



Arts & Culture Plan

2025 – 2035

We Make Things Here

**TRANSFORMING
COMMUNITIES** ART
through the power of arts and culture

FORGE ECI

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Tim Scales — *Indiana University East*
Karen Vincent — *Delaware County Historical Society*
Jenna Wachtmann — *Ball Brothers Foundation*

Braydee Euliss — *Indiana Arts Commission Region 5 Arts Partner*

December 4, 2025

Letter to the Region,

We are proud to share the East Central Indiana Arts & Culture Plan. This collective vision and framework for strengthening and celebrating creativity and cultural heritage will play a vital role in shaping a vibrant future of which we can all be proud.

Over the past year, *over 450 residents, artists, and community leaders* shared their ideas and hopes for the future through surveys, interviews, and conversations. Together, we identified *nearly 700 arts, culture, and history assets and over 500 pieces of public art*, revealing an incredible depth of creativity, heritage, and innovation from which we can build and grow. Through this work, we built new relationships, discovered shared goals, connected across sectors, and found ourselves in rooms with people we'd never met or collaborated with before. We look forward to building upon those relationships to deepen our shared understanding of how arts and culture can strengthen quality of life and economic vitality to collectively move forward together.

We're excited to see plan goals and strategies come to life – from deepening next generation attachment and activating downtowns to mobilizing sectors and leaders to make it happen. This is not a plan to sit on a shelf, but a living framework for counties, cities, and communities to use in a variety of ways – from local planning and economic development to tourism, education, and civic engagement. It reflects a true team effort – arts and culture working synergistically with civic and economic leaders to create meaningful and lasting impact.

We are deeply grateful to the [Indiana Economic Development Corporation](#) and [Lilly Endowment Inc.](#) for their investment in regional planning, which has fostered a growth mindset and sparked new ways of thinking about how creativity drives quality of life, economic vitality, and regional identity.

Together, we look forward to putting this plan into action —

Continuing to Deepen Relationships, Elevate Creativity, & Forge a Creative Path for East Central Indiana.

Sincerely,

Garrett Doan
Forge ECI, Chair

Caitlin Hancock
Forge ECI, President & CEO
chancock@forgeeci.com

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east central indiana



Images from Winterfest, Downtown Connersville



Arts & Culture Plan

**EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**

Arts & Culture Plan

2025 – 2035 : Executive Summary

We Make Things Here

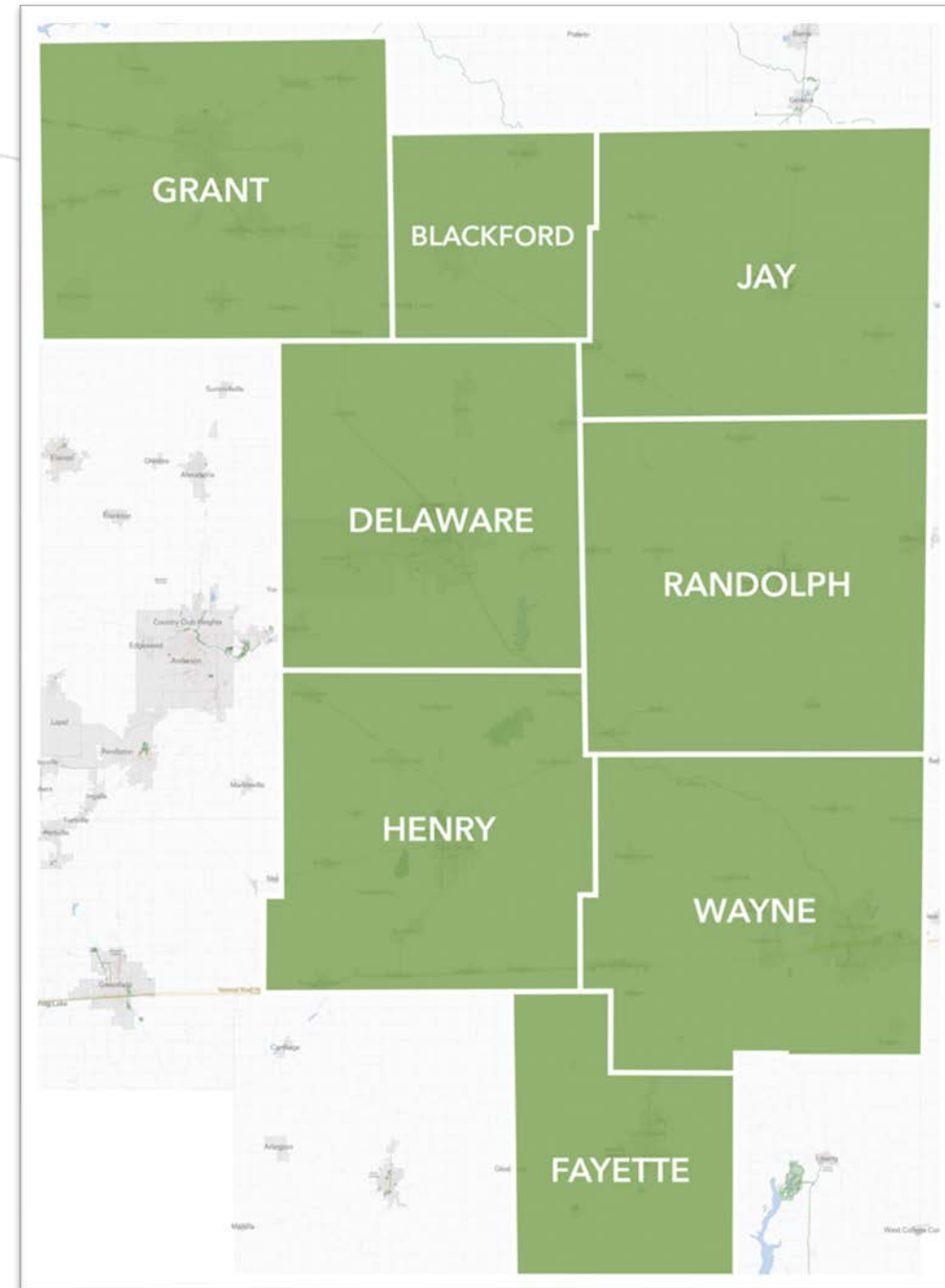
Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana

Introduction

This plan is part of Indiana's READI Arts & Culture Initiative as funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. But it is so much more. **The purpose of this plan is to enhance quality of life, strengthen the local economy, and provide an important – often missing – piece to community planning: arts and culture.** It is one of 15 such plans that lay the groundwork for a decade of activity – a road map for cities, counties, and regions to use regardless of funding source, leadership, or whatever else the future might hold. It provides a long-term strategy with details and resources to strengthen local identity, foster economic growth, and attract and retain residents.

The Region

Comprised of Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, and Wayne Counties, the region is home to **5.8% of the state's population**. While it may have some challenging economic and demographic realities, its extraordinary history and its foundation of industry, innovation, and entrepreneurship have produced some of the most well-known cultural icons in the world. The same spirit of innovation lives in this plan – helping write the next chapter of the story of East Central Indiana's contributions to Indiana and to the world.



Arts & Culture in East Central Indiana

In the course of planning, we identified and inventoried the region’s Cultural Assets including:

- **518** Artists, arts organizations, groups, businesses, and program sites
- **508** Pieces of Public Art including murals, sculptures, utility wraps, and more
- **295** Related Civic Assets (parks, trails, schools, universities, and centers)
- **214** History and heritage organizations, sites, districts, and attractions
- **168** Events & Traditions (annual festivals, recurring series, and markets)
- **112** Support Organizations (boosters, Main Streets, Chambers, tourism, funders)
- **45** Misc. Amenities (community attractions, craft product producers, etc.)

East Central Indiana is rich in cultural assets and activity. A strong base for building a plan upon.

Vision for Success

From that base, leaders and residents from all sectors and all corners of the region produced an ambitious vision – a collective aspiration – for the future in which:

The Arts are a Thriving, Vital Force shaping regional connection and resilience

- Downtowns – *of every size* – are Vibrant Cultural & Economic Hubs
- The Next Generation is Engaged, Empowered & Educated *through* the Arts
- The Region’s Mosaic of Communities are Physically & Culturally Connected
- Cross-Sector Partnership Drives Arts & Culture Success
- The Creative Sector is Growing in Strength & Impact, because...

**We Make Things Here –
Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana.**

Goals & Strategies

The region will achieve that vision through six goals and strategies for each. Pairing goals within three overarching regional priorities, provides a balanced framework that addresses the core needs of every focus area.

450+

East Central Hoosiers Participated through

- Visioning Sessions
- Groups
- Regional Leader Discussions
- Interviews
- Public Surveys

Not to mention dozens of online submissions, inquiries, and hundreds more website visitors.

What is “Arts & Culture”?

The plan values *the full creative ecosystem* –


Not only arts organizations, but the fabricators, makers, artisans, musicians, writers, crafters, podcasters, performers, designers, architects, libraries, and history organizations (and everyone within them).

Together they form the cultural fabric of the region and remind us that we each have a personal connection to the arts, whether through the high school band, having a favorite author, art teacher, or song, writing poetry, learning to play guitar, draw, crochet, dance...

Or simply loving to create the best music playlist ever.



The circled star highlights the goal collectively identified by the region as the top priority in plan.

Priorities	Goals	Strategies
<p>priority PLACE & IDENTITY</p>	<p>1. ACTIVATE DOWNTOWNS</p> <p> Activate and revitalize downtowns – <i>of every size</i> – through arts, culture, and local heritage. Filled with public art, entertainment, food, and creative retail they become Cultural Hubs – blending historic preservation with contemporary energy to attract residents, visitors, and business.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Enhancement projects (<i>signage, façade programs, landscaping</i>) — Activate with public art and programs — Restore and reuse downtown assets (<i>historic buildings, open spaces</i>) — Celebrate cultural heritage (<i>incorporate into signage, public art, programs</i>) — Link physical & cultural assets (<i>new trails, trail enhancements, activation</i>) — Advance regional tourism through relationships, collective strategies, and efforts
	<p>2. CONNECT COMMUNITIES</p> <p>Leverage Cultural Identity & Creative Experiences (e.g., public art trails, regional program, and wayfinding) to increase access to cultural assets, unify communities, and promote exploration and place-based tourism.</p>	
<p>priority ATTACHMENT & OPPORTUNITY</p>	<p>3. DEEPEN NEXT GENERATION ATTACHMENT</p> <p>Invest in initiatives with and for next generation – expanding access to arts programming and education, increasing participation, and opening pathways to creative careers. Deeply engaging the next generation in a vibrant Cultural Life will feed talent pipelines while increasing resident and college student retention across the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Empower youth engagement and volunteerism — Expand arts opportunities for all ages – <i>co-designed with target audiences</i> — Build creative career pathways (<i>internships, programs</i>) — Empower creative capacity (<i>affordable spaces, connect to resources, training</i>) — Grow creative opportunity (<i>support paid gigs, retail, expand markets</i>)
	<p>4. GENERATE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY</p> <p>Position Artists & Creative Businesses for success within the local and regional economy. Generate opportunities with, by, and for artists, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural nonprofits through training, workforce development, and material supports needed to grow in strength and impact.</p>	
<p>priority LEADERSHIP & COLLABORATION</p>	<p>5. MOBILIZE, COLLABORATE & COMMUNICATE</p> <p>Collaborate to advance Cultural Development & Regionalism. Systemize collaboration and communication among leaders to align planning, build networks, share resources, and create joint programs to strengthen the region’s collective capacity for long-term cultural growth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Mobilize county-level creative networks (<i>coffee & calendar mtgs, build networks</i>) — Catalyze a regionwide movement (<i>cross sector, annual convening</i>) — Build stakeholder support — Build policy infrastructure (<i>% for art, streamline policies, etc.</i>) — Secure sustainable funding
	<p>6. FORMALIZE SUSTAINABLE COMMITMENTS</p> <p>Hardwire Arts & Culture Strategy into governance, economic development, funding, and civic frameworks. Embedding arts and culture into plans and policies will ensure their sustainable visibility, investment, and impact.</p>	

The BIG Ideas

These ideas supersize plan goals, reimagining them as bold opportunities to elevate and expand the region and its vision. They are *“What if?” opportunities for long-term, whole-region advancement* rather than short-term project recommendations. Since great change requires enthusiasm and commitment, these ideas are offered for exploration and consideration.

1. PLACE AMPLIFIED:

Cultural Districts

Every county in East Central Indiana has at least one community with strong potential to become a cultural district. *Imagine the entire region connected through a network of these districts*, each one celebrating its own character while collectively showcasing the richness of East Central Indiana’s arts and cultural scene. Practically, implementation could provide a framework for downtown revitalization, local action plans, and implementation.

2. ALL-IN MARKETING:

Indiana Icons & Industry

What would it look like to go 'all in' – to showcase incredible artists and icons like Garfield, Gennett Records, James Dean, and Bob Ross alongside a treasure trove of attractions and sites? Imagine a *shared regional marketing strategy across multiple platforms that creates a clear “brand” or sense of united identity centered on Indiana Icons & Industry – a combination that produced some of the most well-known cultural icons in the world.*

3. A PARTNERSHIP TO JOIN:

Indiana’s Music Corridor

Imagine if Forge ECI *leveraged East Central Indiana’s deep music-education and performance culture as a regional music strategy.* Doing so would benefit communities across all eight counties and set up the region as an ideal partner for strategies in adjacent regions. Specifically, SEI READI is considering a music corridor – running from Richmond, *birthplace of recorded jazz* to Madison's *“music city” – to celebrate the deep musical roots of Indiana’s eastern tier.* The case for showcasing both regions' incredible musical legacies and today's vibrant cultures could reverberate across East Central Indiana.

“ It’s hard to express how important our READI work is across so many communities and so many sectors. Right now we have all 15 regions, the entire state, working on Arts & Culture Strategic Plans that align with their READI plans.

The scale and breadth of this work in this sector has never been done before. Even beyond the awards we’ll be able to make in the next year,

the impact of having this many people focused specifically on Arts & Culture has the chance to fundamentally impact generations of Hoosiers.

– Jim Rawlinson
 Director of READI, Indiana Economic Development Corporation
[Posted to LinkedIn](#), October 2025



Creative Hearts Art Studio, program of Carey Services, Marion



New Castle Community Schools Award-Winning Performing Arts Programs

Contact

Caitlin Hancock, President & CEO, Forge ECI, chancock@forgeeci.com

The Rest of the Plan. The full document includes detailed goals, strategies, and tactics along with:

- **County Profiles** as a start for local leaders to use in adapting the plan to their needs.
- **A Toolkit** of ideas, inspiration, resources, and a glossary.
- **Recommended Tools** scattered throughout the plan.
- **An Appendix** with the methodology and detailed data tables
- There is more on the [Project Website](#) that will be available directly from [Forge ECI](#) in early 2026.

Fostering More Vibrant and Livable Communities for Generations to Come

This plan is a road map for cities, counties, and regions to use regardless of funding source, leadership, or what else the future might hold.

Acknowledgements FORGE ECI

Caitlin Hancock, President & CEO

Garret Doan, Chair – *First Merchants*

Alexandra Pflug, Vice Chair – *Purdue for Life Foundation*

Haley Tomlinson, Past Chair – *Duke Energy*

Scott Riggs, Treasurer – *Meridian Health*

Jason Miller, Secretary – *RMA Engineering*

Initiative Funder, Partners & Consultant Team



Lilly Endowment Inc.
A private foundation since 1937



Sara A. Peterson & Paige Sharp
in collaboration as





Arts & Culture Plan

WELCOME



THE PROJECT

This plan is part of Indiana’s READI Arts & Culture Initiative as funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. (LEI). But it is so much more. It is one of 15 such plans that lay the groundwork for a decade of activity – **a road map for cities, counties, and regions to use regardless of funding source, leadership, or what else the future might hold.**

This is an incredible moment for Indiana. A moment that has united the state’s economic development infrastructure, its arts, culture, and history sector (artists, creative businesses, nonprofits, and programs), and communities of every size in a simultaneous effort to:

Foster More Vibrant and Livable Communities for Generations to Come.

We are unaware of any other effort of this scope or scale. And it didn’t happen by accident. A state policy initiative inspired the private investment that brought us here (*box right*). **This is also an incredible moment for East Central Indiana** resulting in a comprehensive strategy for achieving its ambitious vision in which:

The Arts are a Thriving, Vital Force shaping regional connection and resilience

- Downtowns – *of every size* – are Vibrant Cultural & Economic Hubs
- The Next Generation is Engaged, Empowered & Educated *through* the Arts
- The Region’s Mosaic of Communities are Physically & Culturally Connected
- Cross-Sector Partnership Drives Arts & Culture Success
- The Creative Sector is Growing in Strength & Impact, because...

**We Make Things Here –
Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana.**

This vision directly supports the region’s economic vision, goals, and other aspirations.

Soon after these plans are launched across the state, the state will launch the LEI Arts & Culture Initiative funding opportunity to support projects that align with this plan. While this will be the last step of the state’s project, it will be just the beginning of the work on the ground.

READI 2.0 Arts & Culture Initiative

ABOUT

In 2021, Governor Eric J. Holcomb launched the [Regional Economic Acceleration & Development Initiative](#) (READI 1.0) allocating \$500M of pandemic funding among Indiana’s 92 counties.

2023 brought READI 2.0 – a new \$500M investment – focused on **Quality of Life, Place, & Opportunity**. It encouraged regions to include arts and culture initiatives to help them know how to work proactively with economic development and prepare the sector to be better poised to access future funding.

In 2024, the [Lilly Endowment Inc.](#) put \$250M behind it – including \$65M for a first-ever statewide initiative advancing creative transformation. With that grant, the [LEI Arts & Culture Initiative](#) was born for regions working with a broad cross-section of residents to develop assets, experiences, and initiatives.

Soon after, the [Indiana Economic Development Corp.](#) announced \$1.5M for arts and culture planning and led by [Indiana Arts Commission](#)-identified experts.

GOALS

Engage residents and communities across creative, geographic, and demographic boundaries • **Unleash** regional creative transformation through investment in public art and culture amenities that are accessible to the entire community • **Elevate** READI's quality of place impact on Indiana’s cities and towns • **Build** a critical mass of authentic, yet bold, artistic, and culture assets with a long-term plan for their maintenance and expansion.

THE PLAN

Overall Approach

This plan is grounded in the region's existing capacity and resources while looking forward with vision and intention.

First, it takes an **"Arts and" approach** – recognizing that arts and culture are not separate, but integral to efforts in economic development, tourism, community development and vitality, activating parks, education, and more. Implementation depends on leaders across these sectors working together, with arts and culture seen as a key ingredient for shared success.

What is "Arts & Culture"?

The plan values **the full creative ecosystem** – not only arts organizations, but the fabricators, makers, artisans, musicians, writers, crafters, podcasters, performers, designers, architects, libraries, and history organizations (and everyone within them).

Together they form the cultural fabric of the region and remind us that we each have a personal connection to the arts, whether through the high school band, having a favorite author, art teacher, or song, writing poetry, learning to play guitar, draw, crochet, dance... or simply loving to create the best music playlist ever.

Regional & Hyperlocal

This plan is designed to be implemented on both the county and regional levels elevating both while maintaining community voices and local authenticity. The plan belongs to the region, not any one organization or place. It provides **regional direction and aspiration that can be achieved through local initiative** – regional and hyperlocal at the same time. The smallest towns and counties were intentionally placed on an equal footing with the largest of both throughout the process and in the resulting strategies.

Feasible & Sustainable




This plan also **acknowledges current and future funding realities**, building strategies that are both aspirational and sustainable. It is designed to align with and complement existing

Document Guide Find What You Need

This document can be used as a **whole or in parts**.

— Welcome	Introductory Materials
— THE REGION	THIS IS THE PLAN
— The Counties	Profiles of Each
— The Toolkit	Implementation Aids
— Appendix	Methodology & Data

Each section can stand alone as can any of the individual County Profiles.

 The lightbulb points to footnotes and tips.
 The cloud points to links a reader might miss.
 The toolbox identifies a recommended tool.

The Document is also color coded. Here's the Key:

priority • **priority** • **priority**
big ideas • **counties** • **appendix** • **everything else**

More for the Reader

These **light gray boxes** are found throughout the document. They are your source for:

- Regional development plan alignment,
- **Digging Deeper** ideas and resources,
- **Your Input** quotes from participants,
- **Making the Case** for a strategy
- **Recommended Tools**, and
- Statistics, quotes, and definitions for context

Darker boxes list the contents of a section.

community plans, so that collectively, the region moves forward in concert toward a stronger, more connected, and more resilient future.

Developmental & Long-Term

This is not a traditional capital or project-based plan. It is instead one focused on regionalism and advancing arts and culture over a full decade. In order to maintain flexibility for evolution, the plan intentionally avoids proposing or endorsing particular projects that may already exist.

Participation

This plan emerged from a community-driven, asset-based approach to planning. This allowed for deep and diverse participation across sectors and communities. By the end **over 450 East Central Hoosiers** had participated through:

- 8 Community Visioning Sessions
- 18 Focus Groups & Regional Leader Discussions
- 50-ish Interviews
- 2 Public Surveys

Not to mention dozens of online submissions, inquiries, and hundreds more website visitors.

Wayne Gaydos,
From the Woods Instruments,
Indiana Artisan in Wayne County

450+



Participation by Sector

Sector	Participation
Arts, Culture & History	41%
Education (K12 & Higher Ec.)	8%
City/County Government	7%
Economic Dev. & Related	5%
Foundations / Funders	5%
Libraries & Misc.	4%
Finance & Professional Services	4%
Health & Social Services	3%
Chambers & Main Streets	3%
Business & Manufacturing	3%
Tourism & Attractions	2%
Real Estate, Construction, Etc.	1%
Other/Unknown	13%

* Misc, includes media, extension, and nature

Participation by County

	Participation vs 2020 Pop	
Delaware	20%	30%
Wayne	17%	18%
Jay	14%	5%
Fayette	11%	6%
Blackford	10%	3%
Henry	10%	13%
Grant	8%	18%
Randolph	8%	7%
Multi/Other	2%	--

Including 30 cities and towns across the region



See the Appendix for the full methodology (pages 139-146) including participation details.

Sections of the Plan

The plan (*"The Region"* pages 17-64) includes several components, one leading to the next.

About the Region. This introduces the Forge ECI region, its counties, economy, and regional development authority at a high level.

State of the Arts. This bird's eye view of the region's arts and culture identity, assets, and inventory provides an assessment of strengths and challenges in the creative sector, and the opportunities and challenges addressed in this plan.

Vision & Success Measures. This plan fully embraces the region's vision for economic development, adding detail specific to the *"Arts and" approach*.

Goals & Strategies. The plan is organized to move seamlessly from vision to action. Three overarching regional priorities each supported by two goals, provide a balanced framework that addresses the core needs of every focus area. Each goal is presented in its own section and is supported by strategies and tactics that outline practical steps for implementation.

Big Ideas. These are carefully curated big bets for the region – ways to supersize the goals and strategies for regional impact.

★ **Implementation.** The circled star highlights the goal collectively identified by the region as the top priority in plan.

The Counties. The profiles here provide a starting guide for each county in adapting this plan to their individual needs.

The Toolkit. Also included is a toolkit of ideas and inspiration drawn from national and local examples to spark creativity and show what's possible. These resources align directly with goals and are designed to deepen understanding, build confidence, and equip leaders with the tools they need to translate ideas into action. Not every idea will fit every community, but all can inform new approaches.

Appendix. Here are the methodology and technical details that supports the plan overall.

More resources are available online. These are currently connected with the project website but will transition to Force ECI in early 2026.

- [Materials](#) from the planning process (e.g., presentations, recaps)
- [Spreadsheets](#) for each county (e.g., asset inventories, participation, plans reviewed)
- The regional asset map [online](#).



6:00 in the Studio Mural by Megan Oldhues, Richmond

Principles Used in Arts & Culture Planning

ARTS PLANNING SHOULD BE:

1. **Ground-Up** Regions are comprised of counties, which are comprised of communities, which are people, places, organizations, activities, traditions – build from the bottom not the top.
2. **Authentic** Celebrate community history, heritage, stories, and points of pride – its unique cultural identity.
3. **Asset-Based** Built on the foundation of strengths – it's the best way to fill in the gaps.
4. **Team Sport** This is a “yes, and” proposition. It only works with broad collaboration and community engagement – arts and culture WITH economic development and planning, education and health care, cities and civic organizations, tourism, and Main Street, etc.
5. **Visionary** Think big about a long-term horizon for goals and strategies, not projects – that's where the magic happens.
6. **Interdependent** Not just aligned with the momentum of existing plans and projects but reinforcing – other plans support arts and culture; arts and culture support other plans.
7. **Sustainable** First, do no harm. Then, make sure results can last.
8. **Creative** The plan will be arts and culture after all and should **ARTify** / **ARTivate** all the goals and strategies.
9. **So Much More than Murals** It includes your local artists and creative economy, theaters and museums, arts education for all ages, festivals, and concert series, knitting circles and woodworking clubs, amphitheaters, and bar stages, and so very much more.
10. **Interesting & Fun** Because that's what art, artists, and culture ultimately bring – joy and discovery (and besides, everyone needs motivation – every great pop song has a hook).

WHERE DOES ARTS PLANNING FIT?

If **tourism plans** focus on attracting visitors: what is there to do here?

And **development** on attracting businesses and jobs: what supports are here?

Both depend on a vibrant quality of life and of place – which is where an arts plan comes in.

FOCUS ON INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, THE COMMUNITY –

What you celebrate, what brings you joy, what is good for your kids and your health, how you express yourselves and develop as full humans.

It isn't just what you are close to.

It's who you are and what you have, right here, every day.

“ Creative Placemaking:
Strengthening Communities
with Arts at the Core

NEA Creative Placemaking Technical Assistance

Principles from
Sara A. Peterson
in collaboration with Paige Sharp (2025)

Arts & Culture Plan

THE REGION



EAST CENTRAL, IN

Comprised of Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, and Wayne Counties, the region describes itself as offering:

*Unparalleled advantage for businesses looking to grow and thrive.
This region is more than just a dot on the map –
it's a **powerhouse of opportunity** within reach of several major cities.*

Population

The region is home to **5.8% of the state's population**.

For perspective, the ECI region at just over 374,500 residents is **slightly smaller than Hamilton County** (approx. 379,700). It is also more than twice the population of its neighboring region to the south.

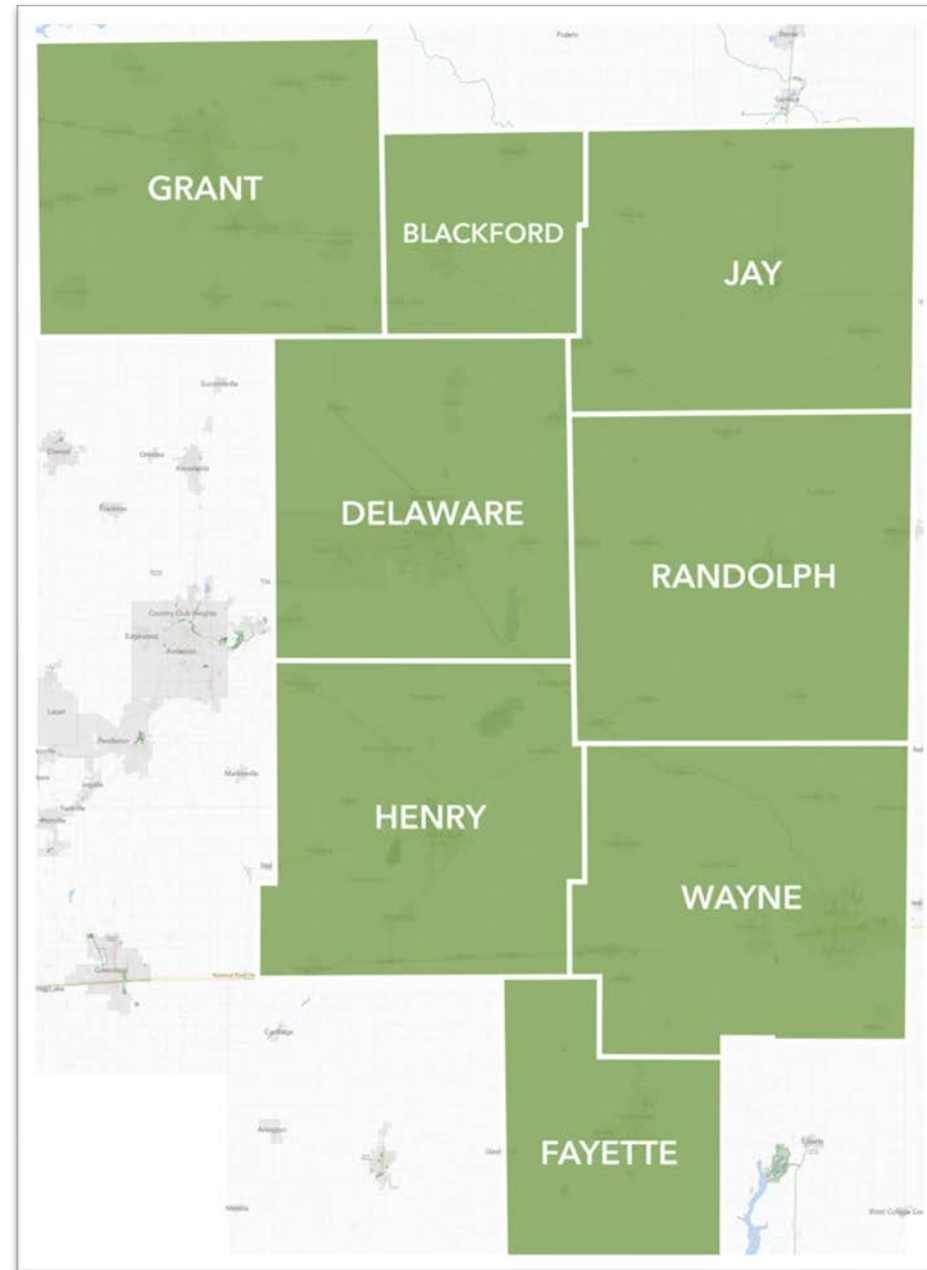
It finds itself in an interesting place between major metropolitan areas:

- Delaware and Henry are in the [Indianapolis-Carmel-Muncie CSA](#)
- Wayne-Fayette are the Richmond-Connersville Metropolitan Area
- Henry is its own Micropolitan area
- Leaving Blackford, Jay, and Randolph as too small or too distant to garner any designation.

Economic Drivers

From an economic development perspective, the region touts its:

- Access to Transportation
- Access to Quality Healthcare
- Dedication to Lifelong Learning & Educational Excellence
- Vital Agriculture Economy
- Strong Manufacturing Legacy



- Outdoor Recreation Opportunities
- Central Location



One Region, Eight counties,

5.8%

of the state population

Key Numbers

The region has **challenges to contend with.**

- **Poverty Rate.** Every county has higher rates than the state.
- **Median Household Income.** All eight counties are in the bottom 30% of Indiana counties for household income. In fact, **5 of the bottom 10 are in this region.**
- **Population Growth.** Population is stagnant-to-shrinking.
- **Median Age.** At the same time regional population is **1-5 YEARS OLDER** than the state with only one exception – Delaware County with a median 2 years younger.



Ball Jars, Ball Corporation, Muncie

	2020 Census	2020–24 Growth	2024 Median Age	2023 Median Household Income	2023 Poverty Rate
Delaware	111,903	< 1%	36	Co. Rank #86 \$55,704	19%
Grant	66,674	(0.3%)	39	#89 \$53,872	20%
Wayne	66,553	(0.02%)	41	#90 \$52,493	17%
Henry	48,914	0.3%	42	#64 \$62,048	13%
Randolph	24,502	(0.07%)	43	#83 \$58,009	15%
Fayette	23,398	(0.3%)	43	#75 \$60,483	20%
Jay	20,478	(1.5%)	39	#70 \$61,030	13%
Blackford	12,112	(2.4%)	43	#91 \$51,799	16%
ECI REGION	374,534	0.005%	41	\$56,930	Ave. 17%
INDIANA	ECI is 5.8% of IN	2.0%	38	ECI is 82% of \$69,458	12%
NATION	-----	2.6%	39	and 71% of \$80,610	11%

See each county's profile for additional numbers (pages 65-114).

“ Growing places face problems, but these are happy problems. Shrinking places also face problems, but they are unhappy problems.”

The loss of residents means declining demand for restaurants and grocery stores... fewer well-educated residents to run for city council or school board... a shortage of volunteers. Declining places suffer from higher overhead costs of operating everything.

Excerpt from [What the Census tells Hoosiers..](#) Michael Hicks (Daily Journal, March 26, 2025)

Population, Service & Professional Needs

With an aging population, the region is on the verge of shrinking. A step further, as a region, East Central Indiana faces critical human capital needs.

- **Legal Deserts.** A [July 2025 report from the Commission on Indiana’s Legal Future](#) categorized Blackford, Fayette, Henry, Jay, Randolph, and Wayne Counties as legal deserts (< 1/1,000 residents).
- **Health Professional Shortage Areas.** Every county has at least one [HPSA designation](#). (See also <https://www.indianapca.org/about-chcs/hpsa-mua/>)
- **Banking Deserts.** The [Federal Reserve](#) has identified four banking deserts in Delaware county (each with the closest branch 5-8 miles away) with one potential in Henry.

This region needs active vigilance and in-migration – or more aggressive strategies – to counter-balance age and other risks like these.

Livability

We know that quality of life and place drive individual location decisions, and that people go to a place first to find a job later.

Because of this, it is important to understand the region’s livability. With many ways of doing this, we chose the [AARP Livability Index](#) for its consistency, depth, and focus on all life cycles.

“AARP employs a variety of survey research to inform [its methodology] to reflect a wide range of preferences for people living at all stages of life.

*Metrics... are scored for each of the **seven livability categories**: Housing, Neighborhood, Transportation, Environment, Health, Engagement, and Opportunity...*

Those communities with more livability-friendly practices earn a score above 50 and those facing obstacles to livability score lower.”

According to the 2024 Index, the region’s **strongest category is “Engagement”** with a score 17 or more points higher than the U.S. median. Its **weakest category is “Neighborhood”** where none of the counties do well. Grant has the lowest score (U.S. median -6 points) and Delaware the highest (U.S. median +1 point).

Digging Deeper What comes first, people or jobs?

Today, the conclusion is simple:

“People are increasingly relocating to and staying in places where they wish to live, and jobs are following.

Places with higher estimated quality of life are associated with higher population growth and in turn higher job growth.

This is true in the Midwest and even more so for rural areas in the Midwest.

[M]ore than a dozen key amenities – including school spending, low crime rates, recreation and arts and culture places, food stores, and personal care places – are associated with quality of life,

They also found that natural amenities, such as moderate temperatures, play a more modest role in quality of life after accounting for the prevalence of recreation businesses.

Together, this work suggests **public, private, and natural amenities are playing a significant role in fostering healthy local economies.**

Excerpted from [Why Have Local Economic Development Policies Been So...?](#) (M.J. Hicks, A Weinstein, E Wornell in [Reaching Regions](#), 2025)

The Regional Average Compared with U.S. Median Scores

	Region	U.S.	Difference	
Livability Overall Score	49	50	- 1 pt	
The 7 Livability Categories – Ranked				
1. Engagement	64	47	+ 17 pts	2 STRENGTHS with scores above 50 and above the U.S. median
2. Opportunity	60	50	+ 10 pts	
3. Housing	48	59	- 15 pts	5 CHALLENGES with scores below 50 of which 3 are also below U.S. median
4. Health	48	40	+ 8 pts	
5. Transportation	47	44	+ 4 pts	
6. Environment	44	61	- 17 pts	
7. Neighborhood	33	36	- 4 pts	

The Region's Top Strength & Challenge by County

	Delaware	Wayne	Henry	Blackford	Fayette	Randolph	Grant	Jay
Livability Overall Score	51	51	49	49	48	48	48	48
1. Engagement	66	60	73	65	63	62	60	59
7. Neighborhood	37	33	31	32	35	32	30	36

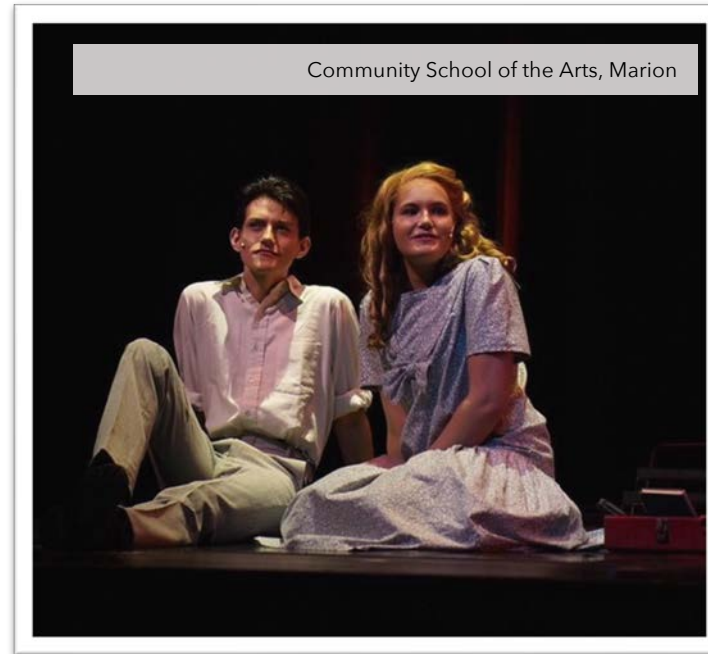
Green boxes highlight each county's highest score. Pink boxes highlight each county's lowest score. Index Scores are based on 61 Indicators (outlined in the Appendix along with county scores for all 7 categories, page 131). Full details are available at [/livabilityindex.aarp.org/methods-sources](https://livabilityindex.aarp.org/methods-sources).

Access to (or lack of) reliable **internet, computing, broadband** is often a dealbreaker for today's mobile workforce. 2022 data put **the region up to 5 points behind Indiana** overall.

% of Households	No Internet	Cell Data Only	Mobile Dev. Only	No Computing Device
Regional Average	14%	16%	22%	10%
Indiana	11%	13%	17%	7%
United States	9%	11%	15%	7%

2017-2022 change, urban/rural differences, and county-by-county details are available in the Appendix, page 132. [Analyzing Indiana's Digital Landscape](#) (Purdue Center for Rural Development, January 2024)

The data shows big gains at both the county and regional level in recent years, but there remain holes to fill in order to maximize resident and business potential.



Digging Deeper Beyond Connectivity

“Rural counties with **high broadband adoption rates of over 80% have significant advantages** over those with low usage, including:

- 213% *higher* Business Growth
- 10% *higher* Self-Employment Growth
- 44% *higher* GDP Growth
- 18% *higher* Per Capita Income Growth

“Broadband is the equalizer in today's economy.”

[Beyond Connectivity: The Role of Broadband in Rural Economic Growth & Resilience](#) (Center on Rural Innovation, September 2024)

Conclusions

Even before looking at the **State of the Arts**, several things are clear:

- The region must **attract families, young people, and professionals** to sustain and grow its population and economy.
- East Central Indiana is a high **“Engagement”** region (AARP) which sets it up well for many of the goals and strategies in this plan.
- It has critical barriers to address in **Health, Housing, Environment, Transportation, and Neighborhoods** (AARP). Of these, the goals and strategies of this plan could have a positive impact on all but health (only because of the measures used for that category). This plan can certainly have a positive impact on community health outside those specific measures.

See [//livabilityindex.aarp.org/methods-sources](http://livabilityindex.aarp.org/methods-sources) for additional details about each category and their measurement indicators.

Recognizing the above, **this plan provides a framework for harnessing the region’s creative assets to improve quality of life, strengthen communities, and support sustainable growth.**



Music for All’s Bands Across America camps, symposiums, and institutes come to Muncie each summer

Forge ECI

East Central Indiana’s Regional Economic Development Organization

Forge ECI fosters economic growth in its nine-county region as the lead economic development marketing and business attraction organization.

Forge ECI works in collaboration with local economic development organizations and the Indiana Economic Development Corporation to attract new investment, support existing industries, and enhance the quality of life, place, and opportunity for all residents. It:

- Coordinates with local economic development organizations (LEDOs)
- Communicates with and educates local officials
- Grows trust throughout the region
- Supports business development through a clear brand that LEDOs can use cooperatively
- Generates leads for key business segments
- Assists with prospect and BR&E strategy
- Works to mitigate local challenges re quality of place and opportunity as a barrier to workforce
- Advances priority projects identified in the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan



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STATE OF THE ARTS

Overview

This section provides an overview of the region's unique identity, the strengths and weaknesses of its arts and culture sector, and a similar assessment of the supports surrounding that sector.

Arts & Culture Identity

East Central Indiana stands as a testament to American ingenuity, perseverance, and community spirit – a region where extraordinary history continues to shape a vibrant cultural future. Spanning eight counties from the Ohio border west toward Indianapolis, this region has produced some of the world's most recognizable cultural icons while maintaining the authentic character of small-town Indiana life.

A Legacy of Innovation and Industry

The region's identity is inseparable from the transformative Indiana Gas Boom of the late 19th century. The abundant, inexpensive fuel attracted manufacturers who built empires here – most notably the Ball Brothers' glass manufacturing in Muncie (nicknamed the "**Magic City**"), but glass factories flourished throughout. Blackford County alone hosted 15 glass manufacturers in its heyday, drawing skilled craftsmen from Belgium and France, while Jay County's Dunkirk earned the title "**Glass Capital of Indiana**" and Winchester joined in.

The automotive industry further transformed the region. Connersville evolved from the "furniture and buggy town" to "**Little Detroit**" with automobile manufacturing's arrival. Henry County's Maxwell automobile factory was once the nation's largest, while automobile pioneer Elwood Haynes hailed from Jay County. Legacy of this industry persist today through speedways and cruise-ins integrated in events and festivals.

Contents

- Overview
- Arts & Culture Identity
- Creative & Capacity Assets
- Capacity Needs
- Conclusions

“When arts thrive in a community, the community thrives.”

– Indiana Arts Commission



Cornerstone Center for the Arts, Muncie

Henry County was home to Jesse French & Sons Piano, a significant manufacturer later purchased by Selmer and distinguished itself as **one of the country's first viral sensations** – the Hoosier Cabinet. With over 2 million sold, one in 10 households had them. This prosperity created lasting institutions. Ball State University stands as the most visible legacy, joined by six other universities across the region – together providing significant arts and culture offerings that serve as both educational anchors and cultural drivers.

Cultural Icons of Global Significance

For a predominantly rural region, East Central Indiana has **produced a staggering number of nationally and internationally significant figures**. Garfield creator Jim Davis, talk show legend David Letterman, Hollywood icon James Dean, Hoosier Group painter J. Ottis Adams, internationally renowned choreographer Twyla Tharp, fashion designer Angel Chang, and artist Robert Indiana (whose iconic LOVE sculpture is replicated – twice – in New Castle's Arts Park) all claim roots here. Aviation pioneer Wilbur Wright, astronaut Kevin Ford, and basketball legend Steve Alford add further dimension, while Mrs. Wicks gives us pies.

Richmond's distinction as the "**birthplace of recorded jazz**" through Gennett Records – which recorded Louis Armstrong, Hoagy Carmichael, and other jazz and blues legends – reveals how this region has consistently punched above its weight in cultural influence. Union City gave the world The McCoys and their rock classic "*Hang on Sloopy*." Henry County inspired the novel and movie "*Raintree County*," while Knightstown's Hoosier Gym achieved immortality in the film "*Hoosiers*." And Muncie was the fictional setting for "*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*" ([50th anniversary approaching in 2027](#)).

Heritage Rooted in Freedom and Tradition

The region's cultural identity extends deep into its foundational heritage. **Miami Indian ancestry** remains honored through sites like the 25-foot sculpture in Montpelier and the Godfrey Reserve.

Quaker settlements in Wayne and Randolph Counties established a legacy of abolitionist activism, with the Underground Railroad playing a significant role. The Union Literary Institute – founded in 1846 as **one of Indiana's first integrated schools** – and the Levi and Catharine Coffin State Historic Site symbolize enduring values of education and equality. The region's racial history includes difficult chapters alongside stories of progress – experiences that communities continue to acknowledge as part of their evolving identity.

Cross Sector Strategies for Creative Rural Development

“When it comes to rural arts access and creative development, economic growth and sustainability are not only about recruiting businesses to establish and bring jobs.

Rural economic resiliency is aided by strong local leadership combined with community vision and branding. Rural economies succeed when communities understand themselves – who they are and what they have to offer.

Not only does a strong creative identity engender local community pride, it creates a brand that attracts visitors and future residents.



[Strategy Sampler](#)
National Association of State Arts Agencies, 2025

Asset Highlights

Fiber includes artists and trades (e.g., tailoring), suppliers (e.g., sheep and goat farms), shops, groups, exhibits, competitions, and festivals are vibrant in the region

There is a core of creative businesses that every community seems to need and support.

Every county has at least one **Photography** and one **Dance** studio. If we looked closely, we'd find the same for **Florists**.

Amish communities across the region (as many as 2,700 Hoosiers in 28 congregations, www.tharda.com) add another cultural dimension, preserving traditions of craftsmanship, agriculture, and faith that enrich the regional tapestry. **Even notorious history** found its way here: Dillinger made his mark and the Brady Gang robbed the Farmland, Indiana branch of the Peoples Loan and Trust Company, capturing a slice of outlaw lore.

A Culture of Performance and Pride

Basketball isn't just a sport in East Central Indiana – it's woven into regional identity. Henry County houses the world's largest high school fieldhouse and the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame, while its connection to "**Hoosiers**" and Steve Alford reinforces this identity.

Performance culture extends beyond the court. Fayette County claims the first high school band in the country. In New Castle, show choir and band are central to community life, with the high school's Bundy Auditorium serving as THE performance venue – a reminder that school facilities often anchor cultural life.

This is a **region of contrasts**: cities adjusting to global manufacturing shifts revitalizing alongside thriving agriculture, rural communities with easy access to metropolitan areas. From those contrasts come a spirit of collective action and shared purpose. "Stronger together" represents both current work and future vision as the region's eight counties build connections across boundaries, university and hometown cultures, past and future.

This commitment manifests in **impressive cultural infrastructure**: arts organizations across every county, over 500 documented public art pieces region-wide, the 62-mile rail trail Cardinal Greenway connecting communities, and countless festivals celebrating local traditions. The region's extraordinary history of industry, innovation, and entrepreneurship – the very forces that produced globally significant cultural icons – now provides the foundation for a vibrant arts and culture future built on collaboration and shared identity.

Creative & Capacity Assets

While the sector could greatly benefit from capacity building programs, services, and networking, there are key strengths and a creative sector backbone in each county.

Asset Highlights East Central Indiana Artisans

The region has 17 designees

Delaware

[Carol Burt](#), Clay
[David Calvin](#), Wood
[Brian Gordy](#), Painting
[Jan McCune](#), Jewelry
[Carrie Wright](#), Fiber

Fayette

[Tracy Burns](#), Fiber

Henry

[Terry Dukeman](#), Clay
[Kerry Moncrieff](#), Leather

Grant

[Janet Webb](#), Jewelry

Randolph

[Wayne Gaydos](#), Stringed Instruments
[Tim Passmore](#), Wood
[Martin Price](#), Clay
[Carol Strock Wasson](#), Painting

Wayne

[Dan Sims](#), Glass



Food & Beverage

Delaware

[Tonne Winery](#), Beverages
[John Tom's BBQ](#), Sauces & Syrups

Wayne

[Abbott's Candies](#), Sweets



What is [Indiana Artisan](#)?

Indiana Artisan is a statewide nonprofit that elevates a curated network of makers as standard-bearers for Indiana's creative community. It supports artisan entrepreneurs through marketing, retail opportunities, education, and peer networking to help them grow their businesses.

Cultural Asset Inventory By the Numbers

	Blackford	Delaware	Fayette	Grant	Henry	Jay	Randolph	Wayne	Total
Category									
Public Art	11	171	75	32	19	14	67	119	508
Artist/Creative Bus.	13	77	18	47	30	17	23	39	264
History & Heritage	5	43	10	26	19	17	13	45	178
Events & Traditions	15	31	12	23	28	27	12	20	168
Art in Non-Art Spaces	6	32	4	28	11	15	9	16	121
Informal Arts Group	–	13	5	29	3	3	1	2	56
Nonprofit Arts	5	17	2	7	3	4	7	9	54
Discipline & Form									
Music & Related	6	37	5	45	14	6	3	13	129
Visual Arts	4	37	8	25	7	9	14	25	129
Traditional Craft	4	22	9	4	10	8	10	12	79
Design	2	9	1	6	1	4	3	2	28
Theater & Related	–	5	3	7	4	3	2	2	26
Literary Arts	1	9	2	1	4	1	–	7	25
Dance	1	8	1	4	2	1	1	5	23
Film	1	1	–	5	2	–	–	1	10
Location Type									
Venue	1	12	1	10	5	6	2	9	46
Museum	–	8	3	9	4	5	1	14	44
Retail	2	13	4	2	3	7	3	4	38
Library	2	7	1	8	4	3	5	5	35
Center/Coop/Council	3	5	1	5	1	2	5	1	23
History Society/Club	4	4	1	4	1	3	3	2	22
Support Entities									
Friends & Volunteers	4	4	2	3	3	6	5	7	34
Economic Develop.	6	3	1	4	4	2	3	2	25
Foundation / Funder	1	6	1	3	1	1	1	4	18
Professional Network	1	5	1	1	1	2	1	2	14
Local Media or Club	1	3	2	1	1	3	1	2	14
Tourism / CVB	–	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Miscellaneous									
Parks/Trails (<i>inc. Tourism</i>)	10	17	12	29	27	9	24	24	152
K-16 Education	4	36	8	29	18	6	15	29	145
Historic Districts	1	11	1	5	3	2	4	9	36
Craft Products	4	6	–	1	4	11	2	1	29
Other Attractions	2	3	2	–	4	2	2	1	16

Detail in the Appendix, pages 134-135

About The Cultural Asset Inventory

The cultural asset inventory is a compilation of as many of the arts and culture assets as possible within the project's desk research and crowdsourcing. **It is not about "regional" assets but rather assets in the region.**

It is incomplete, and that is okay. Errors are a byproduct. Almost by definition, any asset inventory like this will be incomplete. Information is always incomplete; someone is always moving; something is always changing. Someone (or several ones) will be missing and may even be wrong.

Readers may argue with categories. That's okay too. **The purpose is less about perfection than about identifying opportunity to build from.**

With that in mind, the cultural asset inventory should be considered **a living, working tool for communities and the region.**

- What is a [Cultural Asset](#)?
- Here are [the inventory sheets for each county](#)
- Here is the [interactive map online](#).



Need help with the categories?

See Methodology in the Appendix for details about how this inventory was compiled, what is (or isn't) included in it, and a few caveats about it.

For the table here, a few of the categories are broader than they may seem at first glance. For instance, the following include:

Visual Arts includes two-dimensional (e.g., painting, photography, tattoo) art and sculpture

Traditional Crafts include ceramics, fiber, glass, jewelry, leather, metal, and wood

Design includes graphic, web, interior, and other designers as well as architects, and SWAG shops (e.g., embroidered sweatshirts)

Economic Development includes local organizations such as Main Street, Beautification, and Downtown Revitalization

Venues include indoor, outdoor, public- and private-owned

Backbone. Every county in the region has at least some form of arts infrastructure (creative sector backbone) – whether formal or informal – providing a strong base to build upon. While every county has elements of a creative backbone – anchor arts organization, spaces, and outlets for artists, the presence and strengths of those assets vary across the region. The box to the right highlights the region’s Creative Backbone.

Anchors. In addition, the region’s creative sector has anchors providing capacity and strength.

- **Universities:** The region’s universities (Ball State, Bethany, Earlham, Indiana Wesleyan, Ivy Tech, IU East, Purdue Polytechnic, Taylor) provide access to high quality education, creative opportunities, and facilities including faculty across arts disciplines, performing arts groups and student performers, venues and exhibit halls, regularly scheduled events, and a local market for supplies. Some of the region’s signature events and arts anchors are embedded on those campuses (e.g., David Owsley Museum of Art, Marilyn Glick Center for Glass, Phillippe Performing Arts Center, Taylor Music Theatre Camp, and more).
- **Performing Arts:** While universities provide access to opportunities and signature performance venues, communities in all counties have invested in indoor and/or outdoor venues to host live music. In counties without a university presence, high schools help address this gap. Live music is also hosted across the county in taverns, bars, and outdoor amphitheatres.
- **Libraries** are also key contributors to the creative space by providing creative programming (book clubs, arts and crafts workshops, lectures, performances, community art exhibits, etc.) for all ages and serving as a convenor and partner. In some cases, they serve as a place-based attraction: the Hartford City Public Library in Blackford County recently opened their outdoor Nature Play Park attracting all ages to interact and engage. The outdoor space also includes an area for small musical performances.
- **Individual artists, teachers, makers, and their businesses.** While asset mapping identified 272 artists / creative businesses, there’s no doubt many more exist. Individual artists and creative businesses frequently do not include their local address presumably because there’s a concern they won’t be taken as seriously as those from larger areas.
- In addition, there are numerous arts and craft festivals, non-arts markets with vendor opportunities, groups, and private studios.

Backbone Highlights

3 counties have **government created or endorsed** arts councils (intermediary or policy entities), though two are either defunct or largely inaccessible to the public.

- [Hartford City Arts Council](#), Blackford
- [MuncieArts](#) & [Yorktown Council for the Arts](#), Delaware
- [Marion Arts Commission](#), Grant

4 have largely volunteer **member-driven associations** with classes, exhibits, and artist supports.

- [Whitewater Valley Arts Association](#), Fayette
- [Grant County Art Association](#) & [Fusion Arts Alliance](#)
- [Arts in Union City Alliance](#), Randolph

All 8 have local arts **centers or community art schools** – are staffed hubs similar to the above with broader program offerings, often with performing arts.

- [Arts Place](#) in both Jay and Blackford
- [Cornerstone Center for the Arts](#), Delaware
- [Imagine Performing Arts](#), Fayette
- [Community School for the Arts](#), Grant
- [Art Association of Henry County](#)
- [Art Association of Randolph County](#) & [Start with Art](#)
- [Oblivion Cinema & Arts](#), Wayne

5 have additional formal **artist co-ops, guilds, or studio** rental spaces. There are also informal groups in each county where individuals practice their art as a community. This is an area for the region to build.

Businesses sell local art in all 8. Many are coffee or gift shops, but [1 has a full gallery with representation.](#)

- **5** with quilt shops and/or fiber farms
- **4** with stores for musicians
- **2** with independent book/comic book shops
- **2** with makers markets
- All in addition to the artists who sell from their studios or storefronts. In some places, artists rent booths in antique malls to sell their work.

Even so, artists report needing access to retail space.

Support Structures. The state of the arts depends heavily on the support structures in place, which means that we have to understand those functions and sectors in order to understand the creative sector. Below are a few of the most important supports for this plan and its implementation.

- **Economic development** across East Central Indiana is in transition, shifting toward community development approaches while experiencing significant turnover – four of eight counties saw leadership changes in 2025 alone. This state of flux, combined with limited staffing in some areas, makes strategic progress more difficult to sustain.
- **Tourism and destination management** face capacity challenges throughout the region. One county lacks tourism infrastructure entirely, while others maintain limited programs or embed tourism within economic development roles. Some counties focus primarily on traditional metrics around major attractions rather than the broader engagement approach of becoming known as places locals love first, which naturally attracts nearby neighbors and visitors. Overall, the region would benefit from better county-to-county connections and access to modern tools like aggregator calendars, mobility data, and updated digital strategies.
- **Main Street programs and downtown improvement initiatives** vary across the region—some are volunteer-led while others, like New Castle, demonstrate what well-structured programs can accomplish with proper support.
- **Purdue Extension** is an active source of support and capacity building in every county.

Capacity Needs

Functional Needs. While the sector has a strong base, it struggles in key functional areas:

- **Staffing.** Many of the arts and culture nonprofits (including the historic societies) are all-volunteer organizations. This isn't always a choice. Some have been unable to hire or keep staff – struggling to find candidates (especially younger ones) able to move organizations forward, maintain funding for a position, or keep volunteers after a hire.
- **Connections.** As connected as smaller communities tend to be, the sector often lacks the relationships it needs for success – both within the creative sector and across to others. In focus groups and most visioning sessions, participants realized they'd never met together and promised to start meeting in the future recognizing the potential.

Asset Highlights >500 Pieces of Public Art

MURALS

Well over 100 in [Wayne](#) alone

UTILITY WRAPS/BOXES & BARN QUILTS

80 [Wraps](#) in Muncie and counting
64 [Quilts](#) in Fayette + 47 in Randolph

MULTIPLES

33 [Garfield Statues](#) (14 Grant, 17 Delaware)
16 Pamela Bliss Murals
7 [Bicentennial Bisons](#)
6 [New-Deal Murals](#)
4 E. M. Viquesney [Doughboys](#)

ARTISTS & FABRICATORS

200+ identified, including pieces by:

Girl Scouts • Boys & Girls Clubs • Foundation Staff • High School Classes • Local Associations • Grand-kids & Family • 100+ not-yet-attributed



Barn Quilt, one of well over 100 across four counties

- **Relationships.** The sector needs strong working relationships with key support entities. Primary among these are tourism, Main Street, economic development, and planning. They need the kind of relationships where one can call the other and ask hard questions as trusting colleagues, where they can negotiate each other’s needs easily.
- **Marketing.** Marketing was consistently cited as a key weakness – needing to cross-promote, identify new strategies, understand current trends and practices, and improve effectiveness. The sector needs training, partnerships, and resources to have effective social media campaigns, modern websites, media relationships, branded collaterals, representation in aggregator sites, better storytelling, and placement in tourism magazines, etc. Right now, most lack the capacity to make this happen.
- **A Place at the Table.** Overall, the Creative Sector needs a seat at the table in City Hall, the county building, economic development, Main Street, and more. Until they are included, many of the goals and strategies in this plan will struggle.

Funding Needs. Arts & Culture Funding is the number one most cited need, and that **support is needed for current operations, leveling up capacity, and deferred maintenance** before building new capital or programming. This is becoming truer in the current environment of uncertain, shrinking, and disappearing public funding.

Taken a step further, it is important to note that some of the region’s counties feel this even more than others. SMU DataArts Arts Vibrancy Index (*below*) highlights some of those differences among the region’s counties. For example, there's a **significant difference in "Public Support" between Delaware’s 75 and Henry’s 44, not to mention Fayette’s score of 13.**

Indices (Percentile)	Delaware	Henry	Grant	Wayne	Jay	Randolph	Blackford	Fayette
Arts Vibrancy Score	84	67	59	49	48	38	28	20
Component Scores								
1. Arts Providers	50	82	38	79	43	52	24	54
2. Arts Dollars	64	89	80	49	39	49	60	36
3. Public Support	75	44	57	49	55	34	26	13

Detail in the Appendix, page 133

In the chart that follows, analysis of state and federal arts-related grants shows fewer federal dollars reaching East Central Indiana. Making up **5.8% of the state’s population**, it has received a proportional per capita share of state arts funding and funds managed by the state agency. However, it has been able to **attract less than 3% of federal program dollars** coming to the state.

Your Ideas View from the Survey

“We need to be as pragmatic as possible without starting initiatives that can't be sustained,

and focus on saving irreplaceable community treasures that could otherwise disappear.

I like the regional approach presented if we can leverage dwindling resources to cross-promote activities and share equipment, expertise, etc.

Many of this region's **groups operate on shoestring** budgets. Quite a few are all-volunteer driven and in **danger of volunteer burnout**, failing during leadership transitions, they need help with planning a year or two into the future instead of just surviving, etc.

It would be helpful to have a **steady resource to turn to** for small tasks when an organization (or an individual artist) doesn't have the funds or the need to hire a full-time employee but just needs a little bit of support occasionally with marketing, accounting, legal skills outside their realm of expertise.

Individual response from the regional survey used to provide feedback on the plan’s vision, goals, and strategies.



Taylor University Theatre, Upland

Of the total arts-related funding, 39% came from covid-related funding.

Grant Programs	Total Grants Made to IN	Received by ECI Region	% of Total IN
IAC	2019-24 \$ 22,066,309	\$ 1,278,464	5.79%
ARPA & CARES via IAC	2021-22 \$ 10,873,582	\$ 626,122	5.76%
SVOG	2021 \$139,090,261	\$ 1,362,964	0.98%
NEA	2019-24 \$ 13,198,447	\$ 205,000	1.55%
NEH	2019-24 \$ 19,330,299	\$ 898,625	4.65%
IMLS	2019-24 \$ 29,110,349	\$ 722,457	2.48%

Detail in the Appendix, page 136

Community foundations are the most important sources of grant funding for the creative sector across the region. The only exception is Delaware County where private foundations provide an additional \$4M to arts and culture each year.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that community foundations are key drivers behind much of what the region has today.



Raintree Children's Choir, New Castle



Union City Art Hub



Need help with the abbreviations?

STATE AGENCY PROGRAMS
IAC Indiana Arts Commission

FEDERAL COVID-RELIEF PROGRAMS
ARPA American Rescue Plan
CARES Coronavirus Aid, Relief, & Economic Security
SVOG Shuttered Venue Operators Grant

FEDERAL AGENCY PROGRAMS
IMLS Institute of Museum and Library Services
NEA National Endowment for the Arts
NEH National Endowment for the Humanities

Conclusions

The Importance of Investment. Years of limited investment across East Central Indiana have created accumulated challenges around maintenance and infrastructure in smaller communities and smaller counties. Historically, state funding has primarily gone to large-scale projects, major institutions, and high-density population areas. At the same time, small communities often lack the capacity to pursue competitive grants, particularly when they cannot meet match requirements or manage federally sourced funds. Most arts nonprofits – especially smaller ones – have little to no access to state funding beyond arts-specific opportunities for several reasons. As a result, opportunity for growth is limited and gaps in cultural programming exist across the region.

The Importance of Local Leadership One of the most notable observations across the region is the impact of local leadership. Communities with leaders who bring an abundance mindset, ambition for positive change, and authentic connections to act consistently show stronger momentum. Curiosity, creative problem-solving skills, and field expertise make a meaningful difference. This aligns with the Forge ECI regional development plan's identification of "*Engaged Citizens with Positive Outlooks*" as a key opportunity for the region.

The Downsides of Competition. Competition between communities can sometimes work against shared progress. Smaller towns and larger ones may feel at odds as they navigate changes like school consolidations and hospital mergers. County-focused boundaries – whether in council directives or funding approaches – can limit opportunities for collaboration. County seat leaders may assume their amenities serve everyone, while residents of other communities prefer local access. These patterns reflect understandable pressures but can prevent the region from leveraging collective strengths.

The Importance of Collaboration & Scaffolding. The path forward involves embracing collaboration and recognizing how progress builds upon itself.

A "*State of the Arts*" assessment naturally emphasizes broader community factors because the arts thrive when supported by strong infrastructure and collaborative relationships with all sectors on both the county and regional level. Gaps in areas like small grant programs, tourism partnerships, shared resources, and broadband affect everyone, including cultural organizations. Addressing these foundational needs creates conditions for growth. By investing thoughtfully, nurturing leadership, fostering collaboration over competition, and building regional connections, East Central Indiana can create an environment where all communities and their cultural assets flourish.

Digging Deeper into Local Leaders Take Note

Openness is a pathway for positive change, growth, and momentum.

“ **Openness to new ideas makes the difference.** The world is changing around all of us, and Iowa State University has been studying what characteristics help communities facing change. They followed 99 small towns for over 20 years. In that time, those towns experienced every kind of change you can name. Some lost a manufacturer; others gained a new business. Some lost a local school, some had big growth in their schools. Some were hit by natural disasters, others were not.

No matter what happened or didn't happen, the towns that came through it the best were the ones that were open to new ideas.

Those were the towns that saw “better economic and demographic outcomes” no matter what change threw at them. ISU Professor David Peters said, “They realize no one is coming to save their town. If their town was going to survive and have a future it was going to be up to them.” It's that openness to new ideas that boosts our resilience.”

Becky McCray, *The Idea Friendly Guide*. (2025)



Detail from Super Nova, Carrie Wright Silks

DEFINING SUCCESS

Vision 2035

County by county and then together as a region this process asked East Central Indiana to imagine a Vibrant Arts & Culture Future for itself – *one that embraces an “Arts and” approach*. It builds from the region’s extraordinary history and its foundation of industry, innovation, and entrepreneurship – a combination that produced some of the most well-known cultural icons in the world. The aspiration that emerged describes an East Central region circa 2035 in which:

The Arts are a Thriving, Vital Force

shaping regional connection and resilience.

Downtowns – of every size – are Vibrant Cultural & Economic Hubs. They are revitalized, walkable, centers filled with public art, entertainment, food, and creative retail – a blend of historic preservation with contemporary energy attracts residents, visitors, and business.

The Next Generation is Engaged, Empowered & Educated through the Arts. Creative programming, leadership roles, and accessible arts education have fed talent pipelines, increased retention of the region’s youth, and embedded them in community life.

The Region’s Mosaic of Communities are Physically & Culturally Connected. Cultural trails, public art, regional initiatives, and design have unified communities, increased access to cultural assets, and promoted exploration and place-based tourism.

Cross-Sector Partnership Drives Arts & Culture Success. Coordinated leadership, planning, and shared communications have maximized resources, strengthened partnerships, and catalyzed arts and culture development throughout.

The Creative Sector is Growing in Strength & Impact. The sector is an effective partner in innovation and prosperity because the region supports and incentivizes artists, creative businesses, and nonprofits as a valued industry. Because...

We Make Things Here –

Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana.

Forge ECI

2021 Regional Development Plan

ALIGNING VISIONS

“Arts and” recognizes that arts and culture are not separate, but integral to efforts in economic development, tourism, community development and vitality, activating parks, education, and more. Implementation depends on leaders across these sectors working together, with arts and culture seen as a key ingredient for shared success.

This plan fully embraces the region’s vision for economic development, its aspiration to be:

“A welcoming region in which new and existing residents are invited to be their authentic selves and create a life that matters. Backed by community resources, residents are empowered to forge their own path to success. There are three elements that serve as the backbone for East Central Indiana’s vision:

- *A Mosaic of Communities,*
- *Innovative Eds & Meds Institutions, and*
- *Amenities that Enable Residents to Thrive.*

These three elements encapsulate the region’s strengths, while also providing a focus for the future.”

The arts and culture vision here works hand in glove with that aspiration, ensuring regional success.

In the pages that follow, readers will see that alignment in action. Goal, strategy, and outcome excerpts from Forge ECI’s plan in boxes like this highlight those connections.



This also aligns with plans reviewed from communities across the region. (See Methodology in Appendix, pages 139-146.)

Measuring Success

Because this work is part of READI 2.0 and framed by the LEI Arts & Culture Initiative gift, their **Quality of Place** goals will inform success measures long after those initiatives end. But success for this plan should be more targeted to local needs. **This plan belongs to the entire region.** Every community across the region comes to this plan from a different place – with different assets, resource levels, capacity, expertise, and authentic identity. Because of this, the plan assumes that key stakeholders and organizations in each community, as well as Forge ECI, will:

1. Periodically Re-Prioritize this Plan’s Goals & Strategies
2. Develop Appropriate Action Plans for Implementation
3. Set Developmental Benchmarks and Plans for Measuring Success considering:
 - a. **Arts & Culture Output Documentation**
Any activity tied to any of the plan goals or strategies, engagement of community in the process, and capacity built toward plan goals should be documented and tracked.
 - b. **Arts & Culture Outcome Measures – Proposed**
Each goal in this plan includes a list of proposed success measures – indicators to consider in setting targets toward vision achievement. The region and each community should set benchmarks and steppingstones applicable to their vision for success.
 - c. **Existing Success Measures – Forge ECI Benchmarks**
Because the Arts & Culture plan supports the Forge ECI Regional Development Plan, it should positively impact those goals and target benchmarks .
 - Attracting and Retaining Population
 - Increasing Degree Attainment
 - Building Housing Units
 - Boosting per Capita Income
 - Increasing Business Start Ups

Implementation Support

This plan includes a toolkit of ideas and inspiration drawn from national and local examples to spark creativity and show what’s possible (*beginning on page 115*). These resources align directly with goals and are designed to deepen understanding, build confidence, and equip leaders with the tools they need to translate ideas into action.

Forge ECI

2021 Regional Development Plan

ALIGNING OUTCOMES

Regional economic development targets are:

1. STABILIZE THE POPULATION

Increase the annual regional growth rate to 0% or higher... [T]his requires attracting or retaining 1,500 people across the region each year.

2. INCREASE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Boost educational attainment in the region by enabling an additional 1,300 people to obtain a bachelor’s degree or higher each year. This will result in 25% of residents holding such a degree.

3. PROMOTE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Build at least 7,200 housing units across the region by 2031, including 3,000 housing units with READI support.

4. SUPPORT LIVELIHOODS

Boost the regional per capita personal income by \$22,043, which would represent a 47% increase over the course of the decade.

5. FOSTER INNOVATION

Encourage filing of 100 additional business applications each year across the region (a 45% increase in new business applications).



This is the Place Mural by Addeline Griswold (pictured), Marion

GOALS & STRATEGIES

Introduction

This section begins with an overview of the six goals and how key priorities align with the regional development plan

From there forward, each goal is presented in detail – with strategies, tactics, proposed measurement indicators, and a clear presentation of its alignment with the regional development plan. Along the way are resources, recommended tools, and first steps for implementation. There are even three BIG IDEAs for supersizing implementation and impact as a region.



Program of the Art Association of Randolph County

Plan Guide

While each priority, goal and strategy is intended to be regional in scope, they should be implementable at regional, county, and community levels.



Reminders to the reader.

Each of the priorities, goals and strategies in the Arts & Culture plan are intended to be regional in scope, implemented at regional, county, and community levels.

Residents across the region were asked to prioritize goals and strategies through an online survey.

The ones they chose are marked with

Document Color Coding

priority • priority • priority

big ideas • counties • appendix • everything else

Overview of Goals by Priority Area

priority
PLACE & IDENTITY

1. ACTIVATE DOWNTOWNS



Activate and revitalize downtowns – *of every size* – through arts, culture, and local heritage. Filled with public art, entertainment, food, and creative retail they become **Cultural Hubs** – blending historic preservation with contemporary energy to attract residents, visitors, and business.

2. CONNECT COMMUNITIES

Leverage **Cultural Identity & Creative Experiences** (e.g., public art trails, regional program, and wayfinding) to increase access to cultural assets, unify communities, and promote exploration and place-based tourism.

priority
ATTACHMENT & OPPORTUNITY

3. DEEPEN NEXT GENERATION ATTACHMENT

Invest in initiatives with and for next generation – expanding access to arts programming and education, increasing participation, and opening pathways to creative careers. Deeply engaging the next generation in a vibrant **Cultural Life** will feed talent pipelines while increasing resident and college student retention across the region.

4. GENERATE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

Position **Artists & Creative Businesses** for success within the local and regional economy. Generate opportunities with, by, and for artists, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural nonprofits through training, workforce development, and material supports needed to grow in strength and impact.

priority
LEADERSHIP
&
COLLABORATION

5. MOBILIZE, COLLABORATE & COMMUNICATE

Collaborate to advance **Cultural Development & Regionalism**. Systemize collaboration and communication among leaders to align planning, build networks, share resources, and create joint programs to strengthen the region’s collective capacity for long-term cultural growth.

6. FORMALIZE SUSTAINABLE COMMITMENTS

Hardwire Arts & Culture Strategy into governance, economic development, funding, and civic frameworks. Embedding arts and culture into plans and policies will ensure their sustainable visibility, investment, and impact.

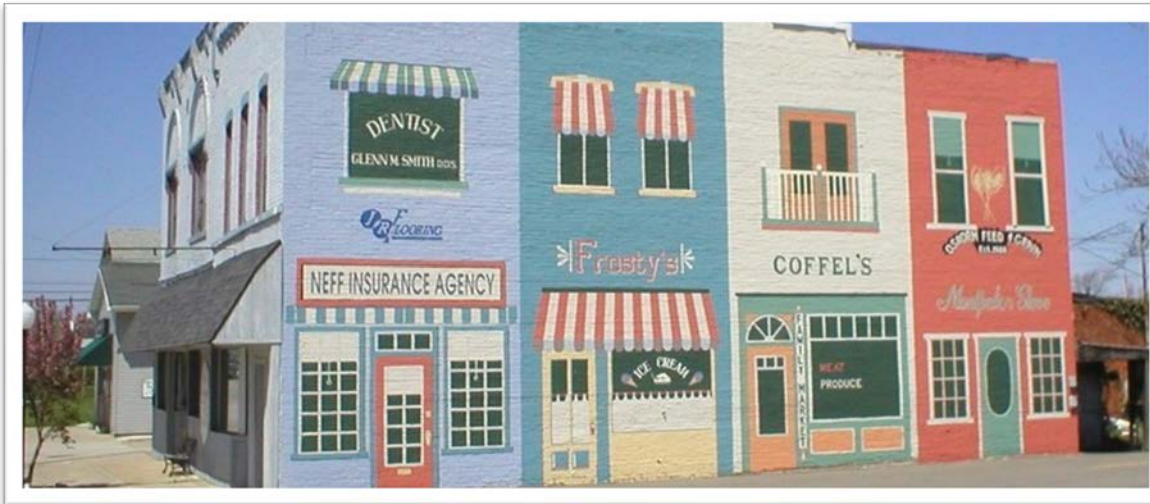


History Center at Marion Public Library

Goal Alignment

While the Arts & Culture Plan goals are an imperfect match with those in the regional development plan, the two plans align in key themes, strategies, and metrics (*described on the coming pages*). Three overarching regional priorities each supported by two goals, provide a balanced framework that addresses the core needs of every focus area. Similarly, Forge ECI's development plan includes four regional goals (*box right*).

Arts & Culture Priorities	Regional Development Plan
Place & Identity	Directly aligned: Quality of Life Supporting key outcomes related to: Population Stabilization, Livelihoods, & Innovation
Attachment & Opportunity	Directly aligned: Education & Opportunity Supporting key outcomes related to: Population Stabilization, Educational Attainment, Livelihoods & Innovation
Leadership & Collaboration	Directly aligned with vision backbone: Amenities that Enable Residents to Thrive , enabling all regional outcome targets



Montpelier Storefront Murals

ALIGNING GOALS

The region's four economic development goals are:

- 1. QUALITY OF LIFE**
Stabilize our region's population and encourage growth through investments that directly benefit the health and well-being of residents, promote tourism, and support vibrant downtowns.
- 2. HOUSING & INFRASTRUCTURE**
Stimulate the development of quality housing in the region to create thriving neighborhoods that appeal to both current and future residents.
- 3. CHILDCARE & SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES**
Position the region as a great place to raise a family, and attract employers seeking a robust workforce, by investing in quality, affordable childcare.
- 4. EDUCATION & OPPORTUNITY**
Enhance the upward mobility of residents and promote regional prosperity by developing talent, supporting innovation, and attracting well-paying jobs to the region.



Reminder to the reader.

Each of the priorities, goals and strategies in the Arts & Culture plan are intended to be regional in scope, implemented at regional, county, and community levels.

ACTIVATE DOWNTOWNS

goal 1



Activate and revitalize downtowns – *of every size* – through arts, culture, and local heritage. Filled with public art, entertainment, food, and creative retail they become **Cultural Hubs** – blending historic preservation with contemporary energy to attract residents, visitors, and business.

Alignment with Regional Development Plan

Forge ECI’s **Quality of Life** goal focuses on six strategies (*box right*).

Activate Downtowns directly addresses all but the last of these, prioritizing Arts, Culture & Community.

At the same time, it sets the stage for success achieving population stabilization as well as increases in livelihoods and in innovation for the region.

Success Measures – Proposed

- Façade, alley, and streetscape improvements completed
- Resident survey results show increased pride in downtown
- Increased number of programs
- Underused/vacant properties activated as cultural assets
- Increased foot traffic and increased tourism



Defining Downtowns

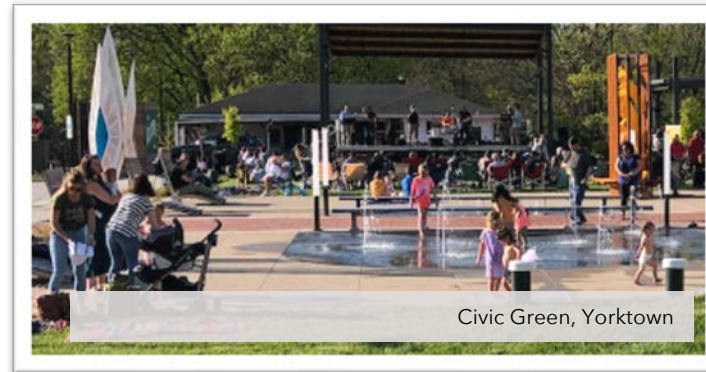
As used in this plan, downtowns include everything down to the two-block Main Street in a town of 200.

Forge ECI
2021 Regional Development Plan

QUALITY OF LIFE

This regional goal includes strategies intended to:

1. **MARKET** existing regional attractions and encourage the development of new arts and culture, recreation, retail, and culinary destinations.
2. **REVITALIZE** historic downtowns through façade, structure, and streetscape improvements, as well as the introduction of new businesses, including nightlife.
3. **ADVOCATE** for the preservation of existing rural health services.
4. **ENHANCE** pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to encourage healthy lifestyles and provide alternative transportation options.
5. **ENHANCE** existing parks and trails and consider opportunities to develop new outdoor recreation amenities.
6. **EXPAND** access to mental health resources and to drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in the region.



Civic Green, Yorktown



Goal 1 Strategies

7.1 Enhance through Identity & Design

Create welcoming, walkable environments that spark pride and a sense of arrival.

- tactics*
- a) Create a **sense of arrival** using intentionally designed signage, gateways, and zoning standards
 - b) Spark **civic pride** with programs to maintain and beautify façades, alleys, and streetscapes (e.g., small matching grants)
 - c) Create safe, **welcoming, walkable environments** through landscaping, lighting, design features (e.g., awnings where there are no trees), and public art

7.2 Activate with Public Art & Programming

Bring downtowns to life year-round with arts, culture, and community programming.

- tactics*
- a) Install **public art** in strategic locations to reinforce identity and animate gathering places
 - b) Expand **programming across all seasons** (e.g., markets, concerts, temporary art installations, winter festivals)
 - c) **Partner with** business, youth, and artists to host arts and culture activities (e.g., live music, art displays, artist talks, open mic)

7.3 ★ Restore & Reuse Downtown Assets

Preserve history and spark creative reuse using existing assets.

- tactics*
- a) Leverage arts to restore and creatively reuse **historic buildings** as mixed use creative hubs (e.g., arts venues, co-working hubs, and creative businesses)
 - b) Transform **underused properties** into cultural assets (e.g., pop-up exhibit, retail, and restaurant opportunities)
 - c) Beautify and activate **open, visible spaces** such as alleys and abandoned sites ('brownfields') (e.g., gardens and pocket parks)

Digging Deeper to Activate the Region

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Façade and beautification incentive programs
- Creating a Cultural District
- Adding to the [Public Art Archive](#)

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

- [The Power of 10+](#) See Recommended Tool: Cultivating P.L.A.C.E. on page 41.
- [America in Bloom](#) promotes and builds vibrant and sustainable communities through volunteerism and education emphasizing flowers, plants, trees, heritage, and environmental and lifestyle enhancements (see page 118).
- [Better Block](#) is a great placemaking source including free downloadable designs to activate a downtown space.



Ecco Lawn Chair
([Wikiblock](#) design from [Better Block in a Box](#))



Looking for more?
Check out The Toolkit (pages 115-128), where you will find more on these and other ideas.

CONNECT COMMUNITIES

goal 2

Leverage *Cultural Identity & Creative Experiences* to increase access to cultural assets, unify communities, and promote exploration and place-based tourism.

Alignment with Regional Development Plan

Forge ECI's **Quality of Life** goal focuses on six strategies (see goal 1).

Connect Communities directly addresses all but the last of these. It does so emphasizing the breadth of the region and prioritizing Arts, Culture & Community.

At the same time, it sets the stage for success achieving population stabilization as well as increases in livelihoods and in innovation for the region.

Success Measures – Proposed

- Artist collaborations to create wayfinding that integrates community identity
- Partnerships among relevant sectors, organizations, and groups
- Cultural trails or corridor routes extended, connected, or established
- Sites activated for creative programming, exhibitions, or performances
- Increase in trail usage
- Cost savings through shared tools (e.g., Placer.ai, Yodel)
- Visitors attending multi-county or packaged cultural-tourism experiences.

Forge ECI

2021 Regional Development Plan

QUALITY OF LIFE across a MOSAIC of COMMUNITIES

The regional vision includes three elements that serve as the backbone for East Central Indiana's vision:

- A Mosaic of Communities,
- Innovative Eds & Meds Institutions, and
- Amenities that Enable Residents to Thrive.

The mosaic is described as:

The region is made up of diverse communities ranging in size and character, from rural communities like Redkey to metros like Muncie.

Your Ideas

View from the Survey

“*Celebrating – linking together the past, present, and future of the arts,*

and their respective impacts to who we were, who we are, and who we can become is a

critical responsibility for leadership and arts funding in our region.

Individual response from the regional survey used to provide feedback on the plan's vision, goals, and strategies.

Goal 2 Strategies

2.1 Celebrate Cultural Heritage

Bring local history and identity to life through art, storytelling, and place-based interpretation

- tactics*
- a) Incorporate local history identity into cultural **programming** (e.g., public art, festivals, plays, art exhibits, storytelling nights)
 - b) Collaborate with artists to create **wayfinding** that integrates community identity (e.g., street signs, trail markers, bike racks)
 - c) Historical societies, libraries, and tourism bureaus collaborate to highlight **shared heritage** (e.g., Black History, National Road, gas boom, glass production) within and across county boundaries via: Interpretive signage, Walking tours, and storytelling (e.g., QR codes, digital media)

2.2 Link Physical & Cultural Assets

Leverage recreational infrastructure and cultural assets to connect communities

- tactics*
- a) Develop **new cultural trails** using existing assets (e.g., Garfield sculptures across Delaware and Grant Counties)
 - b) **Enhance recreational trails** with designed wayfinding, public art, and intentional connections to key cultural and recreational destinations (e.g., physically connecting trail segments, new bike lanes, mapping, signage)
 - c) Activate underused and historic sites along **cultural corridors** for creative programming, exhibitions, and performances (e.g., Levi Coffin Days, Ghost Stories) that encourage exploration and economic activity

2.3 Advance Regional Tourism

Develop regional tourism strategies that tell compelling stories from the region in collaboration with the creative sector.

- tactics*
- a) Develop **regional relationships and strategies** to support cross-promotion, cross-county marketing, and shared expertise
 - b) Develop **shared marketing assets** that increase local capacity and efficiency while reducing costs (*box right*).
 - c) Intentionally pairing tourism attractions with cultural assets for marketing **packaged experiences**

Digging Deeper to Connect Communities

PUBLIC LIBRARIES (for 2.1c)

Don't forget your local libraries. These community cornerstones and often ***the*** anchor for arts and culture in smaller communities. They're also skilled programmers, partners, and convenors and a key asset for building better communities.



Jay County Public Library, Portland

TOURISM RECOMMENDATIONS (2.3b)

- Develop agreed-upon **methods** for marketing key assets (e.g., all use [Public Art Archive](#) versus locally created GIS maps)
- Collectively purchase of **tools** (e.g., Placer.ai data subscription) to reduce overall costs
- Mirror **content** county-to-county, city-to-city (e.g., Yodel) to make the most of limited staff capacity
- Develop a regional **website** aggregating arts and culture opportunities for more complete and effective information sharing



Recommended Tools for Goals 1 & 2 Cultivating P.L.A.C.E.

- P: [The Power of 10](#)** The Project for Public Spaces Power of 10 theory is a great place to start. It's a simple but very effective way to think about creating thriving places. Essentially, the idea is that **a region needs 10 great destinations, each destination needs 10 unique places, and each place needs at least 10 things to do, see, or experience.**
- L: Locals** To create a vibrant and sustainable destination, never start with the tourists. Prioritizing the engagement and enjoyment of locals when activating spaces is a more effective foundation. Creating places and amenities for residents prepares these areas for potential elevation to destination marketing status—if that is what the community desires. Without enough locals loving an asset, it won't last. Regardless of how great your mountain bike trail network is, having a reliable group of local volunteers to help maintain and protect it is essential if it's going to be a sustainable destination. The same goes for your Main Street organization's programming, boutique retail shop, or restaurant. A locally sourced burger with a story about the farmer or chef from a business oooooozing local character is a compelling reason to exit the highway and go beyond the fast food chains along the interstate. Also pie. I love pie."
- A: Assets & Attractions** These are tangible things. A museum, a park, a fountain, a mural, a food truck, a farmers' market, a big tree, a quiet path... Anything can be elevated from an asset to an attraction. Make a list of all the things. Make lots of lists. Natural assets, dining assets, historic assets, arts, music, what else?
- C: Cultural Connection** Does this thing feel like it's from this place? You can get barbeque or visit a farmers' market in many places, but are there enough connections to the local people and cultural history to make it feel like this place? For example, where I'm from, George Washington apparently slept a lot of places. Each one of those places has a similar but slightly different way of integrating that history into its unique experience.
- E: Experiences** This is the real measure of success. A memorable and shareable experience with a place emerges when everything mentioned above comes together. Are your assets loved and cared for in a way that elevates them to an attraction? Whether it's a bustling town square or a quiet copse of pine trees in the middle of a national forest, have you created a compelling way for people to engage with it? Is it done in a way that makes them feel connected to the place? To the experience, they are having in it?

Above article: [How do places become places people love to be?](#) (Hersick + Webster Creative Partners, 2023)

Digging Deeper to Jumpstart Your Placemaking

- 1. Start with Petunias.**
In other words, keep it [Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper](#), and visible for early, obvious wins.
- 2. They Always Say, "It Can't Be Done."**
Don't believe it.
- 3. Engage Community**
Involve residents in planning and decision-making, so that projects reflect local values and needs – fostering ownership and community bonds.
- 4. Collaborate Across Sectors**
Partner with other sectors – local businesses, government agencies, and nonprofits – to pool resources and expertise, amplifying your impact.
- 5. Use Asset-Based Development**
Identify and use local talents, traditions, and resources. This builds on what the community already has, leading to sustainable development.
- 6. Be Flexible & Adaptable**
Be open to evolving ideas and feedback. This allows projects to remain relevant and responsive to changing community dynamics.
- 7. Focus on Quality of Place**
Make public spaces more inviting and functional. Parks, community centers, and public art enhancements boost pride and attract newcomers.

This is a compilation of ideas from:

- 1) [Eleven Principles for Creating Great Community Places](#),
- 2) [Rural Placemaking and the Thrive Rural Framework](#),
- 3) [Creative Placemaking Resources](#), 4) [Placemaking, Wikipedia](#)

DEEPEN NEXT GENERATION ATTACHMENT

goal 3

Invest in initiatives with and for next generation – expanding access to arts programming and education, increasing participation, and opening pathways to creative careers. Deeply engaging the next generation in a vibrant **Cultural Life** will feed talent pipelines while increasing resident and college student retention across the region.

Alignment with Regional Development Plan

Forge ECI's **Education & Opportunity** goal focuses on five strategies (see goal 4).

Deepen Next Generation Attachment directly addresses the first two – pathways to jobs and connecting recent college graduates to career opportunities – reinforcing the region's eds and meds backbone.

At the same time, it sets the stage for success in achieving population stabilization as well as increases in educational attainment, livelihoods and in innovation.

It can also improve the next generation's mental and physical health – implicit in the region's quality of life goal.

Success Measures – Proposed

- Internships, apprenticeships, or mentorships created and filled
- Youth serving on boards, committees, or councils
- Youth-driven initiatives launched or supported
- Schools integrating creative career pathways
- Arts offerings tailored to under-40 and participation by ages 20-30

Forge ECI

2021 Regional Development Plan

INNOVATIVE EDS & MEDS

Another of the backbones for East Central Indiana's vision is "innovation eds and meds" as described here.

ASSETS. East Central Indiana has one of the state's most concentrated clusters of higher education institutions producing graduates that stay.

IU East & IU Muncie School of Medicine • Purdue Polytechnic Institute – Richmond • Ivy Tech (Marion, Muncie, Richmond, and satellites) • Ball State University • Taylor University • Earlham College • Indiana Wesleyan University • Bethany Theological Seminary

Plus, outstanding hospitals and medical programs.

IU Health • Reid Health • Marion Health • Ascension St. Vincent • Henry Community Health • Centerstone • Meridian Health Services • Open Door Health Services • Neighborhood Health Centers • Veterans Affairs Clinics

[It] is also developing a reputation as a center of excellence in medical education.

OPPORTUNITY. These provide transformative educational opportunities and critical health service to rural and underserved communities. To support the needs of these anchor institutions to fill high-wage positions, East Central Indiana is committed to talent development and talent attraction.



Regional Outcome Targets include:

POPULATION. Growth rate at 0% or higher
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT. An additional 1,300 obtain a bachelor's degree or higher each year

Goal 3 Strategies

3.1 Empower Civic Engagement

Build a culture that welcomes and empowers civic engagement of youth, young adults, and young families.

- tactics*
- a) Intentionally **empower** formal (e.g., youth councils, board positions, training) and informal (e.g., finding and supporting the party planners and doers who make things happen) forms of **youth leadership**
 - b) Actively support **youth-driven initiatives** and involve them in community decision-making (e.g., surveys, committee roles)
 - c) Ensure participation is **welcoming and accessible** for any project or engagement (e.g., adapting meetings times)

3.2 Expand Arts Opportunity

Increase access to meaningful arts and culture experiences for all ages.

- tactics*
- a) Create safe and affordable **third spaces** – places to create, perform, socialize, and share – in **every** community (e.g., coffee shop, library, center, park)
 - b) Directly work with the next generation to **co-design** programming according to their creative wants and needs
 - c) Expand arts program offerings to engage each community and to reach young audiences where they are:
 - Targeted offerings for **under-forty** and intergenerational audiences (e.g., youth plays based on senior stories)
 - Arts programming integrated into **non-arts spaces** (e.g., community events, parks)
 - Exhibits, performances, and **showcases** for budding talent

3.3 Build Creative Career Pipelines

Connect high school and college-aged youth to arts opportunities, skill-building, and pathways to creative careers

- tactics*
- a) Integrate **creative career pathways** into k-12, after-school, community, and higher education programs
 - b) Establish **intern and mentorships** (apprenticeships) that connect students and creatives to the business community for skill-building (e.g., arts administration, instrument repair, media production, web design)

Digging Deeper Next Generation Attachment

Forge ECI's 2021 youth survey (1,720 responses, most between the ages of 15 and 21) produced useful data.

Will the Youth Surveyed be in the Region in 10 years?

Only 21% envisioned themselves staying in the region

- 43% Were UNSURE where they would be
- 34% Could NOT see themselves staying

Why Stay or Leave?

Factors Motivating them to Stay

- 52% Close To Friends/Family
- 29% Job Opportunities
- 24% Small-Town Charm
- 18% Close To Significant Other
- 17% Housing Options

Factors Motivating them to Leave

- 51% Job Opportunities *
- 28% Entertainment Options
- 27% Lack City Life
- 25% Housing Options
- 16% Safety
- 16% Diversity

* 41% see future job opportunities for themselves in the region. 38% were unsure.

Encouragement to Stay

Respondents Suggest Expanding/Improving:

- 56% Job Opportunities
- 48% Entertainment (inc. Festivals/Concerts)
- 42% Housing Options (inc. Rentals)
- 41% Downtown
- 39% Safety In The Region

GENERATE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

goal 4

Position **Artists & Creative Businesses** for success within the local and regional economy. Generate opportunities with, by, and for artists, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural nonprofits through training, workforce development, and material supports needed to grow in strength and impact.

Alignment with Regional Development Plan

Forge ECI's **Education & Opportunity** goal focuses on five strategies (*box right*).

Generate Business Opportunity directly addresses all but the last of these. It does so by emphasizing the breadth of the region and prioritizing Arts, Culture & Community.

At the same time, it sets the stage for success achieving population stabilization as well as increases in educational attainment, livelihoods and in innovation.

Success Measures – Proposed

- Affordable spaces established or sustained (e.g. studios, makerspaces)
- Retail opportunities for artists (pop ups, art fairs, art on walls in business).
- Artists/creative businesses connected to small business resources (e.g., ISBDC)
- Increased contract opportunities between artists and arts providers (e.g., with schools, towns, libraries)

Forge ECI

2021 Regional Development Plan

EDUCATION & OPPORTUNITY

This regional goal includes strategies to:

1. **INCREASE** awareness of existing educational resources and skills training opportunities as pathways to well-paying jobs in East Central Indiana.
2. **CONNECT** recent college graduates to satisfying career opportunities in the region.
3. **CREATE** dedicated spaces to encourage innovation and collaboration, such as coworking spaces, makerspaces, and community kitchens.
4. **ENCOURAGE** the creation of new businesses through financing and technical support.
5. **INVEST IN** quality of life and of place improvements to attract jobs and talent

Goal 4 supports each of those strategies leading with by, and for the region's creative sector.



Goal 4 Strategies

4.1



Empower Creative Capacity

Provide artists, entrepreneurs, and nonprofits with the resources, training, and infrastructure they need to thrive.

tactics

- a) Develop and sustain affordable spaces for creatives (e.g., shared studios, co-work, and makerspaces)
- b) Connect creative businesses and artists to existing state, local, and related **support systems** for:
 - Small Businesses (e.g., incubators, SBA, Chambers, Main Street, Ivy Tech, Extension) and
 - Artists (See “Artists & Creative Businesses” in *The Toolkit*, page 121-121)
- c) Develop tools and training to fill **unmet needs** of artists and creative businesses:
 - Material (e.g., microloans, grants, tool-libraries)
 - Apprenticeship (matching artists, creatives, and/or businesses – e.g. [Traditional Arts Indiana](#))
- d) Supports for **up-skilling** particularly in digital commerce (e.g., digital commerce/marketing training, micro-grants)

4.2

Grow Creative Opportunity

Expand markets locally and regionally to promote local talent and open and grow markets.

tactics

- a) Support **programs** that contract with and provide visibility to artists (e.g., residencies in schools, libraries, and parks)
- b) Facilitate **retail opportunities** (e.g., arts trails, curated arts markets, vendor space at events, consignment in businesses) that reduce start-up risk and encourage sustainable growth
- c) Encourage **cooperatives** to collectively expand markets (artist cooperative gallery, regional online store, shared studios, or makerspaces)

Digging Deeper into Generate Business Opportunity

Here is another of your ideas from the goals and strategies prioritization survey.

“This is all exciting.

I would also suggest that we broaden the conversation of creative careers to clearly include graphic design, marketing, social media content creators, video and film production, web design, architecture, urban design, etc. Too often the general public only thinks about murals and boutiques.

We need to expand the imaginations of all stakeholders to help them understand that future economic development and talent attraction depends on all of the creative fields.



Ply Creatives, Richmond

Recommended Tools for Goals 3 & 4

What do Indiana Artists Need?

Below are key findings from the [2023-24 Indiana Arts Commission Artist Needs Assessment](#), which reinforce the goals in this plan – research that can be used to advocate for programmatic support in implementation.

Networks & Connections

Artists want to build more connections with artists. Artists want to build more relationships and connections with other artists, within and beyond their respective disciplines. They want mentors, resources to find local artists, recurring opportunities to meet other artists, and community hubs dedicated to creatives to spark organic networks and relationships. Networks and connections were seen as vital to career success and the ability to grow locally.

Marketing Support & Education

Artists need marketing support (resources, platforms, education). Marketing is a challenge for many artists. Social media marketing is considered time-consuming with little return, and artists see a lack local resources outside social media to advertise and champion local artists. Technical assistance and educational resources about marketing emerged as priorities.

Financial Support & Education

Artists need resources and guidance to strengthen their financial footing while pursuing their art. Artists find a recurring tension between creativity and financial stability that limits their artistic practice. Challenges such as inconsistency of cash flow, health insurance, cost of materials, and time for business planning are key drivers that build tension between creativity and financial stability. The time and stress of running a business as an artist often meant the need for multiple part-time positions or a full-time position to subsidize their artistic career.

Local Investments in Local Artists

Local government and organization support are critical to artists. Artists view local government and local organizations as critical catalysts for artists' careers and artist retention. Public art, local festivals, and local performing and exhibiting opportunities are essential resources, particularly for young artists, and lay the groundwork for local artist growth, as well as public engagement. Artists emphasize the importance of government and organizations prioritizing support, resources, and opportunities for artists working locally.



Digging Deeper into Business Training for Artists

Springboard for the Arts – [Work of Art](#)
 Minerva Financial Arts – [Financial Education](#)
 Center for Cultural Innovation – [Business of Art](#)
 Artists Thrive – [National Resource Hub](#)
 Indiana Arts Commission – [Artist Services Hub](#)



See also the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation's [Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Playbook 3.0](#)

More resources and programs in
The Toolkit, pages 115-128.

“More than many other occupations, networks have an incredibly powerful influence on the trajectory of artists' careers.”

“... not only the functional dependencies that artists have on one another to produce creative products but also the social dependencies many artists have with one another that help them get their next gig and build a reputation.”

MOBILIZE, COLLABORATE & COMMUNICATE

goal 5

Collaborate to advance **Cultural Development & Regionalism**. Systemize collaboration and communication among county and regional leaders to align planning, build networks, share resources, and create joint programs to strengthen the region's collective capacity for long-term cultural growth.

Alignment with Regional Development Plan

Forge ECI's **Stronger Together** Vision and READI initiatives focus on achievement through a collaborative approach (*box right*).

Mobilize, Collaborate, Communicate directly aligns with and supports this vision and collective effort. It does so by developing a convening structure to increase communication and set the stage for collaboration and collective action.

Success Measures – Proposed

- Creative sector partners that regularly participate in meetups
- Active cross-sector partners engaged in community conversations per county
- Regional, creative sector meetups by type and frequency (artists, nonprofits)
- Average attendance and diversity of participants (artists, nonprofit, county)
- Partnerships, joint projects or initiatives from network and cross-sector activities
- Counties with regular, cross-sector "community conversations" convenings
- Annual, regionwide, convening held
- Evidence of increased communication (shared calendars, attendee feedback)

Forge ECI

2021 Regional Development Plan

STRONGER TOGETHER

The regional vision includes a focus on collaboration:

*...to leverage the unique perspectives, assets, and opportunities our region has to offer, East Central Indiana is committed to collaboration across sectors and scales. Our towns, cities, and counties understand that **we are stronger together, and can learn from one another**. When opportunities to work together arise, our region steps up.*

Deeper in the Forge ECI plan you'll find:

READI 1.0. East Central Indiana combines the strengths and talents of eight counties, over 60 cities and towns, and approximately 375,000 residents. Counties in our region... offer unique attractions and exciting opportunities. This regional development plan represents an effort to leverage county assets, build consensus on regional strategies, and promote vibrancy and resiliency in East Central Indiana.

READI 2.0. The region has learned from READI 1.0 that there are **no shortcuts to regionalism**. Past engagement efforts are no substitute for active attempts to engage the community.



Sunflowers Mural by Amy Carnes & Family, Connersville

Goal 5 Strategies

5.1 Mobilize County-Level Creative Networks

Build support networks that facilitate resource sharing, joint programming, skill-building, and plan alignment region-wide.

tactics

- a) Commit to regular (weekly-monthly), **EASY, face-to-face meetups and mixers** within the creative sector
 - Artists (e.g., studio visits, after hours social network)
 - Arts, Culture & History Nonprofits (e.g., Coffee & Calendars, page 64)
- b) Develop creative sector **support networks** (e.g., art associations, guilds, informal groups) and initiatives (e.g., Muncie Creative Corridor, Richmond Arts Organization Council) to foster collaboration, communication, and resource sharing among and between artists, makers, and organizations.
- c) Curate **cross-sector interactions** – conferences attendance, projects, dinners – where the experience organically leads to new relationships, ideas, and initiatives with the creative sector (e.g., road-trip idea and community foundation support)

5.2 ★ Catalyze a Regionwide Arts & Culture Movement

Strengthen the region’s capacity for arts and culture success through cross-sector collaboration, communication, and the power of celebrating together.

tactics

- a) Facilitate understanding between the region’s **tourism and creative sectors** to align goals and leverage best practices.
- b) Facilitate **cross-sector communication within each county**, sowing the seeds for organic partnership, resource sharing, and arts and cultural initiatives throughout the region (e.g., lunch and share-out “community conversation” ideally hosted by the community foundation or similarly situated entity)
- c) **Convene all** established and newly established individual sector and cross-sector networks and groups – spanning creative, cultural (history and libraries), tourism, civic (community foundations and Main Streets), and other sectors at least annually to:
 - Celebrate the State of the Arts, Annual Awards, and other successes
 - Share data and promote regional efforts in and outside the region
 - Spark innovation, plan future arts and culture strategy, and foster regionalism

Digging Deeper to Mobilize, Collaborate & Communicate

“We’ve already heard from leaders who’ve said, “I didn’t know these cultural assets or these creatives were in this region.” Those new relationships are already beginning to bring about regional change.

– Miah Michaelsen
Executive Director to the Indiana Arts Commission

Your Ideas Suggestions from the Survey

Two resources that would help the sector succeed:

Database providing free/low-cost access grant opportunities and tutorials that address common grant writing needs.

Regional Portal for artists and arts organizations with a calendar of events, deadlines, on-demand trainings, forums, artist portfolios, etc.

“... a place online with public facing links for “what’s going on where, when and all the pertinent information” also a place for those looking to purchase work from artists or hire performing artists.

Individual response from the regional survey used to provide feedback on the plan’s vision, goals, and strategies.

FORMALIZE SUSTAINABLE COMMITMENTS

goal 6

Hardwire Arts & Culture Strategy into governance, economic development, funding, and civic frameworks. Embedding arts and culture into local and regional plans and policies will ensure their sustainable visibility, investment, and impact.

Alignment with Regional Development Plan

The third of Forge ECI's vision backbones – **Amenities that Enable Residents to Thrive** (box right) – is in many ways a backbone without a goal.

The fact, especially in an increasingly uncertain funding environment, is that the region will not be able to make the progress it needs to make without hardwiring arts and culture strategies into every level of local and regional government and civic life – the focus of Goal 6 **Formalize Sustainable Commitments**.

Success Measures - Proposed

- New community champions and institutional partners (e.g. mayors, schools, libraries, civic groups)
- Percent for Art and related policies adopted
- Government-appointed arts councils established
- Arts representation at non-arts sector tables (e.g., boards, committees)
- New funding mechanisms or partnerships established (e.g., city-based small grant programs, donor-advised funds, endowment matches, dedicated revenue streams)

Forge ECI 2021 Regional Development Plan **Amenities that Enable Residents to Thrive**

The final backbone of East Central Indiana's vision is:

Amenities that Enable Residents to Thrive – *The region leverages existing assets in outdoor recreation, arts, and culture, and family-owned small businesses to enhance quality of life for residents. Residents are further supported by a commitment to increase educational attainment, expand access to childcare, and revitalize historic downtowns. By expanding access to valuable amenities, East Central Indiana enables residents to thrive.*

... When pursued, this vision should manifest in population growth and regional prosperity.

This is the focus of the Arts & Culture Plan.



Our Small Town Mural, Parker City



The "hardwired" concept was inspired by *"In London, we have been on our own mission, working to future-proof our city as a world creative capital, hardwiring culture into the fabric of our city – and planning is at the heart of our work."* Quote from Forward to [The Routledge Handbook of Urban Cultural Planning](#) (2025).

Goal 6 Strategies

6.1 Build Support for Arts & Culture Strategy

Expand the pool of community champions, leaders, and volunteers actively committed to arts and culture strategy.

- tactics*
- a) Engage key leaders as **champions** (e.g., mayors, foundation executives, civic boards) then expand pool through **civic institutions** such as libraries, Purdue Extension (4H), schools, and Rotaries
 - b) Encourage **businesses** to directly engage with local creatives (e.g., exhibits, commissions, performances, sponsorships)

6.2 Build Policy Infrastructure

Formalize local government policies and practices that directly support arts and culture strategy.

- tactics*
- a) Adopt **Percent for Art and related** policies (e.g., food & beverage tax, public art guidelines and plans, design code, designated outdoor refreshment area) that create opportunity and support the creative sector. Also, simplify and streamline policies that create barriers to success
 - b) Institute government-appointed **arts councils and small grant programs** in alignment with city goals.
 - c) Commit to **direct representation of the creative sector** in public processes to center arts strategies in future plans (e.g., Main Street, tourism, historic preservation, economic development, and infrastructure)

6.3 ★ Secure Sustainable Funding

Cultivate a portfolio of long-term support and investment in arts and culture

- tactics*
- a) Designate **public funds** and revenue streams that demonstrates commitment to arts and culture (e.g., portion of hotel/lodging tax, portion of utility or telecommunication fees, local sales tax, budget line item).
 - b) Cultivate **local philanthropy** with each county's community foundation and private philanthropy partners (e.g., donor advised funds, endowment matches, donor engagement)
 - c) Pursue **grants** for arts initiatives while leveraging public, private, and corporate match opportunities, such as those found in the Appendix
 - d) Advocate for supportive **state and federal** policies, grants, and programs that reinforce local investment (e.g., legislated cultural district incentives).

Digging Deeper Formalize Sustainable Commitments

The Recommendation

Explore the policy ideas on page 51 along with grant information in The Toolkit (page 124). Then dive into public funding mechanisms such as:

- Percent for Art in Development
- [Food & Beverage Tax](#) IC 6.9.27.3
- [County Innkeeper Tax](#) IC 6.9.18
- [Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area](#) IC 7.1.3.31

Your Ideas Views from the Survey

“ **The most important part of this is to have a dedicated organization in each County or city to oversee this process.**

Providing a salary for this person would solve a lot of problems with fundraising.

“ With the passing of SB1 into law there will be no available government resources for funding this initiative. Funding will have to start at the state level as the state legislature has choked any ability for this initiative to begin on a local level that relies on local government resources for success.

Individual response from the regional survey used to provide feedback on the plan's vision, goals, and strategies.

Recommended Tools for Goals 5 & 6 Actions Local Government Can Take to Strengthen Community *through* the Creative Sector

Establish Key Supports:

- Designate staff – a point of contact between local government and the creative community
- Charter a local arts commission, board, or council within local government
- Develop grant programs to support the development of arts organizations and arts events

Provide Programs in Partnership with:

- Local arts to provide programs for underserved populations
- Main Street on pop up visual arts and live music events
- The Boys & Girls Club or parks department on out of school arts programs for youth
- The library, area agency on aging or other community partners on programming for vulnerable populations such as older adults

Commit Resources for:

- Commissioning public art and murals
- Visual / performing arts in local parks, greenspaces, farmers markets, other public spaces
- Events to bring community together such as street dances or community performances

Adopt Ordinances & Policies that:

- Designate funds for arts – general funds or non-tax (e.g., Percent for Art, energy) sources
- Support creative efforts such as murals and outdoor performances
- Establish a cultural district or a creative or cultural hub
- Support community events such as artist markets, concerts or festivals and public art installations such as murals and sculptures (e.g., right-of-way guidelines and processes)

Actively Engage the Creative Sector:

- Including creative entrepreneurs in the local small business community.
- Putting creatives on boards and commissions and asking them to serve on task forces
- Involve the creative sector in economic and community development planning

Or Maybe...

- Support the development of artist studios and creative makerspaces
- Decommission surplus equipment or buildings for creative use



Digging Deeper into Policy Options

EXPLORE STATE & LOCAL LEGISLATION

- Advisory Boards & Commissions (Arts Councils)
- Zoning Overlay Districts (Cultural or Design)
- Public Art Guidelines and Master Plans
- Right-of-Way Guidelines
- Special Permitting for Pop Ups

INCLUDE THE SECTOR IN PLANNING FOR:

- Regional Development Authorities and CEDS
- Economic Development (City, County, Region)
- Comprehensive Plans (City and County)
- Downtown Development & Revitalization
- Tourism (Commissions, CVBs, DMOs)
- Workforce Development
- Trails, Bike + Pedestrian, Parks & Recreation
- Innovation and TIF Districts
- Public Transportation and Safety
- Quality of Life, Quality of Place, & CBAPs
- Public Libraries, Community & Senior Centers
- Purdue Extension (County and Region)
- Strategy for Community Foundation, Main Street, Chamber of Commerce, College or University, United Way, Council on Aging, etc.

AND ALWAYS

Make the case that arts and creativity have significant positive impacts on Indiana's people and places.



Have arts and creative inspiration and information sent to your inbox: <https://www.in.gov/arts/about/news/>.

Recommendations from the [Indiana Arts Commission](#).

THE BIG IDEAS

Overview

Shaped by community input and grounded in regional assets, strengths, and themes, these bold, high impact BIG IDEA opportunities are designed to elevate the plan for maximum impact. Secondary to the goals and strategies above, they are ***"What if?" opportunities for long-term, whole-region advancement*** rather than short-term project recommendations. Since great change requires enthusiasm and commitment, these ideas are offered for exploration and consideration.

1. PLACE AMPLIFIED:

Cultural Districts

Every county in East Central Indiana has at least one community with strong potential to become a cultural district. ***Imagine the entire region connected through a network of these districts***, each one celebrating its own character while collectively showcasing the richness of East Central Indiana's arts and cultural scene. Practically, implementation could provide a framework for downtown revitalization, local action plans, and implementation.

2. ALL-IN MARKETING:

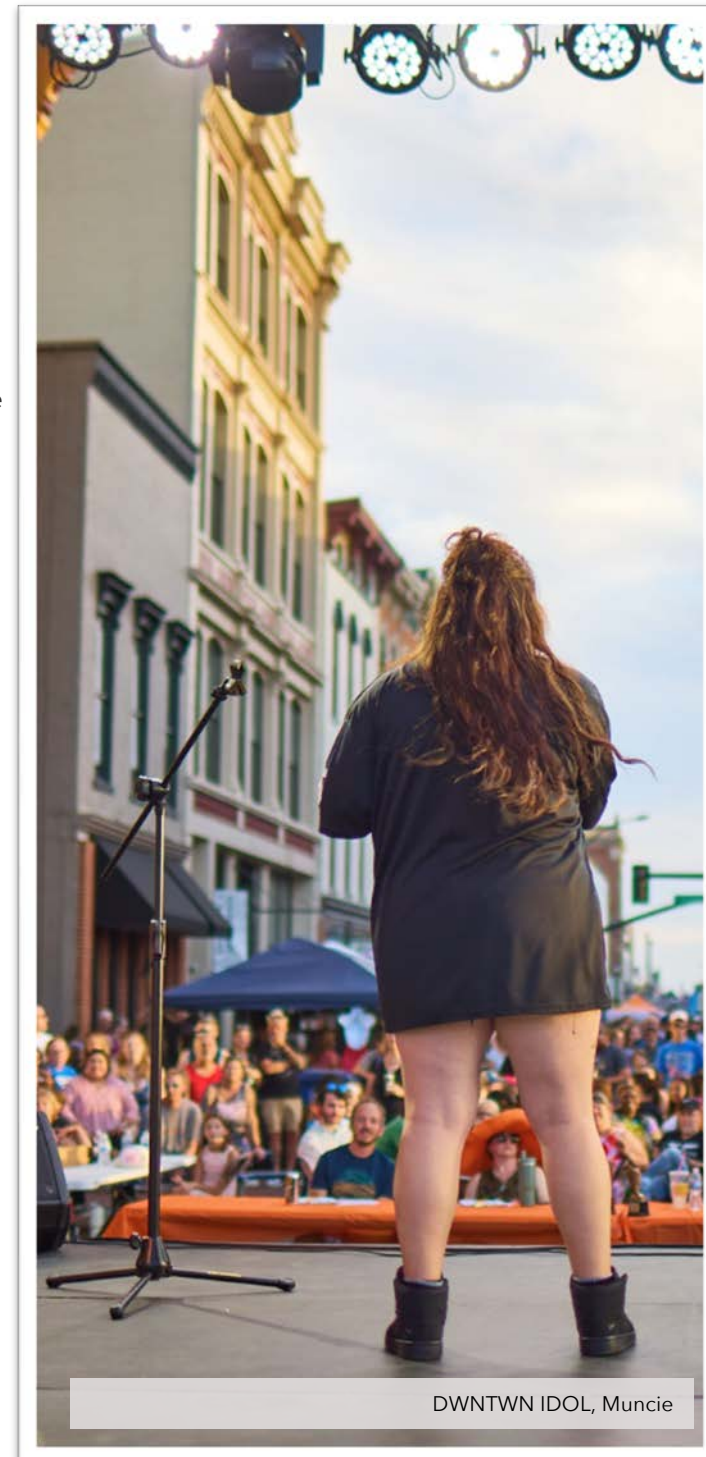
Indiana Icons & Industry

What would it look like to go 'all in' – to showcase incredible artists and icons like Garfield, Gennett Records, James Dean, and Bob Ross alongside a treasure trove of attractions and sites? Imagine a collectively curated web platform weaving in stories, showcasing artisans, highlighting events and opportunities, and connecting residents and visitors to the people and places that define the region. Then think bigger. Imagine a ***shared regional marketing strategy across multiple platforms that creates a clearer "brand" or sense of united identity centered on Indiana Icons & Industry– a combination that produced some of the most well-known cultural icons in the world.***

3. A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN FORGE ECI & SEI READI:

Indiana's Music Corridor

Imagine if Forge ECI ***leveraged East Central Indiana's deep music-education and performance culture as a regional music strategy.*** Doing so would benefit communities



DWNTWN IDOL, Muncie

across all eight counties and set up the region as an ideal partner for strategies in adjacent regions. Specifically, SEI READI is considering a music corridor – running from Richmond, [birthplace of recorded jazz](#) to Madison's "[music city](#)" – **to celebrate the deep musical roots of Indiana's eastern tier**. The case for showcasing both regions' incredible musical legacies and today's vibrant cultures could reverberate across East Central Indiana

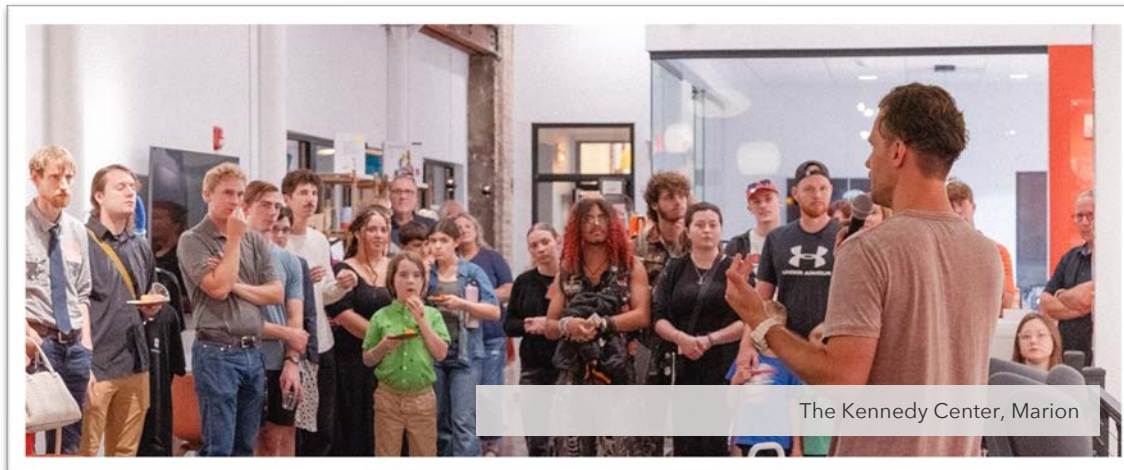
Next Steps

When it comes to Big Idea implementation, the following steps are recommended. Key is taking a community engaged approach to build buy-in, momentum, and maximize results.

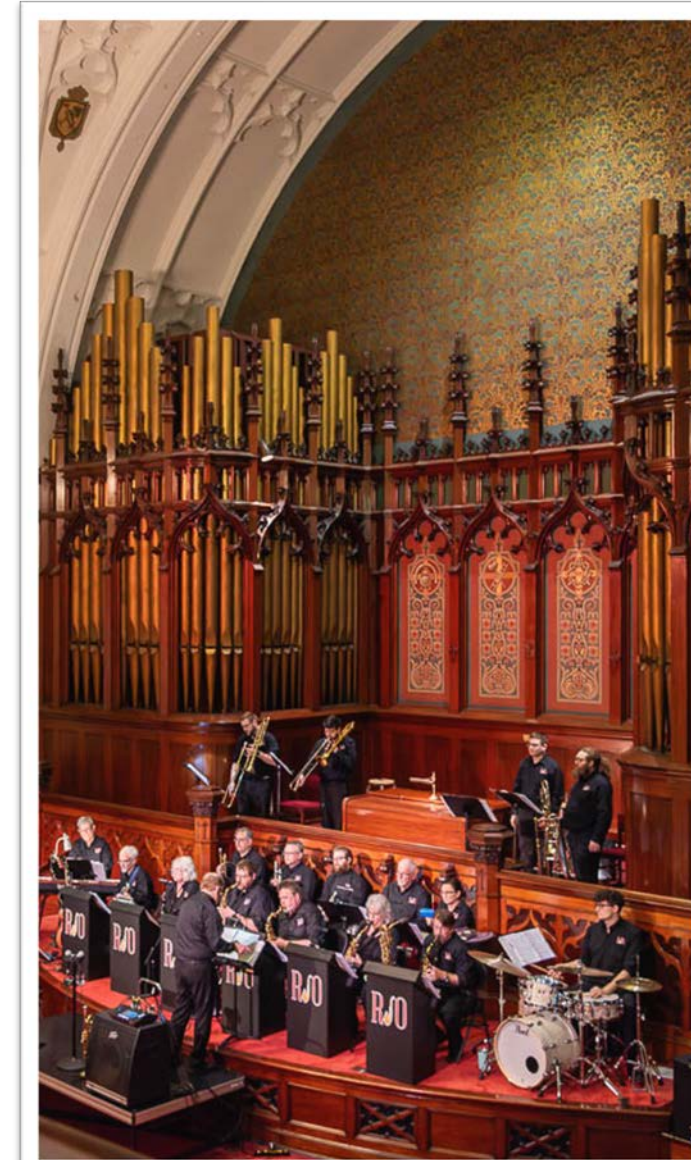
First. Get the rest of the plan up and running, network groups meeting, and past the region's first convening so that new expectations are starting to form.

Once that's done, start small, develop, test, improve with cross-sector partners.

1. **Start the conversation** with individual leaders, expand to facilitated groups, and identify interest for further exploration.
2. **Deeply explore** the options with traction via brainstorming sessions, site visits, and conversations with other communities.
3. **Hone the idea** – continue to ask for input (think public survey, open house, etc.) to build interest – and develop cross-sector implementation plans.



The Kennedy Center, Marion



Richmond Jazz Orchestra at The Reid Center, Richmond



Important for Big Idea #3

If pursuing Indiana's Music Corridor, be sure to meet with SEI READI, Accelerate Rural Indiana, and Our Southern Indiana leaders to build those partnerships first. Each has relevant arts and culture plan goals. See page 60.

7. PLACE, AMPLIFIED CULTURAL DISTRICTS

The Idea

Imagine the entire region connected through a network of Cultural Districts, each one celebrating its own character while collectively showcasing the richness of East Central Indiana's arts and cultural scene.

Cultural districts - located in a defined area downtown where arts and culture assets and activities serve as a key draw – offer incredible benefits. They boost the local economy, reinforce the community's identity, attract visitors, and strengthen arts and culture while fostering belonging and quality of life. Communities may consider pursuing state level designation through the Indiana Arts Commission, but most importantly is the drive to amplify the incredible places East Central offers. Practically, implementation could provide a framework for:

- Downtown revitalization, local action plans, and implementation
- Regionwide marketing campaigns (e.g., a dedicated [tourism platform](#) / comprehensive website to showcase the districts)

The Opportunity

Development aligns with Goals 1, 2, 4, and 6 (activate downtowns, connect communities, generate business opportunity, formalize sustainable commitments), and offers an exciting opportunity to showcase what makes East Central Indiana so special.

Bringing this idea to life requires a coordinated, community-driven effort within each county to develop and elevate its own cultural district. While full realization – where every county maintains a publicly designated cultural district – may take time, the development process itself offers substantial value. Tourism can come alongside and showcase the development with storytelling, milestone celebrations, and event calendar.

Making the Case The Arts as a Strategy for Revitalizing Our Cities

“ A cultural district is **a well-recognized, labeled, mixed-use area of a city in which a high concentration of cultural facilities serves as the anchor of attraction.**

The impact of cultural districts is measurable: The arts attract **residents and tourists** who also support adjacent businesses such as restaurants, lodging, retail, and parking.

The presence of the arts enhances **property values**, the profitability of **surrounding businesses** and the tax base of the region.

The arts attract a well-educated workforce- a key incentive for **new and relocating businesses.**

Finally, the arts contribute to the **creativity and innovation** of a community.

Excerpt: Hilary Anne Frost-Kumpf,
Americans for the Arts (1998)

Indiana Arts Commission's Cultural District Program

Indiana has [officially designated 12 districts](#) since this program started.

Contact Eric Ashby, Director of Programs (eashby@iac.in.gov) for more.



An Abundance to Build from for Big Idea #1

Every county in East Central Indiana has at least one community with strong potential to become a cultural district.

BLACKFORD

Hartford City has great anchor assets it could leverage to build support and momentum.

DELAWARE

Muncie has tried for state designation in the past without success, but recent collaboration around its Creative Corridor, [Creative Space Action Plan](#), and College & Community Collaboration Program-funded work at BSU could become a recipe for success.

FAYETTE

Connersville has a number of local champions working to develop downtown, a supply of visitors from the railroad, and a cute factor that could support a strong district in time.

GRANT

Marion has begun working on this as part of its downtown and river revitalization work. The College & Community Collaboration work around Taylor University (Upland) and Indiana Wesleyan (Marion) may also become district potential.

HENRY

New Castle has made great strides through its Main Street, has a 2025 downtown revitalization plan, and key assets poising it well for a focused effort.

JAY

Portland began the process in 2023 and could pick it back up.

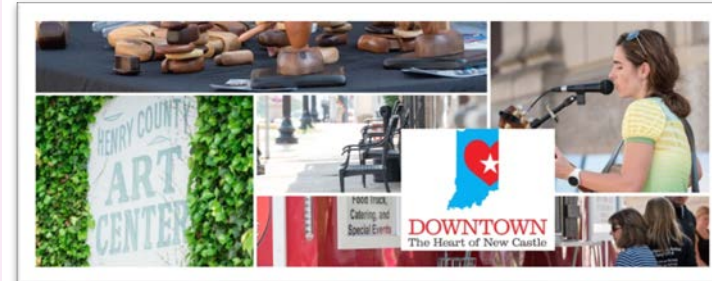
Redkey is developing a core of activity that could become a mini district in its own right.

RANDOLPH

Union City has been deepening its efforts since its finalist days in the state's Stellar Communities program.

WAYNE

Richmond has a plethora of cultural assets, artists, and a significant revitalization effort with Earlham University funded through the College & Community Collaboration Program all giving it great district potential.



Images Above: Downtown New Castle

the big ideas

2. ALL-IN MARKETING INDIANA ICONS & INDUSTRY

The Idea

What would it look like to go 'all in' – to showcase incredible artists and icons like Garfield, Gennett Records, James Dean, and Bob Ross alongside a treasure trove of attractions and sites?

Imagine a collectively curated web platform weaving in stories, showcasing artisans, highlighting events and opportunities, and connecting residents and visitors to the people and places that define the region. Then think bigger. Imagine a **shared regional marketing strategy across multiple platforms that creates a clear “brand” or sense of united identity centered on Indiana Icons & Industry– a combination that produced some of the most well-known cultural icons in the world.** Practically, implementation could include:

- Digital components (online and in-person enhancements)
- Information booths, staff to answer questions, merchandise
- Aggressive marketing throughout the Midwest (online and print)

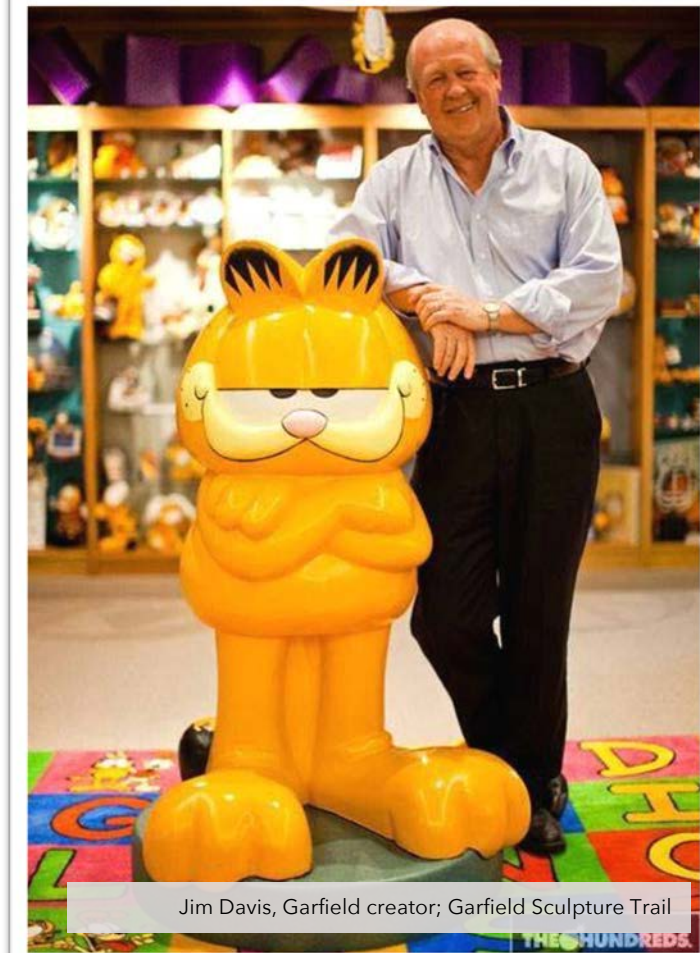
The Opportunity

This idea takes Goal 2 and supersedes it, offering a powerful opportunity to connect communities through iconic arts, culture, and rich history steeped in innovation.

The Garfield Sculpture Trail, James Dean Festival, Bob Ross Experience, and National Road already draw global visitors, yet many never discover the region’s broader arts and cultural landscape. By creating more connected experiences such as coordinated arts, music, and icon trails, and uniting the region’s assets under a shared narrative and digital platform, East Central Indiana can amplify visibility, deepen resident pride, and elevate engagement. A centralized events calendar and cohesive storytelling approach would position the region as a national example of how arts, culture, industry, and iconic figures can define place.



Bob Ross Experience, Minnetrista Museum & Gardens, Muncie



Jim Davis, Garfield creator; Garfield Sculpture Trail

An Abundance to Build from for Big Idea #2

East Central Indiana's rich, iconic people, places, and uniqueness provide much to build upon.

CULTURE ICONS

- **Art.** Bob Ross, Robert Love
- **Design.** Frank Lloyd Wright, Round Barns, Tiffany
- **Illustration/Comics.** Jim Davis & Garfield
- **Film/TV.** James Dean, Robert Wise, David Letterman
- **Books.** The Snake Pit & Raintree County
- **Dance.** Twyla Tharp
- **Music.** So much! (See *Big Idea #3*)

Beyond the most well-known and popular, there are less iconic, but equally important: Samuel Plato, the Richmond Group, Overbeck Sisters, Starr Piano, Reid Center, and more

BASKETBALL – Henry

- Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame
- “*Hoosiers*” and its physical legacy - the Hoosier Gym and Hickory Bus used in filming

INDUSTRY & INNOVATION

- **Astronauts.** Kevin Ford
- **Cars.** Little Detroit
- **Gas Boom.** Gas City, Gas Boom Trail (Muncie, Dunkirk, Marion)
- **Glass Production.** Ball Glass as one of many
- **Inventions.** Hoosier Cabinet, Phantoscope, earliest mass producible car, cruise control
- **Inventors.** Wilbur Wright, Elwood Haynes, C. Francis Jenkins, Ralph Teeter
- **Transportation.** Railroads, the National Road, Whitewater River, and more

AND MORE

- Haunted Asylum Sites (Randolph, Blackford) & Ghost Stories
- Popcorn Capital of the World (Van Buren, Grant)
- Jack's Donuts (New Castle)
- Car Culture – Cruise-Ins & Speedways throughout
- The Brady and Dillinger Gangs

“ The James Dean Festival began in 1975...

Now, 50 years later, it's a full-blown, three-day affair honoring the actor with a parade, dance contest, and a memorial service. Dean was born in **Marion**, Indiana, in 1931. His family moved to California when he was 6. Three years later, his mom died [and] his father sent him to live with his aunt and uncle in a farmhouse in **Fairmount**, where he lived until he graduated high school. Then, back to California, where he... briefly became one of [Hollywood's] brightest stars, then died in a car crash at age 24. That, of all those places, the site of his annual tribute is Fairmount, is instructive:

**Dean wasn't Hollywood.
He was America.**



[Rebels with one cause: A three-day Midwest blowout for James Dean](#), The Washington Post, October 11, 2025

Jim James Dean Cutout Mural, Fairmount

3. A PARTNERSHIP TO JOIN INDIANA'S MUSIC CORRIDOR

The Idea

Imagine if Forge ECI **leveraged East Central Indiana's deep music-education and performance culture as a regional music strategy**. Doing so would benefit communities across all eight counties and set up the region as an ideal partner for strategies in adjacent regions. Specifically, SEI READI is considering a music corridor – *running from Richmond, birthplace of recorded jazz to Madison's "music city"* – to celebrate the **deep musical roots of Indiana's eastern tier**.

The case for showcasing both regions' incredible musical legacies and today's vibrant cultures connecting historic studios, performance venues, and living traditions is strong, and the rewards could reverberate across East Central Indiana as a framework for:

- Linking existing festivals and tours, while opening the doors for new ones as well;
- An aggressive marketing campaign spanning across regions; and
- A dedicated [tourism platform](#) / comprehensive website to host that campaign.

The Opportunity

Joining a broader music movement – with Richmond as a key anchor – offers a strong opportunity to **deepen the region's performing arts focus** and expand multi-regional marketing and connections. If SEI READI pursues the strategy, it will depend on partnership with Forge ECI as northern anchor point. If [SEI READI](#) does not immediately pursue the strategy, Forge ECI can make it inevitable by building its assets independently. In either case, two other regional arts and culture plans include music goals to leverage goals – goals Forge ECI could join in implementing or otherwise benefit from (page 59).

In any scenario, Forge ECI leaders would want to work with regional stakeholders to identify the vision, gameplan, and assets to serve as key stops along the music corridor. Engaging key leaders in Batesville, Madison and Richmond could bring early energy to the work.



An Abundance to Build from for Big Idea #3

Forge ECI can reach deep into its counties, **building a music performance and education strategy** that links its well-documented culture of music, venues, festivals, bands, orchestras and more throughout East Central Indiana (maybe connecting with Big Idea #2) including:

Assets Across the Region

Music Education

- College and university performing arts programs, wealth of venues (e.g., Ball State Performing Arts Center, Phillippe Performing Arts Center, Rediger Auditorium, Goddard Auditorium), local faculty and students, established audiences, and supports
- K-12 school programs and assets of note such as New Castle Choirs and The Bundy

Venues & Production

- Outdoor venues, amphitheatres, and pocket park performance spaces across the region
- Performing Arts Centers in Gas City, Richmond, and university campuses
- Historic local gems like the Castle Theater and Guyer Opera House
- Local audio/video production like 357 Studios and Frequency Canvas
- And a vibrant scene in bars, breweries, wineries, churches, high schools, town parks, community centers – every county

Festivals & Events

- Summer festivals in every county including Hudson Family Park Summer Concert Series and Muncie Three Trails Music Series
- Larger commemorations (e.g., Black Music Month)
- Music for All's long-term connection with Delaware County

Groups & Education

- Numerous bands and performers including faculty
- A tremendous number of university-based groups, ensembles, and choral groups
- Mississinewa Valley Band

Instruments & Retail

- Specialty Providers: Player's Gear Guitar Shop and Hunt Guitars
- Music Stores with Lessons: Quinlan & Fabish Music Co. and Sight & Sound Music Center
- Record Stores: Monkey Jacks Emporium and Thrifty Sounds

Music Goals in Other Plans

A corridor would require four regions to collaborate (from [Forge ECI](#) through [SEI READI](#) and [Accelerate Rural Indiana](#) to [Our Southern Indiana](#)). Luckily their arts and culture plans include music goals to leverage – goals Forge ECI could join in implementing.

SEI READI

Parallel Big Idea

The SEI READI strategy parallels this one without the anchors. It provides the connection and scale that makes the idea truly BIG!

Accelerate Rural Indiana: Batesville

Music & Venue Strategy

- Create Regional Performance Venue Network
- Implement Tiered Venue Development Strategy
- Establish Music Heritage Program
- Launch Regional Performing Arts Collaborative
- Develop Music Education Ecosystem

[Our Southern Indiana: Madison](#)

Southern Bookend on the Ohio River

Build on Madison's "**Music City**" momentum, busking and grassroots platforms, and school-based sound production capacity to create a regional circuit of venues and outdoor stages, a music incubator with rehearsal and recording access, and youth pathways into music technology and stagecraft.

(See also Rust Belt Magazine: [Madison Wants to Be the Next 'Music City'](#), 2020)

The Case for Developing the Northern Bookend

While the bulk of a corridor would flow through SEI READI, it relies on Richmond's unique legacy as a critical anchor. Given its incredible history and rich music scene, it's a natural focal point within a broader regional – potentially even multi-regional – effort.

North on the Whitewater River: Richmond, IN

“*Richmond doesn't rank among the ten largest cities in the state, let alone the nation. Yet the course of American music was fundamentally changed by the songs recorded within its city limits.*”

Where do I begin? Perhaps with the recordings of **King Oliver's Jazz Band**, made in Richmond in 1923 – these were the most influential jazz sides of their day and introduced the world to **Louis Armstrong**. ...**Bix Beiderbecke**, who's classic 1924 recordings also came from Richmond. But we can't forget **Jelly Roll Morton**, the most important jazz composer of the era, who made history in Richmond, collaborating with the **New Orleans Rhythm Kings** on the first racially integrated jazz recording session... **Charley Patton's** "Pony Blues," a recording that single-handedly created the commercial market for Delta blues. By the same token, the market for Texas blues was built by **Blind Lemon Jefferson**, whose final recordings were made far from the Lone Star State, again in Richmond. The father of black gospel music **Thomas Dorsey** recorded here, as did country music legend **Gene Autry**, and the great songwriter **Hoagy Carmichael**.

No matter what style or genre, Richmond was at the crossroads. It may have been a tiny city, but the rest of America danced to its beat.

Excerpt from Ted Goia's forward to *Jelly Roll, Bix, and Hoagy: Gennett Records and the Rise of America's Musical Grassroots*, by Rick Kennedy (2013)

A HISTORIAN'S VOICE ON RICHMOND

Richmond is so important that Charlie Dehan, historian of American music and the Gennett–Starr legacy has proposed historic markers there for the Country Music Hall of Fame, Mississippi Blues Trail, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. "The music recorded by Gennett... led to a dynamic shift in American music culture. After Gennett's founding, American vernacular music went from ignored to mainstream..."

[The Music Never Stopped](#) (2016)

Richmond Assets Rooted in Music Legacy

Organizations & Groups

- Richmond Jazz, Community, and Symphony Orchestras
- Chanticleer String Quartet

Host Venues & Retail

- Music Pantry
- 4th Street Blues Club
- Morrison-Reeves Library
- "E" Street Pub
- Firehouse BBQ & Blues
- Smiley's Pub
- Civic Hall Performing Arts Center
- Dudas Inspiration Venue
- The Reid Center
- And many more

Sites & Trails and More

- Starr Historic District
- Gennett Records Walk of Fame
- Gennett Recording Studio
- Richmond Music Festival
- Related murals and more

CALL TO ACTION

What's Next?

Now that the plan has been adopted and rolled out, it is time for the region, all eight counties, the communities within them, and every corner of the creative sector to find its place in the goals and strategies – to convert the plan into specific actions it will take. Here are some thoughts to get started.

Goal & Strategy	2026-28: NEAR TERM	2028-30: MID-TERM	2030-35: LONG-TERM
<p>1. ACTIVATE DOWNTOWNS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Enhancement projects (signage, façade programs, landscaping) — Activate with public art and programs — Restore and reuse downtown assets (historic buildings, open spaces) <p>2. CONNECT COMMUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Celebrate cultural heritage (incorporate into signage, public art, programs) — Link physical & cultural assets (new trails, trail enhancements, activation) — Advance regional tourism through relationships, collective strategies & efforts 	<p>Leadership from Local Economic Development, Main Street and/or Community Foundations</p> <p>Begin Small Identify Projects & Strategy</p>	<p>Learn Repeat Better</p>	<p>Repeat Bigger Sustain</p>
<p>3. DEEPEN NEXT GENERATION ATTACHMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Empower civic engagement by involving youth — Expand arts opportunities for all ages – co-design with target audiences — Build creative career pipelines (internships, programs) <p>4. GENERATE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Empower creative capacity (affordable spaces, connect to resources, training) — Grow creative opportunity (support paid gigs, retail, expand markets) 	<p>Leadership emerges from Goals 5 & 6 <i>(key partners will be schools, youth-serving organizations, arts anchors)</i></p> <p>Advocate & Connect Train & Co-Design Identify Projects & Strategy Pilot Programs</p>	<p>Learn Repeat Better</p>	<p>Grow & Sustain</p>
<p>5. MOBILIZE, COLLABORATE & COMMUNICATE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Mobilize county-level creative networks (coffee & calendar mtgs, build networks) — Catalyze a regionwide movement (cross sector, annual convening) <p>6. FORMALIZE SUSTAINABLE COMMITMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Build stakeholder support — Build policy infrastructure (% for art, streamline policies...) — Secure sustainable funding 	<p>Forge ECI takes the lead <i>(Local Economic Development Organizations and Community Foundations partner)</i></p> <p>Convene Groups Identify Opportunities Build Momentum</p>	<p>Learn Repeat Better</p>	<p>Grow & Sustain</p>

call to action

The Toolkit

We encourage readers to follow the guidance found in The Toolkit as they move forward with this plan (*beginning on page 115*). These resources align directly with goals and are designed to deepen understanding, build confidence, and equip leaders with the tools they need to translate ideas into action. Not every idea will fit every community, but all can inform new approaches.

What You Can Do Now

Forge ECI will take the lead with Goals 5 and 6, providing a structure for other conversations, and IEDC will roll out Arts Initiative funding opportunities. But both of these are only first steps in a long race toward success. Arts and culture planning and implementation is a team sport, and this plan is intended to work at the region, county, community, and even the organizational and individual levels.

So, a few suggestions for getting started.

<p>Region-Level Forge ECI</p>	<p>Roll Out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host discussions and presentations of the plan for key stakeholders in each of the counties to build buy-in and early action steps <p>Begin Implementation & Support Early Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate first meetings for all under Goals 5 and 6 to start new networks • Host webinars in support of the LEI Initiative when re-launched, and offer proposal review consultations
<p>Organizations & Councils at Any Level</p>	<p>Take it In</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the plan and discuss it as a group • Dive into the information for your county, and add to it • Dive into the other counties, to find new opportunities • Look for connections to your mission and existing plans <p>Act On It</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly endorse the plan • Use the resources in the plan to learn more and guide your organization in setting goals that align with the plan

Digging Deeper into The Role of Community Foundations in this Plan

Community Foundations already play important roles as funders, convenors, capacity-builders, connectors, and more. This plan leans into those roles, which underscores the importance of community foundations as key implementation partners for this plan.

Many have already begun the work.

For example, the Community Foundation of Randolph County is IAC's local service partner, committed to supporting cultural activities throughout the region. The Community Foundation of Muncie & Delaware County has led the community planning process for the arts in Muncie. All eight foundations have strategies that mirror ones in this plan such as building capacity and convening alliances.

We couldn't ask for better alignment and expect the same across the region.



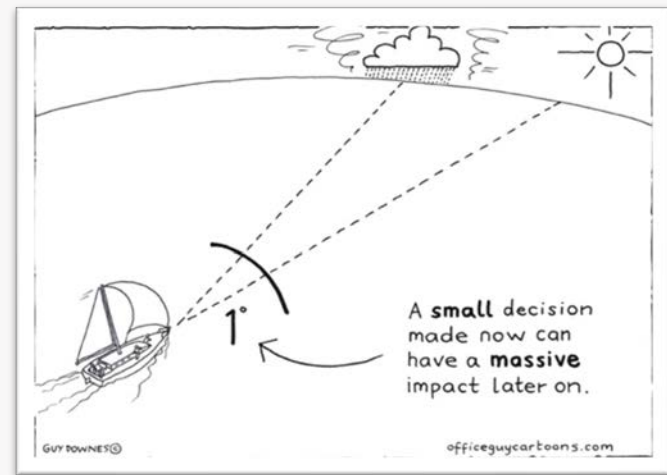
Upland Spring Craft Fair

More of What You Can Do Now...

<p>County-Level</p>	<p>Community Foundations & Tourism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start a Coffee & Calendars-like group in your county • Call your peers across the region, convene, and start discussing the plan <p>Economic Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite the creative sector to join you in touring empty and underused buildings / sites to inventory them throughout the county (downtowns and elsewhere) and share ideas for their use
<p>Community-Level</p>	<p>Main Street</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take the Downtown Revitalization Readiness Assessment • Convene key stakeholders to discuss the plan and the assessment • Host walking tours for key stakeholders to better know your assets and identify opportunities <p>Civic Organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join in when the community foundation, economic development, tourism, Main Street, or arts and culture anchor calls <p>Local Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go back and review the ideas on page 51. • Learn about and explore public policy and funding available to you • Meet with the creative sector to understand its strengths and challenges
<p>The Creative Sector</p>	<p>Arts Nonprofits & Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call your peers across the region, convene, and start discussing the plan • Join the local Chamber of Commerce, Main Street, and related • Get to know the leaders for all of the above, then get a seat their table • Join in the conversations and tours OR take the lead in getting them started (don't wait for others) <p>Artists & Creative Businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check out offerings from IAC, IEDC, and your local SBA <p>Public Libraries, Historic Societies & Museums</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call your peers across the region, convene, and start discussing the plan
<p>Any Individual</p>	<p>Get Inspired, Learn Something New, & Share the Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read something from The Toolkit, then keep exploring • Call a friend and talk about the plan • Do something on this list of things that don't require anyone's permission

Before We Go... 
What's your one small thing?

Just as one small decision now can have a massive impact over time, so one small action can sustain momentum.



The Recommendation

We encourage every reader to consciously identify one small thing to do today, tomorrow, the next day when they put this document down.

- Who should you meet and talk with?
- What can you learn more about?
- What can you talk with your board about?
- What action can you take that aligns with something in the plan?

Once that is done...

What's your next small thing?

Contact

Caitlin Hancock, chancock@forgeci.com



Recommended Tool for Implementation

Every Small Town Can Try Coffee & Calendars

It's the antidote to "I wish I'd known about that!" Ever found out about an event or project in your town only *after* it was happening? Ever wish you could have helped with something or offered some insight, *if you only knew it was coming*? You want to collaborate more with local and regional organizations, but you can't possibly know everything that's going on. ***Even in a small town, we don't keep each other informed like you'd think.***

Here's the simple solution: Why not just get folks together and compare organization calendars once a month or so? ***Keep it simple:***

- Invite some local people to coffee.
- Ask them to bring their groups' calendars.
- Go somewhere together and get some coffee.
- Let each person go over their group's calendar and tell what they have going on.
- That's all. Just share coffee and calendars.

Who to invite: Start with people who are part of any organizations related to your ideas. Think of arts or history groups, town or county government, the chamber of commerce or schools. ***You can start with a few and grow over time.*** Reach out to all kinds of community groups, local boards, churches, organizations, clubs, and everyone. Have them bring their calendars, too. Yes, declare it as an official public meeting of government groups if the law requires. Whatever you need to do to stay legal, but keep the coffee discussion itself informal.

What to talk about: ***The only goals (at first) are to share what you have planned and get to know each other better. Coffee and calendars.*** Later, people will naturally start talking about maybe cooperating, or doing shared projects, or noticing when they have shared goals. Then even later, maybe people can talk about collaborating in bigger ways. It will all start with just a few folks sitting down for "Coffee and Calendars."

Avoid this common trap: Don't try to replace the in-person get together with a combined online calendar. ***The calendar is not the goal. The conversation is the goal.***

Homework: ***Invite one person who is working on good things in your town to join you for Coffee and Calendars.*** Forward this story to them and suggest a specific day next week to get together.

Digging Deeper where This is already happening

IN EAST CENTRAL INDIANA

Among the region's examples are:

Coffee with Bill Muncie (Delaware)
Bill Lett, developer and Elm Street Brewing owner, hosts this WEEKLY power table in Muncie.

Coffee with the Mayor Connersville (Fayette)
Hosted by a civic group, this periodic sit down is for the community to chat with Mayor Frank.

Emerging Group Connersville (Fayette)
This is a small invitation-only group of leaders just getting started – a first step toward new relationships.

IN A NEIGHBORING REGION

Community Council Brookville (Franklin)
The Franklin Community Foundation schedules these, sends out invitations, and distributes notes to the list.

The Recommendation

Community Foundations in each county are uniquely positioned to launch efforts like this, jumpstarting Goals 5 & 6. We encourage them to dive in.



Article left by [Becky McCray](https://saveyourtown.com/every-small-town-can-try-coffee-and-calendars/) at <https://saveyourtown.com/every-small-town-can-try-coffee-and-calendars/>

The content is also found in ***From Possibilities to Reality: Save Your Small Town with these Uniquely Do-able Ideas, Projects, and Success Stories***
By Deb Brown and Mars Manderico (2024) [available for purchase](#)



Arts & Culture Plan

THE COUNTIES

INTRODUCTION

The regional plan is intended to be implemented on the county and regional levels elevating both while maintaining community voices and local authenticity. It assumes that each community, and the region overall, will periodically prioritize the most important of goals, strategies, and tactics for vision success – setting developmental benchmarks along the way.

This section “The Counties” includes eight profiles – *one per county* – aren’t intended to be county-level plans. Instead, they **provide a starting point of information for each county to use in adapting this plan to their specific needs**. They include:

- **Arts & Culture Identity**, an overview of the county’s distinctive character and assets.
- **From Community Visioning**, an excerpt from that county’s community vision session recap as a start in adapting the plan to local needs.
- **Asset Highlights**, a summary view of inventoried cultural assets.
- **County Composition** includes key population and economic numbers.
- **Key Influences**, a brief presentation of catalytic funding , and momentum and challenges influencing efforts.

There are too many stories to tell, works to highlight in each county to cover them all in such a small space. We encourage each to take this starting point and make it their own – telling the whole story in all is splendor.

Every community across the region comes to this plan from a different place – with different assets, resource levels, capacity, expertise, and authentic identity. To support that variety, this plan includes a toolkit of ideas and inspiration. Not every idea will fit every community, but all can inform new approaches.



And there is more on the [Project Website](#) that will become available directly from [Forge ECI](#), including:

- Community Visioning Presentation & Recap
- Interactive Asset Maps along with Asset Inventory and Project Participation Spreadsheets
- The Toolkit and More

Data Tables in the Appendix (pages 130-138) break out counties from the region for key indicators.

More in Appendix

- A. Data Tables
Livability Index • Technology & Broadband • Arts Vibrancy • The Asset Inventory • Recent Arts & Culture Funding • Forge ECI READI Projects
- B. Methodology – including engagement details

Never Doubt... Committed Volunteers

“ Just wanted to share a little win with you. Yesterday we opened the People’s Marketplace, a holiday market for local artisans.

We took the empty side of the building beside Obi’s and in a little under 3 weeks transformed it into an upscale/rustic shop.

This was a true community project, built by volunteers. The story is pretty interesting, and it speaks to what we can do with a little support and a lot of volunteer enthusiasm.

We have a section dedicated Young Entrepreneurs and are looking forward to creating new opportunities for them, as well as all of our artists.

Cheri Brown
Community Development Director
Hartford City, Indiana

<https://www.facebook.com/ThePeoplesMarketplace/>
<https://the-peoples-marketplace.com>

BLACKFORD COUNTY

Arts & Culture Profile

Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana

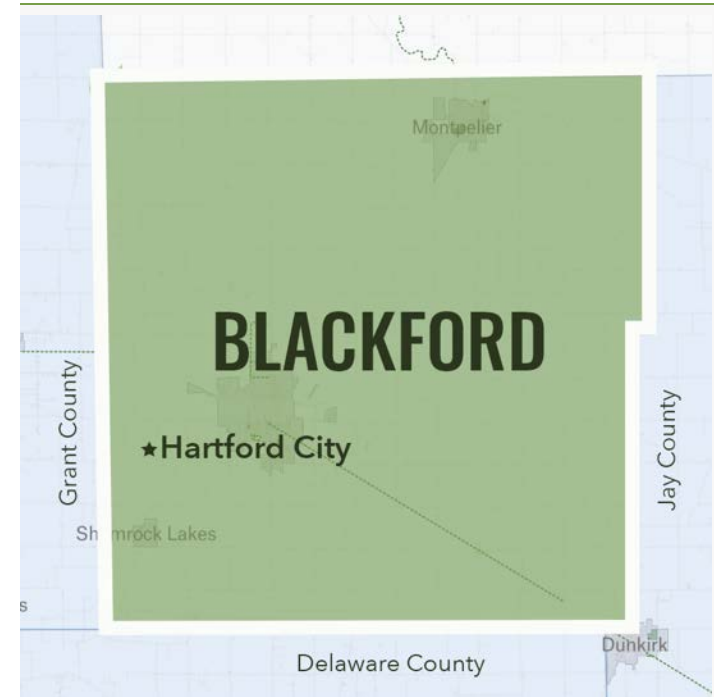
Vision, asset, and opportunity highlights to guide county efforts – shaped by local voices and research. 2025 – 2035

Arts & Culture Identity

Blackford, a small rural county of just over 12,000, is defined by the strength of its people. **“United community, we do things together”** emerged as a guidepost throughout the engagement process, reflecting residents’ pride and willingness to work collectively to shape their future.

The county’s cultural identity is rooted in its **Miami Indian heritage, agricultural beginnings, and industrial boom**. Chief Larry P. Godfroy, a descendant of Miami leader Chief Francois Godfroy, donated the 25-foot-tall Miami Indian sculpture in Montpelier in 1984 to honor the tribe’s ancestral ties to the area. Along with the Godfroy Reserve, Civil War Days festival, and historic structures, the sculpture serves as a lasting reminder of the county’s layered history, while today Hartford City and Montpelier anchor a community known for its hospitality and small-town character.

Blackford County has strong foundational assets including a stable, well-established arts organization (Arts Place), signature festivals, county history center, unique historic assets, and active public **spaces like the Weiler Plaza which bring communities and all ages together**. Each community is poised for growth and already making great progress in strengthening quality of place through arts and culture through public art, activating outdoor spaces, beautification projects, façade improvement, and a city arts council.



Praying Mantis, unknown artist, Hartford City

blackford county

By the numbers, Blackford County has a solid foundation of arts and cultural assets for its population size including an impressive collection of public art, events and traditions, and creative practitioners many of which are connected to neighboring Taylor University.

Goals & Strategies from Blackford County's Plan

GOAL 1 CREATIVE PLACEMAKING DOWNTOWN.

Blackford County's downtowns are thriving – revitalized through arts initiatives, beautification, and programming.

- Beautify all the "small" stuff for civic pride and engagement.
- Activate with public art, partnerships, events, and opportunities to create.
- Connect activities, places, and people.

GOAL 2 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN & THROUGH THE ARTS

Blackford County's youth are thriving through the arts and civic participation.

- Increase opportunities for youth arts engagement.
- Increase youth access to arts.
- Increase youth stake in the arts.

GOAL 3 CREATIVE ECONOMY & ENTREPRENEURS

All benefit from a thriving creative economy with increasing numbers of successful creative entrepreneurs and groups.

- Build support systems and training opportunities.
- Create spaces for creatives.

GOAL 4 CULTURAL IDENTITY & HERITAGE

Blackford County's identity has been strengthened through the arts, history, and community engagement.

- Reimagine and strengthen signature festival traditions.
- Lean into Blackford County's history and heritage.

GOAL 5 SUSTAINED COMMITMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

Arts initiatives and programming are sustained through collaboration, leadership, and long-term funding.

- Increase support for arts and culture
- Solidify long-term investment pathways for arts and culture.
- Include arts elements and arts stakeholders when implementing related existing plan strategies.

Blackford County Arts & Culture Master Plan

Blackford County was part of another regional arts and cultural planning project in 2024-2025. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts through their [Our Town](#) grant and fiscally managed by [Arts Place, Inc.](#), that work included Blackford and Jay Counties in Indiana and Auglaize County in Ohio and sought to:

"Provide opportunities for the arts to be integrated into the fabric of community life – Strengthening Communities."

The resulting plan has been endorsed by the county and is being implemented under the collaborative leadership of Arts Place and Purdue Extension.

Facilitated by the same consultant team, using a similar planning process the work fed seamlessly into the larger, East Central Indiana regional Arts & Cultural Strategy.



Top: Airplane, Baldwin Park, Montpelier
Bottom left: Fallen Soldier, Veterans Garden, Hartford City
Bottom right: Guitar, Weiler Plaza, Hartford City

What You Have

Highlights from the County Cultural Asset Inventory

Blackford County has strong arts and culture assets from which to draw upon.

#	Overview by Category	Select Arts & Culture Assets
35	Arts	
13	Artists & Creative Business	Artists & Creative Businesses Don Rogers Photography, ADM Custom Creations, Hunt Guitars, Blue Felt Jazz Band, Blackford County Radio Club, painters, musicians, teachers, fiber artists, designers Arts Organizations & Groups Arts Place, Hartford City Arts Council Public Libraries in Montpelier Harrison Township and Hartford City Historical Groups dedicated to Blackford County and Montpelier Places Dunkirk Oddfellows Cemetery, Old Blackford County Jail, Hartford City Courthouse, Square, and Historic District Festivals Civil War Days, Rendezvous on the Reserve, Heritage Days Nature & Trails Blackford Greenway, Godfroy Reserve, Wilderness Park Other Places & Spaces Baldwin Park (Airplane Park) Weiler Plaza, Montpelier Motor Speedway
--	Informal Group	
6	Art in Non-Art Spaces	
11	Public Art	
5	Organizations	
51	Culture	
9	History & Heritage	
15	Events & Traditions	
12	Parks & Trails	
15	Funders & Friends	
12	Misc.	
4	Civic Assets	
8	Other Opportunities	
	In addition to the highlights presented here. The Full Inventory with individual asset details is available as well Inventory sheets for each county Interactive regional map	

County Composition

Overview	2020 #	Co. Rank
Population	12,112	#85
Square Miles	165	
Population / Sq Mi	72	
% of Co.		
City Hartford City (seat)	6,086	50%
Cities & Towns < 3,500 (line for SEA1 purposes)		
City Montpelier	1,540	13%
Town Shamrock Lakes	222	2%
City Dunkirk (partial, Jay Co.)	130	1%
Everywhere Else	4,134	34%

Source: Stats Indiana (2020 = U.S. Census)
(fractions rounded to full digit)

Composition	2024 %	Co. Rank
Preschool 0-4	5%	#84
School Age 5-17	17%	#84
College Age 18-24	7%	#85
Young Adult 24-44	23%	#85
Older Adult 45-64	25%	#86
Seniors 65+	23%	#84
Median Age	43	

Dynamics	2023	Co. Rank
Population Growth (2020-2024)	- 2 %	#91
Median <i>Household</i> Income	\$51,799	#91
Median <i>Per Capita</i> Income	\$46,989	#85
Poverty Rate	16%	#9

Notable

- Population decline, but predicted to stabilize
- Aging population with nearly half age 45+
- One of the lowest median incomes in the state
- 9th highest poverty rate in the state

blackford county



People's Marketplace, Hartford City

Key Influences

Resources to leverage, dynamics poising the county for growth, and areas to address include:

Catalytic Investments	
\$35,000,000	READI 2.0 Regional Award to Forge ECI <i>Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, & Wayne</i>
\$30,000,000	Lilly Endowment Inc. College & Community Collaboration <i>Grant to Taylor University for its Main Street Mile initiative (Grant but recognize carry over effect)</i>
\$10,000,000	Projected annual Wind and Solar project revenue
\$ 3,100,000	Lilly Endowment Inc. GIFT VIII <i>Grant to expand the Blackford Greenway</i>
\$ 20,000	Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs <i>Planning grant for improved walkability in Montpelier</i>

READI Projects with Connection to Arts & Culture Plan Goals			
1.0		2.0	
\$ 700,000	Broadband Improvements	--	None

See full list of READI projects in Appendix, pages 137-138.

The following came from community input at the in-person visioning session.

Momentum Pushes

- Dedicated to downtown revitalization
- Has a groundswell of successful efforts to build upon (public art, placemaking, beautification projects, façade improvement, city arts council), and several in the works that align well with goals and strategies within this plan

Challenging Pulls

- Inter-community competition
- Lack of leadership – there aren't enough to address community needs
- Loss of identity (of Montpelier school, of hospital, of golf course)
- Burn out (lack of volunteers)
- Needs new volunteers and leaders



Arts Place Arts in the Parks Program, Montpelier



Weiler Plaza, Hartford City



Civil War Days Reenactment, Hartford City

DELAWARE COUNTY

Arts & Culture Profile

Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana

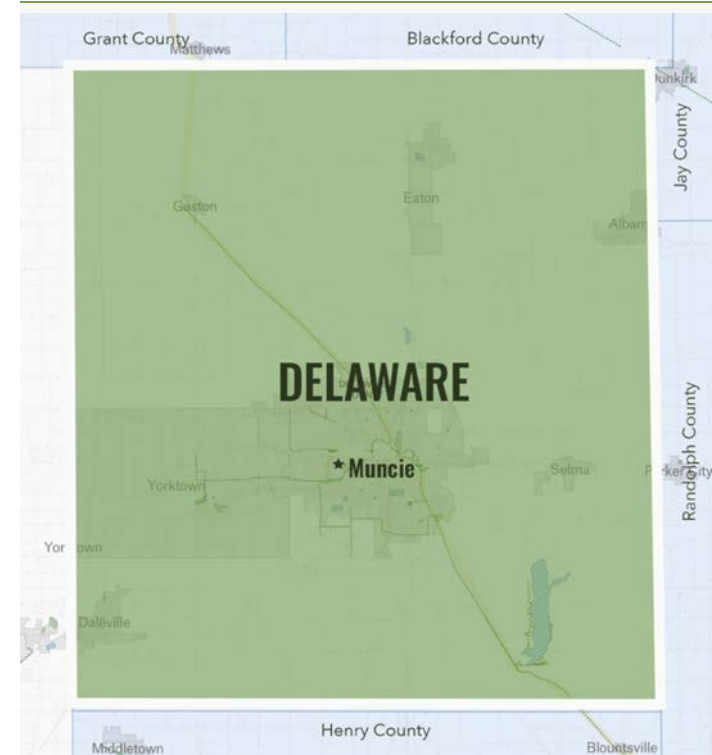
Vision, asset, and opportunity highlights to guide county efforts – shaped by local voices and research. 2025 – 2035

Arts & Culture Identity

There is perhaps no greater legacy impact from Indiana’s late 19th century Gas Boom than in Delaware County. The natural **gas discovery in Eaton sparked a flurry of businesses** to form and the relocation of Ball Brother’s Ball Corporation glass manufacturing company to Muncie to take advantage of the abundant, inexpensive fuel. The Ball prosperity and philanthropy is ever-present today through both its continued financial support and its visible legacy marked by beneficiary institutions hallmark to county identity and culture, most notably, Ball State University. BSU serves as a driver of economy, population, education, and arts and culture through its schools (fine arts, architecture, etc.), museum, planetarium, glass center, performance venues, programming, and more.

Yet, BSU and the multiple Ball family foundations are just a part of the greater Delaware County story which has been **home to nationally and internationally significant artists** including Jim Davis (Garfield), J. Ottis Adams (Hoosier Group), Angel Chang (fashion designer), and David Letterman. Railroads sparked community growth county-wide, and each brings its own, yet connected identity. Visitors and residents alike can explore the county’s natural beauty via the Cardinal Greenway which spans diagonally through the county and connects four other counties in the region. Other natural features include the White River, Prairie Creek Reservoir, and more.

Delaware County can **boast a healthy arts and culture presence strongly reflecting its population and university presence**. While largely centralized in the Muncie area, assets span the county offering unique opportunities to engage in county history and cultural life from the Albany Glass Museum to the National Model Aviation Museum. Residents can engage in all artforms across all



Mad Jax Maker Force, Muncie

levels fueled by a treasure trove of arts organizations (18 in total) and arts providing organizations (most notably, Ball State University) of varying levels from emerging-to-professional. Muncie was even the fictional setting for “*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.”

Growth and investment continue to centralize the role of arts and culture as both a key attractor and emerging identity for Muncie and potentially the county. By the numbers, Delaware County is replete with arts and cultural assets the vast majority of which occupy the Muncie area. Within History and Heritage, there are 43 sites on the National Register of Historic Places including 11 historic districts (all of which are in Muncie), 34 buildings, and one cemetery. A staggering 171 public art pieces reflects a commitment to celebrating place and identity.

What You Want for the Future *c. 2035*

Content from Community Visioning Recap

The regional plan is intended to be implemented on the county and regional levels elevating both while maintaining community voices and local authenticity. What follows emerged from the local vision session. It is here as a start in adapting the plan to Delaware County’s needs.

1. **Connected & Vibrant Communities**

The region features improved transportation infrastructure like rail and trail systems, thriving downtowns, arts and culture opportunities, and seamless cultural corridors that physically and socially connect people, cities, towns, and the region overall.

2. **A Thriving Creative Sector**

Film studios, audio/visual production, makers, local fabrication, and food innovation have become exports, supported by private and government investment, expanded markets, and strong local prioritization.

3. **Arts & Culture as a Tool for Healing and Identity**

The community has surpassed the trauma of manufacturing decline using arts, culture, and placemaking, to build a keen sense of place, pride, and resilience.

4. **Shared Leadership, Inclusive of All Voices**

Decision-making includes voices previously left out, embracing the county’s identity as “big city” and “small town,” and recognizing diversity as its strength.

5. **Empowered Youth & Lifelong Arts Education**

Arts education is widely available for young people, with creative opportunities that embed youth in the cultural and economic fabric of the region.



East Central Indiana Chamber Orchestra, Muncie



National Model Aviation Museum, Muncie



Muncie Civic Theatre

What You Have

Highlights from the County Cultural Asset Inventory

Delaware County has strong arts and culture assets from which to draw upon.

#	Overview by Category	Select Arts & Culture Assets
312	Arts	
78	Artists & Creative Business	<p>Artists & Creative Businesses MadJax Maker Force, Hoosier Made, Harmony Movement Studio, Happy Accidents Art Studio, John Peterson Pottery, Carrie Wright Silks, Gordy’s Fine Art & framing, painters, musicians, teachers, fiber artists, designers</p> <p>Arts Councils Muncie Arts & Culture Council (MuncieArts) and Yorktown Council for the Arts</p> <p>Organizations & Groups Minnetrista Museum & Gardens, Orchestra Indiana, Cornerstone Center for the Arts, Youth Symphony Orchestra, Muncie Civic Theatre, Muncie Children’s Museum, Masterworks Chorale, Shamaniacs Drum Troupe</p> <p>University Assets such as the David Owsley Museum, Marilyn Glick Center for Glass, Brown Family Amphitheater, etc.</p> <p>Public Libraries in Muncie, Yorktown, Eaton, and an all-volunteer community library in Daleville</p> <p>Historical Groups dedicated to Delaware County, Yorktown Mt. Pleasant Township as well as Muncie Railroad Preservation</p> <p>Places Albany Glass Museum, Midwest Computer Museum, National Model Aviation Museum, Shaffer Chapel AME Church, and 34 assets on the National Register of Historic Places</p> <p>Festivals Fire Up DWNTWN, Art in Bloom, Muncie Three Trails Music Series, Black Music Month, Daleville Fall Frenzy, Bluebird Days</p> <p>Nature & Trails Cardinal Greenway, White River Greenway, Garfield Trail, Prairie Creek Reservoir, Mountain Bike Trails</p> <p>Other Places & Spaces White River, Charles W. Brown Planetarium, Red-Tail Land Conservancy Nature Preserve</p>
13	Informal Group	
32	Art in Non-Art Spaces	
171	Public Art	
18	Organizations	
123	Culture	
51	History & Heritage	
31	Events & Traditions	
18	Parks & Trails	
23	Funders, Friends & Support Organizations	
42	Misc.	
37	Civic Assets	
5	Other Opportunities	

In addition to the highlights presented here. The **Full Inventory** with individual asset details is available as well
[Inventory sheets for each county](#)
[Interactive regional map](#)

County Composition

Overview	2020 #	Co. Rank
Population	111,903	#16
Square Miles	392	
Population / Sq Mi	288	
% of Co.		
City Muncie (seat)	65,194	58%
Town Yorktown	11,548	11%
Cities & Towns < 3,500 (line for SEA1 purposes)		
Town Albany	2,099	2%
Town Daleville	1,651	2%
Town Eaton	1,595	1%
Town Gaston	796	1%
Town Selma	747	1%
Everywhere Else	28,267	43%

Composition		2024 %	Co. Rank
Preschool	0-4	5%	#16
School Age	5-17	13%	#18
College Age	18-24	19%	#8
Young Adult	24-44	23%	#17
Older Adult	45-64	23%	#16
Seniors	65+	18%	#16
Median Age		36	

Dynamics	2023	Co. Rank
Population Growth (2020–2024)	< 1 %	
Median <i>Household</i> Income	\$ 55,704	#86
Median <i>Per Capita</i> Income	\$47,629	#82
Poverty Rate	19	#3

Notable

- While the population is aging, the median is lower than the state likely reflecting Ball State University student population
- 3rd highest poverty rate in the state
- 75% of county population lives outside incorporated cities/towns

Source: Stats Indiana (2020 = U.S. Census)
(fractions rounded to full digit)



Masterworks Chorale, Muncie

Key Influences

Resources to leverage, dynamics poised the county for growth, and areas to address include:

Catalytic Investments	
\$35,000,000	READI 2.0 Regional Award to Forge ECI <i>Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, and Wayne</i>
\$35,000,000	Lilly Endowment Inc. College & Community Collaboration <i>Grant to Ball State University</i>
\$ 2,250,000	Lilly Endowment Inc. GIFT VIII grant to expand the Blackford Greenway
\$ 75,000	Ball Brothers Foundation Award to support the Muncie Creative Space Action Plan

READI Projects with Connection to Arts & Culture Plan Goals			
1.0		2.0	
\$ 250,000	Yorktown Downtown Revitalization	\$ 2,000,000	Revitalizing the Village
\$ 250,000	Salem Township Initiative		

See full list of READI projects in Appendix, pages 137-138.

The following came from community input at the in-person visioning session.

Momentum Pushes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muncie Creative Corridor project • Great philanthropic leadership through local foundations and a generous community • Forward thinking support from the Indiana Arts Commission • Unique prosperity legacy • Opportunity to value and increase opportunities for K-12 arts education • Deeply felt sense of place and pride
Challenging Pulls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception: Muncie doesn't believe it's as good as it is. • Challenge centralizing the role of arts and culture to the city identity • Public transportation



Extess by Project One Studio, Muncie



Civic Green Amphitheatre, Yorktown



Under the Same Sun by Carolyn Frost, Muncie

delaware county



Muncie Three Trails Music Series, Canan Commons

FAYETTE COUNTY

Arts & Culture Profile

Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana

Vision, asset, and opportunity highlights to guide county efforts – shaped by local voices and research. 2025 – 2035

Arts & Culture Identity

Fayette County is a predominantly rural county located in the Whitewater Valley, with its county seat of Connersville home to nearly 60% of the county's population of just over 13,000. In the early 1800s, Fayette served as a critical gateway for settlers moving into the Northwest Territory. The construction of the Whitewater Canal, followed by the arrival of the railroad only a few decades later, positioned the county as a hub of transportation and growth. By 1909, **automotive manufacturing further transformed Connersville into a bustling center of industry and opportunity.**

Though the Whitewater Canal exists now only through historical markers, the railroad remains a visible and active feature in Connersville, including a working Amtrak station and restored historic cars that recall the city's industrial past. **County history is ever visibly present through sites, structures, and Connersville's downtown historic district.** The county is proud of its history and traditions, and while the population declined after its boom periods, it's dedicated to strengthening its quality of place, quality of life emphasizing health and wellness investing in parks, trails, and downtown.

Despite Fayette County's size and geographic location, it has an impressive foundation of assets. Anchor arts organizations – Imagine Performing Arts and the Whitewater Valley Arts Association provide opportunities for both visual and performing arts, while festivals like the Fayette County Free Fair and 4th Street Art Fair celebrate identity community and attract visitors. History is activated through Historic Connersville and the Whitewater Valley Railroad



First High School Band in the United States, Connersville

Association, while signature sites such as the Fayette County Historical Museum, Historic Elmherst Landmark & Place, and the Canal House highlight the area’s unique cultural heritage. Complementing a growing arts and culture scene are over 20 civic assets and opportunities including Roberts Park, trails, Mary Gray bird sanctuary, preserve, amphitheaters, newly installed inclusive playground, and more making for rich opportunities to connect and engage. Alongside, a robust creative industry features artists from traditional to contemporary, and from locally to nationally known. All this and more make for an impressive, growing cultural county.

What You Want for the Future c. 2035

Content from Community Visioning Recap

The regional plan is intended to be implemented on the county and regional levels elevating both while maintaining community voices and local authenticity. What follows emerged from the local vision session. It is here as a start in adapting the plan to Fayette County’s needs.

1. Downtown Revitalization through Arts & Culture

Downtown becomes a cultural destination with streets transformed into public gathering spaces, revitalized districts, and activity after 5 p.m., making it a place where people want to stop, stay, and engage.

2. Connectivity through Corridors & Trails

Cultural corridors, health and wellness trails, and creative multi-county trail concepts like QR-code history walks and themed trail experiences link communities physically and culturally.

3. Creative Sector & Regional Identity

Inspired by models like Paducah and Strasburg, the county evolves into a hub for visual and performing arts, film, and local fabrication, with expanded markets and incentives supporting creators and small businesses.

4. Tourism, Promotion, & Storytelling

Strategic marketing, compelling storytelling, and curated tourism packages (e.g., Blue Ridge-style rail tourism) highlight local assets, build regional pride, and attract visitors from beyond the county.

5. Inclusive Engagement & Cross-Sector Collaboration

A culture of collaboration drives progress, with youth, residents, organizations, and sectors working together through structured partnerships and shared leadership to advance arts, culture, and community development efforts.



Mystery Mural by Whiteriver Valley Arts Association Artists



Boy Scout Camp Out at Historic Elmherst



Welcome to Glenwood by Lexi Keen

What You Have

Highlights from the County Cultural Asset Inventory

Fayette County has strong arts and culture assets from which to draw upon.

#	Overview by Category	Select Arts & Culture Assets
42	Arts	
20	Artists & Creative Business	Artists & Creative Businesses Act 3 Pottery and Lynette Eklund along with wood carvers, painters, musicians, actors, teachers, fiber artists, designers
5	Informal Group	
4	Art in Non-Art Spaces	
11	Public Art + 64 in Quilt Trail	
2	Organizations	Organizations & Groups Imagine Performing Arts, Whitewater Valley Arts Association, Conner Quilters Guild
45	Culture	
12	History & Heritage	Public Library in Fayette County
12	Events & Traditions	Historical Groups dedicated to Historic Connersville, Whitewater Valley Railroad Association
12	Parks & Trails	Places Fayette County Historical Museum, Canal House, Historic Elmhurst Landmark & Place, First Ward Hose House
9	Funders, Friends & Support Organizations	Festivals Fayette County Free Fair, Renaissance Fair, Celebration in the Ville, 4th Street Art Fair
12	Misc.	
8	Civic Assets	Nature & Trails Roberts Park, Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary, Shrader-Weaver Nature Preserve, Heritage Barn Quilt Trail
4	Other Opportunities	Other Places & Spaces Market Street Plaza, Mettel Field Airport, Kunkel's Drive-in, Connersville Station
<p>In addition to the highlights presented here. The Full Inventory with individual asset details is available as well</p> <p>Inventory sheets for each county</p> <p>Interactive regional map</p>		



“ Miah Michaelsen, executive director of the Indiana Arts Commission, told an assemblage of local arts organizations that the city is **“hitting above your weight,”** using an expression from the sport of boxing to tell us that Connersville is doing more than many places of the same size.

Blue Zones is about building on the good, Connersville audience learns,
Connersville News-Examiner, October 15, 2025

County Composition

Overview	2020 #	Co. Rank
Population	23,398	#65
Square Miles	215	
Population / Sq Mi	109	
% of Co.		
City Connersville (seat)	13,324	57%
Cities & Towns < 3,500 (line for SEA1 purposes)		
Town Glenwood (partial, Rush Co.)	72	<1%
Everywhere Else	10,146	43%

Source: Stats Indiana (2020 = U.S. Census)
(fractions rounded to full digit)

Composition		2024 %	Co. Rank
Preschool	0-4	6	#66
School Age	5-17	16	#67
College Age	18-24	8	#63
Young Adult	24-44	23	#67
Older Adult	45-64	26	#66
Seniors	65+	21	#66
Median Age		43	

Dynamics	2023	Co. Rank
Population Growth (2020-2024)	-0.3 %	
Median <i>Household</i> Income	\$60,483	#75
Median <i>Per Capita</i> Income	\$50,175	#73
Poverty Rate	20%	#10

Notable

- Slightly declining population
- Aging population with nearly half (47%) age 45+
- 10th highest poverty rate in the state
- 57% of the population lives outside Connersville and Glenwood

Layette county



October Art Stroll, Downtown Connersville

Key Influences

Resources to leverage, dynamics poising the county for growth, and areas to address include:

Catalytic Investments	
\$35,000,000	READI 2.0 Regional Award to Forge ECI <i>Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, & Wayne</i>
\$ 5,000,000	Lilly Endowment Inc. GIFT VIII <i>Grant to enhance Roberts Park and create accessible trail loop</i>
\$ 500,000	OCRA Community Development Block Grant <i>Fayette County: Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation Grant</i>

READI Projects with Connection to Arts & Culture Plan Goals			
1.0		2.0	
\$ 200,000	Market Street Plaza	\$ 500,000	Imagine Performing Arts Center

See full list of READI projects in Appendix, pages 137-138.

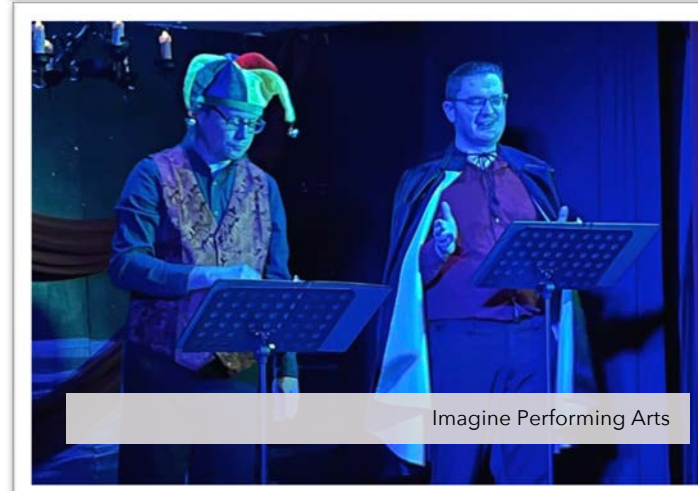
The following came from community input at the in-person visioning session.

Momentum Pushes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connersville part of OCRA HELP Cohort 3 • Improved broadband • Low cost of living • Key anchors are active and have bones of an arts district • Placemaking partnership with the Center for Rural Engagement at Alpine Park • Civil War Reenactment reinstatement would benefit Elmhurst, youth, and tourism

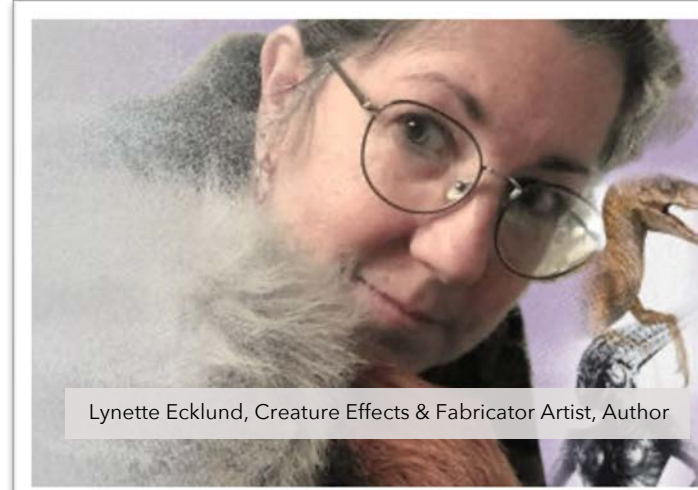
Challenging Pulls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication, collaboration (“weak”), inclusion, and structure to move efforts forward • Accessible parking downtown • Job loss – however this provides opportunity for tourism around arts and culture • Getting into schools



Whiteriver Valley Arts Association



Imagine Performing Arts



Lynette Ecklund, Creature Effects & Fabricator Artist, Author



Whitewater Valley Railroad

GRANT COUNTY

Arts & Culture Profile

Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana

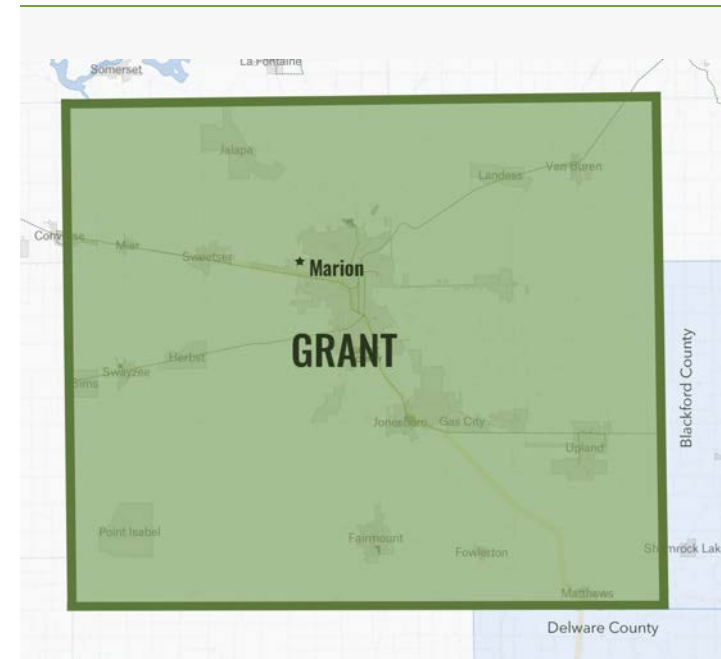
Vision, asset, and opportunity highlights to guide county efforts – shaped by local voices and research.
2025 – 2035

Arts & Culture Identity

With over 66,000 residents, slightly eclipsing Wayne, Grant County is the second most populated county in east central Indiana. Its cultural identity is **rooted in Native American heritage, industrial innovation, pivotal historic events, and nationally recognized icons**. The Mississinewa River, which winds through many of the county's communities, was the site of the 1812 Battle of the Mississinewa—an event still remembered today through one of the nation's largest War of 1812 reenactments. Later, the Indiana Gas Boom transformed the landscape, fueling Marion's rapid growth and giving rise to towns like Gas City and Matthews, a legacy still visible in the county's architecture, historic districts, and public art.

The county also carries **stories of national significance** from the African American Weaver settlement to the tragic 1930 lynching in Marion, and later the global fame of James Dean and Jim Davis's Garfield. Today, traditions like the Popcorn Festival honoring Van Buren as the "popcorn capital of the world" and James Dean Festival celebrate community pride, while preservation efforts ensure Grant County's layered history continues to shape its distinct cultural identity and future.

Grant County offers an **impressive and rich tapestry of arts and culture assets county-wide** collectively reflecting and celebrating its unique heritage and traditions while embracing and blending the present. Alongside 7 arts organizations, two universities – Taylor (Upland) and Indiana Wesleyan (Marion) – and their professional creative sector faculty bring a collective force of visual and performing arts offerings for students and residents alike. Organizations, events, historic structures, and trails reflect and celebrate local heritage, histories, and cultural icons.



Garfield Trail Stop (creator, Jim Davis)

There are 5 historic districts, 12 structures on the National Register of Historic Places, and 10 history organizations and museums providing opportunity to engage, research, and connect. Alongside, there’s a barn quilt trail and 20 documented pieces of public art mostly in Marion revealing an opportunity for growth across the county. Taken as a whole, Grant County has a robust inventory of arts and culture assets from which to draw upon.

What You Want for the Future *c. 2035*

Content from Community Visioning Recap

The regional plan is intended to be implemented on the county and regional levels elevating both while maintaining community voices and local authenticity. What follows emerged from the local vision session. It is here as a start in adapting the plan to Grant County’s needs.

1. **Pride, Identity, & Community Narrative**

A renewed sense of pride is evident as residents feel proud to call the area home, external perceptions improve, and a unified narrative rooted in value, history, and creativity begins to take hold.

2. **Connected Arts, Culture, & Education Ecosystem**

A cultural district, collaborative arts infrastructure, strong arts education, and career pathways create a vibrant ecosystem that connects artists, schools, history organizations, and regional partners.

3. **Quality of Life & Livability**

Walkable, safe, and accessible communities, abundant green space, public art, and family-friendly activities contribute to a high “joy index” and make the area attractive for both residents and remote workers.

4. **Innovation & Economic Development through Creativity**

The region is known as a hub for tech innovation and creative enterprise, blending historic preservation with modern arts, fostering entrepreneurship, and offering vocational training tied to local opportunity.

5. **Regional Collaboration & Coordinated Communication**

A strong regional framework supports planning, resource-sharing, and artist connection through structures like regional arts councils, cooperatives, and community councils, while centralized communication tools keep residents informed and aligned across county lines.



Boy & Bird by Andrew Luttrull, Marion



Marion Community School of the Arts



Marion Design Co. Fashion Show at the Kennedy Art Center

What You Have

Highlights from the County Cultural Asset Inventory

Grant County has strong arts and culture assets from which to draw upon.

#	Overview by Category	Select Arts & Culture Assets
129	Arts	
47	Artists & Creative Business	<p>Leaders & Anchors Marion Arts Commission, Community School of the Arts, The Quilters Hall of Fame, Hoosier Shakes, Grant County Art Association, along with Indiana Wesleyan and Taylor University performing groups</p> <p>Centers & Spaces Gas City, Phillippe and Walton Performing Arts Centers; James Dean Memorial Stage, Taylor University Theatre, Kennedy Arts Center</p> <p>Artists & Creative Businesses Halstead Architects, Player’s Gear Guitar Shop</p> <p>Groups Dance studios, singers, jazz groups, visual artists, designers, writers, actors, media, university performing groups</p> <p>Public Libraries in Marion, Gas City-Mill Township, Upland, and Jonesboro</p> <p>Historical Societies dedicated to Grant County, Gas City, and Jonesboro, as well as to Indiana Motorcycle Preservation</p> <p>Places James Dean Museum, History Center at the Marion Public Library, Woodside Frank Loyd Wright House, Hostess House, Obadiah Jones Cabin, Samuel Plato buildings, Lustron Homes, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers</p> <p>Festivals dedicated to James Dean, Old Settlers Days, Popcorn, Cumberland Covered Bridge, Congruence Art & Music</p> <p>Events Fly/In Cruise/In, Jonesboro River Rally, Mississinewa 1812 Reenactment, Ducktail Run</p> <p>Trails for Quilts, Garfield statues, and James Dean.</p> <p>Other Places & Spaces Cardinal Greenway, Sweetser Switch Trail, parks, and historic districts</p>
29	Informal Group	
27	Art in Non-Art Spaces	
19	Public Art + 2 Art Trails	
7	Organizations	
97	Culture	
31	History & Heritage	
23	Events & Traditions	
29	Parks & Trails	
14	Funders, Friends & Support Organizations	
31	Misc.	
29	Civic Assets	
2	Other Opportunities	

In addition to the highlights presented here. The **Full Inventory** with individual asset details is available as well

[Inventory sheets for each county](#)

[Interactive regional map](#)

County Composition

Overview	2020 #	Co. Rank
Population	66,674	#25
Square Miles	414	
Population / Sq Mi	160	
% of Co.		
City Marion (seat)	28,310	43%
City Gas City	6,157	9%
City Upland	3,821	6%
Cities & Towns < 3,500 (line for SEA1 purposes)		
Town Fairmount	2,682	4%
Town Jonesboro	1,516	2%
Town Swayzee	918	1%
Town Van Buren	790	1%
Town Total for 3 Towns <500 *	1,007	2%
Everywhere Else	21,510	32%

Composition	2024 %	Co. Rank
Preschool 0-4	5	#26
School Age 5-17	16	#27
College Age 18-24	13	#18
Young Adult 24-44	22	#27
Older Adult 45-64	24	#27
Seniors 65+	20	#25
Median Age	39	

Dynamics	2023	Co. Rank
Population Growth (2020-2024)	-0.3 %	
Median <i>Household</i> Income	\$53,872	#89
Median <i>Per Capita</i> Income	\$49,748	#74
Poverty Rate	20%	#2

Notable

- Population slightly declining and with nearly half (44%) age 45+ despite university
- One the lowest median incomes in the state ranking at 89th
- Indiana's 2nd highest childhood poverty rate
- 68% of the population lives outside incorporated cities/towns

Source: Stats Indiana (2020 = U.S. Census) (fractions rounded to full digit)

* Fowlerton, Matthews, and Converse (partial, Miami Co.)



Gas City in Boom Days by William Adelbert Dolwick, Gas City Post Office

grant county

Key Influences

Resources to leverage, dynamics poising the county for growth, and areas to address include:

Catalytic Investments

\$35,000,000	READI 2.0 Regional Award to Forge ECI <i>Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, & Wayne</i>
\$30,000,000	Lilly Endowment Inc. College & Community Collaboration <i>Grant to Taylor University for its Main Street Mile initiative</i>
\$24,300,000	Lilly Endowment Inc. College & Community Collaboration <i>Grant to Indiana Wesleyan University for the 29 Project</i>
\$ 1,500,000	Lilly Endowment Inc. GIFT VIII <i>Matching grant to build assets and support charitable activities</i>

READI Projects with Connection to Arts & Culture Plan Goals

1.0		2.0	
\$ 2,750,000	Gas City Performing Arts Center	\$ 1,263,000	Gas City YMCA
\$ 100,000	Kennedy Art Center		

See full list of READI projects in Appendix, pages 137-138.

The following came from community input at the in-person visioning session.

Momentum Pushes

- [Marion Arts Commission](#) leadership and [plans](#)
- 2018 Grant County by Choice plan implementation
- Riverfront District and DORA approvals
- Downtown revitalization efforts + Opportunity for downtown residency
- Opportunity to create clear growth measures for the arts plan
- Lilly Endowment Inc. funding has deepened efforts

Challenging Pulls

- Current narrative (not pride and value) + Perception downtown Marion unsafe
- Strengthen branding, marketing, and promotion
- History and buildings preservation (inc. public policy, incentives, and training)
- Communication across sectors and the county



Cumberland Covered Bridge



Taylor University Theatre, Upland



Ole Miss Singers at Obadiah Jones Cabin, Jonesboro



The Davis House / Woodside, Frank Lloyd Wright, Marion (Photo by davelandweb.com)

HENRY COUNTY

Arts & Culture Profile

Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana

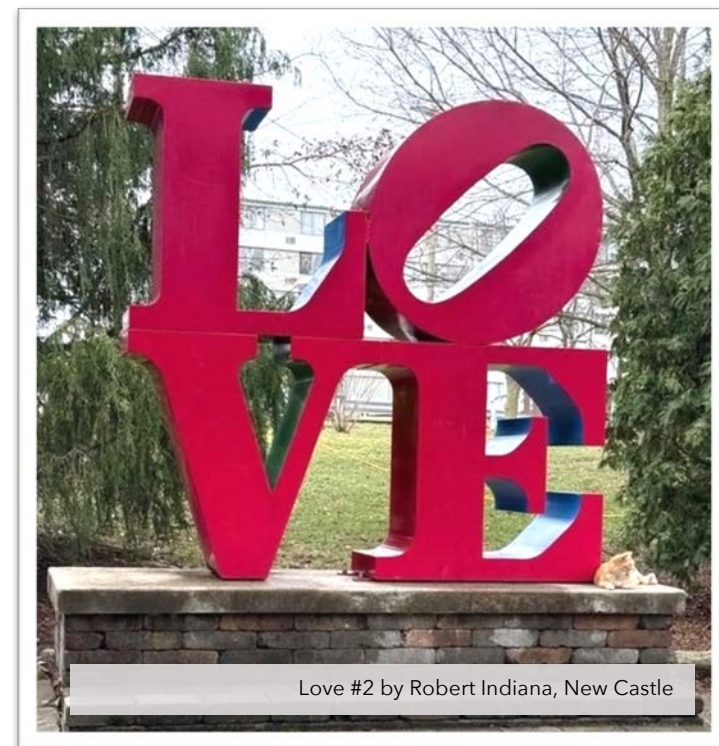
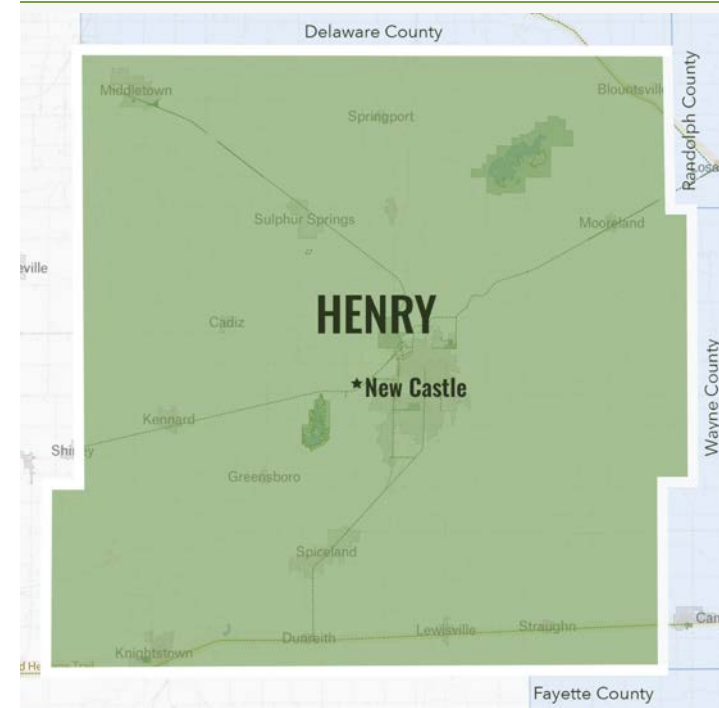
Vision, asset, and opportunity highlights to guide county efforts – shaped by local voices and research. 2025 – 2035

Arts & Culture Identity

Henry County, with a population of about 50,000, is shaped by innovation, the arts, and basketball. It is the birthplace of aviation pioneer Wilbur Wright, whose farmhouse and museum near Millville preserve his early life and legacy. The county also claims **Robert Indiana, the internationally known artist behind the iconic LOVE sculpture**, with one of two replicas installed at New Castle’s Arts Park. Basketball is central to Henry County’s identity. New Castle is home to the world’s largest high school fieldhouse and the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame, while **Knightstown’s Hoosier Gym, made famous in the film Hoosiers**, attracts visitors nationwide. Other notable aspects of its identity and history include being the birthplace of the American Beauty rose, significant contributions to early piano manufacturing, and being the site of the Maxwell automobile factory, once the largest of its kind in the nation.

County residents and visitors can enjoy a **range of quality-of-life opportunities**. Summit Lake State Park, multiple trails, and other green spaces provide recreation and connection to nature, while historic sites like the County Courthouse, the Knightstown Historic District, and the Guyer Opera House highlight the county’s cultural heritage.

Henry County’s arts scene is anchored by the Arts Association of Henry County in New Castle and the historic Guyer Opera House in Lewisville, both offering programs and opportunities for artists and performers. Schools, libraries, and community groups strengthen this ecosystem through award winning choral and theater programs, while more than 25 annual festivals—including Artoberfest, the Knightstown Fall Festival, and the Moorland Free Fair—celebrate local culture and traditions. Cultural assets span from the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame, Hoosier



Love #2 by Robert Indiana, New Castle

henry county

Gym, and local museums to 3 historic districts and 11 sites on the National Register of Historic Places, libraries, and community spaces like the Arts Park & Pavilion.

A **growing creative industry** includes studios, artisans, musicians, and designers, while outdoor destinations such as the Wilbur Wright Trail, Honey Creek Trail, and Summit Lake State Park connect arts, heritage, and recreation – making Henry County’s cultural profile both broad and dynamic. Together, these assets reflect a county that values both its history and its future livability.

What You Want for the Future *c. 2035*

Content from Community Visioning Recap

The regional plan is intended to be implemented on the county and regional levels elevating both while maintaining community voices and local authenticity. What follows emerged from the local vision session. It is here as a start in adapting the plan to Henry County’s needs.

1. **Arts & Culture as Quality of Place Driver**
The transformation of Henry County includes improved venues, public art, expanded arts festivals, and a greater emphasis on integrating arts into everyday spaces (e.g., trails, gateways, and tourism).
2. **Youth Engagement & Retention**
Investing in keeping and retaining young talent by providing arts-related opportunities for youth and young adults, embedding them in planning and leadership roles, and offering spaces and events that reflect their interests.
3. **Marketing, Promotion & Destination Development**
A centralized and strategic approach to market the County as an arts and culture destination, with strong branding, global outreach, and well-promoted activities.
4. **Diversity in Arts, Culture & Business**
Supporting minority-owned businesses, culinary and cultural festivals, and diverse music and performance opportunities that reflect the interests of different generational and cultural communities.
5. **Collaboration & Infrastructure for Growth**
Strengthening community, philanthropic, and cross-sector partnerships, creating a nonprofit network, offering technical training for creative businesses, and ensuring physical and financial accessibility to the arts.



Middletown Historical Society



Bluegrass at Baker Park, New Castle



Robin McBride Scott, Weaving Demonstration

What You Have

Highlights from the County Cultural Asset Inventory

Henry County has strong arts and culture assets from which to draw upon.

#	Overview by Category	Select Arts & Culture Assets
66	Arts	
30	Artists & Creative Business	
3	Informal Group	
11	Art in Non-Art Spaces	
19	Public Art	
3	Organizations	
84	Culture	
23	History & Heritage	
28	Events & Traditions	
22	Parks & Trails	
11	Funders, Friends & Support Organizations	
26	Misc.	
18	Civic Assets	
8	Other Opportunities	
	In addition to the highlights presented here. The Full Inventory with individual asset details is available as well Inventory sheets for each county Interactive regional map	<p>Organizations Arts Association of Henry County, Guyer Opera House, Monarch Filmcraft, Lightkeepers of Henry County</p> <p>Artists & Creative Businesses The Castle Theater, Let's Fuse that Glass, 5 After 5, Monkey Jacks Emporium, Raintree Studio, Moncrieff Leathers, musicians, literary artists, designers, photographers, frame shops, dance studio, jewelers, etc.</p> <p>Public Libraries New Castle-Henry County Public Library, Spiceland Public Library, Middletown Fall Creek Township Public Library, and Knightstown Public Library</p> <p>Historical Societies dedicated to Henry County, Mooreland, Middletown Fall Creek</p> <p>Places Historic Knightstown Museum, Henry County Veterans Museum, Wilbur Wright Museum, The Hoosier Gym, Hickory Bus, and 3 historic districts</p> <p>Festivals dedicated to New Castle-Henry County Renaissance Festival, Knightstown Fall Festival, Moorland Free Fair, Artoberfest, Sulphur Springs Community Days & Mud Bog</p> <p>Trails Wilbur Wright Trail, Honey Creek Trail, Woolly Bear Parkway Trail</p> <p>Other Places & Spaces Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame, Arts Park & Pavillion, Garden of Memories, Summit Lake State Park, Saddle Club, Speedway, Redtail Conservancy's public woods, and Farmer's Markets</p>

County Composition

Overview			Composition			Dynamics		
	2020 #	Co. Rank		2024 %	Co. Rank		2023	Co. Rank
Population	48,914	#29	Preschool	0-4	5 #39	Population Growth (2020-2024)	0.3 %	
Square Miles	392		School Age	5-17	15 #37	Median <i>Household</i> Income	\$62,048	#64
Population / Sq Mi	125		College Age	18-24	8 #33	Median <i>Per Capita</i> Income	\$48,320	#81
		% of Co.	Young Adult	24-44	25 #28			
City New Castle (seat)	17,382	35%	Older Adult	45-64	27 #29	Poverty Rate	13%	#32
Cities & Towns < 3,500 (line for SEA1 purposes)			Seniors	65+	20 #29			
Middletown	2,270	5%	Median Age		42			
Town Knightstown	2,158	4%						
Town Spiceland	963	2%						
Town Total for 12 Towns <500 *	2,951	6%						
Everywhere Else	23,190	47%						

Notable

- Aging but steady population
- Better than average household income and poverty rates for the state
- Population split between incorporated and non-incorporated places

Source: Stats Indiana (2020 = U.S. Census) (fractions rounded to full digit)

* Blountsville, Cadiz, Dunreith, Greensboro, Kennard, Lewisville, Mooreland, Mount Summit, Shirley (partial, Hancock Co.), Springport, Straughn, and Sulphur Springs

henry county



Knightstown Makers Market

Key Influences

Resources to leverage and areas to address include:

Catalytic Investments	
\$35,000,000	READI 2.0 Regional Award to Forge ECI <i>Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, & Wayne</i>
\$ 2,000,000	Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs <i>PreservINg Main Street Grant to New Castle</i>
\$ 40,000	Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs <i>Downtown revitalization planning grant awarded to Middletown</i>

READI Projects with Connection to Arts & Culture Plan Goals			
1.0		2.0	
\$ 245,000	Wilbur Wright Trail Phase 3	\$ 500,000	Henry County 4-H Center
\$ 190,000	Knightstown Library Expansion		
\$ 3,625	Henry County YMCA		

See full list of READI projects in Appendix, pages 137-138.

The following came from community input at the in-person visioning session.

- | Momentum Pushes |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity – events, festivals, Main Street, Arts Park, etc. • Food & Beverage Tax as well as Downtown revitalization planning efforts • Multiple trail expansions planned |

- | Challenging Pulls |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospital funding for the arts • Safe, welcoming youth/young adult activities reflect interests, leadership opportunities • Centralized way to market and promote myriad activities |



Evening Mail Mural by Raymond L Morris



Hoosier Gym Mural, Knightstown



Henry County Art Center



Youth Program at Guyer Opera House, Lewisville

JAY COUNTY

Arts & Culture Profile

Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana

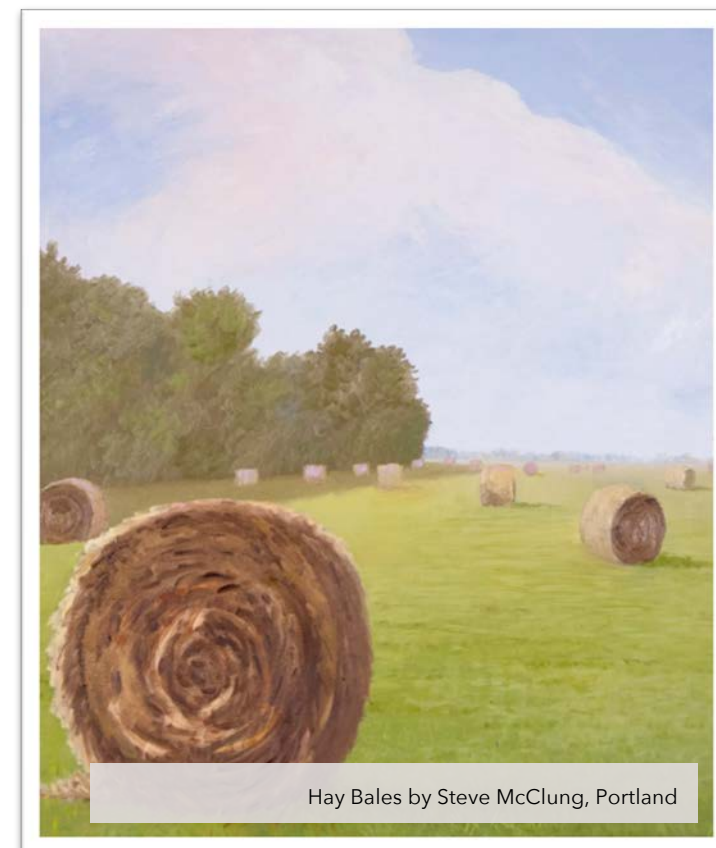
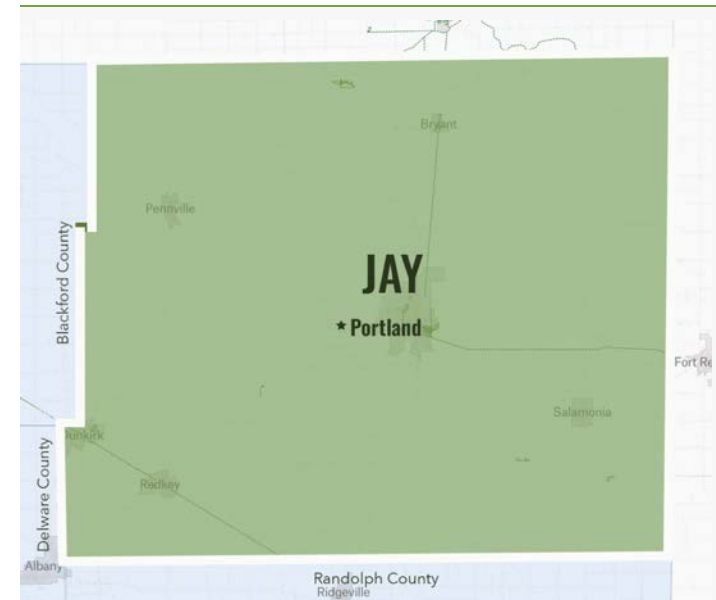
Vision, asset, and opportunity highlights to guide county efforts – shaped by local voices and research. 2025 – 2035

Arts & Culture Identity

Jay County, home to just over 20,000 residents and spanning approximately 52 people per square mile, reflects its rural heritage and industrious spirit. The county's identity emerged early through a natural gas boom in the late 1800s – a discovery that spurred rapid growth, fueled glass factories in places like Dunkirk (known as the **"Glass Capital of Indiana"**), and helped shift the local economy from purely agricultural to increasingly industrial.

"Advancing creative economy embedded in local history, heritage, and people" emerged as a guidepost early in the engagement process revealing a core strength of drive and ambition continuously reemphasized through ongoing input. Anchored in committed leaders of all levels, from all communities, each have the drive to create lasting cultural, community, and economic impact for their communities and county. This vision is reflected in creative entrepreneurs, downtown revitalization efforts, and signature festivals including the Tri-State Antique Gas Engine & Tractor Show (one of the nation's largest) and the annual Jay County Heritage Festival.

Jay County's arts scene is anchored by Arts Place, the county's regional arts council, alongside the Jay County Civic Theatre and Harmony Players. Informal arts groups and arts in non-traditional spaces broaden opportunities for residents to engage in creative activities across the county. **Festivals remain a central feature**, with more than two dozen annual events – three-quarters of which are festivals – highlighting traditions such as the Fiber Arts Festival, Dunkirk Glass Days, and the Great Lakes Nation Powwow.



Hay Bales by Steve McClung, Portland

The creative sector is growing, with at least 17 local artists and businesses spanning quilt-making, jewelry, design, fiber arts, and blacksmithing.

Community life is supported by civic assets, parks, and trails such as the Gas Boom Trail, as well as arts venues and gathering spaces like the Hall-Moser Theatre, Webster Depot Park, and the Jay County Fairgrounds. Together, **assets showcase a county where history, tradition, and creativity are closely connected**, and a prime opportunity to catalyze that connection into its next phase of growth and development.

Goals & Strategies from Jay County's Plan

GOAL 1 CREATIVE PLACEMAKING DOWNTOWN.

Jay County's downtowns are thriving – revitalized through arts initiatives, beautification, and programming.

- Beautify all the “small” stuff for civic pride and engagement.
- Activate with public art, partnerships, events, and opportunities to create.
- Connect activities, places, and people.

GOAL 2 CREATIVE ECONOMY & ENTREPRENEURS

All benefit from a thriving creative economy with increasing numbers of successful creative entrepreneurs and groups.

- Build support systems and training opportunities.
- Create spaces for creatives.

GOAL 3 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN & THROUGH THE ARTS

Jay County's youth are thriving through the arts and civic participation.

- Increase opportunities for youth arts engagement.
- Increase youth access to arts.
- Increase youth stake in the arts.

GOAL 4 CULTURAL IDENTITY & HERITAGE

Jay County's identity has been strengthened through the arts, history, and community e

- Reimagine and strengthen signature festival traditions.
- Lean into Jay County's history and heritage.

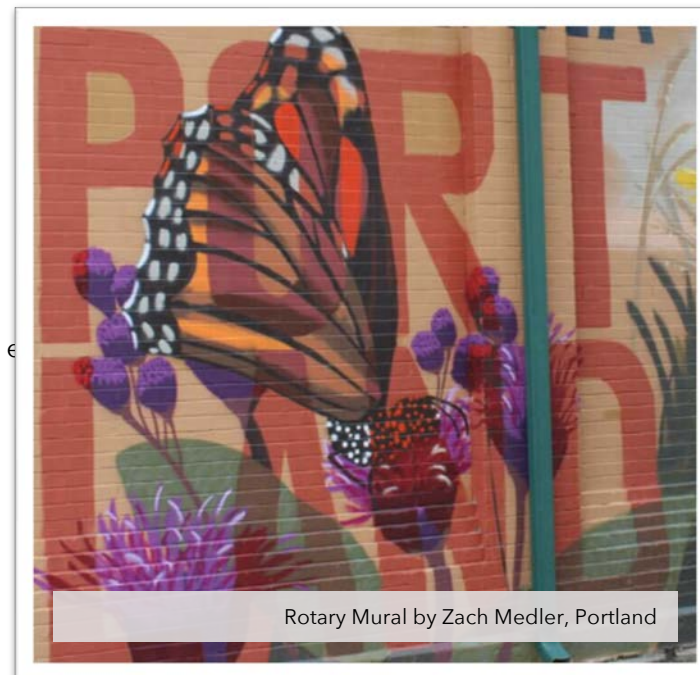
Jay County Arts & Culture Master Plan

Jay County was part of another regional arts and cultural planning project in 2024-2025. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts through their [Our Town](#) grant and fiscally managed by [Arts Place, Inc.](#), that work included Blackford and Jay Counties in Indiana and Auglaize County in Ohio and sought to:

“Provide opportunities for the arts to be integrated into the fabric of community life – Strengthening Communities.”

The resulting plan has been endorsed by the county and is being implemented under the collaborative leadership of Arts Place and Purdue Extension.

Facilitated by the same consultant team, using a similar planning process the work fed seamlessly into the larger, East Central Indiana regional Arts & Cultural Strategy.



Rotary Mural by Zach Medler, Portland

GOAL 5 SUSTAINED COMMITMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

Arts initiatives and programming are sustained through collaboration, leadership, and long-term funding.

- Increase support for arts and culture
- Solidify long-term investment pathways for arts and culture.
- Include arts elements and arts stakeholders when implementing related existing plan strategies.

What You Have

Highlights from the County Cultural Asset Inventory

Jay County has strong arts and culture assets from which to draw upon.

jay county

#	Overview by Category	Select Arts & Culture Assets
53	Arts	
17	Artists & Creative Business	
3	Informal Group	
15	Art in Non-Art Spaces	
14	Public Art	
4	Organizations	
72	Culture	
19	History & Heritage	
27	Events & Traditions	
10	Parks & Trails	
16	Funders, Friends & Support Organizations	
25	Misc.	
9	Civic Assets	
16	Other Opportunities	
	In addition to the highlights presented here. The Full Inventory with individual asset details is available as well	
	Inventory sheets for each county	
	Interactive regional map	
		<p>Organizations Arts Place, Harmony Players, The Glass Museum, Jay County Civic Theatre, Harmony Players</p> <p>Artists & Creative Businesses Reclaiming Design, Grandma-N-Me Quiltin, Jay County Woodcarvers, Redkey Blacksmiths, The Alcove Artists, Pennville Custom Cabinetry, 5 photographers, painters, musicians, jewelers, traditional artists</p> <p>Public Libraries in Pennville, Dunkirk, and Jay</p> <p>Historical Societies dedicated Jay County, Dunkirk, and Redkey</p> <p>Places Museum of the Soldier, Underground Railroad/Pioneer Home, Jay County Historical Museum, 6 sites on the National Register, and 2 historic districts</p> <p>Festivals dedicated to Fiber Arts. Great Lakes Nation Powwow, Dunkirk Glass Days</p> <p>Other Places & Spaces Hall-Moser Theatre, Gas Boom Trail, Bowstring Truss Bridge, formal and informal galleries, Jay County Fairgrounds, Loblolly Marsh Wetland Preserve</p>

County Composition

Overview	2020 #	Co. Rank
Population	20,478	#71
Square Miles	384	
Population / Sq Mi	53	
% of Co.		
City Portland (seat)	6,320	31%
Cities & Towns < 3,500 (line for SEA1 purposes)		
City Dunkirk (partial, Blackford)	1,968	10%
Town Redkey	1,100	5%
Town Pennville	621	3%
Town Bryant	239	1%
Town Salamonia	151	1%
Everywhere Else	10,079	49%

Source: Stats Indiana (2020 = U.S. Census)
(fractions rounded to full digit)

Composition	2024 %	Co. Rank
Preschool 0-4	7	#62
School Age 5-17	19	#68
College Age 18-24	8	#69
Young Adult 24-44	23	#73
Older Adult 45-64	25	#74
Seniors 65+	19	#76
Median Age	39	

Dynamics	2023	Co. Rank
Population Growth (2020-2024)	-1.5 %	
Median <i>Household</i> Income	\$61,030	#70
Median <i>Per Capita</i> Income	\$53,566	#48
Poverty Rate	13%	#23

Notable

- Declining population
- Median household income lower than the state average ranking at 70th
- 51% of the population lives outside incorporated cities/towns



Arts Place Jay Campus, Portland

Key Influences

Resources to leverage, dynamics poising the county for growth, and areas to address include:

Catalytic Investments	
\$35,000,000	READI 2.0 Regional Award to Forge ECI <i>Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, & Wayne</i>
\$ 3,900,000	Jay County Council and Board of Commissioners <i>Approved investment to expand broadband access (various sources)</i>
\$ 1,250,000	Indiana Department of Transportation <i>Community Crossings grants</i>

READI Projects with Connection to Arts & Culture Plan Goals			
1.0		2.0	
\$ 2,750,000	Gas City Performing Arts	\$ 240,000	Pennville Community Park Revitalization
\$ 9,000	Salamonia Schoolhouse & Park Project		

See full list of READI projects in Appendix, pages 137-138.

The following came from community input at the in-person visioning session.

Momentum Pushes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County part of OCRA HELP Cohort 1 Dedicated to downtown revitalization Recently adopted County Arts & Culture plan Committed leaderships Groundswell of successful efforts (placemaking, façade improvement, beautification projects) 	
Challenging Pulls	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need people to belief in arts/its importance Strengthen communication and marketing Affordable space for artists to make and sell their work 	



Education program at Redkey Blacksmiths



Jay County Civic Theatre, Portland

Jay County



Demonstration at Dunkirk Glass Days

RANDOLPH COUNTY

Arts & Culture Profile

Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana

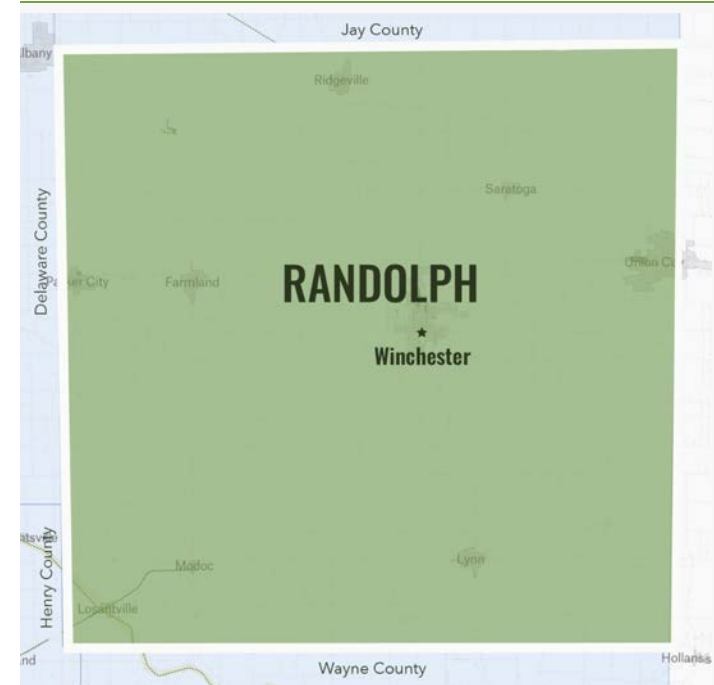
Vision, asset, and opportunity highlights to guide county efforts – shaped by local voices and research. 2025 – 2035

Arts & Culture Identity

Bordering the state of Ohio, Randolph County is home to just under 25,000 residents. Established in 1818, the county is rooted in Quaker settlement and abolitionist activism and played a significant role in the Underground Railroad, with sites such as the **Union Literary Institute—founded in 1846 as one of Indiana’s first integrated schools**—symbolizing its values of education and equality. Amish communities also contribute to the county’s cultural fabric, preserving traditions of craftsmanship, agriculture, and faith. The discovery of oil and natural gas in the late 19th century fueled industrial growth, with **Winchester emerging as a glass-manufacturing center and Union City as a hub for auto parts production**. Today, Randolph County continues to balance heritage and innovation, with its small towns revitalizing through historic preservation, community festivals, and a growing network of arts and cultural initiatives that build upon its long legacy of creativity and craftsmanship.

Randolph County’s **arts and cultural landscape is defined by its deep historic roots and creative energy**. The county is home to 4 historic districts and 9 sites on the National Register of Historic Places, alongside preservation efforts that honor its architectural and community heritage. A thriving public art presence includes 67 documented works and the impressive Quilt Barn Trail, where 44 murals showcase local identity across the rural landscape.

Cultural vitality is growing through anchor organizations and grass roots arts alliances including the Randolph County Art Association, Randy Players Little Theater, and Start with Art, while festivals like the Union City Arts Festival and Aloha International Steel Guitar Festival bring together music, performance, and community



pride. Arts and historic assets combined with local enthusiasm and a growing creative industry - from artisan glass and pottery to chocolatiers, designers, and musicians – reveal **a county poised for growth.**

What You Want for the Future *c. 2035*

Content from Community Visioning Recap

The regional plan is intended to be implemented on the county and regional levels elevating both while maintaining community voices and local authenticity. What follows emerged from the local vision session. It is here as a start in adapting the plan to Randolph County's needs.

1. Arts, Heritage, & Technology Activate Place

Arts and culture animate historic sites and public spaces through storytelling, theatrical performances, murals, and digital enhancements like augmented reality and projections—blending tradition with innovation to make history engaging and relevant.

2. Countywide Access to Arts Infrastructure

New and expanded arts facilities—such as galleries, studios, mobile units, and multi-use venues—ensure every community in Randolph County can access, create, and experience the arts close to home.

3. Youth Engagement & Creative Attraction

Youth are actively engaged through music, theatre, and arts programs that build confidence and skills, while a vibrant, supportive arts environment helps attract and retain youth, artists, and creative entrepreneurs.

4. Signature Attractions & Regional Connectivity

Each community features a fun, distinctive arts or culture draw—supported by improved transportation, trails, and collaborative programming—that strengthens regional identity and encourages exploration across the county.

5. Arts as a Driver of Wellbeing & Belonging

The arts foster inclusion, civic pride, and mental wellness by supporting public engagement, intergenerational connection, and creative expression—making Randolph County a more vibrant and welcoming place to live.



The Randy Players at the Little Theatre, Union City



To Be Honest, Inc, Mongo



Boettger Pottery, Union City

What You Have

Highlights from the County Cultural Asset Inventory

Randolph County has strong arts and culture assets from which to draw upon.

#	Overview by Category	Select Arts & Culture Assets
107	Arts	
23	Artists & Creative Business	<p>Organizations Randolph County Art Association, Start with Art, Randy Players – Little Theater, Randolph County Area Community Theater, To Be Honest, Arts in Union City Alliance, Union City Arts, Music & Entertainment, Blue Steel Blues Society</p> <p>Artists & Creative Businesses Timber Creations, Bee Wings & Fuzzy Things, Gallery 112, Cat Tails Art Glass Studio, Singing Bridge Pottery, The Goodrich Mill, photography studios, dance, pottery, designers, painters, jewelers</p> <p>Public Libraries in Farmland, Ridgeville, Union City, Washington Township, and Winchester</p> <p>Historical Societies dedicated to Randolph County, Union City, Farmland, and Saving the Old Properties</p> <p>Places Randolph Co Historical Museum, Union City Depot, Stone Mansion, Randolph County Infirmary, Windsor Mound, Carnegie Library, 4 historic districts, 9 sites on the National Register</p> <p>Festivals Union City Arts Festival, Aloha International Steel Guitar Festival, Stateline Heritage Days, Winchester Main Street Festival</p> <p>Other Places & Spaces Cardinal Greenway, Randolph County Quilt Trail, Goodrich Park, Modoc Gardens, Goodrich Park Amphitheatre, Winchester Speedway</p>
1	Informal Group	
9	Art in Non-Art Spaces	
67	Public Art including Quilt Trail	
7	Organizations	
65	Culture	
16	History & Heritage	
12	Events & Traditions	
24	Parks & Trails	
13	Funders, Friends & Support Organizations	
27	Misc.	
23	Civic Assets	
4	Other Opportunities	
	<p>In addition to the highlights presented here. The Full Inventory with individual asset details is available as well Inventory sheets for each county Interactive regional map</p>	

County Composition

Overview	2020 #	Co. Rank
Population	24,502	#63
Square Miles	452	
Population / Sq Mi	54	
% of Co.		
City Winchester (seat)	4,843	20%
Cities & Towns < 3,500 (line for SEA1 purposes)		
City Union City	3,454	14%
Town Parker City	1,278	5%
Town Farmland	1,270	5%
Town Lynn	954	4%
Town Ridgeville	688	3%
Town Total for 4 Towns <500 *	792	5%
Everywhere Else	11,223	46%

Composition	2024 %	Co. Rank
Preschool 0-4	6	#60
School Age 5-17	17	#64
College Age 18-24	7	#64
Young Adult 24-44	23	#64
Older Adult 45-64	26	#63
Seniors 65+	21	#61
Median Age	43	

Dynamics	2023	Co. Rank
Population Growth (2020-2024)	-0.7 %	
Median <i>Household</i> Income	\$58,785	#83
Median <i>Per Capita</i> Income	\$58,725	#43
Poverty Rate	15%	#15

Notable

- Declining population
- Nearly half (47%) of the population is age 45+
- Median household income ranks 83rd in state
- 54% of the population lives outside incorporated cities/towns

Source: Stats Indiana (2020 = U.S. Census) (fractions rounded to full digit)

* Albany, Losantville, Modoc, and Saratoga

randolph county



Start with Art, Winchester

Key Influences

Resources to leverage, dynamics poised the county for growth, and areas to address include:

Catalytic Investments

\$35,000,000	READI 2.0 Regional Award to Forge ECI <i>Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, & Wayne</i>
\$ 50,000	Lilly Endowment Inc. GIFT VIII <i>Community Planning Grant</i>

READI Projects with Connection to Arts & Culture Plan Goals

1.0		2.0	
\$ 1,375,000	Vision Corner Learning Center	\$ 232,000	Second Welding Lab at Winchester Community High School
\$ 250,000	Randolph County 4-H Improvements		

See full list of READI projects in Appendix, pages 137-138.

The following came from community input at the in-person visioning session.

Momentum Pushes

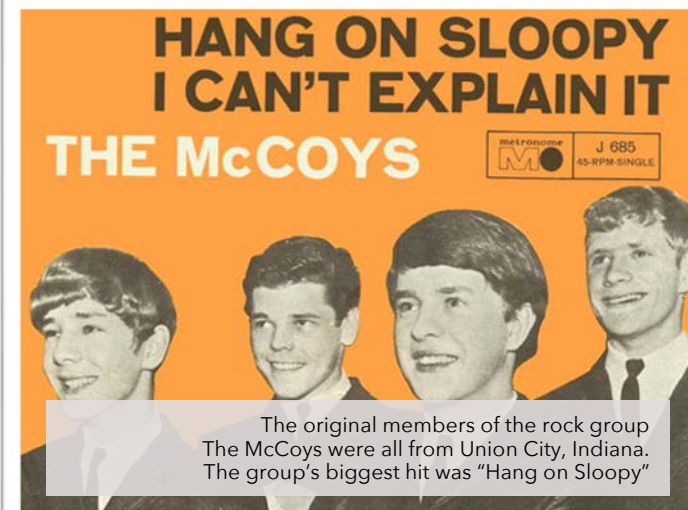
- Forum of Funders focused on public art.
- Ohio/Indiana Stateline opportunity to amplify/highlight
- Randolph County Cultivating Community Initiative actively in progress

Challenging Pulls

- Many small groups with the same type of goals makes resources spread thin and loss of momentum
- Many people do not venture out
- County mental health and opioid use crisis (87/92 highest overdose rate in state)



Mural by Jaylei Osting



The original members of the rock group The McCOYS were all from Union City, Indiana. The group's biggest hit was "Hang on Sloopy"



New Deal Mural, Union City Post Office

randolph county



Blue Steel Blues Society, Union Mills

WAYNE COUNTY

Arts & Culture Profile

Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana

Vision, asset, and opportunity highlights to guide county efforts – shaped by local voices and research. 2025 – 2035

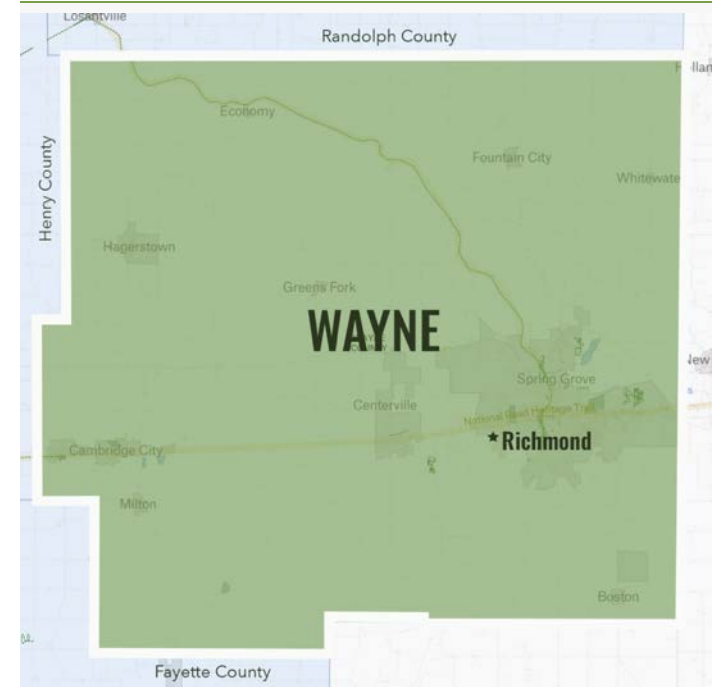
Arts & Culture Identity

With a population of just over 66,000, Wayne County has **long been a place where industry, education (the county has five higher education institutions),** and social progress intersect. Richmond, a 19th century hub for manufacturing, is recognized as the **'birthplace of recorded jazz'** and earned renown for its rich musical heritage – most notably through Starr Piano Company and Gennett Records, which recorded early jazz and blues legends including Louis Armstrong, Hoagy Carmichael, and Jelly Roll Morton.

The county's Quaker roots established a legacy of abolitionist activity, including significant roles in the Underground Railroad, shaping a cultural identity rooted in freedom, education, and civic responsibility. It was home to Levi and Catharine Coffin whose work fighting against slavery earned national recognition. Earlham College, a Quaker-founded liberal arts institution, still influences the intellectual and cultural life of the region.

Wayne County hosts **a vibrant arts and cultural scene, anchored by an impressive public art collection** of over 141 assets. Central are dedicated; long-standing arts organizations driven to serve and build new audiences across the county and region. The Richmond Art Museum, the nation's only independent art museum housed in a public high school, joins the Symphony and Jazz Orchestras, Civic Theater, Shakespeare Festival, a growing community of artists and creative businesses, and Earlham College which serves as both arts provider and educator.

Cultural attractions abound: The Reid Center doubles as both music venue and Tiffany Glass Studio showcase; the Levi and Catharine Coffin State Historic Site highlight the county's historic significance; and 38 sites on the National Register sites, Model T Museum, and Overbeck Museum add further depth. Signature festivals like Canal Days and creativity while outdoor



The Jazz Man by Ivan Roque, Richmond

assets like the National Road Heritage Trail, Cardinal Greenway, Hayes Arboretum, and Cope Environmental Center offer rich recreational experiences. With revitalization efforts underway, Wayne is poised for economic development and population growth. **Centering arts, culture, and legacy would further drive these efforts alongside tourism from local to national.**

What You Want for the Future c. 2035

Content from Community Visioning Recap

The regional plan is intended to be implemented on the county and regional levels elevating both while maintaining community voices and local authenticity. What follows emerged from the local vision session. It is here as a start in adapting the plan to Wayne County's needs.

1. Vibrant, Walkable Downtowns

Downtowns are revitalized, clean, and walkable with preserved historic architecture, thriving businesses, public art, and eliminated blight to create attractive and active community hubs.

2. Increased Public Engagement Across All Ages

A strong culture of public participation emerges through a centralized event platform, youth involvement in planning, better feedback loops, and inclusive opportunities for residents of all ages.

3. Strong Arts Infrastructure & Artist Support

An arts council is established to align and strengthen the arts ecosystem, supported by vibrant studio centers, collaborative spaces, affordable studios, artist support networks, and grants for emerging creators.

4. Cross-Sector Collaboration & Capacity Building

Arts, culture, education, and community organizations work together to pool resources, eliminate duplication, support leadership, and ensure sustainable growth through coordinated, bottom-up development.

5. Regional Destination for Arts, Culture, & Heritage

Wayne County becomes a regional arts and tourism hub with restored historic districts like the Starr District, expanded trails and wayfinding, dynamic museum experiences, a thriving creative sector, and strong arts education that ties past, present, and future together.



Historic District and Antique Trail, Centerville



Overbeck Pottery Mural by Pamela Bliss, Cambridge City




Levi Coffin House, Fountain City

What You Have

Highlights from the County Cultural Asset Inventory

Wayne County has strong arts and culture assets from which to draw upon.

#	Overview by Category	Select Arts & Culture Assets
192	Arts	
44	Artists & Creative Business	
3	Informal Groups	
17	Art in Non-Art Spaces	
119	Public Art + Quilt Trail	
9	Organizations	
117	Culture	
54	History & Heritage	
20	Events & Traditions	
24	Parks & Trails	
19	Funders, Friends & Support Organizations	
31	Misc.	
29	Civic Assets	
2	Other Opportunities	
	<p>In addition to the highlights presented here, The Full Inventory with individual asset details is available as well Inventory sheets for each county Interactive regional map</p> 	<p>Organizations Richmond Art Museum, Richmond Symphony Orchestra, Richmond Jazz Orchestra, Richmond Civic Theater, and Richmond Shakespeare Festival, Overbeck Pottery Museum</p> <p>Artists & Creative Businesses Whitewater Valley Fiber Arts Guild, Ply Creative, Art Restoration Technique, Sky & Earth Studio, Oblivion Cinema & Arts, India Kruse Griffin, arts faculty at Earlham College & IU East, dance studios, photography studios, visual artists, designers, writers, performers</p> <p>Public Libraries in Cambridge City, Centerville, Dublin, Hagerstown, Richmond</p> <p>Historical Societies dedicated to Wayne County, Black Legacy, Clay Township, and Women’s History, Overbeck House, Historic Hagerstown Museum & Arts Place, Mansion House Museum, Clay Township Historical Society, Women’s History Club, Starr-Gennett Building, 29 sites on the National Register of Historic Places</p> <p>Places The Reid Center, Model T Museum, Wilbur Wright Birthplace, Levi & Catharine Coffin State Historic Site, Hagerstown Museum & Arts Place, Starr-Gennett Building, and 29 sites on the National Register</p> <p>Festivals dedicated to heritage - Canal, Archway, and Levi Coffin, and Jubilee Days, and arts - Meltdown Winter Ice Festival, Potterypalooza, Wayne County Mural Festival, Gennett Records Walk of Fame Festival</p> <p>Trails 6 tourism trails and 8 recreational trails including the Whitewater Valley Gorge Park & Trail and the Cardinal Greenway</p> <p>Other Places & Spaces Civic Hall Performing Arts Center, Cope Environmental Center, Hayes Arboretum, Red Tail Conservancy, Swoveland Preserve</p>

County Composition

Overview	2020 #	Co. Rank
Population	66,553	#26
Square Miles	402	
Population / Sq Mi	165	
% of Co.		
City Richmond (seat)	35,720	54%
Cities & Towns < 3,500 (line for SEA1 purposes)		
Town Centerville	2,748	4%
Town Cambridge City	1,751	3%
Town Hagerstown	1,681	3%
Town Fountain City	714	1%
Town Dublin	679	1%
Town Total for 8 Towns <500 *	1,878	3%
Everywhere Else	21,382	32%

Composition	2024 %	Co. Rank
Preschool 0-4	6	#25
School Age 5-17	17	#26
College Age 18-24	9	#25
Young Adult 24-44	24	#26
Older Adult 45-64	25	#26
Seniors 65+	20	#24
Median Age	41	

Dynamics	2023	Co. Rank
Population Growth (2020-2024)	-0.2%	#74
Median <i>Household</i> Income	\$52,956	#90
Median <i>Per Capita</i> Income	\$52,493	#59
Poverty Rate	17%	#6

Notable

- Declining population with median age slightly above the state
- Median household income ranks 90th in state
- 17% poverty rate ranks 6th in the state
- 68% of the population lives outside incorporated cities/towns

Source: Stats Indiana (2020 = U.S. Census) (fractions rounded to full digit)

* Boston, East Germantown, Economy, Greens Fork, Milton, Mount Auburn, Spring Grove, and Whitewater



Richmond Symphony Orchestra

Key Influences

Resources to leverage, dynamics poising the county for growth, and areas to address include:

Catalytic Investments	
\$35,000,000	READI 2.0 Regional Award to Forge ECI <i>Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, & Wayne</i>
\$25,000,000	Lilly Endowment Inc. College & Community Collaboration <i>Grant to Earlham College to fund the "Revitalize Richmond" initiative</i>
\$ 5,000,000	Lilly Endowment Inc. GIFT VIII <i>Award to advance quality of life projects</i>

READI Projects with Connection to Arts & Culture Plan Goals			
1.0		2.0	
--	None	\$ 5,100,000	Wayne Co. Revitalization (LEI Blight)

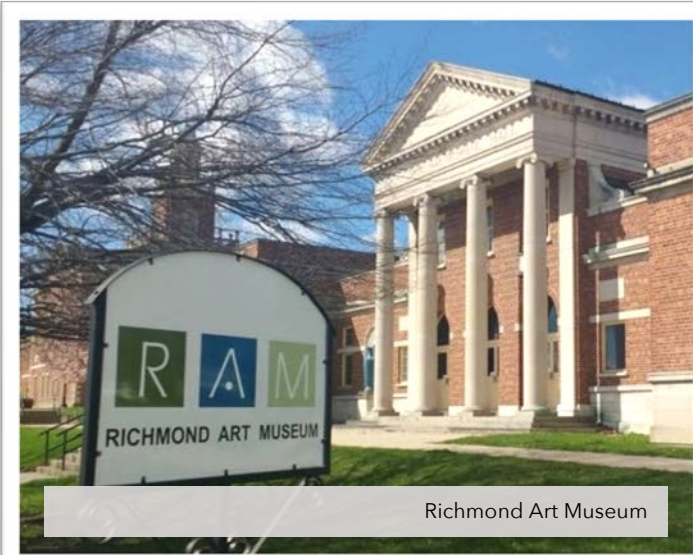
See full list of READI projects in Appendix, pages 137-138.

The following came from community input at the in-person visioning session.

Momentum Pushes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County part of OCRA HELP Cohort 3 Gift VIII funding performances spaces and countywide opportunities from arts organizations Opportunity to develop and implement strategies to drive greater participation from tourists
Challenging Pulls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better feedback loops/communication between sectors Blight and a scarcity mindset

“ The studio was primitive, the room wasn't soundproof, and just outside was a railroad spur with switch engines puffing away noisily. Yet this obscure recording studio in a small Indiana city saw a history-making parade of musicians. They made the name of the Hoosier Gennetts one of the greatest names in recorded music, and the gold-lettered Gennett label is one to collect.

Hoagy Carmichael



Richmond Art Museum



Cambridge City Summer Concerts



Birthplace of Recorded Jazz, Richmond



Heron Mural by Holly Sims, Mount Auburn



Arts & Culture Plan

THE TOOLKIT




INTRODUCTION


This toolkit includes ideas and inspiration drawn from national and local examples to spark creativity and show what's possible.

These resources align directly with goals and are designed to deepen understanding, build confidence, and equip leaders with the tools they need to translate ideas into action. Not every idea or resource will fit every community, but all can inform new approaches.


Surprise me ↻ Refresh



The Happy Coincidence of Life
Ed Haddaway
City of Loveland Art In Public ...
📍 [Loveland, CO](#)



Acequia Madre II
Janet Abrams
State of New Mexico Public A...
📍 [Albuquerque, NM](#)



Everglades Swamp with Curlew
Ann Tyler
University of Florida's Art in S...
📍 [Belle Glade, FL](#)

[Public Art Archive](#)

This section is full of hyperlinks (as is the document overall). All were working when this document was completed. We know that those change with time and hope you will search for the resources if you find a dead link sometime in the future.

Toolkit Contents



- A. Ideas & Inspiration
 - 1. Collections of Ideas
 - 2. Place & Identity
 - 3. Public Art
 - 4. Artists & Creative Businesses
 - 5. Marketing
- B. Project Funding
- C. Data & Advocacy
- D. Glossary

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Recommended Tool

Creative Placemaking Capacity Assistance Program

Two Forge ECI communities have completed Indiana Arts Commission's [Creative Convergence](#) program, and a two more have just begun (Muncie and Marion).

Links to their projects:

- **Gas City** – "[Historical Main St. Tour](#)"
- **Union City** – "[Arts Project Pitch Competition](#)"

This is a team-based workshop and funding program aimed at creative community development. Community Teams that participate will learn how to work together to advance arts and creativity in their community through training and a funded project.

It equips community leaders, organizational representatives, and creatives to:

- Embed arts and creativity into community and economic development strategies
- Collaborate effectively across sectors
- Engage residents in meaningful, inclusive ways

The Recommendation

Contact IAC to find out when applications will reopen.

Anne Johansson, Community Services Program Manager, AJohansson@iac.IN.gov



This program is a partnership between the [Indiana Arts Commission](#) and the [Indiana Communities Institute at Ball State University](#)

A. IDEAS & INSPIRATION

Overview

This section provides ideas, tools, guides, and resources from the region, state, and across the country. These should both provide source for inspiration and reduce the learning curve for communities and local leaders.

Collections of Ideas

- Arts Midwest [Ideas Hub](#)
- Indiana Arts Commission list of [Ideas](#)
- Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper [examples](#)
- NEA Our Town [past projects](#) from across the country
- Americans for the Arts [database of projects](#) from across the country
- Better Blocks [free open-source designs](#)
- [10 Alleys & Streetscapes](#) from 10 Years of Patronicity
- [Social Life Project](#) of the Placemaking Fund
- Explore [CODAworx](#) and [Public Art Archive](#) for public art inspiration
- [1,205 Ways to Improve Your Hometown](#). (number changes every time and idea is added) a search for "art" brings up over 690 results, and the numbers keep growing
- [99% of the best things you can do for your town don't require anyone's permission](#)

Recommended Reading

- [From Possibilities to Reality: Save Your Small Town with these Uniquely Do-Able Ideas...](#) (2024) from Debra Brown (Biloxi, MS) & Becky McCray (Alva, OK) of [SaveYourTown](#)
- Phil Eich & the [Storyville Substack](#) (Bay City, MI)
- [John Shepard](#) (David City, NE)
- [Walkable City](#) (2013)
- All the books and toolkits [here](#)

Place & Identity

Start Here

- Project for Public Spaces [definition](#) and [deeper resources](#)
- [Creative Placemaking Technical Assistance](#), Tools & Resource Library (NEA)
-

Then Check these How-to Resources

- National Association of Counties: [Creative County Placemaking Initiative](#) with resources
- National League of Cities
 - [Put Your City's Public Art on the Map with the Public Art Archive](#)
 - [Activating Civic Infrastructure through the Arts](#)
 - [Arts Help Rural Cities Creatively Support Community Mental Health](#)
 - [Improving Community Health and Resilience through the Arts](#)
 - [How Cities Use the Arts to Promote Youth and Community Development](#)
- And for development projects: [Indiana Community Development Toolkit](#) (READI)

Then Check Rural Specific Guidance

- [Community Arts & Culture Guide](#) (<https://rural.indiana.edu/>)
- [Thriving Downtowns: an investment playbook for rural Appalachia](#) (2023)
- National Governor's Association's [Rural Prosperity through the Arts...](#) & [Action Guide](#)
- USDA: "[Rural America Placemaking Toolkit](#)"

Examples of Streetscape & Façade Programs

- Main Street Streetscape Beautification (Rushville, IN)
- [Building Renovation Assistance Program – BRAP](#) (New Castle, IN)

And Examples of Alley & Underused Space Activations

- [6th Steet Arts Alley & Parklet](#) (Columbus, IN) and [Pocket Park](#) (Versailles, IN)

Location	Resources
411 6th Street, Columbus, IN 47201 www.artsincolumbus.org/arts-alley	6th Street Arts Alley Closure Process.pdf Find an Artist Toolkit and Street Art List Indiana Arts Commission Artist Services Hub
Contact Organization Columbus Area Arts Council	More under Public Art

- [Cartoon Alley](#) (Nappanee, IN)
- [SEI Community Gardens](#) (Multiple in Region)



Recommended Tool



AIB promotes and builds vibrant and sustainable communities through volunteerism and education emphasizing flowers, plants, trees, heritage, and environmental and lifestyle enhancements.

THE MODEL has been successful in the hundreds of cities of all sizes (*including Rising Sun, Greendale*) with a sweet spot capping around 20,000 population.

- 40+ page assessments with detailed short- and long-term recommendations (\$10,000s FMV)
- Other Program Elements: annual symposium, national awards, webinars, and resources

COST & FUNDING

- Subscription starts at \$1,700/year (*by pop.*)
- Cities pay for lodging (AIB covers other travel)
- Convening registration (*if applicable*)
- After that it is all about how much a city does on the ground to implement recommendations,

Some communities recruit garden centers as committee members and sponsors. There is also a grant program for towns along CN Railroad lines.

CHAPTER BENEFITS

Created when 3+ cities in an area participate, these come with a 25% discount and quarterly check-ins.

The Recommendation

We recommend that communities join America in Bloom to provide a structure to their work, particularly related to Goal 1 – and join as a group to become a chapter. Contact <https://americainbloom.org/>.

Public Art

Start Here

- [Strategies for Public Art: A Guide to Creating Engaging Public Art with your Indiana Community](#) by the Putnam County Mural Project folks

Then Check Topical Guides

- Places of Possibility (POP) Public ART & Placemaking: [Toolkit for Rural Communities](#)
- From Bloomberg Associates:
 - [Asphalt Art Guide & Safety Study](#)
 - [Baltimore Toolkit](#)

And Examples of Public Art that is More than Murals

- [ARTsy Switchboxes](#) (Madison, IN) and [BoxBox](#) (Muncie, IN)
- ["C" Bike Racks](#) (Columbus, IN)
- [Sidewalk Poetry](#) (Multiple)

Jumpstart Public Art Marketing

- Host a volunteer weekend to upload your inventory to PAA over pizza!

“Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.

[Creative Placemaking.](#)

Ann Markusen & Anne Gadwa for National Endowment for the Art, 2010

Recommended Tool
PUBLIC ART
ARCHIVE
publicartarchive.org



About

The [Public Art Archive™](#) (PAA) is a **free, continually growing online database of public artworks throughout the U.S. and abroad**. Artists and organizations contribute completed projects to the portal at **NO COST**.

By **making all projects discoverable on the world's largest centralized source of public art information**, artists and organizations can increase the accessibility and visibility of public art in every community.

The Recommendation

This project made clear how **little of the region's public art is accessible online** – on digital maps, in news articles, on websites. Even then, information about the work or its artist is limited. Some places have custom map sites that are difficult to maintain or to connect with intended audiences.

This is a **missed opportunity of spectacular proportions** that doesn't need to be.

We recommend that every community, county, and the region overall focus on PAA first for all of its public art. Everything in a one place is regionalism in practice.

- [Explore art](#) and their [featured collections](#).
- Request a [Demo](#), PAArchive@WeAreCreativeWest.org
- If you want a custom look, they work at low cost (e.g., \$500/yr to embed in your site).

The National League of Cities agrees with us!
[Put Your City's Public Art on the Map with the Public Art Archive](#)

Templates for Implementing a Public Art Program

- Sample Public Art Guidelines from [Madison](#) and Fort Wayne [Fort Wayne](#)
- Sample Public Art Master Plans from [Bloomington](#) and [Plainfield](#)
- [Templates](#) from the Public Art Archive for almost every part of a public art program and its implementation

Sample Ordinances

- Mural Permitting – [Bloomington, MN](#)
- Overlay Zones & Districts (Gateway or Design)
 - [Franklin, IN](#)
 - [Rushville, IN](#) (starting on page 65 of *linked* document)
 - [Portland OR](#)

Sample Public Art Grant Programs

These are programs created within cities versus external funders of public art.

- [Montrose, CO](#)
- [Stuart, FL](#)
- [Iowa City, IA](#)
- [Indianapolis, IN](#)
- [West Columbia, SC](#)
- [Amarillo, TX](#)
- Chicago, San Francisco, and Nashville also have nice public-facing guides

Other Resources

- ABA: [1st Amendment Limitations on Government Regulation of Artwork](#)
- Americans for the Arts [Public Art Network](#) (professional development, resources, etc.)
- Online collections and artist connections: [CODAworx](#) and [Public Art Archive](#)



Looking for Data on Economic Impact of Public Art?

Take a look at [CODAreview The Power of Public Art](#) volumes 1 and 2 (2024-2025)

Then Join the Public Art Network! Anyone thinking about or managing a public art program should be signed up to the [Americans for the Arts Public Art Network](#) newsletter and list serv.

Digging Deeper into Case Example PUBLIC ART IN EDMOND, OK pop ~94,000

[Edmond's Public Art Program](#) has helped fill the city with a sense of community and culture. The Edmond Visual Arts Commission is responsible for all of the public art around the city, and is in charge of expanding the art collection, promoting the public art program, and maintaining the pieces. These pieces are funded through donations, partnerships, and construction project 1% set aside funds.

The public art program began in 2001, with 13 pieces in the inventory. Now, there are over 300 pieces with many installations from Oklahoma natives and other artists who are known and admired throughout the world. The City's art program has created a great attraction for tourists and given Edmond residents something to be proud of.

You can view all of the beautiful murals and sculptures [on the public art website](#), during the guided Art in Public Places Tour or on your own self-guided tour by foot or bicycle:

- [Bicycle Art Tour](#): Scenic ride with over 20 pieces
- [Downtown Art Tour](#): More than 30 art pieces
- [BoulevART Art Tour](#): More than 20, min. 1/block
- [UCO Art Tour](#): More than 15 sculptures
- [Historic Art Tour](#): More than 20 sculptures



Artists & Creative Businesses

Start Here

- Join/Learn: Chamber of Commerce, Main Street, Ivy Tech, Extension, Local Arts Council
- Check out
 - [Artists Thrive](#), which aims to raise the value of artists in every community (especially its [National Resource Hub](#))
 - [Springboard for the Arts](#), which supports artists with the tools to make a living (especially [Work of Art](#))

Other Funds, Ideas & Opportunities

- Arts Midwest [Ideas Hub](#) and [Gig Fund](#)
- Center for Cultural Innovation [Investing in Artists](#) (funding), [resources](#), labs, programs
- [CERF+ \(Craft Emergency Relief Fund\)](#)
- [Indiana Artisan](#)
- [Traditional Arts Indiana](#)
- [Vore](#) – arts fund (great idea to copy)
- Marion Design Co. – [10 years of intern cohorts](#) (another idea to copy)
- List of funding [opportunities for musicians](#) (entrepreneurship resources listed as well)

Indiana Arts Commission Programs for Artists

- [Vision & Venture](#) – for creatives with less than one year of business experience
- [On-Ramp Creative Accelerator](#) – 3-day intensive workshop, [decentralizing in 2027](#)
- [The Creative Leap](#) – 6-week virtual workshop series
- [Work in Progress Exchange](#) – 2025 pilot and example for local endeavors

Teaching Artist Opportunities

- [Teaching Artist Guild](#)
- [Arts for Learning](#)

Working with Specific Populations

- Indiana Arts Commission [Lifelong Arts Indiana](#)
- IU Center for Rural Engagement [Creative Arts for Vets](#)



See also the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation's [Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Playbook 3.0](#).



Recommended Tool Indiana Arts Commission's Artist Services Hub

The Indiana Arts Commission's [Artist Services Hub](#), provides resources for artists, communities, and organizations to support your creative community.

- Are You An Artist? [Help your career thrive.](#)
- Are you an arts administrator, arts programmer, or agent who wants to support artists in your community? [Connect with Creatives](#)
- Looking to bring arts to your local community but don't know where to start? [Engage Community](#)

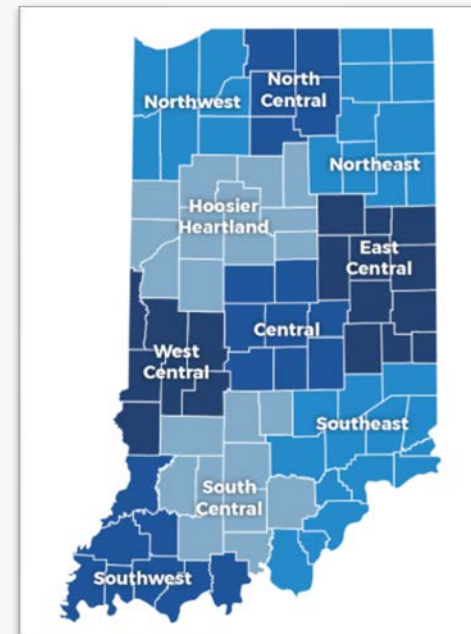
The Recommendation

Contact IAC to find out more.

Jordan Adams, Artist Services
Program Manager, joadams1@iac.in.gov



Find your local
[Small Business
Development
Center](#)
regional office
entrepreneurial
support





Entrepreneurship & Business Assistance

- Indiana [SBA](#) provides FREE business technical assistance
- [Lawyers for the Arts](#) provides FREE to artists and small nonprofits in Indiana
- [Freelancers Union](#) provides support systems for independent workers
- Universities in the region have programs to partner with such as:
 - IU [Innovates](#) and IU Jacobs School of Music [Innovation](#)
 - IU East [Center for Entrepreneurship and Business Opportunities for Self-Starters \(BOSS\) Program](#)
 - BSU [Innovator Connector](#) and [Center for Innovation & Collaboration](#)
- Minerva Financial Arts – [Financial Education](#)

Recommended Tool

IEDC [Entrepreneur Support](#)

- ConnectIND: Hub for Indiana Entrepreneurs
- Indiana Small Business Development Center
- Innovate WithIN (high school pitch competition)
- gener8tor (early-stage startup accelerator)
- Ecosystem Navigator
- Indiana Technical Assistance Program
- Indiana Procurement Assistance & Certification Training Initiative

The Recommendation

[Contact IEDC](#) to find out more.



Check out your county's [Indiana Entrepreneurship Scorecard](#).

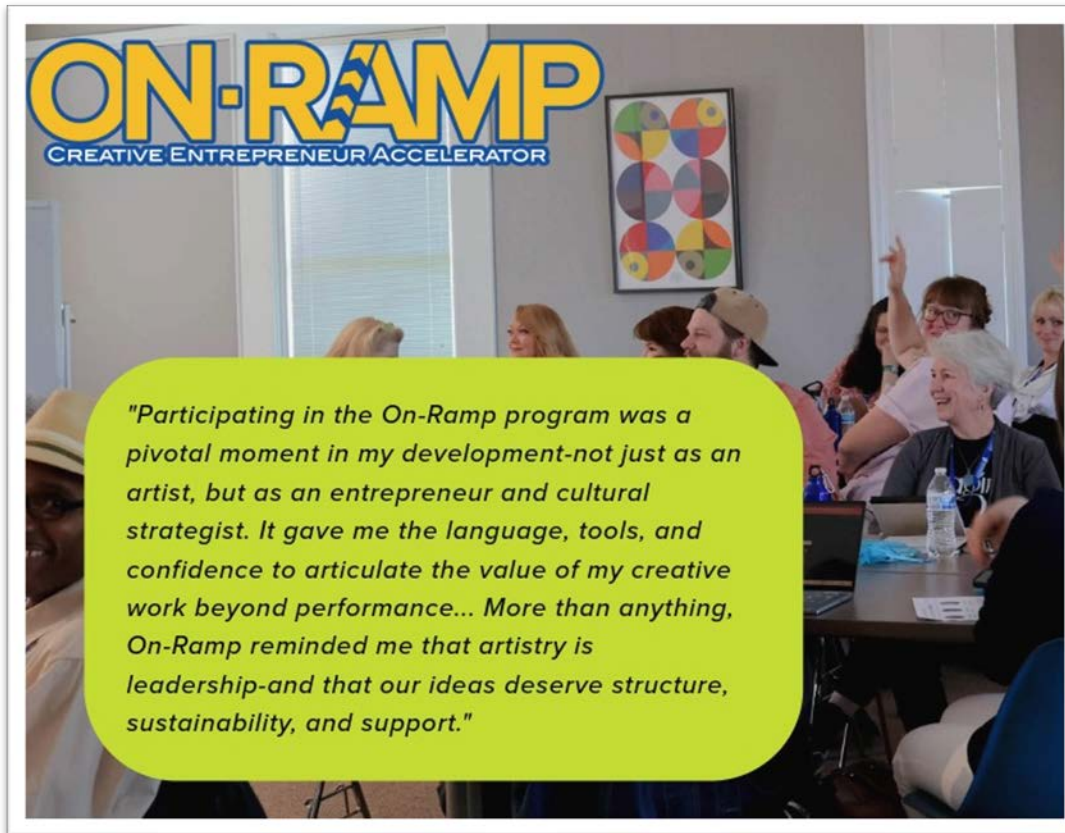
INDIANA
FOR THE BOLD

Model in the Field [ARTrepreneurship](#)

An 8-week, cohort educational program for artists in that region who wish to establish their own businesses and generate revenue from their work



A collaboration among Heartland Art Center, Marshall County Economic Development Center, and the North Central Indiana Small Business Development Center



"Participating in the On-Ramp program was a pivotal moment in my development-not just as an artist, but as an entrepreneur and cultural strategist. It gave me the language, tools, and confidence to articulate the value of my creative work beyond performance... More than anything, On-Ramp reminded me that artistry is leadership-and that our ideas deserve structure, sustainability, and support."

[Indiana Arts Commission On-Ramp](#) creative entrepreneur accelerator program, decentralizing in 2027

Your Input Leveling Up Marketing

In focus groups, we asked arts, culture, and history leaders how tourism can help them do their job better. We asked the same in reverse of tourism leaders. Here is some of what you suggested.

Marketing Arts & Culture

To successfully market and promote events, Tourism shared that they need event information:

- At least 6 weeks in advance (one year in advance for reoccurring events), and
- In text along with a **high-resolution** photo. This helps with storytelling and quality promotional efforts (e.g., print).

It's also recommended that events always be created as a Facebook "event" so it's easier to promote and for online aggregators like Yodel to capture and market events. (It can't grab text from a photo, which means the opportunity is lost.)

Looking more broadly, folks identified the need for Tourism to evolve from a "heads-in-beds" mindset to today's best practice focusing on local and personalized experiences. This still means marketing outside the county and regional boundaries but focusing on the overall experience. To learn more and strengthen, Tourism encouraged others in their sector to join the Indiana Tourism Association.

In general, Tourism sector websites need to be modernized, interactive, and searchable, and the sector would be better served to collaborate across county lines to benefit all involved.

History, Heritage, & the Arts

Both arts and history organizations realized they are better served to work across the region within their peer groups and each other. In addition to identifying cross-promotional marketing and collaborative opportunities, they want to learn from one another and resource share.

And More from Us

Here's an event to try: "[Be a Tourist in Your Own Hometown](#)" (Fort Wayne, IN)
And an interesting grant program idea: [Digital Storefront Program](#) (South Bend, IN)



Recommended Tool CALENDAR AGGREGATOR

One of the longest standing difficulties in this work, regardless of community size or location, is how to compile and manage a community events calendar. They are notoriously time consuming, incomplete, and underperforming.

However, options now exist that aggregate information instead of requiring data entry. Even better, those options are relatively low cost and easy to set up.



Example: <https://yodelevents.com>

Yodel collects and categorizes everything that is collectable according to filters the subscriber sets.

Population	Fees
Up to 15,000	\$1,000 set up + \$1,560 / year
15,000–60,000	\$1,200 set up + \$2,220 / year

But, it is only \$250 to add a widget to a partner's website. This means organizations and communities can mirror each other's content at a low cost. In addition, communities can sell ad space on their yodel app to cover costs.

The Recommendation

Get started today. The region only needs to:

- Agree to work together and share cost fairly
- Educate event entities on how to ensure their information is imported (e.g., "events" with details vs images on social media)
- Work with Yodel to set it up
- More at [//yodelevents.com/category/blog/](https://yodelevents.com/category/blog/)

B. PROJECT FUNDING

National

- AARP Community Challenge and its [Quick Action Livability Grants](#)
- Bloomberg Philanthropy's [Arts Programs](#) especially its [Asphalt Art Grant Program](#)
- Literary Arts Fund's [General Operating and Innovation Project Grants](#)
- Levitt Foundation's [Venue & Music Grants](#)
- Main Street America [Funding Opportunities Resource](#)
- National Endowment for the Arts' [Grant Programs](#) especially [Our Town](#)
- National Endowment for the Humanities' [Grant Programs](#)

Indiana & Midwest

- Arts Midwest [Grant Programs](#) (More at [US Regional Arts Organizations](#))
- Center for Rural Engagement's [Arts & Culture Programs](#)
- Indiana Humanities' [Grant Programs](#)

CREATING PLACES



Indiana Agencies

- Arts Commission
 - [Grant Programs](#)
 - [Training Programs](#) (some include project funding)
 - [Artist Services](#) (includes a list of grant sources)
- Destination Development Corp. [Partner Resources](#) (*grants eliminated in 2025 budget*)
- Housing & Community Development Authority (partnerships with [Patronicity](#))
 - [CreatINg Places Crowdgranting](#) & [CreatINg Livable Communities](#) (*box right*)
 - [My Community My Vision](#)
- Office of Community & Rural Affairs [Grant Programs, Main Street, and Other Initiatives](#)
- State Library [Services & Technology Act Grants](#)



How to use this page? Grant programs change over time, but these are some of the top funds to look at when implementing Goal 6.

Find Your Region-Specific Funds



[Community Foundation Lookup Tool](#), then see:

- [Ball Brothers Foundation](#) – a range of funds
- [Vore Arts Fund](#) – artist funding

Façade & Beautification Grant Programs

- New Castle [Building Renovation Assist. Prog.](#)
- Marion [Façade](#) and Grant Co. [CHARM](#) Programs

Local Tourism Marketing Grants

Contact your tourism bureau for information.

- [Destination Muncie](#)
- [Fabulous Fayette County](#)

East Central Indiana has already made good use of the CreatINg Places program that matches crowdfunded projects and should continue to leverage it going forward.

	#	\$ Goal (Match)	\$ Crowd-Raised
Blackford			
Hartford City	1	10,000	12,410
Delaware			
Albany	1	10,750	21,851
Muncie	5	147,500	177,054
Yorktown	1	50,000	55,765
Grant			
Gas City	1	50,000	76,800
Marion	4	177,000	122,626
Upland	2	90,000	104,195
Jay			
Pennville	1	50,000	51,424
Randolph			
Union City	4	117,500	131,714
Winchester	1	50,000	67,851
Wayne			
Cambridge City	1		
East Germantown	1	100,000	108,332
Dublin	1	50,000	51,190
Economy	1	50,000	67,501
Milton	1	50,000	50,705
Richmond	8	321,500	383,624

C. DATA & ADVOCACY

Arts Impact Data Sources

Start Here

- [Arts & Economic Prosperity](#) and [Arts Impact Explorer](#) (Americans for the Arts)

Indiana Specific

- [Embracing ... Indiana's Overlooked Economic Engine](#) (Pattern & Pathemy Strategies)
- [How Indiana Municipalities are Utilizing Local Arts...](#) (Indiana Communities Institute)
- [Impact Points for Indiana's Cultural Districts](#) (Indiana Arts Commission)
- [Grants Dashboard](#) (Indiana Arts Commission)
- [Creative Economy State Profiles](#) (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies)
- [Arts Vibrancy 2024](#) Interactive Map, includes county-level (SMU DataArts)

Interactive National Sources

- [Research & Datasets](#) (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies)
- [Arts & Culture Data](#) (US Bureau of Economic Analysis)
- A [treasure trove of resources](#) from the National Endowment for the Arts
- Emerging Data Dashboard – [Wesley's Project](#)

Industry or Art Form–Specific

- [National Independent Venue Association: State of Live](#)
- [Why Making Music Matters](#)
- There are plenty more like these for every form of art or art activity if you search.

Quality of Life, Place & Health Data Sources

- [Indiana Communities Institute](#) (Ball State University)
- [Livability Index](#) and [Livability Data](#) (AARP)
- [County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#) (UW-Madison Population Health Institute)

Digging Deeper into Related Data

ECONOMIC & DEMOGRAPHIC

- [Center for Business & Economic Research](#) (BSU)
- [Indiana Business Research Center](#) (IU Kelley)
- Kauffman [Indicators of Entrepreneurship](#)
- [Center for Regional Development](#) (Purdue)
- [Indiana's Public Data](#) (STATS Indiana)
- [The Regionizer](#) (Stats America)

NONPROFITS & FOUNDATIONS

- ProPublica : [Nonprofit Explorer](#)
- [Guidestar](#) and [Foundation Directory](#) (Candid)
- [Tax Exempt Organization Search](#) (IRS)
- [Business Search](#) (Indiana Secretary of State)

OTHER INDIANA-SPECIFIC

- [State Data Center](#) (Indiana State Library)
[A-Z Statistics by Topic](#)
And [by County](#)
- Other IN.gov:
[IndianaMap](#) (various GIS maps)
[Indiana State Library](#)
[Indiana Gateway](#) (access to local tax and finance dashboard and reports)

TOURISM

- [Indiana Tourism Industry Research](#) (IDDC)
- Contact [Indiana Tourism Association](#) for more

MISCELLANEOUS

- [Community Commons](#)

Advocacy Tools

- [The Arts as Public Good](#) (research and resources from The Topos Partnership)
- [Americans for the Arts](#) has a plethora of tools for arts advocacy as well. [Start here.](#)



NEW RESOURCE FOR GOAL 3

New report identifies long-term benefits of **youth participation in community arts programs**, from well-being to future trajectories.

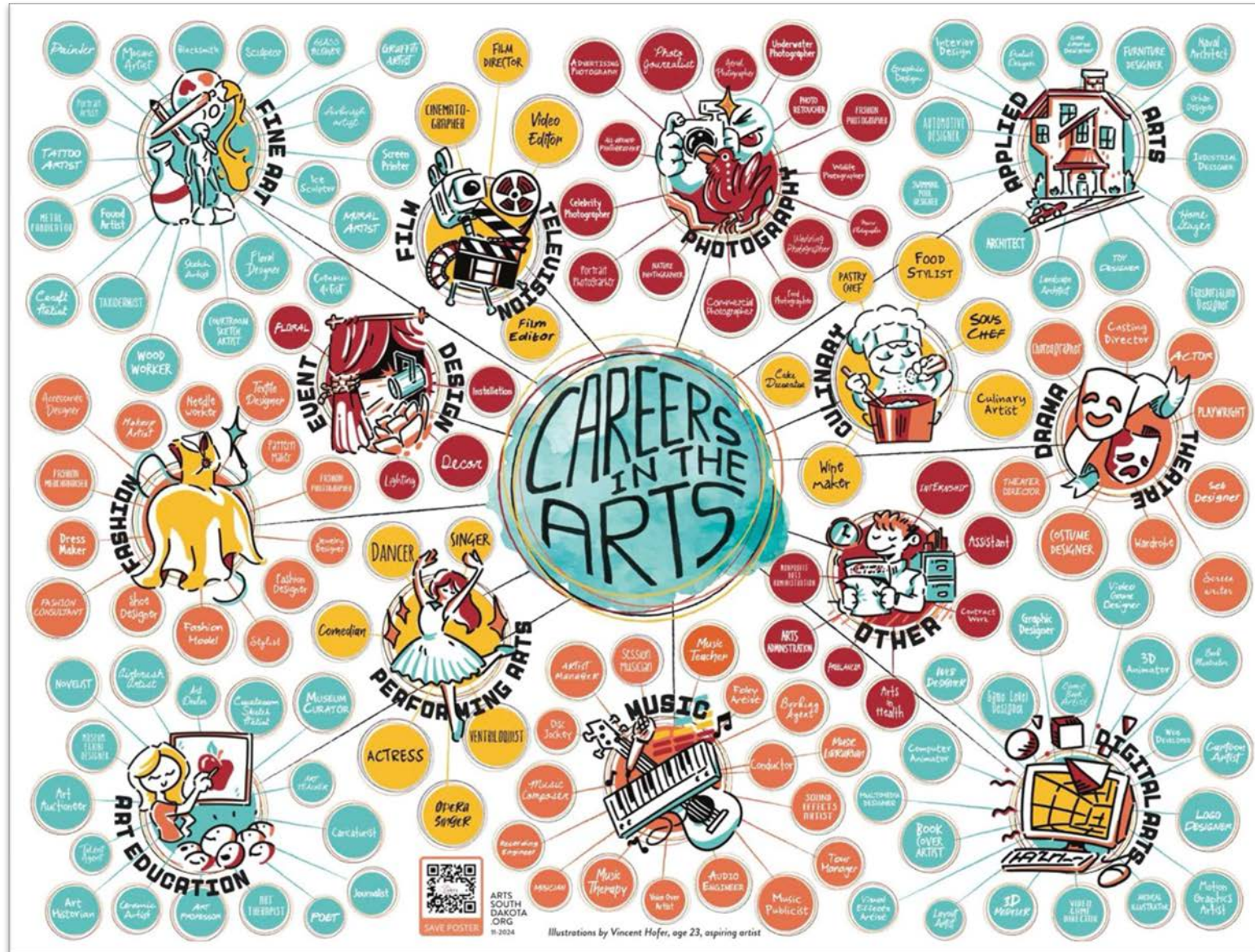
[Creative Expression, Caring Relationships, and Career Pathways: A Guide to Youth Outcomes in Community Arts Programs](#) (November 2025)

More to Get Started on 3.2.

See Aim's [Youth Councils Network](#). And more examples for 3.3. Juxtaposition Arts (MN) – [youth-focused](#), ArtMix Urban Artisans – [vocational and social](#), New Castle Career Center – [broadcast, design](#)

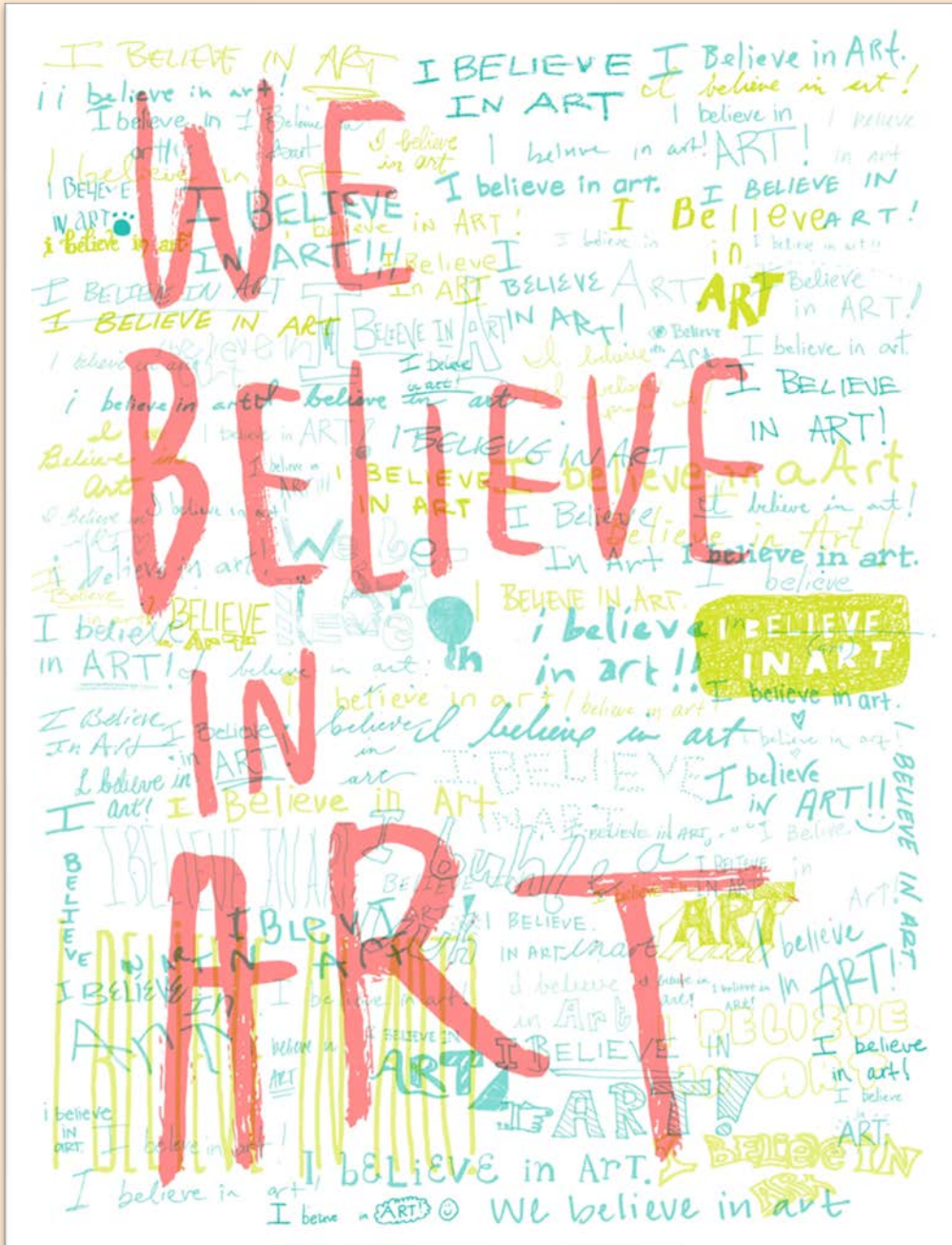
Careers in the Arts poster is another great tool to use while implementing this plan. It demonstrates the breadth of career opportunity available in arts and culture.

“Careers in the Arts” Poster, [Vincent Hofer](#) (2024) for Arts South Dakota.



the toolkit

Recommended Reading Art as Community Change-Maker



Now is the time to learn more about how the creative sector can engage in community life and how community can benefit from arts and culture partnerships.

Here are just a few sources to empower your journey:

- [Transforming the Workforce Development Sector through Arts...](#) (2020)
- [Centering Creative Youth In Community Development](#) (2020)
- [Creative Placemaking & Community Safety](#) (2018)
- More of ArtsPlace America's Field Scans [here...](#)

And a few more that speak directly to artists and arts organizations:

- [How to Partner with Your Chambers of Commerce: Connecting Community Impact to Arts & Chamber Partnerships](#) (2022)
- [Handbook for Artists Working in Community](#) (2020)
- [Artists at the Community Development Table](#) (2019)

Each of these sources supports implementation of one or more of the goals in this plan.

“Arts bind people to place *and* each other.”

Alberto Ibarguen, Former President
The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 2018

Poster Image from
THE I / WE BELIEVE IN ART PROJECT
<https://www.publicspaceone.com>
[Sayuri's World](#) (2019)

D. GLOSSARY

This process brought together arts organizations and professionals, civic and elected leaders, economic development, and community. This was a new combination for most participants – one that led each to share new concepts with the others. We carried the following into this plan:

Placemaking is a collaborative process that strengthens the bond between people and shared spaces. It goes beyond urban design by fostering creative uses of public spaces and honoring their physical and cultural identities.

Creative Placemaking focuses on strengthening communities with arts at the core.

Activating/Activation a creative event, installation, or project that is designed to bring an area to life and increase its visibility through the use of art

Creative Economy is the crossroads of creativity, culture, and commerce – workers in arts occupations, creative industries, and places. Creative economies thrive when a wide array of industries and workers are treated as active participants in it.

Hyperlocal is relating to or focusing on a small community or geographical area.

Philanthropy is the voluntary giving by individuals or groups to promote the common good, often through financial donations or time, with the aim of benefiting others and fostering a more civil and just society.

Quality of Place the characteristics of a community or region that make it attractive and desirable to live, work, and visit, including both tangible and intangible factors like environment, culture, and social connections.

Stakeholders are those who may benefit or be affected by a project. They may or may not take part directly in the decision-making process of that project.



Looking for more?

See [Key Concepts](https://rural.indiana.edu/) : [Community Arts & Culture Guide](https://rural.indiana.edu/) (<https://rural.indiana.edu/>) and [Glossary](https://www.mapc.org/) : Arts & Planning Toolkit (a project of <https://www.mapc.org/>)

Definitions adapted from: <https://www.pps.org>, <https://www.creativeplacemaking.us>, <https://patternindy.com>, <https://rural.indiana.edu/>, and <https://artsandplanning.mapc.org/glossary-of-terms/> and <https://www.cultivategrandrapids.org/post/creative-placemaking-activating-art-in-public-spaces>

Abbreviations

AIB	America in Bloom <i>subscription-based technical assistance program</i>
ARPA	American Rescue Plan <i>federal COVID-relief program</i>
CARES	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, & Economic Security <i>federal COVID-relief program</i>
CCC	College and Community Collaboration <i>grant program of the Lilly Endowment Inc.</i>
CSA	Combined Statistical Area <i>defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget</i>
CVB	Convention & Visitors Bureau
ECI	East Central Indiana
FMV	Fair Market Value <i>approximate commercial cost</i>
GIFT	Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow <i>grant program of the Lilly Endowment Inc.</i>
IAC	Indiana Arts Commission <i>state agency</i>
IEDC	Indiana Economic Development Corporation <i>state agency</i>
ISBDC	Indiana Small Business Development Center <i>program of IEDC</i>
IMLS	Institute of Museum and Library Services <i>federal agency</i>
LEDO	Local Economic Development Organization
LEI	Lilly Endowment Inc. <i>private foundation, distinct from the Lilly Foundation</i>
NASAA	National Assembly of State Arts Agencies <i>NEA-funded association</i>
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts <i>federal agency</i>
NEH	National Endowment for the Humanities <i>federal agency</i>
OCRA	Indiana Office of Community & Rural Affairs <i>state agency</i>
REDO	Regional Economic Development Organization <i>Forge ECI is one of these</i>
READI	Regional Economic Acceleration & Development Initiative <i>a program of IEDC</i>
SEI	Southeast Indiana OR short form of SEI READI <i>REDO to the south of Forge ECI</i>
SVOG	Shuttered Venue Operators Grant <i>federal COVID-relief program</i>
USRAO	US Regional Arts Organizations <i>NEA-funded association</i>

Arts & Culture Plan

APPENDIX



A. DATA TABLES

Overview

This section provides detailed data and context aligned with discussion in the body of the plan. They are included to help the region with benchmarking and case-making with leaders. At the same time, they provide support for the regional overview, the State of the Arts assessment, goals, and strategies overall. Finally, it provides a quick recap of related investments for planning purposes.

List of Data Tables

1. Livability Index
2. Technology & Broadband
3. Arts Vibrancy
4. The Asset Inventory
5. Recent Arts & Culture Funding
6. Forge ECI READI Projects



Note to the Reader

The Forge ECI site numbers may vary from these because:
 1) The region includes Rush County for all but READI; or 2) Some numbers lean on estimates for different years.

data tables



“Paint By Monster is an educational comedy about Art and being an Artist, created and performed by me, Dan Wright.” (Muncie)

<https://www.paintbymonster.com/gallery>

1. Livability Index (AARP, 2024)

	Regional Average		Delaware	Wayne	Henry	Blackford	Fayette	Randolph	Grant	Jay	U.S. Median
Overall Score	49	- 1	51	51	49	49	48	48	48	48	50
1. Engagement	64	+17	66	60	73	65	63	62	60	59	47
2. Opportunity	60	+10	58	58	58	66	55	60	61	62	50
3. Health	48	+8	47	61	49	35	44	51	56	41	40
4. Housing	48	- 11	56	51	43	51	45	44	49	44	59
5. Transportation	47	+3	49	48	41	51	46	49	40	53	44
6. Environment	44	- 17	41	49	48	43	49	39	39	41	61
7. Neighborhood	33	- 3	37	33	31	32	35	32	30	36	36



Green boxes highlight each county's highest score.
 Pink boxes highlight each county's lowest score
 Plus/minus numbers under regional average are the difference between the region and U.S. overall.

Index Scores are based on 61 Indicators (including 40 metrics and 21 policies - details at [//livabilityindex.aarp.org/methods-sources](https://livabilityindex.aarp.org/methods-sources).)

	Engagement	Opportunity	Health	Housing	Transportation	Environment	Neighborhoods
METRICS	Broadband cost/speed Voting rate Social involvement index Cultural, arts, and entertainment institutions	Income inequality Jobs per worker Age diversity Local government creditworthiness	Smoking prevalence Obesity prevalence Access to exercise opp. Healthcare prof. shortage areas Preventable hospitalization rate Patient satisfaction	Zero-step entrances Housing costs Housing cost burden	Local transit service freq. ADA-accessible stations and vehicles Walkability index Congestion Access to jobs by auto Speed limits Crash rate	Drinking water quality Regional air quality Near-roadway pollution Local industrial pollution Household transportation costs	Access to grocery stores/farmers' markets ... to parks ... to libraries ... to jobs by transit Destinations diversity Activity density Crime rate Vacancy rate
POLICIES	Municipal Laws LGBTQ+ anti-discrim. State Voter participation support laws	State & Local Min. wage inc.	State & Local Laws Smoke-free	State & Local Inclusive design laws Housing trust funds State Manufactured protections Foreclosure prevention and protection Acc. dwelling unit support	State & Local Policies Complete Streets State Human services transport coordination Volunteer driver policies	Local Plans Multi-hazard mitigation State Policies Utility disconnection Energy efficiency scorecard	State & Local TOD programs

data tables

2. Technology & Broadband

Below is additional detail aligned with the discussion on page 21.

Purdue University Center for Regional Development

	No Internet			Cell Data Only			Mobile Dev. Only			No Computing Dev.		
	2017	2022	Diff.	2017	2022	Diff.	2017	2022	Diff.	2017	2022	Diff.
Blackford	26.4	13.8	(12.6)	13.3	14.8	1.5	11.9	24.3	12.4	19.0	10.8	(8.2)
Delaware	20.3	10.1	(10.2)	8.7	13.0	4.3	9.6	18.4	8.8	14.2	6.8	(7.4)
Fayette	32.2	15.2	(16.9)	7.4	16.7	9.3	9.9	23.8	13.9	20.7	9.9	(10.8)
Grant	25.6	12.6	(13.0)	10.7	14.8	4.1	13.4	22.3	8.8	18.2	9.6	(8.5)
Henry	25.6	12.4	(13.2)	7.8	14.5	6.7	10.7	19.4	8.8	19.0	8.7	(10.3)
Jay	29.0	17.2	(11.8)	10.7	20.4	9.7	12.6	25.9	13.4	23.3	13.5	(9.8)
Randolph	24.1	15.8	(8.3)	12.2	18.9	6.7	12.1	20.5	8.4	17.6	8.8	(8.8)
Wayne	27.5	11.7	(15.8)	8.1	14.9	6.8	11.4	20.1	8.6	18.6	9.5	(9.1)
Regional Average *	26.3	13.6	(12.7)	9.9	16.0	6.1	11.5	21.8	10.4	18.8	9.7	(9.1)

<https://pcrd.purdue.edu/analyzing-indianas-digital-landscape-bridging-gaps-and-unveiling-trends-in-internet-access-and-device-usage/>

* Each of the differences measured in this study were deemed to be statistically significant EXCEPT for those with stars. Regional averages were calculated as part of this plan, not the underlying research.



Check out [A Practitioner’s Guide to Rural Digital Inclusion](#)

Center for Rural Innovation Blog (October 8, 2025)

Rural communities must pair broadband expansion with affordable devices, hands-on training support, and AI literacy—to turn connectivity into jobs, entrepreneurship, and long-term local prosperity.

“ Rural people need to see themselves as **creators** and not just consumers of technology.

Shaniqua Corley-Moore,
Head of Tech Talent Development at CORI

Digging Deeper into Internet Benchmarks

Indiana

	Urban	Suburban	Rural	Total
No Internet				
2017	19.5	17.3	24.5	20.2
2022	9.8	10.2	14.6	10.6
<i>Difference</i>	(9.7)	(7.1)	(9.9)	(9.6)
Cellular Data Only				
2017	11.7	8.5	4.5	8.9
2022	11.9	13.2	17.7	13.0
<i>Difference</i>	0.2	4.7	13.2	4.1
Mobile Devices Only				
2017	10.3	8.9	10.4	10.1
2022	17.6	15.9	17.9	17.2
<i>Difference</i>	7.3	7.0	7.5	7.1
No Computing Device				
2017	14.2	11.9	17.2	14.5
2022	6.9	6.8	9.8	7.3
<i>Difference</i>	(7.3)	(5.1)	(7.4)	(7.2)

United States

	Urban	Suburban	Rural	Total
No Internet				
2017	16.2	18.7	24.7	17.6
2022	8.0	9.8	13.8	9.0
<i>Difference</i>	(8.2)	(8.9)	(10.9)	(8.6)
Cellular Data Only				
2017	6.9	8.1	10.5	7.5
2022	10.5	11.5	15.2	11.2
<i>Difference</i>	3.6	3.4	4.7	3.7
Mobile Devices Only				
2017	8.9	8.7	10.0	9.0
2022	14.1	14.8	17.4	14.6
<i>Difference</i>	5.2	6.1	7.4	5.6
No Computing Device				
2017	14.2	11.9	17.2	14.5
2022	6.9	6.8	9.6	7.3
<i>Difference</i>	(7.3)	(5.1)	(7.6)	(7.2)

[Analyzing Indiana’s Digital Landscape \(January 2024\)](#)

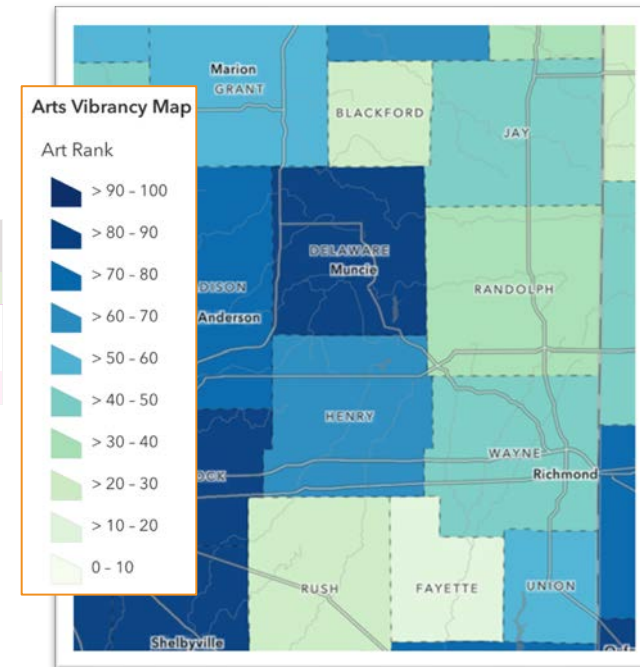
3. Arts Vibrancy (SMU DataArts, 2024)

Some Indiana communities use the Arts Vibrancy Index in their benchmarking and communications. It is both an imperfect measure, particularly as it gives funding greater weight than arts organizations or activity. Even so it is useful in highlighting the differences among the region's counties. As such, it tells a compelling story of have vs have-not in arts vibrancy.

Indices (Percentile)	Delaware	Henry	Grant	Wayne	Jay	Randolph	Blackford	Fayette
Arts Vibrancy	84	67	59	49	48	38	28	20
Arts Providers	50	82	38	79	43	52	24	54
Arts Dollars	64	89	80	49	39	49	60	36
Public Support	75	44	57	49	55	34	26	13

Source: <https://dataarts.smu.edu/ArtsVibrancyMap/>
<https://culturaldata.org/arts-vibrancy-2024/executive-summary/> and <https://culturaldata.org/arts-vibrancy-2024/methodology/>

Index scores show how a county performs relative to other counties nationally (3,143 counties) on a 0-100% scale. For example, a county scoring 85 would be performing better than 85% of other counties, while one scoring 15 would be performing worse than 85% of others. All measures are calculated on a per capita basis.



Variables & Weighting Used for Calculating Arts Vibrancy

WT	(aggregated at X level)	DESCRIPTION	SOURCES
21%	Arts Providers		US Census Bureau, IRS 990s
7%	Artists (zip code)	Freelance artists primarily engaged in performing in artistic productions, in creating artistic and cultural works or productions, or in providing the technical expertise necessary for these productions	
5%	Employees (county)	Number of employees (salaried and contract) by the museum, historical site, theater, dance, music, opera, and other performing arts sectors	
2%	Organizations (zip code)	Number of nonprofit organizations in the museum, arts education, community, dance, music, opera, performing arts center, orchestra, theater, multidisciplinary performing arts, or arts alliance and service organization sectors	
7%	Firms (zip code)	Number of arts, culture, and entertainment firms, weighted for size. Includes museums, theaters, dance companies, opera companies, music groups and performers, music producers and presenters, fine arts schools, and recording, motion picture, and video production companies	
22%	Arts Dollars		IRS 990s, SMU DataArts' Cultural Data Profile, Theatre Communications Group
3%	Program revenue	All revenue earned due to people participating in the activities of nonprofit arts and cultural organizations *	
7%	Contributed revenue	All revenue from contributions to nonprofit arts and cultural organizations (includes public funding) *	
7%	Total expenses	All expenses of nonprofit arts and cultural organizations *	
5%	Total compensation	All payment to staff and artists by nonprofit cultural organizations *	
56%	Gov. Arts Support		National Endowment for the Arts, Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
12%	\$ State DOLLARS	All state arts dollar funding in the community *	
12%	# State GRANTS	Number of state arts grants awarded in the community	
11%	\$ Federal DOLLARS	All NEA and IMLS dollar funding in the community *	
10%	# Federal GRANTS	Number of NEA and IMLS grants awarded in the community	
11%	\$ Total Government	All government dollar funding in the community (federal, state, and local)	

* Adjusted by a cost-of-living index

data tables

4. The Asset Inventory

Both the region and the individual counties will have received the complete cultural asset inventories as collected by the end of this work. They will also have access to mapped versions online via Felt.com. It is everyone's hope that local leaders will add to the inventories and maintain them over time; use them in planning, outreach, program delivery, and advocacy; develop public maps from them; and use them in implementation of this plan. The detail is included here for ease of access and as back up to numbers in the body of the document

		B	D	F	G	H	J	R	W	Total
Art in Non-Art Spaces N = 121	Local art, in business	1	5	2			4	1	2	15
	Local art, in non-art NPO					1	1			2
	Museum/Art, in higher ed.		3		2				1	6
	Programs, in business		1					1		2
	Programs, in k12 or higher ed	2	4		5	1				12
	Programs, in non-art NPO		3		2	1	4		1	11
	Programs, in public library	2	7	1	8	4	3	5	5	35
	Venue, in bar etc.		1	1	5	3			4	14
	Venue, in k12 or higher ed		3		3				1	7
Artist / Creative Industry N = 272	Venue, in local gov	1	4	1	2		2	1	1	12
	Venue, in non-art NPO		1			1	1	1	1	5
	Artists, Coop/Guild							1		1
	Community Art Ctr/School								1	1
	Design, Various	2	9	1	6	1	4	3	2	28
	Film				4	1				5
	Folk/Traditional Arts					2				2
	Literary Arts	1	5	2	1	4			6	19
	Performing Arts, Dance	1	6	1	4	1	1	1	4	19
	Performing Arts, Music		14	1	13	7			1	36
	Performing Arts, Theater			1		2				3
	Retail, Books		2					1		3
	Retail, Fiber		1	1				1	1	5
	Retail, Framing		1				1			2
	Retail, Gallery				1			1		2
	Retail, Music	2	2		1	1			1	7
	Retail, Supplies		1	1						2
	Venue, in bar etc.		1							1
	Venue, Music		2					2		5
Venue, Other		1							1	
Venue, Theater						1	1		2	
Visual Arts	2	15	4	9	1	2	3	11	47	
Visual Arts - Craft, Ceramics		6	2			3		4	18	
Visual Arts - Craft, Fiber	1	2	1				1		5	
Visual Arts - Craft, Glass		3	2		1		1		7	
Visual Arts - Craft, Jewellery	1	2		1		2			6	



The cultural asset inventory is a compilation of as many of the arts and culture assets as possible within the project's desk research and crowdsourcing. ***It is not about "regional" assets but rather assets in the region.***

It is incomplete, and that is okay. Errors are a byproduct. Almost by definition, any asset inventory like this will be incomplete. Information is always incomplete; someone is always moving; something is always changing. Someone (or several ones) will be missing and may even be wrong.

Readers may argue with categories. That's okay too. ***The purpose is less about perfection than about identifying opportunity to build from.***

With that in mind, the cultural asset inventory should be considered ***a living, working tool for communities and the region.***



Hunt Guitars, Hartford City
Doug Hunt is one of the Designers for the Stem Guitar Project

	B	D	F	G	H	J	R	W	Total
Artist / Creative Industry	Visual Arts - Craft, Metal					1			1
	Visual Arts - Craft, Wood	1	1				3		5
	Visual Arts, Photography	2	3	2	7	3	1	5	12
	Visual Arts, Tattoo		1				1		2
Arts / Informal Group N = 57	Literary Arts		1					1	2
	Performing Arts, Dance		1			1			2
	Performing Arts, Music		1	2	23				1
	Performing Arts, Theater			1	2				3
	Visual Arts		3		2		1		6
	Visual Arts - Craft, Fiber		5	1	2	1	1	1	12
	Visual Arts - Craft, Wood		1	1			1		3
	Visual Arts, Photography		1			1			2
Arts Nonprofits N = 55	Arts Council or Assoc, NPO	1	1	1	2	1		3	9
	Arts Council, Local Gov	1			1				2
	Community Art Ctr/School	1	1		1		1	1	5
	Film	1				1			2
	Literary Arts		1						1
	Museum (any type)		3		1		1		2
	Performing Arts, Dance			1				1	2
	Performing Arts, Film	1	7						3
	Performing Arts, Mult		2		2	1	2	2	2
	Performing Arts, Music	1				1			2
	Performing Arts, Theater/Story		2		2	1	2	2	2
	Other		1						1
	Former Asset	Various	1		1	6	1	1	3
History & Heritage N = 175	Historic Building/Site/NRHP	1	35	6	16	14	9	8	32
	Historic Society/Club	4	4	1	4	1	2	3	2
	Museum		3	3	6	4	4	1	11
	Other						1		1
Public Art N = 508	Barn Quilt			64		2		47	3
	Mural	2	6	11	18	10	12	18	109
	Other	1	10			1			12
	Sculpture	8	75		14	6	2	2	7
	Utility Wrap		80						80
Misc.	Events & Traditions	15	31	12	23	28	27	12	20
	Civic	16	53	20	58	40	19	39	48

If the region or individual counties maintain their online asset inventories or maps, these numbers will continue to evolve.

Digging Deeper into Cultural Assets – What are they?

 [Cultural Assets Can Be...](#)

PUBLIC ART

Murals or sculptures designed to enhance or beautify a space (usually not monuments without sculpture)

CREATIVE INDUSTRY

Artists earning income from their craft as a business (with an online or built presence) as well as for-profit entities like a gallery, design or architectural firm, musical group, etc.

ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

Nonprofits dedicated to the arts (e.g., museums, theaters, performance venues, arts councils, arts education entities)

HISTORY & HERITAGE

Historic sites and history-focused organizations (but usually not historic markers)

ART IN NON-ART SPACES

Places like bars, libraries, or parks that regularly host arts activities, creative groups, or rotating art displays

INFORMAL GROUPS

A collective that meets regularly, such as quilting circles or history clubs

EVENTS & TRADITIONS

Those signature gatherings, festivals, celebrations unique to every community

5. Recent Arts & Culture Funding State & Federal Grants *

One of the important stories to tell in this work is the wide variation in resources that have been available to each county in the region. This data makes that case from the perspective of government (state and national) arts grant programs. **Of the total funding, 39% came from covid-related programs.** The remaining 61% came from regular agency programs.

Grant Programs	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	Total
Indiana Arts Commission							
Delaware	61,058	74,249	58,590	77,065	70,211	127,546	\$468,719
Wayne	49,566	47,911	50,175	38,761	39,024	59,160	\$284,597
Grant	27,204	32,204	33,430	27,960	18,269	42,005	\$181,072
Randolph	24,244	28,244	25,008	25,126	26,386	45,348	\$174,356
Jay	17,700	20,700	17,192	18,446	15,724	20,183	\$109,945
Henry	8,787	9,837	6,591	--	5,486	12,923	\$43,624
Fayette	--	--	--	3,667	5484	7,000	\$16,151
Blackford	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
ARPA & CARES via IAC							
Delaware			201,758	21,000			\$222,758
Wayne			173,987	12,000			\$185,987
Grant			97,011	15,000			\$112,011
Randolph			12,944	3,000			\$15,944
Jay			55,341	3,000			\$58,341
Henry			28,081	--			\$28,081
Fayette			3,000	--			\$3,000
Blackford			--	--			--
Shuttered Venue Operators Grant							
Grant			524,109				\$524,109
Wayne			447,234				\$447,234
Delaware			286,170				\$286,170
Randolph			105,451				\$105,45
National Endowment for the Arts							
Delaware	50,000	10,000	30,000		30,000		\$120,000
Jay				75,000			\$75,000
Grant				\$10,000			\$10,000
National Endowment for Humanities							
Delaware	99,996		200,000	196,000			\$495,996
Wayne			402,629				\$402,629
Institute of Museum and Library Services							
Wayne		249,668	48,889	209,983	48,771		\$557,311
Delaware				99,146	66,000		\$165,146
Forge ECI Region Totals	\$338,555	\$472,813	\$2,807,590	\$835,154	\$325,355	\$314,165	\$5,093,632

* Counties may also have received arts related grants from other state or federal agencies and budgets that we did not research.

6. Forge ECI READI Projects Completed, In Progress, or Approved

These details are included to continue to make those variations plain, while simultaneously highlighting projects (green rows) – already funded or complete – within the READI initiative that support goals or strategies in this plan.

Given the ongoing nature of this work, the status of projects or their numbers may have changed since this document.

			READI	Public	Private	Total	READI multiplier
1.0 IEDC							
Blackford	Hartford City	Blackford County Broadband Improvements	700,000	2,661,000	--	3,361,000	5
Delaware	Muncie	McKinley-Whitely Live Learn Neighborhood	2,650,000	910,000	37,075,000	40,635,000	15
	Yorktown	Yorktown Downtown Revitalization	250,000	17,750,000	8,000,000	26,000,000	104
	Albany	Albany Commercial Park Initiative	250,000	520,000	330,000	1,100,000	4
	Salem Twp	Salem Township Shovel Ready Site Initiative	250,000	739,360	--	989,360	4
	Selma	Selma Accessibility Improvements	250,000	119,720	--	369,720	1
Fayette	Connersville	Market Street Plaza	200,000	340,605	85,000	625,605	3
Grant	Gas City	Gas City Performing Arts Center	2,750,000	16,543,183	--	19,293,183	7
	Marion	Kennedy Arts Center	100,000	--	1,133,215	1,233,215	12
Henry	Mooreland	Wilbur Wright Trail Phase 3	245,000	1,732,540	178,800	2,156,340	9
	New Castle	Henry County YMCA	3,625	800,000	1,149,000	1,952,625	539
	Knightstown	Knightstown Library Expansion	190,000	110,000	--	300,000	2
	--	Ashbury Fields	186,375	--	--	186,375	1
Jay	--	Jay County Early Learning Center	291,000	--	3,222,472	3,513,472	12
	Salamonia	Salamonia Schoolhouse and Park Improvement Project	9,000	71,232	--	80,232	9
Randolph	Union City	Vision Corner Learning Center	1,375,000	4,665,627	250,000	6,290,627	5
	--	Randolph County 4-H Improvements	250,000	650,000	1,300,000	2,200,000	9
Wayne	Richmond	Richmond Rising: Filling the Gap Workforce Housing	2,950,000	8,945,500	21,652,390	33,547,890	11
Region	--	ECI Talent Collaborative Birth to Five Initiative	1,500,000	662,955	198,000	2,360,955	2
	--	ECIRP Grant Administration	144,000	--	--	144,000	1
Totals			\$14,544,000	\$57,221,722	\$74,573,877	\$146,339,599	10

data tables

data tables

			READI	Public	Private	Total	READI multiplier	
2.0 IEDC								
Blackford	Hartford City	Project - TBD						
Delaware	Muncie	Muncie Central City Housing						
	Muncie	Revitalizing the Village						
	Yorktown	Canal Street Lofts						
Fayette	Connersville	Reid Health - Connersville Construction & Spartan Square Dev.						
	Connersville	Imagine Performing Arts 406 N Central Arts Center						
Grant	Upland	Main Street Mile Initiative: Expanding Housing in Upland, Indiana						
	Gas City	Gas City YMCA at Turner Park						
	Marion	River Rock Lofts						
Henry	New Castle	Develop New Castle Residential						
	--	Henry County Infrastructure						
	New Castle	Henry County 4-H Center (Formerly Henry County Expo Center)						
Jay	Portland	Jay County 68-Acre Development Site						
	Portland	Jay County Early Learning Center - Phase II						
	Portland	The Hood Building						
	Pennville	Pennville Community Park Revitalization						
Randolph	Winchester	Project - TBD						
	Union City	Brave Little Learners and Brave Little Day Care						
	Winchester	Second Welding Lab at Winchester Community High School						
Wayne	Richmond	Smith Hill Mixed Residential Neighborhood						
Region	--	Forge ECI Grant Administration						
State	--	State Administration						
			Totals	\$34,500,000	\$85,117,588	\$483,227,219	\$602,844,807	17
2.0 L.E.I. Blight								
Wayne	Richmond	Wayne County Revitalization				5,100,000		
Region		Forge ECI Grant Administration				TBD		
State		State Administration				TBD		
			Totals	\$ 5,100,000				

Project Specifics & Allocations
Completing the Approval Process

B. METHODOLOGY

1. Process

This plan emerged from a community-driven, asset-based approach to arts and culture planning. It used a wide range of engagement modalities including:

- **A Website** for transparency and to ensure that anyone in the region could participate.
- **Desk & Field Research** to collect and assess available information about the region.
- **Crowdsourcing** to fill gaps, connect with residents and encourage participation.
- **In-Person Engagement** to develop trust while truly listening to residents and leaders.
- **Deep Follow Up** to test ideas, explore new avenues, and develop the plan itself.

This ground-up approach, this allowed for deep and diverse participation across sectors and communities. Work progressed in three parts as depicted here.

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Pre-Work January - March										
Initial Meetings										
Key Assessment Interviews										
Logistics & Design										
Part 1 February – June										
Asset Inventories										
Doc. Review / Opportunity Research										
Part 2 April – November										
Visioning in Counties										
Focus Groups										
Steering Committee Work										
Synthesis & Drafting										
Project Coordination Ongoing										

Methodology Sections

1. Process
2. Engagement Summary & Detail by Interaction
3. Goal Prioritization Survey Results
4. Documents, Projects & Plans Reviewed



YART (Yard Sale for Art), Muncie

methodology

Specific tasks focused on the development of a forward-looking regional arts and culture strategy for East Central Indiana that reflects the diversity and cultural aspirations of the region's residents. Using those tools and the principles on page 16, the process included:

- An inventory of existing arts, cultural, and creative assets
- Engagement with local artists, cultural institutions, local leaders, and the public
- Alignment with existing plans for assets, stakeholders, and strategic opportunities
- Facilitated sessions in each county to envision a vibrant, authentic future
- Follow up with focus groups, interviews, and benchmarking – testing and review
- Online survey for the region to prioritize and comment on vision, goals, and strategies

Readers may notice overlaps between the Arts & Culture Plans for SEI READI and Forge ECI. This was a product of the process and of the team's intent to have both plans speak to each other.

First, these adjacent regions share key elements of geography and history. As largely rural areas, they share challenges best addressed with like strategies. In fact, their regional development plans are similar as well.

Not only did the regions follow similar processes, but participants often shared the same ideas. This was true across all 14 counties in these regions. The creative sector in both share capacity needs – needs heard by all of the consulting teams across the state. The differences here came from the intensity and uneven impacts of those needs. When that is the case, best practices from the field take hold.

Most importantly, in drafting the plans we found them talking to each other. When we learned something in one region, it informed how we thought about the other. An idea heard in one was shared or tested in the other. Just as The Big Ideas amplify core goals in each plan, this dialogue amplified the good of regionalism across an even larger footprint.

All of that said, there are significant differences between the plans. The regions start with different strengths, funding profiles, and density of arts and culture assets. After that, the nuance and details matter. They can be found throughout. Certainly, in the flavor of each region, its geography, its history, its leaders – *its identity* – and the big ideas that resulted.

Digging Deeper into Community Visioning

County by county and then together, this process asked the region to imagine a Vibrant Arts & Culture Future for itself. One that embraces an "Arts and" mindset and through which East Central Indiana's:

Arts & Culture have been Transformed with:
Resident engagement across boundaries, amenities that are accessible to the entire community, and a critical mass of authentic, yet bold, sustainable assets.

AND Have Transformed the Region in return –
Elevating quality of place across cities and towns

What emerged as East Central Indiana's Vision for the Future describes 2035 where Arts are a Driving Force in Shaping a Thriving, Connected, & Resilient Region

What is a "Vision"?

“... a description of what it should look like once it has successfully implemented its strategies and achieved its full potential. This is [its] “vision of success.” **OR** ... “visioning” exercises... develop enough of a consensus on purposes and values to guide ... strategy formulation...

John Bryson. Strategic Planning for Public & Nonprofit Organizations (1995)

Inevitably, readers come to this with different expectations for a “vision.” We lean toward:

1. Success of Plan or “What will we have achieved?”
2. Ideal for the Future or “How __ should look when it is working extremely well” (Bryson)

2. Engagement Summary

In total, **over 450 individuals** participated in or provided information to the project including:

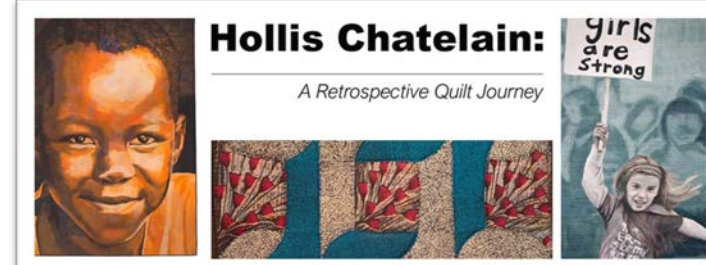
- Kickoff Webinar** 99 individuals participated live, and 11 viewed the recording at a later date.
- Community Visioning** 165 individuals participated in total across the region, 56% of whom were from the Creative Sector
- Other** Dozens reached out in other ways to ask a question or suggest an asset (e.g., emails, website contact forms, asset submissions, focus groups)
- Website** 258 unique visitors to project-specific pages
Any number of these may be in addition to the 400+ participants we tracked.
- Contact Generation** Along the way we expanded project contacts from <500 to >1,100. The final list included >30% arts and culture focused individuals. And the list – aka interest in this work – keeps growing. Dozens of new emails came from the prioritization survey.

Breaking down that participation by county and by sector:

Participation vs 2020 Pop			Sector	
				Participation
Delaware	20%	30%	Arts, Culture & History	41%
Wayne	17%	18%	Education (K12 & Higher Ec.)	8%
Jay	14%	5%	City/County Government	7%
Fayette	11%	6%	Economic Dev. & Related	5%
Blackford	10%	3%	Foundations / Funders	5%
Henry	10%	13%	Libraries & Misc.	4%
Grant	8%	18%	Finance & Professional Services	4%
Randolph	8%	7%	Health & Social Services	3%
Multi/Other	2%	--	Chambers & Main Streets	3%
			Business & Manufacturing	3%
			Tourism & Attractions	2%
			Real Estate, Construction, Etc.	1%
			Other/Unknown	13%

Two members of the Indiana State Legislature also participated in the process.

* Misc. includes media, extension, and nature.



Detail by Interaction

= count of events/items

N = number of participants/attendees

methodology

Personal		Digital
<p>Public (# = 8)</p> <p>Community Visioning Sessions <i>all from 4:30-6:30 pm</i></p> <p>2024</p> <p>Blackford, Nov 14 City Hall, Hartford City (N = 22)</p> <p>Jay, Nov 12, 2024 John Jay Learning Center, Portland (N = 21)</p> <p>2025</p> <p>Delaware, Apr 10, Minnetrista Museum & Gardens, Muncie (N= 30)</p> <p>Fayette, Apr 16 Ivy Tech, Connersville (N =16)</p> <p>Grant, Apr 22 Kennedy Art Center, Marion (N = 25)</p> <p>Henry, Apr 1 Smith Auditorium, New Castle (N = 30)</p> <p>Randolph, Apr 30, Towne Square Community Center, Winchester (N = 13)</p> <p>Wayne, Apr 24 Earlham College, Richmond (N = 41)</p>	<p>Group (# = 8)</p> <p>4 Focus Groups (virtual)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts Organization Leaders: Jul 21 9am & 5 pm (total N =16) History Leaders: Jul 16 (N = 5) Tourism Leaders: Jul 15 (N = 8) <p>4 Regional Leader Discussions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steering Committee (virtual): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feb 18 (N = 9) Mar 28 (N = 4) May 14 (N = 7) Regional Leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts Plan Goals & Strategies Workshop Sep 10 Muncie (N = 15) <p>Individual (# = 47)</p> <p>13 Arts & Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts-Specific <i>Arts Place, Marion Arts Commission, Richmond Symphony & Art Museum, Whitewater Valley Arts Association, Start with Art, Artists</i> History/Culture <i>Historic Elmhurst, History Center at the Marion Public Library, Historic Connersville, Overbeck Museum</i> <p>7 Funders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foundations & Community Foundations <i>Ball Brothers Foundation, Blackford, Delaware, Henry, Jay, Randolph, Wayne County Community Foundations</i> <p>27 Local Government & Civic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mayors & Leaders (<i>Hartford City, Dunkirk, Montpelier, Portland</i>) Economic Dev. & Tourism (<i>Blackford, 2 Fayette, Henry, 2 Wayne</i>) Local Business Leaders & Creative Placemakers (<i>Portland, Hartford City, Connersville, Marion, Union City, Winchester, Purdue Extension</i>) Universities (<i>IU East, Taylor, Earlham, Combo</i>) Other (<i>IU Health, John Jay Learning Center, 2 Main Streets, IDA, ICI</i>) 	<p>Webinar (# = 1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kickoff : Feb 28 (N = 99 + 11 after) <p>Website Interactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 117 Google Form Submissions from 20-60 ind. 41 Website Contacts from 33 individuals Project-Specific Web Pages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 258 Unique Visitors 710 Sessions 1,955 Page Views <p><i>Web analytics through 11/16/2025</i></p> <p>Prioritization Survey (# = 1, N = 230)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> N = 12 Blackford N = 62 Delaware N = 32 Fayette N = 16 Grant N = 11 Henry N = 16 Jay N = 31 Randolph N = 51 Wayne <p>Misc.</p> <p>Additional Our Town Process beginning in 2024</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus Groups (# = 6, N = 35) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 Blackford Focus Groups 2 Jay Focus Groups 1 Blended Focus Group Interviews (N = 11, included in left) Prioritization Survey (# = 1, N = 64) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> N = 27 Blackford N = 37 Jay Website (59 unique visitors, 110 sess., 126 p. views)

3. Goal Prioritization Survey Results

Items were randomized in the survey to increase the quality of response.

VISION	5		4		3		2		1		Score	N	
	Really Exciting!		-----		Pretty Good		-----		Needs Help				
Blackford	3	3	2	--	--	4.1	83%	8					
Delaware	17	18	6	3	--	4.1	82%	44					
Fayette	9	10	4	1	2	3.9	78%	26					
Grant	8	1	3	--	--	4.4	88%	12					
Henry	4	1	1	1	--	4.1	83%	7					
Jay	5	5	1	--	2	3.8	77%	13					
Randolph	11	7	4	1	--	4.2	84%	23					
Wayne	16	12	9	1	1	4.1	81%	39					
Total Response	42%	72	34%	57	17%	29	4%	7	3%	5	4.1	82%	172
Balanced Score											4.10		

GOALS	1		2		3		4		5		6		Rank	Score	N
	Top		-----		-----		-----		-----		-----				
★ 1. Activate Downtowns	35%	78	27%	61	14%	32	10%	22	8%	17	6%	14	1	4.5	224
2. Connect Communities	12%	26	15%	33	17%	39	15%	33	19%	43	22%	50	5	3.2	224
3. Deepen Next Generation Attachment	7%	16	17%	39	17%	39	24%	54	20%	44	14%	32	3	3.3	224
4. Generate Business Opportunity	15%	33	22%	50	19%	42	18%	41	13%	29	13%	29	2	3.7	224
5. Mobilize, Collaborate, & Communicate	11%	25	11%	24	15%	34	18%	41	25%	57	19%	43	6	3.1	224
6. Formalize Sustainable Commitments	21%	46	8%	17	17%	38	15%	33	15%	34	25%	56	3	3.3	224

STRATEGIES for...	1		2		3		Rank	Score	N
	Top		-----		Bottom				
GOAL 1: Activate Downtowns									
1. Enhance through Identity & Design			18%	34	36%	68	3	1.7	189
2. Activate with Public Art & Programming			24%	45	35%	66	2	1.8	189
★ 1. Restore & Reuse Downtown Assets			58%	110	29%	55	1	2.5	189
GOAL 2: Connect Communities									
1. Celebrate Cultural Heritage			26%	49	39%	75	2	1.9	192
★ 2. Link Physical & Cultural Assets			44%	84	34%	66	1	2.2	192
2. Advance Regional Tourism			31%	59	27%	51	2	1.9	192
GOAL 3: Deepen Next Generation Attachment									
3. Empower Civic Engagement			30%	52	34%	60	3	1.9	176
★ 3. Expand Arts Opportunity			41%	72	29%	51	1	2.1	176
3. Build Creative Career Opportunity			30%	52	37%	65	2	2.0	176

methodology

methodology

STRATEGIES for...	1 Top		2 -----		3 Bottom		Rank	Score	N
GOAL 4: Generate Business Opportunity									
★ 4. Empower Creative Capacity	56%	70	44%	54			1	1.6	124
5. Grow Creative Opportunity	44%	54	56%	70			2	1.4	124
GOAL 5: Mobilize, Collaborate, & Communicate									
1. Mobilize Creative Networks	42%	46	58%	63			2	1.4	109
★ 6. Catalyze a Sustainable Arts & Culture Coalition	58%	63	42%	46			1	1.6	109
GOAL 6: Formalize Sustainable Commitments									
7. Build Support for Arts & Culture Strategy	39%	75	29%	55	33%	63	2	2.1	193
8. Build Policy Infrastructure	17%	33	38%	74	45%	86	3	1.7	193
★ 9. Secure Sustainable Funding	44%	85	33%	64	23%	44	1	2.2	193

COMMENTS CODED BY TYPE			
Substantive	12	Many of the open-ended responses to this survey are embedded in the body of the document.	
• Suggestions	7		
• Concerns / Questions	4		
• Process Critique	1		
Supportive	22		All of the responses were provided to Forge ECI as part of project documentation
• Simple Thanks	9		
• Thanks + Suggestion	8		
• Comment	5		
Other	3		
• Name	1		
• Process Comment	1		
• Reflection	1		
Total	35		

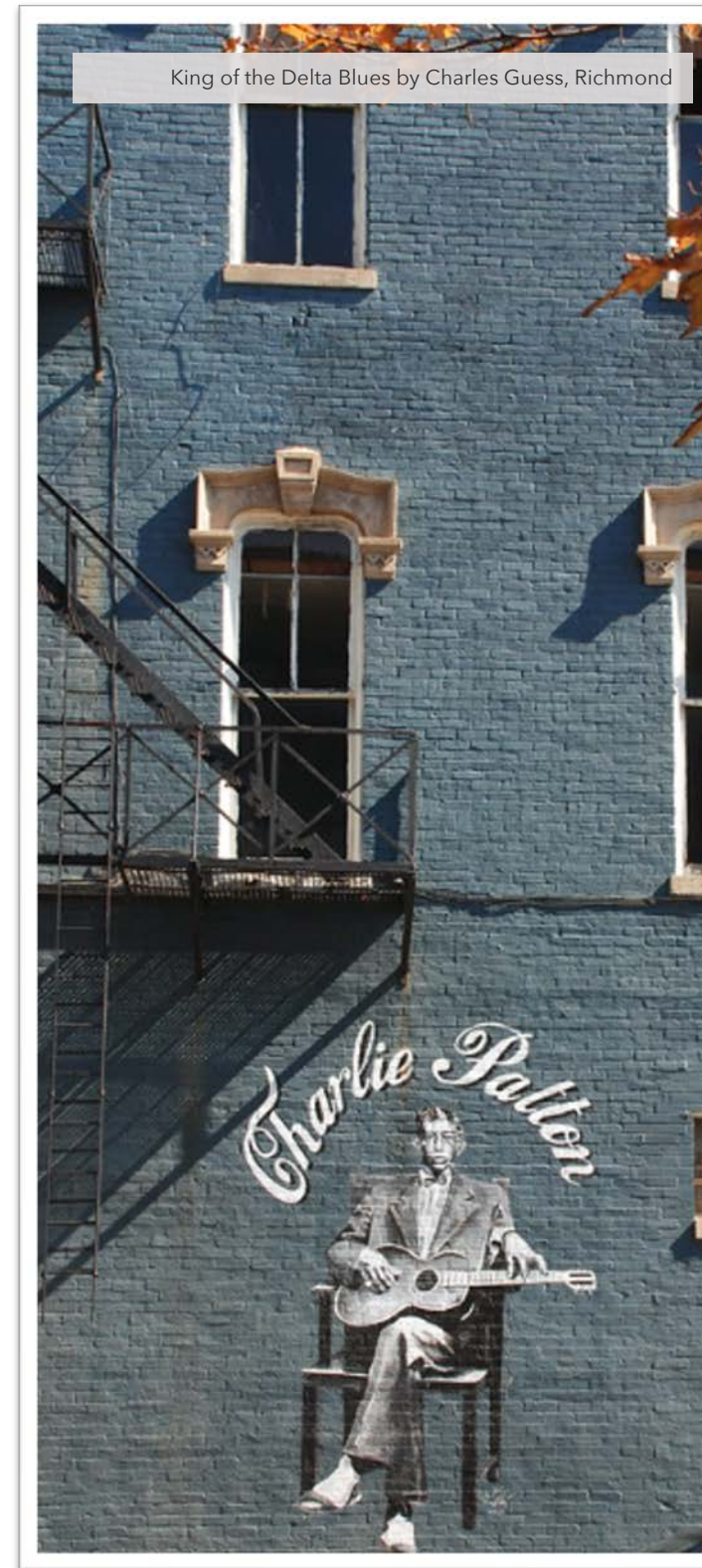
ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS	Complete	Partial
Blackford	12 5%	7
Delaware	62 27%	13
Fayette	32 14%	16
Grant	16 7%	5
Henry	11 5%	6
Jay	16 7%	3
Randolph	31 13%	8
Wayne	51 22%	16
N =	231	74



4. Documents, Projects & Plans Reviewed

In addition to asset mapping and public engagement, existing plans in the community informed goals and strategies, including the following 52 documents:

Location	Year, Title, & Hyperlink *
Blackford	2025 Arts & Culture Master Plan (Our Town Project rolled over into this one)
	2025 Hartford City Park Master Plan (draft)
	2024 Blackford County Comprehensive Plan
	2024 Kevin Ford Aerospace Park & Outdoor Museum Plan
	2023 Montpelier Comprehensive Plan
Delaware	2024-28 Town of Yorktown 5-Year Parks Master Plan
	2024 Muncie: Creative Space Action Plan
	2023 BSU: Village Revitalization Plan
	2022 Comprehensive Plan for the Delaware-Muncie Region
	2022 Vision 2027 Muncie-Delaware County, IN 5-Year Economic Development Plan
Fayette	2024 Connersville Parks & Recreation 5-Year Master Plan
	2022 Connersville Strategic Investment Plan (OCRA-HELP)
	2022 Connersville Comprehensive Plan
Grant	2025 Grant County Comprehensive Plan (adoption draft)
	2024 Grant County Strategic Visioning Plan (ICI)
	2023 Taylor Thrives (Main Street Mile) (CCC)
	2023 Indiana Wesleyan University (CCC)
Henry	2025 New Castle Downtown Master Plan
	2023 New Castle Main Street Transformation Strategy
	2018 City of New Castle Comprehensive Plan
	2018 Henry County Comprehensive Plan
	2016-2035 Knightstown Comprehensive Development Plan
Jay	2025 Arts & Culture Master Plan (Our Town Project rolled over into this one)
	2024 Portland IN Downtown Economic Development Plan
	2023 Jay County Strategic Investment Plan (OCRA-HELP)
	2022 Portland Park Plan 2022-2026
	2019 Pennville Comprehensive Plan
	2019 Jay County Economic Development Plan



Location	Year, Title, & Hyperlink *
Randolph	2020-2025 Plan & Ongoing Efforts: Cultivating Community Randolph Co. (ICI CBAP) 2024 Randolph County Trails Master Plan 2023 Winchester Comprehensive & Strategic Reinvestment Plan 2018 Randolph County Comprehensive Plan
Wayne	2024 Concept Paper: Wayne County Community Foundation (GIFT VIII) 2023 Revitalize Richmond: Earlham & Richmond Growing Together (CCC) 2023 Whitewater Gorge Activation Plan 2023 Wayne County Strategic Investment Plan (OCRA-HELP) 2022 Hagerstown Comp Plan Update 2020 Richmond Rising: Community Action Plan 2020 Cambridge City Comprehensive Plan 2020 Richmond Parks & Recreation Master Plan 2020 Wayne County Comprehensive Plan
ECI Region	Forge Your Path: East Central Indiana Regional Development Plan (READI) 2024 IU East Regional Business Confidence Index & East-Central IN Business Survey 2023 EIRPC Comp. Economic Dev. Strategy (Fayette, Henry, Randolph, Union, Wayne) 2022 ECI Regional Development District CEDS Plan (Blackford, Delaware, Grant, Jay)
State Arts & Culture	2024 Embracing a Culture of Creativity: IN's Overlooked Economic Engine (Study) 2024-2028 Indiana Arts Commission Strategic Framework 2023-24 Indiana Arts Commission Artist Needs Assessment (Study) 2022 Planning with Arts & Culture: How Indiana Municipalities Are Utilizing... (Study) <p>See also IAC Research Repository https://www.in.gov/arts/programs-and-services/research/</p>
State Tourism	2024 Indiana Destination Development Corporation Strategic Plan 2024 Indiana Destination Development Corporation Future Asset Study 2024 Tourism at Work: The Impact of Travel & Tourism in Indiana (Study) <p>See also IDDC Research Repository https://www.visitindiana.com/about-iddc/tourism-research/</p>

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 page 63 "Small Decisions" Cartoon, Guy Downes, [available for purchase](#)
 page 126 "Careers in the Arts" Poster, [Vincent Hofer](#) (2024) for Arts South Dakota, [available for download](#)
 page 127 "We Believe in Art" Poster, [Sayuri Sasaki Hemann](#) (2019), [available for purchase](#)

Digging Deeper into Document Design

For those curious about the unusual colors or fonts in this document. It deliberately combines Forge ECI's official branding / style guide with that of the consultant team as described here.

Forge ECI

Designed by	IronGate Creative Hagerstown, Wayne County, IN
Header Font	Roboto (Regular)
Accent Font	<i>Milkshake</i> (Regular)
Hex Colors	Each with lighter/darker variations
	Dove F8F7F7
	Green 789E4A
	Navy 003764
	Orange F09020
	Pink ED336E
	Purple 872D74

TransformingCommunities.art

Designed by	Sara A. Peterson & Paige Sharp
Body Font	Avenir Next (Ultra Light, Reg, Med, & Demi Bold)

Special Thanks to Avery Eberle for design assistance along the way.



Why include this?

Because we want to walk the talk from the beginning – not just giving credit to the creators but making that credit transparent to all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the hundreds of community members who participated in this process.

You took our calls, completed surveys, shared information, came to meetings, and beta-tested ideas. Your communities graciously hosted us when we were in town. You made the plan happen! Your commitment to community and to a *Vibrant Arts & Culture Future for East Central Indiana* has been a joy to see.

Sara & Paige


Project Made Possible by –

Initiative Funders



Lilly Endowment Inc.
A private foundation since 1937

The **National Endowment for the Arts** for its funding of work in Blackford & Jay Counties as part Our Town – and that project’s
Coordinator & Fiscal Sponsor – Carolyn Carducci, *Arts Place, Inc.*
Steering Committee – Dan Borgenheimer, Dan Hammond, Doug Horn, Mike Medler, Chris Noble, and Doug Spencer



Initiative Partners

<p>Jim Rawlinson <i>Indiana Economic Development Corporation</i></p>		<p>Miah Michaelsen <i>Indiana Arts Commission</i></p>	
--	---	---	--

Consultant Team

Sara A. Peterson in collaboration as
dba Sara Peterson Consulting

Paige Sharp
dba Sharp Visionarts

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES 
through the power of arts and culture

