



INDIANA UPLANDS

READI 2.0: Arts and Culture Strategy

Final Report
January 2026



PREPARED BY

Public Sphere Projects

FOR

Regional Opportunity Initiatives



INTRODUCTION

6..... Project overview

10..... Letter from the President and CEO

12..... Process oversight and acknowledgements

14..... About the Indiana Uplands Region

15..... About Public Sphere Projects

Part 1
DISCOVERY

18..... Regional context and overview

30..... Research and analysis

42..... Stakeholder input and insights

Demographics.....20

Cultural policy and governance.....21

Funding mechanisms and emerging opportunities.....22

Philanthropy snapshot.....26

READI 2.0 grant application review.....30

Cultural asset mapping.....32

Benchmarking and peer evaluation.....36

Key findings from initial research.....40

Stakeholder ecosystem and community engagement.....42

Defining stakeholder groups.....42

Engagement activities.....44

Preliminary themes from engagement.....46

Part 2
IMPACT AREAS

50..... Ecosystems approach

54..... Artisan industry

60..... Music

66..... Performing arts

72..... Lifelong learning

78..... Space and place

Part 3
IMPLEMENTATION

86..... Overview

88..... Cultural capacity

94..... Cross-cutting priorities

96..... Implementation priorities

101..... Appendix

Impact funding.....90

Sector vibrancy.....91

Administrative and operational implications.....92

APPENDIX



Introduction

Project overview

The Indiana Uplands spans eleven counties in south-central Indiana, where expansive trail systems and natural areas form a backdrop for a vibrant cultural landscape. The region is home to extraordinary assets—major institutions such as Indiana University, nationally recognized festivals, thriving artisan enterprises, and a growing network of creative talent and culture-bearers. Manufacturing centers and rural main streets are woven into this environment, creating a setting where outdoor experience and creative life continually reinforce one another. Supported by a broad ecosystem of employers, educators, and cultural organizations, the Uplands

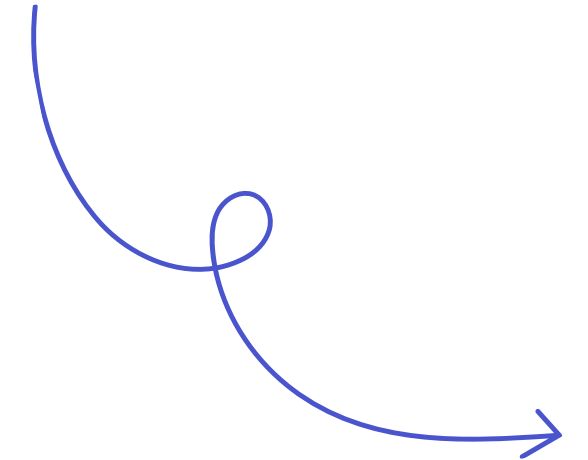
reflects a long-standing culture of collaboration, innovation, and deep connection to place—one in which arts and culture are both expressions of community life and contributors to regional vitality.

In 2024, the Indiana Uplands launched a new initiative to integrate arts, culture, and quality of place into its broader economic development agenda. Supported by the State of Indiana’s Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) 2.0, this effort seeks to strengthen the region’s Creative ecosystem not only as an economic driver, but as a core element of community identity, belonging, and long-term resilience.

This work is grounded in the understanding that investments in arts and culture generate economic benefits precisely because they are deeply rooted in the lived experiences, histories, and aspirations of Uplands communities.

The project is guided by Public Sphere Projects (PSP), a national planning and placemaking consultancy, in partnership with Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI)—the Uplands’ leading regional organization dedicated to advancing prosperity through education, workforce, and quality of place. A regional Steering Committee composed of community leaders,

creative professionals, and cultural stakeholders provides ongoing insight and guidance, ensuring the process reflects the diversity and aspirations of the region while balancing intrinsic cultural value with broader regional goals.



The work advanced in three phases:

Phase 1: Discovery and Analysis February–May 2025

Phase 1 established a foundation of research and understanding across the Indiana Uplands. PSP conducted a review of existing regional and local frameworks, mapped key cultural and natural assets, analyzed funding patterns and policy environments, and benchmarked best practices from peer regions. This work was complemented by a gap analysis and the development of a stakeholder engagement strategy tailored to the Uplands’ unique context. The findings and emerging themes from this phase—particularly those related to potential creative and industry clusters—are presented in this report as preliminary hypotheses, intended to prompt discussion and guide the Steering Committee’s reflection.

Phase 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Draft Framework June–October 2025

Building upon the discovery findings, Phase 2 emphasized direct engagement with community members and regional stakeholders. Through dialogue with the Uplands Arts and Culture Steering Committee and meetings with individuals, organizations, and businesses, this phase refined the preliminary hypotheses into a cohesive draft strategy. The engagement process prioritized inclusion, transparency, and alignment with ongoing regional efforts in economic development, education, and workforce advancement.

Phase 3: Recommendations and Roadmap October–November 2025

The final phase synthesized all research and engagement outcomes into a comprehensive regional arts and culture strategy. PSP and ROI translated community insights into actionable recommendations, identifying opportunities for investment, policy development, and partnership. The roadmap outlines a framework for implementation—defining roles, responsibilities, and milestones to ensure sustained progress across the 11-county region.

Together, these phases form a structured and inclusive planning process that places arts and culture at the center of regional growth and quality of place. This report represents the first step in that journey—a foundation upon which the Indiana Uplands can continue to build a thriving, connected, and creative regional identity. The insights presented here are not conclusions, but the beginning of a shared conversation about how arts and culture—valued for their intrinsic contributions and their broader impacts alike—can shape the Uplands’ next chapter of economic and community vitality.



Letter from the Executive Director

Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI) is pleased to present the Indiana Uplands Regional Arts and Cultural Plan, a regional blueprint for advancing the creative vitality, cultural identity, and artistic economy of our 11-county region in Southwest Central Indiana. This plan represents a significant opportunity to elevate the role of arts and culture as catalysts for community well-being, talent attraction, and economic resilience across the Uplands.

The development of this plan reflects the combined efforts of artists, cultural practitioners, community leaders, organizational partners, and residents from the Indiana Uplands. Guided by a dedicated Steering Committee, the planning process was intentionally collaborative and locally grounded.

Over the course of numerous focus groups convenings, interviews, site visits, and community conversations, participants generously shared their experiences, aspirations, and creative insights. Their contributions shaped a plan that is both regionally relevant and deeply reflective of the Uplands' unique cultural strengths.

ROI and Public Sphere, the national planning and placemaking consultancy that assisted our region with this process, wish to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the many artists, tradition bearers, educators, nonprofit leaders, and creative entrepreneurs who participated in this process. Your voices helped illuminate the opportunities and challenges facing the creative community.

We owe our gratitude to the Steering Committee for their leadership, thoughtful guidance, and strong commitment to ensuring that this plan reflects the diversity, authenticity, and cultural richness of the Uplands.

The initiatives and strategies in this plan have the potential to generate transformative impact—strengthening regional cultural infrastructure, expanding creative workforce pathways, increasing regional visibility, and enhancing quality of life for residents and visitors alike. By leveraging our world-class institutions, natural assets, creative talent, and welcoming communities, the Uplands is well positioned to grow as a thriving cultural destination and an inspiring place to live, work, and create for those of all ages.

We look forward to continued partnership with communities, artists, regional organizations, and statewide leaders as we work together to build a vibrant and prosperous cultural future for the Indiana Uplands.

With appreciation,

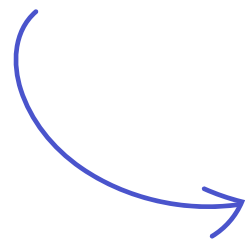
Tina Peterson

Tina Peterson

President and CEO
Regional Opportunity Initiatives

Process oversight and acknowledgements

Public Sphere Projects, in partnership with Regional Opportunity Initiatives and a cross-sectoral steering committee, led the development of this arts and culture strategy. Steering Committee members included:



- Cindy Barber – Daviess County Arts and Culture Alliance
- Andrea “Andi” Bartels – Town of Nashville Arts and Entertainment Commission
- Ashlynn Bender, Hoosier Hills Credit Union
- Ed Comentale – Indiana University, Arts and Humanities Council
- Kyla Cox Deckard – Center for Rural Engagement, Indiana University
- Gabe Gloden – Constellation Stage and Screen
- Sachi Janek – Dragonfly Gallery
- Lyn Letsinger-Miller – Brown County Art Gallery Board
- Kristal Painter – Discover Southern Indiana (Radius Indiana)
- Evelyn Rivas – Asociación Latinoamericana del Sur de Indiana (ALASI)
- Kyle Rupert – Jasper Community Arts
- Holly Warren – City of Bloomington, Economic and Sustainable Development Department
- Jadin Wolf – Dirt Road Designs

The planning process was facilitated and overseen by the leadership of Regional Opportunity Initiatives, including the following:

- Tina Peterson – Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI) and Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County, President and CEO
- Julie Halbig – Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI), Vice President of Economic and Community Development
- Maren Harris – Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI), Project Manager

This strategy reflects the voices and visions of the many residents, artists, educators, business owners, and civic leaders who engaged in dialogue throughout the process. Through interviews, surveys, and listening sessions, they offered insights and experiences that shaped the direction and spirit of this work.

About the Indiana Uplands Region

The Indiana Uplands is a region defined by innovation, creativity, and a strong sense of place. Spanning eleven counties—Brown, Crawford, Daviess, Dubois, Greene, Lawrence, Martin, Monroe, Orange, Owen, and Washington—the Uplands is home to a diverse network of communities, including the largest university in the state, manufacturing centers, arts and entertainment districts, and natural landscapes that together drive the region’s vitality. Its strengths in education, advanced industry, and cultural life create a powerful foundation for collaboration, shared identity, and sustainable growth.

At the heart of this work is Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI), the organization leading efforts to advance economic and community prosperity across the Uplands. Focused on the key drivers of regional vitality—education, workforce, and quality of place—ROI aligns resources, strategies, and stakeholders to strengthen the region’s capacity for innovation and sustainable development. Through targeted investments, data-driven planning, and cross-sector partnerships, ROI serves as a catalyst for transformative change, ensuring that the Uplands’ opportunities translate into meaningful, long-term impact for the people and communities who call the region home.

About Public Sphere Projects

Public Sphere Projects (PSP) is a national planning and placemaking consultancy. We advise place managers on the visioning, strategy, and stewardship of shared urban places through an uncompromising commitment to the values of justice and joy. Our work varies in location and scale: from long-term strategic planning to tactical interventions. But it is always in partnership with place managers, city agencies, community leaders, and property owners who steward the public realm—and always in service to the community.





Part 1: Discovery

Regional context

The first phase of work set the foundation for arts and culture planning in The Uplands. This stage was designed not just to gather information, but to uncover the conditions, assets, and dynamics that shape the region's cultural ecosystem. By grounding the work in careful research and analysis, the process helped ensure that future recommendations are responsive to community realities and strategically aligned with The Uplands' broader goals around workforce, education, and quality of place.

To establish this foundation, Public Sphere Projects undertook a series of interconnected activities. The team scanned comprehensive plans of multiple typologies along with demographic and workforce data to identify long-term trends. In addition, a list of municipal and county arts commissions was compiled to compare and contrast the varying

visions and goals of these convening groups. The team also reviewed financials, grants, and state allocations to arts and culture to assess funding patterns and resource distribution across the region. A thorough scan of READI grant applications was reviewed to understand grantmaking patterns, with the aim of strategizing how projects that will come out of this plan should be evaluated. Stakeholder mapping and data gap analysis further informed the design of engagement, ensuring inclusive participation and a focus on what mattered most to local communities.

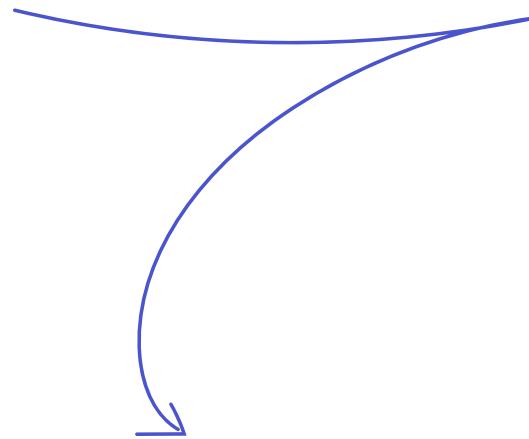
Together, these efforts provided a shared starting point before embarking on community engagement. By taking stock of both assets and challenges, the discovery process not only clarified existing conditions but also pointed to the leverage points where arts and culture can have the greatest impact.



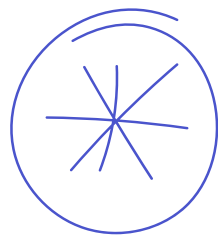
Demographics

The Indiana Uplands spans more than 4,500 square miles and includes forty-eight cities and towns, each contributing to a diverse regional identity. Home to approximately half a million residents, the population is anchored by Monroe County—home to Bloomington and Indiana University—followed by Lawrence, Dubois, and Daviess counties. While Monroe County alone represents nearly one-fifth of the regional population, smaller counties such as Brown, Crawford, and Martin contribute distinct cultural and geographic character. The region is predominantly White (92.7%), with smaller Black (2.1%), Asian (2.8%), and Hispanic or Latino (4.2%) populations, reflecting a less diverse demographic profile than the state overall. The presence of a large college-age population (13.5%)—driven by Indiana University—distinguishes the Uplands from peer regions, while a higher proportion of older

adults (18.6%) signals an aging population. Median age across the region is estimated between 39 and 41 years, slightly above the state average. Employment across the Uplands totals roughly 229,000 jobs, with government, manufacturing, and healthcare as major employers. Manufacturing remains a critical driver, providing strong wages, while education, retail, and service industries round out the employment landscape.



The arts, entertainment, and recreation sector, though relatively small, accounts for more than one thousand jobs across nearly one hundred establishments—an indication of both **existing creative capacity and untapped potential for future growth.**



Cultural policy and governance in the Indiana Uplands

A scan of local, county, and state policies reveals an arts ecosystem across the Indiana Uplands that is active, diverse, and unevenly formalized. The eleven counties support arts and culture through an array of structures—from municipal departments and cultural districts to volunteer-led guilds and councils—reflecting both the strength of local initiative and the opportunity for greater regional coordination and investment.

Communities such as Bloomington and Jasper exemplify mature models of integration, with formal municipal arts departments, public art ordinances, and Cultural District designations that embed the arts into local planning. Bloomington's 1% for Public Art policy and Jasper's Community Arts Department illustrate how civic alignment can advance sustained cultural growth. Elsewhere, counties such as Owen, Greene, and Washington rely on small volunteer-run organizations—like the Owen County Art Guild or Washington County Arts Council—to maintain cultural programming, underscoring disparities in administrative and financial capacity across the region.

Two counties—Monroe and Brown—have achieved state-recognized Cultural District status, highlighting a long tradition of arts-based placemaking and creative tourism. Legacy institutions such as the Brown County Art Guild (est. 1954) and Lawrence County Art Association (est. 1964) anchor this heritage, while the Indiana Arts Commission (IAC), through its Regional Arts Partner structure, extends professional networks and funding access to eight of the eleven counties.

County and municipal comprehensive plans widely recognize the arts as drivers of economic development and quality of life, linking cultural investment with tourism, workforce retention, and heritage preservation. Common themes include adaptive reuse of historic buildings, public events that animate downtowns, and the integration of arts education and STEAM programs into youth engagement. Yet, planning depth and institutional capacity vary significantly—from Brown, Lawrence, and Owen Counties, which connect arts to tourism and education, to Crawford, Daviess, and Orange Counties, which focus on heritage programming as a form of cultural identity.

A scan of local, county, and state policies reveals an arts ecosystem across the Indiana Uplands that is **active, diverse, and unevenly formalized.**

Funding mechanisms and emerging opportunities

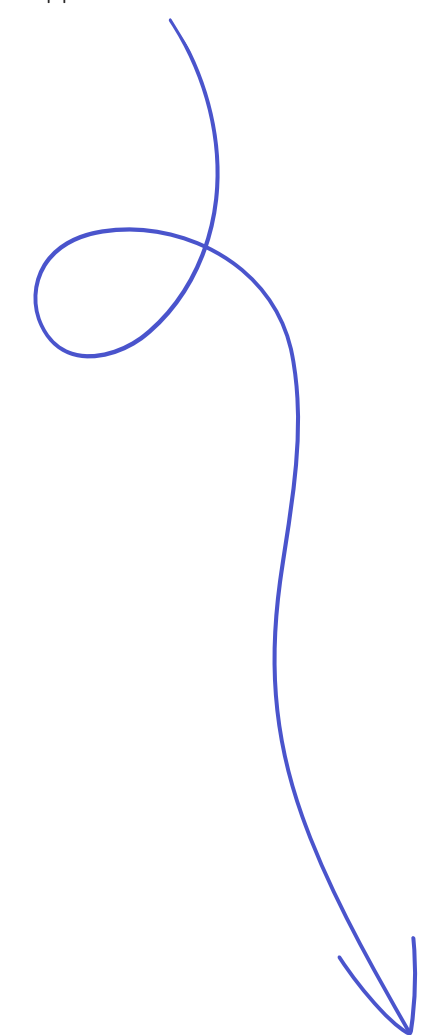
The policy landscape is supported by a patchwork of local and state funding mechanisms that collectively shape cultural development—though many remain disconnected from arts-specific strategies.

- **Education-Linked Referenda:** The Monroe County Community School Corporation (MCCSC) referendum (2023) represents a landmark example of local tax-based investment in cultural enrichment—allocating \$75 million toward early learning, arts education, and curricular enrichment. However, failed referenda in nearby counties, including Brown County, have resulted in cuts to arts and athletics, exposing inequities in community capacity and advocacy for creative education.
- **Tourism and State Grants:** The Indiana Destination Development Corporation (IDDC) supports public art and placemaking through small grants (up to \$25,000), statewide cultural passports, and marketing programs like Visit Indiana. In 2023, arts and entertainment contributed \$1.5 billion to the state economy and supported 35,000 jobs, underscoring the sector’s economic potential.
- **Innkeeper’s Tax Revenue:** The innkeeper’s tax—ranging from 4% to 9% across counties—represents a consistent yet underutilized source of tourism and cultural reinvestment. In 2025, combined collections exceeded \$2 million, with Brown, Dubois, and Monroe Counties generating the most revenue, suggesting potential anchor counties for coordinated arts reinvestment.
- **Main Street and Placemaking Networks:** Programs such as Destination Huntingburg, Heart of Jasper, Spencer Main Street, and Discover Downtown Washington link downtown revitalization with cultural activation, demonstrating scalable models for community-led placemaking. When paired with clear planning frameworks and local recognition, these networks show how arts and culture can be intentionally integrated into economic development, tourism, and quality-of-place strategies across diverse community contexts.
- **Municipal and Local Arts Commissions:** In addition to Bloomington’s established arts grant program, other communities in the region have formalized local arts support through structured commissions. In Jasper, the Jasper Arts / Community Arts Commission operates as a city government-linked body overseeing cultural programming at the Jasper Arts Center and Thyen-Clark Cultural Center, while entities like the Sweet Owen Arts Commission in Owen County are organizing county-level support for creativity and community engagement. These models demonstrate how locally appointed arts

commissions can provide targeted cultural support that complements broader regional and state funding structures, helping embed arts and culture within municipal planning and community identity.

- **Community Foundations:** Every Uplands county has a community foundation offering small arts and culture grants—from Brown County Community Foundation’s role as IAC’s regional partner to Monroe, Greene, and Daviess County foundations funding STEAM, heritage, and creative literacy initiatives. These programs form the backbone of local cultural support but operate without a unifying regional strategy.
- **State Arts Infrastructure and Advocacy:** The Indiana Arts Commission (IAC) is one of the few statewide entities dedicated specifically to arts funding, access, and advocacy. Through operating support, project grants, and the Regional Arts Partner network, IAC provides essential baseline resources to arts organizations and artists across the Uplands, particularly in rural communities with limited local funding infrastructure. While modest in scale, IAC support plays an important role in sustaining cultural activity and connecting local efforts to broader state and national networks, connecting communities to statewide and national cultural networks.

- **National Endowment for the Arts:** The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) provides highly competitive federal funding and research support for arts and cultural initiatives with demonstrated public impact. NEA investments often emphasize community engagement, cross-sector collaboration, and equity, aligning closely with many of the Uplands’ cultural priorities. However, limited organizational capacity in smaller communities can restrict access, underscoring the need for regional coordination and shared grant development support.



Arts and cultural production value added by state

In 2023, Indiana’s arts and cultural industries contributed approximately \$13.85 billion to the state’s economy, with \$4.46 billion attributed to core arts industries (such as performing arts, design, museums, and film) and \$9.39 billion to supporting industries (such as manufacturing and publishing). This represents about 3.9% of Indiana’s Gross State Product (GSP), aligning closely with the national average (4.5%), and reflects a 6.2% increase in total arts and culture value since 2022.¹

This represents about 3.9% of Indiana’s Gross State Product (GSP), aligning closely with the national average (4.5%), and reflects a **6.2% increase in total arts and culture value** since 2022.

STATE	TOTAL ARTS AND CULTURE VALUE ADDED (Thousands \$)	PERCENT CHANGE (2022–2023)	OBSERVATIONS
Indiana	\$13,852,884	+6.2%	Balanced growth, moderate sector strength, 3.9% share of GSP
Illinois	\$37,393,801	+6.6%	Regional anchor; high concentration in Chicago metro
Ohio	\$26,120,418	+5.4%	Larger economy, slower relative growth, but strong base
Tennessee	\$21,162,864	+8.5%	Strong regional leader driven by music, film, and design
Michigan	\$20,546,147	+9.8%	Rapid post-pandemic rebound, strong design and manufacturing linkages
Minnesota	\$14,802,054	+6.0%	Similar scale, with a strong nonprofit and creative-services base
Wisconsin	\$12,439,989	+3.9%	Comparable in size but slower growth rate
Kentucky	\$6,917,540	+7.1%	Smaller overall sector but slightly faster growth rate

Comparative states

When benchmarked against states of similar population size or regional profile—Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, and Michigan—Indiana’s arts and culture sector shows steady but moderate growth, with value-added contributions roughly in the middle of the pack.

Indiana’s performance positions it as a stable, mid-tier creative economy within the Midwest—stronger than many peers in proportional growth but still lagging behind states with highly specialized creative sectors like Tennessee (music and entertainment), Illinois (urban concentration), and Michigan (industrial design).

The 6.2% year-over-year increase suggests healthy recovery and moderate expansion following pandemic-related slowdowns, with particular strength in supporting industries that amplify the arts through manufacturing, design, and digital media.

Compared to neighboring states:

- Indiana’s growth rate outpaces Ohio and Wisconsin, showing resilience in its Creative ecosystem.
- Kentucky’s faster growth indicates an emerging creative economy, though from a smaller base.
- Illinois and Michigan remain dominant in total output due to urban density and sector diversity, but Indiana’s distributed cultural network positions it well for equitable regional growth.

Indiana’s arts and cultural production sector demonstrates measured, sustainable growth, contributing nearly \$14 billion to the state economy in 2023. While it trails regional powerhouses in overall scale, Indiana’s balanced mix of core and supporting industries—coupled with its steady growth rate—positions it as a resilient and diversifying creative economy within the Midwest.

Despite this strong economic contribution, state investment in the arts remains modest. Indiana ranks 38th nationally in state arts funding, with a legislative appropriation of approximately \$5.2 million, or \$0.92 per capita, for Fiscal Year 2025. This places Indiana behind neighboring states such as Michigan (\$3.21 per capita, rank 24) and Ohio (\$2.30 per capita, rank 28), but roughly in line with Kentucky (\$0.81 per capita, rank 46) and Illinois (\$2.80 per capita, rank 18) when adjusted for population and regional context. National leaders like Minnesota (\$10.25 per capita, rank 2), Maryland (\$5.63 per capita, rank 6), and Vermont (\$4.49 per capita, rank 9) demonstrate how sustained state investment can amplify local and regional arts ecosystems, yielding greater cultural visibility and long-term economic returns.²

Within this framework, Indiana’s position reflects a funding gap relative to its demonstrated creative output. The state’s arts sector contributes significantly to GDP yet operates with comparatively lean public support. For the Indiana Uplands region, this imbalance reinforces the importance of local philanthropy and regional coordination—particularly through county community foundations and regional initiatives like READI 2.0—to sustain creative activity where state investment remains limited.

¹ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). *Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (ACPSA): State Data, 2023*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, March 2025. Available at: <https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/acpsa0425.pdf>

² National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA). *FY2025 State Arts Agency Revenues Report*, February 12, 2025. https://tsd-wpe-largefs-storage.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/nasaa/file-Bucket/2025/02/FY2025-State-Arts-Agency-Revenues-Report_021225.pdf

Philanthropy snapshot

Regional overview

Across the 11-county Indiana Uplands region, philanthropic investment in arts and culture between 2019 and 2025 reveals significant concentration in a handful of communities, most notably Monroe County, which accounted for an outsized \$28.7 million in total arts and culture grant receipts. Collectively, Uplands counties documented \$5.37 million in locally controlled arts and culture funding (from community foundations and local grantmakers) and more than \$38 million in total cultural grants received, indicating that much of the region's philanthropic activity flows from external funders into county-based institutions.

Ten Indiana University (IU)-affiliated or hosted entities in Monroe County accounted for approximately \$22.2 million of total arts and culture funding received, while non-IU organizations across the region collectively drew \$6.49 million in additional funding from 67 distinct recipients. This pattern underscores both the central role of higher education in regional philanthropy and the relative fragility of local arts infrastructure outside Bloomington.



County-level summaries

Brown County

Brown County demonstrates one of the more balanced local philanthropic ecosystems in the Uplands. With five active local grantmakers holding \$26.4 million in assets and an estimated population of 15,650, the county's philanthropic assets amount to roughly \$1,687 per resident. Nearly 9% of assets were directed toward grantmaking, and arts and culture accounted for \$1.14 million in funding (47% of total giving). Twelve organizations received 68 arts and culture grants totaling \$1.33 million with an average grant size of \$19,547, reinforcing Brown County's long-standing identity as a regional arts hub.

Crawford County

Crawford shows a much smaller philanthropic footprint, with one local grantmaker managing \$12 million in assets and an estimated population of 10,523, yielding about \$1,140 in assets per resident. Arts and culture received \$75,000 (about 20% of total giving), with an average grant of \$37,500, suggesting targeted support despite limited overall activity. The absence of recorded local recipients likely reflects reliance on external funding or limited reported data.



Daviess County

Although Daviess County does not have identified local arts grantmakers, local organizations nonetheless attracted \$324,004 in total arts and culture grants across 30 awards. With an estimated population of 33,381, this equates to approximately \$9.71 per capita in arts and culture grant funding. The average grant size of \$10,800 indicates a reliance on smaller, program-specific awards from external funders rather than sustained local philanthropic capital, reflecting a modest but meaningful level of cultural investment within the county.

Dubois County

Dubois County demonstrates a moderately active philanthropic environment, with 15 local grantmakers holding \$20 million in assets and a population of 43,637, or about \$458 in assets per resident. Arts and culture received \$197,954 (17% of total giving), while local organizations received \$560,003 across 100 grants to 12 recipients, averaging \$5,600 per award, suggesting diversified but small-scale support.

Greene County

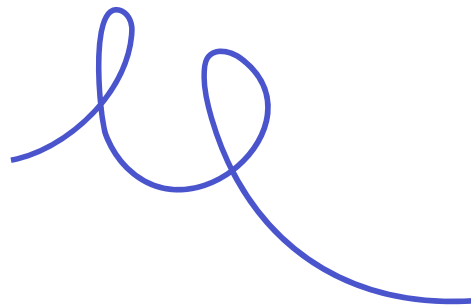
Greene County's philanthropic base remains limited, with one local grantmaker managing \$14.3 million in assets and distributing approximately 3% annually. Arts and culture accounted for 6% of total giving (\$25,301). With an estimated population of 31,219, local organizations received \$153,530 in arts and culture funding across 12 grants to five recipients, equating to roughly \$4.92 per capita. The average grant size of \$12,794 reflects modest but meaningful community-level engagement, largely sustained through small-scale awards rather than concentrated philanthropic investment.

Lawrence County

Lawrence County recorded three local grantmakers with \$77 million in assets and a population of 45,077, yielding about \$1,709 per resident. While only \$162,299 (6%) went to arts and culture, three organizations received 10 grants totaling \$42,091 (average \$4,209), underscoring that, despite strong asset holdings, arts is a smaller focus.

Martin County

Martin County has no active local grantmakers identified, indicating a limited local philanthropic infrastructure. With an estimated population of 9,864, the county did receive \$80,122 in external arts and culture funding across six grants to two organizations, resulting in approximately \$8.12 per capita in arts and culture grant support. The average grant size of \$13,354 suggests reliance on modest, program-specific awards from outside funders rather than sustained local philanthropic capital. While this level of per-capita funding reflects some external investment, the absence of local grantmaking institutions underscores structural constraints on long-term arts and culture funding capacity within the county.



Monroe County

Monroe County—home to Bloomington and Indiana University—dominates regional philanthropy. 19 local grantmakers hold \$107.8 million, and with a population of approximately 140,702, this equates to around \$766 in assets per resident. With 5% annual giving resulting in more than \$3 million (57% of total giving) directed to arts and culture, 77 organizations received 435 grants totaling \$28.7 million (average \$66,034), the highest figures in the Uplands. Even excluding IU affiliates, non-university organizations still attracted \$6.49 million, illustrating the county's strong cultural infrastructure.



Orange County

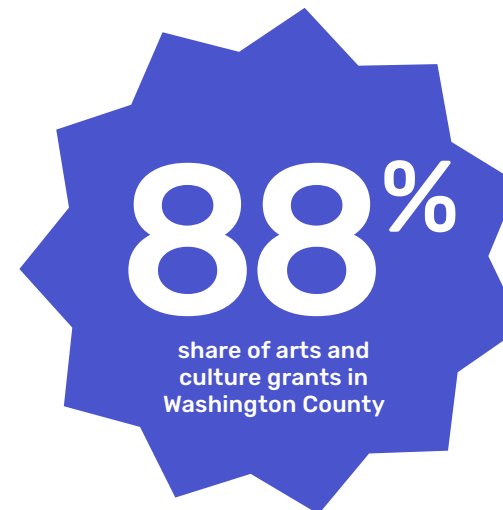
Orange County shows modest but consistent giving, with one local grantmaker holding \$9.18 million in assets and a population of 19,824, or about \$463 per resident. Arts and culture accounted for \$83,227 (1% of giving). Nonetheless, seven recipients secured 21 grants totaling \$151,586 (average \$7,218), indicating small but distributed arts support.

Owen County

Owen County's single local grantmaker holds \$12.58 million in assets with a population of 21,851, yielding approximately \$576 per resident. Only \$29,173 (5%) went to arts and culture. Local organizations received six grants totaling \$48,751 to three recipients (average \$8,125), reflecting modest rural investment.

Washington County

Washington County stands out for its high proportion of arts funding relative to total giving. With one local grantmaker holding \$35.7 million and an estimated population of 12,192, assets per capita are approximately \$2,927—the highest in the region. Arts and culture accounted for \$629,446 (88% of giving). One recipient received nine grants totaling \$804,459, with an average grant of \$89,384, pointing to a concentrated institutional relationship.



Summary observations

The distribution of arts and culture philanthropy across the Indiana Uplands reveals a clear concentration of wealth and influence, with Monroe County overwhelmingly dominating the region's philanthropic landscape and capturing nearly three-quarters of all documented arts and culture grant dollars. Most other counties rely heavily on external funding sources, such as statewide or national foundations, with only Brown and Monroe Counties demonstrating substantial local grantmaking capacity and institutional depth.

In smaller rural counties, patterns of micro-granting prevail—numerous small awards rather than concentrated investments—predominantly funded through local County Community Foundations. While per-capita grant levels in some rural counties compare favorably within the region, this funding is generally modest in scale and lacks the long-term capital, endowments, and organizational infrastructure needed to sustain growth. As a result, localized giving reflects both strong community engagement and the underlying fragility of rural arts ecosystems, where activity is maintained through frequent, small awards rather than transformative investment.

Indiana University-affiliated organizations account for more than half of all cultural philanthropy in the region, underscoring the institution's pivotal role as both an economic and cultural anchor. Looking forward, the most significant opportunity for impact lies in expanding philanthropic infrastructure beyond Monroe County, particularly in communities such as Dubois and Greene Counties, where cultural activity is present but philanthropic capacity and per-capita investment remain comparatively low.³

³ All data is copyright of Candid.org and Foundation Center Online

Research and analysis

READI 2.0 grant application review

The purpose of this review was to understand the types of arts and culture projects submitted under the READI 2.0 program and to identify key themes, gaps, and patterns across the applicant pool. By examining the first round of submissions, the review provides insight into how the region's Creative ecosystem positioned itself for investment—and where future strategies may need to evolve to support broader geographic, disciplinary, and organizational participation.

The initial framing of READI, which emphasized capital investment, blight remediation, and large-scale economic development, strongly influenced the applicant pool. While aligned with statewide revitalization goals, this framing narrowed the perceived eligibility of the program, favoring organizations with real estate assets, development capacity, or experience managing capital projects. As a result, the first round of applications reflects a limited segment of the region's Creative ecosystem, with fewer proposals focused on programming, creative workforce development, fine art / craft, music, or creative industry growth.

Across 21 applicants, the dominant focus was on physical infrastructure, including new construction, renovation, and adaptive reuse. Projects clustered into four primary typologies: Arts and Culture Infrastructure, Historic Preservation and Adaptive Reuse, Public Art and Creative Placemaking, and Trail and Park Enhancement. While these project types align with READI's original intent, they represent a narrow cross-section of the region's creative activity.

Project scale and financial capacity varied widely, with funding requests ranging from \$6,000 to \$4 million. Some proposals relied almost entirely on READI funding, indicating limited access to matching capital or philanthropic resources, while others were highly leveraged through public and private matches. These disparities underscore equity challenges within the current funding model, where rigid match expectations and capital-heavy requirements may exclude smaller organizations and rural communities despite strong local impact potential.

The applicant pool also revealed several sectoral and geographic imbalances. Collaboration among arts organizations was limited, adaptive reuse and performing arts facilities were overrepresented, and key creative sectors—such as fine craft, music, and creative industries—were largely absent. Geographic participation was uneven, with Brown County strongly represented, while Daviess, Martin, and Crawford Counties saw minimal engagement.

Across the pool, capital projects significantly outnumbered proposals addressing organizational sustainability, capacity-building, or long-term programming.

In summary, the review of READI 2.0 arts and culture applications revealed both promise and imbalance. The proposed projects demonstrated the Uplands' strong orientation toward creative placemaking, heritage preservation, and community revitalization, but they also highlighted structural challenges around equity, collaboration, and funding access. Moving forward, a more balanced investment strategy—one that pairs infrastructure with programming, and major capital projects with small-scale community initiatives—will be essential. A flexible, right-sized funding model can help ensure that every county, regardless of size or capacity, has a pathway to participate in the region's growing creative economy.

Cultural asset mapping

The asset mapping process for the Indiana Uplands was designed to capture a comprehensive and evolving picture of the region's cultural landscape. Building on extensive research, stakeholder interviews, and review of regional plans and reports, this effort sought

to document not only where cultural activity occurs but how it connects to broader community life. The mapping process layered quantitative data with local perspectives, resulting in a multidimensional understanding of the places, institutions, and traditions that shape the region's creative identity.

Highlight: **South Side Artists in Sacred Spaces**

The South Side Artists for Sacred Spaces initiative offers a compelling model for the Indiana Uplands as it works to better document and activate underrepresented forms of cultural practice. Rooted in community-led partnerships between local artists and faith-based institutions, the program demonstrates how nontraditional and underutilized spaces—particularly sacred and civic settings—can be repurposed for authentic, equitable cultural programming. This approach directly responds to gaps identified in the Uplands inventory, where craft, storytelling, informal creative expression, and arts activity occurring in faith-based or community-serving spaces remain less visible. By clarifying access pathways, strengthening neighborhood ownership, and activating existing spaces without requiring major capital investment, the model shows how cultural activity can unlock new venues, stabilize neighborhoods, and expand participation—offering a scalable framework that could meaningfully strengthen coordination, inclusion, and visibility across the Uplands' Creative ecosystem.

Asset mapping methodology

Participatory cultural mapping is a community-driven approach that documents the tangible and intangible dimensions of cultural life through collective inquiry and local knowledge. Building on the framework articulated in the Participatory Asset Mapping Toolkit (Advancement Project, 2011), this method positions residents, artists, and community organizations as active contributors in identifying the cultural assets that define their environment. These assets may include creative practices, heritage sites, informal gathering places, and networks of social and artistic exchange. Through participatory

workshops, interviews, and field-based mapping, the process captures how culture is lived and experienced—revealing relationships that are often invisible in conventional datasets. By integrating spatial data with narrative insight, participatory cultural mapping expands the definition of culture beyond institutions and facilities to encompass values, practices, and identities embedded in everyday life. This approach reframes cultural planning as an act of co-creation, one that surfaces local meaning, strengthens social cohesion, and informs strategies for equitable cultural development.

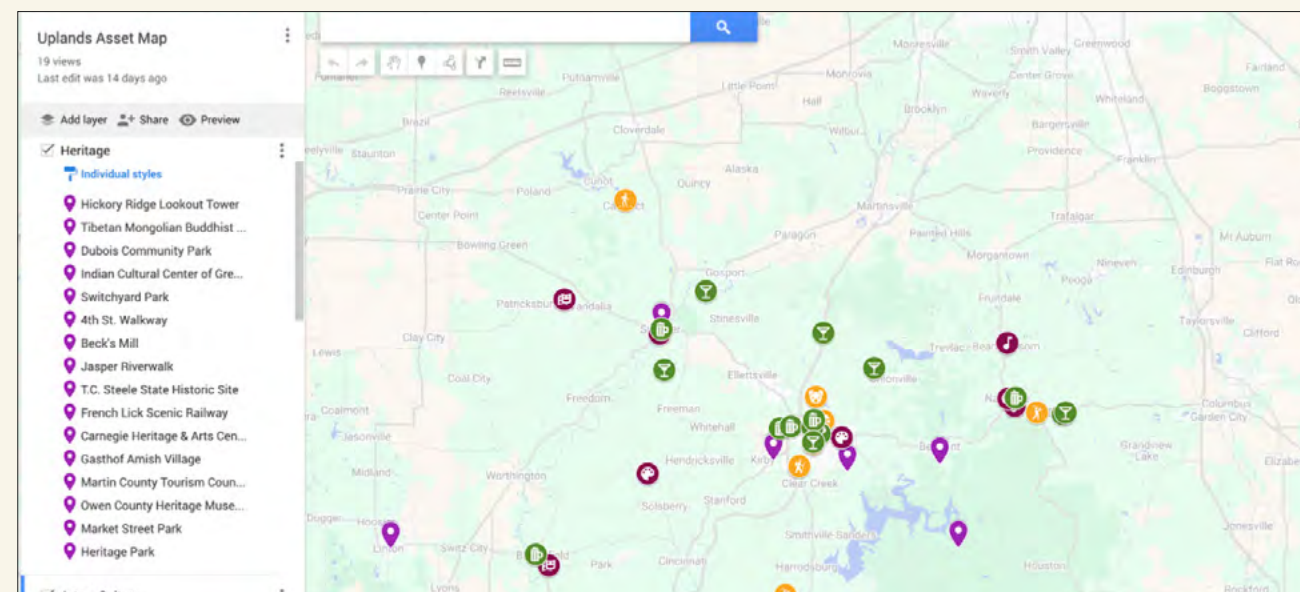
To date, more than 600 cultural and recreational assets have been identified across the eleven counties. These include arts organizations, festivals, trails, parks, historic landmarks, and community gathering spaces. Together, they reflect the Uplands’ deep integration of creativity, heritage, and the natural environment. Festivals and seasonal events are among the region’s most visible cultural expressions, serving as anchors of local identity and engines of tourism. Outdoor and adventure-based assets also feature prominently, underscoring the strong relationship between arts, culture, and the region’s natural amenities. Music emerges as another unifying thread—woven through festivals, community celebrations, and informal gatherings—demonstrating its central role in cultural participation across both rural and urban settings.

This inventory highlights not only the richness of the Uplands’ cultural life but also the areas where visibility and coordination can be strengthened. While outdoor and event-based programming attract attention and investment, more discreet or less infrastructure-intensive cultural practices—such as craft, storytelling, and informal creative expression—remain underrepresented. Similarly, public art and creative activity occurring in faith-based or community-serving spaces have yet to be fully documented. Addressing these gaps will be essential in future phases of the project to ensure a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of the region’s creative ecosystem.

The asset map provided a foundation for regional collaboration, offering a shared reference point for identifying synergies, locating opportunities for investment, and guiding equitable development. As the planning process advanced into Phases 2 and 3, this resource was designed to evolve, integrating new data and community feedback to reflect the

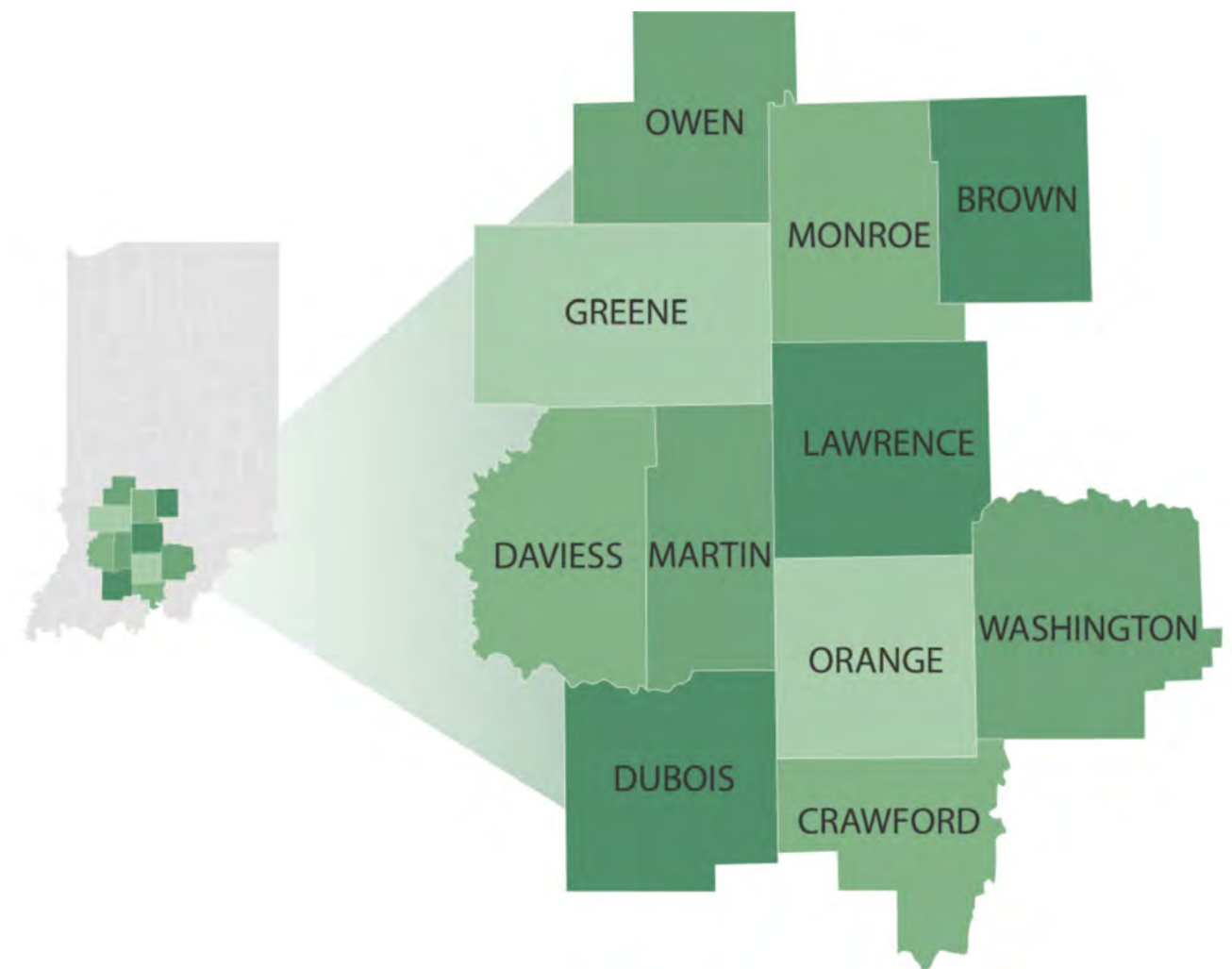
dynamic networks and resources that can anchor future initiatives. Understanding these dynamics is critical for identifying funding pathways, aligning regional priorities, and strategically positioning arts and culture as a vehicle for community development.

Managing the Cultural Asset Inventory



See Cultural Asset inventory: <https://airtable.com/appg8ATQft6UPdQxY> →

See Appendix for Discovery Report →



Benchmarking and peer evaluation

To situate the Indiana Uplands within a broader context of rural cultural development, this report examined three peer regions—Appalachian Ohio, the Central Pennsylvania Creative Corridor, and Southern Vermont—whose experiences offer insight into how dispersed communities can sustain creative vitality through coordinated investment and shared identity. Each shares

key characteristics with the Uplands—a mix of rural communities and university centers, strong natural and recreational assets, and an emerging creative economy supported by overlapping local, state, and philanthropic funding structures. These regions offer valuable lessons in how dispersed, small-town networks can sustain cultural vibrancy through coordinated investment, creative placemaking, and institutional collaboration.

Benchmark: Central Pennsylvania Creative Corridor

The Central Pennsylvania Creative Corridor—encompassing Centre, Blair, and Huntingdon Counties—shares with the Uplands a landscape of small cities, a college town, and interconnected rural communities. Anchored by Penn State University, the region has built a robust cultural network through coordinated state funding, including the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Creative Sector Flex Fund, and the Creative Communities Initiative. These mechanisms provide direct and flexible support for arts organizations, ensuring that funding reaches both major institutions and smaller community-based programs. The area's long-running Folk College Festival, hosted by Juniata College, exemplifies how cultural traditions and participatory arts can sustain relevance over generations. Together, these assets highlight the potential for the Uplands to strengthen its arts ecosystem through recurring funding streams, collaborative programming, and regional convening structures.



Benchmark: Appalachian Ohio

The region of Appalachian Ohio, particularly Hocking, Athens, and Meigs Counties, presents a strong peer comparison for the Indiana Uplands. Like the Uplands, it combines rural landscapes with the influence of a major university—Ohio University—as a cultural and economic anchor. The area's institutions, such as Stuart's Opera House and Arts West, demonstrate how community-centered facilities can function as regional hubs for performance, education, and collaboration. Large-scale public investment through the Appalachian Community Grant Program (\$500 million statewide) and the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio has restored historic venues and expanded access to arts participation. This model illustrates how sustained state and philanthropic partnerships can elevate grassroots creativity into a driver of regional identity and economic growth.



Benchmark: Southern Vermont

Southern Vermont—particularly Windham and Bennington Counties—offers another instructive comparison, combining a rural economy with a mature creative infrastructure. Institutions such as the Southern Vermont Arts Center, Bennington Museum, and Vermont Arts Exchange demonstrate how local organizations can leverage state-level frameworks, including the Vermont Arts Council and the Vermont Creative Network, to advance creative economy development. Bennington College adds a strong educational dimension, cultivating a creative workforce that contributes to the region's design and crafts industries. Southern Vermont's success lies in its ability to connect cultural vitality with tourism, sustainability, and quality of life—an approach that mirrors the Uplands' opportunity to integrate arts and culture into broader regional development.



Benchmarking the Indiana Uplands: Peer regions, Economic profile, and Arts and culture investment

REGION	POPULATION	WORKFORCE (EST.)	MAJOR CITIES	KEY INDUSTRIES	HIGHER ED INSTITUTIONS	PER CAPITA ARTS FUNDING (STATE) ⁴	STATE AANDC GDP CONTR.
Indiana Uplands	397,901	194,000	Bloomington, Jasper, Bedford, Washington	Defense, Life Sciences, Manufacturing	Indiana University	\$0.92 pp	\$9.3B
Appalachian Ohio	112,691	50,000	Athens, Logan, Nelsonville	Higher Ed, Recreation, Cultural Tourism	Ohio University (Athens)	\$2.30 pp	(2.0%)
Central PA Creative Corridor	325,086	160,000	State College, Altoona, Huntingdon	Manufacturing, Higher Ed, Heritage Tourism	Penn State University	\$0.91 pp	\$25B
Southern Vermont	83,252	40,000	Bennington, Brattleboro	Artisan Economy, Education, Creative Placemaking	Bennington College	\$4.49 pp	(3.02%)

Trails, parks, and cultural landscapes


Across these benchmark regions, the intersection of natural amenities and cultural programming stands out as a defining strength. Appalachian Ohio's Hocking Hills, Central Pennsylvania's Raystown Lake, and Southern Vermont's Green Mountains demonstrate how parks and trail systems can double as cultural venues—hosting festivals, art installations, and public events that reinforce both environmental and cultural stewardship. The Indiana Uplands share this potential. With assets like Brown County State Park, McCormick's Creek State Park, Spring Mill State Park and Hoosier National Forest, and regional trail systems including the B-Line and Knobstone Trails, the Uplands already possesses the natural and spatial infrastructure to connect outdoor recreation with creative expression. Leveraging this intersection could position the region as a leader in arts-driven environmental tourism and place-based cultural identity.

⁴ Data on economic impact of nonprofit arts and culture organizations and their audiences are drawn from the American for the Arts Arts and Economic Prosperity 6 (AEP6) study, accessed via the AEP6 online database, Americans for the Arts, <https://aep6.americansforthearts.org/>

Key findings from initial research

The discovery phase revealed a region rich in cultural activity, creativity, and collaboration, yet marked by uneven visibility and support across sectors. Through asset mapping, benchmarking, and early engagement, clear patterns began to emerge: the Indiana Uplands possesses an abundance of artistic and natural assets, a strong sense of place, and deep traditions of making, music,

and storytelling. At the same time, challenges such as geographic imbalance, underrepresentation of certain art forms, and limited cross-sector coordination highlight the need for more connected and equitable systems of cultural support. These insights provided the foundation for identifying and expanding the region's core cultural clusters.



These challenges such as geographic imbalance, underrepresentation of certain art forms, and limited cross-sector coordination highlight **the need for more connected and equitable systems of cultural support.**

Abundant and diverse cultural assets

Over 600 cultural and recreational assets were identified across the eleven counties, including festivals, trails, historic landmarks, and arts organizations. Festivals and outdoor amenities stand out as key cultural strengths and regional connectors.

Imbalance in representation

Outdoor recreation and event-based activities are highly visible, while other creative sectors—such as fine craft, music, and informal or faith-based venues—remain less represented in both funding and formal planning.

Distinct local identities, shared regional story

Each county contributes uniquely to the region's creative fabric—from Brown County's artisan legacy to Monroe County's university-centered cultural ecosystem—offering opportunities for collective storytelling and collaboration.

Collaboration as a growth driver

Benchmarking against peer regions confirmed that sustainable cultural ecosystems in rural areas depend on coordination among universities, local governments, and cultural organizations, along with diverse and flexible funding models.

Evolving cultural clusters

Early engagement revealed three key areas of creative concentration—Artisan Industry, Music, and Space + Place—where artistic practice, economic potential, and community identity converge. Building on Phase 2 engagement, the framework expanded to include Performing Arts and Lifelong Learning, reflecting community priorities around live performance, creative education, and intergenerational participation.

Stakeholder input and insights

Stakeholder ecosystem and community engagement

From the outset, engagement for the Indiana Uplands Arts and Culture Planning process was designed to be inclusive, layered, and reflective of the region's broad cultural and geographic diversity. The approach recognized that meaningful arts and culture planning depends on local knowledge and early collaboration. Public Sphere Projects, working in partnership with Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI), launched engagement efforts alongside the formation of the Steering Committee to ensure that community perspectives shaped the project from the beginning.

The Indiana Uplands spans eleven counties with distinct cultural and economic identities—ranging from Brown County's heritage-driven tourism to Monroe County's university-centered arts ecosystem. Early engagement focused on listening across this spectrum: to artists, educators, civic leaders, cultural organizers, and residents. These

conversations revealed both the shared values and local distinctions that define the Uplands' creative landscape. The engagement framework was designed to be flexible and iterative, building on what had been learned while remaining open to new insights as the process advanced. This approach has laid the groundwork for a regional strategy that reflects authentic community priorities and strengthens the alignment between arts, culture, workforce, and quality of place across the Uplands.

Defining stakeholder groups

Stakeholder mapping identified a wide range of individuals and organizations driving cultural activity and community life across the eleven counties. These stakeholders represent overlapping networks of creativity, education, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement—many of which operate beyond traditional geographic or sector boundaries. Through collaboration with ROI and the Steering Committee, key stakeholder typologies were defined to guide outreach and ensure representation from every part of the regional ecosystem:

Artists and Creatives

Individuals working across disciplines, from visual and performing arts to craft and design.

Arts and Cultural Organizations

Nonprofits, councils, guilds, and venues that anchor creative participation and local identity.

Education and Higher Learning

Institutions such as Indiana University, Ivy Tech, and regional schools that foster creative education and talent pipelines.

Tourism and Destination Development

Visitors bureaus, Main Street programs, and local event organizers linking culture with economic vitality.

Government and Economic Development

Municipal departments, planning agencies, and workforce initiatives integrating culture into growth strategies.

Philanthropy and Business Leaders

Foundations, local industries, and entrepreneurs investing in arts-related quality-of-place initiatives.

Community and Faith-Based Groups

Local organizations, volunteers, and informal networks that build social cohesion through creative expression.

Youth and Older Adults

Residents shaping cultural participation across generations, from student artists to community elders preserving heritage.

Mapping these networks provided a clearer view of how influence, partnership, and creative leadership circulate through the region. The process also assessed ROI's existing partnerships and past READI investments to identify areas of overlap and opportunity. A RACI (a responsibility project management tool) analysis helped ensure that the Steering Committee represents a balanced cross-section of sectors and geographies, strengthening its role as both a decision-making and communication body.



Engagement activities

The first phase of engagement centered on early relationship-building and information exchange across the Uplands. Outreach included individual conversations, small-group discussions, and structured engagement with regional partners and cultural organizations. In collaboration with ROI, an in-person kickoff meeting convened the Arts and Culture Steering Committee, bringing together leaders from the arts, business, civic, and nonprofit sectors to establish shared values and priorities for the planning process.

Following is a summary of initial community engagement activities completed as part of Phase 1 Discovery:

Economic Development Leaders

The team conducted one-on-one interviews with economic development leaders to better understand their perspectives on arts, culture, and quality of place. These conversations revealed how cultural assets and creative industries factor into their strategies for regional growth and community vitality. This direct engagement helped build relationships, surface shared priorities, and uncover opportunities for deeper collaboration between economic and cultural development efforts.

Arts Commissions

Public Sphere Projects aligned with regional arts and entertainment commissions to explore their efforts in shaping the cultural landscape—past and present. These conversations uncovered a range of niche initiatives from the creative sector, revealing

both longstanding traditions and emerging expressions that animate the region’s unique cultural identity.

Educational Leaders

Through multiple modalities—including site visit tours and interviews—consultants learned from educational leaders to better understand how higher education contributes to the region’s cultural and Creative ecosystem. Their insights highlighted the university’s role as both a community anchor and a vital resource for cultivating talent, innovation, and cultural exchange.

Center for Rural Engagement

Through research and conversations with the Center for Rural Engagement team, a comprehensive grasp of their place-based initiatives that intersect with arts, culture, and community development across the region was gleaned. Their work provided a valuable lens into rural resilience, creative placemaking, and the power of local storytelling. These insights helped identify opportunities to align with and amplify efforts already rooted in community-driven change.

Annual Report to the Region

As part of the Annual Report to the Region, a dynamic working session was hosted to launch the development of a comprehensive regional Arts and Culture Plan for the Indiana Uplands. The session brought together developers, arts leaders, educators, economic development professionals, employers, and government representatives to explore shared priorities and opportunities for cultural advancement.

Site Visits

Site visits to key locations across the Indiana Uplands brought the project to life, offering a firsthand look at the region’s diverse cultural and economic assets. Stops included Indiana University, Brown County’s creative district, the Owen County Public Library, and the historic resort in French Lick. These visits enriched the consulting team’s understanding of the region’s unique character and revealed opportunities to connect cultural initiatives with education, tourism, and community development.

Steering Committee Convening

The first Steering Committee meeting for the Indiana Uplands Arts and Culture Regional Planning Initiative was convened virtually in April, bringing together a diverse group of regional leaders to begin shaping the vision for the plan. A second, in-person meeting was held in mid-May, providing an opportunity to dive deeper into identifying cultural assets, exploring emerging cultural clusters, and conducting a “gut check” on early assumptions. Committee members acted as local experts, grounding the conversation in lived experience and regional knowledge to ensure the plan reflects the unique character and aspirations of the Uplands.

These activities collectively created a foundation of trust and regional insight that will guide subsequent phases. By embedding engagement throughout every stage of planning, the process has strengthened coordination across sectors, surfaced underrepresented perspectives, and set the stage for an arts and culture strategy that is both authentically local and regionally connected.

Defining clusters

In the context of this strategy, clusters describe conceptually linked areas of creative activity—networks of artists, organizations, traditions, and enterprises connected by shared values, materials, or modes of practice rather than by geography. A cluster is not a fixed boundary or industry category, but a way of recognizing how creative energy circulates across sectors and communities. It captures relationships that are cultural and economic, formal and informal, often overlapping and evolving over time.

This framework allows the Indiana Uplands to view its Creative ecosystem as a series of interconnected affinities instead of isolated disciplines or locations. A craftsperson in Nashville, a musician in Bloomington, and a preservationist in Bedford may all contribute to the same cluster through different means—each advancing a common set of cultural, economic, or spatial goals. By identifying clusters, the planning process highlights where collaboration, investment, and innovation are most likely to strengthen regional identity and yield long-term impact.

Preliminary themes from engagement

Early engagement across the Indiana Uplands surfaced several clear themes that informed the identification of three preliminary cultural clusters: fine craft/fine art, music, and space and place. These themes reflect where creative energy, community interest, and institutional capacity most strongly align across the region.

Conversations revealed a deep tradition of making and material culture, from woodworking and pottery to textiles and metalwork—craft practices that connect the Uplands’ creative identity to its natural landscape and history of skilled labor.

Stakeholders also emphasized the region’s musical richness, shaped by Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music, community ensembles, independent venues, and festivals that bring local and global artists together. Equally significant was a shared appreciation for place-based creativity, encompassing historic preservation, adaptive reuse, public art, and the cultural value of the Uplands’ trails, parks, and architectural heritage.

These insights led to the articulation of three interrelated cultural clusters—areas of affinity that describe how creative practices, institutions, and traditions converge across the region. The clusters were intentionally exploratory: working hypotheses that evolved through continued engagement, data analysis, and community input during the next phases of planning.

Refining the cluster framework

As the planning process progressed into Phase 2, community feedback and additional research prompted the refinement of the original cluster framework. The early findings from Phase 1—rooted in stakeholder dialogue, grant analysis, and benchmarking—served as a foundation for deeper exploration. Through Steering Committee discussions and expanded engagement, participants emphasized the importance of recognizing creative practices that extend beyond traditional arts sectors, capturing how the region learns, performs, and connects through culture.

In response, the framework of three exploratory clusters was expanded to five interrelated areas of affinity. These updated clusters incorporate both data-driven insight and lived community experience, reflecting the diverse ways creativity contributes to quality of life, workforce development, and regional identity across the Indiana Uplands. They are:

Artisan Industry

Making-oriented practices, techniques, methods and mediums, institutions, fine art and exhibition spaces.

Music

Practices of composing, performing, and preserving musical traditions.

Space + Place

Practices that design, preserve, or enhance environments.

Performing Arts

Practices of creating, rehearsing, and staging live performances.

Lifelong Learning

Practices that strengthen youth development and support aging in place, reducing social isolation through creative participation.

As Phase 2 engagement deepened, community conversations transitioned from broad discovery to applied understanding—how the region’s creative clusters function in practice and what supports are needed to sustain them. Through in-person focus groups at the Brown County Art Gallery, the Daviess County Museum, and The Mill in Bloomington, along with two virtual sessions, more than 40 participants reflected on both progress and persistent barriers within their local arts and cultural ecosystems. These dialogues revealed a shared desire to translate momentum into action through stronger networks, cross-sector partnerships, and more equitable access to resources.

The insights gathered through these sessions served as a bridge to the next phase of this work: identifying how investment can generate lasting regional impact. The following section, Part 2: Impact Areas, distills what emerged from these discussions into five interconnected areas of opportunity—Artisan Industry, Music, Performing Arts, Space and Place, and Lifelong Learning—that together define the Uplands’ cultural strengths and its potential for sustained, inclusive growth.





Part 2: Impact areas

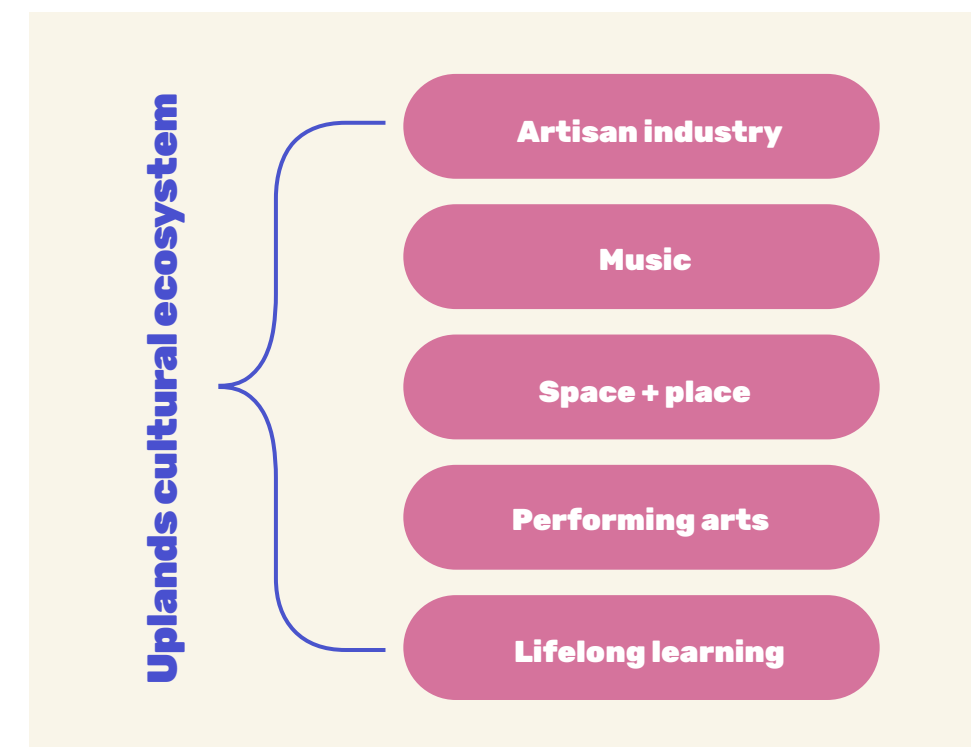
A Creative ecosystem is the network of people, places, organizations, and relationships that make arts, culture, and creativity thrive in a community. Like a natural ecosystem, each part has a role — and when they work together, the whole system becomes **stronger, more resilient, and more impactful.**

Grantmaking in arts and culture is most effective when it goes beyond simply distributing funds and instead focuses on building long-term value for communities. Every investment has the potential to shape the cultural and economic fabric of a region, whether by strengthening identity, creating opportunities for broader audience participation, or laying the groundwork for cross-sectoral partnerships. Effective cultural plans therefore emphasize not only immediate outcomes but also the lasting, multiplying effects of cultural investment.

An ecosystems approach

To focus future efforts and investments, Public Sphere Projects identified five “impact areas” that represent key strengths and differentiators for the region: Artisan Industry, Music, Performing Arts, Space and Place, and Lifelong Learning. These impact areas act as lenses for understanding how different types of projects can reinforce one another, spark innovation, and sustain cultural vitality. By mapping existing assets and identifying new initiatives, we look to build a comprehensive picture of the cultural ecosystem and the opportunities it holds.

While large-scale, visible projects often capture the spotlight, they succeed only when supported by a strong foundation of artists, organizations, and cultural spaces that drive ongoing engagement. For this reason, ROI’s framework acknowledges both catalytic investments and the everyday systems that nurture creativity—studios, rehearsal halls, community spaces, and the networks that connect them.

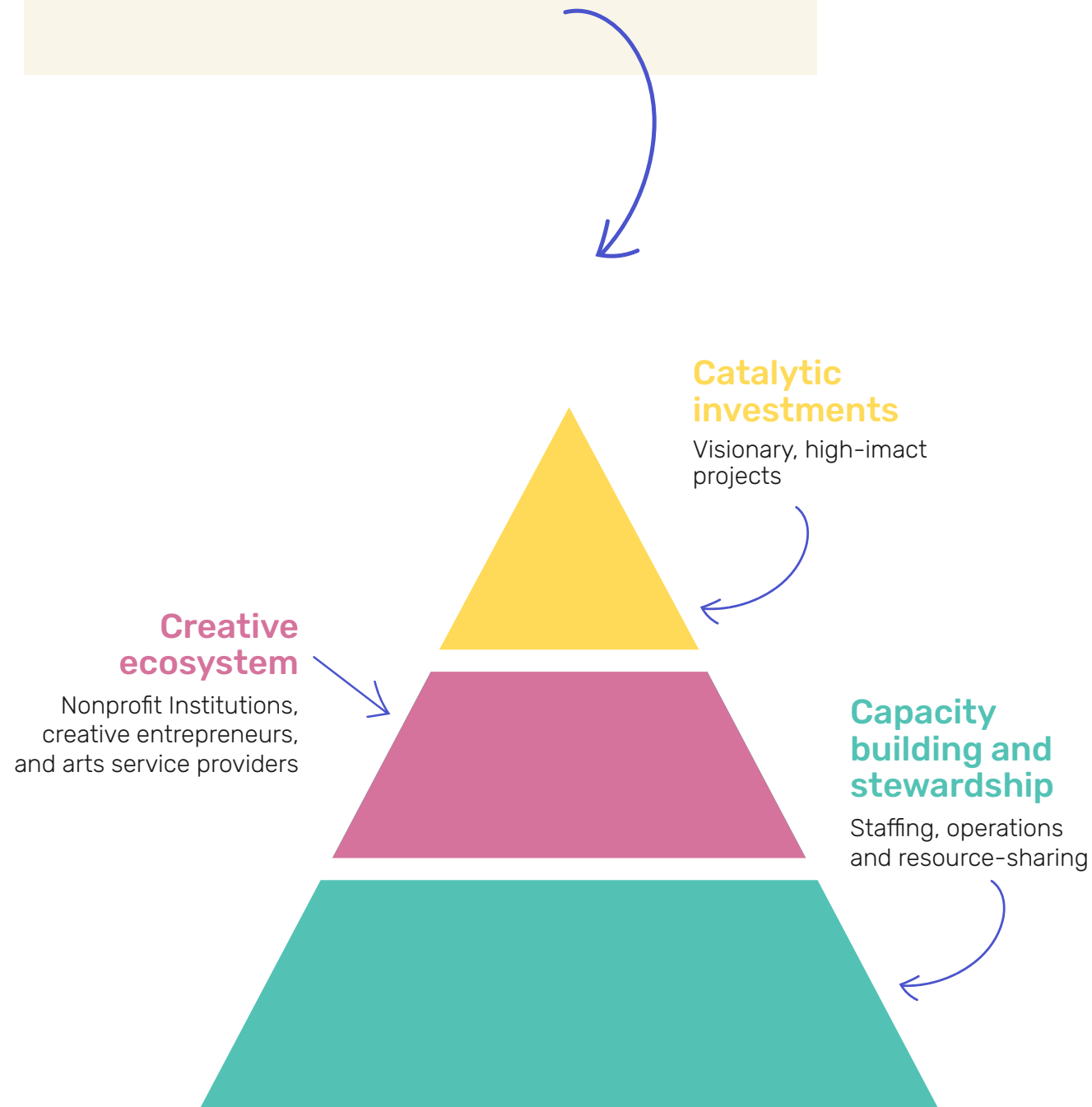


A thriving cultural strategy is not the product of isolated efforts, but of an ecosystem in which multiple players (such as government, creative industries, nonprofits, etc) complement one another; and a set of initiatives (transformative projects, advocacy, capacity-building, etc.) that lend ongoing energy to the sector.

By aligning grantmaking and other efforts along these five impact areas, ROI will ensure that cultural investments not only create immediate impact or support individual projects, but strengthen the capacity of the sector overall.

3 Tiers of Cultural Investment

A three-tier framework captures how investments can spark, sustain, and steward cultural transformation.



In an ecosystem impact model, Public Sphere Projects proposes considering projects and activities that span across three distinct tiers.

The first, catalytic investments, encompasses ambitious, high-impact initiatives capable of shifting public perception and laying the groundwork for broader transformation. The second tier, the Creative ecosystem, includes projects that focus on the essential structures—such as nonprofits, artists, and entrepreneurs—that sustain and propel the cultural sector. Finally, the capacity building and stewardship tier emphasizes investments in the operational side of arts and culture, such as staffing, resources, and infrastructure, which are crucial for managing and sustaining these initiatives over time.

To evaluate **feasibility**, an additional layer of understanding involves assigning each project an estimated cost value, providing a sense of its financial scope. For this, we recommend utilizing the following scale:

- **\$ (Tens of thousands of dollars):** Could be implemented with the support of a single funder. This level typically supports smaller projects or initiatives, where one key funder provides the necessary financial resources. Examples may include local events, pilot programs, or small-scale community initiatives.
- **\$\$ (Hundreds of thousands of dollars):** Could be implemented with the support of a few funders. This funding level allows for larger, more complex projects or regional programs that require multiple contributors. It may support programs that involve partnerships, such as multi-city events, community outreach efforts, or larger public-facing initiatives with a broader scope.
- **\$\$\$ (Millions of dollars):** Could be implemented with the support of many funders. At this scale, projects can cover wide-ranging initiatives or infrastructure projects that require substantial financial backing from multiple funders. These could include region-wide programs, city-wide cultural initiatives, or major public works projects that require collaborative, multi-funder support to achieve large-scale impact.

This section highlights a selection of representative regional arts and culture concepts, organized by their impact area. Each concept is further categorized by its tier and estimated cost. It is important to note that this list is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. It does not capture the full breadth of potential arts and culture concepts in the region, nor does it attempt to recommend concepts that should be funded. Rather, it provides a snapshot of current initiatives that illustrate how various types of projects might shape the broader cultural landscape.

For a more comprehensive and up-to-date overview, the cultural asset map will continue to be updated regularly, capturing new projects and ideas as they emerge.

Artisan industry

Practices of making, preserving, and presenting skilled craft/fine art across disciplines—including metalsmithing, woodworking, pottery, textiles, basketry, and related methods—as well as practices of sustaining small-scale production systems, emphasizing craftsmanship, local materials, and cultural heritage, while fostering intergenerational exchange, community identity, and niche markets.

Investment opportunity: Strategic investment in the Uplands’ artisan industry can strengthen regional identity, expand creative infrastructure, and elevate craftsmanship as a driver of innovation, entrepreneurship, and cultural vitality. Artisan enterprise in the region already unites heritage, small-business development, and advanced creative production—offering clear opportunities to deepen economic impact.

Key actions include embedding artisan entrepreneurship into regional economic strategies; expanding market pathways that connect local makers to statewide and national buyers; developing a unified regional brand (e.g., Uplands Made) to elevate the visibility of artisan goods; and supporting object design and innovation that bridge the arts with advanced manufacturing. Together, these priorities build a durable system of support—investing in people, places, and platforms so creativity and craftsmanship thrive across the Indiana Uplands.

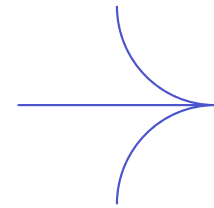
See **Discovery Report** in **Appendix** for examples of artisan industry projects from elsewhere in the U.S.



Needs, strengths, and possible interventions

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Shared production and fabrication facilities



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Expanding public and mobile makerspaces into a “maker corridor”



LOCATION: Region-wide

TIER: Capacity building and stewardship

COST: \$

The Indiana Uplands is building a robust foundation for hands-on innovation through a growing ecosystem of digital fabrication and maker facilities. Regional Opportunity Initiatives’ UpLabs Digital Fabrication Network supports nine digital fabrication labs in schools across the region. With state-of-the-art equipment and instruction, these labs are developing a new generation of makers equipped for advanced STEM careers and creative industries alike.

Complementing this educational network are community-based hubs that bridge lifelong learning, entrepreneurship, and local industry:

- Jasper–Dubois County Public Library’s MakerSpace offers a comprehensive suite of creative tools—from 3D printers and laser engravers to sewing machines, audio/video

tools, and traditional craft supplies. Certified users can access tools through scheduled training. Its Mobile MakerSpace, supported by ROI and the Dubois County Community Foundation, extends this access to schools, community events, and underserved areas—reducing geographic and economic barriers.

- Bloominglabs, Indiana’s first community makerspace, anchors Monroe County’s creative technology scene. Entirely volunteer-led, it provides public access to electronics labs, CNC machines, and woodworking equipment. With targeted investment in staffing, equipment upgrades, and outreach, Bloominglabs could significantly expand its impact across the Uplands.

Together, UpLabs, Jasper’s MakerSpace and Mobile MakerSpace, and Bloominglabs form a powerful regional infrastructure for digital fabrication and artisan innovation. Strategic investment opportunities include:

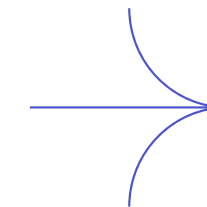
- Equipment and Capacity Upgrades: Expand CNC, textile, and ceramics capabilities at fixed and mobile sites.
- Expanded Access: Increase hours, staff support, and outreach, particularly in rural and underserved communities.
- Regional Coordination: Align programming across the network to share expertise, avoid duplication, and amplify reach.

- Branding and Promotion: Develop a unified “Maker Corridor” identity linking fabrication labs with local festivals, schools, and tourism hubs.

Collectively, these facilities position the Uplands as a regional leader in maker-based learning and artisan industry, supporting workforce development, creative entrepreneurship, and inclusive access to innovation tools.

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Artist upskilling and workforce pipeline expansion



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Coordinated residency networks for skill-based learning and multi-generational knowledge transmission



LOCATION: The STEAMery (Brown County), Lawrence County Art Association workshops, The Hundredth Hill (Monroe County)

TIER: Creative ecosystem

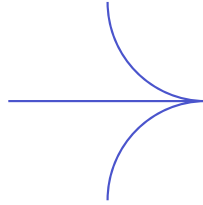
COST: \$\$

The STEAMery, The Hundredth Hill Artists Residency, and the Lawrence County Art Association together represent a strong foundation for an expanded regional residency and training network in the Uplands. The STEAMery and The Hundredth Hill both support multidisciplinary creative practice, with The Hundredth Hill offering studio, performance, and living spaces that could be further strengthened through artist stipends,

upgraded housing, and more community-facing programming. The STEAMery adds a complementary focus on interdisciplinary learning and creative production at the intersection of art, design, and making. The Lawrence County Art Association reinforces this ecosystem through workshops and hands-on training for emerging and mid-career artists. With coordinated investment, these three organizations could function as a connected system in which artists create, teach, mentor, and exhibit across multiple counties—supporting post-college talent retention, attracting visiting artists, and enriching cultural life throughout the Uplands.

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Regional craft identity and narrative-building



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

National campaign to position artisan industries as a differentiator



LOCATION: Region wide
TIER: Catalytic investment
COST: \$\$

The Indiana Uplands is home to a rich landscape of pottery guilds, fiber collectives, limestone workshops, and art-based studios—but it still lacks a cohesive brand that fully elevates and connects its artisan economy. Existing marketing efforts such as “This is Uplands Made”—a regional storytelling campaign by ROI—already highlight the creativity, entrepreneurship, and craftsmanship that define the Uplands. Building on this foundation, a “Uplands Made” initiative could formalize and expand that brand through professional marketing, online directories, and seasonal festivals that position fine craft and the arts as a signature driver of tourism, pride, and regional identity.

A key partner in this effort would be the Indiana Artisan organization, which certifies Hoosier artisans and specialty food producers through a juried statewide designation program. Working with Indiana Artisan, the Uplands could create a regional sub-designation that recognizes high-quality makers, links them into broader markets, and gives consumers confidence in the authenticity and excellence of locally produced goods.

Benefits of Aligning with Indiana Artisan:

Market access: Provides Uplands artisans entry into Indiana Artisan’s network of shops, fairs, and marketing channels across the state.

Regional distinction: Creates a unified “Uplands Made” identity under the Indiana Artisan umbrella, elevating the region as a cultural brand while linking it to a larger statewide Creative ecosystem.

Storytelling and marketing: Extends the This is Uplands Made platform through multimedia campaigns and regional maker spotlights that celebrate heritage, innovation, and place.

Economic development: Strengthens tourism and local economies by positioning the Uplands as a must-visit destination for artisan goods, comparable to Kentucky’s Artisan Center at Berea or North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Craft Trail.

Investments would enhance digital storytelling, fund joint marketing and certification programs, and support collaborative events aligned with existing efforts such as This is Uplands Made and the Cooperative Calendar of Student Art. By uniting the region’s makers under one recognizable brand and amplifying their visibility, this initiative would position the Uplands as a nationally recognized center for craftsmanship—rooted in authenticity, collaboration, and creative excellence.

Highlight:
Indiana Artisan network

The Indiana Artisan program is a prestigious designation for makers whose work has been rigorously reviewed by a panel of experts and deemed among the finest in the state of Indiana. Indiana Artisan For artists and artisans, becoming part of the Indiana Artisan community unlocks a suite of valuable benefits: from branded marketing

support and inclusion in a statewide marketplace to professional development workshops, peer networking, and exposure through newsletters, social media and gallery opportunities. Indiana Artisan In short, being selected as an Indiana Artisan means your work is officially recognized for excellence, and you gain access to resources and platforms that help grow your craft into a sustainable business.

<https://indianaartisan.org/become-an-indiana-artisan/> →



Music

Practices of composing, performing, and preserving musical traditions, as well as practices related to designing, fabricating, and conserving instruments and other performance infrastructure.

Investment opportunity: Targeted investment in the Uplands' music ecosystem can expand access, nurture emerging talent, and build the infrastructure needed to position the region as a connected, creative hub for live performance and cultural exchange.

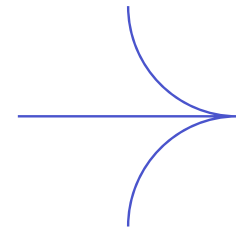
See **Discovery Report** in **Appendix** for examples of music projects from elsewhere in the U.S.



Needs, strengths, and possible interventions

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Youth seeking safe and supportive spaces for musical expression



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Youth music incubators



LOCATION: Monroe County - IU Saturday Art School, Girls Rock Bloomington-style programs, Owen County - Fiesta Owen County, and Dubois County - Folk and Polka music

TIER: Creative ecosystem

COST: \$

In Monroe County, Indiana University's Saturday Art School already integrates dramatic and visual arts into short summer sessions. With investment, this program could expand to include music incubators—youth rock camps, songwriting labs, and digital recording workshops. A strong partner in this work is Girls Rock Bloomington, a nonprofit that empowers girls, trans, and nonbinary youth through music education, performance, and mentorship. Building on their proven model of fostering leadership and confidence through collaborative music-making, Girls Rock Bloomington could anchor a larger regional network of youth music programs.

Across the Uplands, county-level cultural traditions further strengthen the foundation for a regionwide youth-music ecosystem. In Owen County, Fiesta Owen County serves as a vibrant community celebration that elevates local talent, multicultural traditions, and intergenerational participation—providing a natural platform for expanded youth music activation. In Dubois County, the region's deep

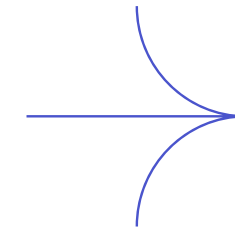
folk and polka music heritage—sustained through family bands, community festivals, and longstanding social traditions—offers a strong cultural base for teaching traditional music alongside contemporary genres, ensuring that youth programming reflects and sustains local identity.

At the same time, there are clear calls for safe places and programming that genuinely welcome communities of color and LGBTQ+ audiences and artists. Some venues across the region feel unwelcoming, while others—such as drag venues—are perceived as rare safe havens. Even longstanding cultural spaces like the Jewish Theatre now require additional security. By supporting inclusive incubators like Girls Rock Bloomington, expanding access to rehearsal and performance venues, and uplifting culturally rooted events such as Fiesta Owen County and Dubois County's folk and polka traditions, investments would not only build creative skills but also create equitable, affirming spaces. Together, these efforts would generate a robust pipeline for the region's creative workforce while reinforcing the importance of belonging, safety, and cultural authenticity in participation across the Uplands.

[Read more about Girls Rock Bloomington programs](https://www.girlsrockbloomington.com)
<https://www.girlsrockbloomington.com> →

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Regional live music touring circuit needs coordination among regional venues, producers, and promoters.



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Multi-county touring network



LOCATION: 30-60 minute regional travel radius

TIER: Catalytic investment

COST: \$\$

While the Uplands region as a whole is quite expansive, most cities and towns are within a 30-60 minute radius—creating an ideal environment for a coordinated regional music touring circuit. This proximity allows artists to reach multiple audiences without the prohibitive travel and lodging costs typically associated with regional touring, making it easier to build sustainable performance schedules while strengthening cross-county cultural exchange.

Anchored by established venues and festivals such as the Buskirk-Chumley Theater (Monroe County), the internationally renowned Lotus World Music and Arts Festival (Monroe County), and the historic Bean Blossom Bluegrass Festival (Brown County), the region already possesses a strong musical backbone. Additional anchor sites further expand this ecosystem: Huntingburg's Market Street Park offers a high-quality outdoor stage for large community events; the Thyen-Clark Cultural Center in Jasper serves as a flexible, multidisciplinary arts hub capable of hosting performances and youth music programs; and The Commons in downtown Washington provides a centrally located civic venue well-suited for concerts, community gatherings, and

touring performances. Hard Truth Distillery in Brown County has also emerged as a major live-music destination, drawing regional crowds and national touring acts with its large-scale outdoor venue.

By structuring a touring network that connects these diverse venues—along with county fairs, libraries, community centers, and heritage festivals, the Uplands could offer stipends for artists to perform across multiple counties. This model would reduce financial risk for emerging musicians, increase performance opportunities, and expand access to live music for rural audiences.

Comparable models exist in Appalachian Kentucky, where state-sponsored Touring Grant initiatives enable artists to tour across county lines, strengthening both economic and cultural exchange.

This model could also be duplicated across the Performing Arts field, creating a unified touring framework that connects theaters, dance companies, and multidisciplinary ensembles. By coordinating schedules, sharing marketing, and pooling travel resources, the Uplands could extend the reach of both its musicians and performing artists—building a sustainable, cross-county cultural network that amplifies participation and visibility across the region.

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Accessible rehearsal and performance venues

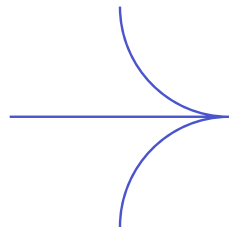


LOCATION: Lawrence County (Mitchell Opera House), Dubois County (Astra Theatre), Brown County (Brown County Playhouse)

TIER: Capacity building and stewardship

COST: \$\$-\$\$\$

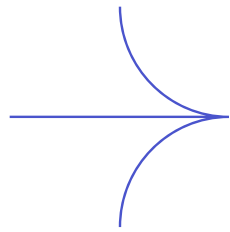
Musicians face significant barriers to affordable rehearsal and performance spaces across the region. Many facilities lack the infrastructure needed for music—quality sound systems, recording equipment, or flexible rehearsal studios—limiting opportunities for young bands, ensembles, and independent musicians to practice and perform.



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION (1):

Expanding public and mobile makerspaces into a “maker corridor”

Investment in upgrading underutilized community spaces could create mid-sized halls and rehearsal rooms equipped with sound, lighting, and recording capabilities. Venues such as the Mitchell Opera House (Lawrence County), the Astra Theatre (Dubois County), and the Brown County Playhouse (Brown County) could serve as regional anchors in this effort. Each has the capacity to host music programming but would benefit from resources to strengthen sound infrastructure, expand rehearsal availability, and reduce rental costs for local musicians.



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION (2):

Connecting artists to underused cultural spaces

music, turning dormant or unused spaces into lively, community-driven stages. Boys and Girls Clubs, present in nearly every county, could dedicate rooms for rehearsal, after-school bands, and digital music labs, giving teens and young adults equitable access to music-making and building pipelines into local festivals and venues. The aim is straightforward: more places to practice, more places to play, and more ways for communities to gather around live music close to home.

By leveraging these anchor sites and creating a network of accessible music spaces, the Uplands could foster cross-county collaboration, lower entry barriers for emerging artists, and expand opportunities for live music. Such investments would help position the region as a place where music thrives at both grassroots and professional levels.

Highlight:
Inclusive spaces for expression

Girls Rock Bloomington is a nonprofit organization based in Bloomington, Indiana, whose mission is to build positive self-esteem and creative self-expression in girls, trans, and non-binary youth (ages 8-14) through music education and mentoring.

They provide an annual summer camp, after-school programs, and workshops that not only teach instruments and songwriting but also foster a safe and inclusive space where young people can feel valued, heard, and empowered to express themselves musically and personally.

<https://www.girlsrockbloomington.com/> →



Performing arts

Practices of creating, rehearsing, and staging live performance—encompassing theater, dance, opera, spoken word, circus, and hybrid forms—alongside writing, directing, choreographing, producing, and the design and upkeep of sets, costumes, stages, and related infrastructure.

Investment opportunity: Investment in the Uplands' performing arts sector can strengthen creative infrastructure, build leadership capacity, and expand community participation—ensuring that performance remains a vital hub for creating new imaginative work, engaging broad audiences, and welcoming Hoosiers of all ages, interests, and identities.

See **Discovery Report** in **Appendix** for examples of performing arts projects from elsewhere in the U.S.



Needs, strengths, and possible interventions

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Performing arts back-of-house space



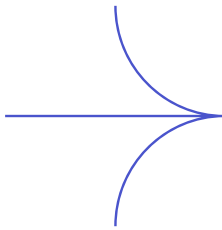
LOCATION: Region-wide

TIER: Capacity building and stewardship

COST: \$\$-\$\$\$

While the Thyen-Clark Cultural Center in Dubois County serves as a strong anchor, many regional performing arts organizations lack access to the basic infrastructure needed to operate sustainably—such as storage for sets, costumes, props, and instruments, as well as dedicated rehearsal and fabrication spaces. As a result, companies often duplicate expenses, rely on volunteer labor, or scale back productions due to limited resources.

Just as the Artisan Industry impact area calls for shared hubs where makers can access specialized equipment, the performing arts sector in the Uplands would benefit from regional production, rehearsal, and fabrication hubs that provide centralized spaces for set construction, costume



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Shared production, rehearsal, and fabrication facilities

design, prop storage, and technical preparation. These shared facilities would enable community theaters, dance troupes, and music ensembles to rehearse and produce work year-round—something many currently lack due to inadequate or high-cost space.

Organizations such as the Shawnee Theatre (Greene County), Brown County Playhouse, and the Mitchell Opera House (Lawrence County) would be natural beneficiaries of such hubs, as would smaller community groups and high school or college theater programs. Modeled after successful shared scene shops in other regions—such as New York’s TDF Costume Collection—a multi-county facility could provide professional-grade resources that individual groups cannot sustain independently, ultimately lowering costs, raising production quality, and strengthening collaboration across the Uplands.

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Performing arts leadership development

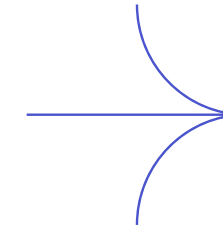


LOCATION: Region-wide

TIER: Capacity building and stewardship

COST: \$

Arts leaders across the Uplands face persistent challenges related to fundraising, volunteer recruitment, and long-term planning. Many small and mid-sized organizations are heavily volunteer-driven and lack the professional infrastructure to manage growth or sustain operations. The recent closure of the Peacock Children’s Theatre in Crawford County—a well-loved organization that served the community for over 15 years—highlights these challenges vividly. Despite its legacy of youth engagement and local performance, the theater was forced to close when its board and artistic director could not find new leadership with the time, capacity, and resources to sustain operations. This loss underscores a broader regional issue: without targeted investment in workforce development and leadership training, even longstanding cultural institutions remain fragile.



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

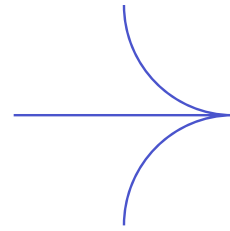
Leadership and knowledge-exchange cohort

An annual leadership development forum would convene directors, choreographers, producers, and administrators from across the region for targeted workshops, peer exchanges, and mentorship opportunities. The program could be structured as a cross-county exchange program, allowing leaders to learn directly from one another’s practices, share resources, and collaborate on regional productions. It could also include peer-to-peer technical assistance, providing coaching in areas such as grant writing, digital marketing, and board development.

Experiential learning opportunities—such as field trips to larger institutions within Indiana or neighboring states—could further equip leaders to adapt proven models for their own communities. This model could be piloted within the performing arts, where the leadership pipeline is most vulnerable, before expanding to include other creative sectors such as music and visual arts. By strengthening management capacity, fostering collaboration, and investing in people as much as in infrastructure, the Uplands can build a resilient Creative ecosystem that ensures organizations like the Peacock Children’s Theatre are supported for decades to come.

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Volunteer and staff capacity for small and medium-sized performing arts organizations



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Cross-county volunteer coordination and incentives



LOCATION: Region-wide

TIER: Capacity building and stewardship

COST: \$\$

Across the Uplands, small performance venues and community arts centers—such as the Mitchell Opera House in Lawrence County and Brown County Playhouse, serve as vital incubators for theater, dance, and live performance. These spaces provide volunteer-powered opportunities for residents to connect through performance, movement, storytelling, and local creativity. Yet, they often operate with fragile infrastructure, minimal staff, and heavy reliance on unpaid labor. To sustain their impact, greater investment is needed in affordable rental rates, baseline staffing, insurance underwriting, and shared administrative systems that would allow these organizations to operate year-round and expand programming.

To strengthen this regional network, the Uplands could adapt and expand the City of Bloomington Volunteer Network model, an existing civic platform that connects residents to service opportunities across nonprofit sectors. A performance-focused volunteer network, modeled on Bloomington’s system, could coordinate recruitment, onboarding, and shared training for performing arts organizations across the region—particularly for

community members seeking meaningful ways to contribute their time and skills. This approach would be intentionally designed to complement, not replace, paid and professional pathways, especially for recent graduates and early-career practitioners emerging from university and training programs. By clearly distinguishing volunteer roles from professional positions, the network could help fill appropriate support functions—such as box office teams, front-of-house assistance, production support, and backstage coordination—while offering recognition, skill-building, and retention strategies that strengthen organizational capacity without undermining the local creative workforce.

Such a network would not only bolster community theaters and dance companies but also serve as shared infrastructure supporting cross-county productions, touring ensembles, and interdisciplinary performance projects. Over time, a Regional Performance Volunteer Network could become a cornerstone of cultural stewardship, linking residents of all ages to creative opportunities in live performance while nurturing civic pride and participation.

Highlight:
Creative West Consortia Professional Development Grant Program

The Creative West Consortia Professional Development Grant Program is a competitive funding initiative, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, aimed at regional or state-wide professional organizations (“consortia”) in the Creative West service region. Its purpose is to build capacity by funding these

organizations to deliver professional development services—such as workshops, conferences, and online resources—for their members and constituents, particularly those who may otherwise lack access to such training. Programming may be virtual or in-person and focuses on topics related to engagement and touring in the performing arts sector.

<https://wearecreativewest.org/grant-award/consortia-professional-development/> →



Lifelong learning

Practices that foster creative aspirations at every stage of life – from young people gaining creative confidence in schools, to midcareer art professionals seeking to bolster skills, to older adults ready to volunteer their time and expertise to cultural organizations. Emphasizing an intergenerational approach, lifelong learning simultaneously benefits young people, aging adults, working families, and practicing artists.

Investment opportunity: Investing in the Uplands’ lifelong learning ecosystem can strengthen intergenerational connections, expand equitable access to creative education, and position the region as a model for lifelong engagement through the arts, innovation, and community well-being. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of a full continuum of creative workforce development—from youth arts education and mid-career support to creative aging and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Key actions include expanding youth and intergenerational programs that build skills and confidence; providing mid-career re-skilling, mentorship, and entrepreneurship training; and increasing access for neurodivergent artists while embedding wellness into creative practice. In light of Indiana’s shifting demographics, investments in creative aging can also leverage older adults as a vital resource, connecting their skills, relationships, and lived experience back into the broader creative sector. Together, these strategies create meaningful retention pathways for post-graduates and strengthen the region’s “missing middle” of emerging and mid-career creative professionals.

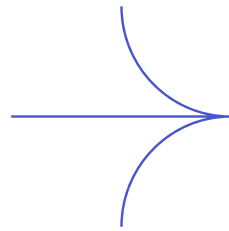
See **Discovery Report** in **Appendix** for examples of lifelong learning projects from elsewhere in the U.S.



Needs, strengths, and possible interventions

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Social and cultural isolation among elder populations



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Support mobility, access, and regular regional programming for creative aging— including artists, artisans, volunteers, and cultural consumers



LOCATION: Region-wide

TIER: Capacity building and stewardship

COST: \$\$

Social and cultural isolation is a growing challenge for older adults across the Uplands, especially in rural areas where limited mobility restricts access to creative and community life.

Investments could enhance transportation options and coordination among cultural organizations, libraries, and senior centers to host rotating creative workshops, performances, and intergenerational events across counties.

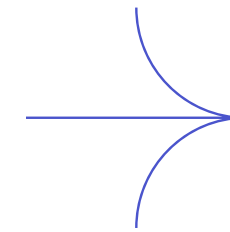
The Brown County Art Gallery already demonstrates the power of this model. With its robust intergenerational arts programming,

including classes, exhibitions, and heritage craft demonstrations, the Gallery brings together youth, adults, and seniors in ways that strengthen social bonds and preserve regional traditions. Expanding partnerships with institutions like this would help ensure that older adults remain central to the region’s cultural life.

National models like Road Scholar, which engage older adults through travel-based cultural learning, illustrate how creative engagement can combat isolation and strengthen well-being. A regional version could include arts-based excursions and festivals that connect wellness, creativity, and community. Strengthening mobility and access would reduce isolation while celebrating older adults as active contributors to the Uplands’ cultural vitality.

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Limited or disconnected pathways for youth to explore creative entrepreneurship and develop entrepreneurial, design, and production skills that prepare them for creativity in careers



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Consolidate multiple youth-focused business and art initiatives into a regionwide “resource clearinghouse” for creative entrepreneurship



LOCATION: Region-wide

TIER: Capacity building and stewardship

COST: \$\$

Expand youth engagement in creative entrepreneurship by integrating arts, design, and business training into existing education and workforce pipelines—building on ROI’s Ready Schools Initiative, its model of student-run businesses, and established youth entrepreneurship programs already operating in the region. In counties such as Daviess and Martin, the CEO Program (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) provides high school juniors and seniors with a yearlong, immersive experience in starting and managing small businesses. These programs offer a strong foundation for expanding intentional creative entrepreneurship, particularly by incorporating arts-, design-, and culture-based enterprises alongside more traditional business models.

Through this expansion, high schools could incorporate creative enterprise pathways that teach business fundamentals through studio arts, craft production, performance, and digital media projects. Students would gain practical experience in product development, marketing, and sales by managing school-based arts ventures such as

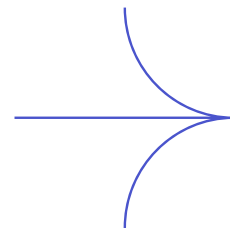
student galleries, pop-up markets, performance series, or design studios—complementing the entrepreneurial skills already emphasized through CEO and Ready Schools frameworks.

The initiative could also integrate STEAM-based makerspaces and innovation labs—such as those emerging at the Jasper–Dubois County Public Library Makerspace and Bloominglabs in Monroe County—to provide hands-on environments for experimentation and applied creativity. After-school enrichment and mentorship opportunities with local artists, designers, and entrepreneurs would further connect students to the region’s artisan economy and cultural industries.

Finally, a coordinated “clearinghouse” approach would elevate opportunities to share, show, and celebrate student work through all-ages community venues, regional fairs, and youth-led exhibitions—linking creative learning to broader cultural tourism and economic development efforts within the Music and Artisan Industry impact areas. By embedding creative entrepreneurship into existing youth business pipelines, the Uplands can cultivate the next generation of innovators who contribute to both economic vitality and cultural life across the region.

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Desire for knowledge- and skill-sharing among people of all ages, in informal environments where cultural knowledge, traditional arts, and creative practices can be exchanged



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Informal hubs for intergenerational creative exchange

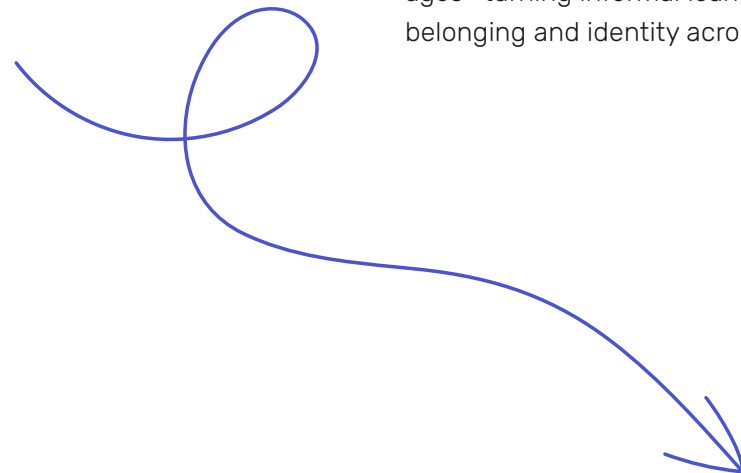


LOCATION: Region-wide
TIER: Creative ecosystem
COST: \$\$

Establish and strengthen informal hubs for intergenerational exchange that support traditional and community-based art forms—such as local fiddlers’ gatherings, quilting circles, and artisan meet-ups—where learning occurs organically across generations. Programs like Traditional Arts Today in Dubois County demonstrate effective models through workshops, demonstrations, and community events that connect master artisans with emerging practitioners and families. Traditional Arts Indiana at Indiana University Bloomington offers an important complementary resource, providing grants, technical assistance, and educational programs that can help strengthen these local networks and expand access to traditional arts across the region.

Nationally, events such as The Old Fiddler’s Convention in Galax, Virginia—established in 1935—demonstrate how informal, intergenerational traditions can evolve into large-scale cultural gatherings. While primarily a competition, the convention’s true vitality comes from spontaneous campground jams and cross-generational collaborations that preserve and celebrate community heritage.

Building on these models, additional investments in the Uplands could expand opportunities for small-grant programs, shared community venues, and partnerships with local libraries, senior centers, and farmers markets to host informal “learning circles.” By celebrating everyday creativity and shared cultural practice, these hubs would sustain regional heritage, strengthen community bonds, and make cultural participation accessible to residents of all ages—turning informal learning into a key driver of belonging and identity across the Indiana Uplands.



The Lifelong Arts INDIANA initiative, developed by the Indiana Arts Commission (IAC) in partnership with the Center for Aging and Community at the University of Indianapolis, evaluated creative-aging programs that engaged older adults across 44 Indiana counties. The research found that participants experienced statistically significant improvements in mental well-being, and especially in rural communities, reported higher levels of both mental and physical health compared to national averages.

“The Arts Are Good For You”

With his 2006 landmark publication “The Creativity and Aging Study: The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults,” Gene D. Cohen, M.D., Ph.D., demonstrated that participation in activities that foster creative engagement and skills mastery in a social environment has positive psychological, physical and emotional health benefits for older adults. Read the full research on the National Endowment for the Arts website. - *From Lifelong Arts Indiana*



Space and place

Practices that design, preserve, or enhance environments, including significant landscapes, architectural heritage, museums, parks and open spaces, and buildings and sites. Space and Place practices elevate a sense of community character and pride – manifesting not only as physical structures but as intangible cultural heritage.

Investment opportunity: Targeted investment in the Uplands’ built and cultural environment brings about tangible quality-of-place enhancements, revitalizing main streets, park trails, community centers, and other significant public spaces. These investments also contribute to skill-building across built-environment disciplines—including architecture and design, construction trades, preservation, and conservation—ensuring that local talent is equipped to sustain and expand this momentum.

Most importantly, such investments strengthen community identity through shared storytelling, adaptive reuse, and regionwide cultural activation. By linking historic landmarks, creative spaces, festivals, and natural destinations, these improvements also bolster regional marketing and tourism efforts. A coordinated promotional strategy, highlighting signature assets such as heritage main streets, artist studios, cultural districts, and outdoor recreation corridors, can amplify visibility, attract visitors, and reinforce the Uplands as an interconnected and dynamic landscape.

See **Discovery Report** in **Appendix** for examples of space and place projects from elsewhere in the U.S.



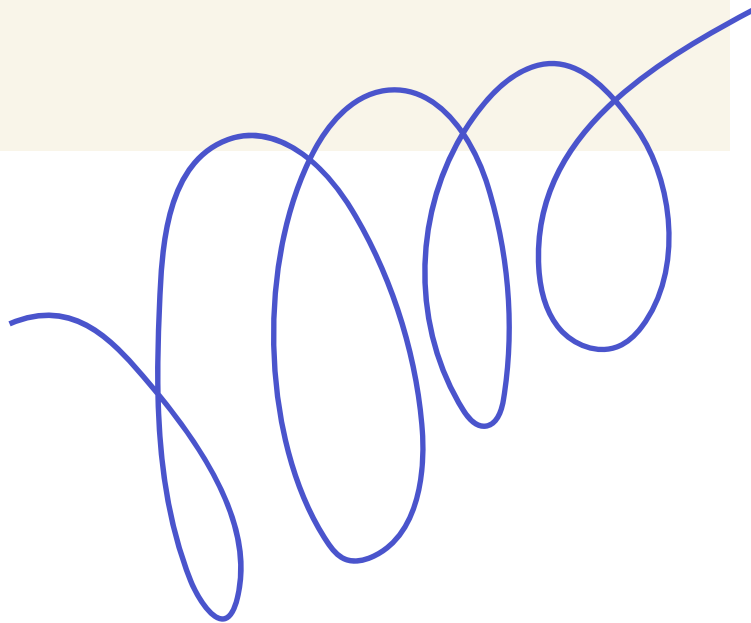
Highlight:
Intangible cultural heritage

The term 'cultural heritage' has changed content considerably in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by UNESCO. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

While fragile, intangible cultural heritage is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue, and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a state, and is as important for developing states as for developed ones.

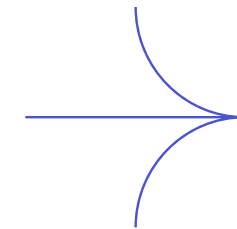
<https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003> →



Needs, strengths, and possible interventions

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Uplands communities have strong historic and cultural assets but face disinvestment and limited preservation capacity



POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Establish a design and preservation corps



LOCATION: Region-wide (rural counties)
TIER: Capacity building and stewardship
COST: \$\$

Establish a Rural Preservation and Heritage Skills Program that combines hands-on training in historic preservation with community-based projects celebrating local identity. In partnership with community colleges, trade guilds, and the IU Center for Rural Engagement, the initiative could function as a "living laboratory" where students and craftspeople learn restoration skills while revitalizing historic barns, main streets, and community landmarks. Complementary programs—such as interpretive signage, heritage festivals, and documentation of folk traditions—would strengthen community pride and preserve both tangible and intangible assets. This approach would create a skilled workforce pipeline while safeguarding the Uplands' rural character and sense of place.

Highlight: Center for Rural Engagement

Working in tandem with the IU ServeDesign Center at the Eskenazi School of Art, Architecture + Design, the Rural Placemaking Studio enhances quality of place within communities by facilitating partnerships with expert IU faculty and students in comprehensive design, creative placemaking, and community arts engagement to uncover, link, and leverage unique assets identified by residents.

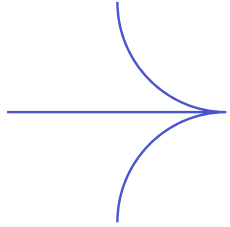
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/7af43baf11ce48eeb780f3c204e552da> →

IDENTIFIED NEED:

Local stewardship organizations lack consistent resources and coordination to sustain and activate public spaces across the Uplands

POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Direct funding to stewardship groups and place-based organizations, prioritizing heritage and quality of place projects



LOCATION: Region-wide

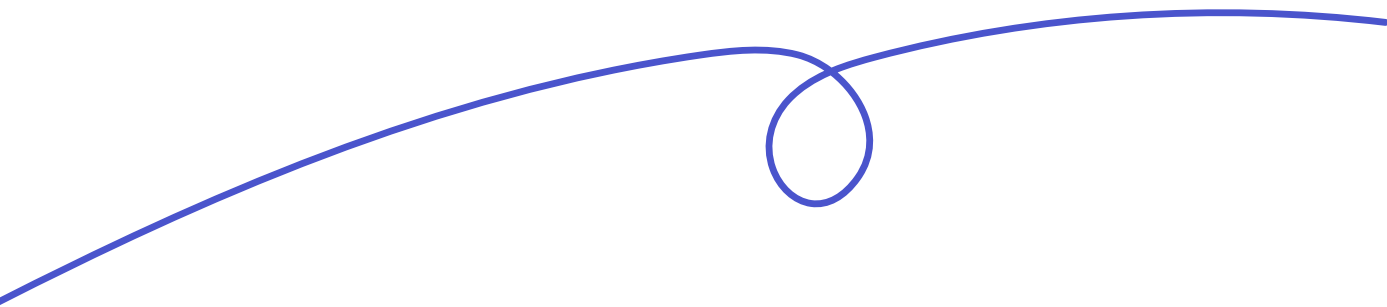
TIER: Capacity building and stewardship

COST: \$\$

Develop a Regional Stewardship and Public Space Activation Fund to strengthen the capacity of local groups that maintain and animate the Uplands' parks, trails, and downtown spaces. This initiative would provide flexible operational support, mini-grants, and shared training for organizations such as Main Street programs, Friends of the Park groups, and regional trail alliances, enabling them to expand cultural programming, volunteer coordination, and year-round activation of public spaces.

A strong local example is The Friends of Brown County State Park, which supports conservation, education, preservation, research, and interpretation of Indiana's largest state park through volunteerism, fundraising, and public engagement. Their work exemplifies how community stewardship not only preserves natural resources but also deepens cultural connection by hosting educational programs, restoration projects, and heritage-focused events that bring residents and visitors together.

By aligning these efforts with broader arts and cultural strategies, the program would promote cross-sector collaboration—linking environmental, heritage, and creative placemaking initiatives. Investing in the stewards who care for and activate shared spaces ensures that the region's cultural and natural assets remain vibrant, accessible, and community-driven for generations to come.

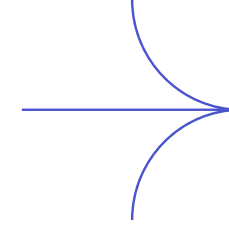


IDENTIFIED NEED:

Urban and rural communities seeking to enhance and reuse public spaces and infrastructures

POTENTIAL INTERVENTION:

Recommit to a regionwide initiative – including planning, funding, and implementation assistance – to enable communities to transform underused spaces through adaptive reuse and pop-up projects



LOCATION: Region-wide

TIER: Creative ecosystem

COST: \$\$-\$\$\$

An Adaptive Reuse and Pop-Up Infrastructure Program could build on ROI's Ready Communities Grant Program, which supports locally driven, place-based revitalization efforts across the Indiana Uplands. While many towns have successfully launched small-scale placemaking projects, such as the Salem Pocket Park (Washington County), Huntingburg's alley activation, and the Avoca Park transformation (Lawrence County), and the new shelter house project at Hindostan Falls (Martin County), these efforts often remain scattered and short-term.

This program would expand the Ready Communities framework to include adaptive reuse and creative placemaking, offering micro-grants, design assistance, and activation funding to repurpose vacant buildings and underused public spaces. By empowering local governments, Main Street groups, and community partners, the initiative would transform dormant assets into lasting cultural and economic drivers—turning historic structures, storefronts, and parks into vibrant pop-up venues, outdoor stages, and exhibition spaces.

Rooted in community pride and supported by ROI's regional infrastructure, this expansion would help unify the Uplands' revitalization efforts under one coordinated system—demonstrating how creativity, design, and reuse can sustain both local identity and long-term rural renewal.

Highlight:
Main Streets Revitalization along a trail route

Magnificent Monon South (MMS) was launched by Radius Indiana with the primary goal of fostering economic growth and community development along the Monon South Trail, which stretches through six key communities. This initiative seeks to highlight the unique qualities and potential of these areas while stimulating local economies and improving quality of life for residents. MMS adopts the Main Street Approach, a proven framework for revitalizing and strengthening neighborhoods. This approach is centered around four core points: Economic Vitality, which focuses on enhancing local businesses and attracting new ones; Design, which emphasizes the improvement of public spaces and the overall aesthetic appeal of the area; Promotion, aimed at marketing the communities and drawing in visitors, businesses, and investors; and Organization, which fosters collaboration and strong partnerships between local stakeholders. By aligning these elements, MMS aims to create a more vibrant, sustainable, and economically prosperous future for the communities along the Monon South Trail.



Part 3: Implementation

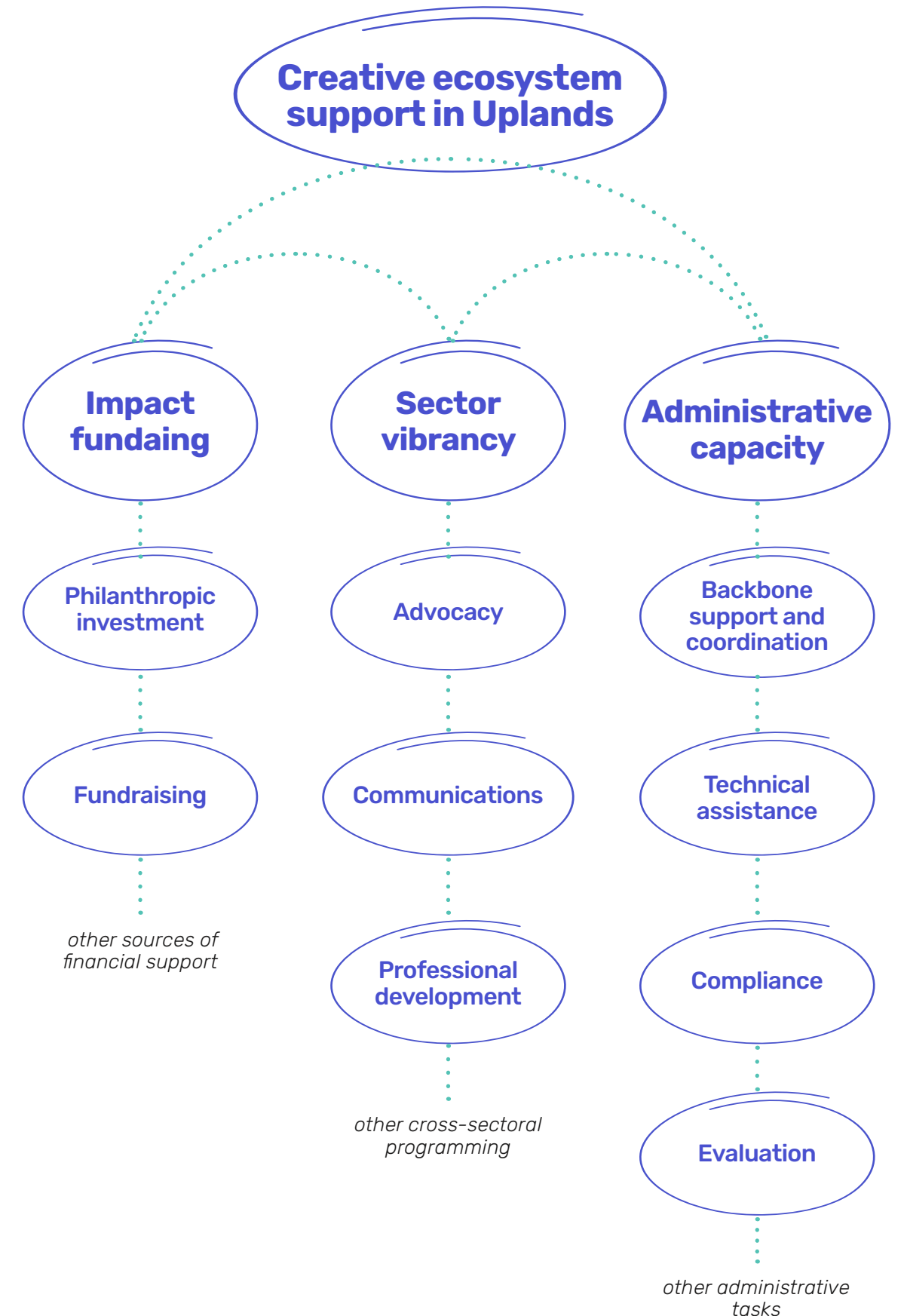
Overview

As part of developing the Indiana Uplands Arts and Culture Strategy, Public Sphere Projects identified a landscape of cultural assets, sector needs, and community priorities. The process also clarified three essential approaches for strengthening the Creative ecosystem: direct funding toward high-impact projects, supporting a vibrant and interconnected creative sector, and building long-term capacity through philanthropic investment, technical assistance, and professional training.

The following section elaborates on the activities, priorities, and administrative structures needed to execute the Strategy, focusing on these three interrelated workstreams:

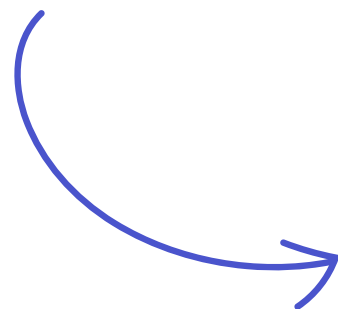
- 1. Impact funding:** philanthropic investment, fundraising, and other sources of financial support
- 2. Sector vibrancy:** advocacy, communications, professional development, and other cross-sectoral programming
- 3. Administrative capacity:** backbone support and coordination, technical assistance, compliance, evaluation, and other administrative tasks

In addition, the following section discusses recurring, sector-wide needs that go beyond any one organization or geography. Summarized as Cross-cutting priorities, these needs will need to be addressed in parallel with advancing the strategy's other identified impacts.



Cultural capacity

An effective Arts and Culture Strategy requires thoughtful and ongoing stewardship. To advance the Strategy, the region will require reliable administrative infrastructure, defined roles, and interagency coordination. Together, these functions in the Creative ecosystem constitute “cultural capacity:” multilayered coordination for implementing the Arts and Culture Strategy in the long term.



Definition: Cultural capacity

The National Council of Nonprofits defines capacity building as being “about [a] nonprofit’s ability to deliver on its mission effectively now and in the future. Capacity building is an investment in the effectiveness and future sustainability of a nonprofit.”

Distinct capacity building projects, such as identifying a communications strategy, improving volunteer recruitment, ensuring thoughtful leadership succession, updating a nonprofit’s technology, or improving how it measures its outcomes, all build the capacity of a charitable nonprofit to effectively fulfill its mission. When capacity building is successful, it strengthens a nonprofit’s ability to deliver on its mission over time, thereby enhancing the nonprofit’s ability to have a positive impact on lives and communities.

Capacity building is whatever is needed to bring a nonprofit to the next level of operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational maturity, so it may more effectively and efficiently advance its mission into the future.”

Cultural capacity in particular may involve several nonprofit and governmental organizations working in cooperation to deliver on the stated goals of a cultural plan.

Cultural capacity requires, at a minimum, a system of inclusive governance, ongoing information management and learning, evaluation, and back-bone staff expertise.

<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/files/media/documents/2023/a-network-approach-to-capacity-building.pdf> →

Building cultural capacity and deploying impact funding are intentionally designed as mutually reinforcing efforts, rather than a linear sequence. Early-stage funding is meant to activate creative work and test partnerships, while capacity-building investments strengthen the administrative, financial, and governance structures needed to sustain that work over time. This approach recognizes that many organizations build capacity through doing—by managing projects, navigating grant requirements, and participating in shared systems—rather than waiting until full capacity is achieved.

This approach recognizes that many organizations **build capacity through doing**—rather than waiting until full capacity is achieved.

Highlight: Community roundtables

The overarching themes discussed in this section of the report came to the surface during multiple intensive discussions among the Uplands’ cultural leaders. Through a series of in-person and virtual roundtables, participants shared their insights and experiences of the Creative ecosystem. The roundtables convened diverse stakeholders across primary impact areas: Artisan Industries, Music, Performing Arts, Lifelong Learning, and Space and Place.

- Participating organizations included:
- Indiana University Arts and Humanities Council
- Eskenazi Museum of Art
- Constellation Stage and Screen
- Brown County Art Gallery / Brown County Art Guild

- Jasper Community Arts / Thyen-Clark Cultural Center
- Lotus Education and Arts Foundation
- Bloomington Parks and Recreation
- Daviess County Arts and Cultural Alliance
- Owen County Community Foundation
- Greene County Economic Development Corporation / Sculpture Trails
- Next Act, Inc. (Astra Theatre)
- Brown County Music Center
- Owen County Art Guild
- Washington County Actors Community Theatre
- Visit Bloomington / County CVBs
- Southern Indiana Development Commission

These represent: performing arts groups, cultural institutions, museums, community foundations, economic development entities, tourism bureaus, and artisan-focused organizations — covering all five impact areas.

Impact funding

As outlined in Part 2 of this report, the Indiana Uplands' grantmaking framework is organized around five interrelated Impact Areas—Artisan Industry, Music, Performing Arts, Space and Place, and Lifelong Learning — that reflect the region's strengths, community aspirations, and shared priorities across the creative sector.

Regardless of the eventual funding source—whether through Lilly Endowment Inc., Regional Opportunity Initiatives, local community foundations, tourism bureaus, municipal partners, or private-sector investment—effective grantmaking requires a transparent, well-managed process. This includes application intake, evaluation, compliance, payment processing, and long-term stewardship of funded projects. The oversight necessary for this process, including committee and staff roles, is detailed below.

For this reason, impact funding is structured to be right-sized and tiered, allowing organizations with varying levels of administrative capacity to participate. Smaller or early-stage awards can prioritize program delivery and partnership development, while larger or more complex investments are paired with additional technical assistance, fiscal sponsorship options, or shared administrative support. This design ensures that funding acts as a pathway to stronger capacity, rather than a barrier to entry.

ROI acts as a crucial conduit linking regional partners to state-level funding opportunities, stewarding a diverse portfolio of grant proposals. To elevate the quality of these proposals—and to maximize their long-term impact, whether they receive funding or not—ROI should weave learning and capacity-building into every stage of the grant cycle.

Highlight: Best-practice approaches to equitable grantmaking

A transparent and equitable grantmaking process helps ensure cultural investments in the Uplands advance regional priorities while supporting communities of all sizes. The William Penn Foundation's Decision-Making Framework offers a strong best-practice model that can inform the Uplands' approach. The framework emphasizes clear alignment with strategic goals, assessing organizational and project readiness, and prioritizing community impact and equity. Applied to the Uplands, this means evaluating proposals based on how well they support the five Impact Areas, advance rural and cultural equity objectives, demonstrate feasible implementation plans, and engage meaningful partners. Using a readiness scale—ranging from absent to strong—can help reviewers assess capacity while still encouraging emerging organizations. By making scoring criteria transparent and offering feedback loops to applicants, ROI can build a more accessible and inclusive funding environment. This structured approach strengthens decision-making, increases fairness, and ensures that investments meaningfully advance the region's long-term creative and economic goals.

Sector vibrancy

A growing and vibrant creative sector is the result of an intentional, mutually-supportive system of advocacy, donor engagement, convening, networking, and access to technical resources. Among these, advocacy is perhaps the most urgently needed.

Advocacy and philanthropy

While this body of recommendations was initially tied to pledged grant funding from Lilly Endowment Inc., it should be noted that they are independent of the source of funding. Put another way, the impact areas can and should be supported through philanthropic funds (and other mechanisms, as addressed below) beyond the Lilly Endowment pledge. The Lilly Endowment funding ought to be seen not as the only, primary, or final investment in

the creative sector but, rather, as seed funding that can stimulate further co-investment from regional philanthropy.

Consistent advocacy efforts — such as the case presented in this report — are required to engage these funders as long-term partners in enhancing the creative sector and stimulating the regional creative economy. The capacity required for such an advocacy campaign is addressed below.

Convening and technical assistance

ROI has already demonstrated its convening ability throughout the cultural planning process. Throughout the planning phases, multiple stakeholder segments gathered to inform the plan. A byproduct of these gatherings was not only direct input into the plan, but an emerging community of practice that shared programmatic updates with one another, weighed in on common challenges, and identified overlaps and opportunities for collaboration across the sector. Stakeholders repeatedly called for more such convenings — formal and informal occasions to gather, learn, and share.

A vibrant sector thrives through convenings. They are particularly important in a geographically large and dispersed region, where such opportunities may be few. It is the recommendation of this report that a regular series of convenings — both for the sector overall and segmented by typology and geography — be hosted by ROI. The staff and governance capacity needed in order to coordinate these is discussed below in Implementation Capacity.

Likewise, ROI can play a pivotal role in coordinating technical assistance for arts and culture organizations across the Indiana Uplands. This support may include helping small creative enterprises navigate legal and business formation needs, connecting communities with expertise in construction, preservation, and real estate development, and providing access to relevant professional services.

Administrative and operational implications

As recommended in this strategy, this backbone capacity may be housed within Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI), the region’s leading intermediary for cross-county coordination and rural development. While many organizations—including Indiana University, local arts organizations, community foundations, and county cultural partners—contribute important leadership roles, ROI is uniquely equipped to steward this work. Its regional mandate, trusted relationships, and history of administering multi-county initiatives position it as the natural convener and coordinating body for implementing this strategy.

This report recommends the creation of a dedicated Arts and Culture Support Function, housed within Regional Opportunity Initiatives (ROI). ROI’s regional mandate, cross-sector partnerships, and track record in community and economic development make it the most well-positioned entity to steward this role on behalf of the Uplands.



Staffing and governance

To fully leverage READI 2.0 resources and strengthen the Indiana Uplands’ rich ecosystem of cultural assets, the region requires dedicated management and oversight capacity. While many nonprofit organizations, municipal partners, and creative enterprises support cultural activity across the Uplands, there is currently no unified, regionwide coordination structure or backbone organization focused specifically on arts and culture. As a result, philanthropic engagement, alignment across counties, and large-scale cultural investment remain inconsistent.

Core responsibilities of the support function

- This function would lead both administrative and ecosystem-wide responsibilities, including:
- Structuring application intake and review for arts and culture grants
- Ensuring regulatory compliance, reporting, and fiscal stewardship
- Connecting grantees to technical assistance and professional resources
- Convening the arts and culture sector through regional gatherings, workshops, and peer-learning networks
- Coordinating advocacy with elected officials, municipal leaders, and philanthropic partners
- Maintaining and analyzing the Uplands Cultural Asset Inventory, ensuring data informs decision-making and planning

These responsibilities directly reinforce the Sector Vibrancy strategies outlined earlier in this report.

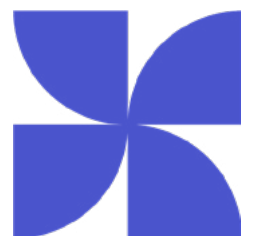
Governance structure

Implementation capacity should be guided by a dedicated Arts and Culture Committee, composed of trusted regional arts leaders. This committee would serve as the primary advisory and decision-making body for cultural investments across the Uplands.

The Arts and Culture Committee may include:

- Leaders from nonprofit arts and culture organizations
- Working artists and creative entrepreneurs
- Representatives from libraries, museums, and cultural districts
- Arts funders and community foundation partners
- Representatives from Indiana University or other educational institutions
- Cultural organizers from rural and underrepresented communities

The committee would review proposals, recommend grant decisions, advise on regional needs, and support the evolution of the cultural strategy over time.



Cross-cutting priorities

With backbone staffing and governance structures established, the next step in building a durable regional Creative ecosystem is to strengthen the cross-cutting stewardship functions that enable the sector to thrive. These stewardship priorities operate in parallel with the administrative responsibilities of ROI's Arts and Culture Support Function and the work of the Arts and Culture Committee. They are essential for ensuring that investments in the Impact Areas—Artisan industry, Music, Performing arts, Space and place, and Lifelong learning—translate into long-term, regionwide impact without diluting the local character, traditions, and practices that define individual communities.

While the *support function* provides coordination and oversight, the stewardship priorities outlined below are intentionally designed as

enabling infrastructure rather than prescriptive systems. Their purpose is to reduce friction, increase access, and share resources across counties—while leaving creative expression, programming, and identity rooted firmly at the local level. Regional coordination is positioned here as a way to support place-based authenticity, not replace it.

Across the Uplands, cultural vitality is inseparable from local history, geography, and tradition. For this reason, regional tools—such as shared platforms, touring networks, or design support—are structured to remain flexible and responsive to local context. Rather than standardizing cultural production, these priorities aim to strengthen each community's ability to do its own work more sustainably, while benefiting from shared learning, visibility, and capacity.

Digital literacy and communications

A digitally fluent creative sector strengthens visibility, expands audiences, and improves sustainability.

Key actions

1. Provide regionwide training in digital marketing, e-commerce, audience engagement, and storytelling.
2. Launch shared communications platforms—regional calendars, event listings, and resource libraries—to support cross-county alignment while allowing communities to maintain their own voices, branding, and storytelling traditions.
3. Offer communications templates, media kits, and shared services that streamline outreach.
4. Publish a regional ROI Arts and Culture knowledge hub or newsletter—a centralized platform that shares tools, case studies, templates, funding alerts, project highlights, and sector updates to strengthen connectivity and coordination across the Uplands.

Regional stewardship and local management capacity

Local stewardship structures ensure that arts and culture remain coordinated and supported at the community level.

Key actions

5. Establish or strengthen county/regional arts councils to convene partners and organize local efforts.
6. Offer consistent operational support in the form of staffing and implementation guidance for cultural organizations and municipalities.
7. Build cross-county coordination models aligned with ROI's regional framework that respect local governance structures and decision-making authority.

Volunteerism and civic engagement

Volunteerism is a defining strength of rural and small-town life across the Uplands.

Key actions

1. Recognize and elevate arts volunteers through leadership opportunities and public acknowledgment.
2. Incentivize sustained service through recognition events or access to regional cultural programming.
3. Partner with civic groups—Rotary, Kiwanis, Boys and Girls Clubs, 4-H, Purdue Extension Offices, Chambers—to integrate arts volunteering into community service pathways.

Peer exchange and knowledge transfer

Shared learning strengthens organizational maturity and fosters cross-county collaboration.

Key Actions

1. Convene an annual Uplands Arts Leaders Forum to share best practices and build regional alignment.
2. Create a peer technical-assistance network for coaching, mentorship, and problem-solving.

Cultural real estate and infrastructure

Support adaptive reuse projects and targeted infrastructure upgrades that reflect local history, scale, and patterns of use, across rural and urban communities.

Key Actions

1. Conduct a regionwide creative space assessment to identify gaps and shared-use opportunities.
2. Develop shared fabrication, production, rehearsal, and storage facilities for artists and arts groups.
3. Advance venue-sharing agreements with schools, libraries, and higher education partners, including Indiana University.
4. Support adaptive reuse projects and targeted infrastructure upgrades across rural and urban communities.

Funding and policy mechanisms

Long-term stability depends on reliable, diversified revenue and enabling policy environments.

Key actions

1. Create a regional arts funding strategy aligned with philanthropic, corporate, tourism, and public-sector partners.
2. Establish predictable grant cycles that allow organizations to plan sustainably.
3. Develop matching-grant programs to incentivize local investment and cross-sector partnerships.
4. Advocate for arts-friendly policies—percent-for-art programs, cultural district designations, zoning for creative reuse.
5. Strengthen access to state and federal funding (NEA, USDA, EDA, IAC) through coordinated outreach and technical assistance.
6. Build a regional policy agenda that elevates the creative economy within state-level planning frameworks.

Together, these stewardship priorities ensure that the Uplands has the systems, infrastructure, and shared capacity required to support creative activity at scale. They complement the governance and staffing structures described above, forming the complete implementation capacity needed to advance the region's cultural strategy and sustain long-term growth.



Implementation priorities

Each cluster is supported by a set of targeted strategies designed to move the work forward in practical and measurable ways. For every strategy, the plan identifies primary owners, existing and potential partners, and an anticipated implementation timeframe—short-, medium-, or long-term—to support accountability and ongoing tracking. An example of an implementation matrix illustrating this structure is included in the appendix.

Artisan industry

- 1.1. Expand public and mobile makerspaces into a connected “Maker Corridor” linking fabrication labs, libraries, and community workshops.
- 1.2. Develop coordinated residency networks that foster skill-based learning, mentorship, and multi-generational knowledge exchange.
- 1.3. Launch a national campaign to position the Uplands’ artisan industries as a regional and cultural

Music

- 2.1. Establish youth music incubators that provide inclusive rehearsal, recording, and mentorship opportunities.
- 2.2. Build a multi-county touring network to connect local venues, festivals, and artists into a shared performance circuit.
- 2.3. Invest in capital upgrades to existing music venues to enhance rehearsal, recording, and performance capacity.
- 2.4. Activate underused community spaces—such as churches, libraries, and Boys and Girls Clubs—as accessible rehearsal and performance hubs.

Performing arts

- 3.1. Create shared production, rehearsal, and fabrication facilities to support theaters, dance companies, and community arts groups.
- 3.2. Establish a leadership and knowledge-exchange cohort to strengthen management, collaboration, and creative direction across the region.
- 3.3. Coordinate a regional volunteer network and incentive program to bolster capacity for small and mid-sized performing arts organizations.

Lifelong learning

- 4.1. Support mobility, access, and regional programming for creative aging—engaging artists, artisans, volunteers, and cultural participants.
- 4.2. Consolidate youth-focused business and art initiatives into a regionwide “resource clearinghouse” for creative entrepreneurship.
- 4.3. Develop informal hubs for intergenerational creative exchange that sustain local traditions and community connection.

Space and place

- 5.1. Establish a regional design and preservation corps that trains residents in heritage restoration and rural revitalization.
- 5.2. Relaunch a regionwide adaptive reuse and pop-up infrastructure initiative to transform underused spaces through arts activation.
- 5.3. Provide direct funding to stewardship groups and place-based organizations that preserve heritage assets and enhance quality of place.

Appendix

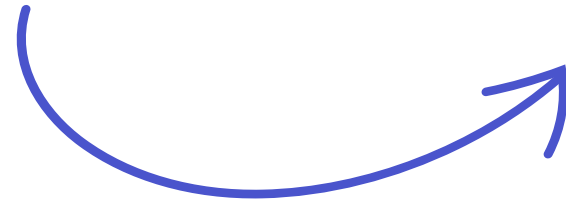


Appendix:

Discovery Report:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kz0toTgjWlO11kGUACQRX7K4x_i27hm/view?ts=6983793f →

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX: The Uplands



1. Artisan industry				TIMEFRAME			
STRATEGIES	OWNER	STATUS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ONGOING	SHORT-TERM (1-2 YEARS)	MID-TERM (3-5 YEARS)	LONG-TERM (5-10 YEARS)
1. Strategic investment in the Uplands' artisan industry can strengthen regional identity, expand creative infrastructure, and elevate craftsmanship as a driver of innovation, entrepreneurship, and cultural vitality.							
1.1. Expand public and mobile makerspaces into a connected "Maker Corridor" linking fabrication labs, libraries, and community workshops.							
1.2. Develop coordinated residency networks that foster skill-based learning, mentorship, and multi-generational knowledge exchange.							
1.3. Launch a national campaign to position the Uplands' artisan industries as a regional and cultural differentiator.							

2. Music				TIMEFRAME			
STRATEGIES	OWNER	STATUS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ONGOING	SHORT-TERM (1-2 YEARS)	MID-TERM (3-5 YEARS)	LONG-TERM (5-10 YEARS)
2. Targeted investment in the Uplands' music ecosystem can expand access, nurture emerging talent, and build the infrastructure needed to position the region as a connected, creative hub for live performance and cultural exchange.							
2.1. Establish youth music incubators that provide inclusive rehearsal, recording, and mentorship opportunities.							
2.2. Build a multi-county touring network to connect local venues, festivals, and artists into a shared performance circuit.							
2.3. Invest in capital upgrades to existing music venues to enhance rehearsal, recording, and performance capacity.							
2.4. Activate underused community spaces—such as churches, libraries, and Boys & Girls Clubs—as accessible rehearsal and performance hubs.							

3. Performing arts				TIMEFRAME			
STRATEGIES	OWNER	STATUS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ONGOING	SHORT-TERM (1-2 YEARS)	MID-TERM (3-5 YEARS)	LONG-TERM (5-10 YEARS)
3. Investment in the Uplands' performing arts sector can strengthen creative infrastructure, build leadership capacity, and expand community participation—ensuring that performance remains a vital hub for creating new imaginative work, engaging broad audiences, and welcoming Hoosiers of all ages, interests, and identities.							
3.1. Create shared production, rehearsal, and fabrication facilities to support theaters, dance companies, and community arts groups.							
3.2. Establish a leadership and knowledge-exchange cohort to strengthen management, collaboration, and creative direction across the region.							
3.3. Coordinate a regional volunteer network and incentive program to bolster capacity for small and mid-sized performing arts organizations.							

4. Lifelong learning

				TIMEFRAME			
STRATEGIES	OWNER	STATUS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ONGOING	SHORT-TERM (1-2 YEARS)	MID-TERM (3-5 YEARS)	LONG-TERM (5-10 YEARS)
<p>4. Investing in the Uplands' Lifelong Learning ecosystem can strengthen intergenerational connections, expand equitable access to creative education, and position the region as a model for lifelong engagement through the arts, innovation, and community well-being. Especially in light of Indiana's projected demographic change, creative aging investments can leverage older adults as a resource; connecting their valuable skills, relationships, and experiences to the rest of the creative sector.</p>							
4.1. Support mobility, access, and regional programming for creative aging—engaging artists, artisans, volunteers, and cultural participants.							
4.2. Consolidate youth-focused business and art initiatives into a regionwide “resource clearinghouse” for creative entrepreneurship.							
4.3. Develop informal hubs for intergenerational creative exchange that sustain local traditions and community connection.							

5. Space and place

				TIMEFRAME			
STRATEGIES	OWNER	STATUS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ONGOING	SHORT-TERM (1-2 YEARS)	MID-TERM (3-5 YEARS)	LONG-TERM (5-10 YEARS)
<p>5. Targeted investment in the Uplands' built and cultural environment brings about tangible quality of place enhancements, revitalizing main streets, park trails, community centers, and other significant places. Investments also contribute to skill-building in built environment disciplines that include architecture and design, construction trades, and preservation and conservation. Most importantly, investments strengthen community identity through shared storytelling, adaptive reuse, and regional tourism—linking historic landmarks, creative spaces, and natural destinations to position the region as an interconnected and dynamic landscape.</p>							
5.1. Establish a regional design and preservation corps that trains residents in heritage restoration and rural revitalization.							
5.2. Relaunch a regionwide adaptive reuse and pop-up infrastructure initiative to transform underused spaces through arts activation.							
5.3. Provide direct funding to stewardship groups and place-based organizations that preserve heritage assets and enhance quality of place.							