

**Indiana Arts Commission  
Quarterly Business Meeting**

Friday, March 13, 2026, 9:00 AM (CT)  
Southwest Indiana Small Business Development Space  
318 Main St. #500, Evansville, IN 47708  
Dave Haist, Chair



**Commissioners Present:** Réna Bradley, Jeanne Campbell, Dave Haist, Greg Hull, Daniel Martinez, Judith Sawyer, Scott Wylie

**Commissioners Present via Zoom:** Azizi Arrington-Slocum, Dawn Conwell, Rick James, Jake Oakman, Kelsey Peaper

**Commissioners Absent:** Chad Bolser, Walter Knabe, Renee Thomas

**IAC Staff Members Present:** Jordan Adams, Eric Ashby, Connie Brahm, Britt Fechtman, Austin Hendricks, Anne Johansson, Miah Michaelson, Stephanie Pfendler, André Zhang Sonera

**IAC Staff Members Present via Zoom:** Gwendolyn Pickett

**Regional Arts Partners Present via Zoom:** Kayla Myers, Sherri Wright

**1. Call to Order**

- a. **Welcome.** Commission Chair Dave Haist called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM Central Time and welcomed all present.
- b. **Roll Call.** Indiana Arts Commission (IAC) Administrative Assistant, Austin Hendricks, called the roll. All were present as listed above.
- c. **Welcome to Evansville.** Commissioner Scott Wylie gave a few remarks welcoming the Commission to Evansville and highlighting the networking event and community hours hosted the night before. He also highlighted some of the development in Evansville as it continues to grow. Mr. Wylie then introduced Dominic Poggi, Regional Director of the Southwest Indiana Small Business Development Center. Mr. Poggi shared the work his organization does as well as how they are funded. He highlighted the intersection of arts and the economic sector, especially in Evansville.

2. **Approval of Agenda and Consent Agenda.** Mr. Haist asked for any items to be removed from the consent agenda. Mr. Wylie motioned for the removal of the executive committee meeting from the agenda. Commissioner Réna Bradley seconded. **By roll call vote, all were in favor and the executive committee meeting was removed from the agenda.**

Mr. Haist then called for a motion to approve the agenda and the consent agenda. Commissioner Greg Hull motioned, and Mr. Wylie seconded. **By roll call vote, all were in favor, and the agenda and consent agenda were approved.**

- a. **Items Submitted for Commission Approval**
  - i. December 12, 2025, Meeting Minutes
  - ii. FY26 Year-to-Date Financial Statement
  - iii. Arts and Health Program Framework
- b. **Reports:**

i. Arts Trust	vi. Creative Convergence Round 1 & 2
ii. Communications	vii. Every County Funded
iii. Key Performance Indicators	viii. External Partnerships
iv. Staff Activity	ix. Vision and Venture Participants
v. America250	

**3. Committee Reports**

- a. **Committee on the Future**
  - i. **FY27 Budget Preview.** IAC Deputy Director and Chief of Staff, André Zhang Sonera, presented this agenda item. He highlighted that the state's budget runs from July 1

through June 30 and that we are in year two of the 2026-2027 biennium budget. In the fall of this year, the IAC will submit its proposed budget for FY28-29. Mr. Zhang Sonera then reminded the committee that the Federal budget runs from October 1 to September 30 and that the IAC gets funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and submits a yearly application every September. He then shared that since this is the middle of a biennium budget, that the IAC will still be in a 33% reduction from the last state appropriation. He expects a 4% reduction in the NEA grant due to the fact that the America 250 allocation was a one-time funding opportunity. Mr. Zhang Sonera then shared that the agency is expecting a draw of \$240,000 from the Arts Trust, and a 5% management reserve holdback is expected for the next fiscal year. He then shared that the agency is expecting increases in personnel expenses due to the potential addition of a new program manager; an increase in Arts Project Support (APS) granting; and targeted opportunity funding, including cultural districts. He noted that staff welcome input from the commission on the budget, and that the IAC will receive federal allocation information in early May. The budget for FY27 will be presented at the June 2026 QBM. . Mr. Zhang Sonera called for questions and discussion. *Please see the agenda for the specific discussion questions.* None was had.

*At this time Commissioner Judith Sawyer joined the meeting.*

- ii. **CY26 Agency Goals Presentation.** Mr. Zhang Sonera continued with this agenda item. He noted that the IAC is in the middle of its 2024-2028 strategic plan framework. The goals for 2026 were presented to the commission and are listed below:
  1. **Strengthen the fieldwide capacity through subject matter partnership.** This goal is aligned with the IAC's "Partner" strategic priority. Below are the specific actions the IAC plans to use to meet this goal:
    - a. Identifying Subject Matter Expert (SME) organizations (statewide, regional, and national) aligned with priority needs for Indiana artists and arts organizations (e.g., governance, accessibility, finance, communications, talent retention, sustaining economic volatility, diversification, and sustainability of funding streams, etc.)
    - b. Structuring formal partnership models (learning series, pilot program) that pairs SME with Indiana organizations and artists.
    - c. Embedding SME-led learning or technical assistance opportunities within existing grant programs.
    - d. Prioritizing partnerships that demonstrate scalable impact across multiple regions or disciplines.
  2. **Standardize programmatic lifecycle to strengthen accountability and learning.** This goal is aligned with the IAC's "Build" strategic priority. Below are the specific actions the IAC plans to use to meet this goal:
    - a. Defining and documenting standard lifecycle phases for all programs, including application, award, grant implementation, closeout, and reflection.
    - b. Establishing clear expectations and timelines for final grant reports, communications closeout, and record retention.
    - c. Aligning internal workflows across the Programs, Communications, and Operations departments to support lifecycle consistency.
    - d. Creating a structured internal reflection process to capture lessons learned and inform future program design.

3. **Implement Cohesive Arts and culture messaging informed by national research.**

This goal is aligned with the IAC's "Amplify" strategic priority. Below are the specific actions the IAC plans to use to meet this goal:

- a. Transitioning national research into an internal messaging framework applicable across programs, grants, and communications.
- b. Aligning external-facing communications, reports, and dashboards to shared language and narrative themes.
- c. Equipping staff, commissioners, and partners with consistent talking points and messaging tools.
- d. Integrating data and storytelling to reinforce key messages about the arts' impact, public value, and outcomes.

4. **Create Actional Pathways for Cross-Sector Support of the Arts.** This goal is aligned with the IAC's "Amplify" strategic priority. Below are the specific actions the IAC plans to use to meet this goal:

- a. Engaging with non-arts partners (business, philanthropy, health, education, community development) that are interested in supporting the arts.
- b. Facilitating introductions between partners and arts stakeholders.

*Please see the corresponding memo for more details on each of these goals.*

Mr. Zhang Sonera then moved on to the discussion portion of this presentation. *Please see the agenda for specific questions asked.*

Mr. Haist thanked Mr. Zhang Sonera for his work on the goals.

Ms. Bradley noted that she appreciated that Goal 1 is very clear, and she is willing to recommend mentors for that specific goal. She also is impressed with Goal 3, and if the data presented with it will be sharable as graphics.

IAC Marketing and Communications Director Connie Brahm said yes, they will and she will share them as they are made.

Commissioner Jeanne Campbell noted that she is impressed with accountability and support that the IAC centers in its goals.

Mr. Haist called for anyone online for comments. None were spoken.

Mr. Haise called for a motion to approve the goals. Commissioner Jake Oakman motioned. Ms. Bradley seconded. **By roll call vote, all were in favor and the goals were approved.**

- iii. **IAC Tableau Dashboard Update.** Mr. Zhang Sonera also presented this item. He shared the financial grants dashboard. It is a tool to measure the impact on the grantees from counties, disciplines, and regions. This dashboard is approximately four years old and was powered by Microsoft Power BI but is now on Salesforce Tableau. Mr. Zhang Sonera noted that the data presented goes back to FY17.

IAC Executive Director Miah Michaelsen then shared that this dashboard has been a goal for a while, and it is available on the website and is publicly available. She then noted that the agency will send a link to the Commission for their use. This dashboard is also for the public, commissioners, and state-decision makers to understand how the IAC's dollars are being used. Ms. Michaelsen reemphasized that this presentation is to seek input on any features the Commission would like to see in addition for this.

Mr. Zhang Sonera then proceeded with the visual demonstration. *Please see the recorded livestream for the demonstration.* He then called for questions.

Mr. Haist asked how this dashboard will be publicly shared.

Ms. Brahm shared that this will be linked in the grant announcements and annual report. She noted that this model that was demonstrated is not currently live but will be soon. Previous iteration is live and shared on the website.

Ms. Campbell asked if it was the first year all 92 counties were funded.

Mr. Zhang Sonera shared that FY25 was the first time when all 92 were funded, in no small part due to the Every County Funded program.

Ms. Campbell also noted that there's likely some cross-sector movement within the arts and health sector.

Mr. Zhang Sonera added that yes there are some non-traditional applicants like 4H groups.

Commissioner Daniel Martinez shared that he thinks that this tool is very helpful in getting the quantitative data. He added that he also values qualitative data and wondered if there is a way to link the qualitative data to the quantitative data. He specified: if there is a way to share the specifics of projects in each county, he would like to see that added to the dashboard.

Mr. Zhang Sonera noted that that is something the agency is working on and that the programs team is working on standardizing the qualitative data in the final grant report. Connecting the qualitative and quantitative data together is an additional development he would also like to see.

Mr. Haist asked if the IAC was using Artificial Intelligence (AI) on this project.

Ms. Brahm shared that no, the state is both supportive and cautious with AI due to the sensitive data that it has access to. At this time the State is making sure there are policies in place before they use it.

Ms. Michaelsen shared further discussion on AI will be coming in the future at QBMs. She then responded to Mr. Martinez's question. She noted that the IAC is still thinking about how to make a data tool capture qualitative data and that adding that into the dashboard is the next step in this project. She shared that the IAC is thinking a lot about storytelling and adding it into more of their communications. One example being adding photos to the dashboard.

Mr. Zhang Sonera highlighted that this tool is unique among other state arts agencies, and that the IAC is providing coaching on how to make a dashboard like this for other states.

Ms. Michaelsen emphasized that the IAC is the only state agency in Indiana that shares its data in this format.

Mr. Haist called for more questions or comments. None were spoken.

Ms. Michaelsen shared that Mr. Zhang Sonera is great at coaching people on how to use systems like this dashboard, and he is available to help any commissioner with its use.

**b. Programs, Grants, and Services**

**i. Core Programs**

1. **FY27 Arts Project Support (APS) Update.** IAC Director of Programs, Eric Ashby, presented this agenda item. He shared that the deadline was on March 5, 2026, and that there will be another cycle of this program in July. He noted that a majority of the applicants in this cycle are not arts organizations. In this cycle, there were 211 applicants which is a 20% decrease from the previous cycle. There were 63 counties with applications, which is a 7-county decrease from FY26 Spring Cycle (this time last year). He noted that 8 counties that applied in this cycle that didn't apply last year. 30 metro counties applied, 48% of applicants, and 33 rural counties applied: 52% of the applicants. These percentages were almost identical to the FY26 Spring applications last year. He then shared a map of application volume. He noted that this map is very standard when compared to most years.

Mr. Ashby then shared theories on why the applications were lower this year than last year: the volume of program offerings between the end of 2025 (which includes READI 2.0 Arts and Culture), the first time offering a Spring cycle after a Fall cycle, or a greater awareness of the second cycle. He also noted it could be a response to the increasing competitiveness of this program.

He noted then that the application numbers through FY26, which shows an ever-increasing number of applications, In FY23 there were 236 applications, but in FY26, there were 431 applications, a 50% increase.

He then shared a visual graph of applications including the Spring and Fall cycles split out. He noted that there will be a big push in the Fall to try and get the numbers of applications to match what has been previously shown. He then gave a breakdown of the applications' type of activity, with concerts, performances, or readings being the most common type of application, followed by arts instruction. By discipline, the top two categories were visual arts and music projects. The groupings are prescribed by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

Mr. Ashby then gave the next steps for this program. Currently, there are final reviews for completeness and eligibility, completed by the IAC and Regional Arts Partners (RAPs) through March. Then the external reviewer training will happen in March, then external reviewers will review in April, and the funding recommendations to come to the commission in June.

Ms. Campbell asked if Mr. Ashby knows why counties who did apply then did not this cycle.

Mr. Ashby shared that oftentimes it's a personnel issue, and oftentimes in rural counties, people may not have the bandwidth and find it is not worth applying again.

Ms. Campbell noted that first-time applicants can have a difficult time applying for a state grant.

Mr. Ashby said yes, and that IAC Community Services Program Manager Anne Johansson provides a lot of good hands-on help, as do the RAPs.

Ms. Zhang Sonera added that first time applicants do have the opportunity to get a draft review from their RAP.

Mr. Ashby called for more questions. None were spoken.

Mr. Haist thanked Mr. Ashby for his report.

## ii. **Community Services Programs**

**5. Cultural Districts Presentation.** IAC Community Services Program Manager, Anne Johansson, presented this agenda item. She shared that this program has been on a brief hiatus and gave a brief recap of what a cultural district is. The program was established by the Indiana Code (IC 4-23-2-7) and Ms. Johansson has been doing research on the program with the current districts and former program managers. The Code does not carry any dedicated funding or tax incentive requirements and allows the IAC to run the program as they see fit. Currently, there are 12 cultural districts, which have been added from 2010-2021. Ms. Johansson noted that in the past, certification criteria included local designations of cultural districts, community demographics, cultural aspects, narrative descriptions, cultural programming, and various plans including goals, marketing, evaluation, budget, and other requirements. She noted she met with all the districts back in January of this year, and all Cultural Districts are interested in recertifying.

Historically the IAC offered a \$5,000 project support grant for planning or casemaking each year. They were also required to submit an annual report, a final grant report if money was accepted, and attend an annual consortium meeting with all the Cultural Districts.

Ms. Johansson moved into the discussion questions that were presented to the commission. *Please see the questions listed in the agenda of this meeting.* She also recapped the discussion had in the Committee meetings.

In the first question, the committees wanted to see the local designation, and narrative in their final report shows that they are meeting the goals that they set. The committees wanted to see a slightly simpler application while still making sure that the designation is important.

Commissioner Dawn Conwell noted she would be interested in hearing the economic impact of the current cultural districts, and that it would encourage other potential districts to apply.

Ms. Michaelsen called on Mr. Ashby to share the work of Michael Hicks in the cultural district designation.

Mr. Ashby noted that Dr. Hicks is with Ball State University and he looked at the data surrounding Cultural Districts in Indiana, specifically noting that home values increased with proximity to a cultural district, and that there are some snapshots of specific basic economic indicators of the Districts shared on the IAC website. Mr. Ashby noted that the economic indicators lag about two years behind due to how long it takes to process that data. Mr. Ashby did add that some of the economic

impact that is tracked nationally is going away, and that replacement indicators are being ideated.

Mr. Haist asked if Dr. Hicks' findings are public.

Ms. Michaelsen shared no, but the agency is looking at putting it on the website.

Commissioner Judith Sawyer asked if the Cultural Districts decide their project when using the \$5,000

Ms. Johansson responded yes, they would have to apply for the \$5,000 with a specific project in mind.

Ms. Conwell asked if there was any other funding that the IAC can provide to communities with a cultural district.

Ms. Johansson responded that that is a conversation that has happened internally, and two options are an annual grant, or using the Arts Trust Plate to fund the program, and in return the Cultural Districts would have to promote the plate.

Mr. Ashby noted that the READI arts and culture plans call out Cultural Districts as a piece of their arts economic strategies.

Ms. Michaelsen shared that Districts support will likely be an increased ask in the FY28-29 proposed budget to the General Assembly. She added that around 2012, there was a proposed piece of legislation to appropriate specific funds to Cultural Districts. It did not pass at the time, but it was a good learning experience and could be something to be revisited in the future.

Ms. Conwell asked if any private funding has been sought.

Ms. Michaelsen shared she will share more about that when she discusses READI.

Ms. Conwell clarified that she wondered if there were any private individuals who would donate to the Districts to help fund them, so they don't solely rely on State dollars.

Commissioner Greg Hull asked about the period of time for recertifications.

Ms. Johansson noted that it is 3-5 year cycles, with a recertification at year 5 and a check-in at three years.

Mr. Martinez shared that this is not an easy designation to get, and that a longer cadence makes sense. He then added that in the Programs, Grants, and Services Committee, they had discussed shared desires among the districts, and having an option open where they could pool their \$5,000 together and get one project that benefited all of them, such as unified wayfinding graphics.

Ms. Johansson noted that there will be check-ins quarterly with all the Cultural Districts and she loves the idea of the Districts collaborating.

Mr. Haist thanked the Programs, Grants, and Services Committee for their discussion for this item. He added that getting the Cultural Districts to work collaboratively is an interesting idea and provided an example of two Districts that

are relatively close together doing joint events. He then called for any final thoughts. None were shared.

Ms. Johansson shared her next steps, which include creating guidelines, evaluation criteria, and scoring rubrics for recertification, opening applications Summer 2026, and provide updates at the June and September QBMs.

Mr. Haist asked if all Cultural Districts participated in the last convening.

Ms. Johansson responded that about 80% participated.

Mr. Haist thanked Ms. Johansson for her presentation.

*At this time, the meeting took a twelve-minute break.  
It was reconvened at 10:30 AM CT.*

### iii. **Artist Services Programs**

1. **Creative Leap First Year Pilot Review Presentation.** Artist Services Program Manager, Jordan Adams, presented this agenda item. She gave a quick verbal update of On-Ramp, noting that the Indy Arts Council is hosting in Indianapolis, and this is the last central cohort of On-Ramp before it moves to local models, one North, one Central, and one Southern. She noted she will give a further update in June. She then gave a brief review of what the On-Ramp program is.

She then went into the review of the Creative Leap program. She highlighted that this program came out of the Artist Needs Assessment and it was geared toward serving sustaining and scaling artists by revisiting their strategic business plans. This program meets the needs of marketing, financial support, education, and local access. This program was a 6-week virtual series, with the core curriculum presented in the first four weeks and the final two being progress check ins. Dr. Elaine Grogan Luttrull of Minerva Financial Arts reviewed survey results, themes, participant feedback, and recommended improvements. Ms. Adams then shared that there was a pre- and post-workshop survey with this program having four statements that the participants answered on both ends of the program, noting that on the whole, all responses trended positively. Ms. Adams then shared the common themes that came out, which included accountability, community, and instructor/team. Each of these themes had a specific quote from a participant attached in the presentation. Ms. Adams then shared observations taken from the program. Participants were able to accomplish their goals, collaborations were impactful, participants were comfortable sharing challenges, and participants shared impactful wins. She then shared participant feedback noting that they wanted to adjust the timing of the workshops and the payment schedule, desired tailored goals to the cohort, shared an interest in guest speakers, and wanting IAC branded posts to share on social media She then shared that the recommended improvements for this program are to increase communications and community and tweak the programmatic plan. Ms. Adams then shared some specific participant highlights with the commission.

Ms. Adams then noted that the IAC is thinking of re-sequencing the artist services programs to better serve individual artists. Ms. Adams called for questions. None were spoken.

4. **Regional Arts Partnership Consortium.** Regional Arts Partner (RAP) Sherri Wright presented this agenda item. She highlighted that Region 6 has a Work-In-Progress (WIP) grantee had an artbook published recently, and he will be speaking on that in Region 6 in April.

She then gave a brief review of the partnership's work. Currently all RAPs are reviewing grant applications for completeness with a deadline of Monday March 16, 2026. They are also reviewing the FY26 final grant reports for Arts Project Support (APS). They are also working on their capacity building opportunities, and making sure the IAC's Communications Team knows of them so they can be shared with the state. There is also planning for an in-person RAP meeting in Indianapolis for this Summer. She also noted that there is high interest in the READI program, and that Ms. Michaelsen will be meeting with the RAPs to discuss more information. Ms. Wright called for questions. None were spoken.

5. **READI 2.0 Arts & Culture Initiative.** Ms. Michaelsen presented this item. She noted that there was a question about READI at the networking event last night, and she is interested in furthering the IAC's partnerships with this program and other state agencies. She then gave a brief overview of READI and its history, noting that it is an Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) program that is partnered with the IAC. She noted that it's a \$65 million statewide investment supporting arts and culture-driven projects. She also highlighted that this project is made possible by the Lilly Endowment. She shared that this project has two phases, a planning phase, and a funding phase. Currently, the project is in its funding phase, and applications are open through April 15, 2026. Ms. Michaelsen then gave a brief overview of the 15 regional arts and culture plans. She then shared the twelve themes she pulled out from the regional arts and culture plans. *Please see the corresponding memo for additional information.* She added that the planning process was engaged with arts organizations, community leaders, and economic development individuals in each region. She highlighted that more will come soon on this program. She noted that in the funding step of this program, the Commission has no responsibility in approving or reviewing funding recommendations. The funding decisions will all be made by IEDC, and Ms. Michaelsen will share more information as funding is determined. She then called for questions.

Mr. Martinez asked about the matching funds that are not required but recommended in the requirements. He wanted to know how READI was reviewing applications' funding with the match element.

Ms. Michaelsen shared that working with an economic development entity is great, but there are differences in sector operations. She highlighted that the READI grant is a reimbursement grant, as opposed a disbursement grant. The match is recommended and encouraged, but is not a requirement, and she expects a substantial number of applications who do not apply with a match. She also noted that there is ability to use the match from dollars given to an applicable project from 2023 on to today. She noted that this recommendation of match is used to help IEDC to show how this grant elevated local development to the Indiana General Assembly.

Mr. Haist asked if there was a priority toward programs, venues, or construction.

Ms. Michaelsen responded that there is no priority given to any particular "discipline," and the primary focus is if the project advances the goals of the regional arts and culture plan. She added that all the funds given by READI must be expended by December 31, 2028.

Mr. Haist then asked if there is any interest in collaboration from multiple organizations working on one project.

Ms. Michaelsen noted that collaborations like that would get a slight preference given to them in the application review. She defined consortium as several parties working together to do a single project, and partnerships as multiple organizations working together to accomplish a goal, but not all of them are actively working on the project. She added that there is encouragement to organizations to have partners, especially if they are not a consortium.

Ms. Michaelsen then thanked the Regional Arts Partners for their work in this program.

Mr. Haist noted that he is very excited to see that the IAC is a part of this project, and thanked Ms. Michaelsen for her leadership.

6. **Consent Agenda Items Moved to Full Agenda.** No items were moved. This item was skipped.
7. **Old Business and New Business.** At this time, Mr. Haist called for any old or new business to be shared.
  - a. **Poet Laureate CY27-28 Extension.** Ms. Johansson noted that Curtis Crisler is the current Poet Laureate for the State of Indiana and his contract has been extended for two more years into 2027-2028.

- b. **Poetry Out Loud Winner.** Mr. Ashby reviewed this program. It is a poetry recitation program, the funding comes from the NEA, and it is a high school program. This program has been hosted in partnership with Indiana Humanities for the last two years. This happened on February 21, 2026. The champion was Jayda Dawn from Carmel, IN and the runner up was Mina Dioubate from Indianapolis, IN. Ms. Dawn will be going on to compete at the national level after her win in Indiana. Mr. Ashby thanked all the schools, students, and coaches for this project.

Ms. Campbell asked about how long the poetry anthology goes back. She also noted there were two finalists from Dubois county.

Ms. Michaelsen noted that the anthology is curated by the NEA, from public domain poems.

Mr. Ashby also noted that the Lifelong Arts program currently has a toolkit, which the physical book has been shared with the Commissioners. The Creative Aging summit will happen on March 23, 2026, in Indianapolis, and the event sold out. This is one of the first major statewide convenings since COVID in this field.

Mr. Zhang Sonera shouted out the Communications team to put together the Lifelong Arts Toolkit.

Mr. Zhang Sonera also noted that the Men's Final Four is in Indianapolis April 3-6, 2026. He is serving as co-chair for the Arts and Culture Committee for this event. There are dozens of artists participating in this event. He also noted that Commissioner Hull and his students commissioned five poster designs for this event.

Mr. Haist thanked the IAC staff for their work across the board, and thanked Mr. Hendricks for his work in coordinating the QBMs.

8. **Adjournment of Quarterly Meeting.** Mr. Haist called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Mr. Martinez moved and Mr. Oakman seconded. **By roll call vote, all were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 11:31 AM Central Time.**