

Program Overview

An Indiana Cultural District is a well-defined, navigable geographic area with a recognized concentration of arts and culture assets — including facilities, creative businesses, historic resources, programming, and community activity — where creativity is visible, accessible, and rooted in the character of the place.

Cultural Districts serve dual purposes: they celebrate and preserve a community's unique identity while also driving economic and community development by attracting businesses, supporting quality of life, and creating purposeful spaces where residents and visitors come together. The IAC Cultural Districts Program certifies communities that meet statewide standards for arts and cultural identity, leadership, planning, and community impact.

Who Can Apply: Nonprofit organizations or units of local government can apply for new certification. Existing IAC cultural districts can apply for recertification.

Key Dates:

Letter of Intent Opens: September 29, 2026

Program Webinar: October 2, 2026 at 10:00 AM ET

Letter of Intent Deadline: October 15, 2026 at 11:59 PM ET

Invitations to Apply Sent: October 30, 2026

Full Application Deadline: December 31, 2026 at 11:59 PM ET

Certification Notification: March 15, 2027

Grant Application Opens: March 15, 2027

Grant Implementation Period: April 30, 2027 – March 31, 2028

Final Grant Report Due: April 14, 2028 at 11:59 PM ET

Who to Contact: Anne Johansson, Community Services Manager, ajohansson@iac.in.gov

Program Details

Program Goals

The Cultural Districts Program advances two core goals:

- Strengthening Indiana's existing cultural districts through a structured recertification process
- Expanding the statewide network by certifying new communities that demonstrate local designation and readiness

Certified districts are expected to demonstrate strong arts and cultural identity, planning capacity, and measurable community impact — anchoring local economic development, supporting quality of life, and serving as destinations that draw visitors and investment to their regions.

At the state level, a thriving network of cultural districts directly advances Indiana's broader goals in tourism, workforce attraction, and creative economy development. Cultural districts generate jobs, support small and creative businesses, and contribute to the kind of distinctive, livable communities that retain and attract residents.

Program Outcomes

- In every Indiana county, people and communities have access to arts experiences.§
- Indiana's arts providers have expanded opportunities to enhance the quality of life in their communities.§
- There is broad recognition of arts and creativity's value for Indiana.§

[§ IAC 2024 – 2028 Long-Term Strategic Framework Impact](#)

About Us

The Indiana Arts Commission (IAC) is an agency of state government, and its funding comes from the Indiana General Assembly and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

A core component to the Indiana Arts Commission's commitment to investing in the state's vibrant and rich arts and culture sector are grants, which support people and communities through arts organizations and arts projects.

Program Contacts

The following information outlines primary contacts for the grant program:

- **For questions about application, eligibility, and guidelines:** Contact Anne Johansson, ajohansson@iac.in.gov or 317-618-1522
- **For help or technical assistance with the Online Grant System:** grantsadmin@iac.IN.gov or 317-232-1269
- **For accessibility accommodations or questions about accessibility at an organization or for a project:** Contact the Indiana Arts Commission, accessibility@iac.in.gov or 317-232-1269
- **To apply:** [Access the application](#). Only applications submitted online will be accepted, except in the case of ADA accessibility accommodations.

Dates to Know – Cultural District Application Cycle

Milestone	Date	Details
Letter of Intent Opens	September 29, 2026	Available in IAC grant portal
Informational Webinar	October 2, 2026, 10:00 AM ET	<u>Register here for online webinar.</u>

Letter of Intent Deadline	October 15, 2026, 11:59 PM ET	All letters must be submitted by this time
Invitation to Apply Sent	October 30, 2026	Communities invited to submit full applications notified
Application Open	October 30, 2026	Full application available in IAC grant portal
Application Deadline	December 31, 2026, 11:59 PM ET	Full application including Cultural District Plan due
Certification Notification	March 15, 2027	Applicants notified of certification decision
Grant Application Open	March 15 – April 15, 2027	Certified districts may submit grant applications
Grant Implementation Period	April 30, 2027 – March 31, 2028	All funded activities must be completed by March 31, 2028
Final Grant Report Due	April 14, 2028, 11:59 PM ET	

Eligibility

The Indiana Arts Commission Cultural Districts Program certifies communities that meet statewide standards for arts and cultural identity, leadership, planning, and community impact.

The FY27 Cultural Districts Program is open to two tracks: New Applicants and Recertifying Districts. All applicants must name a management entity that is responsible for district operations and fiscal management.

1. New Applicants:

- Must hold an existing locally designated cultural district status prior to applying.
- Submit a Letter of Intent and demonstrate readiness through the eligibility assessment.
- Show evidence of local investment and community support.

2. Recertifying Districts:

- Be a currently certified Indiana Cultural District.
- Demonstrate ongoing municipal partnership and support.
- Demonstrate sustained activity, leadership, and community impact since last certification.
- Make any adjustment to boundaries or management entity to bring the district current.

IAC staff may follow up to request documentation or additional information and will make the final determination on eligibility.

Local vs State Designation:

Local designation — granted by the municipality through a resolution, ordinance, or similar action — reflects a community's own commitment to recognizing and investing in its cultural district. State certification affirms that the district meets statewide standards for arts and cultural identity, leadership, planning, and community impact. New applicants must hold local designation before applying for state certification.

Certification and Recertification Criteria

The FY27 Cultural District program is open to two tracks: both new applicants pursuing certification for the first time and existing districts seeking recertification. Both tracks follow the same two-stage review process.

Stage 1 — Letter of Intent Review

Reviewed by: IAC staff

Purpose: Determine whether a community demonstrates sufficient readiness and eligibility to be invited to submit a full application.

Outcome: Invitation to apply (or decline with feedback).

A strong LOI includes:

- A specific description of your district and its authentic arts and cultural identity
- For new applicants: documentation or description of your local designation
- Identification of your district's management entity (your district name will be your local municipality)
- Names of 2–3 key community partners engaged in the district
- An honest statement of where your community currently stands and what you are working toward

Stage 2 — Full Application Review

Reviewed by: External panel, with IAC staff support

Purpose: Evaluate the full application — including the Cultural District Plan — against the five certification dimensions.

Outcome: Certification decision

All applications — new and recertifying — are evaluated against the same five dimensions. Each dimension carries equal weight in the full application score.

1	Arts & Cultural Identity	
	Stage 1: Letter of Intent	Stage 2: Full Application
	● District has a named, authentic arts and cultural identity	● Year-round arts and cultural programming is documented and diverse in type
	● Identity is connected to local history, traditions, or community character	● The district is recognizable to both residents and visitors
	● Applicant can describe the district's identity clearly and specifically	● Identity is reflected in branding, signage, or community reputation

2	Cultural Development & Leadership	
	Stage 1: Letter of Intent	Stage 2: Full Application
	● Active artists are working in the district	● Artists are visibly and regularly engaged — not just featured at events
	● Arts and cultural organizations are operating in or connected to the district	● Cross-sector partnerships are active and documented
	● Municipal government engagement is evident	● Organizations empower residents and visitors to participate in and create arts and culture

3	Community Development	
	Stage 1: Letter of Intent	Stage 2: Full Application
	● A community development plan exists that references the district or quality-of-life goals	● The plan includes specific quality-of-life goals relevant to district residents and workers
	● Planning has included input from residents, artists, and diverse community voices	● The district is treated as a defined unit in community planning

4	Economic Development	
	Stage 1: Letter of Intent	Stage 2: Full Application
	● Local economic development or tourism strategy acknowledges arts and culture as an asset	● The economic development plan includes specific strategies that build on district assets

	● Artists are involved in or connected to economic planning efforts	● Creative-sector data (businesses, jobs, visitors) is being tracked
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5	Planning & Management	
	Stage 1: Letter of Intent	Stage 2: Full Application
	● A designated management entity is identified by name	● A long-range Cultural District Plan (3–5 years) is submitted with the application
	● The management entity has a staff role or equivalent capacity responsible for district activities	● The plan aligns with the READI Regional Arts and Culture plan where applicable
	● A guiding team or coalition with cross-sector representation is described	● The management entity has an operating budget and evidence of financial sustainability

[Access the evaluation criteria for applications to the program.](#)

[Access the scoring rubric that will be used by application reviewers.](#)

Grant Award Information

Award Amount

Certified districts are eligible for a non-competitive grant of up to \$5,000. Grant funds may be used for:

- Research, evaluation, and community impact studies
- Local policy development in support of the district
- Long-term strategic planning
- Marketing and promotion

Match Requirement

A 1:1 local match is required. Applicants must describe their match and its source in the grant application. Match may include cash contributions or in-kind support.

Grant Period

Grant Implementation Period: April 30, 2027 – March 31, 2028

Final Grant Report Due: April 14, 2028 at 11:59 PM ET

Note: Grant applications open March 15, 2027, following certification notification. Only certified districts are eligible to apply. Funds may take up to 90 days to deposit after the grant period begins.

How to Apply

Access the online portal at <https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=indianaarts>

Step 1 — Confirm Local Designation (New Applicants Only)

Before applying for state certification, new applicants must hold a locally designated cultural district status, granted by their municipality through a resolution, ordinance, or similar action. If your community does not yet have local designation, that is your first step. Contact IAC staff for guidance.

Step 2 — Submit a Letter of Intent

All applicants — new and recertifying — must submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) through the IAC online grant system by October 15, 2026. The LOI is a brief statement of intent that tells the IAC your community is interested in applying. It is not a commitment, and it is not the full application.

Step 3 — Submit a Full Application

Communities invited to apply will be notified October 30, 2026 and must submit a full application by December 31, 2026.

The full application includes:

- Completed [Community Readiness Workbook](#) (new applicants)
- Cultural District Plan (3–5 year strategic plan)
- Documentation of local designation (new applicants)
- Letters of support from community partners
- Baseline data: creative-sector businesses, jobs, visitors, and youth served
- Description of the district management entity and operating budget

Step 4 — Certification Decision and Grant Application

IAC will notify all applicants of certification decisions on March 15, 2027. Certified districts are then eligible to submit a proposal for the \$5,000 grant, with applications open March 15 – April 15, 2027.

Grant Recipient Requirements

Final Report Requirements: Grantees are required to submit a report on their funded activity(ies) at the end of the grant period. This report includes:

- What occurred and the outcomes as a result of the funding (narrative/multiple choice)
- Address(es) where the activity(ies) occurred
- Number of participants by age
- Photo and/or video documentation of the project

- Actual cash income, actual cash expenses, and in-kind contributions. A detail of expenditures and additional funds leveraged will be required.

Final grant reports submitted after the due date may be subject to penalty. Read the [Not in Good Standing policy](#).

Additional Requirements

IAC grants come with additional requirements such as acknowledgement of public funding. [Consult Requirements and Policies for Indiana Arts Commission Grantees for additional information](#).