



Henry County

East Central Indiana Arts & Culture Plan

Community Input Session | April 1, 2025

Memorial Park, Smith Auditorium, New Castle

Overview

On April 1, thirty **residents from across Henry County** – representing arts, culture, government, business, health, education, and local media – **envisioned a vibrant arts and culture future for their county in which:**

- Everything decided has been successfully implemented.
- Arts & Culture in their county have been transformed with:
 - Resident engagement across creative discipline, geography, and demographics;
 - Art and culture amenities that are accessible to the entire community; and
 - A critical mass of authentic, yet bold, and sustainable assets.
- They have transformed the county in return - elevating quality of place across cities and towns.

The following ideas and insights emerged.

The Highlight Reel

1. Arts & Culture as Quality of Place Driver

The transformation of Henry County includes improved venues, public art, expanded arts festivals, and a greater emphasis on integrating arts into everyday spaces (e.g., trails, gateways, and tourism).

2. Youth Engagement & Retention

Addressing brain drain by providing arts-related opportunities for youth and young adults, embedding them in planning and leadership roles, and offering spaces and events that reflect their interests.

3. Marketing, Promotion & Destination Development

A centralized and strategic approach to marketing Henry County as an arts and culture destination, with strong branding, global outreach, and well-promoted activities.

4. Diversity in Arts, Culture & Business

Supporting minority-owned businesses, culinary and cultural festivals, and diverse music and performance opportunities that reflect the interests of different generational and cultural communities.

5. Collaboration & Infrastructure for Growth

Strengthening partnerships (e.g., Ball State, Ball Foundations), creating a nonprofit network, offering technical training for creative businesses, and ensuring physical and financial accessibility to the arts.

Public Input

The following are notes from discussion and individual inputs, edited lightly for space and categorization.

1. Who and what is distinctively Henry County?

Discussion

- **Music:** number of opportunities and level of talent
- **Basketball:** The Fieldhouse “world’s largest high school gym”
- **Events:** Myriad throughout (e.g., Oktoberfest)
- **Inclusive Cultural Opportunities:** Juneteenth, Pride, International, Climate, and Peace festivals
- **Community Engagement:**
 - Attendance over neighboring counties
 - Support, especially of youth
- **Iconic Art:** Robert Indiana (have 2)
- **Agri-Artisan Opportunities:**
 - 4-H Chapter one of Indiana’s strongest (draw)
 - FFA Chapter
 - Business: goat cheese, sheep to yarn
- **Great Museums** throughout county including Milltown (could do a Museum trail)
- **Trails:** Outstanding outdoor options
- **Rose City:** “American Beauty Rose” best-selling cultivar in 1920s

2. Think BIG - Where can we go by 2035?

Discussion

- **Well-Known Venues**
 - Arts Pavilion redone
 - Expo Center completed
 - Performance/concert opportunities
- Physically and financially **accessible** opportunities
- **More opportunities for artists to share their work**
 - Emerging and youth artists involved
 - Conner Prairie model
 - Competitions, festivals, talent shows, etc.
- **Lightkeepers expand** into their own building, staff
- There’s a significant **decrease in brain drain**
- **Henry County is a destination**
- Activities and opportunities are **well promoted**
- **Centralized way of marketing** and promotion
- People are **proud advocates** of their community
- **Gateways** message art-friendly
- **Arts are on the same level as sports**
- **Strong variety** of music opportunities reflecting tastes and interests of generational communities
- **Quality** classical music and ballet **opportunities** available locally

Post-it Input

- **Youth Involvement**
 - Things for youth and young adults to do that are safe, welcoming, and reflect their interests
 - Opportunities to embed youth, young adults (part of committees, planning, have input, etc.)
- **Amenities**
 - Regular large venues have beer (fieldhouse)
 - Great hotels
 - Trails maintained
 - CW a go to for local, shop small destination
 - Railroad overpass by Hudson’s is repainted and sculptures added to welcome people
- **Events & Programs**
 - Festivals/concerns/music
 - Museum “Crawls” or connected tours
 - Children’s Art Festival
 - Fringe Festival like Edinburg, Scotland
 - Film festival
 - Arts make and take event at local parks
- **Food festivals; culinary arts**
 - Restaurant downtown with two kitchens where cooks compete against each other.
- **Basketball Identity Reinforced**
 - Public Art: water tower painted as a basketball
 - Architecture: building in shape of a basketball
- **Minority Owned Businesses**
 - Cultural restaurants celebrate traditions
- **Celebration & Capacity Supports**
 - Bundy Governors Arts Awards
 - There’s a nonprofit network
 - Technical training for [creative] businesses
 - Less siloed arts, more incorporated (e.g., trails have art displays, stops to hear local music)
 - Leverage Ball State / Ball Foundation partnerships for funding and expertise
 - Advertise well ahead, think globally not locally

3. Momentum & Opportunity: What can we build from?

Discussion: Momentum

- **Activity**
 - Events and festivals
 - Seeds given out at festival
 - Oktoberfest from Main Street to Arts Park with food, music, etc.
- **New & Newly Renovated**
 - New Castle Music Collective (newly formed)
 - Castle Theatre (renovated/opened)
 - Honey Creek Trail (part missing) Expo Center
- **Fast Approaching**
 - 250 Celebration: July 4, 2026, Torch Run through all 13 townships of Henry County

Discussion: Opportunity

- **Financial Supports**
 - Hospital support – funding for the arts
 - Food & beverage tax
- **Other**
 - Underground Railroad
 - Leadership network: advanced planning, cross-promote

4. Tell us About Your:

Favorite Things and Events the Bring the Henry County Community Together,
Missed Opportunities and Capacity Needs...

Post-it Input

- **Events/Activities**
 - Oktoberfest
 - Mooreland Fair (2)
 - Sulphur Spring Days
 - Mooreland Fair
 - BeeHive Body Co make & take classes
 - Local Farmer's Markets in New Castle, Middletown, Knightstown
 - Cruise-ins
 - Christmas Walk
 - Summer music concert series
 - Trails/Festivals
 - Town festivals/parades
 - Greenways – art on the trails
 - Food truck Fridays
 - Concert season for Bundy Auditorium
 - Middletown
 - Fall Fun Festival
 - Lions club fair
 - Town parade
 - Farmer's Pike Festival
- **Places**
 - Mt Lawn Speedway
 - Rose City Trail
 - Mud Bog
 - Wineries
 - Buyer Opera
 - Saddle Club
 - Museums
 - Bendy Auditorium
 - Historical society
 - Many parks, city/state
- **Other**
 - Vocational School (graphic design)
 - 1000's of free trees given out each earth day
 - Sculptures, trail tales in Memorial Park
 - "Raintree Rocks" painted for others to find
 - Craftsmanship used to manufacture J French Pianos and Hoosier Cabinets
- **Needs**
 - Venues to take our music business students to so that they can observe and intern

About

This work is part of IEDC's READI Arts Initiative and conducted on behalf of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership. For more information, see <https://www.transformingcommunities.art>.