



2025 ASSEMBLY BILL 159

April 2, 2025 - Introduced by Representatives NOVAK, KITCHENS, ANDERSON, ARMSTRONG, BARE, BEHNKE, BILLINGS, GREEN, GUNDRUM, HONG, B. JACOBSON, J. JACOBSON, JOHNSON, KREIBICH, MIRESE, MURSAU, O'CONNOR, PALMERI, STEFFEN, TRANEL and TUSLER, cosponsored by Senators QUINN, TESTIN, PFAFF and SPREITZER. Referred to Committee on Rural Development.

- 1 **AN ACT to create** 238.137 of the statutes; **relating to:** creating a rural creative
2 economy development grant program.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This bill creates a grant program administered by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. The bill requires WEDC to award rural creative economy development grants on a competitive basis to cities, villages, towns, counties, American Indian tribes and bands in this state, economic development organizations in this state, and nonprofit organizations in this state. A grant recipient must use grant moneys for any of the following purposes:

1. To develop or implement a plan to increase tourism, enhance visitor experiences, or bolster community development in rural areas in this state through the development or promotion of creative enterprises, including by supporting or expanding public arts performances and exhibitions, renovating or improving public spaces and vacant or underutilized buildings, supporting community-based arts education, supporting business accelerator programs, and providing technical assistance for creative businesses.

2. To market, brand, and promote local creative enterprises, public arts performances and exhibitions, or public spaces in rural areas in this state.

Under the bill, such a grant may not exceed \$50,000 and must be expended solely for the benefit of rural areas. Additionally, the bill prohibits WEDC from awarding a grant unless the grant recipient matches the amount of the grant with

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moneys raised from nonstate sources and limits the amount of in-kind match to no more than 25 percent of the match amount. The bill requires WEDC to submit a report on the effectiveness of the grants to the Joint Committee on Finance no later than May 1, 2027.

For further information see the state fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.

The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:

1 **SECTION 1.** 238.137 of the statutes is created to read:

2 **238.137 Rural creative economy development grant program.** (1) In
3 this section:

4 (a) “Creative enterprise” means an organization, individual, or company
5 whose products and services have their origin in artistic, cultural, creative, or
6 aesthetic content.

7 (b) “Eligible applicant” means a city, village, town, county, American Indian
8 tribe or band in this state, economic development organization in this state, or
9 organization in this state described in section 501 (c) (3) or (6) of the Internal
10 Revenue Code that is exempt from federal income tax under section 501 (a) of the
11 Internal Revenue Code.

12 (c) “Rural area” means any of the following:

13 1. A city, town, or village in this state that has a population of less than
14 10,000.

15 2. An area in this state that is not an urbanized area, as defined by the federal
16 bureau of the census.

17 3. A county in this state that has a population of less than 55,000.

18 **(2)** (a) The corporation shall award rural creative economy development

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1 grants on a competitive basis to eligible applicants for the purposes described under
2 par. (b). The corporation shall prescribe the form of application and the information
3 required to be submitted with an application, which shall include specific goals and
4 clear outcomes regarding public accessibility, participation, and engagement.

5 (b) An eligible applicant that is awarded a grant under this subsection shall
6 expend all grant moneys as specified in the application for any of the following
7 purposes:

8 1. To develop or implement a plan to increase tourism, enhance visitor
9 experiences, or bolster community development in rural areas in this state through
10 the development or promotion of creative enterprises, including by doing any of the
11 following:

12 a. Supporting or expanding public arts, including performances and
13 exhibitions. Expenditures under this subd. 1. a. may include production costs,
14 artist stipends, and supplies.

15 b. Renovating or improving public spaces, signage, and facades, including the
16 repair or renovation of vacant or underutilized buildings. Expenditures under this
17 subd. 1. b. may include construction costs, artist stipends, and supplies.

18 c. Supporting community-based arts education.

19 d. Supporting business accelerator programs and providing technical
20 assistance for creative businesses.

21 2. To market, brand, and promote local creative enterprises, public arts
22 performances and exhibitions, or public spaces in rural areas in this state.

23 (c) A grant awarded under this subsection may not exceed \$50,000 and shall
24 be expended solely for the benefit of rural areas in this state.

