



Instructions for Reviewers:

This rubric is used in two stages. Use only the section that applies to your review assignment.

- Stage 1 — LOI Review (IAC Staff): Use the LOI Review Tool on the following pages to make a binary determination for each dimension: Ready to Invite or Not Ready.
- Stage 2 — Full Application Review (Panel): Use the Panel Scoring Rubric to assign a score of 1 (No) to 4 (Exemplary) for each of the five certification dimensions. Scores are averaged with equal weighting to produce a final score.

Additional Notes:

- Do not compare applications to one another. Each application is reviewed on its own merits against the criteria.
- Do not score on grammar, writing style, or formatting. Focus on the substance of the information provided.
- If a dimension is partially met, use your best judgment and note your rationale in the comments field.
- For recertifying districts, assess current demonstrated capacity — not reputation from a prior certification cycle.

Stage 1 — LOI Review Tool (IAC Staff)

For each dimension, review the LOI narrative and applicant information and determine: does this community demonstrate sufficient readiness in this area to be invited to submit a full application?

Mark Ready to Invite or Not Ready for each dimension. In the Notes column, briefly explain your determination — particularly for any Not Ready ratings. IAC staff will share summary feedback with communities not invited to apply.

#	Dimension	Ready to Invite	Not Ready
1	Arts & Cultural Identity	● Named, authentic identity described with specifics ● Connected to local history or tradition ● Recognizable to residents and/or visitors	● Identity is vague, generic, or not described ● No connection to local history or character ● District is not yet publicly recognized
2	Cultural Development & Leadership	● Active artists named or described ● Arts organizations operating in the district ● Municipal engagement present	● No artists or organizations specifically named ● No evidence of municipal engagement ● Leadership is undefined or informal only
3	Community Development	● A community development plan exists and references district or quality-of-life goals ● Planning process has included community voices	● No community development plan mentioned ● District is not referenced in any planning document
4	Economic Development	● Economic or tourism strategy acknowledges arts/culture as an asset ● Artists connected to economic planning	● No connection between district and economic development strategy ● Arts and culture treated as separate from economic goals
5	Planning & Management	● Management entity named with staff capacity described ● Cross-sector guiding team or coalition described	● No management entity identified ● No staff or organizational capacity for district activities

Stage 2 — Full Application Panel Scoring Rubric

Instructions: Assign a score of 1–4 for each dimension. Scores for all five dimensions are averaged with equal weighting to produce a final score. Use the comments field to note any specific strengths, gaps, or questions.

4 — Exemplary

Criteria fully and compellingly met; specific, credible evidence; no significant gaps

3 — Yes

Criteria clearly met; solid evidence; minor gaps that don't undermine the application

2 — Somewhat

Criteria partially met; evidence is present but limited or underdeveloped; gaps are notable

1 — No

Criteria not met or not addressed; evidence is missing, vague, or unconvincing

Dimension 1 — Arts & Cultural Identity				
Application questions referenced:	● Application Question — District Identity ● Application Question — Current Readiness			
Score	4 — Exemplary	3 — Yes	2 — Somewhat	1 — No
<i>The extent to which the district demonstrates each criterion:</i>	The district's identity is distinctive, authentic, and clearly rooted in local history or tradition. Year-round, diverse programming is documented. The district is broadly recognized by residents and visitors. Branding and public presence reinforce the identity consistently.	The district has a clear arts and cultural identity with evidence of regular programming. Identity is connected to local character. Recognition among residents is evident; visitor recognition is developing.	An arts and cultural identity is described but is vague or generic. Programming exists but is limited in frequency or diversity. Identity is primarily internal — not yet broadly recognized by residents or visitors.	No distinct arts and cultural identity is articulated. Programming is absent or incidental. The district is not recognizable as a creative destination.

Dimension 2 — Cultural Development & Leadership

Application questions referenced:

- Application Question — Partners and Coalition
- Application Question — Management and Capacity

Score

4 — Exemplary

3 — Yes

2 — Somewhat

1 — No

The extent to which the district demonstrates each criterion:

Working artists are actively and visibly engaged in the district — not just at events but through studios, sales, commissions, or teaching. Multiple arts and cultural organizations operate in the district. Cross-sector partnerships are active and documented. Municipal government is an engaged partner.

Artists are working in the district with visible presence. Arts organizations are active. Cross-sector partnerships exist. Municipal engagement is present, if not deeply integrated.

Some artists and organizations are present but engagement is limited or informal. Cross-sector partnerships are nascent. Municipal involvement is minimal or reactive.

No working artists are named or described. Arts organizations are absent or tangential. No cross-sector partnerships. No evidence of municipal engagement.

Dimension 3 — Community Development

Application questions referenced:

- Application Question — Community and Economic Development Connection
- Cultural District Plan — Community Development section

Score

4 — Exemplary

3 — Yes

2 — Somewhat

1 — No

The extent to which the district demonstrates each criterion:

A community development plan explicitly names the district and includes specific quality-of-life goals for district residents and workers. The planning process was inclusive and documented. Progress on goals is tracked and reported. The district is treated as a meaningful unit of analysis.

A community development plan exists and references the district or adjacent quality-of-life goals. Planning included community input. At least one goal relevant to the district is identified.

A community development plan exists but does not specifically reference the district. Quality-of-life goals are mentioned but not connected to the district. Planning process is not described.

No community development plan is mentioned or referenced. Quality-of-life goals for district residents are not addressed.

Dimension 4 — Economic Development				
Application questions referenced:	● Application Question — Community and Economic Development Connection ● Cultural District Plan — Economic Development section ● Baseline Data			
Score	4 — Exemplary	3 — Yes	2 — Somewhat	1 — No
<i>The extent to which the district demonstrates each criterion:</i>	Local economic development and tourism strategies name arts and culture as a specific driver with dedicated strategies and resources. Artists are actively involved in economic planning. Creative-sector data is tracked. Cultural tourism is integrated into promotion and strategy.	Economic development or tourism strategy acknowledges arts and culture with at least one specific action. Artists have some connection to economic planning. Basic creative-sector tracking is in place or planned.	Arts and culture are mentioned in economic or tourism discussions but not incorporated into strategy. Artists are not meaningfully involved in economic planning. No data tracking.	No connection between the district and economic development or tourism strategy. Arts and culture are treated as separate from economic goals.

Dimension 5 — Planning & Management				
Application questions referenced:	● Application Question — Management and Capacity ● Cultural District Plan (full document) ● Application Question — Partners and Coalition			
Score	4 — Exemplary	3 — Yes	2 — Somewhat	1 — No
<i>The extent to which the district demonstrates each criterion:</i>	A designated management entity is named and has sufficient staff capacity. A cross-sector guiding team meets regularly with broad representation. A 3–5 year Cultural District Plan is submitted — specific, realistic, and aligned with READI where applicable. The management entity has a diversified operating budget with evidence of financial sustainability.	A management entity is named with described capacity. A guiding team is active with representation from at least three sectors. A Cultural District Plan is submitted with clear goals and milestones. Operating budget is described.	A management entity is identified but capacity is limited or underdeveloped. A guiding team exists but representation is narrow. A Cultural District Plan is submitted but is underdeveloped or lacks specifics. Budget is vague.	No designated management entity is named. No guiding team or cross-sector coalition. No Cultural District Plan submitted, or plan is not meaningful. No evidence of financial sustainability.