

READI 2.0

Arts & Culture Initiative

Program Guidelines



Prepared by Public Sphere Projects
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In this document

This document includes guidelines and details for READI 2.0 Arts & Culture Initiative applicants.

Included are three related sections: program guidelines; an explanation of the evaluation process; and “frequently asked questions” (FAQs). The guidelines are intended to clarify for applicants the type, length, and details of strong responses. Additionally, information about the evaluation process reveals how and when each project will be reviewed by regional and state-level partners. This transparency, as well as the FAQ’s, seeks to eliminate question around both application creation and assessment.

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Section I

Program guidelines

Program Guidelines

Overview of the program and grant

The READI 2.0 Arts & Culture Initiative is a \$65 million statewide investment supporting arts- and culture-driven projects across Indiana's READI 2.0 regions. The program is administered by the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) in partnership with the Indiana Arts Commission (IAC), and made possible through generous support from the Lilly Endowment Inc., It was developed in consultation with Public Sphere Projects.

The READI 2.0 Arts & Culture Initiative advances projects that strengthen regional identity, quality of life, creative workforce development, and long-term community vitality.

Funding supports implementation of projects identified in each region's adopted arts and culture plan. Eligible projects span a wide range of activities, including but not limited to:

- Public art and placemaking
- Cultural facilities and creative campuses
- Festivals and public programs
- Arts education and lifelong learning
- Creative workforce development
- Digital and hybrid arts innovation
- Cultural tourism and regional storytelling
- Feasibility studies and adaptive reuse

Awards are made on a project-by-project basis and are structured **as reimbursement grants**. In addition to capital and programmatic support, the Initiative also informs future technical assistance and capacity-building efforts statewide.

Eligible Applicants

Applications must be submitted by an eligible Applicant of Record, which may include:

- Nonprofit arts and culture organizations (501(c)(3))
- Local or regional government entities
- Main Street, downtown, or place-based organizations (including 501(c)(6))
- Colleges and universities proposing community-facing cultural projects
- Consortia led by an eligible nonprofit or public entity

Individuals and for-profit businesses may not apply directly, but may participate as partners when an eligible entity serves as the Applicant of Record.

Key Eligibility Requirements

All applications must be submitted by an eligible entity that is located within, or clearly serves, one or more READI 2.0 regions. Proposed projects must demonstrate a clear public and cultural benefit and align with priorities identified in the region's adopted arts and culture plan.

Each application must also designate a single Applicant of Record, who will be responsible for grant compliance, reporting, and the management of funds. Applicants are not required to have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) to apply.

Program Timeline and Key Dates

Applicants should plan their proposals with the following program milestones in mind. Early coordination with partners, artists, and regional stakeholders is strongly encouraged.

- **February 10, 2026 – Online Information Session (3:00 PM ET)**
An overview of program goals, eligibility, application requirements, and evaluation criteria. **this meeting will be recorded*
- **February 16, 2026 – Application Portal Opens**
The READI 2.0 Arts & Culture Initiative application becomes available through the Indiana Arts Commission online grants system.
- **April 15, 2026 (5:00 PM ET) – Application Deadline**
All required questions and uploads must be submitted by this deadline. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.
- **May 5, 2026 – Regional Review Complete**
READI 2.0 regions complete their review to assess alignment with adopted regional arts and culture plans.
- **May 15, 2026 – State Panel Review**
IEDC convenes an independent panel of experts to evaluate applications using the statewide scoring rubric. **See ‘Explanation of the Evaluation Process’ section for more information on the scoring rubric.*
- **July 1, 2026 – Award Notifications Issued**
Applicants are notified of funding decisions, pending final compliance review.
- **July 1, 2026 – December 31, 2028 – Grant Period**
Approved projects may incur eligible expenses and request reimbursement in accordance with grant requirements.

Applicants are encouraged to use this timeline to work backward when preparing project budgets, securing partner commitments, and gathering required documentation.

Review process



Introduction: How to Use This Guide

This User Guide is designed to support applicants as they prepare proposals for the READI 2.0 Arts & Culture Initiative. It explains what each section of the application is asking for, how to respond clearly and efficiently within character limits, and how information provided will be considered during review. The guide is intended to help applicants present their projects in a way that is accessible, well-organized, and aligned with program expectations.

The guide also outlines how applications are evaluated at both the regional and state levels, offering transparency into the review process and criteria. **Applicants are strongly encouraged to review their region's adopted arts and culture plan before formulating a proposal.** Applicants are likewise encouraged to use this guide alongside the online application portal to avoid common pitfalls and submission errors, as well as to strengthen overall proposal quality.

Application Questions & Prompts (Section-by-Section Guidance)

This section of the guide provides an overview of each part of the application and explains what reviewers are looking for in applicant responses. The guidance is intended to help applicants understand the purpose of each question, how different sections of the application work together, and how to present information clearly and concisely within the required character limits.

Before you begin

Before starting the application, applicants are encouraged to:

- Review the adopted [arts and culture plan for your READI 2.0 region](#) and identify the priorities most relevant to your project.
- Confirm that your organization is eligible and that a single Applicant of Record has been identified.
- Clarify the project scope, timeline, and key activities to ensure they align with the grant period.
- Identify and confirm project partners, collaborators, and roles prior to completing the partnerships section.
- Prepare a draft project budget that aligns with the proposed activities.
- Gather required uploads, including budget documentation, letters of support, and any relevant visual materials.
- Review application questions, noting which are EVALUATED and which are non-EVALUATED.
- Review evaluation rubric, listed within this document under “*Explanation of the Evaluation Process*.”
- Draft responses in a separate document to track character limits and refine clarity before entering content into the online portal.

Completing these steps in advance will help streamline the application process and support clear, consistent responses across all sections.

Section 1: Applicant of Record Information

This section identifies the eligible organization that will serve as the Applicant of Record and be legally, financially, and administratively responsible for the project if awarded. Information provided here is used to confirm eligibility, determine regional alignment, and establish accountability for grant management, compliance, and reporting. Applicants should ensure all organizational and contact information is accurate and current, particularly for consortium applications where multiple partners are involved.

1.1 Question: *Describe your organization's mission and how it serves your community or region's cultural and economic vitality. * EVALUATED (1500 Character limit)*

1.2. Question: *Is this a consortium application? Please list all project partners, and their role. (2500 Character limit)*

Guidance: Be clear and concise in your organizational description. If applying as a consortium, clearly define partner roles.

Section 2: Project Description

This section provides an overview of the proposed project and serves as the foundation for the application. Applicants should clearly describe what the project is, why it matters, how READI 2.0 Arts & Culture funds will be used, and who will benefit.

2.1. Question: *Describe your project. Specify what READI 2.0 Arts and Culture funds will be used for. Include details such as project history, partners, goals, core activities, and intended impact. (Character Limit: 3000) * EVALUATED*

Guidance: *Tell the story of your project from start to finish. Describe where the idea came from, who participates and at what scale, how READI 2.0 Arts & Culture funds will be used, and what you expect to accomplish. Aim to give reviewers a clear understanding of the project's structure, scope, and relevance to your region.*

2.2. Question: *Write a brief description of the project that could be included in IEDC publications and announcements. (Character Limit: 1500)*

Guidance: *If you had to summarize your project for general audiences, what would you say?*

2.3. Question: *Applicants will be asked to select all categories listed under project types that meaningfully reflect the scope and substance of the proposed project.*

- **Creative Workforce** – *Projects that support artists and creative workers through activities such as residencies, exchanges, apprenticeships, skill development, leadership training, fellowships, or other forms of professional advancement.*
- **Capacity-Building** – *Projects that strengthen the arts and cultural ecosystem through efforts such as digital or hybrid innovation, shared services, organizational or network development, sector support, regional storytelling, branding, or cultural marketing.*
- **Public Programs** – *Projects centered on public-facing engagement, including arts education and lifelong learning, festivals, cultural events, performances,*

competitions, or other recurring community-based programming.

- **Capital Projects** – Investments in physical or mobile cultural infrastructure, including public art and placemaking, cultural facilities or creative campuses, adaptive reuse or heritage revitalization, mobile or rural access infrastructure, and feasibility studies related to arts and cultural development.

Guidance: Applicants should choose every category that reflects a meaningful part of their project—whether programmatic, capacity-building, public programming, digital innovation, or capital investment. A single project may overlap more than one category. If none of the listed options fully describe the project, select “Other” and specify the project type.

Section 3: Project Impact

Applicants use this section to describe the difference the proposed project is expected to make for the community and region. Responses should explain why the project matters, who stands to benefit, and how it responds to identified needs or opportunities.

3.1. Question: *Describe how your project will create a meaningful, lasting impact for your community or region. (Character Limit: 1500)* EVALUATED*

Guidance: Consider the broader effect your project will have beyond individual participants. For example, explain how it influences a neighborhood, strengthens regional connections, fills a gap in cultural access, or supports a shared community goal. Help reviewers understand why this project is important at a regional scale and who stands to benefit.

3.2. Question: *Describe the lasting impact the project or program will create beyond the grant period, including how the benefits of your proposal—whether programmatic, capacity-building, capital, or otherwise—will continue to support artists, residents, or the broader creative ecosystem over time. (Character Limit: 1500) * EVALUATED*

Guidance: Think about what aspects of the proposed project or program will persist beyond the end of the grant period. For example, a single festival might lead to ongoing partnerships, a pilot program could inform future funding or policy, or a training series might leave participants with new skills they can continue using. Describe these kinds of ripple effects so reviewers can understand the longer-term value of your project. One-time projects are eligible, but must demonstrate lasting value through partnerships, learning, infrastructure, or capacity-building.

3.3. Question: *Applicants will be asked to select all the county(ies) in which the project will serve. * EVALUATED*

Guidance: *Applicants should review their region's Cultural Plan prior to submission. Visit Indianareadi.com to view individual regional cultural plans. Select all regions and counties where the project will have meaningful activity or impact. This helps reviewers understand the geographic reach of your project and how it connects communities across your region.*

Section 4: Regional Cultural Plan Alignment

Alignment with the region's adopted arts and culture plan is a key consideration in review. Applicants should identify relevant priorities, goals, or strategies within the plan and describe how the proposed project supports or advances those areas.

4.1. Question: *Explain how your project aligns with your region's arts & culture priorities based on its arts and culture plan. (Character Limit: 3000) * EVALUATED*

Guidance: *Review your region's arts and culture plan and identify the priorities most relevant to the proposed project or program. Describe how your proposed project supports or advances those priorities, helping reviewers see how the project fits within the region's larger cultural direction.*

Section 5: Partnerships & Engagement

Collaboration and community involvement are addressed here. Applicants should outline project partners, their roles, and the level of commitment involved, as well as describe how artists, residents, and other stakeholders will be meaningfully engaged throughout planning and implementation.

1. Question: *Are there partner organizations involved in this project? List each partner and describe their role (e.g. collaborator, in-kind support etc). Note that projects or programs with confirmed partners or collaborators will receive priority in evaluation. * EVALUATED*

Guidance: *Use this section to show who you are working with and how responsibilities are shared. Identify each organization's role and level of commitment so reviewers can understand the strength of the collaboration.*

2. Question: *Describe how artists, residents, governing bodies, etc will be engaged in shaping or implementing this project. (Character Limit: 1500) * EVALUATED*

Guidance: *Explain how partners will be meaningfully involved throughout the project. Describe the approaches you will use to invite input, share decision-making, and ensure participation is accessible.*

Section 6: Project Management & Sustainability

Project readiness and organizational capacity are the focus of this section. Applicants should address the current status of the project, identify the team responsible for implementation, and explain how activities will be managed during the grant period.

1. Question: *Describe the current status of your project including any completed planning, design, artist selection, feasibility studies, community engagement, or any other activities conducted in preparation to execute the project. (Character Limit: 1500)*

Guidance: *Use this section to show how far along your project is and what groundwork has already been completed. Highlight key steps you've taken to prepare for implementation so reviewers can understand your level of readiness. If your project is a new initiative, describe how it came to be or what sparked the idea.*

2. Question: *Describe your organization's current capacity to execute this arts and culture project, including full-time, part-time, consultants & volunteers helping to oversee project implementation. (Character Limit: 1500) *EVALUATED*

Guidance: *Help reviewers understand how your organization is set up to manage the project. Briefly describe the team, skills, and resources in place, and how responsibilities are organized to ensure the work can be carried out effectively.*

3. Question: *If this project is meant to continue after the grant period ends, describe long-term operational and financial plans for sustaining the project. (Character Limit: 1500)*

Guidance: *Use this section to outline how the project will be supported in the future, underscoring financial stability. Describe the resources, partnerships, financing, or strategies that will help maintain the work over time and ensure its continued benefit beyond the grant period. If your project may be a one-time programmatic or capacity-building effort you must clearly show how its benefits will extend beyond the event or activity itself. Highlight the long-term value, momentum, or impact your project will generate for artists, residents, or the broader creative ecosystem.*

Budget Template: *Applicants will be required to fill in a budget template providing the total project cost, including request for READI 2.0 Arts and Culture funding, outlining all funding sources (READI 2.0, public, private, philanthropic, in-kind, etc).*

Section 7: Technical Assistance, Evaluation Key Performance Indicators

Information provided here helps inform future technical assistance and capacity-building support. Applicants may identify anticipated needs, describe how project success will be evaluated, and note potential connections to READI 2.0 Key Performance Indicators. Responses are collected for planning purposes only and are not considered in application evaluation.

1. Question: Outline any technical assistance you anticipate needing to strengthen this project—such as artistic mentorship, fabrication support, curatorial or interpretive planning, audience development, evaluation, business operations, or other creative-sector expertise. (Character Limit: 1500)

Guidance: Use this section to describe any outside expertise or support that would help strengthen your project. Focus on the types of assistance that would improve planning, implementation, or long-term success—for example, help navigating permitting or approvals, strengthening partnerships, or developing sustainability strategies—and explain why that support would be valuable at this stage.

2. Question: Describe how you will evaluate the project's impact and effectiveness in achieving the goals stated above. Examples may include surveys, interviews, testimonials, reflection meetings, comparison to previous projects, or other evaluation methods. (Character Limit: 1500)

Guidance: Explain how you will understand and measure whether the project was successful. In addition to common feedback tools, this could include tracking participation over time, documenting changes in partnerships or capacity, or reviewing how lessons learned inform future programming or decisions.

3. Question: Explain how this project connects with any of the [READI 2.0 Key Performance Indicators \(KPIs\)](#) (under "Performance Metrics")—such as talent attraction/retention, population growth, increased wages, business formation, capital investment, or quality-of-place outcomes. You are not required to address all—or even any—of the KPIs; this is a non-evaluated question intended to help IEDC understand potential alignment. (Character Limit: 1500)

Guidance: Note any broader outcomes your project may influence beyond its immediate artistic goals. For example, describe how the project helps make the region more attractive to residents or visitors, supports creative businesses, encourages reinvestment in a place, or contributes to a stronger sense of community—recognizing that this information is for context only and will not affect evaluation.

Section 8: Uploads * EVALUATED

Applicants will be required to upload materials to support their project or program. Uploads include:

- **Project Budget**
 - *Upload a complete .xlsx project budget.*
- **Budget funding mix documentation**
 - *If your project includes a mix of funding, attach documentation verifying committed or pending funds (e.g., bank letter for loan approval, grant award letters, investor commitments, or other financial verification).*
- **In-kind support documentation**
 - *Provide written confirmation of any in-kind contributions, such as letters from partners detailing donated space, materials, services, or volunteer time. If you do not have in-kind support for this project, upload a document stating so.*
- **Letters of support and partnership documentation**
 - *Upload letters of support from partners or collaborators. Projects with partners are prioritized; please include MOUs or follow the provided partnership letter guidelines. If you do not have in-kind support for this project, upload a document stating so.*
- **Visual Materials**
 - *Include renderings, site photos, design drafts, concept drawings, or other visuals that help reviewers understand the proposed project.*

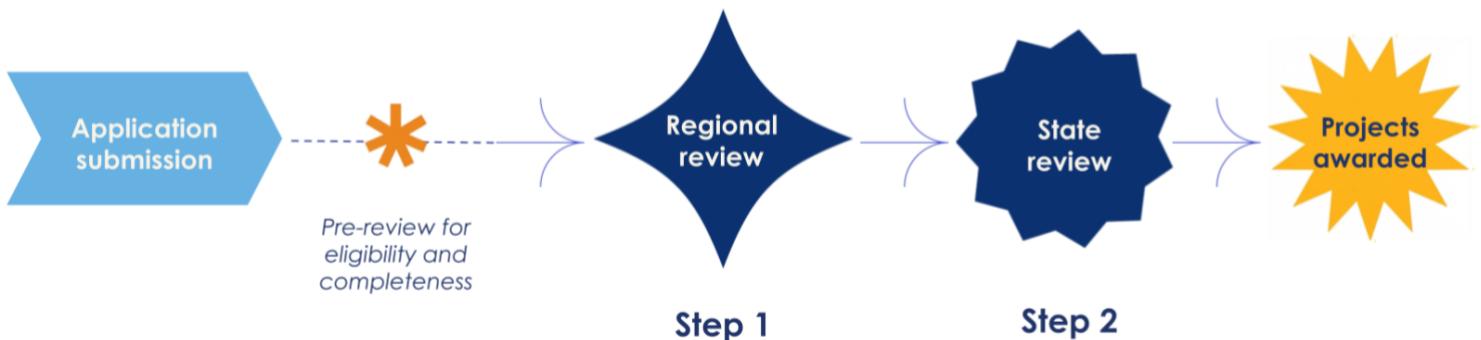
Section II

Explanation of the evaluation process

Explanation of the evaluation process

Applications to the READI 2.0 Arts & Culture Initiative are evaluated through a three-stage review process designed to ensure eligibility, strong regional alignment, and consistent statewide evaluation.

Review process



Eligibility and Completeness Review

All applications first undergo an administrative pre-review to confirm applicant eligibility and verify that required materials have been submitted and are complete. Only applications that meet these baseline requirements advance to the subsequent review stages.

Regional Review

In the second stage, applications are reviewed by the READI 2.0 region or regions in which the proposed project will take place. This regional review focuses on how closely the project aligns with the priorities and strategies outlined in the region's adopted arts and culture plan. Reviewers use a standardized alignment scale to assess relevance and fit. These regional assessments are shared with the state review panel and help inform the second stage of review.

State Panel Review

In the final stage, applications are evaluated by a statewide review panel convened by IEDC. Using a 100-point weighted scoring rubric, panelists assess the clarity, feasibility, and impact of each proposal, based on the below prompts:

- **Project Description (20 PTS)**
 - *Does the description provide sufficient and thoughtful detail about the nature of the project? Does the description demonstrate understanding of the cultural landscape -- locally, regionally, or nationally? Does the project clearly communicate how the READI funds will be used within the context of this project?*
- **Project Impact (20 PTS)**
 - *Does the project or program clearly address a community need? Does it demonstrate a thoughtful and feasible solution? Does it engender wider impact -- beyond the proposing organization, contributing to a broader community, cultural, or regional benefit?*
- **Partnerships and Engagement (20 PTS)**
 - *Is the proposed project or program responsive to community needs and feedback? Does the proposed project or program demonstrate depth and quality of community engagement in both planning and implementation? Is there evidence of engagement of artists, residents, youth, governing bodies, and voices often less heard from? Are there defined substantive roles for partners contributing to the project?*
- **Project Management & Sustainability (20 PTS)**
 - *Does the organization demonstrate the required capacity to responsibly manage and steward project funds? Is there sufficient evidence that the organization is capable of raising or earning additional funds beyond the Arts & Culture Initiative grant to support the project's success?*
- **Overall Submission (20 PTS)**
 - *Does this application constitute a thoughtful, feasible, and impactful project? Does the proposing organization or consortium appear capable of undertaking the proposed project? Is regional context and impact meaningfully considered? Is there evidence of community need, engagement, and support?*
- **Regional Cultural Plan Alignment (Scores imported from regional review.)**
- **Technical Assistance and Resources (Non-scoring)**

Applying with Review in Mind

Successful applications clearly demonstrate both regional relevance and project readiness. Applicants should show how their project directly aligns with priorities identified in their region's adopted arts and culture plan, while also providing enough detail to allow reviewers to understand the project's scope, feasibility, partnerships, and anticipated impact.

Because applications are reviewed at the regional level and then by a statewide panel, **applicants should avoid assuming local knowledge. Proposals should be written for a broad audience**, using clear language and concrete details to explain why the project matters, how it will be implemented, and how it will deliver lasting benefit to the community or region.

Section III

Frequently asked questions

Frequently asked questions

Who is eligible?

Eligible applicants include nonprofit organizations (c3 ad c6) , local or regional government entities, colleges and universities, and consortia led by an eligible nonprofit or public entity. Applicants must be located within, or serve, a READI 2.0 region and propose a project that provides a clear public and cultural benefit aligned with the region's arts and culture plan. Individuals and for-profit businesses may participate as partners but may not apply directly.

Do I need a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) to apply?

No, a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) is not required to apply. In the application please enter "N/A" if you do not have one.

Can a project occur across multiple READI 2.0 regions?

Yes, projects and partnerships can occur across multiple READI 2.0 regions or within a single region. Multi-region collaboration is encouraged.

Is there a capped total project request amount?

There is no funding cap. Applicants may request up to 100% of eligible project costs. Projects that include committed partners and matching funds will be prioritized in the review process.

Are there restrictions for how the funding can and can't be spent?

Funding may be used for both capital expenditures and programmatic costs. Food and beverage expenses are not eligible for reimbursement. This is not an exhaustive list; all proposed costs are subject to review and approval by the IEDC.

How do I identify which READI region my project is located in and where can I find the regional arts and culture plans?

Applicants can visit indianareadi.com to view regional maps and county listings that identify each READI region, as well as access the [full set of adopted regional Arts and Culture Plans](#).

Is this a reimbursement grant?

Yes. Funds are reimbursed based on eligible, documented expenses.

What is an “Applicant of Record”?

The Applicant of Record is the eligible organization that serves as the primary legal, financial, and administrative representative for the project. This entity is responsible for submitting the application, executing the grant agreement, managing grant funds, and fulfilling all reporting, compliance, and performance requirements. Any partners, collaborators, or individual artists involved in the project participate under the direction of the Applicant of Record.

Previous READI 2.0 funding required a match from private and philanthropic sources. Does this grant program have a similar requirement?

No. Matches are not required. However, private and philanthropic support often displays a higher degree of readiness.

Can for-profit entities apply?

For-profit entities may participate as partners, but cannot be the Applicant of Record. The Applicant of Record must be an eligible nonprofit or public entity.

Do projects need to be permanent?

No. One-time projects are eligible if they demonstrate lasting impact or value.

Are application materials public?

Yes. All submitted materials are subject to public records requests.

Why are there both evaluated and non-evaluated questions?

Non-evaluated questions help the state panel understand what resources applicants and project teams may need during the grant terms. It also informs the state about the type of technical assistance and reporting metrics most in need across the state. This information is considered when creating new or amending existing programs.

Evaluated questions are noted with an asterisk. Non-evaluated questions include: 2.1, 2.3, 6.1, 6.3, and all under Section 7.

I am not available during the online information session on February 10th. Will the meeting be recorded?

Yes, the meeting will be recorded. Please find a recording....

Can the application be saved or must it be completed in one sitting?

The online portal allows for applicants to save and return to their application.

Where can I get help?

Program and eligibility questions can be sent to nkouton@iedc.in.gov & heyoung@iedc.in.gov. Technical support with the IAC online grants system can be directed to grantsadmin@aic.in.gov



Public Sphere Projects
PSP.city