



Arts & Culture Plan

2025 – 2035

We Make things Here | Welcome

TRANSFORMING
COMMUNITIES • ART
through the power of arts and culture

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Images from Winterfest, Downtown Connersville

THE PROJECT

This plan is part of Indiana's READI Arts & Culture Initiative as funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. (LEI). But it is so much more. 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 what else the future might hold.**

This is an incredible moment for Indiana. A moment that has united the state's economic development infrastructure, its arts, culture, and history sector (artists, creative businesses, nonprofits, and programs), and communities of every size in a simultaneous effort to:

Foster More Vibrant and Livable Communities for Generations to Come.

We are unaware of any other effort of this scope or scale. And it didn't happen by accident. A state policy initiative inspired the private investment that brought us here (box right). **This is also an incredible moment for East Central Indiana** resulting in a comprehensive strategy for achieving its ambitious vision 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.

This vision directly supports the region's economic vision, goals, and other aspirations.

Soon after these plans are launched across the state, the state will launch the LEI Arts & Culture Initiative funding opportunity to support projects that align with this plan. While this will be the last step of the state's project, it will be just the beginning of the work on the ground.

READI 2.0 Arts & Culture Initiative

ABOUT

In 2021, Governor Eric J. Holcomb launched the [Regional Economic Acceleration & Development Initiative](#) (READI 1.0) allocating \$500M of pandemic funding among Indiana's 92 counties.

2023 brought READI 2.0 – a new \$500M investment – focused on **Quality of Life, Place, & Opportunity**. It encouraged regions to include arts and culture initiatives to help them know how to work proactively with economic development and prepare the sector to be better poised to access future funding.

In 2024, the [Lilly Endowment Inc.](#) put \$250M behind it – including \$65M for a first-ever statewide initiative advancing creative transformation. With that grant, the [LEI Arts & Culture Initiative](#) was born for regions working with a broad cross-section of residents to develop assets, experiences, and initiatives.

Soon after, the [Indiana Economic Development Corp.](#) announced \$1.5M for arts and culture planning and led by [Indiana Arts Commission](#)-identified experts.

GOALS

Engage residents and communities across creative, geographic, and demographic boundaries • **Unleash** regional creative transformation through investment in public art and culture amenities that are accessible to the entire community • **Elevate** READI's quality of place impact on Indiana's cities and towns • **Build** a critical mass of authentic, yet bold, artistic, and culture assets with a long-term plan for their maintenance and expansion.

THE PLAN

Overall Approach

This plan is grounded in the region's existing capacity and resources while looking forward with vision and intention.

First, it takes an **"Arts and" approach – recognizing 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.

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.

Regional & Hyperlocal

This plan is designed to be implemented on both the county and regional levels elevating both while maintaining community voices and local authenticity. The plan belongs to the region, not any one organization or place. It provides **regional direction and aspiration that can be achieved through local initiative** – regional and hyperlocal at the same time. The smallest towns and counties were intentionally placed on an equal footing with the largest of both throughout the process and in the resulting strategies.

Feasible & Sustainable

This plan also **acknowledges current and future funding realities**, building strategies that are both aspirational and sustainable. It is designed to align with and complement existing

Document Guide Find What You Need

This document can be used as a **whole or in parts**.

Welcome	Introductory Materials
THE REGION	THIS IS THE PLAN
The Counties	Profiles of Each
The Toolkit	Implementation Aids
Appendix	Methodology & Data

Each section can stand alone as can any of the individual County Profiles.

 The lightbulb points to footnotes and tips.
 The cloud points to links a reader might miss.
 The toolbox identifies a recommended tool.

The Document is also color coded. Here's the Key:
priority • **priority** • **priority**
big ideas • **counties** • **appendix** • **everything else**

More for the Reader

These **light gray boxes** are found throughout the document. They are your source for:

Regional development plan alignment,
Digging Deeper ideas and resources,
Your Input quotes from participants,
Making the Case for a strategy
Recommended Tools , and
Statistics, quotes, and definitions for context

Darker boxes list the contents of a section.

community plans, so that collectively, the region moves forward in concert toward a stronger, more connected, and more resilient future.

Developmental & Long-Term

This is not a traditional capital or project-based plan. It is instead one focused on regionalism and advancing arts and culture over a full decade. In order to maintain flexibility for evolution, the plan intentionally avoids proposing or endorsing particular projects that may already exist.

Participation

This plan emerged from a community-driven, asset-based approach to planning. This allowed for deep and diverse participation across sectors and communities. By the end **over 450 East Central Hoosiers** had participated through:

- 8 Community Visioning Sessions
- 18 Focus Groups & Regional Leader Discussions
- 50-ish Interviews
- 2 Public Surveys

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

Wayne Gaydos,
From the Woods Instruments,
Indiana Artisan in Wayne County

450+



Participation by Sector

Sector	Participation
Arts, Culture & History	41%
Education (K12 & Higher Ed.)	8%
City/County Government	7%
Economic Dev. & Related	5%
Foundations / Funders	5%
Libraries & Misc.	4%
Finance & Professional Services	4%
Health & Social Services	3%
Chambers & Main Streets	3%
Business & Manufacturing	3%
Tourism & Attractions	2%
Real Estate, Construction, Etc.	1%
Other/Unknown	13%

* Misc, includes media, extension, and nature

Participation by County

	Participation vs 2020 Pop	
Delaware	20%	30%
Wayne	17%	18%
Jay	14%	5%
Fayette	11%	6%
Blackford	10%	3%
Henry	10%	13%
Grant	8%	18%
Randolph	8%	7%
Multi/Other	2%	--

Including 30 cities and towns across the region



See the Appendix
for the full methodology (pages 139-146) including participation details.

Sections of the Plan

The plan (*"The Region"* pages 17-64) includes several components, one leading to the next.

About the Region. This introduces the Forge ECI region, its counties, economy, and regional development authority at a high level.

State of the Arts. This bird's eye view of the region's arts and culture identity, assets, and inventory provides an assessment of strengths and challenges in the creative sector, and the opportunities and challenges addressed in this plan.

Vision & Success Measures. This plan fully embraces the region's vision for economic development, adding detail specific to the *"Arts and" approach*.

Goals & Strategies. The plan is organized to move seamlessly from vision to action. Three overarching regional priorities each supported by two goals, provide a balanced framework that addresses the core needs of every focus area. Each goal is presented in its own section and is supported by strategies and tactics that outline practical steps for implementation.

Big Ideas. These are carefully curated big bets for the region – ways to supersize the goals and strategies for regional impact.



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

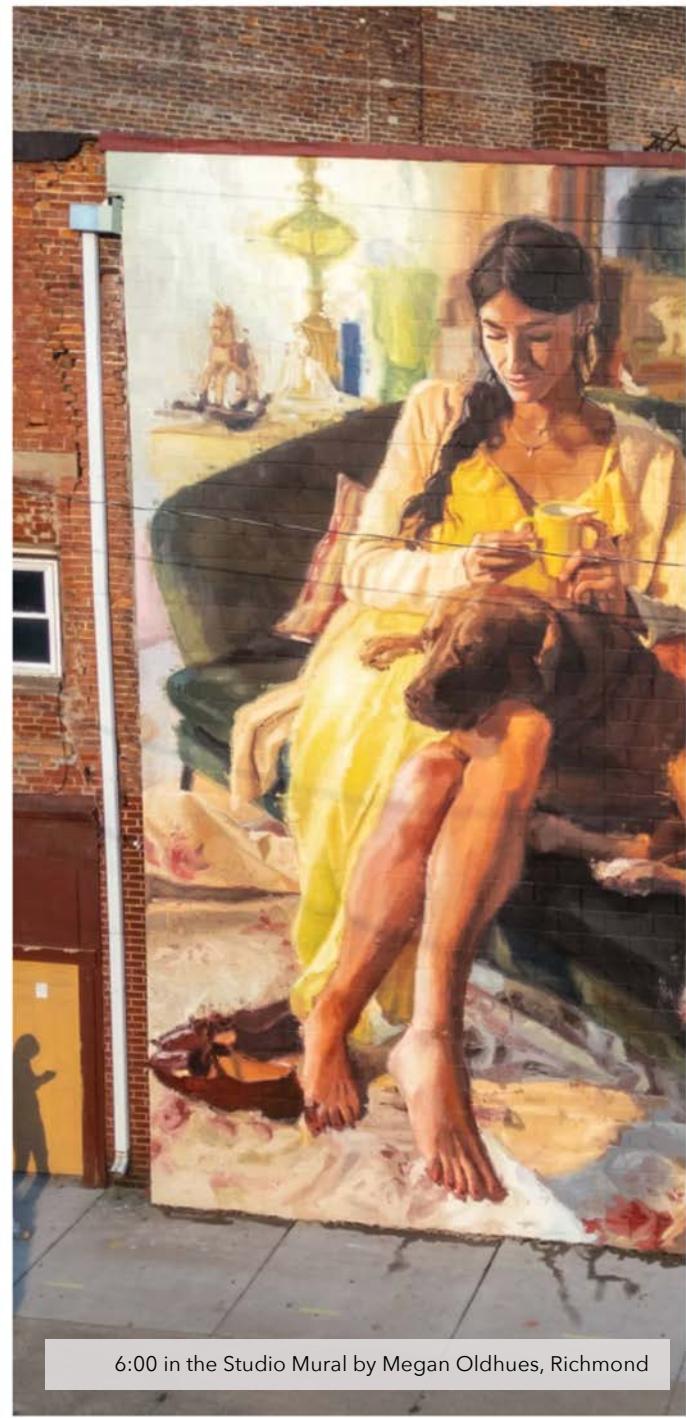
The Counties. The profiles here provide a starting guide for each county in adapting this plan to their individual needs.

The Toolkit. Also included is a toolkit of ideas and inspiration drawn from national and local examples to spark creativity and show what's possible. 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.

Appendix. Here are the methodology and technical details that supports the plan overall.

More resources are available online. These are currently connected with the project website but will transition to Force ECI in early 2026.

- [Materials](#) from the planning process (e.g., presentations, recaps)
- [Spreadsheets](#) for each county (e.g., asset inventories, participation, plans reviewed)
- The regional asset map [online](#).



6:00 in the Studio Mural by Megan Oldhues, Richmond

Principles Used in Arts & Culture Planning

ARTS PLANNING SHOULD BE:

1. **Ground-Up** Regions are comprised of counties, which are comprised of communities, which are people, places, organizations, activities, traditions – build from the bottom not the top.
2. **Authentic** Celebrate community history, heritage, stories, and points of pride – its unique cultural identity.
3. **Asset-Based** Built on the foundation of strengths – it's the best way to fill in the gaps.
4. **Team Sport** This is a "yes, and" proposition. It only works with broad collaboration and community engagement – arts and culture **WITH** economic development and planning, education and health care, cities and civic organizations, tourism, and Main Street, etc.
5. **Visionary** Think big about a long-term horizon for goals and strategies, not projects – that's where the magic happens.
6. **Interdependent** Not just aligned with the momentum of existing plans and projects but reinforcing – other plans support arts and culture; arts and culture support other plans.
7. **Sustainable** First, do no harm. Then, make sure results can last.
8. **Creative** The plan will be arts and culture after all and should **ARTify / ARTivate** all the goals and strategies.
9. **So Much More than Murals** It includes your local artists and creative economy, theaters and museums, arts education for all ages, festivals, and concert series, knitting circles and woodworking clubs, amphitheaters, and bar stages, and so very much more.
10. **Interesting & Fun** Because that's what art, artists, and culture ultimately bring – joy and discovery (and besides, everyone needs motivation – every great pop song has a hook).

WHERE DOES ARTS PLANNING FIT?

If **tourism plans** focus on attracting visitors: what is there to do here?

And **development** on attracting businesses and jobs: what supports are here?

Both depend on a vibrant quality of life and of place – which is where an arts plan comes in.

FOCUS ON INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, THE COMMUNITY –

What you celebrate, what brings you joy, what is good for your kids and your health, how you express yourselves and develop as full humans.

It isn't just what you are close to.

It's who you are and what you have, right here, every day.

“ Creative Placemaking:
Strengthening Communities
with Arts at the Core

NEA Creative Placemaking Technical Assistance

Principles from
Sara A. Peterson
in collaboration with **Paige Sharp (2025)**

