

Accelerate
RURAL
INDIANA

ARTS AND CULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **Accelerate Rural Indiana (ARI)** region—encompassing the city of Batesville, Decatur County (Greensburg), Rush County (Rushville), and Shelby County (Shelbyville)—is rooted in small-town pride and innovative entrepreneurship, where agriculture and industry fuel a legacy of industry, craftsmanship, innovation, and creativity. Yet it is also remarkably connected, positioned along the I-74 corridor with immediate access to Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and Louisville. This dual geography defines ARI’s identity: as local as you want, as dynamic as you need.

ARI is a region that blends heritage and innovation, where covered bridges stand alongside modern manufacturing plants, where German and Irish festivals mix with Hispanic and Japanese cultural celebrations, and where neighbors turn alleys and vacant lots into creative gathering spaces. The people of the ARI region are *can-do creatives*: they are resourceful, entrepreneurial, and proudly distinctive. This is a rural region with heart and grit, one that consistently punches above its weight.

Throughout the Indiana READI program, ARI has demonstrated its ability to deliver transformative projects across its various communities in housing, workforce development, and infrastructure, already with the local arts and cultural sector in mind. The next frontier is a dedicated plan for more intentional arts and cultural infrastructure development that is committed to the heart of community life and to the connective threads that strengthen social cohesion, sense of place, and economic vitality in the ARI region.

PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF THE PLAN

The ARI Arts and Culture Strategic Plan is a comprehensive, community-driven framework designed to integrate arts, culture, and placemaking as essential components of the region’s long-term prosperity. It builds directly on ARI’s development momentum and elevates creativity as infrastructure—vital to attracting residents, supporting employers, and defining a shared sense of place.

This plan’s recommendations will be implemented and advanced by the **Accelerate Rural Indiana Regional Development Authority**. The ARI READI Steering Committee, ARI Arts & Culture Steering committee—consisting of leadership from: the city/town leadership of the ARI region, HWC Engineering, Batesville Area Arts Commission, Blue River Community Foundation, Economic Development Corporation of Greensburg/Decatur County, the Arts and Cultural Council of Decatur County, and others—will assist with implementation of the plan in partnership and under the purview of the ARI RDA. Beyond the steering committees, many others have dedicated their time to this process and will be involved in its implementation.

This committee was instrumental in bringing this strategic plan to fruition, along with the expertise of **two local community coordinators** who were hired to guide the process and provide logistical planning support.

This strategic plan proposes future funding for a dedicated staff position, or a regional Arts and Culture Coordinator, that will assist the ARI RDA and responsible committees to support the implementation of this plan. This process is further detailed and proposed in the Strategic Priorities and Initiatives and the Implementation, Sustainability, and Evaluation sections of the document.



THE DOCUMENT UNFOLDS IN SEVERAL SECTIONS



Regional Identity and Community Profiles

Outlines ARI's geography, history, and cultural roots.



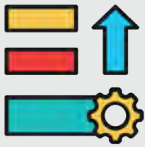
Community and Stakeholder Engagement Process

Details the engagement process involving over 430 survey respondents and 135 stakeholders as well as summarizes key community themes across five focus areas.



Regional Arts and Cultural Assets

Inventories tangible and intangible arts assets in each county.



Strategic Priorities and Initiatives

Lists recommended strategic actions and projects to advance the ARI regional vision for arts and cultural planning.



Strategic Plan Implementation, Sustainability, and Evaluation

Defines governance, funding, staffing, and data-driven performance tracking.



Appendices

Contain project lists, engagement summaries, and supporting frameworks.

COMMUNITY COORDINATION

To ensure the plan was locally grounded and authentically representative, two local community coordinators were hired to lead public engagement, cultural asset mapping, and stakeholder collaboration. These coordinators became the region's first professionals dedicated specifically to arts and cultural strategic planning, bridging local knowledge with regional vision. Their work serves as a model for a permanent Arts and Culture Coordinator and a network of local cultural liaisons who will continue implementing the plan.

REGIONAL VISION

When fully realized, the ARI Arts and Culture Strategic Plan will make the region known for its vibrancy, diversity, and accessibility. Residents and visitors alike will experience a landscape where arts and culture are not occasional events, but a way of life.

Above all, the ARI region will be a place where people can expand their horizons—to imagine new futures while setting down roots, and to see creativity as a cornerstone of resilient community life. It will be a region that stitches together past and future, and where residents feel empowered to shape their community through creative activities and can access the mechanisms to do so.

Arts, culture, and placemaking are thus treated not as luxuries, but as core quality-of-life investments that make small towns and rural cities competitive, welcoming, and dynamic. This plan envisions a future where creativity is the infrastructure of connection, binding together generations, communities, and the shared story of a region that grows from local strength into regional impact.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The plan identifies five strategic pillars, each designed to leverage ARI’s cultural assets, elevate local voices, and sustain creative growth:

				
<p>Placemaking and Public Art</p> <p>Transforming public spaces into vibrant community anchors through murals, sculpture trails, cultural corridors, and art-integrated infrastructure.</p>	<p>Performing Arts and Venues</p> <p>Building a coordinated regional network of theaters, amphitheaters, and multi-use venues to expand cultural participation and economic opportunity.</p>	<p>Heritage and Cultural Experience</p> <p>Connecting historic sites, traditions, and global partnerships through festivals, trails, and interpretive storytelling that honors disparate expressions of cultural heritage while embracing innovation.</p>	<p>Youth Culture and Creative Engagement</p> <p>Empowering the next generation through youth arts councils, teen hubs, and STEAM-integrated creative learning.</p>	<p>Administrative Coordination, Marketing, and Regional Communications</p> <p>Establishing a unified cultural hub and highlighting the ARI brand—“Rural. Reimagined.”—to strengthen communication, accessibility, cultural tourism, and creative opportunities.</p>

These strategies are built around community input and stakeholder engagement, in addition to an alignment with already-established regional development plans and strategies from the ARI regional development authority and its partner communities. These strategies elevate the community voice while addressing the state’s vision for quality of place, economic development, workforce and talent development/retention, and rural revitalization through arts and culture.





Introduction to

ACCELERATE RURAL INDIANA (ARI)

ARI was established in 2021 as an economic partnership initiative of Batesville, Greensburg, Rushville, and Shelbyville, along with Decatur, Rush, and Shelby counties. United by the I-74 corridor, these communities came together to link and leverage their strengths and assets, like a powerful manufacturing base, innovative agricultural practices, and a common labor force. In 2023, the collaboration was formalized through the creation of the Accelerate Rural Indiana Regional Development Authority, the first permanent regional body to guide and deliver projects of shared significance to the region.

The ARI region has built significant momentum through READI 1.0 and 2.0, securing transformative investments. With four cities and three counties, ARI has moved from fragmented boundaries into a unified alliance. In just a few years, ARI has evolved into a fully functioning Regional Development Authority with a record of project delivery, leading the state in READI 1.0 disbursements. This success has created a foundation not only for infrastructure, housing, and workforce development but also for cultural growth, placemaking, and quality-of-life improvements. This strategy elevates arts and culture as the next chapter of ARI's regional story.

Regional History

THE ARI REGION'S HISTORY IS ONE OF RESILIENCE, ADAPTATION, AND REINVENTION.



(1800s) Early Settlement and Immigration

Roots of community and craftsmanship take hold.

Indigenous stewardship and early settlers shaped the land. German and Irish immigrants brought farming, faith, and craft traditions, anchoring the region's rural identity.

(Late 1800s–Early 1900s) Civic Growth and Traditions

Towns flourish with civic pride and shared traditions.

Courthouses, main streets, and libraries rose as symbols of progress. County fairs, parades, and the Beech Settlement linked local identity to abolitionist heritage and the Underground Railroad.

(1900s–1950s) Industrial Era

Industry and agriculture drive prosperity. Batesville's Hillenbrand Industries, Greensburg's manufacturing sector, and Shelbyville's furniture makers fueled economic growth, while theaters and civic bands enriched cultural life.

(1960s–1990s) Transformation and Shifts

Communities adapt amid change. Urbanization and economic shifts tested towns, but preservation efforts, Main Street revitalization, and local festivals kept heritage alive and civic spirit strong.

(2000s–Present) A New Rural Narrative

Innovation and tradition intertwine. Honda in Greensburg ties local and global economies. Rushville earns Stellar Community designation; Batesville invests in creativity through the Kids Discovery Factory, while Shelbyville does so through Pride in Place.

Today's Identity Rural. Reimagined.

Heritage meets innovation in a connected region.

The ARI region blends small-town character with global opportunity. Diverse influences—German, Irish, Hispanic, Japanese, and African American—shape a dynamic, forward-looking cultural identity.

REGIONAL IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY PROFILES

AS SMALL AS YOU WANT, AS BIG AS YOU NEED.

The ARI region is rural and rooted, where century-old family farms stretch between historic courthouse squares and where covered bridges cross creeks that have powered mills for generations. Yet this is no isolated countryside. Positioned along the I-74 corridor, residents can reach downtown Indianapolis in an hour, Cincinnati's riverfront in 90 minutes, or Louisville's Derby City in two hours. Here, a farmer might work on their property in the morning and catch a Pacers game that evening. A Honda engineer in Greensburg commutes from a restored Victorian home in Batesville. In Shelbyville, an international photography art dealer connects artists and collectors across the globe. Communities are as small as you want—where everyone knows your name at the hardware store and your kids' teachers call you by your first name—and as big as you need, with major manufacturers, community-focused healthcare, and cultural venues that rival much larger cities.

ROOTED, GROWING, THRIVING.

Rootedness does not mean stagnation in ARI. This is where a fifth-generation corn farmer uses GPS-guided precision agriculture while his children manage the farm's Instagram account showcasing harvest drone footage and attend the Power of the Past festival. Where the Greensburg courthouse has sprouted a tree from its tower for over a century, becoming a living symbol of persistence and growth. Where murals celebrating William "Bill" Garrett, Indiana University's first African American basketball champion who led Shelbyville's high school to the 1947 state championships, appears in the heart of downtown and where a former Walmart in Rushville transforms into a community center that houses everything from senior fitness classes to children's coding workshops. Batesville's Weberding Carving Shop, a family-owned business four generations strong, exemplifies historic craftsmanship and wood carving as a rooted local business. Public art enlivens Main Streets as community expression—residents painting their own stories on walls, utility boxes becoming canvases for local high school students, and pocket parks emerging in vacant lots through neighbor collaboration. Heritage here isn't confined to the history books; it's lived, adapted, and continually woven into contemporary life.

CAN-DO CREATIVES.

Drive through the ARI region and creativity is everywhere. Where creativity lives not in formal galleries but in the 4-H fair's arts and crafts exhibits, showcasing the region's skill and imagination. The family whose ever-growing Christmas light show, synced to its own radio station, turns an ordinary yard into a small-town landmark. An artist-blacksmith who began his career as a Navy electronics technician has taught local students metal sculpture since 1994, fostering creativity through hands-on making. These are can-do creatives—people who see a problem and build a solution, who spot an empty space and envision possibility, who gather in coffee shops and church basements to plan festivals that bring thousands to town. They run sound systems for outdoor concerts, sew costumes for community theater, organize art walks that fill every storefront window, and turn their skills with welding, carpentry, and gardening into public art that tells their community's story.

RURAL AUTHENTICITY.

The ARI region doesn't apologize for being rural; it celebrates it with authenticity. This is home to the world's largest manufacturer of caskets (Batesville Casket Company), and they're proud of the craftsmanship that helps families honor their loved ones. Rushville's Chocolate Festival draws chocolatiers from around the world, and locals boast about their secret recipes passed down through generations. The Pioneer Engineers Steam Show features restored century-old machinery operated by farmers who can fix anything with baling wire and ingenuity. Honda chose Greensburg for its most environmentally advanced North American plant, where the employees trade their Honda jackets for team colors on Friday nights, heading from the plant to the high school football field. The courthouse tree in Greensburg isn't just a curiosity; it is a metaphor for a community that grows in unexpected ways and endures through everything. Local papers report on Future Farmers of America (FFA) students winning state competitions with the same prominence as professional sports scores. This is a region that refuses to be overlooked: confident in its values, creative in its solutions, and connected to the wider world on its own terms.

Regional vision

A DAY IN THE ARI REGION

The ARI region is alive with creativity, where arts and culture are not occasional events but part of everyday life. Vibrant downtowns, culturally rich programming, and collaborative spaces bring people together across generations and backgrounds. Here, history and innovation coexist, shaping a region where creativity strengthens resilience and belonging.

***A place where culture is not a pretense for exclusion,
it's in everyday occurrences and connections.***



Morning

IN THE ARI REGION

A morning walk through downtown Batesville reveals murals celebrating local history and diversity. Public art wraps utility boxes, while neighborhood cafés and family-run restaurants offer everything from German pastries to tamales. On the morning commute or a walk through downtown, familiar faces and local color reflect a region embracing its many cultural layers.



Afternoon

CREATIVITY IN ACTION

At the Rushville Public Library in the Love Community Center, children explore 3D printing while librarians host a story circle on the regional impact of historic events like the Underground Railroad. Down the block, artists and teens co-create a mural that celebrates community pride. These moments weave past and present, showing how creativity connects people and place.



Evening

CULTURE FOR EVERYONE

As night falls, cultural life emerges across the region, from concerts and plays to community art activations and youth showcases, revealing a creative network that links towns through shared experiences.



Nightfall

CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

The day ends at a community festival on the Fried Chicken Trail, where music floats across the square. Friends gather under the lights, visitors join in, and the ARI region feels both small and expansive—intimate in its connections, yet full of possibility.

COMMUNITY PROFILES

BATESVILLE RIPLEY/FRANKLIN COUNTIES

KEY STATISTICS



6,842
Population



\$215,900
Median Home Value



3,590
Jobs



623 MI²
Land Area



-2.98%
Population Change (2022-2023)



2.43
Average Household Size
(U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year
Estimates, 2023)

IDENTITY

Batesville, founded in 1853 along the Cincinnati and Indianapolis Railroad, spans Ripley and Franklin counties and is the largest community in both, serving as their only incorporated city. It is known for its German-Catholic heritage, which has shaped the local architecture and coincides with a history of historic furniture and coffin production—including Hillenbrand Industries and the Batesville Casket Company—based on its location within rich hardwood timber forests. Batesville is strategically positioned between Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and Louisville. It offers residents a dense urban feel within a small town setting in closer proximity to nature and rural life. The city is recognized for its vibrant arts programming, extensive public art installations and art shows, community theatre productions, and historic local and family-owned businesses. It stands out for its regional impact through a strong commitment to youth arts education and creative activities across the Batesville Community School Corporation, Genesis, Pathways to Success, and the Kids Discovery Factory.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

Batesville boasts significant assets, from the Batesville Area Arts Council to the Gibson Theatre (100+ years old), Batesville Memorial Public Library and Area Historical Center. Amack's Well coffee and community space, Kids Discovery Factory, BAAC Art Walk (self-guided tour), and Central Batesville Historic District extend cultural offerings. The city also features more than 25 public art installations, including murals, sculptures, rotating art panels, and the temporary installations like the Batesville Sky Project of suspended umbrellas.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Batesville's cultural calendar includes Fiesta Hispana, Kiwanis Family Carnival, and the Tap and Chisel Craft Brew and Spirits Festival. Seasonal highlights include Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony, Kiwanis Applefest, Halloween Parade, Vogt Farm Pumpkin Festival, July 4th parade and festival, Main Street Farmers Market, and the Batesville Area Arts Council Art Show and Young Artist Showcase. Together, these events highlight the city's mix of heritage, youth engagement, and contemporary creativity.

ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Batesville Area Arts Council (BAAC), as one of the anchor arts institutions, is led by a part-time executive director. The BAAC champions arts advocacy, programming, education, and regional arts development for Batesville and the ARI region as a whole. BAAC was founded in 1988 as the Rural Alliance for the Arts and today has a 20-member board of directors, many of whom volunteer and are associated with business organizations that provide generous investments of time, resources, and capital.

Other local organizations that make a significant impact on the local creative economy and arts scene include the Batesville Community Theatre, Miss Shannon's Music Studio, Weberding's Carving Shop, the historic Eureka Band, and the Batesville Memorial Public Library Arts and Innovation Hub, among many others identified in the asset mapping section.

ARTS-SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

Support for arts and culture comes from the Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce, the City of Batesville, Margaret Mary Health, and Hillenbrand Industries, alongside the local school district. Additional partners include the Beautification League, Batesville Main Street, Parks and Recreation, and the Batesville Area Inclusion and Diversity Group, which annually organizes a local Pride Festival.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

Capitalizing on strategic location between Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and Louisville for cultural tourism; expanding downtown arts district around historic theater and gallery spaces. There is ample opportunity to add an outdoor concert venue and performance amphitheater; integrating manufacturing heritage with modern community identity; supporting Arts in Education programming across regional school districts; maintaining small-town character while growing as a regional cultural hub; expand initiatives like the Art Shakedown, an arts and cultural municipal policy that requests a percentage of new developments include artistic elements and functional public art – or asks that developers donate a comparable sum to local arts organizations or projects that support local artistic growth.

PLAN ALIGNMENT

Serves as anchor for Heritage and Cultural Experience pillar through German heritage programming and multicultural celebrations; leads Youth Culture and Creative Engagement through established arts education networks and innovative STEAM learning experiences.



COMMUNITY PROFILES

GREENSBURG

DECATUR COUNTY

KEY STATISTICS



26,411
Population



\$189,900
Median Home Value



5,850
Jobs (Greensburg, 2023)



372.6 MI²
Land Area



+1.35%
Population Growth
(Greensburg 2022-2023)



2.46
Average Household Size
(U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year
Estimates, 2023)

IDENTITY

Decatur County, located in southeastern Indiana, was established in 1822 and is best known for being the “Tree City,” symbolized by a live tree growing from the historic courthouse tower in Greensburg. The county blends strong agricultural traditions with modern manufacturing, supported by major employers such as Honda Manufacturing of Indiana, Valeo Engine Cooling, and Decatur County Memorial Hospital. This mix of history, industry, and creativity gives Decatur County a distinctive community character that leans towards innovation and commerce.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

The county’s identity is anchored in its unique cultural heritage assets, regional history, and in its sustaining economic partnerships. The Decatur County Courthouse (National Register for Historic Places) remains a unique and recognizable landmark. Greensburg’s award-winning Rebekah Park contains the Building Bridges Inclusion Park—a play area featuring adaptive playground equipment for youth within a range of accessibility and mobility needs—and Cherry Grove, which honors the partnership between Honda manufacturing, its Japanese roots, and its impact on the Greensburg community. Additionally, the Decatur County Public Library, the Downtown Greensburg Historic District, and the Decatur County Historical Society and Museum collaborate to create arts and cultural engagement opportunities throughout the county. Economic anchors like the Honda Manufacturing of Indiana plant reinforce Greensburg’s role as a global manufacturing hub with cultural influence.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Decatur County celebrates its connection to place and time through signature annual gatherings. The Tree City Festival highlights Greensburg’s iconic courthouse tree, while the Decatur County Fair maintains strong agricultural traditions. DecCo Summer Concert Series, seasonal parades, downtown celebrations, and farmers markets create recurring opportunities for community connection. Living history comes alive through the Greensburg Power of the Past festival and historic building tours upon request.

ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

Decatur County's cultural infrastructure includes its local anchor arts institution, Arts and Cultural Council of Decatur County, which is overseen by a volunteer board of directors from various sectors of the Greensburg community. The Arts and Cultural Council was founded in 1995 and is the oversight board for the ARTisTREE district in Greensburg since 2018, including representation from major arts organizations.

Civic partners that collaborate on community arts engagement projects include the Historical Society of Decatur County, the Decatur County Community Foundation, Main Street Greensburg, and Visit Greensburg. Art on the Square Gallery supports youth arts engagement through events like the Decatur County Recycled Art Show and volunteer historic preservation groups extend community engagement for older adults.

ARTS-SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

Cultural initiatives are supported by the Greensburg/Decatur County Chamber of Commerce, Decatur County Parks and Recreation, City of Greensburg, Decatur County Government, and Main Street Greensburg. Decatur County Community Foundation provides donors with opportunities to support arts and culture, historic preservation, youth and recreation, and more. Private-sector partners such as Honda Manufacturing, Maddux Moving Storage and Auction, Enneking Auto Body, Corya Inc., and local media including WTRE contribute to sustaining arts and cultural vitality.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

Leveraging its local "Tree City" identity for unique tourism, storytelling, and community branding; revitalizing downtown Greensburg while preserving historic architecture; expanding arts programming beyond traditional agricultural community events; connecting rural townships to county seat cultural resources; balancing industrial growth with historic preservation and community character. Expand the **MakeMyMove** campaign, which provides cash and other incentives for relocation to Greensburg, and directly target creative sectors.

PLAN ALIGNMENT

Central to Placemaking and Public Art pillar through downtown revitalization, expansion of performing arts facilities and venues, and unique landmark preservation; supports Heritage and Cultural Experience through seasonal festivals, celebrations, and historic architecture preservation.



COMMUNITY PROFILES

RUSHVILLE

RUSH COUNTY

KEY STATISTICS



16,734
Population



\$155,900
Median Home Value



7,640
Jobs (2023)



408.1 MI²
Land Area



+0.108%
Population Growth (2022-2023)



2.54
Average Household Size
(U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year
Estimates, 2023)

IDENTITY

Rush County was founded in 1822 and named after Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Rushville, the county seat and only incorporated city, serves as the hub of civic and cultural life. Industries, large and small, enhance the quality of work and life in Rushville and Rush County. Rushville offers 80 acres of state-certified “Prime, Shovel-Ready” land, designed to flexibly support a wide range of industrial development needs. The county is especially notable for the Love Community Center, a former Walmart transformed into a comprehensive community facility that includes the public library, senior center, childcare, food pantry, and recreation—all under one roof. The renovation of its main street area, including the historic Princess Theatre and Farmers’ and Artisans’ Market square, has breathed new life into Rushville. A major cultural draw includes RushFest and Willkie Days, an annual festival full of vendors, activities, and live music. This innovative reuse and historic preservation exemplifies the county’s collaborative and resourceful spirit.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

Rush County’s assets reflect both heritage and innovation. The Love Community Center demonstrates adaptive reuse at a community-wide scale. Other important assets include the old Rushville Public Library (est. 1910), Riverside Park Amphitheater, the 1896 Romanesque Revival Courthouse, and the Downtown Rushville Historic District. The Willkie House and East Hill Cemetery preserve political and cultural history, while the Fairgrounds provide space for large events.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Rush County celebrates its agricultural and civic pride with the Rush County Fair, while the RushFest/Willkie Days Festival honors hometown presidential candidate Wendell Willkie. Seasonal highlights include Riverside Park Amphitheater Summer Concert Series, the historical society’s Festival of Trees, and the Christmas 1863 Experience, which brings history to life through community engagement. Outdoor cultural life is strong, with the Rush2Health coalition organizing events, Food Truck Rally, and Libations by the Levee festival drawing broad participation. Farm-to-table dining and premier culinary events—including Heart of Rushville’s Farm to Fork Dinner, Midwest Chocolate Festival, and local Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs)—highlights the county’s agricultural roots.

ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

Cultural organizations include the imagine:nation Arts and Cultural Council, Heart of Rushville, the Rush County Historical Society and Museum, the Rushville Art Gallery, and the Pioneer Engineers Club of Indiana. Together, these groups showcase both creative expression and the county's agricultural connection to the past.

ARTS-SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

Some examples of key supporters include the Rush County Community Foundation, the City of Rushville, Heart of Rushville Main Street organization, and Rush County Economic Development. Tourism promotion is led by Visit Rush County, while the Chamber of Commerce provides business community backing.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

Attracting young families and professionals for population stability; utilizing the new Love Community Center as a central hub for community engagement and cultural activities; enhancing tourism promotion around historic assets and festivals; maintaining agricultural heritage while diversifying local economy; supporting local businesses in a competitive environment.

PLAN ALIGNMENT

Model for Performing Arts and Venues through amphitheater programming and Love Community Center as multi-use cultural facility; exemplifies Heritage and Cultural Experience through presidential history interpretation and pioneer heritage programming.



COMMUNITY PROFILES

SHELBYVILLE

SHELBY COUNTY

KEY STATISTICS



45,104
Population



\$188,300
Median Home Value



22,100
Jobs (2023)



411.1 MI²
Land Area



+0.365%
Population Growth (2022-2023)



2.42
Average Household Size
(U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year
Estimates, 2023)

IDENTITY

Shelby County, established in 1822 and named after Revolutionary War hero Isaac Shelby, hosts Shelbyville as its county seat. Historically a hub of furniture manufacturing and Indiana's first railroad, Shelby County has grown into a dynamic community balancing small town character and comforts with proximity to major metropolitan areas. Ongoing investments in downtown revitalization and cultural programming—such as at the Wortman Family Civic Theatre and historic Strand Theatre—strengthen Shelby County's cultural vitality. Partnerships with firms like Ratio Design have revitalized Shelbyville's historic downtown and have brought new life while maintaining local charm and history. An abundance of public art and live events encourage people to spend time at one of many special gatherings in the downtown area.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

Major cultural venues include the Strand Theatre (1916), the Wortman Family Civic Theatre, and Echo Effect, a newer community arts venue. The Shelby County Public Library and Blue River Memorial Park serve as important centers for programming and events. Historic sites such as the Downtown Shelbyville Historic District and the County Fairgrounds reinforce community heritage.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Cultural events anchor community life. The Shelby County Fair remains a major agricultural and social gathering. Other highlights include the St. Joe Festival, Smokin' the Ville BBQ Festival, Arts in the Park at Blue River Memorial Park, and the City of Shelbyville Summer Concert Series. Seasonal celebrations—such as wine and craft beer festivals and holiday parades—draw residents and visitors alike. The Blue River Highland Games showcase heritage through athletic competitions, music, and dance.

ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

Shelby County's cultural sector includes the Shelby County Players, the Shelby County Arts Fest, Main Street Shelbyville, and the Shelby Art Guild Association, which provides professional gallery space and arts promotion across the county.

ARTS-SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

The Blue River Community Foundation is a major supporter of arts and culture. Additional partners include the Shelby County Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Shelbyville, the City of Shelbyville, and Shelby County Tourism. Local donors and private foundations also play a critical role in sustaining cultural projects.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

Leveraging proximity to Indianapolis for economic and cultural growth; supporting downtown revitalization through Main Street initiatives; expanding community theater and performing arts programming at The Strand Theatre, Wortman Family Civic Theatre, and Shelby County Players; enhancing connectivity between rural communities and county seat resources; managing growth while preserving agricultural heritage and small-town character.

PLAN ALIGNMENT

Anchor for Performing Arts and Venues pillar through established theater facilities and active community theater organizations; demonstrates successful Placemaking and Public Art through downtown revitalization and Blue River Park programming.



ARTS VIBRANCY INDEX

Residents of Indiana have nearby access to many regional communities and hubs with great artistic offerings. SMU DataArts, the National Center for Arts Research, ranks communities according to their Arts Vibrancy Index (AVI), which uses a data-driven approach based on 13 unique measures, including the number of individuals and organizations engaged in the arts and the level of public and financial support for the arts. The AVI can help “arts leaders, businesses, government agencies, funders, and engaged citizens understand the overall intensity and capacity of the community’s arts and culture sector.”¹

Below are the AVI scores for Decatur, Franklin, Ripley, Rush, and Shelby Counties Community Art Vibrancy Index scores² and statistics.

ARI REGION SCORES

DECATUR COUNTY

26,411 <i>Population</i>	40.4 <i>Median age</i>
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\$74,228 <i>Median household income</i>	10,518 <i>Total households</i>
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Art Rank	38
Arts Dollars Index	35
Arts Providers Index	33
Public Support Index	43
Socioeconomic Index	64
Employment Index	85
Bachelor's Degree Index	47
Households >\$150K Index	80

FRANKLIN COUNTY

22,929 <i>Population</i>	42.3 <i>Median age</i>
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\$79,702 <i>Median household income</i>	9,131 <i>Total households</i>
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Art Rank	72
Arts Dollars Index	58
Arts Providers Index	41
Public Support Index	43
Socioeconomic Index	61
Employment Index	69
Bachelor's Degree Index	47
Households >\$150K Index	75

SOURCES

¹<https://culturaldata.org/arts-vibrancy-2024/methodology/>

²These index scores show how a county performs relative to other counties on a 0-100% scale. For example, a county scoring 85 would be performing better than 85% of other counties, while a county scoring 15 would be performing worse than 85% of other counties. <https://dataarts.smu.edu/ArtsVibrancyMap/>

RIPLEY COUNTY

29,039 <i>Population</i>	40.9 <i>Median age</i>
------------------------------------	----------------------------------

\$71,084 <i>Median household income</i>	11,356 <i>Total households</i>
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Art Rank	75
Arts Dollars Index	72
Arts Providers Index	45
Public Support Index	81
Socioeconomic Index	74
Employment Index	84
Bachelor's Degree Index	48
Households >\$150K Index	84

RUSH COUNTY

16,734 <i>Population</i>	42.7 <i>Median age</i>
------------------------------------	----------------------------------

\$64,393 <i>Median household income</i>	6,650 <i>Total households</i>
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Art Rank	28
Arts Dollars Index	56
Arts Providers Index	51
Public Support Index	25
Socioeconomic Index	40
Employment Index	56
Bachelor's Degree Index	26
Households >\$150K Index	66

SHELBY COUNTY

45,104 <i>Population</i>	41.2 <i>Median age</i>
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\$71,301 <i>Median household income</i>	18,145 <i>Total households</i>
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Art Rank	83
Arts Dollars Index	82
Arts Providers Index	70
Public Support Index	80
Socioeconomic Index	58
Employment Index	81
Bachelor's Degree Index	47
Households >\$150K Index	63

MAJOR HIGH-RANKING METROPOLITAN AREAS

The following metropolitan areas and counties have been ranked as among the most “Arts-Vibrant” communities within a five hour drive of Greensburg, IN.

	Cincinnati, OH <i>OH-KY-IN</i>	Chicago, IL <i>Naperville- Arlington Heights</i>	Kalamazoo, MI <i>Portage</i>	Ann Arbor, MI	Milwaukee, WI <i>Waukesha</i>
National Rank	#19 nationally	#11 nationally	#5 mid-size	#10 mid-size	#14 nationally
Drive time from Greensburg	1 hour	4 hours	4.5 hours	4.5 hours	5 hours
Arts Providers Index	167	33	99	294	159
Independent Artists	237	64	195	180	176
Arts & Culture Employees	43	23	8	45	12
Arts & Culture Nonprofits	367	482	634	148	450
Arts & Culture Firms	169	35	99	299	162
Arts Dollars Index	9	27	38	66	4
Program Revenue	8	73	325	55	17
Contributed Revenue	71	24	110	255	86
Total Expenses	65	55	12	36	3
Total Compensation	13	36	80	103	18
Public Support Index	21	28	27	33	63
State Arts Funding	13	73	6	21	112
State Arts Grants	45	59	4	21	64
Federal Arts Funding	83	36	134	97	102
Federal Arts Grants	75	43	106	64	81
Government Support	9	47	419	328	45
Demographics					
Population (2023)	2,272,910	7,075,391	262,215	119,380	1,560,424
Median Age	38.4	38.9	34.9	28.3	38.8
Total Households	921,306	2,856,546	107,893	49,077	650,986
Median Household Income (\$)	\$77,844	\$86,599	\$67,191	\$76,207	\$77,006

ARTS VIBRANCY INDEX

NEARBY HIGH-RANKING ARTISTIC COUNTIES

MARION COUNTY

968,460
Population

34.5
Median age

\$66,582
Median household income

408,293
Total households

Art Rank	98
Arts Dollars Index	99
Arts Providers Index	92
Public Support Index	98
Socioeconomic Index	78
Employment Index	90
Bachelor's Degree Index	86
Households >\$150K Index	44

JEFFERSON COUNTY, KY

772,144
Population

38.5
Median age

\$64,542
Median household income

331,206
Total households

Art Rank	97
Arts Dollars Index	94
Arts Providers Index	91
Public Support Index	92
Socioeconomic Index	84
Employment Index	84
Bachelor's Degree Index	86
Households >\$150K Index	52

HAMILTON COUNTY

371,645
Population

38.5
Median age

\$118,777
Median household income

140,850
Total households

Art Rank	96
Arts Dollars Index	89
Arts Providers Index	98
Public Support Index	96
Socioeconomic Index	98
Employment Index	97
Bachelor's Degree Index	99
Households >\$150K Index	98

FRANKLIN COUNTY, KY

51,563
Population

40.6
Median age

\$66,470
Median household income

22,548
Total households

Art Rank	88
Arts Dollars Index	45
Arts Providers Index	35
Public Support Index	95
Socioeconomic Index	50
Employment Index	69
Bachelor's Degree Index	66
Households >\$150K Index	15

MONROE COUNTY

139,342
Population

31.7
Median age

\$58,970
Median household income

61,400
Total households

Art Rank	90
Arts Dollars Index	95
Arts Providers Index	83
Public Support Index	89
Socioeconomic Index	69
Employment Index	63
Bachelor's Degree Index	99
Households >\$150K Index	6



COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

From July to September 2025, the ARI planning process engaged over **130 stakeholders and 431 survey respondents** across Shelby, Decatur, Rush counties and Batesville. Participants included nonprofit leaders, artists, educators, elected officials, business owners, and residents. Input was gathered through public sessions, focus groups, strategic workshops, cultural asset mapping, and a regional survey. Guided by an **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)** approach, the process emphasized building on existing strengths, building relationships, and surfacing authentic community priorities. Two local community coordinators were hired as part of this process and have served as two of the first regional coordinators focused on arts and cultural strategic planning. This engagement reflects a genuine, grassroots strategy that aligns with state goals and regionally-based funders supporting arts and culture initiatives around quality of place and local capacity-building.

FINDINGS BY STRATEGIC PRIORITY



PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC ART

Survey results: 32.4% of residents ranked public gathering spaces as their top priority, while 14.8% emphasized public art (murals, sculptures, installations).

Input sessions: Participants highlighted downtown plazas, city parks and shaded areas, and flexible gathering spaces for pop-up events in underutilized shared spaces as critical investments. Creative placemaking projects—such as murals and temporary art installations—were consistently named as visible markers of community and regional identity.

Key Takeaway: Residents cited further development of Main Streets and civic spaces to support the growth of cultural anchors that showcase local character, strengthen regional identity, and reinforce pride of place.



ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATION, DIGITAL PRESENCE, AND REGIONAL MARKETING

Survey results: Only 50% of respondents said they feel a sense of regional belonging, showing both a challenge and an opportunity to strengthen collective identity. 6.4% explicitly cited communication and outreach as a top priority, and residents cited this concern in every public input session in each community.

Input sessions: Participants called for stronger cross-county communication, a shared calendar, revival of physical community messaging boards, and the creation of a regional hub and new coordinator position to manage community arts and cultural engagement and to cultivate partnerships. Suggestions for expanding reach across different audiences and demographics included producing more bilingual promotional materials, printed guides, community bulletin boards, and coordinated I-74 cultural corridor branding.

Key Takeaway: Marketing and communication are viewed as the infrastructure of regional identity, essential for inclusion, cohesion, and positioning ARI as a cultural destination. There is a strong preference and great need for a funded coordinator role that works at the regional level to aid community arts engagement, partnerships, and to help oversee the implementation of this strategic plan and future projects.



PERFORMING ARTS AND VENUES

Survey results: 27.3% of respondents prioritized festivals, concerts, and events, and 17% cited performing arts or multi-use facilities as top needs for arts and cultural development within the region that would enhance local priorities and projects.

Input sessions: Across all four communities, participants were enthusiastic about a multi-use performing arts center accessible to all ages and abilities. Informal venues—vacant storefronts, underutilized lots and public spaces—were frequently mentioned as places to activate.

Key Takeaway: Performing arts infrastructure is viewed as a regional connector, expanding cultural participation while supporting economic development and downtown vitality.

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

Despite strong assets, barriers remain:

- Fragmented regional identity and historic rivalries can pose challenges for collaborative projects throughout the ARI region
- While many events remain free, transportation and overall affordability can still pose barriers to participating in arts and cultural events and can constrain access, especially for working families.
- Youth, church groups, and underserved rural residents are underrepresented in current outreach.

A full summary of all results from the public input sessions, surveys, and local assets can be found in [Appendices A and B](#).



HERITAGE AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

Survey results: 13.9% identified historic site activation (covered bridges, courthouses, historic buildings, architecture, local history sites, like the Underground Railroad) as a priority.

Input sessions: Communities expressed pride in unique heritage assets: Decatur’s Tower Tree, Batesville’s German craftsmanship traditions, Rush County’s agricultural landscapes and covered bridges, Shelbyville’s Blue River and revitalized historic Main Street.

Key Takeaway: Residents want these assets tied into a cohesive regional narrative. Festivals and heritage events are seen as gateways for tourism, strengthening both cultural pride and economic opportunity.



YOUTH CULTURE AND CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Survey results: 16% prioritized the further development of creative entrepreneurship initiatives and incentives, appreciation of local maker spaces and arts innovation hubs, with respondents especially interested in cultivating more participatory opportunities for youth and youth arts engagement outside of school.

Input sessions: Youth participation was flagged as underrepresented in public input and surveys. However, successful models—such as Rush County’s Drone Rodeo and local maker space programs—demonstrate appetite for innovation. Residents also emphasized murals and co-created projects as opportunities to engage youth in shaping community identity.

Key Takeaway: The region sees strong potential to position youth as co-creators, embedding creativity into everyday life through schools, libraries, and civic partnerships. Increasing arts experiences and opportunities for the region’s youth, and ensuring they can participate, is a high priority.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR REGIONAL STRATEGY

- Establish a regional coordinator or hub to unify communication and partnerships.
- Develop shared infrastructure, including an I-74 cultural corridor linking theaters, festivals, and arts councils.
- Expand inclusive access with sponsor-supported free programming, transportation solutions, and arts vouchers/“passports.”
- Promote ARI’s brand as resilient, authentic, and innovative, combining tradition with forward-looking creativity.

MEASURING AND EVALUATION OF SUCCESS

Input session and survey respondents suggested that progress could be measured through increases in cross-county participation, stronger representation of a wider socio-economic demographic at events and performances, and an expanded range of cultural offerings and experiences. Evaluation tools, including surveys, ZIP code tracking, and audience feedback, could ensure accountability and document ARI’s impact.

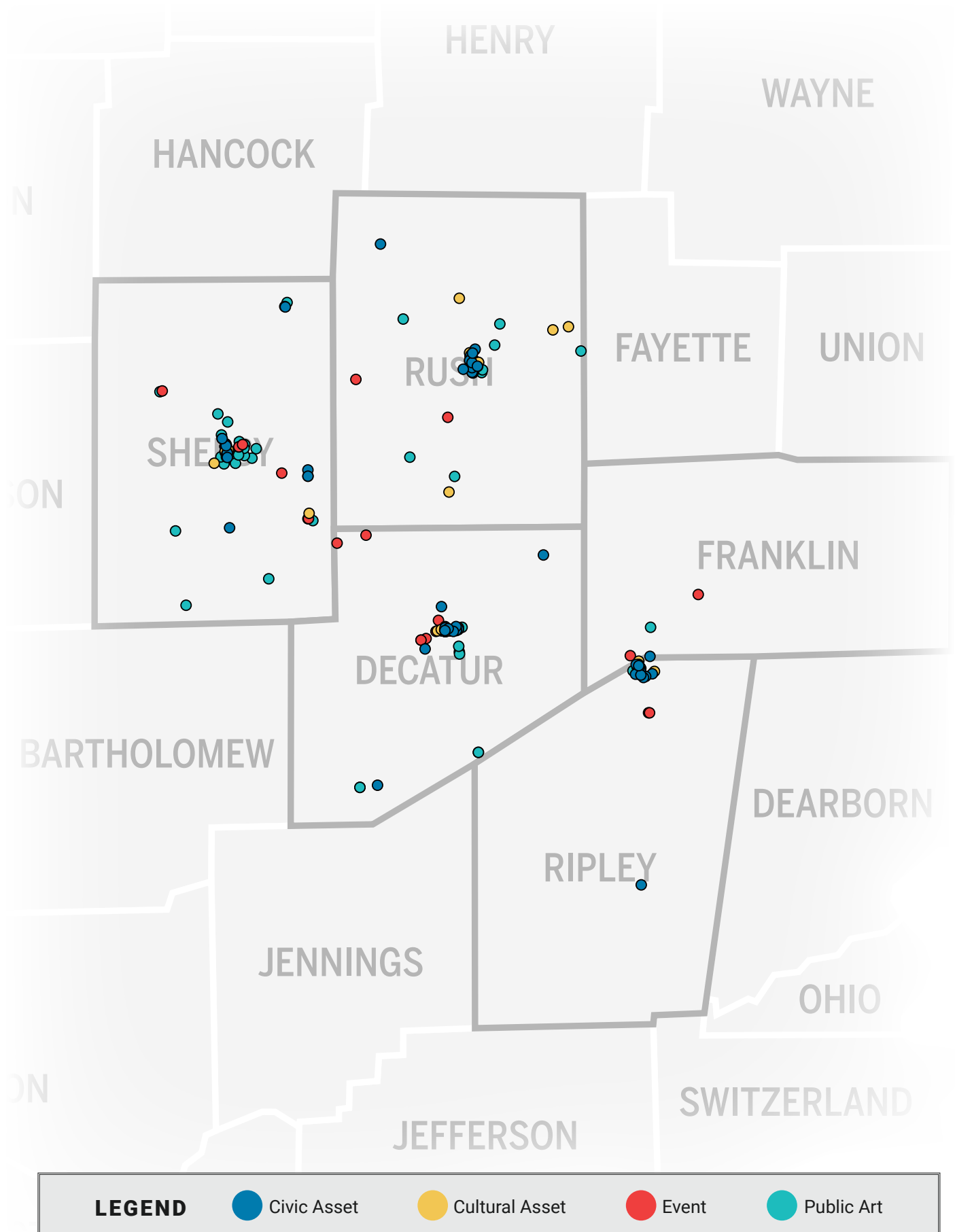
REGIONAL ARTS AND CULTURAL ASSETS

Asset mapping revealed both tangible and intangible resources that form the foundation of ARI's cultural ecosystem. To ensure community voice was reflected in the asset mapping process, two local community coordinators were hired to provide strategic planning guidance and asset mapping support. Tangible assets include public art, historic sites, venues, civic facilities, and natural spaces. Intangible assets include local stories, traditions, networks, and partnerships that create a sense of belonging.

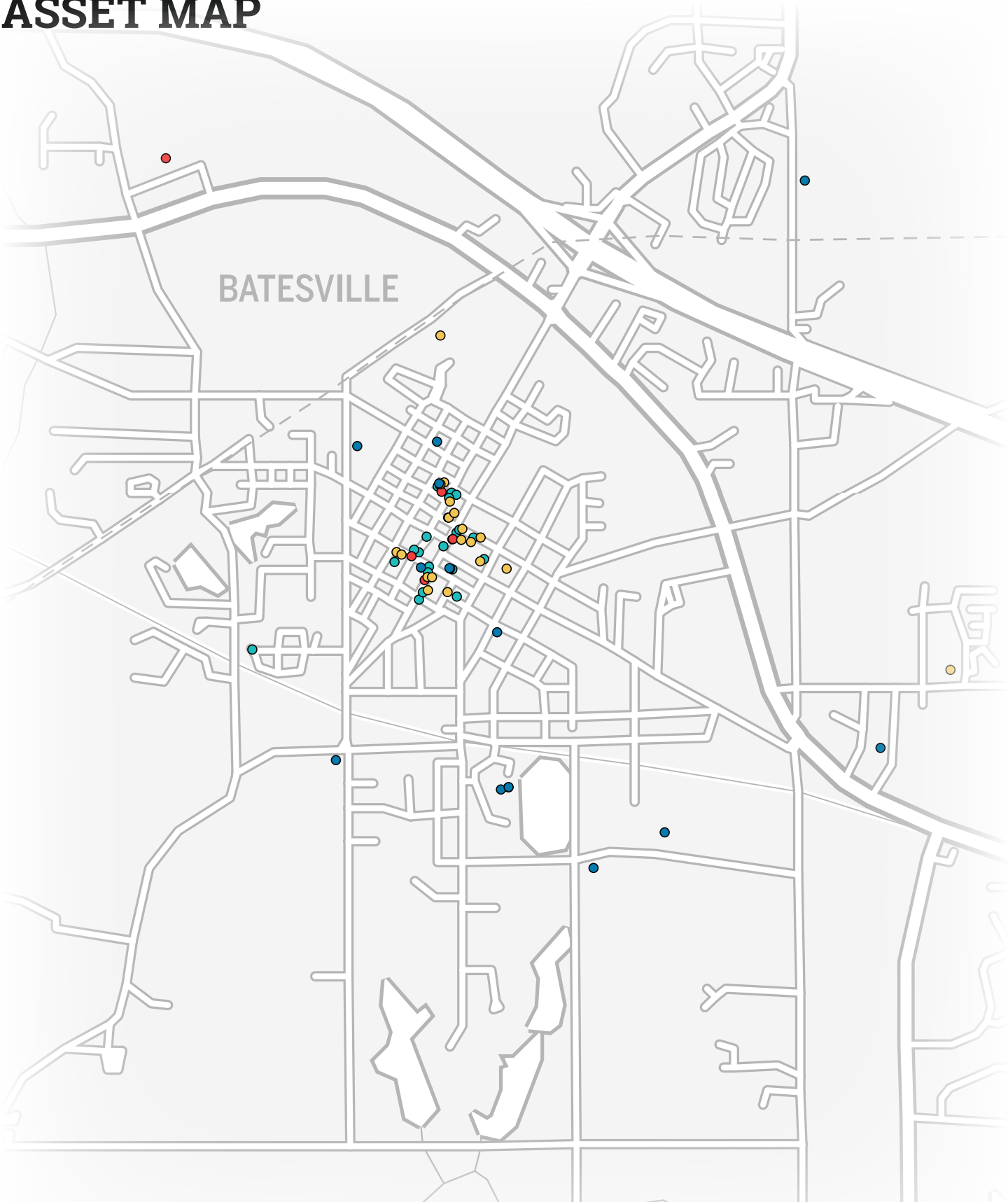
ASSET CATEGORIES INCLUDED:

- **Civic Assets:** Community Center/Senior Center, Higher Education facility, Library, Park/Trail, K-12 Education, Career Training
- **Cultural Assets:** Art in Non-Art Spaces, Artist/Creative Industry, Arts Organization/Non-profits, Informal Arts Group, History and Heritage
- **Public Art:** Mural, Sculpture, Art Installation, Other (e.g. utility wraps, sidewalk art)
- **Public Events:** Past, Annual, Recurring Series

FULL REGION ASSET MAP



BATESVILLE (FRANKLIN/RIPLEY COUNTIES) ASSET MAP



LEGEND	Civic Asset	Cultural Asset	Event	Public Art
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CIVIC ASSETS

- Batesville Memorial Public Library (Library)
- Batesville Park & Recreation (Community Center)
- Batesville Skatepark & Outdoor Adventure (Park/Trail)
- Bill Gillespie Soccer Park (Park/Trail)
- Brum Woods (Park/Trail)
- Freedom Park (Park/Trail)
- Inspiration Park (Park/Trail)
- Liberty Park (Park/Trail)
- Memorial Pool (Community Center)
- Morris Park Arboretum (Park/Trail)
- Ripley County Community Foundation (Community Center)
- Versailles State Park (Park/Trail)
- Veterans Park (Park/Trail)
- Weberding Park (Park/Trail)

CULTURAL ASSETS

- Amack's Well (Art in Non-Art Spaces)
- Batesville Area Arts Council (Arts Org/NPO)
- Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce (Arts Org/NPO)
- Batesville Beautification League (Arts Org/NPO)
- Batesville Historical Center (History & Heritage)
- Batesville Main Street (Arts Org/NPO)
- BMPL Arts & Innovation Hub (Art in Non-Art Spaces)
- Collaboration Corner: George Street Community Gathering Space (Art in Non-Art Spaces)
- Gibson Theatre (Arts Org/NPO)
- Kids Discovery Factory (Art in Non-Art Spaces)
- Margaret Mary Health & Wellness Campus (Art in Non-Art Spaces)
- Miss Lizzy's Performing Arts Academy (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Miss Shannon's Music Studio (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Southeast Indiana Creative Collective – Adult Art Club (Arts/Informal Group)
- Southeastern Indiana Dance Studio (Artist/Creative Industry)
- The Eureka Band (Arts/Informal Group)
- The Galley – Maker Space for Food Entrepreneurs (Artist/Creative Industry)
- The Speakeasy Listening Room (Artist/Creative Industry)

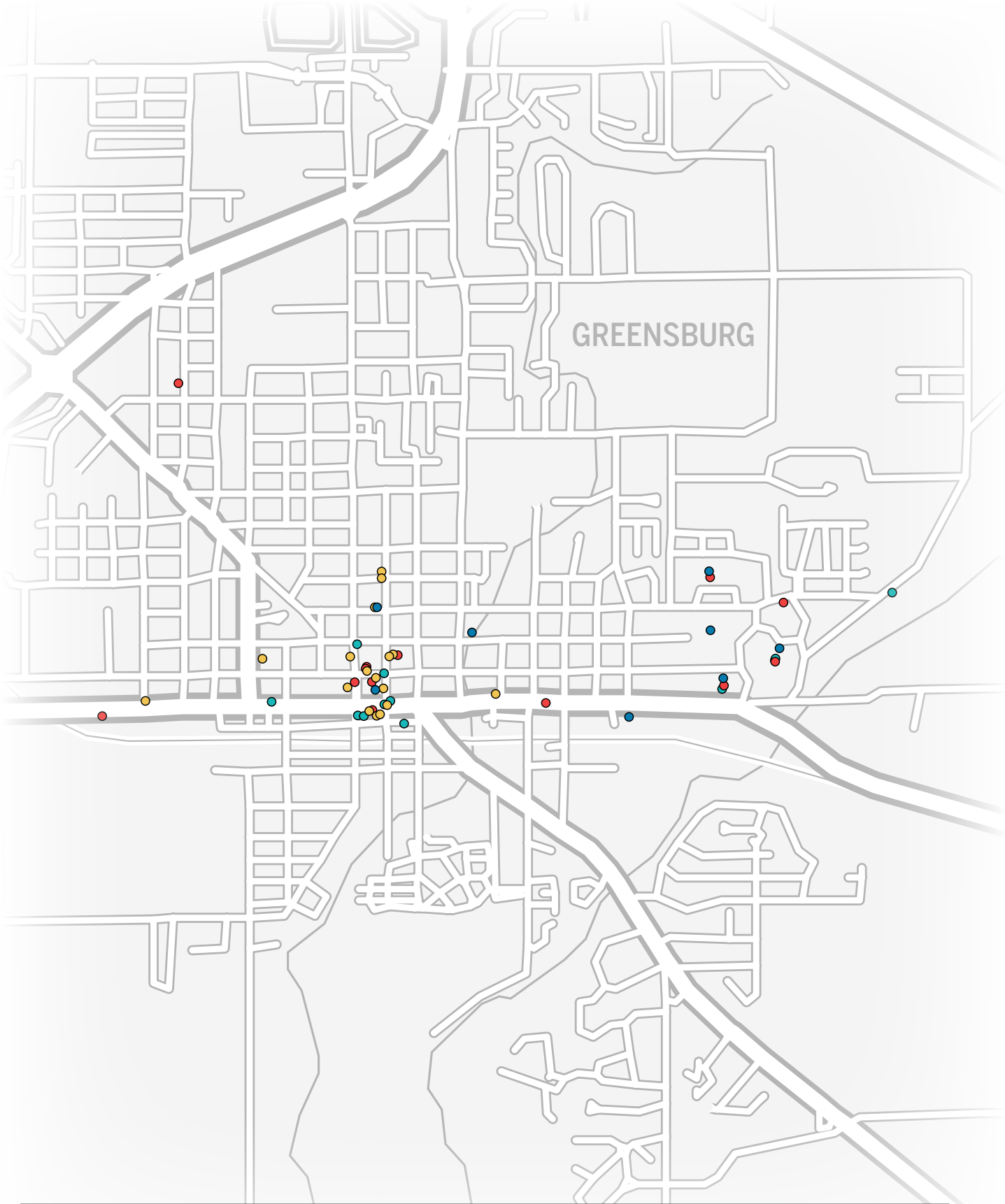
EVENTS

- BAAC Bi-Annual Community Theater Production
- BAAC Community Art Show
- BAAC Farmers Market Music Series
- Batesville Kiwanis Applefest
- Batesville Music Bash
- Happy Valley Bluegrass Festival
- Tap & Chisel Craft Brew & Spirits Fest
- Vogt Farm Mayhem in the Maze
- Vogt Farm Pumpkin Festival

PUBLIC ART

- A Tale of Our Town (Mural)
- Acoustic Alley (Mural)
- Art on Main (Art in Non-Art Spaces)
- Batesville Butterflies (Mural)
- Batesville Sky Project (Former Installation)
- Braun Buffalo (Sculpture)
- Candice (Sculpture)
- Children of Peace (Sculpture)
- Crucifixion Sculpture (Sculpture)
- Downtown Fountain (Sculpture)
- Explore 2 Learn (Mural)
- Farm to Table (Mural)
- Flower Girls (Sculpture)
- Growing Up Batesville (Mural)
- Historical Society Mural (Mural)
- Holzhacker Buam (Installation)
- Inspiration Park Sculpture (Sculpture)
- Journeys of the Imagination (Sculpture)
- Mike Kruse Sculpture (Sculpture)
- Moon Child (Sculpture)
- Oldenburg, Indiana Maypole/Maibaum (Sculpture)
- Our Roots Start Here (Mural)
- Post Office Mural (Mural)
- Wood Carvings (Installation)

GREENSBURG (DECATUR COUNTY) ASSET MAP



LEGEND	Civic Asset	Cultural Asset	Event	Public Art
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CIVIC ASSETS

- Decatur County Community Schools (School/Career Resources)
- Decatur County Courthouse (Community Center)
- Decatur County Parks & Recreation (Community Center)
- Greensburg Adult Center (Community Center)
- Greensburg Community High School (School/Career Resources)
- Greensburg-Decatur County Public Library (Library)
- Greensburg-Decatur County Public Library – Westport Branch (Library)
- Ivy Tech Community College – Greensburg Learning Center (Higher Ed)
- Lake Santee (Park/Trail)
- Pirate Park Green Space (Park/Trail)
- Purdue Extension – Decatur County (Higher Ed)
- Rebekah Park Amphitheatre (Park/Trail)

CULTURAL ASSETS

- Art on the Square Gallery (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Arts & Cultural Council of Decatur County (Arts Org/NPO)
- Carl Fisher Monument (History & Heritage)
- Decatur County Courthouse (History & Heritage)
- Decatur County Historical Museum (History & Heritage)
- Donnell vs. State 1852 Monument (History & Heritage)
- Franklin Street Historic District (History & Heritage)
- Greensburg Daily Yodel (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Greensburg Downtown Historic District (History & Heritage)
- John Wilder Home (History & Heritage)
- Main Street Greensburg (Arts Org/NPO)
- Melody Mart (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Painting the Town (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Tower Tree Square (Art in Non-Art Spaces)
- Tree City Stitches (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Tree County Playhouse (Tree County Players) (Arts Org/NPO)
- Visit Greensburg Decatur County (Artist/Creative Industry)

EVENTS

- Art on the Square Gallery Exhibits
- Blast from the Past St. Paul
- Decatur County Concert Series
- Decatur County Fair
- Decatur County Farmer’s Market
- Decatur County Historic Society Events
- DecCo Summer Concert Series
- Downtown Decatur Christmas Walk 2024
- Greensburg National Night Out
- Greensburg Power of the Past
- Inaugural Bill Smith Underground Railroad Festival
- Main Street Greensburg Holiday Walk
- Market to Meal
- Power of the Past Reunion
- Recycled Art Show
- St. Paul Fall Gathering
- Tree City Fall Festival
- Tree City Lube Modern & Classic Car and Truck Show





PUBLIC ART

- Artsy Waste Receptacles (8) (Other)
- Barklee (Sculpture)
- Charles Robert Sample Memorial (Monument/Memorial)
- Child (Sculpture)
- City Sidewalks (Other)
- Decatur County Bison (Sculpture)
- Feathers for the Fellows (Mural)
- Greensburg Icons (Mural)
- Homegrown Mural (Mural)
- John W. Shaw Memorial (Monument/Memorial)
- Keep on Truckin’ (Mural)
- Love Grows Here (Mural)
- Mary Queen of Heaven (Monument/Memorial)
- Picker Monument (Monument/Memorial)
- Rebekah (Monument/Memorial)
- Steel Sculpture (Sculpture)
- What Lifts You (Mural)

RUSHVILLE (RUSH COUNTY) ASSET MAP



LEGEND

-  Civic Asset
-  Cultural Asset
-  Event
-  Public Art

CIVIC ASSETS

- Carol Jenkins-Davis Park (Park/Trail)
- City of Rushville Parks Department (Community Center)
- Henry Henley Public Library (Library)
- Ivy Tech Community College – Rushville Site (Higher Ed)
- Laughlin Park (Park/Trail)
- Love Community Center (Community Center)
- Purdue Extension - Rush County (Higher Ed)
- Riverside Park & Riverside Park Amphitheater (Park/Trail)
- Rush County Community Foundation (Community Center)
- Rushville Public Library (Library)
- South Veterans Memorial Park (Park/Trail)
- Waggener Community Pool (Community Center)
- Wilkie Park (Park/Trail)

CULTURAL ASSETS

- 1st Maker Space (Art in Non-Art Spaces)
- Ben Davis Creek Church (History & Heritage)
- Booker T. Washington Building (History & Heritage)
- Hackleman Cabin (History & Heritage)
- Heart of Rushville (Arts Org/NPO)
- Imagine:Nation (Arts Org/NPO)
- Mocha Moose Coffee & Antiques (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Rush County Chamber of Commerce Mural (Arts Org/NPO)
- Rush County Courthouse (History & Heritage)
- Rush County Historical Museum (History & Heritage)
- Rushville Commercial Historic District (Art in Non-Art Spaces)
- Smith Covered Bridge (History & Heritage)
- The Princess Theater (Arts Org/NPO)
- Visit Rush County (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Weathered Fence Post (Photography) (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Wild Roots (Artist/Creative Industry)

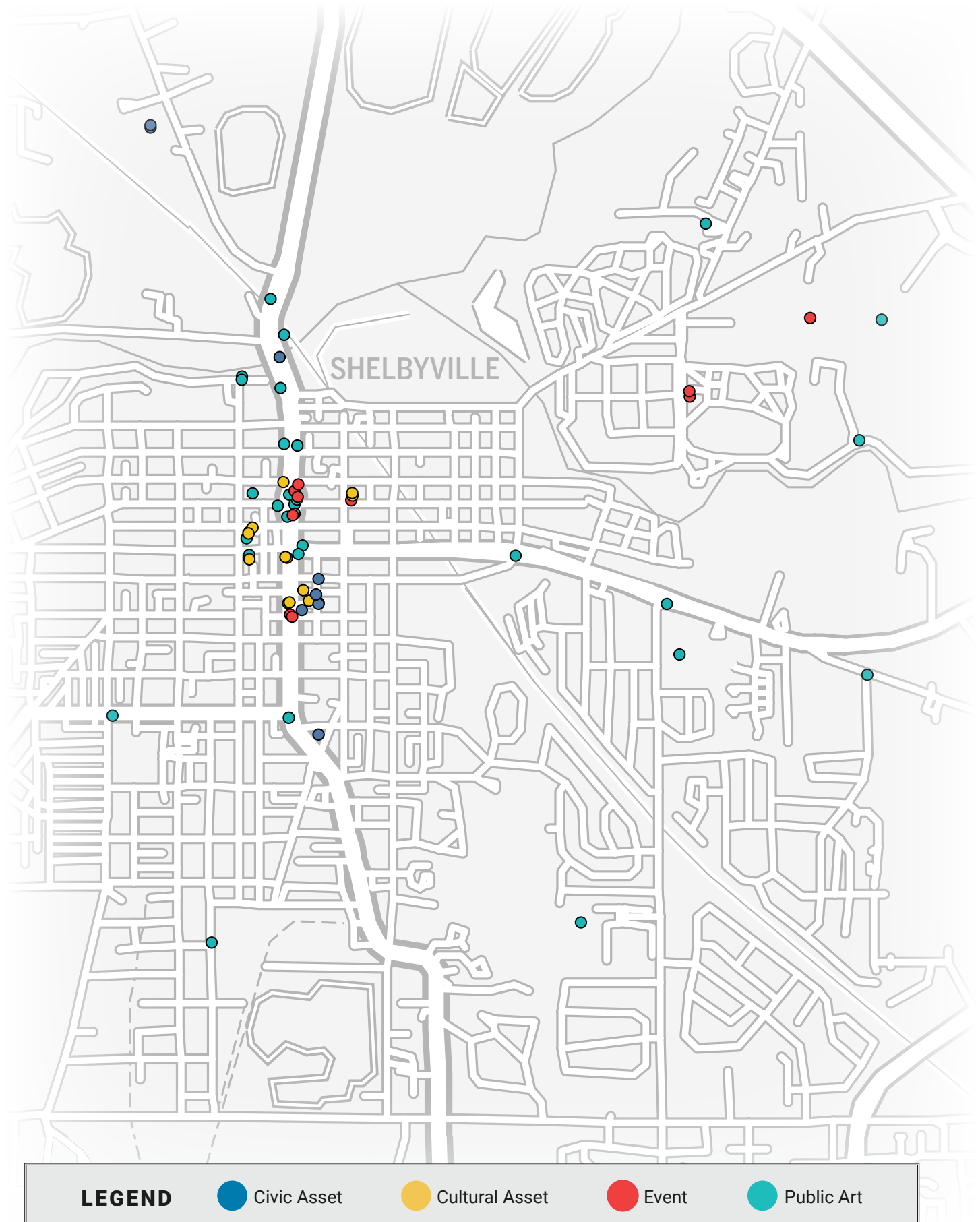
EVENTS

- Eagle Fest
- Friends of Fred Food Truck Festival
- Heart of Rushville Farmers' & Artisans' Market
- Libations by the Levee
- Pinestock Bluegrass Music Festival
- Pioneer Engineers Club Reunion
- Riverside Park Summer Concert Series
- Rush County Fair
- Rushville 4th of July Celebration
- Wilkie Days/RushFest
- Willkie Days / RushFest Vendor & Craft Fair

PUBLIC ART

- Bicentennial Mural (Rushville) (Mural)
- COL Joe Cotton Tribute (Mural)
- Dog Park Murals (Mural)
- Downtown Ladies and Gentlemen Mural (Mural)
- El Reparó Mural (Mural)
- Farmer's Market & Mural (Mural)
- Fish Moon Mural (Mural)
- Forsythe Covered Bridge (Other)
- Glenwood Mural (Mural)
- Guitar Sculpture (Sculpture)
- Historic Downtown Window Art (Mural)
- Let's Go Out to the Movies (Mural)
- Lion Community Pride (Sculpture)
- Lions Crayon Box (Mural)
- Louis Ice Cream Shop Mural (Mural)
- Milroy Mural (Mural)
- Music Lifts a Community (Mural)
- Norris Ford Covered Bridge (Other)
- Offutt Covered Bridge (Other)
- Reverend James H. Havens Portrait (Sculpture)
- RUSH Sculpture (Sculpture)
- Rushville's Greatest Love Story Mural (Mural)
- Shell Station Mural 76 (Mural)
- Smith Covered Bridge (Other)
- Wendell Wilkie Mural (Mural)

SHELBYVILLE (SHELBY COUNTY) ASSET MAP



CIVIC ASSETS

- Advantage Shelby County Program (School/Career Resources)
- Blue River Memorial Park (Park/Trail)
- Blue River Career Programs (School/Career Resources)
- Blue River Trail (Park/Trail)
- Flatrock River (Park/Trail)
- Ivy Tech Community College – Shelbyville Site (Higher Ed)
- Liberty Township Schoolhouse (Library)
- Meltzer Woods (Park/Trail)
- Purdue Extension - Shelby County (Higher Ed)
- Shelby County Public Library – Carnegie East Wing (Library)
- Shelby County Public Library – Morristown Branch (Velma Wortman Branch) (Library)

CULTURAL ASSETS

- Blue River Community Foundation (Arts Org/NPO)
- Echo Effect Arts Campus (Artist/Creative Industry)
- George Rudicel Polygonal Barn (History & Heritage)
- Grover Center Museum & Historical Society (History & Heritage)
- Shelby Art Guild Association (Arts/Informal Group)
- Shelby Community Band (Arts/Informal Group)
- Shelby County Arts Fest, Inc. (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Shelby County Courthouse (History & Heritage)
- Shelby County Players (Arts Org/NPO)
- Shelby County Public Library Makerspace (Art in Non-Art Spaces)
- Shelbyville Commercial Historic District (History & Heritage)
- Skyline Drive-in Theatre (Artist/Creative Industry)
- Strand Theatre of Shelbyville, Inc (Arts Org/NPO)

EVENTS

- Arts in the Park (Shelby County Arts Fest)
- Blue River Highland Games & Festival
- Brewfest
- Annual Fire Department Fish Frys
- Historic Shelby County Fair / Tractor & Car Shows
- Holiday Parade and former Holiday Home Tour
- Intro to ARTS
- Mistletoe Market
- Morristown Derby Days & Bears of Blue River Festival
- Shelby County Farmers Market
- Shelby County Players & Skyline Drive-In

- Sip on the Square
- Taste of Shelby County
- Waldron Freedom Festival

PUBLIC ART

- 'Seek and Find' Bear (Sculpture)
- Balsar the Bison (Sculpture)
- Bicycle Sculpture (Sculpture)
- Blue River Trail Sculpture – Kinetic Comet (Sculpture)
- Blue River Trail Sculpture – Monument to the Lost Empire (Sculpture)
- BRCF Bird Mural by Chelsie Liberati (Mural)
- Civil War Soldiers & Sailors Monument (Monument/Memorial)
- Coulston Elementary Mural "Story Stream" by Christi Ziebarth (Mural)
- Downtown Bike Rack (Sculpture)
- Golden Bear Preschool Mural (Mural)
- Grandmother Bear (Sculpture)
- Grant Impact on Shelby County (Mural)
- Hawaiian Shirt Bear (Sculpture)
- Heron Bear (Sculpture)
- Joseph Fountain/Balsar Statue (History & Heritage)
- Little Balsar and His Bears (Bears of Blue River) Statue (Sculpture)
- Loper Elementary Mural by Artur Silva (Mural)
- Make America Grateful Again Mural (Mural)
- Nature Bear (Sculpture)
- Park Kaleidoscope (Sculpture)
- Patriotic Bear (Sculpture)
- Sandy Allen Mural (Mural)
- Shelby County Public Library Ramp Mural (Mural)
- Shelby Mills Bear (Sculpture)
- Shelby Sundial (Blue River Trail) (Sculpture)
- Shelbyville Mainstreet Mural (Mural)
- Solar System Planet Sculpture Walk (Sculpture)
- Southwestern Elementary Sculpture Flower Garden (Sculpture)
- The Alleyway Murals (Mural)
- Town of Waldron Mural (Mural)
- Traffic Cabinet Box and Utility Box Mini Murals (21) (Mural)
- Waldron Elementary School Mural (Mural)
- Welcome to Shelby County Mural (Mural)
- William "Bill" Garrett Mural (Mural)

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM CULTURAL ASSET MAPPING

1 DOWNTOWNS AND MAIN STREETS ARE COMMUNITY ANCHORS

Revitalized town squares and central plazas serve as natural gathering spaces for performances, history and architecture tours, festivals, and other creative activities in each of the four ARI communities.

Anchoring arts organizations—Batesville Area Arts Council, Arts and Cultural Council of Decatur County, Rushville’s imagine:nation, and Shelbyville’s Blue River Community Foundation—will create long-term stability for implementation and maintenance of arts and cultural plans that incorporate downtown and main street areas. These areas foster social cohesion and already host clusters of cultural assets, with strong demand from residents to see opportunities expand.

2 LEVERAGE FESTIVALS AS GATEWAYS TO REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND TOURISM

Long-running community events and festivals are major draws across the ARI region. They provide opportunities to highlight local artistic talent, showcase each county’s unique cultural identity, and encourage cross-county visitors, strengthening regional visibility and tourism.

3 LINK CIVIC AND CREATIVE SPACES TO CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Libraries, parks, courthouses, and historic sites already double as cultural venues, hosting art shows, concerts, and community programs. Expanding these partnerships can layer programming, reach broader audiences across ages and backgrounds, and further embed creativity into everyday community life.

4 ANCHOR ARTS AND CULTURE IN STRONG CIVIC AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The ARI region already has a robust base of arts councils, nonprofits, and civic anchors such as the Decatur County Courthouse and the Batesville Park system. Groups like the Batesville Area Arts Council, Blue River Community Foundation, the Arts and Cultural Council of Decatur County, and Rushville’s imagine:nation provide leadership and fundraising

capacity, while newer partners like Batesville Memorial Public Library’s Arts and Innovation Hub add youth-driven innovation. Together, they form a stable and scalable network that funders can strengthen rather than build from scratch.

5 ADVANCE CREATIVITY AS PART OF DAILY LIFE

Public art projects—Batesville’s Acoustic Alley, Greensburg’s mosaic trash receptacles—demonstrate how cultural expression extends into streetscapes and everyday infrastructure. Regular markets, concerts, and gallery shows reinforce cultural participation as habitual and sustainable.

6 SHOWCASE COMMUNITY PRIDE, COLLABORATION, AND RURAL LEADERSHIP

Counties across the region express deep pride in their unique assets—from historic Romanesque architectural styles found on the region’s public and municipal buildings to new maker spaces and innovation hubs for youth—and see creative expression as central to identity. Chambers of commerce, schools, governments, and artists are already working together, positioning arts not as “extra,” but as drivers of economic and community development. With this collaborative culture in place, the ARI region is poised to demonstrate how rural communities can lead in creative placemaking and cultural innovation, offering a model for resilience, talent attraction, and economic vitality.

The public input session results, survey data, assets and directory reveal a regional cultural ecosystem that is collaborative, resilient, and evolving. The ARI network is not static; it is an organic system of people and places working in concert to strengthen identity, foster belonging, and celebrate creativity across communities. These are a few examples of how the ARI region is primed for investment through the identification of existing arts and cultural assets that can be linked and leveraged for future development and growth, as identified through community engagement sessions and stakeholder conversations.

READI funding is transforming the ARI region, as the region has been proactively investing in an arts and cultural plan since the READI 1.0 and 2.0 processes, as outlined in the Accelerate Rural Indiana READI Regional Development Plan (September 2021).

The following section highlights how the ARI region and Regional Development Authority have already been making investments with READI funds in arts and culture.

ACCELERATE RURAL INDIANA'S ONGOING INVESTMENTS IN ARTS AND CULTURAL ASSETS

Stakeholder sessions, public engagement, and cultural asset mapping highlights a region rich with creative capacity, civic pride, and cultural momentum. These findings are not abstract—they are reflected in ARI's measurable investments through past successful Indiana READI initiatives. Together, they show that the Accelerate Rural Indiana (ARI) region is not simply primed for cultural investment—it is already investing in its creative economy and cultural future.



INDIANA READI: TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE BY SUPPORTING ARTS AND CULTURE

Through the Indiana READI program, ARI communities have been making strategic early investments weaving arts and culture into the fabric of community life. The earlier development plan showcases arts, culture, and placemaking as core “quality of life/quality of place” investments that make small cities and towns competitive for residents and employers. It does this by:

Building cultural destinations and programming that draw visitors and talent:

- Kids Discovery Factory (Batesville): a regional children's discovery center/museum with STEAM exhibits and a planned Smithsonian Spark!Lab, projecting 30,000+ visitors a year.
- Inclusion Park (Greensburg): an accessible playspace for all levels of play-ability built at Rebekah Park in Greensburg.
- Love Community Center (Rushville) invests in adaptive reuse through repurposing an old Wal-Mart shopping center to create an improved multi-purpose community meeting and event space.

Upgrading venues for events, performance, and festivals to expand the region's cultural calendar:

- Blue River Memorial Park Amphitheatre (Shelbyville), a project that will feature a permanent stage, open-air lawn for capacity of 3,000 attendees, expecting to host its first performances in 2027.
- Shelby County Players, Wortman Family Civic Theatre (Shelbyville) received support to update their facilities into a multipurpose community space for arts and culture, including events like meetings, poetry readings, recitals, and more.

Embedding arts and design in placemaking and trails to knit together civic assets, markets, and public spaces.

- Batesville Skate Park (Batesville), a skatepark and space for all ages to be active, phase 2 of the project is coming soon (bouldering wall and pump track).
- Preserving Main Street Project (Greensburg), a project that enhances downtown Greensburg and makes several improvements to the east side of the city square—parking and streetscape improvements, lighting, landscaping, and more.

- Pirate Park (Greensburg), vibrant playground area and haven for youth with swings, slides, and climbing structures to spark imaginations.

Collectively, these projects are only a fraction of the READI Indiana impact, and use cultural infrastructure to increase visitation, strengthen downtowns, and create everyday experiences that attract and retain families and workers—what the plan frames as a transformational talent strategy. IEDC READI investments established the groundwork for regional creative growth—proof that small cultural projects can spark transformational regional change.

The momentum continues through future funding opportunities through IEDC, which expands arts and culture’s reach into the ARI region through collaborative partnerships, workforce development, education, and innovation sectors. Investment is direct, through capital and operating/program support, and enabled through its investment in marketing and venue infrastructure.

These projects underscore ARI’s evolving understanding that creativity is economic infrastructure—a necessary investment for long-term vitality and regional competitiveness. The region is demonstrating how arts and culture fuel talent attraction, innovation, and community identity.

INVESTING AHEAD OF THE PLAN

Perhaps the most compelling insight from this analysis is that these accomplishments have emerged without a formal regional arts and culture plan in place. The ARI region demonstrates remarkable initiative and cohesion in how it approaches creative development. Yet, a coordinated arts and culture plan can now take this momentum further, aligning investments, amplifying outcomes, and ensuring equitable access to creative opportunity.

This strategic arts and culture plan aims to present a framework so that ARI can position itself as a national model for rural creative placemaking, proving that cultural investment is not a luxury, but a cornerstone of economic development and community resilience. The strategies and objectives outlined in this plan build off earlier developments, advance quality of place as defined by ARI region, leverages current assets, and align with earlier and ongoing efforts to build arts and cultural infrastructure.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND INITIATIVES

PURPOSE

To translate community-driven priorities into actionable, measurable 5-year plan that leverages local cultural assets to strengthen place, grow creative economies, and sustain cultural participation.

The strategic priorities reflect community voice and the region's distinctiveness, translating heritage, creativity, and innovation into actionable pathways. Each strategic priority addresses specific community needs identified through the engagement process while building on existing regional assets and networks.

SUMMARY

Over five years this plan will deliver coordinated placemaking, venue and performance capacity, heritage programming, youth-led cultural leadership, and a unified digital marketing platform.

The Strategic Plan Implementation, Sustainability and Evaluation section includes overview on timelines, key performance indicators, evaluation methods, and sustainability.



Strategic Priority 1

PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC ART

Develop and implement engaging placemaking and public art projects throughout the ARI region to grow a sense of place at the local and regional levels

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Placemaking transforms underutilized spaces into community anchors that reflect local identity while attracting visitors and investment. For ARI, this pillar addresses the community's expressed desire for enhanced regional storytelling (identified by residents as a top priority) and public gathering spaces (32.4% of survey respondents). By weaving art into everyday infrastructure and spaces, communities can celebrate their heritage while signaling innovation and welcoming new residents.

OBJECTIVES

ESTABLISH THE I-74 CULTURAL CORRIDOR

Action: Connect all four ARI communities through a coordinated series of public art installations, heritage markers, and cultural signage along I-74.

Expected Outcomes: Large-scale murals visible from the highway, interpretive sculpture gardens at rest areas, digital installations sharing regional stories and guides on where to find each site, and coordinating map+audio guides.

CO-CREATE A SERIES OF COMMUNITY MURALS THAT PROVIDE A VISION FOR THE REGION'S IDENTITY AS AN ARTS AND CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM AND DESTINATION

Action: Run participatory design workshops in each town, with murals led by youth and professional artists.

Expected Outcomes: Artist-led mural projects that engage local youth and community members reflect local history, cultural expression, and future aspirations in public art.

ACTIVATE UNDERUTILIZED ALLEYWAYS AND IMPLEMENT POCKET PARK PROJECTS

Action: Convert underutilized spaces into public, creative community assets and multipurpose micro-venues through artist-designed installations, community gardens, functional public art, and flexible performance spaces.

Expected Outcomes: Create additional multipurpose spaces in new locations for communities to gather.

INTEGRATE PUBLIC ART INTO LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Action: Embed artistic elements into necessary infrastructure improvements: creative crosswalks, wayfinding, artistic utility box wraps, sculptural roundabouts, decorative bridge elements, and artist-designed transit shelters.

Expected Outcomes: Maximize public investment impact while ensuring art becomes part of daily community experience rather than separate programming. Improve pedestrian safety and add visual pathways to key arts destinations.

CREATE A REGIONAL SCULPTURE TRAIL

Action: Coordinate an outdoor sculpture installation rotating annually among communities, featuring both established and emerging artists with connections to rural themes, agricultural heritage, and contemporary innovation.

Expected Outcomes: Create reasons for cross-county visits while supporting artist careers and community pride.



4th & Hazeldine intersection mural,
Albuquerque, NM
By Artful Life



Big Peony mural, Ft. Wayne, IN
By Ouizi



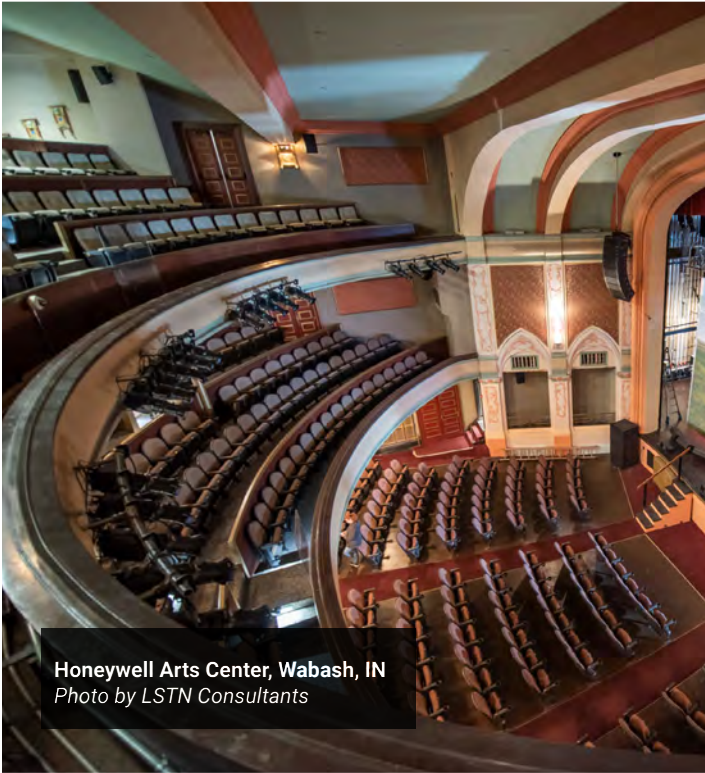
Central Square Cultural District
signage, Boston, MA
By Needs Signs Will Paint

NATIONAL MODELS

Art This Way (Fort Wayne): An example of an Indiana and volunteer-based organization that works out of the Fort Wayne Downtown Improvement District. Public art projects include murals, activations, sculptures, and activations, with Art this Way operating as an intermediary between artists, business owners, and local government. Art This Way provides examples of activating the public realm, which can be applied to rural contexts and communities, along main street corridors for example.

Creative Crosswalks (Various Cities): Cities like Albuquerque, NM and Baltimore, MD have successfully integrated artistic crosswalk designs that improve pedestrian safety while creating distinctive neighborhood identities and tourist attractions.

Massachusetts Cultural Districts: State-designated cultural districts provide coordinated marketing, wayfinding, and programming that has increased cultural tourism revenue by 15% annually in participating rural communities.



Honeywell Arts Center, Wabash, IN
 Photo by LSTN Consultants



Star Theater, Portland, OR
 Photo by Explorist @ledoigtansloeilfr



Levitt AMP Music Series, Stevens Point, WI
 Photo by Levitt Foundation

NATIONAL MODELS

Honeywell Arts Center (Wabash, IN): This 1,500-seat facility in a town of 10,000 demonstrates how rural communities can support professional-level performing arts venues through regional programming, educational partnerships, and volunteer engagement.

Levitt AMP Grant Program: This national initiative has funded 25+ small-town music venues that present 50+ free concerts annually, demonstrating sustainable models for rural outdoor performance programming.

Oregon Presenters Network: This statewide consortium allows small venues to share booking costs, coordinate touring routes, and provide professional development, reducing individual venue programming costs by up to 40%.

Strategic Priority 2

PERFORMING ARTS AND VENUES

Create a regional performance and venue network that strengthens capacity of local cultural programming and attracts outside arts and cultural performances

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Performance venues serve as community gathering places that build social cohesion while providing platforms for local talent and attracting touring acts. Survey respondents identified festivals, events, and concerts as the third-highest priority (27.3%), while community input sessions consistently emphasized the need for flexible, multi-use cultural spaces. This pillar directly supports the need for performance opportunities, expanded accessible cultural programming for families, and visitors seeking authentic arts experiences. Strong performing arts infrastructure also provides economic development through cultural tourism and creative sector job creation.

OBJECTIVES

CONSTRUCT A MULTI-USE PERFORMING AND VISUAL ARTS CENTER

Action: Develop a flexible 400-500 seat venue designed for multiple art forms— theater, concerts, dance, film, visual arts, and community events to serve the entire ARI region while providing an anchor institution for one community.

Expected Outcomes: Multi-use venue with professional lighting and sound systems, and spaces for arts education programming. Feasibility study to determine community selection for venue. Attract professional artists to the region for performances, shows, and extended residencies: performances, educational outreach, and community engagement.

CREATE AND COORDINATE AN ARI REGIONAL PERFORMANCE NETWORK

Action: Create a system for coordinated booking, marketing, and technical resource sharing among existing venues (Gibson Theatre, Strand Theatre, Shelby County Players and Wortman Family Civic Theatre, Riverside Park Amphitheater, Princess Theater, and Tree Theatre).

Expected Outcomes: Create a shared season ticket program, regional programming calendar, joint marketing campaigns, and technical equipment sharing. Maximize existing venue utilization while reducing individual facility operating costs.

ESTABLISH A REGIONAL MUSIC SERIES AND SERIES OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY FESTIVALS

Action: Expand summer concert programming, seasonal festivals, fringe art festivals, and rotate among (indoor and outdoor) venues for increased attendance and visibility.

Expected Outcomes: Build on existing programs like Live by the Levee series. Create opportunities for enhanced cross-county cultural tourism. Support local artists' career development while attracting artists outside the ARI region as a place to showcase and market their work. Attract regional and statewide visitors for concentrated events. Develop new outdoor music venue spaces in communities that are currently without said spaces.

REVITALIZE LOCAL HISTORIC VENUES THAT ARE PRIME FOR REHABILITATION

Action: Restore and rehabilitate existing historic venues, including accessibility improvements, modern technical systems, and expanded programming capacity, including public talks, lecture series, and guided tours.

Expected Outcomes: preserve irreplaceable cultural assets while ensuring they meet contemporary programming and accessibility standards.

INITIATE A YOUTH PERFORMANCE SHOWCASE CIRCUIT

Action: Initiate quarterly youth performance opportunities rotating among venues, including theater, music, spoken word, and multimedia presentations.

Expected Outcomes: Provide local teenagers with regular performance opportunities while building audiences for youth arts, professional mentorship, and connecting families across communities.



Strategic Priority 3

HERITAGE AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

Establish a regional heritage network of interpretive sites and host festivals, exchanges, and events that elevate local cultural experiences for residents and visitors alike

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Heritage preservation and cultural experience programming build community identity while bridging divides between longtime residents and newer community members. The engagement process revealed strong pride in local landmarks and traditions (Decatur County's courthouse tree, Batesville's German craftsmanship heritage, Rushville's political history, Shelbyville's industry and artist development) alongside recognition of evolving community composition (Hispanic communities, Japanese corporate connections). This pillar supports residents sharing local knowledge, understanding local heritage alongside neighbors' traditions, and visitors seeking authentic cultural experiences. Heritage tourism also provides sustainable economic development that builds on existing community assets rather than requiring major new infrastructure.

OBJECTIVES

LAUNCH A HERITAGE TRAIL AND INTERPRETIVE PLAN

Formally inventory sites, create interpretive standards, install signage, and include audio tours.

Actions:

- **Underground Railroad Heritage Trail:** Install multi-county interpretive trail highlighting abolitionist history, featuring restored sites, interpretive signage, guided tours, and annual programming.
- **Regional Food Heritage Initiative:** Develop food tourism infrastructure including heritage food trails, build upon recent community cookbook projects at regional level, and enhance agricultural tourism connections.
- **Heritage Venues Activation:** Expand cultural programming at historic sites including courthouse squares, historic churches, covered bridges, and restored buildings.

Expected Outcomes:

- Connect existing historical society resources while creating educational tourism opportunities and ensuring this important history remains accessible to future generations.
- Celebrate both culinary tradition and agricultural innovation while supporting local restaurants and producers.
- Maximize use of existing historic assets while providing unique venue options for performances, exhibitions, and community events.

DEVELOP A SERIES OF ANNUAL CULTURAL FESTIVALS AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Actions:

- **Cultural Jamboree and Annual Festival:** Create a rotating, annual cultural event showcasing the region's German, Irish, Hispanic, Japanese, and African American cultural traditions through food, music, arts, and educational programming.
- **Cultural Exchange Partnerships:** Develop formal partnerships with communities in Germany, Japan, and Ireland to support cultural exchange programming, sister city relationships, and international arts collaborations.

Expected Outcomes:

- Build on existing cultural celebrations and past events like Rushville's World Fest (2022), supported by Arts Midwest.
- Create opportunities for cross-cultural understanding and community building among residents of all backgrounds.
- Honor heritage connections while creating contemporary cultural opportunities and economic development potential.

CULTIVATE AND CURATE AN ORAL HISTORY AND DIGITAL ARCHIVE

Actions:

- **Heritage Storytelling through Public Art:** Integrate historical narratives into public art installations, including murals depicting local history, sculptural installations at significant sites, and digital storytelling stations.
- **Oral History and Memory Preservation Project:** Document community elders' stories, agricultural knowledge, and cultural traditions through systematic use of digital archives, storytelling events, and intergenerational programming.
- **Heritage Trail Markers:** Develop physical and digital interpretive systems connecting historical sites across the region. Install QR-enabled markers and simply AR/ audio content at historic sites.

Expected Outcomes:

- Make heritage education accessible and engaging while preserving community stories for future generations.
- Preserve community knowledge while creating connections between seniors and younger community members.
- Support educational tourism while preserving and sharing community stories identified as priorities during the engagement process.



Southern Foodways Alliance Liquid South Symposium, Oxford, MS
By Colleen Cruze



2003 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Washington, D.C.
By Smithsonian Institution

NATIONAL MODELS

Freedom Trail (Cincinnati, OH): This multi-site Underground Railroad interpretive trail attracts over 100,000 annual visitors while providing educational programming and economic impact to participating communities.

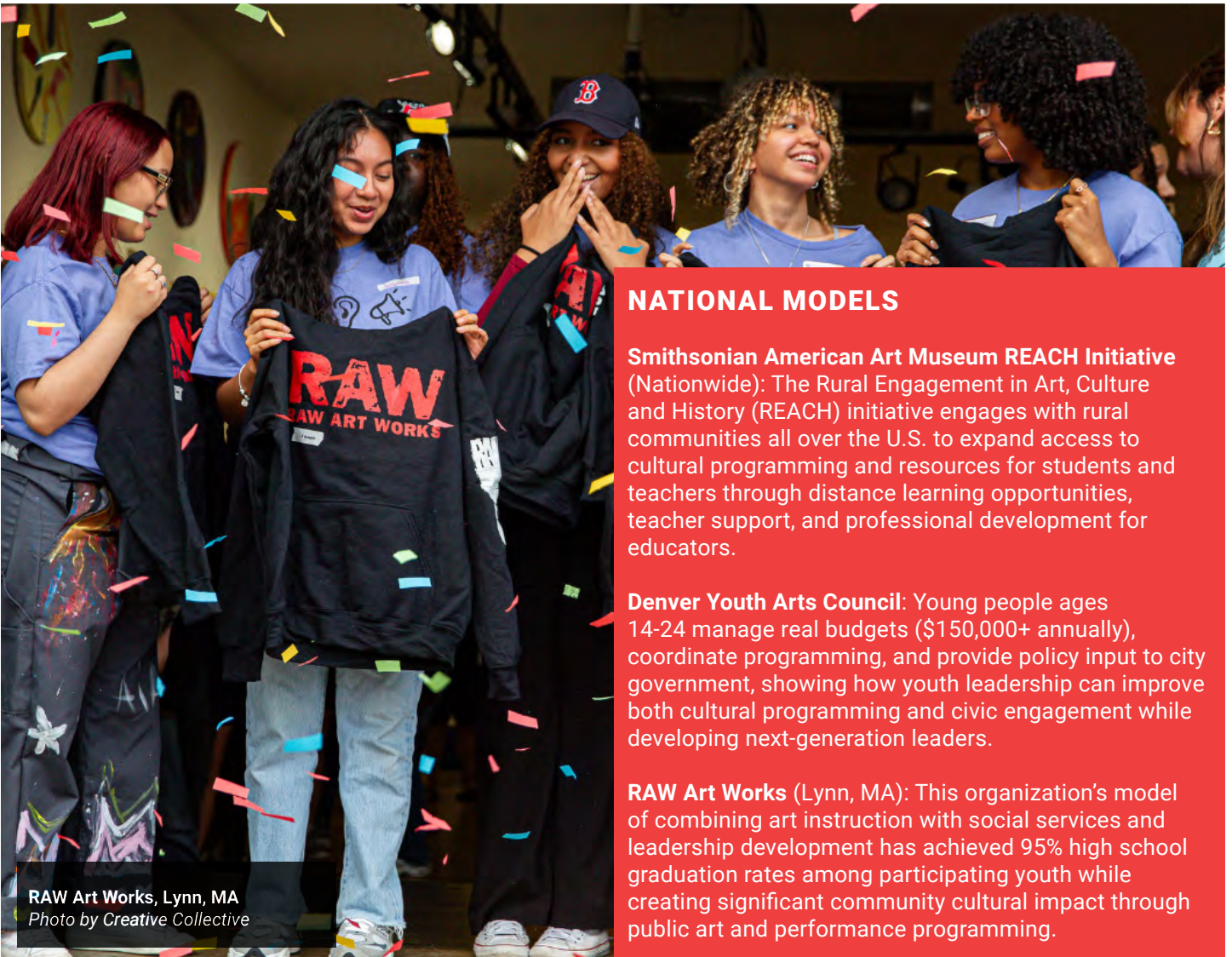
Smithsonian Folklife Festival Model: The festival's approach to authentic cultural celebration demonstrates how heritage programming can honor traditions while building understanding among diverse communities.

Southern Foodways Alliance: This organization's approach to food heritage documentation and celebration shows how culinary traditions can support both cultural preservation and economic development in rural communities.

Strategic Priority 4

YOUTH CULTURE AND CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Establish arts leadership opportunities, cultural hubs, and youth-led public projects to increase youth engagement, improve skills, and encourage growth



NATIONAL MODELS

Smithsonian American Art Museum REACH Initiative (Nationwide): The Rural Engagement in Art, Culture and History (REACH) initiative engages with rural communities all over the U.S. to expand access to cultural programming and resources for students and teachers through distance learning opportunities, teacher support, and professional development for educators.

Denver Youth Arts Council: Young people ages 14-24 manage real budgets (\$150,000+ annually), coordinate programming, and provide policy input to city government, showing how youth leadership can improve both cultural programming and civic engagement while developing next-generation leaders.

RAW Art Works (Lynn, MA): This organization's model of combining art instruction with social services and leadership development has achieved 95% high school graduation rates among participating youth while creating significant community cultural impact through public art and performance programming.

RAW Art Works, Lynn, MA
Photo by Creative Collective

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Youth engagement addresses both talent retention and cultural continuity by providing teenagers with leadership opportunities, creative outlets, and reasons to envision futures in their home communities. Survey data showed the region's split sense of belonging (50% yes, 50% no), while community input emphasized the need to engage underrepresented youth populations. This pillar directly supports teenagers who want to lead community projects, families who want their children to value both heritage and innovation, and the region's long-term sustainability by ensuring young people become cultural leaders and community advocates.

OBJECTIVES

ADVANCE THE CREATION OF REGIONAL YOUTH CULTURAL HUBS AND TEEN CENTERS

Action: Develop dedicated youth spaces offering creative programming, leadership development, and social opportunities. Include maker spaces, recording studios, art studios, and flexible meeting areas with professional-grade equipment for music production, digital media creation, and entrepreneurship development.

Expected Outcomes: Youth development through after-school and weekend programming. Provide teenagers ownership of community cultural spaces and pathways to creative careers in the ARI region.

ESTABLISH A REGIONAL YOUTH ARTS CAMP

Actions:

- Develop and launch a two-week intensive summer program rotating between the four communities.
- Feature multi-disciplinary curriculum (visual, performing, digital arts), professional artist instruction and mentorship.
- Collaborate with local cultural organizations that lead programming in each community. (i.e. Batesville Area Arts Council, imagine:nation, Arts and Cultural Council of Decatur County, and Blue River Community Foundation)
- Conclude with a community showcase or exhibition that presents the final projects to the public.

Expected Outcomes: Provide intensive creative development while building connections among teenagers across all communities.

INTEGRATE STEAM + ARTS INTEGRATION PROGRAMS INTO LOCAL CURRICULUM FOR LOCAL ARTS, CULTURAL, AND EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Actions:

- Connect science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics through project-based learning in a way that continues to advance the arts and grow participants' cultural appreciation and experience.
- Tie local industries (Honda, Hillenbrand) and local cultural assets to create partnerships with regional employers for workforce pathway development.
- Include artist-in-residence programs at each high school.

Expected Outcomes: Hands-on learning opportunities that prepare students for both creative careers and technical employment within the region.

SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ARI REGIONAL YOUTH ARTS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Actions:

- Form a regional youth advisory group (ages 14-24) with representatives from each community with real decision-making authority over cultural programming and budget allocation (i.e. \$25,000 annually).
- Facilitate Youth-Led murals and installations: Annual student-designed public art projects with professional artist mentorship, i.e. large-scale murals, sculptural installations, and digital media projects
- Create a Heritage Ambassadors Program: High school students to serve as tour guides, cultural interpreters, and heritage education leaders through part-time employment: public speaking, research and documentation, social media content creation
- Establish a Creative Entrepreneurship Incubator: Business development programming specifically for young people interested in creative careers—from traditional arts to digital media, event planning, cultural tourism, and creative services.
- Launch a Regional Youth Festival: Annual youth-organized celebration featuring student art exhibitions, musical performances, spoken word, digital media presentations, maker showcases, and community service project displays.

Expected Outcomes:

- Create pathways for youth to see their creative work valued and permanently installed in their communities.
- Increased tourism marketing, and community presentation opportunities.
- Provide mentorship opportunities, increased learning, and grow youth community engagement.



Strategic Priority 5

ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATION, DIGITAL PRESENCE, AND REGIONAL MARKETING

Launch a unified digital cultural hub that integrates a regional calendar, artist directory, ticketing, and interactive arts and cultural asset maps to provide users with vital and timely arts information

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Digital infrastructure and coordinated regional marketing address the fragmentation identified throughout the community engagement process, where 50% of residents reported not feeling a sense of regional belonging. In an era where cultural participation begins with online discovery, ARI's ability to present a unified digital presence directly impacts both resident engagement and visitor attraction. Survey respondents consistently cited communication gaps and difficulty finding information about cultural programming across communities. This pillar responds to those concerns while positioning ARI as a connected, contemporary rural region that leverages technology to amplify its cultural assets. For residents who want seamless access to cultural programming information, emerging professionals who expect sophisticated digital experiences, and visitors planning heritage tourism experiences, strong digital presence and marketing coordination are essential infrastructure, not optional add-ons.

OBJECTIVES

CREATE A PLAN TO LAUNCH "RURAL. REIMAGINED." BRAND DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Actions:

- Create a comprehensive regional cultural brand system that positions ARI as "Where Heritage Meets Innovation."
- Include coordinated wayfinding and gateway signage along I-74 corridor and at community entries, visual identity system with logo, color palette, typography, and photography guidelines to use across all communities.
- Provide marketing materials template library ensuring professional consistency while allowing local customization, and branded merchandise program generating revenue while building regional pride.

Expected Outcomes:

- Transform ARI's tagline (Rural.Reimagined.) from concept to visible reality.
- Create instant regional recognition for residents and visitors while.
- Support a unified identity residents requested during engagement sessions.

INTEGRATE CULTURAL TOURISM MARKETING INTO REGIONAL TOURISM BOARDS, DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITIES, AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC PLANNING

Actions:

- Design and run a comprehensive destination marketing campaign in conjunction with regional tourism boards and regional development authority that positions ARI as a cultural tourism destination while supporting local economies.
- Develop themed cultural tourism packages. (weekend heritage experiences, arts festival travel packages, culinary tourism itineraries)
- Curate and lead group tour development and target regional tour operators.
- Build strategic partnership with Indiana Destination Development Corporation and Visit Indiana for statewide promotion, media relations program with monthly press releases, travel writer familiarization tours, and social media influencer partnerships.

Expected Outcome: Transforms occasional visitors into cultural tourists who plan multi-day visits, book accommodations, dine locally, and return for seasonal programming.

COORDINATE SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONTENT STRATEGY TO SUPPORT REGIONAL BRAND DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Actions:

- Enact strategic digital storytelling campaign across platforms to build audiences and engagement with platform-specific content approaches:
 - **Facebook** for community group management and event promotion reaching older demographics;
 - **Instagram** for visual storytelling, artist spotlights, and behind-the-scenes content attracting younger audiences and tourists;
 - **YouTube** for performance recordings, educational content, and virtual tours providing permanent accessible archives; and
 - **TikTok** for viral cultural content, and creative challenges that position ARI as contemporary and innovative (especially among youth audiences).
- Curate regional content while highlighting each community's distinctive character, with shared hashtags, cross-promotion, and unified brand voice.

Expected Outcomes:

- Grow audiences, digital engagement with both residents, visitors.
- Enhance networking opportunities for artists and entrepreneurs to grow their brand and digital presence.

INVESTIGATE AND SET-UP MORE ROBUST DATA SYSTEMS AND PERFORMANCE TRACKING

Actions:

- Create a plan to enhance local digital infrastructure for arts and cultural organizations that demonstrates impact and informs decision-making through a centralized marketing and tourism hub. Systems would include:
 - website analytics and social media engagement tracking showing what content and programming generates interest, event attendance demographic data collection (ZIP codes, age ranges, cultural backgrounds): Sprout Social, HubSpot, Google Analytics, Brandwatch;
 - data on who participates and identifies underserved populations: SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics, Audiense, Facebook Audience Insights, MailChimp;
 - economic impact measurement tools quantifying tourism spending and local business benefits: IMPLAN, Tourism Economics Event Impact Calculator, Paylocity, and Economic Impact Analysis Tool from Rural Health Information Hub; Southern Methodist University DataArts–Arts Vibrancy Index;
 - community feedback systems including post-event surveys and ongoing input mechanisms, and public-facing impact dashboard making cultural programming contributions visible to funders and stakeholders.

Expected Outcome: This approach ensures programming remains responsive to community needs while providing the documentation necessary for sustained funding.

BUILD A CENTRALIZED DIGITAL CULTURAL HUB AND REGIONAL CULTURAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

Actions:

- Create and fund a position for a Part-Time Regional Arts and Cultural Coordinator to assist the ARI region in implementing this strategic plan, to apply for upcoming funding opportunities, and in the development of future projects.
- Develop centralized website and mobile app serving as the single authoritative source for ARI cultural information: event calendar, interactive maps, audio tours, artist directory, and integrated ticketing system.
- Invest in technology infrastructure that expands cultural access beyond physical attendance, i.e. livestreaming equipment, virtual museum and gallery tours, online education and workshop platforms, and digital storytelling archives.
- Expand accessible communications infrastructure

across communities for cultural event information: weekly regional newsletter, artist features and opportunities, printed quarterly culture guide, public access television program showcasing activities, community bulletin board network

Expected Outcomes:

- Unify planning and marketing across arts and cultural institutions and organizations in the ARI region.
- Eliminate the frustration of checking multiple websites and social media accounts to find cultural programming
- Provide data on user behavior and preferences that informs future programming decisions.
- Increase accessibility to underserved rural residents facing transportation barriers, families lacking time, and educational institutions seeking curriculum-connected resources.
- Create permanent digital assets that extend programming impact beyond single events.

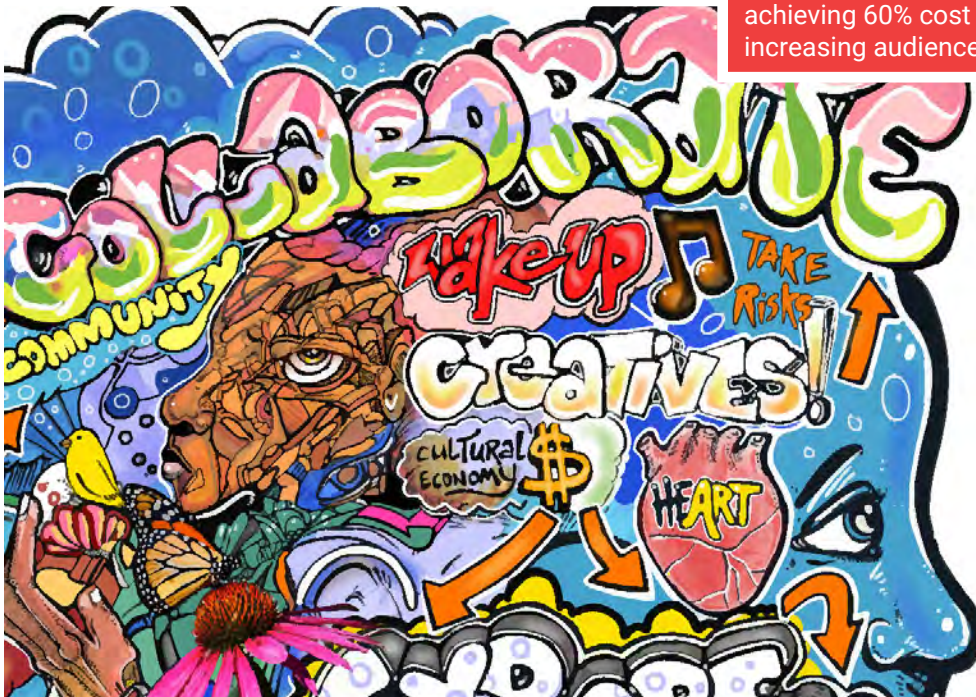


NATIONAL MODELS

South Dakota Office of Tourism's Cultural Tourism Strategy: This rural state's coordinated marketing approach has increased cultural tourism revenue by 23% over five years through unified branding, digital infrastructure, and strategic partnerships with cultural organizations.

Colorado Springs Creative Stays Program: Ongoing digital campaign to attract tourists to Colorado Springs and the surrounding community, featuring a series of 13 weekend getaway itineraries curated by a diverse group of local creatives.

Vermont Creative Network: Regional arts marketing collaborative shows how small communities can achieve sophisticated brand presence through coordination, achieving 60% cost savings on marketing while increasing audience reach by 150%.



create
VT

ACTION PLAN
FOR VERMONT'S
CREATIVE SECTOR

THESE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES WORK TOGETHER TO BUILD THE CONNECTED CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM ENVISIONED BY THE ARI REGION'S RESIDENTS—LINKING HERITAGE, EDUCATION, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH SHARED DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE, COORDINATED MARKETING, AND TECHNOLOGY THAT STRENGTHENS CREATIVE COLLABORATION ACROSS COMMUNITIES.





Personas

LIVING THE VISION

The ARI Arts and Culture Plan envisions a future where every resident—of every age, background, and town—can see themselves reflected in the region’s cultural life. It is not just a strategy for creative development, but a movement toward community empowerment, shared identity, and lasting resilience.



SARAH

The Average Citizen

In Shelbyville, Sarah starts her Saturday at the farmers market, where art meets agriculture. Her kids help create an asphalt chalk art mural while she chats with neighbors. Later, the family walks the heritage trail, scanning QR codes to uncover stories of the region’s local history before ending the evening with live music in the park.

Cultural life is woven into the everyday, not reserved for special trips away.



THE JOHNSONS

The Family

Three generations in Decatur County, the Johnsons blend tradition with innovation. Grandpa teaches woodworking; the kids attend arts camp. Family weekends mix outdoor cultural trails, plenty of festivals to choose from, and nights at the local theatre, raising children who see rural life as creative, connected, and full of possibility.



JAKE

The Young Professional

Jake returned to Rushville after his MBA, drawn by affordability and connection. Between remote work at the coworking hub and evenings at the Entrepreneurs’ Circle, he’s helping build a creative economy rooted in local pride and global reach.

In ARI, young professionals find purpose, not just employment.



MARCUS

The Teenager

Marcus, a high school junior in Batesville, leads youth art initiatives and curates his own multimedia installation on German immigration. He’s discovering that leadership, creativity, and opportunity can thrive right at home, where home offers opportunities to continue growing.



MARIA

The Artist

Maria moved from Cincinnati to Greensburg to run her own studio, just down the block from where she lives. Through the local Artist-in-Residence program, she teaches region-wide while exhibiting her work across the Midwest. Once isolated, her work now fuels local storytelling and cultural exchange.

The ARI region invests in artists as anchors of community life.



ROBERT

The Senior

In Rush County, Robert found a new purpose after retirement through intergenerational arts programs. He shares oral histories, learns photography, and performs in community theater. His stories, once private, now belong to the region's collective memory.



THE VISITORS

Experiencing the Region

Cultural tourists follow outdoor walking trails, full of vibrant public art and interpretative histories, from Batesville to Rushville, and Greensburg to Shelbyville, stay in restored historic inns, and enjoy farm-to-table meals that blend global and local traditions. They come for authenticity and leave with art, stories, and a sense of discovery that reshapes their idea of rural life.

ARI: Where heritage meets innovation, and every visit feels like connection.



**STRATEGIC PLAN
IMPLEMENTATION,
SUSTAINABILITY,
AND EVALUATION**



FUNDING AND RESOURCE STRATEGY

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Sustainable cultural programming requires diversified funding that balances immediate project needs with long-term organizational capacity. The ARI region's funding strategy builds on proven READI success while establishing the revenue streams, partnerships, and financial management systems necessary for cultural programming to thrive beyond initial grant cycles. This approach addresses community concerns about long-term sustainability while demonstrating to funders that investments may generate lasting impact rather than creating dependency on single sources. For initiatives like Maria's artist residency program, the Johnson family's accessible cultural programming, and Marcus's youth leadership councils to succeed, funding must be reliable, flexible, and sufficient to support both programming and the professional coordination capacity identified as essential during the planning process.

READI 2.0 ANCHOR STRATEGY

READI 2.0 serves as the catalytic funding source that launches comprehensive cultural programming while the region builds sustainable revenue diversification. The statewide allocation of \$65 million for arts and culture, through investments by Lilly Endowment, represents unprecedented investment in Indiana's cultural infrastructure, positioning ARI to leverage its proven regional collaboration capacity and strategic planning for significant allocation.

ARI's READI 2.0 strategy focuses on capital investments and capacity-building that create permanent assets and systems rather than solely funding time-limited programming. Priority investments build upon previous development plans in progress since 2021 and strategic arts and culture stakeholder conversations held in 2025, including areas that correlate to this plan's strategies:

- **(Strategy 1: Placemaking and Public Art)** public art and placemaking infrastructure that provides lasting community benefit and tourism attraction,
- **(Strategies 2 and 3: Performing Arts and Venues; Heritage and Cultural Experience)** historic theater restoration and venue improvements that reduce long-term operating costs while increasing earned revenue potential,
- **(Strategy 4: Youth Culture and Creative Engagement)** and youth facility development that provides dedicated spaces for next-generation cultural leadership.
- **(Strategy 5: Administrative Coordination, Digital Presence, and Regional Marketing)** digital platform development that serves residents and visitors efficiently at scale, professional coordination capacity that strengthens organizational effectiveness across all initiatives,

The regional approach maximizes READI impact by coordinating investments across communities to avoid duplication while ensuring each community receives signature projects that advance local priorities. This strategy has proven successful in READI 1.0, where ARI's collaborative approach enabled the region to lead the state in disbursements while maintaining project quality and community satisfaction

DIVERSIFIED FUNDING STREAMS

This section identifies and provides guidance regarding potential funding sources to meet goals of capital campaigns, funding initiatives, and the local match requirements tied to IEDC READI investments.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT

Municipal and county governments can provide foundational support while signaling local commitment that leverages outside investment. The matching requirement tied to READI 2.0 encourages structured public participation, and a phased increase in municipal contributions can demonstrate growing recognition of the measurable economic and quality-of-life impact of cultural programming.

Funding mechanisms at the municipal level beneficial to the implementation of this plan could include, but are not limited to:

- **Integrating arts funding into annual municipal and county budgets:** clearly define percentage increases over a multi-year period to demonstrate sustained growth and local commitment.
- **Allocating a portion of tourism development or “innkeeper” tax revenue:** specific to cultural programming and creative projects, tracked annually through budget reports.
- **Identifying existing local sales tax and property tax mechanisms:** partially redirect or expand to include cultural development, with annual performance reviews tied to project milestones
- **Adopting city policies requiring or incentivizing private development contributions:** these policies could codify the inclusion of new artistic elements, functional public art, or through direct funding/ comparable donations by developers to local arts organizations and projects to support creative growth at the city level.
- **Engaging local economic development corporations:** classify arts and cultural investments as workforce attraction and retention strategy, with metrics like number of projects supported, new jobs created, and increases in visitor spending.
- **Tracking in-kind contributions:** this could include facility access, maintenance, and administrative support, with standardized reporting on volunteer hours and municipal resources leveraged.

Local government investment would have potential to grow as cultural programming demonstrates measurable community benefit and generates economic activity that justifies sustained public investment.

To ensure the success and long-term sustainability of these partnerships, government entities could execute formal agreements outlining funding commitments, performance expectations, and reporting requirements, ensuring accountability while maybe providing multi-year funding predictability that enables strategic planning. Regional coordination ensures government investments complement rather than compete with each other, with each community supporting signature initiatives that serve regional audiences while building local pride.

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION PARTNERSHIPS

Blue River, Decatur County, Ripley County, and Rush County Community Foundations collectively have demonstrated commitment to arts and cultural development through previous grantmaking. Strategic partnership coordination could align foundation support with strategic plan priorities while respecting each foundation’s distinct mission and grantmaking processes.

The Lilly Endowment’s GIFT initiative provides a particular opportunity, with planning grants enabling foundations to develop comprehensive arts funding strategies aligned with this regional plan. Coordination among foundations ensures efficient grantmaking while avoiding duplication, with potential for collaborative funding of regional initiatives that benefit multiple communities.

Foundation support should emphasize capacity building, innovative programming, and sustainability initiatives that complement capital investments. Annual grantmaking should support professional development, pilot programs, evaluation systems, and emerging artist support that requires flexible funding unavailable through more restrictive sources. Long-term partnership includes foundation participation in regional governance, ensuring grantmaking remains responsive to evolving community needs.

CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The ARI region’s unique concentration of major employers—Honda Manufacturing of Indiana, Hillenbrand Industries, Valeo Engine Cooling, Knauf Insulation, and Duke Energy—provides corporate partnership potential exceeding that of comparative rural regions. These employers recognize that cultural vibrancy affects workforce recruitment and retention, making cultural investment aligned with business objectives.

Corporate partnership strategy emphasizes multi-year commitments providing funding predictability rather than annual sponsorship requiring constant cultivation. Partnership packages will offer naming rights for venues and programs, employee engagement opportunities, marketing benefits, and demonstration of corporate

community commitment valuable for recruitment and public relations.

Corporate support may grow as programming matures and demonstrates measurable community impact. Major corporate partnerships will include Honda's environmental and international exchange programming alignment, Hillenbrand's heritage and workforce development connections, healthcare system partnerships around arts therapy and wellness programming, and regional bank support for downtown revitalization and small business development tied to cultural entrepreneurship.

Corporate partnership cultivation requires professional relationship management provided by the Arts and Culture Coordinator working with local chambers of commerce and economic development organizations. Formal partnership agreements will clarify expectations, benefits, and recognition while providing corporations with measurable impact data for internal and external reporting.

STATE FUNDING SOURCES

Indiana provides multiple funding programs supporting arts and cultural development that complement READI 2.0 investment. The **Indiana Arts Commission** offers competitive grants for arts programming, arts education, and organizational development, with rural communities receiving priority consideration. Annual IAC funding will range across organizational support, project grants, and touring program subsidies.

Indiana Humanities supports public programming connecting humanities scholarship with community audiences, particularly relevant for heritage interpretation, oral history projects, and cultural exchange programming. Grants may fund heritage trail development, storytelling initiatives, and community conversations connecting local history with contemporary issues.

The Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority's CreatINg Places program provides matching grants for placemaking projects including murals, public art, and downtown activation. This crowdfunding-based program has supported successful ARI projects and will continue providing revenue for public art and community space improvements.

Indiana Destination Development Corporation cultural tourism grants support heritage trail development, festival marketing, and tourism infrastructure. Support may fund tourism marketing materials, group tour development, and visitor experience improvements that increase cultural tourism revenue.

FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Federal agencies provide competitive grants supporting cultural development with multi-year funding cycles that complement state and local sources. The **National Endowment for the Arts** Our Town program specifically supports creative placemaking in small and mid-sized communities, providing grants for projects integrating arts and cultural planning into community development. ARI communities will pursue multiple Our Town grants for downtown revitalization, heritage trail development, and youth programming initiatives.

The National Endowment for the Humanities supports public programming including exhibitions, documentary projects, oral history initiatives, and historic interpretation. A More Perfect Union grants specifically support projects exploring American history and democracy, directly applicable to Underground Railroad heritage interpretation and civic heritage programming. NEH supports heritage projects meeting program priorities.

Regional Arts Organization Network provides nationally recognized programs that support arts, cultural engagement, and cultural organization capacity building, such as the ARTSHERE program for organizations, Creative Placemaking Leadership Summit, and the National Theatre Project.

Arts Midwest, part of the larger Regional Arts Organization Network, serves Indiana. Arts Midwest provides grant funding and support through programs like the GIG Fund brings artist performers into communities, and Shakesepeare in American Communities, which connects youth to the works of Shakespeare.

USDA Rural Development Community Facilities programs provide loans and grants for community facilities including performing arts venues, community centers, and cultural facilities. While requiring local match, these programs offer favorable terms for capital projects, potentially supporting facility development over the planning period.

The Economic Development Administration's Build to Scale program supports regional innovation ecosystems, potentially applicable to creative economy development and cultural entrepreneurship initiatives. EDA grants could support maker space development, creative business incubation, and cultural tourism infrastructure connecting economic and cultural development.

EARNED REVENUE STRATEGIES

FESTIVAL AND EVENT REVENUE

Regional festivals and events generate revenue through multiple streams while serving community engagement and tourism attraction objectives. Vendor fees provide immediate revenue with low overhead, with growth potential as festival attendance increases.

Corporate sponsorship packages for major events potentially offer tiered benefits in sponsorships. Sponsorship fulfillment requires professional coordination ensuring sponsor recognition, employee engagement opportunities, and measurable benefit documentation justifying continued investment.

Merchandise sales including event-specific items, regional cultural brand products, and artist-created goods could generate revenue through consignment arrangements and direct sales. Online sales through regional cultural platforms extend merchandise revenue beyond event dates while promoting regional identity year-round.

Strategic event development should balance free community programming ensuring accessibility with ticketed performances generating revenue. Premium experiences including VIP seating, backstage access, and artist meet-and-greets provide revenue opportunities while maintaining core programming accessibility. Sponsorship-supported free admission combined with revenue-generating add-ons maximizes both community access and financial sustainability.

CULTURAL TOURISM REVENUE

Heritage trail development creates tourism revenue through guided tour fees, audio tour app purchases, and packaged experiences combining multiple attractions, with growth as marketing matures and tour offerings expand.

Group tour development targeting motor coach tours, school groups, and special interest organizations may generate booking fees and per-person charges for guided experiences. Additionally, it should increase regional visitor spending at restaurants, retail, and accommodations.

Partnership agreements with regional lodging could provide revenue sharing on cultural tourism packages combining accommodations, meal vouchers, and cultural experiences. These packages serve weekend visitors from Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and Louisville markets, positioning ARI as a day-trip alternative that generates overnight stays.

Cultural tourism marketing emphasizes experiences unavailable elsewhere—authentic rural community character, accessible heritage interpretation, and personal

interaction with artists and historians—differentiating ARI from urban cultural tourism while appealing to audiences seeking authentic experiences. Collaboration with Indiana tourism marketing extends reach while coordinated regional promotion maximizes limited marketing budgets.

FACILITY RENTAL REVENUE

Multi-use performance venues generate revenue through private events, corporate meetings, and non-cultural community uses complementing cultural programming. Professional venue management maximizes utilization while maintaining facility quality. Each major venue could generate revenue through rentals and rental fees, providing substantial operating support.

Community art centers offering classroom space, gallery rentals, and studio access may generate revenue per facility through artist memberships, class fees, and event rentals. Pricing potentially balances affordability ensuring broad access with sustainability requiring cost recovery, using sliding scale models and scholarship support maintaining accessibility while generating necessary revenue.

Technical equipment rental to regional organizations, schools, and event producers could provide annual revenue while maximizing investment return on sound systems, lighting equipment, and projection technology. Rental policies could prioritize ARI cultural programming while making equipment available regionally at rates covering maintenance and replacement costs.

Facility rental revenue requires professional management balancing community access with revenue generation. Policies should ensure cultural programming receives scheduling priority while facility downtime generates revenue supporting operations. Marketing to corporate and private renters emphasizes unique venue character, professional technical systems, and convenient regional locations as differentiators from conventional venues.

MEMBERSHIP AND DONOR PROGRAMS

Individual donor cultivation could build sustainable giving through annual membership programs offering benefits balancing donor recognition with cost-effective fulfillment. The development of membership tiers could provide newsletter subscriptions, event discounts, exclusive programming access, and donor recognition appropriate to level.

Fostering relationships with potential major donors (e.g. households or individuals with an annual giving capacity beyond the typical individual donor) could be another funding strategy pursued by the ARI RDA and steering committee members. As acknowledgment for support, major donors could receive program naming opportunities, access to opportunities like behind-the-scenes experiences,

and leadership recognition, generating revenue while identifying future planned giving prospects.

Corporate membership programs distinct from event sponsorship could offer year-round benefits including employee discount programs, volunteer opportunities, and leadership development through board service and committee participation. Corporate members could range annually based on company size, while building corporate engagement beyond transactional sponsorship.

BUDGET ALLOCATION FRAMEWORK

Annual budgets should balance capital investment, programming, administration, and capacity building according to strategic priorities and implementation phase. As an example, Year 1 could emphasize governance establishment, digital infrastructure, and signature placemaking projects creating visibility. Years 2-3 could balance capital projects with program expansion as venues open and staff capacity grows. Years 4-5 could then emphasize programming quality, sustainability, and replication as capital projects complete.

Typical annual allocation across major categories includes:

- **Capital Projects and Infrastructure:** 40-50% Years 1-3, declining to 20-30% Years 4-5
- **Programming and Events:** 25-30% Years 1-3, increasing to 35-40% Years 4-5
- **Administration and Coordination:** 15-20% all years (coordinator, governance, systems)
- **Marketing and Communications:** 8-12% all years
- **Capacity Building and Evaluation:** 5-8% all years

This allocation ensures infrastructure investment creates assets supporting long-term programming while maintaining coordination capacity essential for regional collaboration. Marketing investment builds audiences supporting earned revenue growth while evaluation documents impact attracting continued funding.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Robust financial systems ensure accountability to funders and community while enabling informed decision-making. The ARI RDA and steering committees may approve annual budgets, monitor quarterly financial reports, and ensure alignment between spending and strategic priorities. Professional bookkeeping and annual audits provide transparency and demonstrate stewardship.

Performance-based budgeting should connect funding allocations to measurable outcomes, with quarterly reviews adjusting spending based on progress toward goals. This approach ensures resources flow to highest-impact initiatives while identifying underperforming programs requiring adjustment or discontinuation.

Reserve fund development beginning Year 2 could provide financial stability for unexpected expenses and revenue shortfalls. It is recommended to target reserves equal to 3-6 months operating expenses, which could be built through budget surpluses and designated annual allocations.

Financial reporting is a tool to balance funder accountability requirements with accessible community communication. Annual reports could be leveraged to present financial information in formats showing community impact rather than only accounting details, demonstrating how funding investments translate to programming, participation, and community benefit.

By developing a comprehensive funding strategy like the options identified above, this could position ARI for sustainable cultural development by diversifying revenue, building earned income capacity, and maintaining financial accountability while ensuring programming serves community needs and priorities identified through extensive engagement. Success requires disciplined financial management, relationship cultivation with diverse funders, and ongoing demonstration of measurable community impact justifying continued investment.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL LANDSCAPE AND CHALLENGES

The ARI region has demonstrated remarkable success in collaborative project delivery through Indiana READI, but arts and culture programming currently exists in organizational silos that limit regional impact and coordination. Each community operates through independent arts councils, Main Street organizations, and cultural nonprofits that have developed strong local programming but lack formal mechanisms for regional collaboration and resource sharing.

Existing anchor cultural organizations include the Batesville Area Arts Council, Shelby County Players, Blue River Community Foundation, Arts and Cultural Council of Decatur County, and imagine:nation—the arts and cultural council of Rush County—along with county historical societies and community foundations. While these organizations have successfully secured grants and delivered local programming, they face common challenges: volunteer leadership burnout, limited professional staff capacity, fragmented marketing and communication, inconsistent programming quality, and difficulty accessing larger funding opportunities that require regional coordination.

The community engagement process revealed additional organizational weaknesses. Residents expressed frustration with inconsistent communication about cultural events across communities, lack of coordinated programming that would encourage cross-county participation, and limited youth representation in cultural planning. The survey finding that only 50% of residents feel a sense of regional belonging reflects, in part, the absence of regional cultural programming and coordinated identity-building efforts.

Furthermore, existing organizations operate with varying levels of organizational sophistication. Some have strong financial management and strategic planning capacity, while others depend heavily on individual volunteer leaders without succession planning or institutional knowledge preservation. This uneven capacity limits the region's ability to leverage collective assets and pursue ambitious programming that could elevate ARI's cultural profile.

PROPOSED REGIONAL ARTS AND CULTURE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Building on the proven success of the ARI Regional Development Authority model, the proposed governance structure creates formal coordination mechanisms while preserving local organizational autonomy and community ownership. This approach leverages the collaborative relationships already established through READI implementation while addressing the specific needs of arts and cultural programming.

The **Regional Arts and Culture Steering Committee** would serve as the primary coordinating body, bringing together representatives from each community in a structure that ensures both geographic representation and stakeholder diversity. The 17-member committee would include four representatives from Batesville (Batesville Area Arts Council, business community, elected leadership), four from Decatur County (Arts and Cultural Council, community foundation, corporate partner such as Honda, community resident), four from Rush County (community leader, historical society, business representative), and four from Shelby County (Blue River Community Foundation, major employers, youth representatives), with one additional at-large regional expert in tourism or marketing.

This composition builds on existing organizational relationships while ensuring voices that have been underrepresented in cultural planning—particularly youth, business community, and corporate partners—have formal roles in governance. The structure recognizes that Shelby and Decatur counties, as the region's larger population centers, require additional representation while ensuring smaller communities maintain meaningful influence in regional decision-making.

The Steering Committee would meet quarterly to review strategic plan implementation, conduct annual priority setting and budget allocation processes, evaluate and approve initiatives exceeding \$50,000 (funded by various private public sources), coordinate community engagement activities, and monitor performance against established metrics. This schedule aligns with existing ARI RDA meeting patterns while ensuring cultural programming receives adequate governance attention without overwhelming volunteer capacity.



PROFESSIONAL STAFFING AND LOCAL COORDINATION NETWORK

Recognizing that volunteer governance alone cannot sustain regional cultural programming, the structure includes a **0.5 FTE ARI Arts and Culture Coordinator** position. This role addresses the capacity limitations identified in existing organizations by providing professional staff support for grant writing, strategic coordination, marketing, and administrative functions that currently burden volunteer leaders.

The Coordinator would facilitate cross-county collaboration through regular communication and joint planning sessions, manage regional cultural calendar development and marketing coordination, lead grant writing efforts for initiatives requiring regional partnership, maintain stakeholder communication and engagement systems, and collect and report performance data to demonstrate impact and attract additional funding.

This position builds on the successful model of local coordinators used during the strategic planning process, expanding their role to ongoing implementation support. The half-time structure reflects realistic budget constraints while providing sufficient capacity to make a meaningful impact. The position would be funded initially through READI 2.0 administrative allocation, with transition to diversified funding including corporate sponsorship, foundation grants, and potentially fee-for-service coordination work with local organizations.

Complementing professional coordination, **Local Cultural Liaisons** would serve as volunteer points of contact in each community. These liaisons would coordinate local input into regional planning processes, ensure alignment between local programming and regional priorities, facilitate community engagement activities, and serve as communication bridges between local organizations and regional coordination efforts.

The liaison network builds on existing relationships among arts council leaders, Main Street coordinators, and community foundation staff who already collaborate informally. Formalizing these roles provides structure and accountability while recognizing the essential role of local leadership in community-responsive cultural programming.

INTEGRATION WITH EXISTING ARI GOVERNANCE

This arts and culture governance structure intentionally integrates with the established ARI RDA framework rather than creating competing organizational systems. The Regional Arts and Culture Steering Committee would report regularly to the ARI RDA Development Board, ensuring cultural programming aligns with broader regional development goals and leverages resources efficiently.

The arts coordinator would work closely with existing ARI professional staff and contractors, participating in regular regional coordination meetings and contributing to integrated marketing and communication efforts. This integration ensures cultural programming supports broader quality of life and economic development objectives while maintaining its distinctive focus and specialized expertise.

The governance structure also builds on successful partnership patterns established through READI implementation. Corporate partners like Honda, Hillenbrand, and Valeo Engine Cooling already demonstrate community investment and would be positioned to expand support for cultural programming through formal representation and sponsorship opportunities. Community foundations that have supported local cultural initiatives would have direct input into regional programming while potentially coordinating their grantmaking for greater collective impact.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVOLUTION

The proposed structure includes mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and adaptation. Annual governance retreats would assess effectiveness, adjust committee composition as needed, and ensure the structure remains responsive to changing community needs and organizational capacity. The Steering Committee would conduct annual reviews of the Coordinator position and liaison network effectiveness, making adjustments to improve coordination and impact.

This governance approach recognizes that successful regional cultural programming requires both formal coordination mechanisms and preservation of local ownership and creativity. By building on existing organizational strengths while addressing identified weaknesses, the structure positions ARI to leverage its collaborative culture for sustained cultural development that serves residents across all four communities while attracting visitors and investment to the region.



STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH: PHASED DEVELOPMENT

Learning from READI implementation success, cultural programming will follow a carefully phased approach that builds momentum through early wins while establishing foundations for more ambitious long-term initiatives. This approach recognizes that cultural development requires both immediate community engagement and patient institution-building for sustainable impact.

FOUNDATION BUILDING AND QUICK WINS

YEARS 1-2

NEAR-TERM IMPLEMENTATION

The initial phase focuses on establishing governance structures, professional coordination capacity, and visible programming that demonstrates regional collaboration and community benefit. Priority activities include hiring the Arts and Culture Coordinator, establishing the Regional Steering Committee, and launching signature initiatives that build regional identity while serving existing community interests.

Early implementation projects will focus on coordinated marketing and communication systems that immediately improve residents' access to cultural programming information. A regional cultural calendar, shared social media presence, and coordinated promotional campaigns will demonstrate collaboration benefits while requiring minimal resource investment. These communication improvements address resident frustrations identified in the engagement process while building foundations for more complex programming coordination.

Small-scale placemaking initiatives will provide visible evidence of the strategic plan's impact while engaging residents in cultural development. Community co-creation murals, arts in alleys projects, and heritage trail marker installation can begin immediately using existing volunteer networks and modest funding, creating momentum for larger infrastructure investments while demonstrating the plan's commitment to community-driven programming.

Pilot programming in youth engagement and heritage interpretation will test approaches and build organizational learning for larger initiatives. Youth leadership councils can begin meeting and managing small project budgets, while heritage ambassadors programs can launch in one or two communities before regional expansion. These pilots provide proof of concept while developing best practices for broader implementation.



PROGRAM EXPANSION AND INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

EXCELLENCE AND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

YEARS 2–5

YEARS 5–10

MID-TERM DEVELOPMENT

The middle phase emphasizes major capital investments, program expansion, and regional integration that builds on early successes while addressing more complex community needs. This phase will see completion of major facility improvements, launch of signature festivals and events, and establishment of sustainable programming that positions ARI as a regional cultural destination.

Infrastructure projects will include renovation of downtown spaces that are currently underutilized, development of multi-use performance facilities and creation of youth cultural hubs that provide dedicated spaces for expanded programming. These investments require longer development timelines but create permanent assets that support decades of cultural programming while demonstrating community commitment to cultural development.

Programming expansion will include launch of major regional festivals, artist residency programs, and educational initiatives that serve both residents and visitors while supporting local creative careers. The Regional Arts Festival, Heritage Trail network, and expanded youth programming will provide signature experiences that differentiate ARI from other rural regions while serving identified community needs.

Regional marketing and tourism development will mature during this phase, with coordinated destination marketing, group tour development, and hospitality infrastructure that positions cultural programming as an economic development strategy. These efforts require sustained coordination and investment but create revenue streams that support programming sustainability.

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

The final implementation phase focuses on achieving regional and national recognition for cultural programming excellence while ensuring financial and organizational sustainability that supports continued development beyond initial strategic plan timelines. This phase positions ARI as a model for rural cultural development while serving residents' evolving needs and interests.

Advanced programming will include international cultural exchange partnerships, professional artist development initiatives, and innovative programming that attracts national attention while serving local communities. These initiatives require substantial organizational capacity but position ARI for continued growth and recognition while providing residents with cultural opportunities typically available only in much larger communities.

Organizational sustainability will be achieved through diversified revenue streams, endowment development, and professional staffing that reduces dependence on volunteer leadership while maintaining community ownership and direction. This sustainability ensures cultural programming continues serving residents while adapting to changing community needs and opportunities.

RISK ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

HIGH-RISK SCENARIOS

RISK	PROBABILITY	IMPACT	MITIGATION
<p>FUNDING SHORTFALLS</p> <p>READI 2.0 award insufficient for planned initiatives</p>	<p>30%</p> <p>Medium</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p>Could delay implementation 1-2 years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop phased implementation with priority projects identified • Secure letters of commitment from corporate sponsors • Apply for backup federal grants (NEA, NEH, EDA) • Create revolving loan fund for smaller projects
<p>LACK OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</p> <p>Poor attendance at events, low volunteerism</p>	<p>15%</p> <p>Low</p>	<p>MEDIUM</p> <p>Reduced cultural vibrancy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive outreach through churches, schools, employers • Free or low-cost programming to ensure accessibility • Multilingual materials and programming • Partner with existing community organizations
<p>STAFFING/ VOLUNTEER BURNOUT</p> <p>Over-reliance on small group of volunteers</p>	<p>40%</p> <p>Medium</p>	<p>MEDIUM</p> <p>Project delays and quality issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire part-time coordinator to reduce volunteer burden • Rotate leadership responsibilities • Provide volunteer recognition and retention programs • Build institutional knowledge through documentation

SUSTAINABILITY

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Projects will diversify revenue through ticket sales, memberships, concessions, rentals, vendor fees, and cultural tourism. Regional arts tourism will create a mechanism for sustained economic impact, as localized events will draw out-of-town visitors and encourage investment of resources and capital into areas adjacent to arts and cultural offerings—when people attend a cultural event, they tend to make an outing of it. Community foundations will build permanent endowments, bolstered by corporate giving and philanthropic partners.



ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Local nonprofits and arts councils will receive training in fundraising, marketing, volunteer management, and evaluation. READI 2.0's technical assistance will strengthen grant writing and program design.



COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

Arts will be embedded into daily life, from murals on main streets to music at farmers markets. Youth pipelines will connect creativity to leadership, ensuring the next generation carries forward cultural work.



INFRASTRUCTURE SUSTAINABILITY

Capital projects will include maintenance plans, energy-efficient upgrades, and adaptive reuse of historic sites. Partnerships with utilities and corporate sponsors will offset long-term costs.



ENDOWMENT BUILDING STRATEGY

TARGET: \$2M ENDOWMENT BY YEAR 10

- Annual fundraising campaigns targeting \$100K/year
- Major gift cultivation focusing on 20 prospects with capacity for \$25K+ gifts
- Planned giving program through estate planning workshops
- Corporate naming rights opportunities for major venues/programs



MONITORING AND EVALUATION

FRAMEWORK

A regional dashboard will track outcomes across the five strategic pillars while aligning with READI 2.0's statewide goals: rally housing investment, raise incomes, revitalize quality of life, and reinforce educational attainment and innovation.

KEY INDICATORS

Placemaking and Public Art | Number of murals, sculptures, installations, and activated spaces; business or housing investment near projects

Performing Arts and Venues | Venues renovated or created; performances hosted; attendance figures; ticket revenue

Heritage and Cultural Experience | Historic sites restored; festivals hosted; tourism visitation; international partnerships

Youth Culture and Creative Engagement | Youth participation in programs, internships, and councils; student-led projects; graduate retention

Administrative Coordination, Digital Presence, and Regional Marketing | Website traffic; social media engagement; event calendar usage; regional brand recognition; SMU DataArts–Arts Vibrancy Index

PERFORMANCE METRICS DASHBOARD

- Website and social media engagement tracking
- Event attendance and demographic analysis
- Economic impact measurement tools
- Community survey and feedback systems

REPORTING CYCLE

- **Quarterly:** Internal tracking and partner check-ins
- **Annually:** Public-facing dashboard and report to IAC, READI, and community partners
- **Five-Year Review:** Comprehensive evaluation to guide the next strategic cycle

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK INTEGRATION

Evaluation will include resident surveys, focus groups, listening sessions, and youth advisory input. Feedback will shape programming and ensure broad representation.



Conclusion

The ARI Arts and Culture Strategic Plan represents more than a roadmap for cultural development—it embodies the region’s commitment to Rural. Reimagined. Through the integration of heritage preservation, innovative programming, youth engagement, regional collaboration, and digital infrastructure, ARI will demonstrate that rural communities can be vibrant centers of creativity and cultural innovation.

Building on the proven success of READI 1.0 and positioned to leverage READI 2.0 investments, this plan provides the framework for sustainable, community-driven cultural development that will serve as a national model for rural arts and culture initiatives.

The vision is clear: a region where arts and culture are everyday life, where heritage and innovation coexist, and where people of all ages and backgrounds feel empowered to shape their communities through creativity. Through disciplined implementation, strategic partnerships, and unwavering commitment to community engagement, ARI will transform this vision into reality.

This comprehensive enhancement provides ARI with a complete strategic framework that builds upon the excellent foundation while addressing implementation details, risk management, and long-term sustainability. The plan demonstrates how rural communities can leverage their authentic assets and collaborative culture to create vibrant, sustainable cultural ecosystems that serve residents while attracting visitors and investment.

This plan serves as the comprehensive strategic framework for implementing arts and culture initiatives across the ARI region from 2025-2030 and beyond.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE SUMMARY

Year 1

Foundation Building

- Establish governance structure and hire coordinator
- Launch major READI 2.0 funded projects
- Build partnerships and community engagement
- Develop digital platforms and marketing materials

Year 2

Program Expansion

- Launch signature festivals and events
- Complete initial capital projects
- Expand educational programming
- Begin earned revenue generation

Years 3-5

Regional Integration

- Complete I-74 Cultural Corridor development
 - Launch heritage trail system
- Achieve full programming capacity
- Begin sustainability planning

Years 6-10

Excellence and Innovation

- Achieve national recognition for rural arts model
- Complete endowment building campaign
- Launch advanced technology integration
- Mentor other rural regions in replication

APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Public Input Session Summaries
- Appendix B: ARI Regional Survey Results
- Appendix C: ARI Community Input Session – Project Submission Ideas
- Appendix D: Community Health and Accessibility Framework
- Appendix E: Environmental Sustainability Plan
- Appendix F: Policy Recommendations and Advocacy Agenda
- Appendix G: References



APPENDIX A: PUBLIC INPUT SESSION SUMMARIES

Detailed notes from all stakeholder and public sessions held during summer and fall 2025.

STAKEHOLDERS, FOCUS GROUPS AND OUTREACH TIMELINE (JULY-SEPTEMBER 2025)

- 135 participants total, including:
 - Community organization and nonprofit leaders
 - Local government and elected officials
 - Residents and business owners
 - Educators, artists, and creative entrepreneurs
- Engagement methods: virtual conversations, public input sessions, and strategic visioning workshops, online surveys
- 431 survey responses collected through online survey tools (Qualtrics)

PUBLIC INPUT SESSIONS: DATES, LOCATIONS, AND PARTICIPATION

- July 15: Shelby County, Intelliplex Conference Center (21 participants)
- July 23: Decatur County Annex Building (25 participants)
- July 29: Batesville, Rom Weber party Place (22 participants)
- July 30: Rush County, Love Community Center (26 participants)
- September 9: ARI Arts and Culture Subcommittee, Visioning Workshop, Greensburg City Hall (7 participants)
- September 22: Regional Visioning and Strategic Planning Session, Decatur County Annex Building (24 participants in person and on Zoom) – responded to earlier need for stronger cross-county connection and communication, and to foster shared ownership of plan.

PUBLIC INPUT MARKETING AND OUTREACH

Channels used:

- Local news media and radio stations: Daily News (Decatur), WTRE radio, WRBI radio, The Addison Times (Shelby), Daily Local News (Rush).
- Indiana University Center for Rural Engagement website and social media
- ARI Steering Committee members (via social media and email)
- Printed flyers in regional libraries, cafes, grocery stores, and other public spaces

COMMUNITY INPUT SESSION QUESTIONS

- What is unique about [Shelby, Decatur, Rush County, Batesville]?
- How could we celebrate what makes your community unique?
- What is something you wish your community had more of?
- How can we make sure all voices are heard in the planning process?

We asked participants to rank their top priority areas for arts and cultural investment and future implementation. This provided a sense of how residents want to invest in future local arts and cultural infrastructure.

Priority Areas	Mentions	Percentage
Public spaces (main street development, pop-up event spaces, creative placemaking)	25	26.6%
Performing arts & multi-use arts center/facility	15	17%
Public art (murals, installations, creative displays)	16	16%
Creative entrepreneurship & maker spaces	12	12.8%
Historic site activation (e.g., covered bridges, murals)	11	11.7%
Downtown/Main Street revitalization	9	9.6%
Trails, parks, and outdoor recreation	6	6.4%
Festivals and cultural events (film, global)	6	6.4%
Other: Communication, outreach, and marketing	6	6.4%

COMMUNITY INPUT SESSION RESULTS

Shelby County (July 15, Intelliplex Conference Center, 21 participants)

Themes: Desire for youth programming, murals in downtown, expanded Arts in the Park. Concerns about access for rural residents. Priorities ranked: public spaces, performing arts center, and youth engagement.

Decatur County (July 23, Annex Building, 25 participants)

Themes: Identity linked to Tower Tree and Honda presence. Interest in Cherry Blossom Grove expansion, Underground Railroad interpretation. Priorities ranked: heritage storytelling, downtown activation, multi-use cultural facility.

Batesville (July 29, RomWeber Party Place, 22 participants)

Themes: German heritage festivals, Kids Discovery Factory as youth hub, need for public art and alley activation. Priorities ranked: placemaking, festivals, youth STEAM programming.

Rush County (July 30, Love Community Center, 26 participants)

Themes: Covered bridges and Willkie legacy. Festivals like Willkie Days and Chocolate Festival as identity anchors. Desire for Princess Theatre restoration and Riverside concerts expansion. Priorities ranked: heritage, venues, and youth engagement.

ARI Subcommittee Visioning Workshop (Sept 9, Greensburg City Hall, 7 participants)

Themes: Need for stronger cross-county coordination, shared calendar, and regional branding. Priorities: collaboration, shared infrastructure, inclusive programming.

Regional Visioning and Strategic Planning Session (Sept 22, Decatur County Annex, 24 participants in person/virtual)

Themes: Building a shared regional identity; balancing rural character with growth; using food, music, and festivals as connectors. Priorities: I-74 Cultural Corridor, regional festival, youth councils, heritage trail.

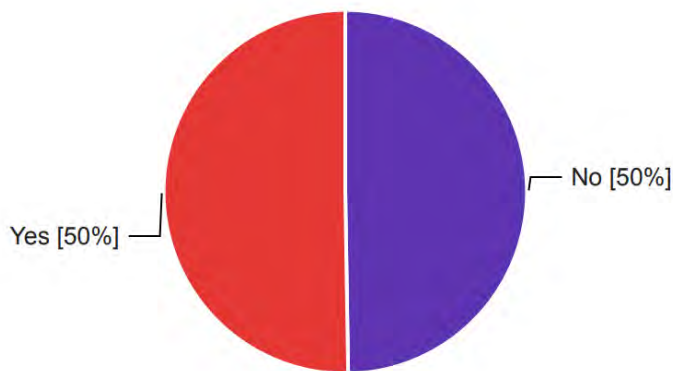
SUMMARY

Across all sessions, residents emphasized storytelling, placemaking, performing arts venues, heritage interpretation, and youth engagement as top priorities. There was strong consensus around the need for regional collaboration, branding, and inclusive access.

Q3: There is a desire for **inclusive representation, emphasizing youth involvement and a need to expand and include more voices in planning** aside from the usual groups and organizers. People are excited to engage residents from other parts of their county that are underrepresented and underserved, and other sectors.



Q4: **The region is evenly split on whether people feel a sense of regional belonging** (Yes 50%, No 50%). This suggests a challenge and opportunity to build a stronger collective identity.



Q5: Survey respondents ranked **public gathering spaces, trails and parks, and festivals, events and concerts** as their top priorities for arts and cultural development.

Priority	# of Responses	Percentage
Public Gathering Spaces	140	32.4%
Trails & Parks	139	32.3%
Festivals, Events, and Concerts	118	27.3%
Downtown/Main Street Revitalization	95	22%
Creative Entrepreneurship	70	16%
Public Art (Murals, Sculptures, etc.)	64	14.8%
Historic Site Activation	60	13.9%
Other	37	0.85%

Q6: 51% marked Yes, indicating strong potential community engagement and volunteer opportunities to support future ARI projects in arts and culture.

APPENDIX C: ARI COMMUNITY INPUT SESSION

PROJECT SUBMISSION IDEAS

Throughout the planning process, community committees and local partners submitted potential projects that reflect the vision and strategic priorities of this plan. These project concepts are illustrative and demonstrate the creativity, ambition, and readiness of ARI communities. They will help guide the next phase, when an open call for proposals will invite projects aligned with the plan's vision and goals.

BATESVILLE ARTS AND INNOVATION HUB EXPANSION

Continued development of underutilized downtown spaces into event lawn and hub for arts, maker labs, and small business incubation. Would provide classrooms, gallery space, performance area, and entrepreneurial support. Goals: support creative economy, engage youth, connect workforce development to arts. Partners: Batesville Area Arts Council, Hillenbrand, Ivy Tech. Funding needs: capital investment, READI 2.0 catalyst, local foundation match.

SHELBY COUNTY CIVIC THEATRE EXPANSION

Expansion of Wortman Theatre and Shelby County Players programming into a year-round multi-use venue. Would support live theater, youth programs, and regional touring acts. Goals: expand performing arts capacity, activate downtown, support youth engagement. Partners: Shelby County Players, Strand Theatre, Shelby Arts Alliance. Funding needs: capital improvements, operating support, endowment-building.

PRIDE IN PLACE EXPANSIONS (SHELBY COUNTY)

Continuation of countywide placemaking initiative. Projects include new murals, alley activations, Japanese Alley enhancements, and creative crosswalks. Goals: celebrate neighbors, increase tourism, expand community pride. Partners: Blue River Community Foundation, Mainstreet Shelbyville, City of Shelbyville. Funding needs: local match, IHCD CreatiNG Places, corporate sponsorship.

WILLKIE PARK ACTIVATION (RUSHVILLE)

Redevelopment of Wendell Willkie Park into a signature heritage and cultural destination. Plans include interpretive signage, concert space, and public art honoring Willkie's presidential campaign legacy. Goals: connect heritage to placemaking, create new event space. Partners: City of Rushville, Rush County Historical Society, local businesses. Funding needs: READI 2.0 seed, NEH Public Humanities, community foundation support.

DECATUR COUNTY UNDERGROUND RAILROAD HERITAGE TRAIL

Development of trail and interpretive network highlighting Underground Railroad sites and stories. Would include signage, digital interpretation, and annual festival expansion. Goals: connect heritage with tourism, expand inclusive storytelling, draw regional visitors. Partners: Decatur County Freedom Trail Association, Decatur County Historical Society, Decatur County Public Library, Grover Center Museum, Arts and Cultural Council of Decatur County. Funding needs: NEH, Indiana Humanities, READI 2.0 arts and culture.

RUSHVILLE PRINCESS THEATRE PROGRAMMING EXPANSION

Following restoration, expansion of programming to include regional film festival, touring acts, and educational workshops. Goals: maximize use of restored venue, increase tourism, connect with youth education. Partners: Princess Theatre, Heart of Rushville, regional arts councils. Funding needs: NEA Our Town, corporate sponsorship, ticket revenue models.

SUMMARY

These ideas demonstrate that ARI communities already have a pipeline of implementable projects ready to align with READI 2.0 and philanthropic support. Each builds on local strengths and contributes to the regional vision. The next step is to open a competitive process so additional projects can be proposed and aligned with the five strategic priorities.

APPENDIX D: COMMUNITY HEALTH AND ACCESSIBILITY FRAMEWORK

ARTS THERAPY AND HEALING PROGRAMS

HOSPITAL AND HEALTHCARE PARTNERSHIPS

- Healing arts programs in waiting areas and patient rooms
- Music therapy partnerships with regional health systems
- Art therapy programming for mental health support
- Wellness-focused community art projects

SENIOR ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES

- Intergenerational arts programs pairing seniors with youth
- Memory preservation projects documenting local history
- Senior theater and music groups
- Arts programming at assisted living facilities

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION FRAMEWORK

PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

- ADA compliance for all new cultural venues
- Sensory-friendly programming options
- Transportation assistance for rural residents
- Sliding scale pricing for all programming

CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVES

- Multilingual programming and materials (Spanish, Japanese)
- Programming that celebrates diverse cultural traditions
- Economic accessibility through free community programming
- Rural outreach to underserved communities

APPENDIX E: ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

GREEN OPERATIONS FRAMEWORK

SUSTAINABLE EVENT PRACTICES

- Zero-waste festival policies
- Local sourcing requirements for food vendors
- Reusable materials for signage and decorations
- Carbon offset programs for major events

FACILITY SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS

- LEED certification goals for new construction
- Solar panel installation on cultural venues
- Water conservation systems and rain gardens
- Native plant landscaping for outdoor venues

ENVIRONMENTAL ARTS PROGRAMMING

NATURE-BASED ARTS INITIATIVES

- Outdoor sculpture parks using sustainable materials
- Environmental education through arts programming
- Community garden projects at cultural venues
- Climate change awareness campaigns through arts

APPENDIX F: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND ADVOCACY AGENDA

LOCAL POLICY PRIORITIES

ARTS-FRIENDLY ZONING ORDINANCES

- Live-work space allowances for artists
- Temporary use permits for pop-up events
- Reduced parking requirements for cultural venues
- Public art requirements for new developments

CULTURAL PRESERVATION POLICIES

- Historic preservation incentive programs
- Adaptive reuse tax credits for arts venues
- Heritage site protection ordinances
- Documentation requirements for demolition projects

STATE-LEVEL ADVOCACY

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- Increased Indiana Arts Commission funding
- Rural arts development tax credits
- Cultural tourism promotion funding
- Heritage trail designation programs

FEDERAL GRANT STRATEGY

TARGET PROGRAMS

- NEA “Our Town” grants for creative placemaking
- NEH “A More Perfect Union” for heritage projects
- USDA Rural Development Community Facility loans
- EDA “Build to Scale” for creative economy development

APPENDIX G: REFERENCES

ARI REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

ARI REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

- Accelerate Rural Indiana READI 1.0 Strategic Plan (2021)
- Accelerate Rural Indiana READI 2.0 Regional Development Plan (2024)
- ARI Quality of Place Assessment and Strategy (2023)

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- Batesville Comprehensive Plan (2019)
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- Rush County Comprehensive Plan (2017)
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- Decatur County Community Foundation Community Needs Assessment (2022)
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- Ripley County Community Foundation Arts and Culture Assessment (2023)

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- Indiana Arts Commission arts project support

- Indiana Humanities Strategic Framework 2023-2026
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- Indiana Regional Cities Initiative Best Practices Report (2022)
- IHEDA CreatiNG Places Program Guidelines
- Indiana Main Street Program Standards and Resources

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- Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology Planning Resources
- Indiana Historical Bureau County History Resources
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- National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation. Resource Guide on Public Engagement (2021)
- International Association for Public Participation. IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (2018)
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- National Endowment for the Arts Research: www.arts.gov/impact/research
- ArtPlace America Creative Placemaking Resources: www.artplaceamerica.org/resources
- Indiana Arts Commission Resources: www.in.gov/arts
- Public Art Network: publicartnetwork.americansforthearts.org
- Creative Placemaking Leadership Summit Resources: www.artplaceamerica.org/leadership-summit





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