



ASSOCIATION OF  
PUBLIC &  
LAND-GRANT  
UNIVERSITIES

IOWA STATE  
UNIVERSITY



CECE

INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY UNIVERSITIES  
AWARDS PROGRAM

CASE  
STUDY  
2021

IEP CATEGORY – PLACE

# Iowa State University: Bringing Digital to Rural Markets

## ABOUT AMERICA'S SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTERS BRINGING DIGITAL TO RURAL AND UNDERSERVED MARKETS

By leveraging its resources and partnerships, Iowa State University (ISU) is bringing minority and rural businesses into the digital world. Iowa has 99 counties and most are considered rural, which makes outreach difficult at times. By pulling both internal and external resources together, a larger impact has been recognized and more rural and minority owned businesses are able to compete on a larger scale.

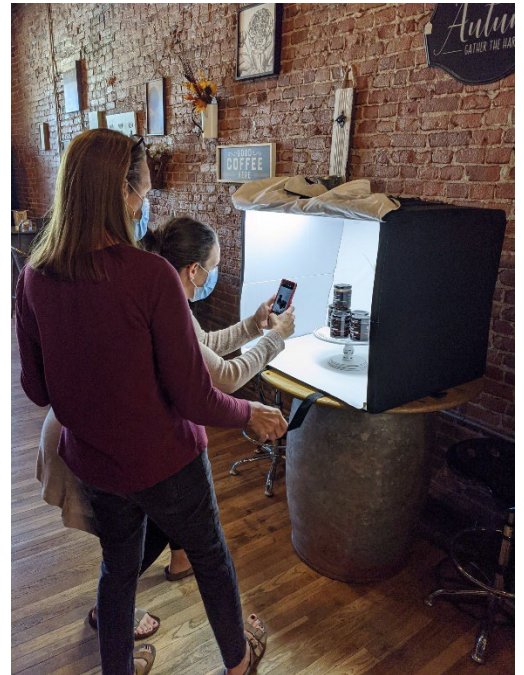
Many groups within the university started creating more partnerships across the state to make this happen.

[America's SBDC Iowa](#) (SBDC) is located in Iowa State University's Research Park and is part of the university's [Office of Economic Development and Industry Relations](#). Established in 1981, SBDC provides no cost, confidential, customized, professional business advice in all Iowa counties to entrepreneurs and existing small businesses with a targeted approach to reach rural and unserved communities.

### COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The SBDC has served as an economic development hub for small businesses and established statewide partnerships to reach all areas of the state. These connections allow for increased access to resources for all Iowa residents interested in starting or growing a business, as well as the opportunity to increase workforce. Some of our partnerships include:

- ISU Extension & Outreach – [Community & Economic Development \(CED\)](#) – two Spanish-speaking business advisors on staff with direct connections to Hispanic and refugee community. They are providing SBDC services and training.
- ISU Extension & Outreach – [Farm Food Enterprise Development \(FFED\)](#) – developed a podcast series on a variety of business development topics, of which many are in Spanish.



*Employee of Small Business Development Center – Iowa working with Iowa small business owner on the portable photo studio*

- The Financial Empowerment Center – working closely with SBDC and CED to provide financial literacy training for minority business owners, to prepare them to acquire capital to start or grow their business. Through the training in the past two years, 76 entrepreneurs were trained, resulting in 50 minority-owned businesses starting or improved.

## PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

After the pandemic began, SBDC proactively reached out to more than 72,000 businesses across the entire state to provide information and resources. In a typical year, SBDC assists approximately 4,000 unique clients. The organization began developing resources and materials for underserved markets:

- Increased amount of materials created and translated to Spanish.
- Engaged interpreters at HandsUp Communications (Cedar Rapids) to assist SBDC Business Counselors and clients with interpretation services during advising sessions, at no cost to the SBDC client.
- Developed on-demand [Smart Start video series](#), which consists of 6 modules to provide virtual training for startup businesses, also available in Spanish.
- Delivered 300 [Business Recovery Kits](#) to 25 communities across the state. Kits contained a Small Business Recovery Guide, cybersecurity poster, customizable posters, and other helpful items. Fifty of these kits have been translated to Spanish and were delivered by CED staff. The kits were paid for by a private sector partnership with SBDC.

## INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMING

America’s SBDC Iowa recognized the need for access to digital resources, including marketing and e-commerce, when many businesses were forced to close due to the pandemic. Several innovative outreach efforts were developed and executed, beginning in the summer of 2020.

- #IASBDCMobile - SBDC staff traveled to 25 communities and set up regional events for small businesses to learn about e-commerce, as well as SBDC services. Following the events, staff met one-on-one with retailers to discuss online selling, digital marketing, and provide use of a [portable photo studio](#). Staff also encouraged business owners to be a part of the Shop Iowa online marketplace. Through Iowa Economic Development Authority funding, Shop Iowa has been free for Iowa businesses. E-commerce became very important during the pandemic and will continue into the future. As a result of training

and encouragement, Shop Iowa has companies from 92 Iowa counties on its site.

- Following the mobile initiative, SBDC staff realized the importance of access to a portable photo studio. A statewide project was conducted to deliver a portable photo studio to all 942 communities in Iowa. A [Portable Photo Studio & Digital Marketing Guide](#) was developed, as well as a training video. The photo studios were delivered by SBDC staff, Business Counselors, ISU Extension & Outreach staff, economic developers, and SBDC advisory board members. It is an organized effort across the state. The photo studios will be housed at SBDC service centers, ISU Extension & Outreach offices, chambers of commerce, economic development offices, libraries and city halls. They will be free of charge for any business to use so they may get their business online exposure with professional looking photos.
- An SBDC enclosed trailer was purchased for outreach efforts, including a mobile learning lab as well. It is currently putting on miles across the state for the portable photo studio initiative and is also used to bring in person classes to our rural businesses.

### PLACE IS IMPORTANT

Through collaborative partnerships, providing opportunities and innovative programming, SBDC has reached out to all areas of the state to provide resources for businesses to develop and grow. We have gone where the support and assistance are needed. As a result, the number of clients that identified as a minority population in the past two years has increased by 31%, as well as access to capital, with an increase of 86% in capital infusion reported. The number of clients in rural areas has also increased during this time, by 55% and capital infusion has increased by 226%. There has been a slight decrease in new business starts and jobs created in both of these populations of clients served, which has been from impact from the pandemic and it demonstrates the continuing need to provide services.

Through partnerships and targeted outreach to all 99 counties in Iowa, our communities are recovering and are thriving. With strong relationships and funneling clients to the right resources and by listening and providing additional resources beyond business assistance, Iowa State University is making a noticeable impact on not only the rural economy but also helping minority and refugee entrepreneurs find success.



## ABOUT APLU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is North America's oldest higher education association. APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association's membership consists of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations.

APLU's mission is to: expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.

Based in Washington, DC, the association's work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

## ABOUT THE IEP UNIVERSITIES PROGRAM

APLU and its **Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE)** established the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Universities Program to help higher education institutions codify, elevate, and advance their campus enterprise supporting economic and community development.

The **IEP designation program** recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a meaningful, ongoing and substantial commitment to economic and community development, growth, and economic opportunity.

The **IEP awards program** recognize exemplary and innovative projects in university-based economic and community engagement:

- **Talent** and workforce development
- **Innovation**, entrepreneurship, and tech-based economic development
- **Place** development through public service, outreach, and community engagement

Learn more at: [www.APLU.org/IEP](http://www.APLU.org/IEP)

