



# Indiana Cultural District Program Readiness Workbook

**FY27 Self-Assessment** – A tool for communities considering cultural district designation at either the local or state level or simply taking stock of their creative assets to inform future planning efforts.

**Proposed District / Community Name:**

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**Track:**

☐ New District   ☐ Recertifying District

**Workbook Team / Lead Contact:**

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**Date Completed:**

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## How to Use This Workbook

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This workbook adapts ideas from three respected community-readiness frameworks — Colorado State University’s Tri-Ethnic Center Community Readiness Model, the Nebraska Arts Council’s Creative District eligibility process, and Washington State’s Certified Creative Districts Community Readiness Toolkit — to fit Indiana’s Cultural Districts Program.

This workbook is built around one big-picture question:

❖ ***Why is it important to our community that we align and support our creative assets?***

### Work as a team

This is not a solo exercise. Convene a small, cross-sector working group — arts and culture leaders, local government, economic development, tourism, and engaged residents — before you begin. The readiness scales in Part 2 work best when scored through discussion and consensus, not by one person filling in boxes alone.

### Three habits to carry through every section

1. For each statement or question, ask: is this clearly true right now, to both residents and visitors — not where we hope to be in five years.
2. When something isn’t true yet, discuss as a team: what innovative approaches have other communities used to get there?
3. Who or which organization, space, tradition, or partnership could take this from true to next-level — or make it uniquely ours? Name names where you can.

### Define your geographic area first

Every item in this workbook references a “cultural district” because these same concepts appear in Indiana’s Cultural District criteria for designation. Even if your community is not pursuing state certification this cycle, complete the boundary exercise in Part 1 before going further — self-assessment is only meaningful within a defined geographic area.

### Indiana Cultural Districts Program: The Pathway

- Step 1 — Letter of Interest (LOI): A brief statement of intent submitted to the Indiana Arts Commission. LOI window opens 9/29.
- Step 2 — Community Readiness Workbook (this document): A self-assessment that helps your team and IAC staff understand your district’s current strengths and gaps.
- Step 3 — IAC Conversation & Technical Assistance: IAC Program staff will review your workbook and may schedule a site visit or follow-up conversation.
- Step 4 — Certification or Recertification Application: New districts and recertifying districts (approximately every four years) submit a full application, including a strategic plan, for designation.

## Part 1 - Setting the Groundwork

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Before assessing readiness, define what you are assessing. This section establishes your district's boundaries, identity, and guiding intent.

### 1.1 - Vision, Mission, and Values

**Vision — What is the ideal future for your cultural district? Describe how it will change your community.**

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**Mission — How will you work toward that vision? What will you do, and how?**

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**Values — What core beliefs or guiding principles will shape your district's work?**

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### 1.2 - Define Your Geographic Area

Is the proposed district a contiguous, well-defined, and appropriately sized area?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

If urban: is the district walkable?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

If rural: are there geographic barriers (rivers, highways, rail lines) that affect how well-defined or functional the district is?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ Don't Know

**Does the district include assets that are not immediately adjacent to the core area?**

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

If yes: describe the asset(s) and the active connection that links them to the district. Connections may include trails, transit routes, shuttles, dedicated parking, wayfinding signage, or other means that make the asset functionally accessible from the core district. A planned connection is acceptable if it is documented and has a realistic timeline.

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**Describe your district's physical boundaries (attach or insert a map):**

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### 1.3 - Community Identity and Heritage

**Describe your community's cultural and historical heritage — Indigenous communities, early settlement, immigrant and migrant populations, specific art forms or heritage traditions, the roots of the local economy (examples: folk art, textiles, barn quilt traditions, limestone craft, glass, woodworking, pottery, music, heritage tied to immigrant or migrant communities, festivals, etc.):**

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**What is your community's unique identity? What sets it apart from other Indiana communities?**

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**What adjectives describe the personality or vibe of your district? How should visitors and residents feel when they're in it?**

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**Describe the architectural character or design identity of your district. Are there distinctive building types, streetscapes, public art, signage systems, or built features that define how the district looks and feels? How does the physical environment reinforce, or have the potential to reinforce, the district's cultural identity?**

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## Part 2 - Readiness Self-Assessment

For each dimension, a 1–9 scale describes how a community typically moves from no awareness to full community ownership of its creative assets. As a team, identify which stage best matches your district today, then work through the reflection prompts.

*There are no “good” or “bad” scores. The purpose is an honest read on where you are, so your action plan (Part 6) targets the right next step — not a step you’ve already taken or one that’s out of reach.*

### Dimension 1: Arts and Culture Identity

#### LOI Criteria Addressed:

- ☐ The cultural district has a unique, authentic arts and cultural identity, and it is articulated clearly.
- ☐ The district’s identity and experience is connected to the history or long-standing traditions and culture of the place and its residents.
- ☐ The district currently has a high concentration and variety of arts and culture assets and programming available year-round and on nights and weekends.
- ☐ The district is recognizable and well-known — physically and in reputation — to residents and visitors as a vibrant center for creativity, arts, and culture.

| Stage | Arts & Culture Identity — where is your community today?                                                                                                                          |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | No identifiable arts or cultural identity exists for this area in the minds of residents or visitors.                                                                             |
| 2     | A few residents could name an arts or cultural asset in the area, but there is no shared sense of identity; misconceptions about what is here are common.                         |
| 3     | Some residents are vaguely aware the area has cultural assets but could not describe what makes them distinct or connect them to local history.                                   |
| 4     | Residents and a few local leaders can name the area’s cultural assets and roughly explain the connection to local history or tradition.                                           |
| 5     | A recognizable identity exists among engaged residents; some assets and programming occur on a regular, if limited, schedule.                                                     |
| 6     | The identity is shared across most of the community; a variety of asset types (visual, performing, heritage, etc.) are active, with at least some evening or weekend programming. |
| 7     | The district is known by name among residents and increasingly by regional visitors; year-round and nights-and-weekends programming is consistent.                                |
| 8     | The district has an established reputation regionally as a creative destination; identity is reinforced through consistent branding, signage, and media coverage.                 |
| 9     | The district’s identity is a defining feature of the community’s reputation statewide or beyond, sustained by residents, businesses, and visitors alike.                          |

#### Reflect as a team:

- Is this clearly true today — to both residents and visitors? Circle the stage above that best fits.
- If the answer is no, or only partly: what innovative approaches have other communities used to move this forward?

- Who or what could take this from true to next-level, or make it uniquely ours?

## Dimension 2: Creative Activity & Organizational Capacity

### LOI Criteria Addressed:

- ☐ Organizations and programming in the district empower residents and visitors to learn about arts and culture and express themselves creatively.
- ☐ Artists of any discipline are active in the district — offering programs, selling products, using studio space, etc.

| Stage | Cultural Development & Leadership — where is your community today?                                                                                                                                       |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | No organizations or individuals are positioned to lead arts and culture work within this area.                                                                                                           |
| 2     | A few organizations exist, but leadership has not connected them to a shared creative development effort; artists are present but isolated.                                                              |
| 3     | Some leaders acknowledge the value of creative development but have not prioritized it; a handful of artists offer occasional programs.                                                                  |
| 4     | At least some leadership and organizations recognize creative development as a priority and are beginning to coordinate; artists are gaining visible opportunities (studio space, markets, commissions). |
| 5     | Organizations are actively developing creative-learning and expression opportunities; a base of working artists regularly sells, exhibits, or teaches locally.                                           |
| 6     | Leadership plays an active role in expanding creative-development programming; artists across multiple disciplines are visibly engaged in the district.                                                  |
| 7     | Programming for creative learning and expression is well established and reaches a broad cross-section of residents and visitors.                                                                        |
| 8     | Leadership is evaluating and improving creative-development efforts; the district supports a critical mass of working artists who help sustain district vitality.                                        |
| 9     | Creative development is fully embedded in community leadership's priorities, with diversified support for artists and continuous expansion of opportunities.                                             |

### Reflect as a team:

- Is this clearly true today — to both residents and visitors? Circle the stage above that best fits.
- If the answer is no, or only partly: what innovative approaches have other communities used to move this forward?
- Who or what could take this from true to next-level, or make it uniquely ours?

## Dimension 3: Community Development

### LOI Criteria Addressed:

- ☐ An existing community development plan includes quality-of-life goals for those who live and work in or near the district (workspace access, housing affordability, transportation, groceries, safety, school quality, etc.).

| Stage | Community Development — where is your community today?                                                                                             |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | No community development plan exists, or quality-of-life issues affecting the district have not been identified.                                   |
| 2     | Quality-of-life issues are known informally, but no plan or planning process addresses them.                                                       |
| 3     | A plan exists for the broader community, but it does not mention the district or its residents' specific needs.                                    |
| 4     | Some leaders are discussing how to connect community development planning to the district; needs are identified but not prioritized.               |
| 5     | A plan or planning process explicitly includes the district and at least one quality-of-life goal relevant to it (e.g., housing, transit, safety). |
| 6     | Multiple quality-of-life goals relevant to the district are reflected in an active plan, with some resources allocated.                            |
| 7     | The plan is being implemented with visible progress on goals relevant to district residents and workers.                                           |
| 8     | Progress on community-development goals is tracked and reported; the district is treated as a meaningful unit of analysis in planning.             |
| 9     | Community development and creative-district goals are fully integrated; outcomes are monitored and the plan evolves based on results.              |

### Reflect as a team:

- Is this clearly true today — to both residents and visitors? Circle the stage above that best fits.
- If the answer is no, or only partly: what innovative approaches have other communities used to move this forward?
- Who or what could take this from true to next-level, or make it uniquely ours?

## Dimension 4: Economic Development / Tourism Development

### LOI Criteria Addressed:

- ☐ The local economic development plan incorporates strategies to support and build upon arts and culture assets in the district.

| Stage | Economic Development / Tourism Development — where is your community today?                                                                       |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Arts and culture are not considered part of local economic or tourism development strategy.                                                       |
| 2     | A few individuals raise arts and culture as an economic asset, but it is not part of any plan; misconceptions about its economic role are common. |
| 3     | Local economic development leadership is aware arts and culture could be an asset but has not investigated or prioritized it.                     |
| 4     | Economic or tourism development leadership acknowledges arts and culture as a priority and is beginning to gather data or examples.               |
| 5     | A local plan or strategy includes at least one specific action connecting arts/culture assets to economic or tourism development.                 |
| 6     | Multiple economic or tourism strategies actively build on arts and culture assets, with some dedicated resources.                                 |
| 7     | Strategies are being implemented and economic development and tourism organizations actively promote the district.                                |
| 8     | Economic development data (visitor counts, creative-sector jobs, business growth) is tracked and used to refine strategy.                         |
| 9     | Arts and culture are a recognized economic driver in local strategy, with diversified, ongoing investment and clear metrics of success.           |

### Reflect as a team:

- Is this clearly true today — to both residents and visitors? Circle the stage above that best fits.
- If the answer is no, or only partly: what innovative approaches have other communities used to move this forward?
- Who or what could take this from true to next-level, or make it uniquely ours?

## Dimension 5: Cultural District Management and Planning

### LOI Criteria Addressed:

- ☐ A guiding team of relevant partners actively collaborates to move the district's plan forward — including local artists and/or cultural sector leaders, key public, nonprofit, and private sector leaders, tourism, and community and economic development partners.
- ☐ Appropriate resources exist — funding, partners, etc. to move the district plan forward.

| Stage | Management & Planning — where is your community today?                                                                                                      |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | No team or organization is positioned to manage district planning; no resources have been identified.                                                       |
| 2     | A few individuals are interested, but there is no organized team, plan, or identified resources.                                                            |
| 3     | Some partners acknowledge a guiding team is needed, but none has formed; limited resources (a meeting space, a few volunteers) exist but are not allocated. |
| 4     | A guiding team is forming; resources are being identified and some partners are actively looking into securing them.                                        |
| 5     | A guiding team meets regularly with representation from at least three sectors (e.g., arts, government, economic development); some resources are secured.  |
| 6     | The guiding team includes a fuller cross-section of partners and is actively driving planning; new resources have been obtained or allocated.               |
| 7     | Management structure (e.g., a designated district administrator) is in place; a meaningful share of resources comes from sources expected to continue.      |
| 8     | The team is evaluating and improving its own structure and plan; resources are diversifying and additional support is being pursued.                        |
| 9     | Management and planning are fully institutionalized, with diversified, ongoing resources and a team that reviews progress and adapts continuously.          |

### Reflect as a team:

- Is this clearly true today — to both residents and visitors? Circle the stage above that best fits.
- If the answer is no, or only partly: what innovative approaches have other communities used to move this forward?
- Who or what could take this from true to next-level, or make it uniquely ours?

## Part 3 - Asset Mapping

Inventory the resources already present in your proposed district. This builds directly on what you discovered in Part 2 and will support your strategic plan if you move toward certification.

| Category                                    | Examples to consider                                                     | What exists in your district? |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Spaces &amp; Places</b>                  | Galleries, theaters, studios, maker spaces, public plazas                |                               |
| <b>Physical / Built Assets</b>              | Historic buildings, public art, signage, walkability features            |                               |
| <b>Culture &amp; Heritage</b>               | Festivals, traditions, historic sites, Indigenous and immigrant heritage |                               |
| <b>Associations &amp; Organizations</b>     | Arts councils, downtown associations, historical societies               |                               |
| <b>Creative Businesses &amp; Industries</b> | Galleries, design firms, breweries, publishers, makers                   |                               |
| <b>Creative &amp; Arts Activities</b>       | Markets, performances, classes, artist talks                             |                               |
| <b>People / Artists &amp; Creatives</b>     | Working artists, educators, tradition-bearers, organizers                |                               |

**What is missing from these lists? What would you like to see come into your community?**

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## Part 4 - Partnerships and District Management

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A broad coalition is one of the strongest predictors of a district's long-term success. As you list partners below, aim for representation across sectors — not just “the choir” of people already engaged in arts and culture work.

### 4.1 - Key Partners

**Who is already on board? List organizations, agencies, and individuals by sector (arts/culture, local government, economic development, tourism, education, business, faith community, social services, etc.):**

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**Who is missing? Which sectors or voices have not yet been engaged — and who could open that door?**

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Will partners write letters of support for your district application?

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Don't Know**

Will there be a partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) among main partners? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Don't Know**

### 4.2 - District Administration

Is there a designated staff position or organization responsible for district activities?

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Don't Know**

**If yes, describe the role and organization. If no, who could take this on?**

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**Identify the proposed administrative entity and its operating structure (local government, nonprofit, downtown development organization, etc.):**

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Does the administrative entity have a minimum annual operating budget sufficient to support district responsibilities -- such as admin/staff, communications/marketing, programming/events, insurance/liability, asset maintenance (banners, signage, etc.), match funds for other grants?

☐ **Yes**   ☐ **No**   ☐ **Don't Know**

## Part 5 - Community Buy-In, Branding, and Economic Development

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### 5.1 - Community Buy-In and Connection

Is there broad community buy-in for the proposed district?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

Have you made concerted outreach efforts to artists and other creatives? Are artists active on your planning team?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

**Describe outreach activities completed so far, including outreach to underrepresented groups:**

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**What challenges have you encountered in outreach, and how are you addressing them?**

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### 5.2 - Branding and Promotion

**List 2–4 target audiences for the district (residents, day-trip visitors, overnight tourists, relocating creatives, etc.) and why each would be drawn here:**

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Will there be a dedicated marketing or promotional budget for the district?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

**What marketing or promotional materials will you need over the district's first five years?**

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### 5.3 - Economic Development Activities

Is there a designated economic development plan that includes arts and culture as a driver of economic activity?

☐ **Yes**   ☐ **No**   ☐ **Don't Know**

**If yes, describe key elements relevant to the district:**

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Are there systems in place to support, train, and grow creative entrepreneurs and small businesses?

☐ **Yes**   ☐ **No**   ☐ **Don't Know**

**Describe what exists — or what you would like to see:**

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## Part 6 - SWOT Analysis

Use the findings from Parts 1–5 to complete a SWOT analysis — a tool for organizing your district’s internal strengths and weaknesses alongside external opportunities and threats. Gather your working group (8–10 people works well) and be realistic and truthful.

| STRENGTHS (Internal) | WEAKNESSES (Internal) |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
|                      |                       |
|                      |                       |
|                      |                       |
|                      |                       |
|                      |                       |

| OPPORTUNITIES (External) | THREATS (External) |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
|                          |                    |
|                          |                    |
|                          |                    |
|                          |                    |
|                          |                    |

*Categories to Consider: programming and awareness; knowledge of the issue or opportunity; people and organizations; norms, values, and willingness to change; communications and data; local and state policy; demographics and future trends; funding sources; location and geography.*

## Part 7 - Goals, Milestones, and Action Plan

Look back across your five readiness scores from Part 2. Which dimensions scored lowest? Those are where your community should focus first — raising the lowest scores typically does more for overall readiness than further strengthening an already-high one.

### Readiness Score Summary

| Dimension                         | Stage (1–9) | Priority for action?                                     |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Arts & Culture Identity           |             | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Cultural Development & Leadership |             | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Community Development             |             | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Economic Development / Tourism    |             | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Management & Planning             |             | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |

### Goal Development

Develop 3–5 goals your district wants to achieve over the next 3–5 years. A goal is a statement of general purpose and direction; the milestones below make it concrete and measurable.

#### Goal 1

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**Dimension(s) addressed:**

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**How will this goal advance the district?**

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#### Goal 2

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Dimension(s) addressed:

How will this goal advance the district?

Goal 3

Dimension(s) addressed:

How will this goal advance the district?

Milestones

| Year 1 Milestones | Year 2 Milestones |
|-------------------|-------------------|
|                   |                   |
|                   |                   |
| Year 3 Milestones | Year 5 Milestones |
|                   |                   |
|                   |                   |

## Matching Action to Readiness Level

Actions should match where a dimension actually stands today — not where you wish it stood. A community at an early stage on a dimension needs different tactics than one ready to formalize and expand.

| If a dimension scores...                        | Consider these kinds of actions                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Low (1–3) No awareness – vague awareness</b> | One-on-one conversations with leaders and residents; share local stories; visit existing unrelated community groups to introduce the idea; conduct an environmental scan (this workbook).   |
| <b>Middle (4–6) Preplanning – initiation</b>    | Public forums and focus groups; recruit key leaders to speak out; formalize a guiding team; pursue early grant funding and training; begin basic data tracking.                             |
| <b>High (7–9) Stabilization – ownership</b>     | Formalize partnerships and service agreements; expand evaluation and reporting; diversify funding; build a speaker’s bureau or mentor network; pursue policy support from local government. |

## Part 8 - Measuring Progress and Sustainability

### 8.1 - Tracking Data

Identify current data and a five-year goal for each measure below. Add categories that reflect what your community values.

| Data Point                                                    | Current | 5-Year Goal |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-------------|
| Creative-industry jobs within district boundaries             |         |             |
| Creative businesses within district boundaries                |         |             |
| Total businesses within district boundaries                   |         |             |
| Visitors / tourists to district activities & venues           |         |             |
| Children & youth directly benefiting from district activities |         |             |

**What other data reflects your community's values — property values, occupancy rates, income levels, safety indicators?**

### 8.2 - Sustainability

Has the administrative entity considered how district activities will be funded over five years?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

**Describe funding mechanisms and projections:**

Can the proposed district administrator provide matching operating funds, if required?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

**Where will match funds come from?**

## Part 9 - Next Steps Toward Designation

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Use this checklist to confirm readiness before submitting your district application to the Indiana Arts Commission.

### Minimum Requirements

- ☐ Clearly defined vision, mission, and values
- ☐ Clearly defined, authentic arts and culture identity connected to local history or traditions
- ☐ Designated, contiguous geographic area that is walkable and/or easily navigable; zoned appropriately for intended activities
- ☐ Structured entity formally recognized as district administrator, with assigned staff role
- ☐ Administrative entity has sufficient annual operating budget
- ☐ Demonstrated community buy-in for the district
- ☐ Local artists and creatives actively engaged in district planning
- ☐ Community development plan includes quality-of-life goals relevant to the district
- ☐ Economic development plan incorporates arts and culture as a strategy
- ☐ Strategic plan drafted, covering 3–5 years of activity
- ☐ This Community Readiness Workbook completed and ready to submit

### Additional Strengthening Factors

- ☐ Partnership agreement / MOU in place among main partners
- ☐ Active engagement in preservation or promotion of cultural and historical heritage
- ☐ Exploring affordable housing or workspace opportunities for artists
- ☐ Workforce development plans that include creative-economy careers
- ☐ Economic data demonstrating current or projected growth of the creative sector

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*Questions about a particular section or criterion? Contact the Indiana Arts Commission's Community Services Program Manager for technical assistance before you submit.*

Anne Johansson, Community Services Manager

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