

Merry Christmas



Wishing everyone peace, warmth, and joy this season, and gratitude for the connections we share. May your holidays be filled with kindness, reflection, and hope for the year ahead.

From the Mahaska Chamber & Development Group and Oskaloosa Main Street

Oskaloosa Awarded State-Backed Grant to Strengthen Small Businesses and Startups

The Mahaska Chamber and Development Group has been selected as one of three communities to receive funding through the Iowa Rural Development Council's Rural Business Initiative (RBI) grant program, with support approved this week by the state's Empower Rural Iowa task force.

The funding will support Ignite Oskaloosa, a multi-part small business development initiative designed to strengthen local businesses, support entrepreneurs, and invest in long-term economic vitality as the community prepares to celebrate 40 years as an Iowa Main Street community in 2026.

Empower Rural Iowa formally approved Oskaloosa, along with Crawford County and Marion County, to receive grant support after seeing a strong response to the initial round of RBI applications. Earlier this fall, five communities were selected for grants of at least \$30,000 funded by the Wells Fargo Foundation. The additional awards expand the impact of the program to eight communities statewide.



"Being named a Rural Business Initiative recipient is an exciting opportunity for Oskaloosa and our surrounding business community," said Deann De Groot, Executive Director of the Mahaska Chamber and Development Group. "Ignite Oskaloosa allows us to invest directly in our local entrepreneurs through practical training, meaningful connections, and access to resources that help businesses grow. As we approach 40 years as a Main Street community, this program reflects our commitment to supporting the people and ideas that make the Mahaska community a strong place to live, work, and do business."

The Ignite Oskaloosa initiative is built around three core components:

Ignite Knowledge and Networks – A quarterly speaker series focused on business growth, marketing strategies, leadership, and peer learning, modeled after the successful Breakfast Blueprint sessions hosted locally last fall.

Ignite Hospitality – Targeted hospitality training and storytelling workshops to help businesses improve customer experience and better share their brand stories.

Ignite Oskaloosa Growth – A pitch-style event offering grant support to existing businesses and startups, aimed at encouraging innovation and investment in the local economy.

Together, the three components are designed to provide training, technical assistance, and direct financial support to small businesses at various stages of growth.

All grant recipients are able to use funds based on their local needs, including training, marketing, technology, or building improvements. Oskaloosa's program will also partner with small-business service providers, such as the Iowa Small Business Development Centers, to maximize resources and long-term impact.

More details about the Ignite Oskaloosa programming, including timelines and opportunities for local businesses to participate, will be announced in the coming months.

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