



Fayette County

East Central Indiana Arts & Culture Plan
Community Input Session | April 16, 2025
Ivy Tech, Connersville

Overview

On April 16, eighteen **residents from across Fayette 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. Downtown Revitalization through Arts and Culture

Downtown becomes a cultural destination with streets transformed into public gathering spaces, revitalized districts, and activity after 5 p.m., making it a place where people want to stop, stay, and engage.

2. Connectivity through Corridors and Trails

Cultural corridors, health and wellness trails, and creative multi-county trail concepts like QR-code history walks and themed trail experiences link communities physically and culturally.

3. Creative Economy and Regional Identity

Inspired by models like Paducah and Strasburg, the county evolves into a hub for visual and performing arts, film, and local fabrication, with expanded markets and incentives supporting creators and small businesses.

4. Tourism, Promotion, and Storytelling

Strategic marketing, compelling storytelling, and curated tourism packages (e.g., Blue Ridge-style rail tourism) highlight local assets, build regional pride, and attract visitors from beyond the county.

5. Inclusive Engagement and Cross-Sector Collaboration

A culture of collaboration drives progress, with youth, residents, organizations, and sectors working together through structured partnerships and shared leadership to advance arts, culture, and community development efforts.

Public Input

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

1. Who and what is distinctively Fayette County?

Discussion

- **Strong Rural Community:**
- **Manufacturing:**
 - Largest dishwashing manufacturer, global
 - Automotive industry was bigger than Auburn
 - Roots Blower invented and manufactured in Connersville
- **Unique Attractions**
 - Kunkel's Drive-in
 - Free Fair: accessible; oldest of its kind
 - Butterscotch pie: invented in Connersville
 - Canal and Canal House
- **High School Trade Center**
- **Natural Assets:**
 - Whitewater River
 - Mary Gray Birdy Sanctuary
 - Kayaking
- **Poor Health Measures**
 - Opioid overdoses, obesity, life expectancy

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

Discussion

- **All Community Involvement**
- **More Public Art** including fun/clever
- **Corridor Connections**
 - Cardinal Greenway and other trails
 - Cultural corridor
- **Downtown Destination**
 - 4th and 5th streets on Central are closed to traffic and transformed into a public gathering place
 - Downtown revitalization through arts and culture (cultural district)
- **Strong Creative Economy**
 - Capacity building
 - Expanded "market" for work
 - Prioritize local in fabrication
- **Variety of Music**
- **Connersville Modeled After Success**
 - Paducah for visual and performing arts
 - Strasburg Railroad
 - Becomes a regional film hub
- **Film Festival**
- **Better Wayfinding** (for in and outside community - e.g., to Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary)
- **People Compelled to Stop/Stay Here.**
 - Businesses open after 5
 - 3rd spaces exist
 - Incentives in place to attract people and businesses
- **Strong Marketing & Promotion**
 - Promote assets and activities
 - Storytelling
- **Tourism Packages**
 - Blue Ridge, GA as a model for the railroad
 - Assets are connected to develop packages like WVRR and Imagine Performing Arts
- **Health & Wellness Trails**
 - Arts integrated
 - Lighted
 - At Waterloo Bridge and down river
- **Connersville becomes a Blue Zone**
- **Outdoors are a Draw**
 - Mushroom hunting on the Elmhurst property with associated programming
 - [Robinson's Whitewater River Campground](#)

Post-it Input

- Trails
 - Multi-county Lego trail scaffolding from WVAA efforts to start Lego program.
 - Walking trail: create marked trail on sidewalk with QR codes on buildings to explain our history.
 - Tour of county mansions - industrialists built some fine ones!
 - Since this is a regional effort, big plug for a multi-county trail like the gnome houses. Something people will travel county to county to experience.
- Film incentive for multi-county region
- Youth involved in community art
- Develop community awareness

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

Discussion: Momentum

- Improved Broadband
- Low Cost of Living
- Key Anchors are Active
- Have Bones of an Arts District
- Placemaking Partnership with the Center for Rural Engagement at Alpine Park

Discussion: Opportunity

- Strengthen
 - Communication & collaboration
 - Inclusion
- Accessible Parking Downtown
- Job Loss provides opportunity for tourism around arts & culture
- Structure to Move Efforts Forward
- Civic War Reenactment reinstatement would benefit Elmhurst, youth, and tourism
- Getting into Schools

4. Tell us About Your:

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

Post-it Input

- Communication & Collaboration
 - Collaboration is weak! How do we pool our assets?
 - Huge challenges here. There is a strange amount of competitiveness among the coordinators.
- The people in the room tonight are a magical team! (Add Tracy to this who you already know).
- Please put together a **task force** through the EDG! Granting & financing will be crucial as cooperation.
- Music
- Art Fairs
- Sculpture Park
- There is a sculpture in Roberts Park made by elementary art students.

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>.