



Arts & Culture Plan

2025 – 2035

We Make things Here | Executive Summary

**TRANSFORMING
COMMUNITIES** • ART
through the power of arts and culture

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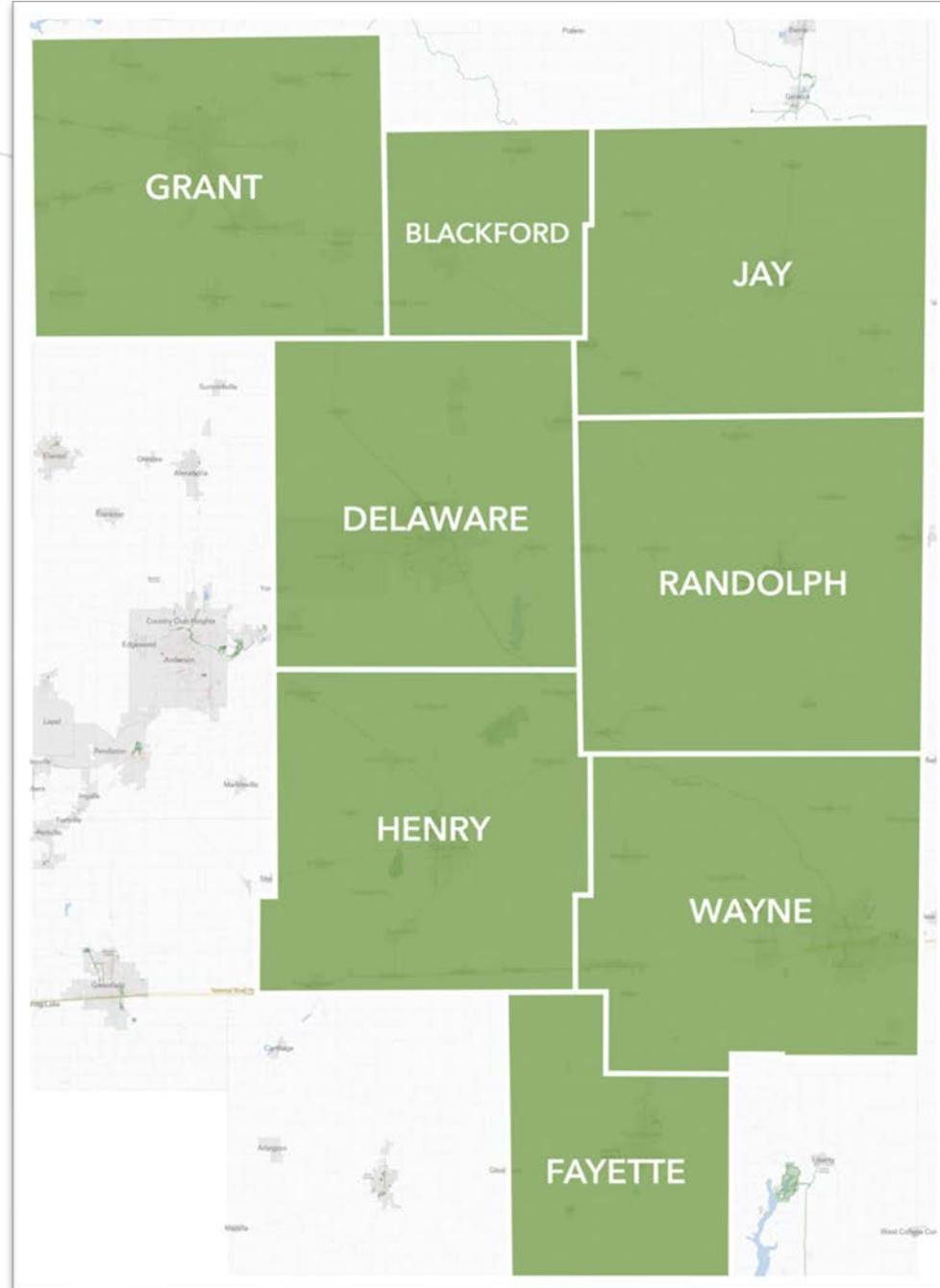
Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana

Introduction

This plan is part of Indiana's READI Arts & Culture Initiative as funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. But it is so much more. **The purpose of this plan is to enhance quality of life, strengthen the local economy, and provide an important – often missing – piece to community planning: arts and culture.** It is one of 15 such plans that lay the groundwork for a decade of activity – a road map for cities, counties, and regions to use regardless of funding source, leadership, or whatever else the future might hold. It provides a long-term strategy with details and resources to strengthen local identity, foster economic growth, and attract and retain residents.

The Region

Comprised of Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, and Wayne Counties, the region is home to **5.8% of the state's population**. While it may have some challenging economic and demographic realities, its extraordinary history and its foundation of industry, innovation, and entrepreneurship have produced some of the most well-known cultural icons in the world. The same spirit of innovation lives in this plan – helping write the next chapter of the story of East Central Indiana's contributions to Indiana and to the world.



Arts & Culture in East Central Indiana

In the course of planning, we identified and inventoried the region's Cultural Assets including:

- **518** Artists, arts organizations, groups, businesses, and program sites
- **508** Pieces of Public Art including murals, sculptures, utility wraps, and more
- **295** Related Civic Assets (parks, trails, schools, universities, and centers)
- **214** History and heritage organizations, sites, districts, and attractions
- **168** Events & Traditions (annual festivals, recurring series, and markets)
- **112** Support Organizations (boosters, Main Streets, Chambers, tourism, funders)
- **45** Misc. Amenities (community attractions, craft product producers, etc.)

East Central Indiana is rich in cultural assets and activity. A strong base for building a plan upon.

Vision for Success

From that base, leaders and residents from all sectors and all corners of the region produced an ambitious vision – a collective aspiration – for the future in which:

The Arts are a Thriving, Vital Force shaping regional connection and resilience

- Downtowns – of every size – are Vibrant Cultural & Economic Hubs
- The Next Generation is Engaged, Empowered & Educated *through* the Arts
- The Region's Mosaic of Communities are Physically & Culturally Connected
- Cross-Sector Partnership Drives Arts & Culture Success
- The Creative Sector is Growing in Strength & Impact, because...

We Make Things Here –

Forging a Creative Path for East Central Indiana.

Goals & Strategies

The region will achieve that vision through six goals and strategies for each. Pairing goals within three overarching regional priorities, provides a balanced framework that addresses the core needs of every focus area.

450+

East Central Hoosiers
Participated through

- Visioning Sessions
- Groups
- Regional Leader Discussions
- Interviews
- Public Surveys

Not to mention dozens of online submissions, inquiries, and hundreds more website visitors.

What is "Arts & Culture"?

The plan values *the full creative ecosystem* –

Not only arts organizations, but the fabricators, makers, artisans, musicians, writers, crafters, podcasters, performers, designers, architects, libraries, and history organizations (and everyone within them).

Together they form the cultural fabric of the region and remind us that we each have a personal connection to the arts, whether through the high school band, having a favorite author, art teacher, or song, writing poetry, learning to play guitar, draw, crochet, dance...

Or simply loving to create the best music playlist ever.



The circled star highlights the goal collectively identified by the region as the top priority in plan.

Priorities	Goals	Strategies
priority PLACE & IDENTITY	<p>1. ACTIVATE DOWNTOWNS  Activate and revitalize downtowns – of every size – through arts, culture, and local heritage. Filled with public art, entertainment, food, and creative retail they become Cultural Hubs – blending historic preservation with contemporary energy to attract residents, visitors, and business.</p> <p>2. CONNECT COMMUNITIES Leverage Cultural Identity & Creative Experiences (e.g., public art trails, regional program, and wayfinding) to increase access to cultural assets, unify communities, and promote exploration and place-based tourism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Enhancement projects (<i>signage, façade programs, landscaping</i>) — Activate with public art and programs — Restore and reuse downtown assets (<i>historic buildings, open spaces</i>) — Celebrate cultural heritage (<i>incorporate into signage, public art, programs</i>) — Link physical & cultural assets (<i>new trails, trail enhancements, activation</i>) — Advance regional tourism through relationships, collective strategies, and efforts
priority ATTACHMENT & OPPORTUNITY	<p>3. DEEPEN NEXT GENERATION ATTACHMENT Invest in initiatives with and for 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 and college student retention across the region.</p> <p>4. GENERATE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY Position Artists & Creative Businesses for success within the local and regional economy. Generate opportunities with, by, and for artists, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural nonprofits through training, workforce development, and material supports needed to grow in strength and impact.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Empower youth engagement and volunteerism — Expand arts opportunities for all ages – <i>co-designed with target audiences</i> — Build creative career pathways (<i>internships, programs</i>) — Empower creative capacity (<i>affordable spaces, connect to resources, training</i>) — Grow creative opportunity (<i>support paid gigs, retail, expand markets</i>)
priority LEADERSHIP & COLLABORATION	<p>5. MOBILIZE, COLLABORATE & COMMUNICATE Collaborate to advance Cultural Development & Regionalism. 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.</p> <p>6. FORMALIZE SUSTAINABLE COMMITMENTS Hardwire Arts & Culture Strategy into governance, economic development, funding, and civic frameworks. Embedding arts and culture into plans and policies will ensure their sustainable visibility, investment, and impact.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Mobilize county-level creative networks (<i>coffee & calendar mtgs, build networks</i>) — Catalyze a regionwide movement (<i>cross sector, annual convening</i>) — Build stakeholder support — Build policy infrastructure (<i>% for art, streamline policies, etc.</i>) — Secure sustainable funding

The BIG Ideas

These ideas supersize plan goals, reimagining them as bold opportunities to elevate and expand the region and its vision. They are ***"What if?" opportunities for long-term, whole-region advancement*** rather than short-term project recommendations. Since great change requires enthusiasm and commitment, these ideas are offered for exploration and consideration.

1. PLACE AMPLIFIED:

Cultural Districts

Every county in East Central Indiana has at least one community with strong potential to become a cultural district. ***Imagine the entire region connected through a network of these districts***, each one celebrating its own character while collectively showcasing the richness of East Central Indiana's arts and cultural scene. Practically, implementation could provide a framework for downtown revitalization, local action plans, and implementation.

2. ALL-IN MARKETING:

Indiana Icons & Industry

What would it look like to go 'all in' – to showcase incredible artists and icons like Garfield, Gennett Records, James Dean, and Bob Ross alongside a treasure trove of attractions and sites? ***Imagine a shared regional marketing strategy across multiple platforms that creates a clear "brand" or sense of united identity centered on Indiana Icons & Industry – a combination that produced some of the most well-known cultural icons in the world.***

3. A PARTNERSHIP TO JOIN:

Indiana's Music Corridor

Imagine if Forge ECI ***leveraged East Central Indiana's deep music-education and performance culture as a regional music strategy.*** Doing so would benefit communities across all eight counties and set up the region as an ideal partner for strategies in adjacent regions. Specifically, SEI READI is considering a music corridor – running from Richmond, [birthplace of recorded jazz](#) to Madison's "[music city](#)" – ***to celebrate the deep musical roots of Indiana's eastern tier.*** The case for showcasing both regions' incredible musical legacies and today's vibrant cultures could reverberate across East Central Indiana.

“ It's hard to express how important our READI work is across so many communities and so many sectors. Right now we have all 15 regions, the entire state, working on Arts & Culture Strategic Plans that align with their READI plans.

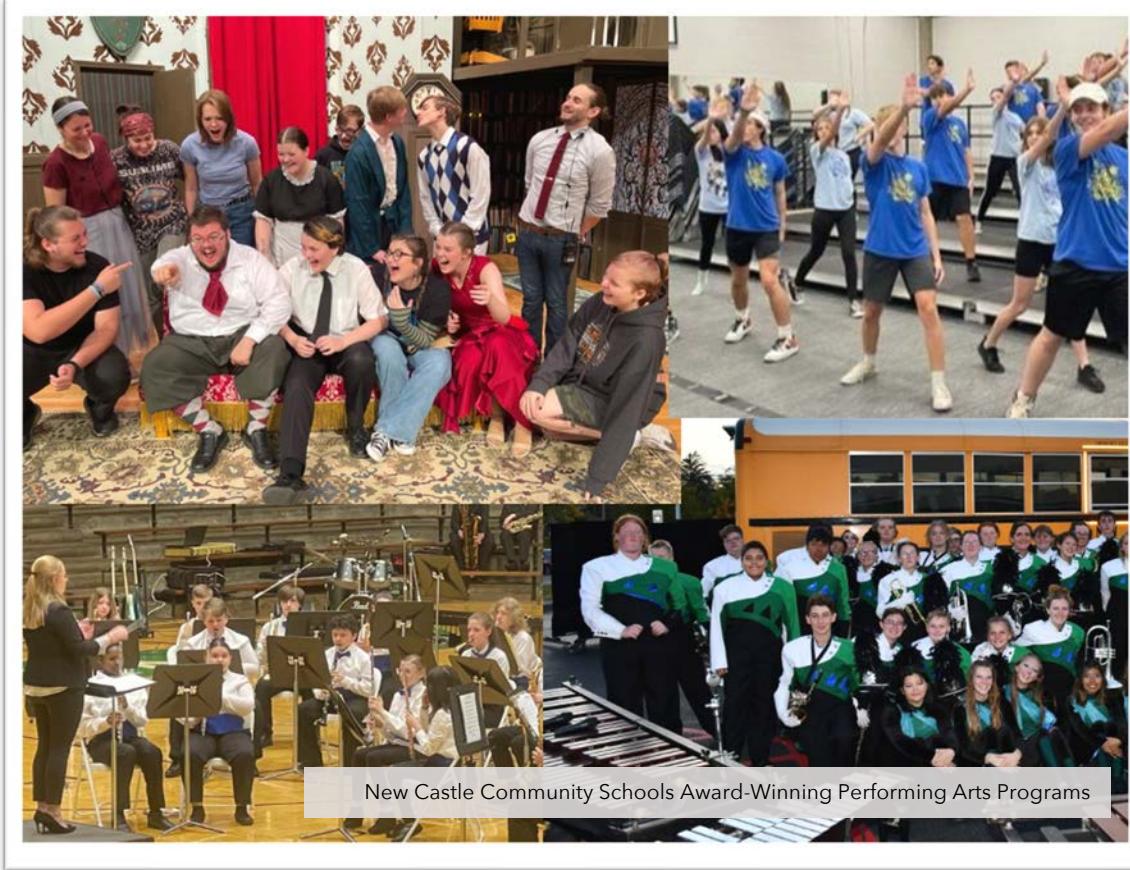
The scale and breadth of this work in this sector has never been done before. Even beyond the awards we'll be able to make in the next year,

the impact of having this many people focused specifically on Arts & Culture has the chance to fundamentally impact generations of Hoosiers.

– Jim Rawlinson
Director of READI, Indiana Economic Development Corporation
[Posted to LinkedIn](#), October 2025



Creative Hearts Art Studio, program of Carey Services, Marion



Contact

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The Rest of the Plan. The full document includes detailed goals, strategies, and tactics along with:

- **County Profiles** as a start for local leaders to use in adapting the plan to their needs.
- **A Toolkit** of ideas, inspiration, resources, and a glossary.
- **Recommended Tools** scattered throughout the plan.
- **An Appendix** with the methodology and detailed data tables
- There is more on the [Project Website](#) that will be available directly from [Forge ECI](#) in early 2026.

Fostering More Vibrant and Livable Communities for Generations to Come

This plan is a road map for cities, counties, and regions to use regardless of funding source, leadership, or what else the future might hold.

Acknowledgements **FORGE ECI**

Caitlin Hancock, President & CEO

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