EAST CENTRAL Indiana REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

Grant County

East Central Indiana Arts & Culture Plan

Community Input Session | April 22, 2025

Kennedy Art Center, Marion

Overview

On April 22, twenty-five residents from across Grant 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. **Pride, Identity, and Community Narrative**
   A renewed sense of pride is evident as residents feel proud to call the area home, external perceptions improve, and a unified narrative rooted in value, history, and creativity begins to take hold.
2. **Connected Arts, Culture, and Education Ecosystem**
   A cultural district, collaborative arts infrastructure, strong arts education, and career pathways create a vibrant ecosystem that connects artists, schools, history organizations, and regional partners.
3. **Quality of Life and Livability**
   Walkable, safe, and accessible communities, abundant green space, public art, and family-friendly activities contribute to a high "joy index" and make the area attractive for both residents and remote workers.
4. **Innovation and Economic Development through Creativity**
   The region is known as a hub for tech innovation and creative enterprise, blending historic preservation with modern arts, fostering entrepreneurship, and offering vocational training tied to local opportunity.
5. **Regional Collaboration and Coordinated Communication**
   A strong regional framework supports planning, resource-sharing, and artist connection through structures like regional arts councils, cooperatives, and community councils, while centralized communication tools keep residents informed and aligned across county lines.

Public Input

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

1. Who and what is distinctively Grant County?

Discussion

- Matter Park and Gardens
- Annual Events
  - Ducktail Run in Gas City
  - Jonesboro River Rally
  - Cornfield Classic
  - Fly/in Cruise/In and the airstrip
- Notable People
  - James Dean born in Fairmount
  - Jim Davis
  - Samuel Plato – architect
- Signature Buildings
  - Hostess House
  - Carnegie Building
  - Frank Loyd Wright House
  - Lustron Homes (prefabricated enameled steel)
- History & Context
  - Lynching
  - Battle of 1812
  - Indiana 2nd highest childhood poverty rate
- Key Assets / Identity
  - Garfield Trail
  - Giants
  - Quilters Hall of Fame
  - Home of the Hog (where name originates)
- Universities: Taylor and Indiana Wesleyan
- Walkway of Lights
- Record Store
- Ivanhoe's Ice Cream

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

Discussion

- Community Culture
  - High Joy Index
  - Pride – people are proud this is their home
  - Open-minded to help attract/retain artists
  - Arts Education recognized as a critical part of education, and a career pathway
- Increased Quality of Life
  - Attracts remote workers as a result
  - Walkable and Accessible Communities
  - Greater Graduation and Retention rate at Taylor U and IWU
- Safe Place
  - Safe activities for youth
  - Public no longer perceive it's not safe
  - Leverage public art to increase safety
- New Assets
  - Cultural District in Marion
  - Garfield Museum is created
- Strong Tourism
  - Draw people from cities
  - People here stay for opportunities here
- Regional Structures
  - For Hub/Spoke Planning & Collaboration
  - Regional arts council (technical assistance)
  - Cooperatives connect artists countywide
- Strong Communication
  - Centralized calendar for events
  - Community better informed
- Arts and Agriculture connect
- Unified History Organizations
  - Work collaboratively
  - Share & tell a story
- Vocational Training available
- Known as…
  - College Towns (Marion and Upland)
  - Tech Innovation Hub; Smart City
- Marion has a Collaborative Community Council to decrease silos and increase opportunities

Post-it Input

- Fusion of historic character and modern arts
- There's a mechanism to connect county and regional arts organizations
- Community is more open-minded; people are no longer embarrassed to be from our area; people outside of the area know what we're known for

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

Discussion: Momentum

- Lilly funding (Taylor and IWU) plus Match
- 2018 Grant County by Choice
- Downtown Revitalization efforts

Discussion: Opportunity

- Community Narratives
  - Need to change the current narrative to one of pride and value
- Strengthen Branding and Marketing/Promo
- Architecture: Preserve Buildings and History
  - Public policy and incentives
  - Provide owners/community with training and resources
- Build Downtown Residency
- River
- Clear Growth Measures for Arts Plan at get-go

4. Tell us About Your:

Favorite Things and Events the Bring the Grant County Community Together,
Missed Opportunities and Capacity Needs…

Post-it Input

- Opportunity – More Public Green Space (river, hiking, etc.) Nature and creativity connection.
- Downtown Residency – Love the imagery and idea of Jay's "Downtown Residency" idea – downtown fuller and act like a community front porch.
- Things we Have
  - Upland Strawberry Festival
  - Groups: Grant County Pride; Pride 360 of Grant County
  - Hostess House
- Could Slow us Down
  - AI (in art specifically)
  - Creative branches/areas slowly losing arts funding
  - Addressing the marginalized minority, poverty
- How to uplift area
  - Geocache?
  - Paint traffic/electric boxes
  - Love the crosswalk painting idea – I would paint one!

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.