for community residents and guests. That includes potential future employers and employees. The appearance of downtown and surrounding neighborhoods often provides a visual clue as to the level of commitment a city and its residents have to community pride.

In Creston, it was visually evident that the community at one time had great pride, but that the pride some time in recent history had at least waned in some respects. The BOOST Team recognizes that the City and key partners are working together to reinvigorate a sense of local pride across the community and it does seem that community pride is once again on the upswing and is being felt within the community.

### RECOMMENDATION: BEAUTIFICATION

Beautification projects are an excellent opportunity to gather the community to make a quick, low-cost visual impact. Uptown beautification projects should focus on:

- Weed and litter removal
- Painting crosswalks, benches, and buildings
- Window displays in both occupied and unoccupied buildings. Window displays in unoccupied buildings could promote existing businesses, upcoming community events or depict potential redevelopment opportunities for that space.

Creston has several Uptown alleys that could be enhanced to improve the pedestrian experience, connect destinations, and create opportunities for outdoor dining and art.

The city must lead by example by making sure that all public facilities, buildings, grounds and right-of-way are maintained to a high standard with a quality and appropriate appearance. Take a visual inventory of city-owned public facilities, buildings, grounds, and right-of-way. Clean up and make visual improvements to those areas where needed.

Sponsor a home, yard, or facade of the month competition.

Sponsor local contests that will encourage citizens to take action to improve community and curb appearance. The nominees could be nominated by others within the community and by city staff. Winners could receive recognition in local media, a yard sign, and a gift card to downtown businesses or the local hardware store.

Work on enhancing neighborhood cleanups. Partner with local community leaders, concerned citizens, city staff, and local trash removal service provider to examine if the current community-wide clean-up event is meeting the city's and community's goals? How might the clean-up event be improved to have an even more dramatic impact on community pride and appearance? Could the clean-up event be augmented with additional scrub days with city or local solid waste hauler dumpsters scheduled in various neighborhoods on a regular basis for localized clean-up events? These types of events help to improve overall community appearance and safety and build goodwill within the community. Consider adding an annual or semi-annual event where service organizations and neighbors come together to help neighbors in need of assistance make improvements in and around their homes such as painting the home, improving accessibility to and within



Figure 1: Charles City "WonderFALL" Business Decorating Contest

the home, and sprucing up landscaping. The [Keep Iowa Beautiful Paint Iowa Beautiful Grant](#) may be a resource to help supply paint for community painting projects.

#### RECOMMENDATION: STREETSCAPING

By “streetscape” we mean the space from building storefront across to building storefront and everything in between including, but not limited to, the street, sidewalks, lighting, trees, landscaping, art, seating, waste and recycling containers, banners, signs, bike racks, play areas, gathering spaces, smells, sounds, window displays, etc. Is your downtown public space, including the public streets, designed to prioritize public access and use for people of all ages and abilities or is it designed mainly for cars and trucks?

A well designed, implemented, and maintained streetscape can help create the environment and atmosphere that you desire for your downtown. Often, it is the attention to the small details that leads to fond memories of downtowns. It might be public art, the smells, the lighting, the public gathering spaces. Think of memorable places you have visited. What about the environment of that place made it memorable, fun, thriving, romantic, etc.? We recommend that all communities go the extra mile. Avoid stale, sterile walking experiences and creatively create places that people want to be.

Implement items identified below. Design and implement the improvements in a manner that reflects the type of downtown environment you are seeking (formal, colorful, whimsical, romantic, playful, etc.). Consider benches, color, plantings, waste receptacles, garbage bins, lighting, signs (blade), outdoor seating and dining, public art, attractive vacant windows, and cleanliness.

Consider improvements like those implemented in Macedonia. They designed the fencing locally, created a donation platform, and installed with volunteers.

Utilize planters and outdoor seating to create sidewalk areas to enjoy the coffee from the coffee shop or read a book. With the sloping elevation creativity may be KEY. Add similar flower containers, seating and amenities to create a rhythm throughout the core blocks. Change the content of your street containers throughout the year.



Figure 2: Macedonia Streetscape Example

#### RECOMMENDATION: WAYFINDING

The BOOST team saw very few signs directing visitors to the downtown and the destination attractions. In fact, some of the team members were surprised by the massive amount of assets in McKinley Park, which felt like a hidden gem in the community (that should not be hidden!). The signs the team did see were often small, non-descript signs in not the most impactful locations.

Creston should develop and implement wayfinding in a way that complements the branding efforts of the community. A comprehensive signage system could help celebrate Creston's community character, welcome visitors, highlight what Uptown Creston has to offer, and increase visits to downtown.

Start by gathering a small group of people, including people new to Creston or from outside Creston. Take that group on a driving tour and enter the community from all different directions on the main roads to Creston. Identify decision points along the way that need signs directing people where to find various places and services. Develop and implement wayfinding signs at those strategic locations.

What signage do you need to bring people into town? Attraction signs? Distance to destination signage?

Also consider the existing signage. Take down out-of-date signs and signs of businesses no longer active. Repair broken, damaged, leaning signs. If the sign no longer applies, whether it is a sign for a business no longer operating or a business that has moved or if the parking requirements are no longer valid or enforced, remove the sign. This also applies to parking limits if they are not enforced.

Establish a local sign grant program to help property owners and businesses improve their signs downtown. Make sure the signs tell passersby what is offered inside the building. Signs must be visible to walkers and bikers as well as motorists. Signs are an opportunity to add public art to the downtown while also reflecting the community's brand and creating a unique community identity. Consider partnering with local artists and school arts and industrial trades classes to design and build signs. "Open" banners and sandwich board signs are additional ways to attract customers by letting them know businesses are open and what is offered.

When it comes time to design the signs, consider having a design competition with students at the community college.

#### RECOMMENDATION: PLACEMAKING

A great greenspace should have multiple activities available (both passive and active), be accessible, be attractive, feel safe and comfortable, and be a place where people want to meet and come together to socialize.

Creston has tremendous opportunities to improve the functionality and size of existing downtown gathering spaces as well as opportunities to leverage the public right-of-way and streets to create unique gathering spaces.

For example, the pocket park on Oak and Montgomery should continue to have improvements, such as the addition of a small playground or water feature. The shelter area is a great start but next would include a reason to linger.

Another opportunity is with the multiple alleys throughout Uptown. If underutilized, an alley could be closed for seating, such as in Oskaloosa or Albia. These additional opportunities for greenspace, gathering, and resting can encourage visitors to stay longer in the area.

One area that Creston is thriving in is the addition of original, creative murals throughout downtown. These have quickly become a calling card for the community! As Creston looks to add additional murals, ensure that they use the appropriate paint for the surface. For example, a different paint should be used on bricks than cement walls.



## CABOOSE PARK

A key feature of the proposed linear corridor to McKinley Park is the Caboose Park across from the intersection of N. Oak St and W. Adams St. Currently this park is accessible to pedestrians after walking between a large, mostly empty parking lot and W. Adams St on a narrow sidewalk. Of key importance is improving access to the park itself from Uptown. Consider how pedestrians will feel on their way there. The new proposed park would be the trailhead of the corridor to McKinley park and could be incorporated in a future corridor plan.



The BOOST team noted an opportunity with the upcoming sewer and water project to several streets in Uptown. Many of them are underlaid with the original brick streets. Perhaps the city could bring those bricks to the Caboose Park to match the bricks there and expand the area around the caboose. Depending on the number of bricks, perhaps this could be incorporated as a design feature along the entire corridor to McKinley.

## RESOURCES

- Use university or community college students to design streetscaping, wayfinding, or placemaking features.
  - Manning: [ISU College of Design Students Create Functional Art for Manning | News \(iastate.edu\)](#)
- Iowa Arts Council Grants: [Iowa Arts Council | Iowa Arts & Culture \(iowaeda.com\)](#)
  - Creative Catalyst Grant
  - Art Project Grant
  - Jon Berg, Creative Community Development & Infrastructure Programs Manager, Iowa Arts Council, [jon.berg@iowaeda.com](mailto:jon.berg@iowaeda.com)
- Downtown Community Examples & Contacts
  - [Spencer](mailto:nancy@spencermainstreet.com) – [nancy@spencermainstreet.com](mailto:nancy@spencermainstreet.com)
  - [Le Mars](mailto:lori@lemarschamber.com) – [lori@lemarschamber.com](mailto:lori@lemarschamber.com)
  - [Cherokee](mailto:director@cherokeiowachamber.com) – [director@cherokeiowachamber.com](mailto:director@cherokeiowachamber.com)
- Programming options for planning and design assistance
  - [Community Heart and Soul](#)
    - Local contact: Jason Neises ([jason@dbqfoundation.org](mailto:jason@dbqfoundation.org)) with Greater Dubuque Community Foundation
  - [Hometown Pride \(Keep Iowa Beautiful\)](#)
  - [Strategic Doing](#)
    - Facilitators: Liesl Seabert ([liesl.seabert@iowaeda.com](mailto:liesl.seabert@iowaeda.com)) or Jim Thompson ([jim.thompson@iowaeda.com](mailto:jim.thompson@iowaeda.com))
  - [Community Visioning \(ISU and partners\)](#)



- Placemaking Grant
  - [OUR TOWN | National Endowment for the Arts](#)
  - [Hometown Grant Program: Revitalizing Small Towns | T-Mobile](#)
  - [Pop-Up! A toolkit for \(fun, invigorating, life-affirming\) Temporary Experiences](#)
  - [POW! A Plan of Work Template for Creative Community Projects](#)

## UPTOWN BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS

The health of a community's downtown has a direct impact upon the entire community's economic well-being. They are interrelated.

Downtown revitalization IS economic development. Downtown is a prime location for incubating small business, it is an affordable location for independent businesses and is historically one of the community's major employers. The commercial center provides a compact environment with multiple stories for commerce, government, and living spaces, thus reducing sprawl and the cost associated with extending city services and infrastructure.

The pedestrian friendly environment is convenient and accessible, serving as the center (community space) for not only commercial trade but also a hub for cultural, social, and civic engagement. A building's condition, the business' viability, and maximization of the building's square footage for income generation affect not only the property's value, but also the value of the neighboring properties and real estate in the entire community. Investments in Downtown allow it to "pay its fair share" in taxes resulting in lessening the tax burdens of its citizens and city government.

Most of our memories are directly associated with a PLACE. We "go back" to places we feel good about. We "go back" to places where we have had positive experiences. We "go back" to places where we have had fun. We "go back" to places we think are important. We are also attracted to places where we think we will have a positive experience. We must strive to keep Downtown a "go to" kind of destination, not an avoidable area we pass by on our way to destinations located on the outskirts of town.

The strength of downtown starts with a comprehensive focus to revitalization. The place to start will always be striving for attractive space & cooperative landlords. The best businesses want to occupy the most attractive spaces. Everyone wins when we create prime locations to occupy quality business. The more feet on the sidewalks creates more opportunity for customers to spend their money. Creating a partnership between the property owners and the city is critical to the long-term success of your downtown.

The physical elements and appropriate use of your historic commercial district, impact the potential for your future vibrancy. It is the buildings and how they are occupied that make your



downtown unique. This effort must be a partnership to create an environment for positive impacts. The goal needs to be a balance between encouraging the desired rehabilitation and incentivizing appropriate rehabilitation. It is vital that the buildings downtown be maintained and cared for by local stewards.

## CHALLENGES

The growth of Creston follows a ring around the center of the community. The hospital to the west, Southwestern Community College to the northwest, retail and child care center to the north, major retail to the south, hotels to the southwest, manufacturing to the east. With the development focus increasingly off of downtown, there needs to be intentional upgrades and investment in downtown, in addition to the consideration of incentives. If downtown is perceived as predominantly low income, dangerous, or run-down, residents will not support investment there.

While the current focus is on the Maple Street connection to Adams St, ensure that fundamental maintenance ordinances are upheld throughout the district.

## RECOMMENDATION 1: LOCAL DESIGN GUIDE

Create appropriate guidelines to consistently approach quality downtown building rehabilitation and gradually repair inappropriate rehab.

### ACTION STEP

- Consider adopting The Downtown Design Guide. Download the Downtown Design Guide developed by the Iowa Downtown Resource Center available at [design recommendations](#). You could adopt them and include them in your local considerations.

This could lead to possible incentives that should help “raise the bar” for improving the aesthetic and functional appeal of downtown. Incentivize the kinds of appropriate rehabilitation projects you want.



## RECOMMENDATION 2: INCENTIVES

To build on the partnerships created in action step above, investigate appropriate local incentives. You will always get what you incent. Make sure when you create a local incentive that they are flexible as well as direct to get what you desire. In some cases, you will have to break the disinvestment cycle. Let us make sure your local incentives create a positive cycle of investment. While there are some fundamental incentives available for developers in the downtown area, the city should consider potential targeted incentives to bring desirable uses into the downtown.

For example, a small clinic from the hospital, Airbnbs in the upper story renovations, a community college center (tutoring, business incubator, innovation center, etc.), and reestablishment of a theater downtown. The goal is to get more feet on the street in the downtown at all hours of the day.

- School Partnership Example: [The Foundry – Buena Vista University](#)

---

## ACTION STEPS

### 1. Further invest in Façade Improvement Grants.

This incentive partnered with your design guide will protect and save your buildings.

### 2. Consider façade mini grants.

Façade mini grants are an excellent way to encourage the kinds of desired improvements everyone will see demonstrated right before your eyes. And frankly, they make sense. They are not really all that expensive and you get what you want. Set expectations high and see the quality results. If no one applies, pick a different priority.

As you create these important local incentives make sure you stay connected with Iowa Downtown Resource Center on additional state and federal incentives. You now can provide additional local match to make your applications even more competitive.

### 3. Consider applying for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG).

Goal is to develop viable communities by providing decent housing and suitable living environments and expanding economic opportunities, principally for persons of low-and moderate income.

Funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

State's program only for non-entitlement communities (cities w/ pop. less than 50K)

Must meet a National Objective

Low-and Moderate-Income Benefit (70% of total funding)

Slum and Blight Elimination

Urgent Need

The most common uses for downtowns are:

Downtown Revitalization Fund

Upper Story Housing



4. Disabled Access Credit (ADA)

Two tax incentives are available to businesses to help cover the cost of making access improvements. The first is a tax credit that can be used for architectural adaptations, equipment acquisitions, and services such as sign language interpreters. The second is a tax deduction that can be used for architectural or transportation adaptations. (NOTE: A tax credit is subtracted from your tax liability after you calculate your taxes, while a tax deduction is subtracted from your total income before taxes, to establish your taxable income.)

5. Consider applying for other Center for Rural Revitalization Grants

[Rural Housing Assessment Grant Program | Iowa Economic Development Authority \(iowaeda.com\)](#)

The Rural Housing Assessment Grant program partners with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach through their Rural Housing Readiness Assessment Facilitation Process. Grant awardees use publicly available information and rural community efforts to interpret hard data and the current development environment through analysis of existing development codes, local ordinances, and housing incentives. This assessment then leads to a report of recommended next steps and grant funding to work towards immediate implementation.

[Rural Scale-Up Grant Program | Empower Rural Iowa | Iowa Economic Development \(iowaeda.com\)](#)

The Rural Scale-Up Grant program aims to support the replication and spread of creative solutions that are addressing current issues and challenges faced by rural communities. In 2020, the Center for Rural Revitalization, a division of the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), launched the Rural Innovation Grant program, supporting creative and unique solutions to rural challenges. Over the past annual funding cycles, grant recipients have illustrated best practices that are now primed for sharing across the state. Funding from the Scale-Up Grant program will assist other communities with the opportunity to implement these and other creative solutions.

[Rural Enrichment Grant Program | Empower Rural Iowa | Iowa Economic Development \(iowaeda.com\)](#)

The Rural Enrichment Grant program aims to support small quality of life projects that will create meaningful results in rural communities. Developing quality spaces for people to want to live, work, play, and engage will support the vibrancy of Iowa's rural places. Eligible projects must be open to the public and contribute to the vitality and engagement of the community.

*This program would be an ideal fit for projects such as the depot park, streetscaping including wayfinding signage and recycling bins, and linear park development.*

[Rural Innovation Grant Program | Iowa Economic Development Authority \(iowaeda.com\)](#)

The Rural Innovation Grant program supports big, innovative ideas that address challenges faced by rural communities associated with the themes of community investment, growth and connection and can serve as a model for other rural communities across Iowa.

Successful applications have identified a solution that has never been done and will make a community-wide or regional impact.

### RECOMMENDATION 3: RENT READY SITES

This must become one of the highest priorities of a downtown focused program. As you walk your district it is easy to miss the quality improved sites because the vacant underutilized ones control your interest. This is very unfortunate. Creston has some wonderful locations that sometimes get lost in the fog of inappropriate rehabilitation and vacancies that are not rent ready simply because no one has washed the windows or cleaned up the space.

---

#### ACTION STEPS

##### 1. Property clean-up

Create a volunteer driven process that partners with cooperative building owners that truly want to rent their spaces. Use your imagination to create a fun and enjoyable process of following up on a property owner visit. Start with easy tasks like washing windows and based on volunteer abilities move on to more comprehensive approaches.

##### 2. Property tours

As you accomplish these partnerships with property owners, move towards window graphic advertising based on what your market-based research desires to fill the space. Complete this process by holding property tours showing off the space and demonstrating what could be.

##### 3. Incentive priorities

Rent Ready Sites should be priorities for the incentives you have created to fill vacant space. Business expansion and recruitment should be encouraged.

### RECOMMENDATION 4: ORDINANCES

Considered a challenge and an opportunity, Creston is making progress in terms of code enforcement. However, both businesses in the downtown and houses had challenges such as plywood windows, peeling paint, and general lack of upkeep.

Taking this challenge head on will not come without significant investment, but the alternative is the eventual loss of buildings. Buildings that are torn down in downtowns rarely come back and the physical capacity/density of a downtown that has frequent demolition projects is weakened. The loss/demolition of buildings in a downtown destroys the very character and qualities that make it attractive – its walkable character and density. Downtowns are a place for walking and strolling. Continuous storefronts built to the sidewalk encourage people to walk from building to building, business to business. Downtown is a place to gather, do business and interact with other members of the community. It is a community's social and business hub...the heart of the town. Maintaining commerce, positive community image and a social center is exceedingly difficult with this type of decline. Downtown begins to look and feel like a place to simply drive through, not a pedestrian friendly walkable commercial neighborhood. Downtown is a destination. Now is the time to act.

Rental inspections, if supported by the public and well implemented, will be a great first step and show a desire for better quality of life in the downtown.

---

## ACTION STEPS

1. The first priority must be building maintenance. Poor building maintenance and inappropriate rehabilitation is a huge obstacle to your downtown revitalization efforts. Addressing these buildings is a challenge that will require substantial commitment and resources – of both time and money. Many communities have addressed buildings like these – some in even worse condition. Other buildings appear to be structurally sound but have had a number of well intentioned, but inappropriate alterations. Many suffer from deferred maintenance; others just need cosmetic improvements to enhance their inherent architectural character. This situation is not unique to Creston. Saving downtown must start with a proactive approach to save downtown buildings. Rehabilitation costs far exceed the property resale values and income potential of many of the buildings, which is very typical in downtown revitalization. The key is to find ways to fill this financial gap. Volunteer efforts and contributions can help reduce some costs. In addition, rents/income are subject to market realities. Therefore, subsidies/incentives are crucial to make these projects feasible. There must be a quality return on investment for building owners, business operators, city, county, and the school district through increased property tax collection. Create a win-win-win scenario. There are positive signs in downtown Creston. Focus on the positive and deal with the negative.

Consider a Minimum Maintenance Ordinance. This ordinance requirement is already included in city code. The goal should be to preserve the structural integrity of the building and property values while assuring a clean and attractive community.

2. Addressing the building use is fast becoming the first priority for communities wanting to deal with inappropriate uses like storage on the first floor or property owners allowing first floor storefront residential.

### Vacant Building Ordinance

This ordinance addresses current or future vacant commercial and industrial buildings which are dilapidated, unsafe, or inadequately maintained creating or contributing to blight. The city seeks to assure the property maintenance of vacant buildings for the purpose of preserving and promoting public health and safety and preventing public and private nuisances and potential fire hazards.

### Vacant Building Registry

Owners have 30 days from the date the building becomes vacant to file this form. The cost to register is free for the initial filing and the first 6-month period. If after the six-month period the building continues to remain vacant, an inspection of the building is made, and a fee charged. Each subsequent one-year period of vacancy will trigger a re-inspection and fee. The owner is responsible for all exterior and interior as well as lot maintenance. Failure to properly maintain the vacant building could result in increased renewal fees.

3. Enforcement

Unfortunately, this effort falls almost exclusively on the city, but it still should operate as a partnership effort. The city must be the lead, but the local community organizations must be in a very supportive role. Creston is fortunate to have some great examples of fully rehabilitated downtown buildings and can use that ROI vs those that are vacant and in disrepair to demonstrate that downtown improvement is economic development.

## RECOMMENDATION 5: INVESTMENTS

Creston has some excellent partners involved in community and economic development making big investments that are moving the needle. Greater Regional Health is one such partner, with the new child care facility the most recent example of their investment in the community. However, the community should consider other ways to provide opportunities for investment in projects moving forward. There may be untapped resources within the community and region who would be interested in contributing if there were clear paths for investment.

### ACTION STEPS

1. Ensure you are leveraging Union County Community Foundation grant opportunities. Consider if there are other ways to partner with the community foundation. [Union County Community Foundation \(desmoinesfoundation.org\)](http://UnionCountyCommunityFoundation.desmoinesfoundation.org)
  - a. Jacey Roy, [roy@desmoinesfoundation.org](mailto:roy@desmoinesfoundation.org)
2. Depending on the flexibility of the Union County Community Foundation, consider developing a local foundation to open opportunities for investment in Creston.
3. Examples of communities who have leveraged local foundation funding.
  - a. [The Big Give - Ord Nebraska](#)
  - b. [Sac Community Foundation | Sac City](#)
    - i. Sac City was also the recipient of a \$5.7 million community beautification and improvement gift from the estate of longtime resident John Criss, a bachelor of a multi-generation community family.  
Educating residents on this opportunity could be an unexpected win for the community.
  - c. [Homepage - Ottumwa Regional Legacy Foundation \(ottumwalegacy.org\)](#)
    - i. Legacy Foundation is a private foundation that was created in April 2010, following the sale of the assets of Ottumwa Regional Health Center to Regional Care Hospital Partners. To ensure that the net proceeds from this transaction would benefit those living in the community previously served by the health center's facility; a nonprofit charitable foundation was formed.
  - d. [Stanton Community Foundation - City of Stanton, Iowa \(stantoniowa.com\)](#)



## HOUSING

Housing is foundational to everything we value as a community. When people live in safe, stable, and appropriate housing, the community wins. Investing in an affordable home means more than improving quality of life, it means ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. Creston has the opportunity to consider housing options ranging from upper story downtown housing to infill, multifamily, and workforce and is in a pivotal moment through the recent hire of a housing director to take an intentional approach to the challenge.

Downtown Upper Story Housing options bridge Historic Preservation, Economic Development and Quality of Life. Historically first floor business and building owners lived above their businesses, but over time, these spaces have become run down, vacant, or just simply ignored. Buildings that stand empty lose money – not

just for the building owner, but also for the entire community. This not only helps property owners cash flow their buildings, but downtown housing also brings a whole new market of people downtown that eat in the restaurants, use the services, shop in the stores, walk the sidewalks and bring activity downtown. The character and types of spaces in historic buildings provide opportunities to create housing that is much different than a typical unit.

Strong downtowns/communities almost always have active residential space (but not in ground floor storefronts). Making use of every inch of a building helps property owners with cash flow and downtown residents bring activity, life, and customers to the downtown. Because many rural downtowns have so many underutilized and/or vacant buildings there are opportunities for this activity. It was said frequently that there is a housing shortage. Identifying the appropriate housing types desired is imperative.

The BOOST Team was told that there was potential for approximately 200 uppers story residential units downtown and that only 60 of them were occupied, with only about 20 of those being recently improved. Of the remaining 140 potential units, it is likely that 70 are not interested in rehab but another 70 might be. The opportunity is there for the City or another housing-focused partner to identify those property owners and incentivize the rehabilitation. Providing clear return on investment to these building owners, such as the story shared regarding the Roundhouse, can help push some into action. Retail follows residential.

In the more residential areas, consider taking advantage of a city-owned nuisance property as an infill lot for [Homes for Iowa](#) pilot.



## ACTION STEPS

1. Knowing where you are going as a community must start with understanding your current inventory. Create a housing task force to identify action steps. Consider applying for the Rural Housing Assessment grant. Start with a building inventory of what is occupied, what could be occupied, what has potential, and what is gut rehab.
2. Create local tools that can be used to assist you with prioritizing housing as an economic development tool. Every employer would like to have access to a broader talent pool.
3. Explore useful downtown development policies to support and encourage real estate development, housing, and the creation of partnerships.
4. Develop local incentives that encourage housing as an economic development tool.
5. Identify common misconceptions and unanticipated consequences of local decisions that are often made with best intentions but end up with negative impacts relating to the encouragement and support of downtown housing development.

- a. Consider an empty building tour, inviting not only the general public but city, county, and state officials to show the potential.
6. Work cooperatively to establish preferred parking for upper story apartment living.

---

## RESOURCES

- [CDBG Housing Rehabilitation | Iowa Economic Development Authority \(iowaeda.com\)](#)
- [Workforce Housing Tax Credit | Iowa Economic Development Authority \(iowaeda.com\)](#)
- [Community Catalyst Building Remediation | Iowa Economic Development Authority \(iowaeda.com\)](#)

## VOLUNTEERS

The City of Creston is filled with incredible resources that are encouraging growth and success for the residents and businesses. Creston shows positive energy, increasing collaboration, expertise, and a desire to make things the best they can be. One of the observations made by the BOOST community was a sense of potential burnout among some of the key partners, indicating both a need for increased leadership capacity and volunteerism to share the load.

Union County hosts two excellent leadership programs, for both youth and adults, that are a model for others across the state. Make sure you are leveraging these participants for future leadership roles on task forces, committees, and councils.



Volunteers are priceless so in addition to recruiting more volunteers, you need to keep them happy, so you retain them. Recognition that paid staff cannot do everything is important. Encouraging more people to become involved is crucial. The phrase "the more the merrier" is a philosophy Creston needs to continue to embrace.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Share the workload (and fun) at the committee level. As projects move forward, develop committees to manage the workload. This could be chaired by someone who reports directly to the City or Chamber or UCDA.
- Committees don't have to meet every month, this can result in fewer interested participants. Planning meetings can be conducted by small core groups. Other members can meet at other times, as needed, to discuss and plan specific next steps.

---

## ACTION STEPS

- If they don't already, Creston should have a request form for volunteers on its website and consider sharing the same form with other organizations as well. Make sure the form is specific enough that people will know what they are getting themselves into. Describe specific initiatives, existing committees, needs, and commitment expectations. If you can go a step further for events or activities and list specific tasks, jobs, and even post time slots volunteers are needed.

- Try to recruit a variety of volunteers: different ages, backgrounds, genders, organizations, etc. Specifically target student volunteers and see if major employers, such as the hospital, will set the standard that employees are expected to volunteer.
- Ask people for specific tasks because of their specific skillsets. People are more likely to say yes to this approach.
- Ask people to volunteer for specific events/activities. Not everyone wants to commit to a committee, but they will commit to something they like.
- Think about work/activities that have a beginning and an end. These are perfect opportunities for new volunteers. Again, remember that committees are not for everyone.
- Don't forget that a face-to-face ask is THE most effective method for volunteer recruitment. It is easy to say no to a message. It is much harder to say no to a person.

## CLOSING

The BOOST Team was impressed and energized by the potential in Creston! Taking initiative to invite new ideas and accept a constructive critique of a community is a commendable first step in this process. We hope this will be a living document to guide Creston as you move forward in your corridor and community development efforts. We encourage you to gather the community together soon to review the recommendations in this report and chart a course forward with the most popular ideas and form implementation teams. One of the best ways to build upon citizen interest and excitement is to identify “quick win” projects that show what is possible when the community comes together.

To assist the city and citizens of Creston in keeping the momentum for community improvement and growth going, the BOOST Team has offered to again visit Creston to answer questions or provide guidance during a public sharing of the report. Additionally, the Center for Rural Revitalization will continue to offer time and assistance. Contact Liesl Seabert to assist in developing and coordinating opportunities for quick implementation of projects.

Review and share the BOOST report.

- Provide a verbal report to local groups
- Send a press release to the local/regional newspapers
- Have a PDF of the report available on the city website
- Print off a couple of copies to share at the library
- Bring all partners who participated in the assessment visit together to discuss the report and offer feedback
- Share small components of the report on your social media platforms

Prioritize the actions the community should take. What quick projects could be within the next month or before the end of the year to show progress throughout the community? This should be in tandem with the determination on how to best leverage the grant funds associated with BOOST.

Identify partnership opportunities and gaps where partners are needed. Which group is best suited to tackle the projects identified as the highest priority to address first? Identify what support may be needed to accomplish their task – financial resources, labor, access?

***Celebrate your wins!***

## CONNECTIONS

---

### BOOST TEAM

David Barker, Barker Companies.....drb@barkerapartments.com  
Derek Folden, Tax Credits, IEDA|IFA.....derek.folden@iowafinance.com  
Bill Menner, Iowa Rural Development Council.....director@iowardc.org  
Kiley Miller.....kileyamiller13@gmail.com  
Mark Reinig, ISU Extension & Outreach.....mreinig@iastate.edu  
Amber Rodgers, Business Development, IEDA.....amber.rodgers@iowaeda.com  
Nick Sorensen, Downtown Resource Center, IEDA.....nick.sorensen@iowaeda.com  
Liesl Seabert, Center for Rural Revitalization, IEDA.....liesl.seabert@iowaeda.com

---

### CONTACTS

Jon Berg, Iowa Arts Council.....jon.berg@iowaeda.com  
Drew Conrad, UNI Institute for Decision Making.....andrew.conrad@uni.edu  
Lora Friest, Iowa Tourism.....lora.friest@iowaeda.com  
Mike Matthes, PACT (Centerville/Appanoose County) .....economicdevelopment@pactiowa.org  
Jason Neises, Greater Dubuque Community Foundation.....jason@dbqfoundation.org  
Jacey Roy, Union County Community Foundation.....roy@desmoinesfoundation.org  
Mickey Shields, League of Cities.....mickeyshields@iowaleague.org  
Jim Thompson, IEDA.....jim.thompson@iowaeda.com  
Margo Underwood, Keep Iowa Beautiful & Pocahontas Leadership Program.....mlunderwood@cltel.net  
Michael Wagler, Main Street Iowa.....michael.wagler@iowaeda.com

---

## ORGANIZATIONS

[ABI Business Succession Resources](#)

[Center for Rural Revitalization](#)

[Community Heart & Soul](#)

[CultureALL](#)

[Des Moines Partnership](#)

[Homes for Iowa](#)

[Hometown Pride](#)

[Iowa Arts Council](#)

[Iowa Center for Employee Ownership](#)

[Iowa Downtown Resource Center, IEDA](#)

[Iowa League of Cities](#)

[Iowa Rural Development Council](#)

[Trees Forever](#)

[UNI Institute for Decision Making](#)

[Union County Community Foundation](#)

---

## RESOURCES

[ABI Business Succession Resources](#)

[Addressing Problem Properties Downtown](#)

[CDBG Housing Rehabilitation](#)

[Center for Rural Revitalization Grants & Programs Fact Sheet](#)

[Community Catalyst Grant](#)

[Community Development Block Grants \(CDBG\)](#)

[Disabled Access Credit \(ADA\)](#)

[Downtown Design Guide](#)

[Enhance Iowa / CAT](#)

[Hometown Grant Program, T-Mobile](#)

[Iowa Downtown Conference](#)

[Iowa Finance Authority – Planning & Design Loans](#)

[Iowa Leadership Exchange](#)

[Iowa State University Extension – Community & Economic Development](#)

[Iowa State University Extension – Community Visioning](#)

[Iowa State University Extension – Marketing Hometown America](#)

[Iowa Tourism Grants](#)

[Keep Iowa Beautiful Grants](#)

- Paint Iowa Beautiful

[Main Street Iowa](#)

[Our Town, National Endowment for the Arts](#)

[Pop-Up! Toolkit](#)

[POW! Toolkit](#)

[Rural Resources](#)

[Shop Iowa](#)

[Strategic Doing](#)

[Workforce Housing Tax Credits](#)

## APPENDIX

### WATERSHED SUMMARY - 2021

# CRESTON, IOWA LABORSHED AREA

A STUDY IN LABOR AVAILABILITY AND WORKFORCE CHARACTERISTICS  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
www.iowalmi.gov/LABORSHED RELEASED

RELEASED  
2021

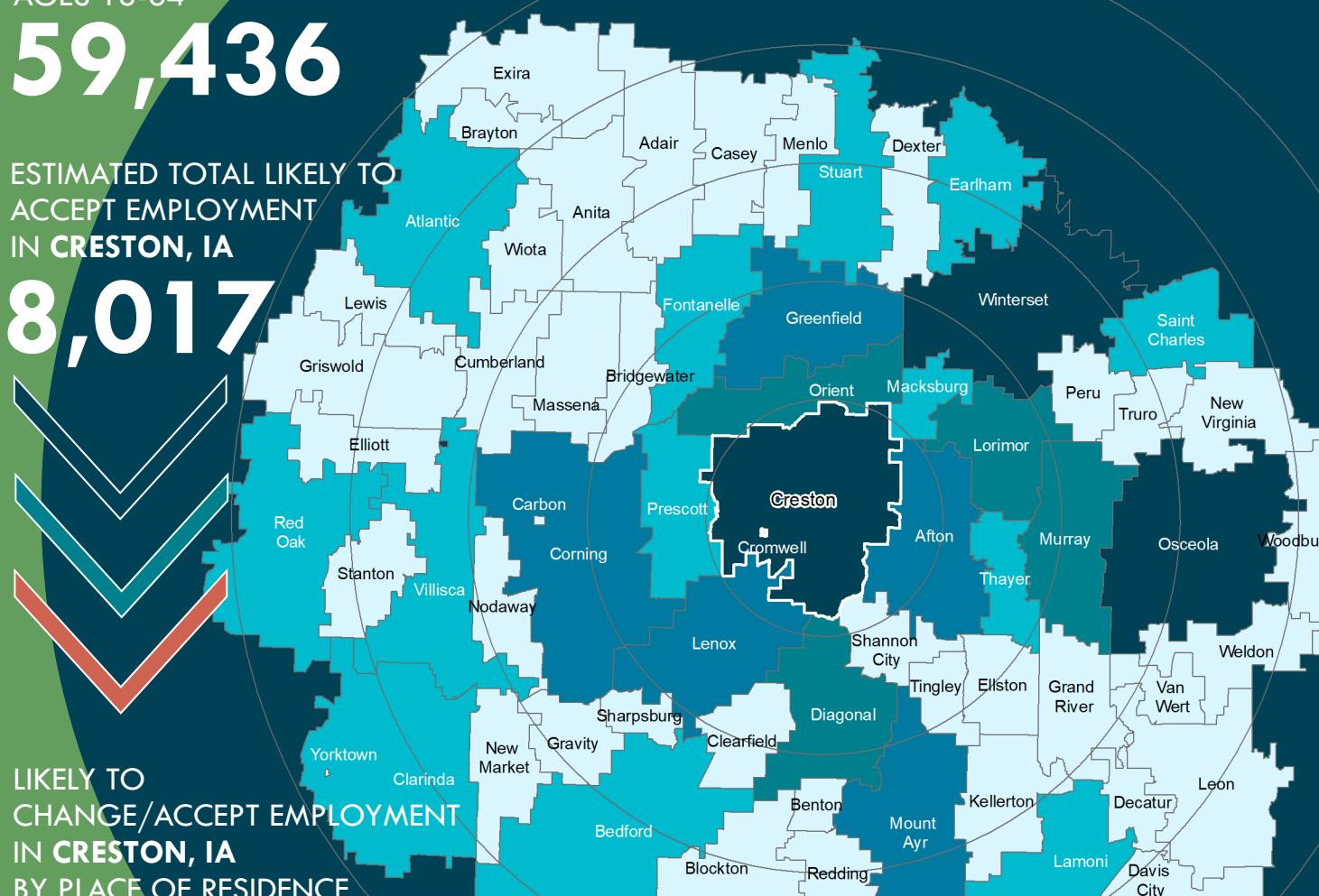
## ESTIMATED POPULATION AGES 18-64

**59,436**

## ESTIMATED TOTAL LIKELY TO ACCEPT EMPLOYMENT IN CRESTON, IA

8,017

LIKELY TO  
CHANGE/ACCEPT EMPLO  
IN **CRESTON, IA**  
BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE  
(PER ZIP CODE)



### 10-Mile Interval Between Rings



## AREA SHOWN

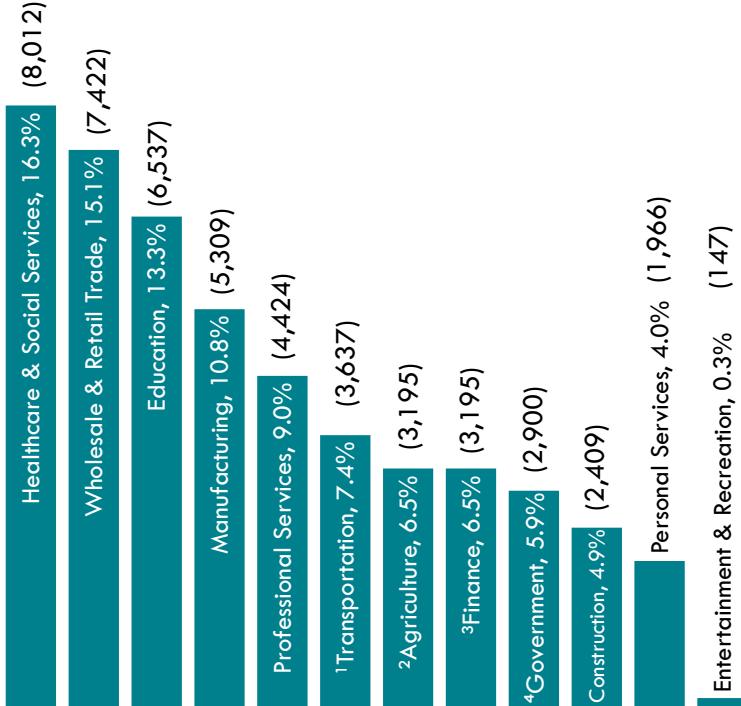
# CRESTON LABORSHED ANALYSIS

A Laborshed area is defined by its commuting pattern and illustrates which communities contribute to an employment center's workforce and at what level. To determine the boundaries of a Laborshed area, local employers supply the residential ZIP codes of each of their employees. The data in this publication reflects characteristics specific to the workforce in the Creston Laborshed area.

The employed are currently commuting an average of—



## BREAKOUT OF THE EMPLOYED BY INDUSTRY (ESTIMATED TOTAL)

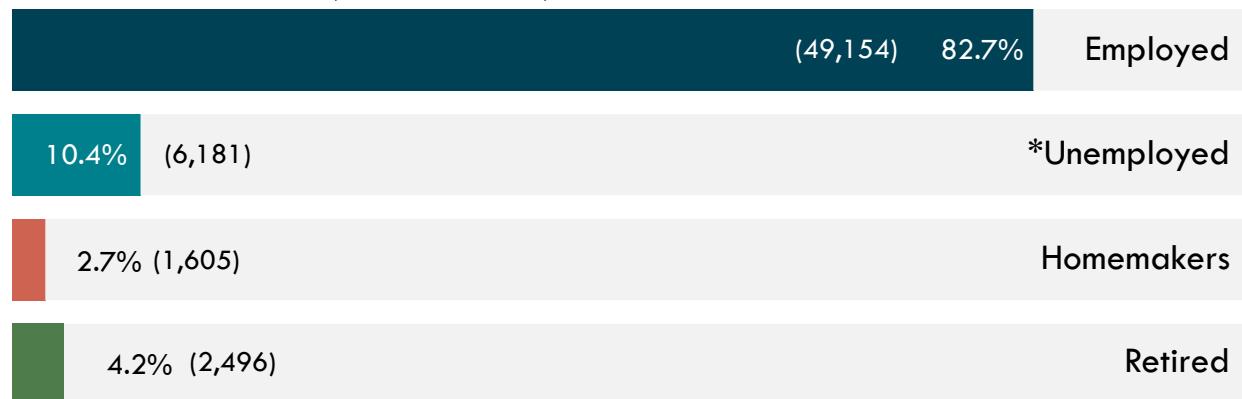


<sup>1</sup>Transportation, Communications, & Utilities  
<sup>3</sup>Finance, Insurance, & Real Estate

<sup>2</sup>Agriculture, Forestry, & Mining  
<sup>4</sup>Public Administration, Government

Totals may vary due to rounding.

## EMPLOYMENT STATUS (ESTIMATED TOTAL)\*



\*Employment status is self-identified by the survey respondent. The unemployment percentage above does not reflect the unemployment rate published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which applies a stricter definition.

### Employed - Likely to Change Employment 28.1%



### Homemakers - Likely to Accept Employment 63.6%



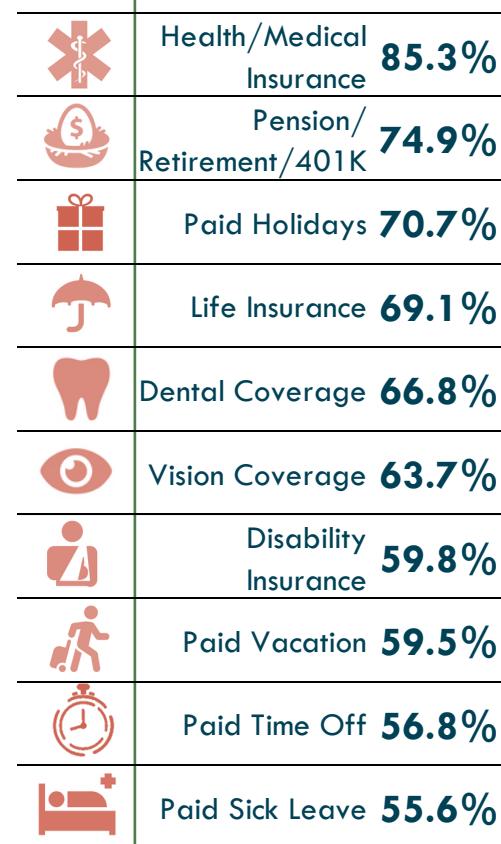
### Unemployed - Likely to Accept Employment 61.9%



### Retired - Likely to Accept Employment 23.5%



## TOP CURRENT BENEFITS OF THE FULL-TIME EMPLOYED



## EMPLOYED: LIKELY TO CHANGE

- An estimated 6,401 employed individuals are likely to change their current employment situation for an opportunity in Creston

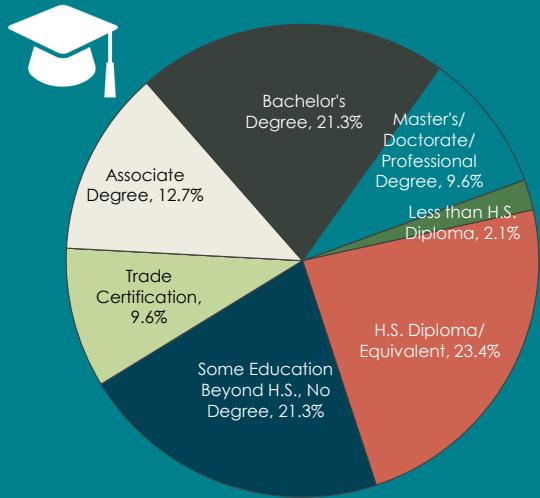
- Current occupational categories:

Professional, Paraprofessional, Technical	34.9%
Production, Construction, Material Moving	18.1%
Clerical	16.9%
Service	15.7%
Sales	7.2%
Managerial	4.8%
Agricultural	2.4%

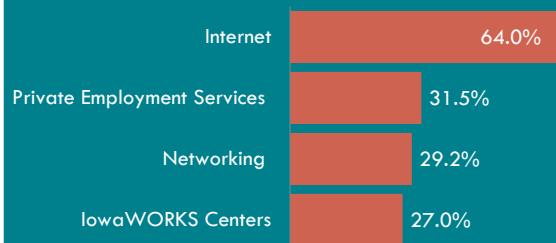
- Current median wages: \$

- \$15.00/hour and \$58,500/year
- \$20.00/hour - attracts 66%
- \$23.50/hour - attracts 75%

- 74.5% have an education beyond HS



- 32.3% are actively seeking employment
- Most frequently identified job search resources:



- Top sites:



- Top newspapers:



- Commute:

- Currently commuting an average of 16 miles/21 minutes (one-way) to work
- Willing to commute an average of 28 miles/35 minutes (one-way) to work

## UNEMPLOYED: LIKELY TO ACCEPT

- An estimated 400 unemployed individuals are likely to accept employment in Creston

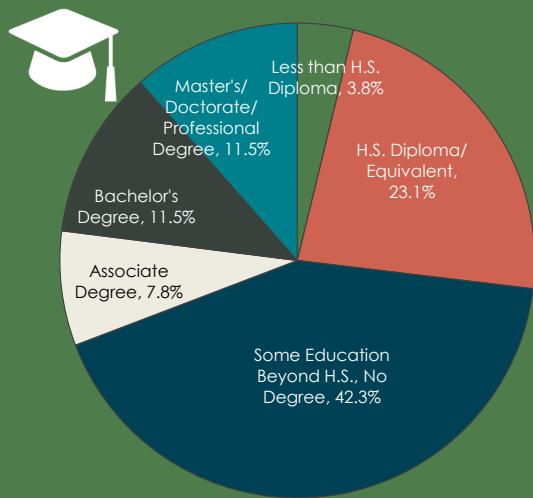
- Former occupational categories:

Service	25.1%
Production, Construction, Material Moving	25.0%
Professional, Paraprofessional, Technical	20.8%
Clerical	12.5%
Agricultural	8.3%
Managerial	8.3%

- Median wages: \$

- \$14.50/hour - lowest willing to accept
- \$15.18/hour - attracts 66%
- \$16.93/hour - attracts 75%

- 73.1% have an education beyond HS



- 57.7% are actively seeking employment
- Most frequently identified job search resources:



- Top sites:



- Top newspapers:



- Commute:

- Willing to commute an average of 23 miles/39 minutes (one-way) to work



The Laborshed survey collects information regarding the **out commute** for an employment center.

The **out commute** for Creston is estimated at 14.3 percent—approximately 596 people living in Creston work in other communities.

Most of those who are out commuting are working in Clive and Corning.

Nearly one-third (28.6%) of out commuters are likely to change employment (approximately 171 people).

57.1% earn an hourly wage—median wage is **\$19.00/hour**  
35.7% earn an annual salary.

**596**

people live in  
Creston  
and work  
elsewhere

## EDUCATION OF AVAILABLE LABOR BY INDUSTRY OF CURRENT OR FORMER EMPLOYMENT

Data on this page is specific to only those survey respondents that reported they are likely to change or accept employment.

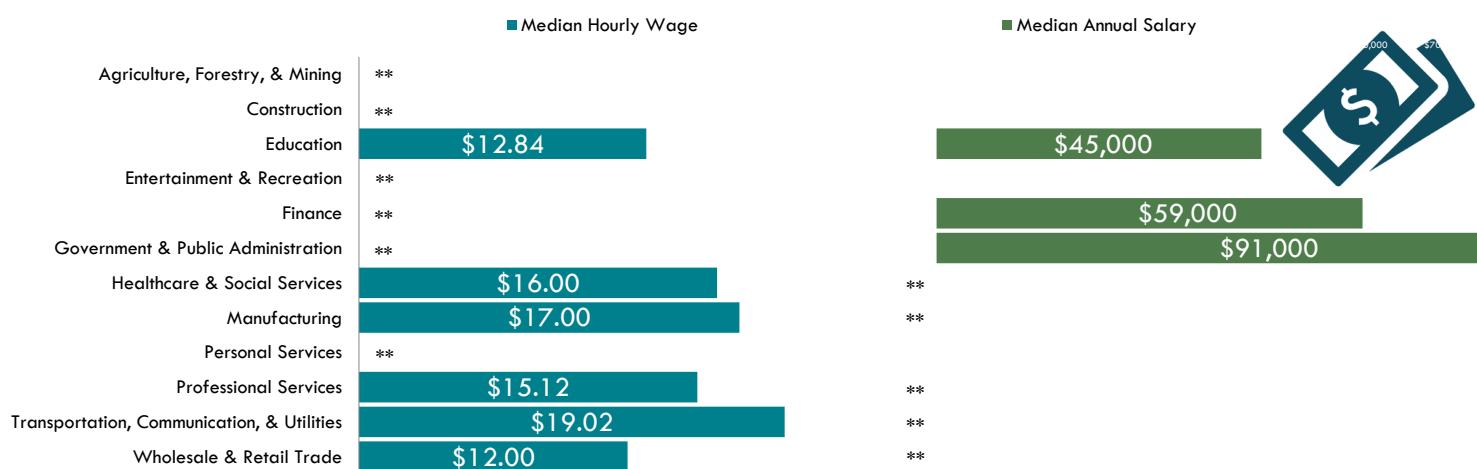


Industry	Education Beyond HS	Some Education Beyond HS, No Degree Obtained	Trade Certification/Vocational Training	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree or Above
Agriculture	66.7%	33.3%	16.7%	0.0%	16.7%
Construction	**	**	**	**	**
Education	92.9%	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%	78.6%
Entertainment & Recreation	**	**	**	**	**
Finance	80.0%	20.0%	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%
Government	100%	28.6%	0.0%	14.3%	57.1%
Healthcare & Social Services	89.4%	26.3%	15.8%	10.5%	36.8%
Manufacturing	78.6%	50.0%	0.0%	14.3%	14.3%
Personal Services	40.0%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%	20.0%
Professional Services	55.5%	22.2%	0.0%	11.1%	22.2%
Transportation	55.5%	33.3%	11.1%	0.0%	11.1%
Wholesale & Retail Trade	57.1%	25.0%	7.1%	14.3%	10.7%

Top percentages among industries per education level are highlighted in the table.

\*\*Insufficient data to report.

## WAGES OF AVAILABLE LABOR BY INDUSTRY OF CURRENT OR FORMER EMPLOYMENT



\*\*Insufficient survey data/refused. A lack of data for a particular industry is not necessarily indicative that there were no (or few) individuals surveyed within that industry. Rather, it may be that there simply were no respondents within that industry that also reported that they are likely to change or accept employment.

Note: A wide variety of occupations are included within these industry categories. Industry classification is based upon the respondent's reported current or former employer. Two respondents that work for a manufacturer will be classified within the manufacturing industry even if, for example, one respondent is a custodian and the other is an accountant.

## UNDEREMPLOYMENT

The underemployed are working fewer than 35 hours per week but desire more hours (**inadequate hours**); in positions that do not meet their skill or education level, or have worked for higher wages at previous employment (**mismatch of skills**); or are earning wages equal to or less than the national poverty level and work 35 or more hours per week (**low income**).

	Percent Surveyed	Estimated Total		Percent Surveyed	Estimated Total
Inadequate Hours	2.2%	141	Mismatch of Skills	5.2%	333
Low Income	0.7%	45	$\sum$ +Total	7.4%	474

<sup>†</sup>Individuals may be underemployed for more than one reason but are counted only once for total estimated underemployment.

Note: To be counted as underemployed in any category an individual must be currently employed and likely to change their current employment situation.

**IOWA**  
**WORKFORCE**  
**DEVELOPMENT**

Data compiled and analyzed by:  
Iowa Workforce Development  
Labor Market Information Division  
1000 E. Grand Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa 50319  
Phone: (515) 281-7505 | Email: [laborshed.studies@iwd.iowa.gov](mailto:laborshed.studies@iwd.iowa.gov)  
[www.iowalmi.gov/laborshed](http://www.iowalmi.gov/laborshed)

**IOWA**  
**economic development**

For more information regarding this Laborshed study contact:  
Union County Development Association  
301 W Montgomery  
Creston, IA 50801  
Phone: (641) 782-2003 | E-mail: [director@unioncountyiowa.com](mailto:director@unioncountyiowa.com)  
[www.unioncountyiowa.com](http://www.unioncountyiowa.com)