



# American Academy of Religion Regional Grant Application

**Summary:** This grant will fund a workshop for scholars of American religion in Iowa (SOARIA) to strengthen our intellectual community, share insights and resources related to teaching and outreach, and plan future collaborations.

**Amount of Funding Requested:** \$4,000

## Contact Information

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## Project Description

**Purpose and Overview:** We are requesting AAR Regional Grant funding to host the first SOARIA workshop, a gathering that will bring together scholars of American religion within the state of Iowa (SOARIA). We intend for this to be the first of regular annual or biennial workshops to strengthen connections between scholars in the state. Aligning with the mission of the

American Academy of Religion, the primary aims of this workshop are to support the academic study of American religious history and culture at Iowa universities and to foster the public understanding of religion in Iowa. The workshop will accomplish these goals by hosting a forum to share research, discuss teaching, and collaborate on outreach opportunities in our local communities. In addition, the workshop will allow us to coordinate and plan future collaborations, allowing us to strengthen these efforts even further.

**Justification:** Iowa is a fitting setting for such a state-focused regional grant. While it is officially part of the Upper Midwest AAR region, Iowa sits at the border of three others: Midwest, Rocky Mountain/Great Plains, and Southwest. Depending on where an AAR member is located in Iowa, it may be easier to travel to a neighboring region rather than attend the designated regional conference. The geographical distribution of AAR regions and the relative isolation felt across the predominantly rural state has created a sense of isolation among scholars in Iowa. This SOARIA workshop would help to bring scholars together to revive a sense of scholarly community.

An AAR Regional Grant can help bring religion scholars together at a critical moment in the state's history. There is broad public support for teaching religion in public schools (typically, Bible classes) as well as broad public support for increased public outreach from faith-based institutions. In addition, there is public interest in cultural and racial diversity in Iowa's history. Both public issues require a greater understanding of the history and cultures of religion in the United States. The state of Iowa has a critical mass of experts in American religion and the capacity to coordinate their efforts across the entire state rather than any one local or regional community within the state. For example, Dr. Michael Graziano at the University of Northern Iowa recently received a Whiting Public Engagement Seed Grant through the AAR. The capacity to meet and share ideas through this workshop will magnify the results of this and other accomplishments of Iowa scholars.

**Workshop Description:** For our initial SOARIA meeting, we plan to host a day-long workshop with 15 scholars. Each scholar will formally contribute to the program with a brief presentation on one of three panels related to teaching, research, and outreach/public history. Participants will be asked to offer comments describing a specific feature of their research, teaching, or

outreach, especially as it relates to engaging with the state of Iowa, before opening up the floor for conversation.

Numerous scholars throughout the state have been engaged in exciting projects that could be useful for others in the state. These include Dr. Graziano's work on religion in public schools, Dr. Cara Burnidge's award-winning service learning course examining refugee resettlement in Cedar Falls/Waterloo, and Dr. Sarah Dees's work with the representation of religion in museums. Dr. Kristy Nabhan-Warren, at the University of Iowa, has been engaging in anthropological research at meatpacking plants. In addition to sharing this regionally-specific insight, this grant would allow us to begin planning future programs, potentially including:

- Digital humanities and public history projects related to Iowa religious history
- Collaborations with the Iowa State Historical Society as well as local museums
- A multi-institution summer course that visits sites significant to Iowa religious history, including visits to:
  - Effigy Mounds National Monument in Harpers Ferry, where Indigenous communities created ceremonial earthworks
  - Clinton, IA, birthplace of the anti-Catholic American Protective Association
  - The "Mother Mosque" in Cedar Rapids, the first purpose-built mosque in the United States
  - The town of Fairfield, a hub for practitioners of Transcendental Meditation
  - The Walter Clark House in Muscatine, built by a proponent of Civil Rights
  - The town of Elkader, named after the Algerian anti-imperialist military leader and Sufi religious leader Abd el-Kader

In sum, with funding from this grant, the SOARIA workshop would enable us to share ideas, strategize on shared issues unique to teaching in the state of Iowa, and think about regionally-focused collaborative projects that could enrich our students, campuses, and communities.

## Regional Specificity of Workshop

Our state-focused workshop is unique as we are bringing together faculty across institutional affiliations--with an eye toward the diversity of research and teaching interests and private and public institutions--in order to collaborate on the ways in which we can work together to promote greater public understanding of religion. Regardless of whether or not we work at a research or teaching intensive institution, our students largely come from rural communities. Many are first generation college students who more likely than not share their new knowledge and college experiences with the entire family. Multi-institutional collaboration in research, teaching, and public outreach in the study of religion holds the potential to reshape public discourse across the entire state. Now--with broad public interest in expanding historical narratives--is a critical time to do so.

Through an AAR Regional Grant, we hope to create a model for other scholars of religion to coordinate teaching, research, and service endeavors across institutional and regional lines. Working together in our home state, with and through our home institutions, we can bolster public engagement with the study of religion beyond our individual classrooms and college towns. Through this coordination, which draws upon our individual strengths found in existing research and teaching portfolios, we can better serve both our flagship professional organization and its mission to “enhance the public understanding of religion.”

## Timeline

### 2020

April-May	Development of AAR grant
June-August	Send informal inquiries out to colleagues Finalize date and make room reservations Develop contingency plan Explore additional funding sources
September	Send official invitations
November	Adjust schedule as needed based on confirmed participants

## 2021

January 2021	Check in with participants w/ details and presentation prompts
February	Finalize plans in light of COVID safety practices
March	Check in with participants re: details
April/May 2021	Final confirmation workshop details
April/May 2021	Meeting on the campus of Iowa State University

## May 2021 Workshop Schedule

9:00	Breakfast
9:30-10:00	Welcome and Introductions
10:15-11:45	Panel 1: Teaching
12:00-1:30	Lunch and public talk by Kristy Nabhan-Warren (University of Iowa) on her book <i>Cornbelt Religion: The Work of Faith in the Heartland</i>
1:30-3:00	Panel 2: Research
3:15-4:45	Panel 3: Outreach
5:00-6:00	Future planning & Wrap-up
6:30	Optional dinner

## Budget

\$2250	Honoraria for participants (\$150 x 15) Will help to offset costs to travel to/from Ames
\$1000	Room rental, A/V equipment, and staff at the Iowa State Memorial Union
\$750	Meals for attendees \$275   Breakfast: 14.90/person x 15 + 22% = 272.67 Choice of 2 hot entrees, 3 sides, 3 beverages \$350   Lunch: 19/person x 15 + 22% = 347.70 Burrito buffet, 3 beverages, dessert \$125   PM coffee/tea/snack: 6.50/person x 15 + 22% = 118.95 Coffee & tea, cookies, fruit
<b>\$4000</b>	<b>TOTAL requested from AAR</b>

*Estimates based on Iowa State Memorial Union website, staff, and budgets from previous conferences at Union. 22% is standard service fee for catering.*