



Arts & Culture Plan

2025 – 2035

We Grow from Deep Roots | The Region

TRANSFORMING
COMMUNITIES. ART
through the power of arts and culture

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Still Pointe Art Studio & Gallery, Rising Sun

Southeast Indiana

Comprised of Dearborn, Franklin, Ohio, Ripley, Switzerland, and Union Counties, the region describes itself as offering:

a great lifestyle for the individuals and families associated with that growth. Nestled amid beautiful, rolling hills, our small- to mid-size communities and rural areas provide a comfortable, relaxed setting.

You will find a variety of shopping, dining, sports, nature, and entertainment. Children play safely outside and attend schools focused on their education and wellbeing. Recreational opportunities abound, including water sports on the Ohio River, fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, swimming, bicycling, motorcycle riding, and golf.

We call ourselves the affordable Cincinnati address, as our region has a small town feel with big city amenities.

Population

The region is home to **1.8% of the state's population**. For perspective, the SEI region, just over 125,000 residents, is only slightly larger than Evansville (approx. 117,300) or Delaware County (approx. 113,000). It is also home to the two least populated counties in the state – Union and Ohio. **Only two counties have cities or towns larger than 3,500 residents.** In Ripley County the City of Batesville is divided across two counties, Ripley and Franklin neither holding the county seat.

Three (sometimes four as Union bounces in/out of the official definition) of the region's six counties are included in the Cincinnati-Wilmington, OH-KY-IN CSA ([Combined Statistical Area](#)).



This proximity provides a significant opportunity for the region – a strong population base to attract as residents, industries, and initiatives to leverage, and access to a major metropolitan market for workforce recruitment and tourism. However, some noted that crossing the river toward Cincinnati is difficult with few ferries or bridges and higher costs to use them, creating a barrier to this opportunity.

Economic Drivers

From an economic development perspective, the region touts its:

- Great Schools & Affordable Housing
- A Thriving Business Community
- A Safe & Relaxed Lifestyle
- Natural Amenities & Recreation (including the Ohio River, its trails, and byways)
- Proximity to Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky

Key Numbers

The region has **strengths** to build from, but they are **uneven**.

- **Poverty Rate.** All but one of the counties have lower rates than the state.
- **Median Household Income.** While half of the counties are below the state, half are above. Of these, one is in the top 10.
- **Population Growth.** All but one of the counties is growing, even if only slightly.
- **Median Age.** At the same time, the population is **3-10 YEARS OLDER** than the state.

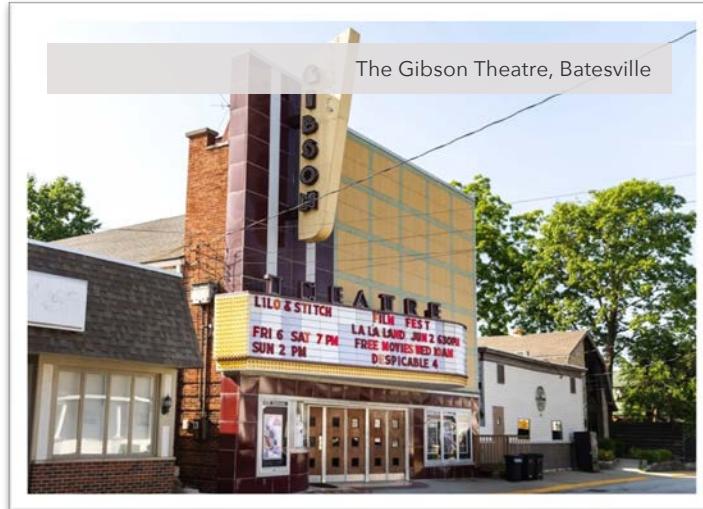
	2020 Census	2020-24 Growth	2024 Median Age	2023 Median Household Income	2023 Poverty Rate
Dearborn	50,679	1.5%	43	Co. Rank #7 \$82,578	8%
Franklin	22,785	1.5%	43	#13 \$77,456	9%
Ohio	5,940	0.9%	48	#33 \$70,757	9%
Ripley	28,995	0.8%	41	#45 \$66,942	10%
Switzerland	9,737	3.0%	43	#77 \$60,219	13%
Union	7,087	(3.0%)	45	#56 \$64,648	11%
SEI REGION	125,223	1.14%	44	\$ 70,433	Ave. 10%
INDIANA	SEI is 1.84% of IN	2.0%	38	SEI is 101% of \$69,458	12%
NATION		2.6%	39	and 87% of \$80,610	11%

See each county's profile for additional numbers (pages 65-102).

One Region, Six counties,

1.84%

of the state population



“ 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, Southeast Indiana faces critical human capital needs.

- **Legal Deserts.** A [July 2025 report from the Commission on Indiana's Legal Future](#) categorized Union and Franklin 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 three banking deserts in the region (Dearborn and Ohio) (each with the closest branch 5-10 miles away) with the potential for two more to emerge (Franklin and Dearborn).

This region needs active vigilance and in-migration – or more aggressive strategies – to counter-balance age and other risks like these (e.g., the uncertain future of Rising Star Casino in Rising Sun).

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 SEI region's **strongest category is "Opportunity"** where four of the six counties have scores approximately 75 or higher. That is exciting to see. At the same time, its **weakest category is "Health"**. While none of the counties do well in this, the fact that Switzerland has a score below 25 is deeply concerning.

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.**

The Regional Average Compared with U.S. Median Scores

	Region	U.S.	Difference	
Livability Overall Score	50	50	Equal	
The 7 Livability Categories – Ranked				
1. Opportunity	72	50	+ 22 pts	3 STRENGTHS
2. Environment	60	61	- 1 pt	with scores above 50 and above the national median
3. Housing	57	59	- 2 pts	
4. Engagement	45	47	- 2 pts	
5. Neighborhood	41	36	+ 5 pts	4 CHALLENGES
6. Transportation	40	44	- 4 pts	with scores below 50 of which 3 are also below median
7. Health	35	40	- 5 pts	

The Region's Top Strength & Challenge by County

	Union	Ohio	Franklin	Dearborn	Ripley	Switzerland
Livability Overall Score	55	52	51	49	48	45
1. Opportunity	83	74	76	74	57	68
7. Health	35	36	41	43	34	22

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 119). 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 as much as to 5 points behind Indiana** overall.

% of Households	No Internet	Cell Data Only	Mobile Dev. Only	No Computing Dev
Regional Average	15%	15%	17%	11%
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 120
[Analyzing Indiana's Digital Landscape](https://www.purduerural.org/research/analyzing-indianas-digital-landscape) (Purdue Center for Rural Development, January 2024)

The data shows big gains at both the county and regional level in recent years, thanks in part to the region's [Broadband Initiatives](#) and [Digital Inclusion Plan](#). 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.
- Southeast Indiana is a high "**Opportunity**" region (AARP) which sets it up well for many of the goals and strategies in this plan.
- It has critical barriers to address in **Engagement, Neighborhoods, Transportation, and Health** (AARP). Of these, the goals and strategies of this plan could have a positive impact on all but health. Even that is 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](https://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.**

About "Opportunity"

AARP justifies it with "Inclusive communities can provide residents an equal chance to earn a living wage and improve their well-being, from jobs to education. Supporting multigenerational, diverse communities with a strong regional economy and fiscally healthy local governments is at the heart of ensuring a rich and full life for all."

And measures it by looking at:

- The gap between rich and poor (using the Gini Index, a measure of income inequality)
- Economic opportunity using jobs per worker
- Adjusted 4-year high school cohort graduation rate
- Age-group diversity of local vs. national population (multi-generational communities)
- Local government AAA general obligation bond rating
- State and local vs. federal minimum wage and cost of living adjustments
- State policies that expand upon FMLA benefits to workers

SEI READI Southeast Indiana's Regional Economic Development Organization

SEI READI, Inc. (SEI), was created in 2021 as a six-county collaboration in response to READI 1.0. By joining together, SEI READI is about a collaborative group of Indiana communities taking control of their destinies. They aim to achieve a higher probability of success in obtaining the greatest allocation of state funding possible.

Serving Dearborn, Franklin, Ohio, Ripley, Switzerland, and Union counties, its focus is more targeted than the region's planning entity (Southeastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission – SIRPC) and its nine counties. That larger entity

"was formed to sustain and increase communication and coordination between member governments in the creation of policies and activities for addressing regional issues collaboratively and providing a forum from which economic and community development can occur."

SEI READI is administered by SIRPC, allowing SEI READI to benefit from that larger mission, skillset, access to leaders and information, and program offerings.



Contact

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More at <https://southeastindiana.org> and <https://www.sirpc.org>

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

The region's identity is carved by geography and history. As little as 20 minutes from Cincinnati, half the region belongs to the Cincinnati metropolitan area, offering urban accessibility while maintaining rural character. Nestled along the Ohio River and rolling through the fertile Whitewater Valley, SEI READI's six counties – Dearborn, Franklin, Ohio, Ripley, Switzerland, and Union – form a region where heritage runs deep and creativity flourishes. With a combined population just over 125,000, this corner of Indiana offers an uncommon blend: ***small-town charm meets modern cultural assets, historic preservation mingles with innovation, and neighborly generosity*** shapes the region's creative culture.

Nature as Cultural Asset

The region's natural beauty – Brookville Lake, Whitewater Memorial State Park, Versailles State Park, and the scenic Ohio River – ***draws over a million visitors annually***. Perfect North Slopes, riverfront parks, and winding trails connect residents and visitors to recreation. Modern attractions like Rising Star, Belterra and Hollywood Casinos complement historic sites, while mottos like Union County's "***Stopped for the lake, stayed for the life***" capture the quality of place that keeps people coming back. These landscapes inspire plein air painting events, outdoor concerts, canal-side performances, and river-based festivals, integrating nature with creative expression.

Industry & Living History

The Ohio River powered early commerce, drawing German, Irish, and Swiss immigrants who brought farming traditions, winemaking expertise, and manufacturing ingenuity. River towns like Rising Sun and Lawrenceburg thrived as commercial hubs, while the Whitewater Canal and

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- Capacity Needs
- Conclusions

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

– Indiana Arts Commission



2025 SEIMA Hall of Fame Inductee, My Brothers Keeper

valley settlement patterns shaped communities like Metamora and Brookville. Industrial strength emerged early and endures. Lawrenceburg earned its title as "**Whiskey City USA**" through 200 years of Ross & Squibb Distillery history, while companies like Batesville Casket Company anchor manufacturing traditions. Innovation threads through generations: from J.W. Whitlock's 19th-century automatic harp to Rees Harps' modern **Harpsicle Harps**, winner of the **2024 "Coolest Thing Made in Indiana"** award. This spirit of making remains central to regional character.

Southeast Indiana **doesn't just preserve history; it lives it daily**. Communities like Metamora and Oldenburg serve as living time capsules, where German heritage and canal-era structures shape tourism and identity. Franklin County's Brookville claims important artists T.C. Steele and J. Ottis Adams, along with three early Indiana governors. Switzerland County, the "**Rhineland of America**," celebrates its founding as a national wine grape leader, with Vevay's earning recognition as Best Small Town in the Midwest in 2023 and 2024. The region's Underground Railroad role is a point of pride as is the "**Milan Miracle**" of 1954, when Milan High School won the state basketball championship, became the "heart of Hoosier hysteria" and inspired "*Hoosiers*." With multiple museums, 13 historic districts (below), and more National Register listings, history grounds the region.

DEARBORN Downtown Aurora Historic District • Downtown Lawrenceburg Historic District • Greendale Historic District

FRANKLIN Brookville Historic District • Central Batesville Historic District • Metamora Historic District • Oldenburg Historic District

OHIO Rising Sun Historic District

RIPLEY Versailles Square

SWITZERLAND Vevay Historic District

UNION Liberty Courthouse Square Historic District • Liberty Residential Historic District

Music & Creative Traditions That Endure

Music, fiber arts, and woodworking stand out as **enduring traditions, supported by robust communities of practice**. The Southeastern Indiana Musicians Association, venues including the Liberty, Gibson, and Damn Theatres; three casinos, and riverfront venues anchor the music scene. Metamora alone hosts an extraordinary concentration of music gatherings while signature events like the Dillsboro Jazz Festival, Happy Valley Bluegrass Festival, Batesville Art & Music Festival, and Lawrenceburg Main Street's Music on the River draw crowds regionwide. Countless taverns, wineries, theaters, and festival stages keep musical heritage alive and thriving.

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



Red Hot Glass Fusing, Rising Sun

Visual and literary arts flourish with equal vigor. Signature festivals like Freudenfest, the Franklin County Quilt Show, and the Goataqua Art Fair inspired by beloved Fred the Goat amplify community identity, while events such as the Plein Air Paint Out echo Hoosier Group traditions. Artisan excellence is reflected in **nationally recognized makers** including Iron Timbers (featured on HGTV's *Good Bones*), Red Forge, Thornfire Forge, and designated "Indiana Artisans." Lawrenceburg's literary festival, local published writers, bookstores, and publishers add literary depth.

Despite their small populations, these counties support an **active creative culture**. Recording studios, design firms, pottery studios, quilters, woodworkers, and specialty businesses – from Lizzy Green Mosaics to The fAxetory Music Co. – demonstrate vitality. Arts centers in Dearborn, Franklin, Ripley, and Switzerland County provide programming and leadership, while organizations like Southeast Indiana Woodturners, SEI MakerPlus, and informal groups such as Union County Knitting Club create networks for makers and artists.

Public art initiatives bring 21st century flair to historic towns. The "**Great Chicken Fry**" rooster sculptures in Brookville, playful fire hydrant characters in Oldenburg, and growing collections of indoor and outdoor works reflect commitment to place-making. Quirky touches – like Kat Von D's **garden of 30,000 black tulips** in Switzerland County – reveal the region's spirit of creative expression and fun.

A Spirit of Community

What truly distinguishes Southeast Indiana is its people, known for their "**can-do" attitude, generosity, and willingness to support one another**. This neighborly culture, rooted in families here for generations, creates an environment where traditions carry forward while embracing contemporary expression. From Switzerland County's quirky charm to Union County's small but mighty foundation of arts and culture from which to grow, connect, and expand, Southeast Indiana presents a unified identity: rooted in heritage, shaped by creativity, sustained by natural beauty, connected to urban opportunity, and animated by a spirit that welcomes all who visit, stay, or call it home.

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.

Digging Deeper into Distinctive Features

The following are just a few of the assets that are unique to the region:

DEARBORN

- Archaeological Research Institute
- Ross & Squibb Distillery
- Perfect North Slopes
- Oxbow Inc.
- Bokenkotter Blooms

FRANKLIN

- Roosters + Chicken Festival then tour the rest of the region for chicken to compare
- [Hickory Road Inn](#) craft retreat facility "where Craftiness is Happiness (with no cooking or cleaning)!"

SWITZERLAND

- Fred + Goataqua and Rubber Ducks
- Black tulips, and everything that comes with Kat Von D

REGIONWIDE

- Ghost Stories, Haunted Houses & Asylums
- Metamora Castle – Yes, a castle in Indiana
- Trains, Muzzleloaders, & Old West Shootouts re-enacted

NEARBY

- America's River Roots Festival in Cincinnati
- Creation Museum / Ark across the way in Kentucky for carryover tourism

Cultural Asset Inventory By the Numbers

	Dearborn	Franklin	Ohio	Ripley	Switzerland	Union	Total
Category							
Artist/Creative Bus.	61	25	19	47	30	24	206
Public Art	31	35	25	42	12	8	153
History & Heritage	32	17	6	22	11	4	92
Events & Traditions	22	20	11	17	7	7	84
Art in Non-Art Spaces	15	13	6	13	4	4	55
Nonprofit Arts	11	3	—	5	2	—	21
Informal Arts Group	7	4	—	1	2	4	18
Discipline							
Visual Arts	27	14	12	17	15	12	97
Traditional Craft	13	14	6	16	13	8	70
Music	16	8	5	14	4	3	50
Literary Arts	19	1	—	9	2	2	33
Design	3	—	1	—	2	6	12
Dance	3	2	—	2	—	1	7
Theater	1	1	—	2	2	—	6
Location Type							
Venue	10	5	4	9	3	1	32
Retail	9	2	3	6	3	2	25
Museum	4	—	2	6	5	—	17
Library	6	2	1	4	1	1	15
History Society/Club	3	3	1	2	2	1	12
Center/Coop/Council	7	2	—	2	1	—	12
Support Entities							
Economic Develop.	5	2	1	6	4	1	19
Foundation / Funder	2	3	2	6	3	1	17
Friends & Volunteers	2	5	—	2	1	2	12
Tourism / CVB	1	1	1	1	2	—	6
Local Media or Club	2	1	—	2	—	—	5
Professional Network	1	1	—	2	—	—	4
Miscellaneous							
Schools	19	9	3	15	4	3	53
Parks	12	7	4	15	7	3	48
Other Attractions	10	9	4	3	3	5	34
Trails	3	2	1	3	3	1	13
Craft Products	1	—	—	—	—	1	2

Detail in the Appendix, pages 122-123

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, SWAG shops (e.g., embroidered sweatshirts), and fabricators – also widespread

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.

- **Libraries** are key contributors to the creative space by providing programming (book clubs, arts and crafts workshops, lectures, performances, community art exhibits, etc.) for all ages and serving as a convenor and partner. Often small communities lack any other cultural connector, and libraries serve a valuable, if not critical, role in filling that gap.
- **Individual artists, teachers, makers, and their businesses.** While asset mapping identified 206 artists / creative businesses, there's no doubt many more exist. Individual artists and creative businesses frequently do not include their local address assumably because there's a fear 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.

Gaps. While art is organically present around every corner, gaps remain in the region. With only a couple of exceptions, nonprofit arts organizations center around Lawrenceburg and Batesville. Two of the six counties have none. Additionally, performing arts (other than music) are limited and largely volunteer, and two counties lack museums entirely. Determining whether these are gaps are significant compared with other regions (per capita) is outside scope of this plan but would be interesting to explore.

Support Structures. The state of the arts depends heavily on the support structures in place, which means that we have to understand those functions 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 Southeast Indiana benefits greatly from their consistent communication and collaboration. SEI READI and SIRPC provide a structure for this that is clearly valued by all. That said, both the capacity and resources of each county's economic development vary widely. All would be better off if some resources and expertise of the strongest could be directly used to support the smallest.
- **Tourism and destination management** face capacity challenges throughout the region. One county lacks tourism infrastructure entirely, while others maintain limited programs.

Backbone Highlights

Staffed Art Centers: 1 County + Starts

Local art center or community art school with paid staff

- Batesville Area Arts Council, Ripley
- SEI MakerPlus emerging in Friendship
- Project Hope trying to form, Dearborn
- Still Pointe Art Studio & Gallery and others trying to fill [Pendleton Art Center](#) loss, Ohio

Volunteer Art Centers: 3 Counties

Volunteer organizations that provide classes, exhibits, and artist supports

- Dearborn Highlands Arts Council
- Dillsboro Arts Friendship Gallery, Dearborn
- Franklin County Arts Council
- Community Art Center of Switzerland County

Market & Retail Opportunities: Every County

For-profit boutique, coffee shop, or store selling local art (12 inventoried) plus:

- 4 quilt shops and an alpaca farm
- 4 music stores
- 3 instrument makers/repair shops
- 3 frame shops
- 2 retail galleries
- 2 local bookstores
- Assorted craft shops

Networks Spanning the Region

Membership associations along with informal groups creating networks for makers and artists

- Southeastern Indiana Musicians Association
- Southeastern Indiana Art Guild
- Southeast Indiana Woodturners
- Metamora Performing Arts
- 2 Quilting Guilds in Dearborn

Some counties overly focus on county lines versus potential gains from collaboration. 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 Lawrenceburg, demonstrate what well-structured programs can accomplish with proper support.

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. In some locations this indicates a struggle to develop. In Southeast Indiana it's likely the organizations are too new, or the community is struggling for resources. The resulting capacity need is for groups to develop their volunteer base and support a professional face (e.g., "staffing", digital presence, marketing) through volunteers.
- **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.
- **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 a given in those, many of the goals and strategies in this plan will struggle.

Indiana Artisans 4 in Southeast

FRANKLIN

[Shari Bartish](#), Ceramics
[Charlene George](#), Painting

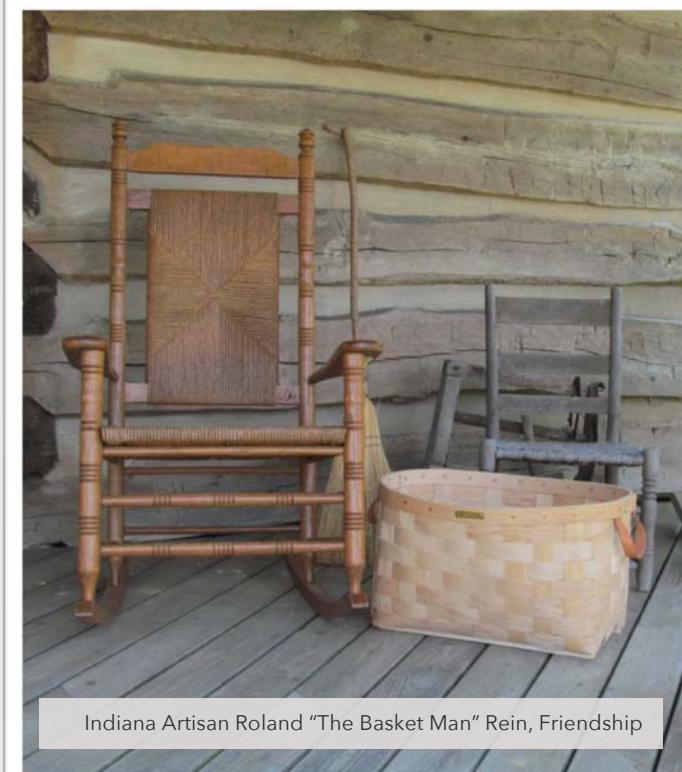
RIPLEY

[Robin Dyer](#), Leather
[Roland Rein](#), Baskets



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.



Indiana Artisan Roland "The Basket Man" Rein, Friendship

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 the some of the region's counties feel this even more than others. SMU DataArts Arts Vibrancy Index (*below, detail in the Appendix*) highlights some of those differences highlighting the differences among the region's counties. For example, there's a vast difference in "Public Support" between Franklin (43) and Ohio (90), and "Arts Vibrancy" between Dearborn (85) and Union (55).

Indices (Percentile)	Dearborn	Ohio	Ripley	Switzerland	Franklin	Union
Arts Vibrancy Score	85	84	75	73	72	55
Component Scores						
1. Arts Providers	69	74	45	61	41	63
2. Arts Dollars	87	89	72	72	58	49
3. Public Support	90	90	81	49	43	45

Detail in the Appendix, page 121

In the chart below, analysis of state and federal arts-related grants shows fewer federal dollars reaching Southeast Indiana. Although the region makes up 1.84% of the state's population, it receives a smaller per capita share of state arts funding.

Of the total funding, 80% came from covid-related programs. Without that, ***virtually no federal arts funding comes into the region.***

Grant Programs	Total Grants Made to IN	Received by SEI Region	% of Total IN
IAC	2019-24	\$ 22,066,309	\$ 217,294 1.0%
ARPA & CARES via IAC	2021-22	\$ 10,873,582	\$ 145,500 1.3%
SVOG	2021	\$139,090,261	\$1,656,391 1.2%
NEA	2019-24	\$ 13,198,447	\$ 50,000 0.4%
NEH	2019-24	\$ 19,330,299	none identified —
IMLS	2019-24	\$ 29,110,349	none identified —

Detail in the Appendix, page 125

Community foundations are the most important sources of grant funding for the creative sector across the region. In fact, they are key drivers behind much of what the region has today.

Asset Highlights

>150 Pieces of Public Art

MURALS

99 inventoried PLUS [Rising Sun Senior Housing Collection](#), and collections of window murals in communities like Aurora and Lawrenceburg

MULTIPLES

100s of [Freds](#) (Goat statues) in Switzerland Co.
 >15 Andrea Grimsley murals in Ohio Co.
 A flock of [Roosters](#) in Franklin Co.
 3 [New-Deal Murals](#) in Dearborn, Ripley, & Union Co.
 2 [Bicentennial Bisons](#) in Ripley & Switzerland Co.

ARTISTS & FABRICATORS

60+ identified including pieces by:

High School Classes and other young artists • local fabricators and woodworkers • 35+ not-yet-attributed



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 Southeast 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.

Southeast Indiana is lucky to have found a way to fill some of that difference. It has three casinos bringing revenue into the region. Even this comes short. A significant portion of the revenue from one goes to Jefferson County because of the way it was approved at the state level. Another is at risk of relocation out of the region. That leaves only one to count on for the future, the one that has already been providing the largest returns in Dearborn County.

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 research findings (*box right*).

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. 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, Southeast 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)



Rebecca Davies Art, Dillsboro

Defining Success

Vision 2035

County by county and then together as a region this process asked Southeast Indiana to imagine a Vibrant Arts & Culture Future for itself – one that embraces an ***"Arts and"* approach**. It intentionally builds from the region's deeply rooted music and craft traditions, visible history, connection to the Ohio River, and rich natural assets. The aspiration that emerged describes a Southeast region circa 2035 in which:

The Arts are a Thriving, Vital Force that:

Spark Community & Economic Vitality

Arts and culture rise as a unifying force for economic development, youth engagement, and communities. From woodworking and live music to mural festivals, creativity is visible, celebrated, and authentically woven into every community.

Amplify Natural Assets & Regional Tourism

Local stories, trails, waterways, and outdoor spaces are celebrated as shared sources of pride and wellbeing. Strategic marketing, compelling storytelling, and curated tourism packages weave the beauty of the place together with active arts experiences.

Foster Regional Collaboration through Local Leadership

Coordinated leadership plus deep, supportive networks have developed local arts and culture assets, strengthened partnerships, and catalyzed development throughout. The arts are a valued, cohesive sector connecting creatives, nonprofits, and civic leaders.

Are Central to Engaging & Empowering the Next Generation

Arts and culture programming, creative learning, and leadership development have increased retention of the region's youth while welcoming and supporting families.

And Where Creative Placemaking & Design have Solidified Vibrant Cultural Districts

Our downtowns and main streets are lively hubs where every storefront is filled, restaurants thrive, and walking trails connect residents and visitors to shops, stories, and scenic assets. Beautification efforts and adaptive reuse have sustained the small-town charm we value.

We Grow from Deep Roots –

Cultivating Big Opportunities with Small Town Charm.

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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, SEI's aspiration to be: "Brimming with potential and opportunity. The region has a hardworking population, where residents value a strong sense of community. Abundant natural resources dedicated regional collaboration, and a convenient geographical location are among some of the many characteristics that prepare it for long-term economic and population growth.."

We call ourselves the affordable Cincinnati address, as our region has a small town feel with big city amenities.

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 SEI READI'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 128-135)

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 SEI READI, 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 – SEI READI Benchmarks**
Because the Arts & Culture plan supports the SEI READI Regional Development Plan, it should positively impact those goals and target benchmarks .
 - Building Housing Units
 - Attracting and Retaining Population
 - Increasing Infrastructure Capacity
 - Boosting per Capita Income
 - Increasing Jobs

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 103*). 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.

ALIGNING OUTCOMES

Regional economic development targets are:

1. **HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOODS.** Provide 1,800 new housing units at attainable price points based on annual per capita income earnings
2. **CULTURE, TOURISM, RECREATION & LIFESTYLE.** Preserve, enhance, and activate our communities, destinations, and recreational activities as a frontline resource to grow our regional population by 5,000 residents by 2030
3. **INFRASTRUCTURE.** Increase regional infrastructure capacity and reach by 10% to meet the needs of our current and future residents and businesses
4. **BUSINESS RETENTION, GROWTH, & ATTRACTION.** [Add] 2,500 jobs by 2030 through business recruitment, expansion, and attraction efforts to increase the per capita income by 2.5% per year
5. **CHILD CARE.** Expand access to quality and affordable childcare and early education programs by 10% each year



Chaz Kaiser, Aesthetic Metal Studio, Oldenburg

Goals & Strategies



Window Mural on the Elks Lodge by Adam Gilliam, Lawrenceburg

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.

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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ACTIVATE THE REGION ★ Revitalize and activate main streets, waterfronts, byways, and hidden gems through arts and culture. Filled with surprises, public art, entertainment, and food they thrive as <i>Cultural Districts</i> – living history hubs blended with creative energy, and small town charm to attract residents and explorers. 2. CONNECT COMMUNITIES Knit the region's <i>Natural & Cultural Assets</i> together (e.g., public art trails, regional program initiatives, and wayfinding design) to amplify and increase access to both, build relationships, and promote place-based discovery, wellness, and tourism.
priority ATTACHMENT & OPPORTUNITY	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. CULTIVATE NEXT GENERATION ROOTS Invest in initiatives with and for the next generation – expanding access to arts programming and education, increasing participation, and opening paths to creative careers. Deeply engaging the next generation in a vibrant <i>Cultural Life</i> will feed talent pipelines while increasing resident retention regionwide. 4. GENERATE CREATIVE OPPORTUNITY Focus on the <i>Art, Artists, & Creation</i> – and opportunities to create – to position the creative sector for success. Generate opportunities with, by, and for artists, creative entrepreneurs, and nonprofits through training, program development, and material supports needed to grow authentically.
priority LEADERSHIP & COLLABORATION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. MOBILIZE, COLLABORATE & COMMUNICATE Collaborate to advance <i>Cultural Development & Regionalism</i>. 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 <i>Hardwire Arts & Culture Strategy</i> into governance, economic development, funding, and civic frameworks. Embedding arts and culture into plans and policies will ensure their sustainable visibility, investment, and impact.



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 in detail 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 (previous page). Similarly, the SEI READI development plan includes six regional goals (*box right*).

Arts & Culture Priorities	Regional Development Plan
Place & Identity	Directly aligned: Creative Placemaking & Preservation Supporting elements of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Quality Health, Safety, & Social Services;Economic Growth Momentum; andComprehensive Regional Marketing
Attachment & Opportunity	Directly aligned: Life-Long Learning Supporting elements of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Creative Placemaking & Preservation;Quality Health, Safety, & Social Services; andEconomic Growth Momentum
Leadership & Collaboration	Directly aligned: Economic Growth Momentum Supporting elements of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Creative Placemaking & Preservation;Accessible Housing & Infrastructure; andEconomic Growth Momentum



Excavator Blade Art outside Versailles

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ALIGNING GOALS

The region's six economic development goals are:

- CREATIVE PLACEMAKING & PRESERVATION.** Prioritized as critical to improving quality of life, leveraging built and natural assets, developing resilient communities, spurring economic investment, and ensuring the region remains an attractive location for talent and business.
- ACCESSIBLE HOUSING & INFRASTRUCTURE.** Improve the accessibility of a variety of housing types in response to a significant need for both new and preserved quality housing.
- QUALITY HEALTH, SAFETY, & SOCIAL SERVICE.** Expand access to essential services and specialized care to improve quality of life throughout the region.
- LIFE-LONG LEARNING.** Support residents through learning opportunities, directly addressing the gap between labor market demands and formal education.
- ECONOMIC GROWTH MOMENTUM.** Maintain momentum as economic growth begins to flourish, especially for select industries.
- COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL MARKETING.** Develop its brand, building on the vision and goals outlined within this regional plan.

ACTIVATE THE REGION

goal 1



Revitalize and activate main streets, waterfronts, byways, and hidden gems through arts and culture. Filled with surprises, public art, entertainment, and food they thrive as **Cultural Districts** – living history hubs blended with creative energy, and small town charm to attract residents and explorers.

Alignment with Regional Development Plan

SEI READI's Creative Placemaking & Preservation goal focuses on three asset types: 1) Built, 2) Nature, and 3) Arts, Culture & Community. **Activate the Region** addresses the first and third (*box right*), prioritizing Arts, Culture & Community.

At the same time, it sets the stage for success in **Economic Growth Momentum** and **Comprehensive Regional Marketing** (*detailed later in strategy*).

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



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CREATIVE PLACEMAKING & PRESERVATION

The regional plan placemaking goal includes:

ARTS, CULTURE & COMMUNITY ASSETS FOCUS

Promote new community connections through cultural and creative experiences.

SEI seeks to engage community members, artists, business owners, organizations, and local government in the development of quality amenities and activities that leverage and promote arts and culture in the region. ...

Murals and mural trails [and] other amenities to build upon the quality of life and quality of place... SEI strives to create and promote equitable access to quality public spaces and programming, which the community and visitors may interact for shared experiences.

BUILT ASSETS FOCUS

Reimagine and preserve unique spaces.

From community centers, downtowns, and main streets, the region is ripe for reimagination and reinvention. Adaptive reuse strategies will allow the region to preserve unique spaces, and intentional investment will allow respective counties to unlock the vibrancy and beauty of their historic main streets and historical buildings.

Community members ... expressed their desire to preserve the rich history of the region; moreover, ... the historical buildings and landmarks should play a central role in the region's redevelopment into a more attractive destination.

Rising Sun Waterfront

Goal 1 Strategies

1.1 Amplify & Celebrate Distinctive Assets

Revitalize and restore community cores, creating cultural districts where you want to sit down and stay for a while.

tactics

- a) Create welcoming, walkable environments that spark **pride** while creating a sense of **place** and **discovery**
 - Programs to maintain and beautify façades, alleys, and streetscapes (e.g., small matching grants)
 - Intentionally designed signage, gateways, and zoning standards
 - Landscaping, lighting, design features (e.g., awnings where there are no trees), and public art
- b) Revitalize core areas as well as smaller communities through preservation and **creative reuse** of existing assets
 - Leverage arts to restore and creatively reuse **historic buildings** as mixed use creative hubs (e.g., arts venues, co-working and creative businesses)
 - Transform **underused properties** into cultural assets (e.g., pop-up exhibit, retail, and restaurant opportunities)
 - Beautify and activate **open, visible spaces** such as alleys and abandoned sites ('brownfields') (e.g., gardens and pocket parks)

1.2 Activate with Public Art & Programming

Bring main streets, waterfronts, and byways to life year-round with arts, culture, and community programming.

tactics

- a) Install, enhance, or revitalize **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)
- d) Bring celebrated **traditions and living history to life** through art, storytelling, and place-based interpretation. Historical societies, libraries, and tourism bureaus collaborate to highlight shared heritage (e.g., Black History, historic districts and towns, music, traditional arts) within and across county boundaries via: Interpretive signage, Walking tours, and Digital storytelling (e.g., QR codes, digital media)



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 40.
- [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 106).
- [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 103-116), where you will find more on these and other ideas.

CONNECT COMMUNITIES

goal 2

Knit the region's **Natural & Cultural Assets** together (e.g., public art trails, regional program initiatives, and wayfinding design) to amplify and increase access to both, build relationships, and promote place-based discovery, wellness, and tourism.

Alignment with Regional Development Plan

SEI READI's **Creative Placemaking & Preservation** goal focuses on three asset types: 1) Built, 2) Nature, and 3) Arts, Culture & Community. **Connect Communities** explicitly links the second and third (*box right*), prioritizing Arts, Culture & Community.

Doing so, supports the Wellness through Recreation elements of **Quality Health, Safety, & Social Services** and sets the stage for success in **Economic Growth Momentum** and **Comprehensive Regional Marketing** (*detailed later in strategy*).

Success Measures – Proposed

- Artist/city 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

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CREATIVE PLACEMAKING & PRESERVATION

The regional plan placemaking goal also includes:

NATURAL ASSETS FOCUS

Raise awareness and leverage the region's natural assets. The Southeast Indiana landscape delights its residents. ... Leveraging the region's state parks, scenic corridors, and abundant waterfronts is a critical strategy for Southeast Indiana. It's important that these natural assets be protected, and that environmental awareness is improved. Water and sewer infrastructure, for example, is necessary to address high-priority environmental issues.

FROM OTHER GOALS

While other goals from the regional plan include:

WELLNESS THROUGH RECREATION

Invest in recreational opportunities to support both resident and visitor interests. These are the same assets that attract talent and visitors. The region should focus investment to enhance diverse recreational opportunities in a region already rich in natural treasures.

REGIONAL BRAND

Create a clear and widely embraced regional brand. In collaboration with regional stakeholders, SEI READI will examine the public image of Southeast Indiana and work together to further develop a regional brand.

Goal 2 Strategies

2.1



Amplify & Activate Nature in Combination with Cultural Assets

Leverage the region's unique geography, natural and cultural assets to connect communities, creativity, and recreation.

tactics

- Create thematic, experience "trails" (e.g., walks, drives, weekends) with designed wayfinding, public art, and intentional connections to key cultural and recreational destinations (e.g., physically connecting trail segments as well as adding bike lanes, mapping, signage)
- Activate **waterfronts and byways and the small towns along the way** with creative programming, exhibitions, and performances that encourage exploration and economic activity

2.2

Build Regional Tourism

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

tactics

- Develop and deepen **regional relationships and strategies** to support cross-promotion, cross-county marketing, and shared expertise
- Develop **shared marketing assets** that increase local capacity and efficiency while reducing costs (box right)
 - 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
- Intentionally package and promote **experiences** that link the region's:
 - Natural destinations (e.g., Perfect Slopes, Brookville Lake, Ohio River, Whitewater Canal, state parks) **with**
 - Arts, culture, and heritage assets (see *Big Idea 1 for more*) **and**
 - Downtown and waterfront activities (e.g., festivals, concerts, tours, shopping, and downtown charm)

Digging Deeper to Connect Communities

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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.

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CULTURE, TOURISM, RECREATION & LIFESTYLE

The regional plan tourism etc. goal includes:

- Utilize the Ohio River Way as a resource to connect, regionally market, fund and redevelop our region's river towns.
- Enhance the public's access to and enjoyment of public waterways, parks, open spaces, nature preserves, cultural facilities, and interpretive programming through the development of trails, pathways, and enhanced amenities.
- Encourage collaboration toward a cohesive and shared Southeast Indiana regional brand among tourism bureaus and EDOs in our region for talent attraction.

The READI 2.0 revisions to SEI's regional plan, including the above directly speak to Goal 2 here.

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 ooohooozing 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 barbecue 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

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

CULTIVATE NEXT GENERATION ROOTS

goal 3

Invest in initiatives with and for the 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 retention across the region.

Alignment with Regional Development Plan

SEI READI's **Life-Long Learning** goal focuses on three life stages: 1) Childcare and Early Education, 2) K-12 Pathways, and 3) Adult Education & Upskilling. **Cultivate Next Generation Roots** focuses most directly on K-2 pathways (*box right*) but also touches on the other two.

Doing so, supports the rationale behind the Wellness through Recreation elements of **Quality Health, Safety, & Social Services**, continues to build arts, culture and community assets tied to **placemaking**, and sets the stage for success in **Economic Growth Momentum** (*detailed later in strategy*).

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
- Arts participation by ages 20-30

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LIFE-LONG LEARNING

The regional plan life-long learning goal includes:

K-12 PATHS TO SUCCESS FOCUS

Improve K-12 school competitiveness and strengthen pathways to in-demand and growing industry jobs. Intentional investment in K-12 schools is possibly one of the most valuable economic development strategies in terms of talent attraction and development. When a young family is looking to move, the quality of K-12 educational opportunities is a significant factor – sometimes, the most important factor. Southeast Indiana has some great schools. However, as a rural region there are substantial struggles for funding. Southeast Indiana needs to be competitive in curriculum, programming, teacher pay, and pathways that will lead to student success. Cooperation and support between schools and local employers is critical to this process.

Underscoring the importance of the next generation of this region, recall that its counties are **3-10 years older than the state at the median**. Without an influx and retention of residents 40 and younger, the region will shrink and face larger challenges.



Regional Outcome Targets include:

3,000 new residents (2.3% growth)

285 new direct jobs

175 new indirect jobs

This goal will be important to reaching those targets

Goal 3 Strategies

3.1

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 and perform, socialize and share – in **every** community (e.g., coffee shop, library, community center, park)
- b) Directly work with the next generation to **co-design / co-lead** programming according to their creative wants and needs
- c) Youth **engagement** is prioritized through art recognition in schools, STEAM programming, and intergenerational creative initiatives
- d) 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) to be hubs of intergenerational activity
 - Exhibits, performances, and **showcases** for budding talent

3.2

Empower Youth Engagement & Volunteerism

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)

3.3

Build Creative Career Pathways

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, sound engineering)



Resource 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](#)

Your Input

View from the Survey

“ ... a mention about **fostering volunteerism**. It is **the life blood of small communities** for people to get involved, and through that involvement you not only get sense of **contributing to someone greater than self**, but you fall in love with your own back yard the people in it.

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

Digging Deeper into Next Generation Roots

Key strategies from the SEI READI regional development plan can be leveraged for this goal, include:

- JAG Expansion via SEIWIB & Eastern IN Works
- Genesis: Pathways to Success
- Job Building for the Future

GENERATE CREATIVE OPPORTUNITY

goal 4

Focus on the **Art, Artists, & Creation** – and opportunities to create – to position the creative sector for success. Generate opportunities with, by, and for artists, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural nonprofits through training, program development, and material supports needed to grow authentically.

Alignment with Regional Development Plan

This goal targets three elements of the SEI READI plan:

- Adult Education & Upskilling in Life-Long Learning (box right)
- Entrepreneurship & Innovation in Economic Growth Momentum (box right)
- Arts, Culture & Community Assets in Creative Placemaking & Preservation

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

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 Indiana Small Business Development Center

SEI READI

2021–2030 Regional Development Plan

ECONOMIC GROWTH MOMENTUM

The regional plan economic growth goal includes:

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & INNOVATION FOCUS

Leverage the region's entrepreneurial culture as a catalyst for startups and innovation.

Southeast Indiana recognizes that the most effective way to unlock the regional economy is to create an environment where innovators, risk takers, and entrepreneurs can flourish. With intentional commitment and investment, the region can provide programs, resources, and technical service to the next generation of business leaders in Southeast Indiana.

LIFE-LONG LEARNING

The regional plan life-long learning goal also includes:

ADULT EDUCATION & UPSKILLING FOCUS

Provide training for in-demand skills and occupations that support the region's economic priorities.

A regional economy is only as strong as the people producing. Southeast Indiana recognizes that attracting and developing talent is the most effective way to grow the regional economy and create wealth for the residents of the represented communities.

An intentional effort to provide training for in-demand skills and jobs will ensure the future success of the Southeast Indiana economy. The region will prioritize programming that increases wages, job readiness, self-sufficiency, and resiliency.

Goal 4 Strategies

4.1 Expand Access to Space for Creatives

Develop the spaces artists and creative entrepreneurs need to live, work, and showcase their talents

tactics

- Develop and sustain **affordable spaces** for creatives (e.g., shared studios, co-work, and makerspaces)
- Facilitate **retail opportunities** (e.g., arts trails, curated arts markets, community box office, vendor space at events) that reduce start-up risk and encourage sustainable growth.
- Encourage **cooperatives** to collectively co-market (artist cooperative gallery, regional online store, shared studios, or makerspaces)

4.2 Empower Creative Capacity

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

tactics

- 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," pages 109-110)
- Develop tools and training to fill **unmet needs** of artists and creative businesses:
 - Material (e.g., microloans, grants, tool libraries)
 - Apprenticeship (matching emerging and established artists, creatives, and/or businesses – e.g., [Traditional Arts Indiana](#))
- Supports for **up-skilling** particularly in digital commerce (e.g., training, micro-grants)

4.3 Grow Teaching & Learning

Expand local and regional opportunities for practitioners to teach arts and culture in programs for all ages

tactics

- Support programs that contract with and provide **visibility to artists** (e.g., residencies in schools, libraries, and parks,)
- New educational programs** to share craft and knowledge across generations (e.g., summer lake institute).
- Rosters and databases** for artist referrals, teachers, and mentors

Digging Deeper to Generate Creative Opportunity

Key strategies from the regional development plan that can be leveraged for this goal, include:

Switzerland County Technology & Education Center
Co-Work Initiative • NEXT Community • Hub & Spoke Institute • Southeast Indiana Maker Network • Culinary Hospitality Project

Local Authors Fair
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Saturday, April 12
Lawrenceburg Main Library
150 Mary St., Lawrenceburg, IN



Gena Stonefield will read with her therapy dog Wenli at 11 a.m. plus more therapy dogs at 11:30 a.m.!



Leigh K. Dean & Cindy Tanner will talk about writing romance books at 11:30 a.m.



Jeff Suess will talk about the book "Pete Rose: A Tribute to a



H.T. Martineau will talk about her new Dungeons & Dragons

Baseball Legend" at 12:30 p.m.

Annual Local Authors Fair, 42 in 2025! by a D&D game!



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 103-116.

“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

SEI READI's **Comprehensive Regional Marketing** goal has two components: 1) Regional Brand and 2) Collaborative Planning (box right). **Mobilize, Collaborate & Communicate** is entirely focused on collaborative planning and success – all boats rise when we work together. At the same time, it expands beyond tourism or a regional brand to supports the capacity of the creative sector.

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

SEI READI

2021–2030 Regional Development Plan

COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

The regional plan also includes:

Develop marketing plan with tactics focused on tourism, entrepreneurship, and talent attraction. Southeast Indiana is dedicated to collaborative processes for updating local planning documents and removing barriers for those already seeking to be in the region. SEI READI will seek more collaboration across county lines to ensure that existing marketing dollars have a greater impact.

SEI READI is considering additional projects to support this strategy, such as: SEI Digital Business Marketing & Inclusion Platform

Your Input View from the Survey

“ *Collaborate, Communicate and Support each County all the way down* to the Pop Up shops. Encourage individuals from the Large Businesses to the Individual and Small Businesses to gather together to help each other succeed. Once you do this, it will come back to support you.

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

Goal 5 Strategies

5.1

Mobilize Mutual Support 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)
- b) Develop creative sector **support networks** (e.g., art associations, guilds, informal groups) and initiatives 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

Expand Implementation Capacity

Build sustainable implementation capacity within the creative sector through leadership development and dedicated staff.

tactics

- a) Balance grassroots "**mini projects**" **AND large** signature events to maximize impact and avoid volunteer burnout
- b) Where possible, transition from **volunteer to staffed** and from informal to formal (especially in tourism and main streets)
- c) **Sustain volunteerism** with next generation recruitment and training coupled with cross-sector partnership to expand capacity



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 Input View from the Survey

“ Help each community FOCUS, uncover, express, and expand their own "unique cultural personality" through art, nature, performance, education and local art and cultural events.

This then creates community awareness, pride, collaboration, mentoring, volunteerism, servant leadership...which then delivers tourism, retention, and placemaking.

Once those individually unique community cultural and arts personalities are better homed in, clear and vibrant, I would help to connect them through **collective regional storytelling** that invites experiential exploration. It's about first identifying and polishing what's truly special locally, then weaving it into a shared cultural narrative that supports and uplifts the whole region.

5.3



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 leveraging best practices
- b) Facilitate cross-sector communication ***within each county***, sowing the seeds for organic partnership, resource sharing, as well as arts and culture initiatives throughout the region (e.g., Community Council in Franklin County, 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 Arts Awards, and other regional successes
 - Share data and promote regional efforts within and outside the region
 - Spark innovation, plan future arts and culture strategy, and foster regionalism
 - Leverage networks to identify key themes, collective actions, data sharing to keep the momentum going



Franklin County Arts Council, Brookville

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

As the final goal, **Formalize Sustainable Commitments** doesn't target one or more of SEI READI's regional development goals – though the Broadband focus in **Accessible Housing & Infrastructure** is critically important to the arts and culture strategy. Instead, it recognizes that success – sustainable success – can only be achieved if there is process here. In that way, it undergirds each of the goals in this strategy document as well as those in the regional development plan.

Success Measures – Proposed

- New champions and institutional partners (e.g., mayors, schools, 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)

SEI READI

2021–2030 Regional Development Plan

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING & PRESERVATION

The regional plan placemaking goal:

Prioritizes placemaking as critical to improving quality of life, leveraging built and natural assets, developing resilient communities, spurring economic investment, and ensuring the region remains an attractive location for talent and business. Project for Public Spaces defines placemaking by the following:

"Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value."

More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution."

SEI READI has outlined strategies to achieve this goal within the following topics:

- Built Assets
- Natural Assets
- Arts, Culture, and Community Assets

This is the focus of the Arts & Culture Plan.



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

- 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
- Encourage **businesses** to directly engage with local creatives (e.g., exhibits, commissions, performances, sponsorships)

6.2

Build a Supportive Public Policy Infrastructure

Formalize local government policy and practice that directly support – and limit those that hinder – arts and culture strategy.

tactics

- 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)
- Institute government-appointed **arts councils and small grant programs** in alignment with city goals
- 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 and solidify a diversified approach to long-term arts and culture support and investment

tactics

- Designate **public funds** and revenue streams that demonstrate commitment to arts and culture (e.g., portion of hotel/lodging tax, portion of utility or telecommunication fees, local sales tax, budget line item)
- Cultivate **local philanthropy** with each county's community foundation (e.g., donor advised funds, endowment matches, donor engagement)
- Pursue **grants** for arts initiatives while leveraging public, private, and corporate match opportunities, such as those found in The Toolkit
- 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 112). 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





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:

- Include 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*** versus short-term project recommendations. Since great change requires enthusiasm and commitment, these are offered for exploration and consideration.

1. ALL-IN MARKETING:
Art Connected to Nature 
What would it look like to go “all-in” – to ***showcase incredible natural assets*** like the Ohio River Way, Versailles State Park, and Monarch Preserve ***alongside a treasure trove of cultural attractions and sites***? Imagine a ***shared regional marketing strategy*** across multiple platforms that creates a clear “brand” or sense of united identity centered on art and nature.
2. FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE REGION:
Indiana’s Music Corridor
Celebrating ***southeastern Indiana’s deep musical roots*** – from Richmond, ***birthplace of recorded jazz*** to Madison’s ***“music city”*** – this corridor would showcase both the region’s incredible musical legacy and today’s vibrant culture. The bookends are strong but make no sense without the region in-between. ***Music is in Southeast Indiana’s DNA***. Musicians celebrate, support, share, and mentor one another, and there’s no shortage of venues for folks to play – from backyards and bars to senior centers and event centers.
3. DEEP TRADITIONS & PRACTICE:
The Region as Folk School

Rooted in its legacy of music, craft, and making, Southeast Indiana has ***the ingredients to become a nationally recognized center for folks arts learning***. By establishing a folk school or a network of creative learning centers, the region can foster creative careers and lifelong learners while strengthening local businesses.



90 Proof Twang, Union County Harvest Fest, Liberty

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.

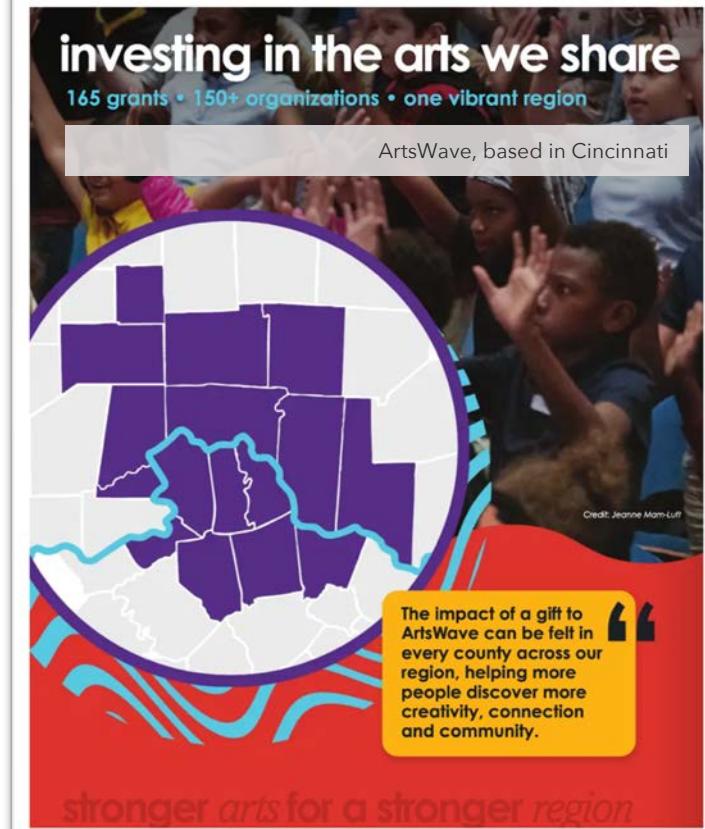
1. **Start the conversation** with individual leaders, expand to facilitated groups, and identify interest for further exploration.
2. **Deeply explore** the options with traction via brainstorming sessions, site visits, and conversations with other communities.
3. **Hone the idea** – continue to ask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

Recommended Partners Beyond the Region

Big Idea #1 – Art Connected to Nature. Partner with [Ohio River Way](#). Its coalition is bringing focus to the Ohio River Basin for conservation, tourism, investment, and more. It is a natural partner, provided SEI READI retains focus on the region's interior and those communities.

Big Idea #2 – Indiana's Music Corridor. Partner with adjacent regions. Meet with [Forge ECI](#), [Accelerate Rural Indiana](#), and [Our Southern Indiana](#) leaders first to build those partnerships. Each has related goals (page 58).

Big Ideas #1-3 & All Goals. Partner across the Cincinnati OH-KY-IN CSA starting with ArtsWave. SEI READI is the only Indiana region that can directly benefit from Cincinnati as part of that region. Ohio ranks [#12 for arts vibrancy](#), and greater Cincinnati ranks #19 among large cities. It has artists, arts and culture organizations, creative businesses, events, funders, supporters, capacity programs, media, and audience. Each is an opportunity to leverage in implementation. [ArtsWave](#) is a proven funder, capacity builder, and amplifier. It is practiced in out-of-state collaboration (e.g., the [Northern Kentucky Creative Placemaking Grant](#) program with [meetNKY](#)). Beyond its work, ArtsWave can connect the region to other Ohio resources and partners.



1. ALL-IN MARKETING

ART CONNECTED TO NATURE

The Idea

What would it look like to go “all-in” – to **showcase incredible natural assets** like the Ohio River Way, Versailles State Park, and Monarch Preserve **alongside a treasure trove of cultural 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 art and nature**.

It would serve as both marketing tool and region-wide calendar reflecting the unique charm and opportunities only found in Southeast Indiana. This model could take shape through a collective, coordinated efforts between tourism, the creative sector, and funders.

The Opportunity

This idea takes Goal 2 (Connect Communities) and supersizes it. Southeast Indiana’s rivers, hills, and trails naturally pair with its rich cultural life, offering a powerful opportunity to connect outdoor recreation with arts and culture.

Millions of visitors already come to enjoy natural assets like the Ohio River Way, Brookville Lake, and Versailles State Park – yet few discover the region’s equally vibrant cultural attractions. By linking recreation, storytelling, and the arts, the region can transform casual visits into deeper, more meaningful experiences that strengthen community identity, support local businesses and artists, and elevate quality of life.

Aligning with regional goals, the “all-in” approach, one that unites natural and cultural assets under a shared narrative and digital platform, will not only attract visitors but also drive resident engagement through shared storytelling and a centralized events calendar, positioning Southeast Indiana as a model for how the arts and environment together define place and purpose.



By our count, the region has:

1,620 sq mi FOOTPRINT with
19 sq mi of LAKE SURFACE and
41% FOREST COVER

Just imagine the number of linear trail-river/creek-lakefront miles!

Digging Deeper The Ohio River

The region has done significant groundwork – recreation studies, designated riverways, scenic byways – that can be leveraged for this effort. For example:

[The Ohio River Way](#), a trail connecting communities across Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio, is an officially designated National Water Trail at the recommendation of the National Park Service.

This rare recognition marks the largest addition to the National Trails System in 2025 – out of 387 miles designated nationwide, the Ohio River Way accounted for 308 miles.

[Ohio River Scenic Byway](#) – Indiana’s first scenic byway, has almost 30 years of practice to build from as well.

The Ohio River Way as officially designated June 2025 The Ohio River Scenic Byway and its extension were designated in 1992 and 2025.

An Abundance to Build from for Big Idea #1

Southeast Indiana's existing focus on natural assets and recreation, combined with the arts and culture assets highlighted throughout this plan, and living history provide a tremendous base. Here are just a few of the abundance of opportunities the region can build from.

NATURE & RECREATION

Indiana's **largest wildlife refuge** – Big Oaks
2nd largest state park – Versailles
 And **largest canoe race** – Brookville Canoefest

AND...

Ohio & Whitewater Rivers and tributaries
 Brookville Lake-Whitewater Memorial Parks
 Designated Scenic Byways & Historic Roads
 Pedestrian/Bike Trail Projects & Trails in Parks
 Monarch Meadows Nature Preserve
 Red Wolf Sanctuary
 Wolf Creek Habitat & Rescue
 Perfect Slopes
 The Sunflower Field (Fox Farms)
 Ohio River Recreation Studies and plans

See Natural Assets Table in the Appendix
 page 124 for a more detailed list.

ARTS & CULTURE ASSETS & EVENTS

Key **Community Festivals** such as:

- Swiss Wine
- Freudenfest
- Harvest Fest

Dozens of **Music & Arts Festivals** such as:

- Batesville Music & Arts
- Dillsboro Jazz
- Bluegrass
- Batesville Music & Arts
- Harvest Fest

Four Renovated **Historic Theaters**

Established **Arts Anchors & Networks** such as:

- Rivertown Quilters
- Southeast Indiana Woodturners
- SE Indiana Art Guild
- Dearborn Highland Arts Council

HISTORIC SITES & COMMUNITIES

Historic Communities in Franklin (Metamora & Oldenburg) and Switzerland (Vevay) Counties

Unique Attractions across the region such as:

- Thiebaud Farmstead (Switzerland)
- Metamora Castle
- Ohio County Courthouse
- Milan '54 Museum
- 1804 Templeton Cabin
- Hillforest Victorian House Museum

Historic Districts in every county – 13 in all

And **so much more...**



Detail from Lawrenceburg River Walk Plan

2. FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE REGION INDIANA'S MUSIC CORRIDOR

The Idea

Celebrating *southeastern Indiana's deep musical roots* – from Richmond, [birthplace of recorded jazz](#) to Madison's "[music city](#)" – this corridor would showcase both the region's incredible musical legacy and today's vibrant culture connecting historic studios, performance venues, and living traditions. The bookends are strong but make no sense without the region in-between which makes up almost the entire corridor.

Music is woven into Southeast Indiana's DNA, deeply rooted in heritage – from early settlers (German, Swiss) to KY and African American slave influence. The region embraces a broad category of genres, and countless musicians hail from and live in the region. Musicians celebrate, support, share, and mentor one another, and there's seemingly no shortage of venues for folks to play – from backyards and bars to senior centers and event centers.

Link the bookends with this deep heritage? Now you have a big idea. Practically, implementation of this idea could be 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

While it would require communities in four regional economic development organizations to collaborate. With SEI READI in the lead the case is strong, and the rewards could reverberate throughout.

Digging into the inventories reveals a healthy cluster of assets and activity in between (e.g., Southeast Indiana Music Association and Hall of Fame, Rees Harps, revitalized theaters throughout, university music departments and programs, waterfront and park amphitheaters, regular live music in bars, churches, legion halls, casinos, basements, backyards, campgrounds). And all connected by rivers and scenic byways.



Southeast Indiana Musicians Association **Generations of Tradition**

SEIMA was founded in 2001 by two musician co-workers at Ross & Squibb Distillery who recognized there were so many amazing musicians, they wanted to honor and recognize them. Since then, **SEIMA has inducted almost 200 musicians into its hall of fame**. Its youth project has attracted 65 nominees since 2022, awarding over \$13,000 across 22 winners.

It has a vibrant and active membership across five counties that is rooted in heritage and families of musicians. Andy Jackson (son of founder Don Jackson) still plays at area nursing homes every Monday. His father played at senior centers and hosted jams.



Detail, SEIMA Mural, Lawrenceburg

SEIMA Project's **Impact on Youth**

*"I can't say how neat it is, that we have a local project/experience that **gives up and coming musicians a way to show their skills before heading off to college, trade school, apprenticeships or a career in music**. The process is simple to use and rewarding.*

My students have used the SEIMA Project and the financial gift given to them in their degrees, to present themselves confidently and professionally. I know through my teaching experience, that the more quality you present, the better impression you will make."

CRYSTAL POWERS, Director
Southeast Indiana Youth Orchestra
seyouthorchestra.org

*"The SEIMA Project is a **wonderful opportunity for young musicians from Southeast Indiana to showcase their talents and receive financial support**. I know that my students have grown during this experience and enjoyed the performance opportunities as well as the positive feedback.*

I believe the SEIMA Project has given my students confidence in their abilities and helped them reach their goals whether it is to continue as a music major in college or a professional songwriter. These opportunities are unique and we are so blessed to have musicians in our area who are helping to support our local young musicians."

DONNA TANNER, Music Department Head,
Choral Director, and Assistant Drama Director,
East Central High School

An Abundance to Build from for Big Idea #2

Southeast Indiana's Vibrant Music Culture is hard to quantify. Musicians are wily that way but just start asking around. It is massive.

Venues & Production

A vibrant scene supported by bar, brewery, winery, church, high school, town park, event center, and farm venues – every county (20 listed, certainly more), including:

- Historic local gems like the Damm, Gibson, Liberty, & Historic Hoosier Theaters
- Unique locations like The Speakeasy Listening Room
- Outdoor venues like Lawrenceburg's Civic Park
- Small town venues like Metamora Opry and Columbia Street Music District
- Larger venues like Rising Star, Belterra, & Hollywood Casinos
- Local audio production like A. Kaiser Productions, Clear Sound Design, A&M Sound

Music Festivals & Events

Well over 80 music festivals and festivals with music, including:

- Birding Man Music Festival
- Dillsboro Jazz Festival, Summer Concert Series and The Porch
- Lawrenceburg Fall Music Fest and Summer Music on the River
- Happy Valley Bluegrass Festival
- Batesville Music & Arts Festival
- Music on the Square (Versailles)
- Metamora Mandolin Gathering and Grist Mill Jams, Acoustic Final Fridays, Second Saturdays, etc.

Musicians & Groups

- Numerous bands and performers (see SEIMA membership)
- Voices of Indiana and Southeast Indiana Youth Orchestra

Record Stores, Specialty Retail & Instrument Makers

- River Dog Music Collective, The fAxetory Music Co., Batesville Music Co.
- Rees Harps, Cincinnati Accordion, Jamonn Zeller String Instrument Repair & Restoration

And all things related to the Southeast Indiana Musicians Association

Music Goals in Other Regional Arts Plans

The bookends are in place with strategies in their new arts and culture plans for what comes next.

- [Our Southern Indiana](#) includes strategies for strengthening the Madison end.
- [Forge ECI](#) includes a music strategy big idea and call for investment in Richmond.

SEI READI's overlapping region, [Accelerate Rural Indiana](#), also has a plan with strategies for a

"regional performance and venue network that strengthens capacity of local cultural programming and attracts outside arts and cultural performances"

Southeastern Indiana could help ARI to jumpstart this effort by leveraging SEI READI's existing assets.

Renovated historic theaters, almost 25 years of SEIMA Hall of Fame inductees, a vibrant calendar of music series and festivals are just the start.

Should Big Idea #2 be pursued, SEI READI would need 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 Madison and Richmond could bring early energy to the work.

3. DEEP TRADITIONS & PRACTICE THE REGION AS FOLK SCHOOL

The Idea

Rooted in its legacy of music, craft, and making, Southeast Indiana has the ingredients to become a nationally recognized center for folks arts learning. **By establishing a folk school or a network of creative learning centers, the region can foster creative careers and lifelong learners while strengthening local businesses.**

This initiative could have a dual purpose: 1) amplify the region's distinctive traditional arts identity through storytelling and celebration, and 2) attract and retain population by cultivating next-generation attachment and increasing quality of life and place. Practically, implementation could be a framework for the following (all of which are ideas that emerged in community visioning sessions):

- Cultural Art Centers, Makerspaces, and Hubs from Goal 1;
- Rebuilding [past studio tour from Ohio and Switzerland Counties](#) (Goals 2 & 4);
- Linking Plein Art Paint Outs as a progressive festival (Goals 1-4); and
- Elevating efforts of SEIMA, SEI MakerPlus, Still Pointe, Iron Timbers, and more – even creating new “institutes by the lake” (Goals 1-4).

The Opportunity

Built on the Region's Traditional Arts

“Indiana’s Folk School Region” builds upon a strong foundation in music, fiber and wood arts, fabrication, instrument building, and wine and whiskey-making. Grassroots education is already happening while Indiana and much of the Midwest is a **“folk school desert,”** offering this unique opportunity. Anchored near Greater Cincinnati yet grounded in authenticity and a focus on healing and discovery, a school or network of schools/learning hubs could position the region as a national model for education, cultural tourism, and rural vitality.

Learn More About Folk Schools

Models: <https://www.elyfolkschool.org> and <https://www.folkschool.org>. And Other Resources: <https://folkcraftrevival.com/suggested-resources/folkschools/> • <https://craftsmanship.net/resource-guide-us-folk-schools/> <https://craftcouncil.org/national-craft-directory/> • <https://www.folkschoolalliance.org>



Southeastern Indiana Woodturners



Thom Maltbie teaching at Dillsboro Arts

An Abundance to Build from for Big Idea #3

Southeast Indiana's rich craft and maker tradition, combined with established networks, emerging makerspaces, educational programs (e.g., welding, woodworking in career centers), enclaves (e.g., visual artists in and around Vevay), and the musical assets already discussed set the stage for vibrant "folk school" offerings.

Here are just a few of the abundance of opportunities the region can build from.

TRADITIONAL CRAFT

- [SEI MakerPlus](#) (emerging makerspace in Friendship)
- [Southeast Indiana Woodturners](#) (established network)
- Quilters, [Quilt Guilds](#), and Quilt Shops with classes such as [Pohler Fabrics](#)
- [Rees Harps](#), maker of [Harpsicle Harps](#) – 2024 Coolest Thing Made in Indiana
- [Whitewater Valley Blacksmiths](#), and local blacksmiths such as [Thornfire Forge](#)
- Fabricators throughout such as
 - Iron Timbers, Osgood (*right*)
 - [Red Forge](#), Batesville
 - [Weberding's Carving Shop](#), Oldenburg
- Welding Programs at community colleges and career centers
- Numerous pottery studios throughout

VISUAL ARTS

- [Switzerland Co. Community Art Center](#) and Tony's [Garden](#) in Vevay
- [Stille Pointe Art Studio & Gallery](#), Rising Sun
- [Genesis Pathways to Success](#), Batesville
- Plein Air events across counties

LITERARY & FILM

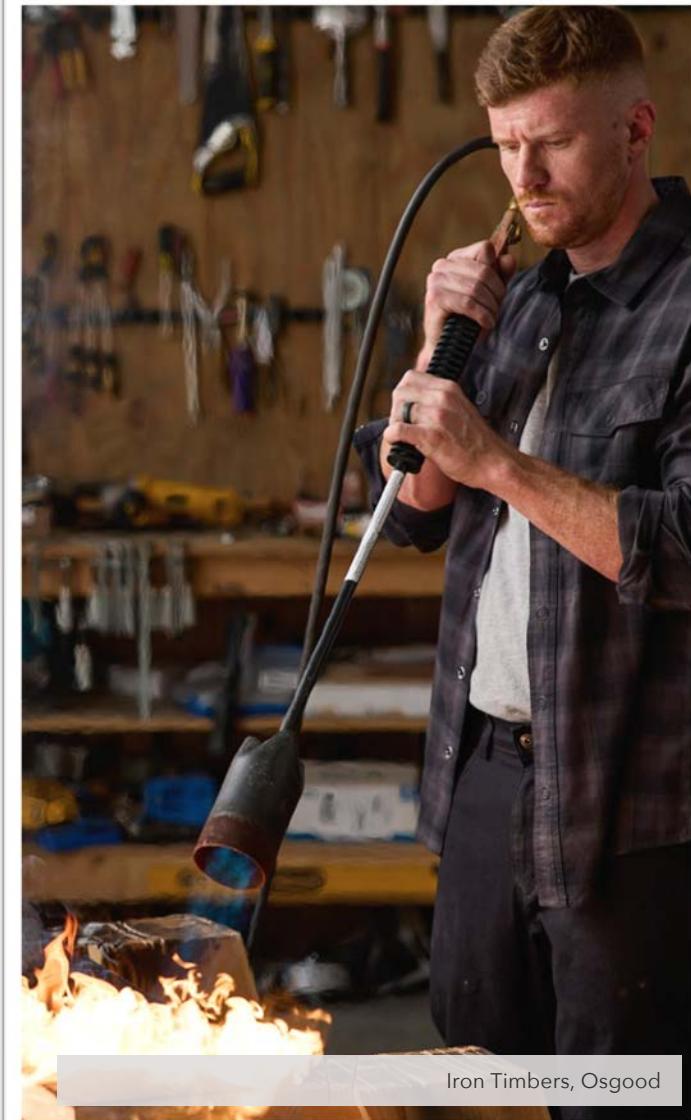
- [Dillsboro Artist Lounge](#), groups, and more
- [Lawrenceburg's Writers Fair](#) (>40 writers!)
- [Ripley County Film Festival](#) (emerging)

MORE...

- Everything listed for Indiana's Music Corridor

Located in Southeastern Indiana—what some consider the Hardwood Capital of the world—Iron Timbers combines their passion and experience to create long-lasting and functional custom woodwork and metalwork.

A locally trained [family](#) of artisans
Creators of the [Osgood Sculpture](#)
Community [partner](#)
Online [business training](#)
In-person classes and camps
Partner with [Genesis Pathways to Success](#)



Call to Action

What's Next?

Now that the plan has been adopted and rolled out, it is time for the region, all six 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
1. ACTIVATE THE REGION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancement and reuse projects (<i>signage, façade programs, landscaping and historic buildings, open spaces</i>) Activate with public art and programs 	Leadership from Local Economic Development, Main Street and/or Community Foundations Begin Small Identify Projects & Strategy	Learn Repeat Better	Repeat Bigger Sustain
2. CONNECT COMMUNITIES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activate and activate nature in combination with cultural assets (<i>thematic trails, creative programming, signage</i>) Build regional tourism through relationships, collective strategies, and efforts 	Leadership emerges from Goals 5 & 6 (<i>key partners will be schools, youth-serving organizations, arts anchors</i>)	Learn Repeat Better	Grow & Sustain
3. CULTIVATE NEXT GENERATION ROOTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empower youth engagement and volunteerism Expand arts opportunities for all ages – co-design with target audiences Build creative career pathways (<i>internships, programs</i>) 	Advocate & Connect Train & Co-Design Identify Projects & Strategy Pilot Programs	Learn Repeat Better	Grow & Sustain
4. GENERATE CREATIVE OPPORTUNITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empower creative capacity (<i>connect to resources, training, micro-grants</i>) Expand access to space for creatives (<i>affordable spaces, retail opportunities</i>) Grow teaching and learning (<i>support paid gigs, knowledge and roster sharing programs</i>) 	SEI READI takes the lead (<i>Local Economic Development Organizations and Community Foundations partner</i>)	Learn Repeat Better	Grow & Sustain
5. MOBILIZE, COLLABORATE & COMMUNICATE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobilize county-level and regional networks – creative and cross-sector Expand implementation capacity (<i>volunteer recruitment, training</i>) Catalyze a regionwide movement (<i>cross sector, annual convening</i>) 	Convene Groups Identify Opportunities Build Momentum	Learn Repeat Better	Grow & Sustain
6. FORMALIZE SUSTAINABLE COMMITMENTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build support Build policy infrastructure (% for art, streamline policies, etc.) Secure sustainable funding 			

The Toolkit

We encourage readers to follow the guidance found in The Toolkit as they move forward with this plan (*beginning on page 103*). 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

SEI READI 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.

Region-Level SEI READI	<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 Arts & Culture Initiative when re-launched, and offer proposal review consultations
Organizations & Councils at Any Level	<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, which will only grow with this plan. However, many have already begun the work. For example, the Ripley County Community Foundation plan includes:

"Convene and guide community groups to encourage and support cross county communication and identified challenges and/or opportunities"

Its strategies mirror ones in this plan:

- Help nonprofit organizations to increase capacity
- Seek funding to support county-wide initiatives
- Expand community alliances
- Partner to catalyze investment with concentrations in arts & culture, environment & natural resources, education & workforce development, and health & well-being

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

Your Input View from the Survey

“ I think this has been an incredibly thought-provoking process. My sincere hope is that our local government officials will make a commitment to a bold, new approach to community development through arts and culture. The involvement of elected officials and community leaders in this process has been very encouraging.

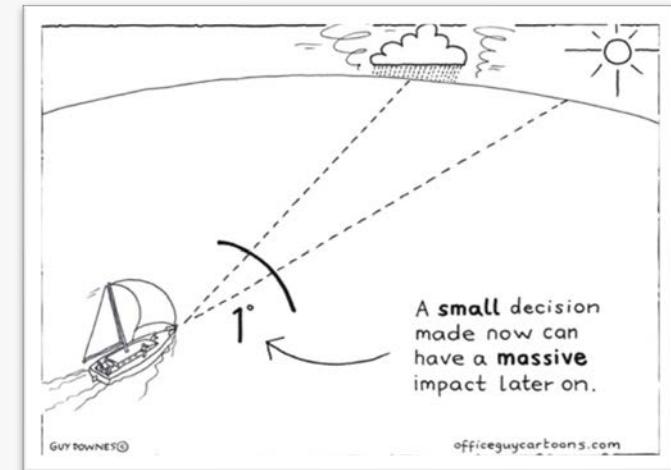
Individual response from the regional survey used to provide feedback on the plan's vision, goals, and strategies.

More of What You Can Do Now...

County-Level	<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
Community-Level	<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
The Creative Sector	<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
Any Individual	<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

Mary McCarty, mary.mccarty@sirpc.org

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 SOUTHEAST INDIANA

Community Council Brookville (Franklin)

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

IN A NEIGHBORING REGION

Coffee with Bill Muncie (Delaware)

Bill Lett, developer and Em 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.

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](#) at
<https://saveyour.town/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 Mandarico (2024) [available for purchase](#)

