



# *Strategic Plan*

2025 - 2030

## *Executive Summary*

A CREATIVE LIFE FOR ALL





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A woman with short brown hair, wearing a light purple tank top, leopard print shorts, and pink gloves, is kneeling on a blue blanket on the grass. She is smiling and painting a colorful mural on a chain-link fence. The mural consists of vertical stripes of red, yellow, blue, and green. A paintbrush is in her right hand, touching the fence. A paint palette and a bag of paint are on the blanket in front of her.

## CHAPTER ONE

# *Introduction*

## 1.1 Who We Are

Indy Arts Council believes every resident should experience arts and culture in a way that nourishes and inspires them. As central Indiana's leading arts advocacy and services agency, we exist to champion arts and culture and realize a creative life for all by supporting artists, arts organizations, and the community.

Founded in 1987, Indy Arts Council advocates for the community funding and support necessary for a thriving arts scene. We connect artists, audiences, businesses, foundations, and organizations with opportunities to explore and expand central Indiana's creative vitality.

Indy Arts Council operates two performance and exhibition spaces, the Indianapolis Artsgarden and Gallery 924. Our free online initiative, Explore Indy Arts, features a comprehensive arts and culture calendar, a non-juried directory of central Indiana artists, a public art database, and more.

## 1.2 Planning Process Overview

Based on evolving community needs and unprecedented challenges during and post-pandemic, the Arts Council partnered with locally based, national planning leaders Next Practice Partners to embark on its most inclusive and comprehensive strategic planning process in over a decade.

This effort, spanning 2023-2024, engaged nearly 3,000 regional stakeholders—artists, arts organizations and administrators, funders, civic partners, and community residents—through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. The process also included national benchmarking, a SOAR analysis, and facilitation by the Next Practice Partners team, leveraging their experience in intersecting arts, culture, parks, and sports to elevate quality of life.

This strategic plan is a collaborative roadmap informed by robust community input, recommended practices, and innovative solutions. It reflects the Arts Council's commitment to regional collaboration, centering inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) in all facets of its mission, ultimately aiming to strengthen Indianapolis as a vibrant arts and culture hub for all.

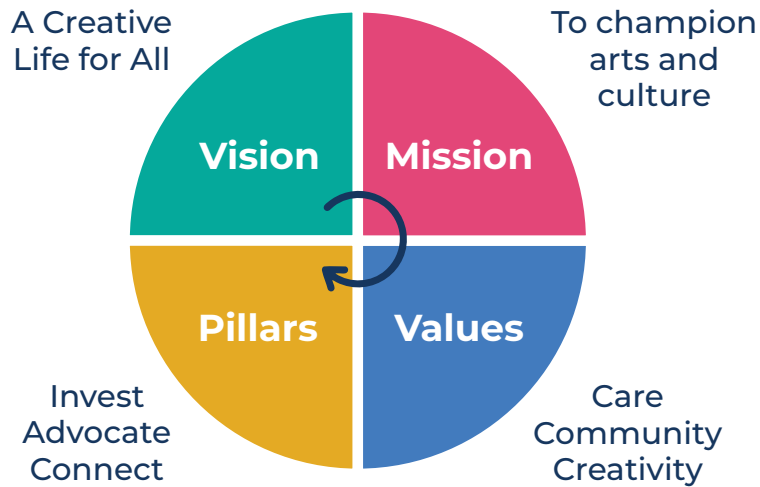
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CHAPTER TWO

*New Framework*

## 2.1 Mission, Vision, Values, Pillars, Priorities, & Recommendations



### 2.1.1 MISSION

Our new mission statement is:



#### *To champion arts and culture*

We're working to help our local arts scene thrive, which means we advocate for community funding and support—and we connect artists to audiences in hopes that everyone in central Indiana who wants to can experience the arts.

### 2.1.2 VISION

Our new vision statement is:



#### *A creative life for all*

We believe everyone should experience arts and culture in a way that nourishes and inspires them. Our vision of a creative life for all drives the work we do to support artists, arts organizations, and the community. When people can connect with the arts, they live more fulfilling, healthy lives—and their neighborhoods thrive.

### 2.1.3 VALUES

Our values are:



## Care, Community, Creativity

Being a true champion of arts and culture means acting in the best interests of the people we serve, and our core values—care, community, and creativity—guide everything we do. We're here to offer support to all artists and arts administrators, build and nurture community, and inspire creativity in the lives of everyone in central Indiana.

### CARE

We put people first and respectfully serve our communities with empathy and compassion.

**We:**

- Seek, welcome, and value every voice.
- Embrace and encourage our diverse community.
- Recognize our own limitations and strive to improve.
- Serve our community with compassion and empathy.

### COMMUNITY

Our community is our highest priority, and we work to uplift artists and the arts by building connections and holding ourselves accountable to a high standard of transparency and trust.

**We:**

- Advocate for the needs and rights of the creative community.
- Create a sense of belonging and ensure all communities are represented.
- Inspire connection through mutual support and collaboration.
- Encourage unity and collective growth.

### CREATIVITY

We work toward the greater well-being of central Indiana by sustainably developing and advancing our arts and culture community. We're committed to uncovering new opportunities and avenues for fostering creativity.

**We:**

- Celebrate self-expression and innovation.
- Elevate all voices to contribute and thrive.
- Lead with imagination and intentionality.
- Nurture the arts for future generations.

### 2.1.4 EQUITY STATEMENT

The Indy Arts Council collaborates with the arts and culture community to serve, celebrate, and value every resident of Indianapolis through the arts. We envision a city where socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability don't prohibit anyone from participating in the arts.



*We believe a robust, successful arts and culture community sustains “a creative life for all” by:*

Ensuring all artists, creative workers, audiences, and students have full access to the creative arts resources of our community and honoring their varied histories, voices, and life experiences.

Creating an environment where all artists and arts organizations have equitable access to arts funding and programs.

Uniting artists and arts organizations with diverse populations to nurture a community where every resident feels welcome in the arts sector.

## 2.1.5 PILLARS

### Invest

Develop greater resources for building and nurturing arts and culture in central Indiana.

### Advocate

Work to provide funding, opportunity, and policy to support the creative community.

### Connect

Bring together artists, audiences, and supporters across diverse communities.

## 2.1.6 PRIORITIES

### Top Five Priorities

*Indy Arts Council's commitment to advancing diverse, equitable, and inclusive representation and access to resources across the local arts ecosystem is embedded across all priorities, strategies, and actions.*

#### 1. Sustainable Funding

**Focus:** Expand and diversify sustainable funding for artists and arts organizations.

**Goal:** Be a top five annual funding source for artists and organizations in Indianapolis.

#### 2. Everyday Arts Access

**Focus:** Ensure that arts, culture, and creativity are accessible to all regional residents, every day.

**Goal:** More art, for more people, in more places.

#### 3. Increased Awareness

**Focus:** Remove lack of awareness as a barrier to engagement.

**Goal:** Be the go-to information source on the regional arts and culture sector.

#### 4. Professional Development & Shared Resources

**Focus:** Increase professional development and services for regional artists and arts organizations.

**Goals:** Make central Indiana a magnet for artists and creative businesses.

## 5. Arts & Culture Destination

**Focus:** Catalyze investments for an arts and culture hub and festival.

**Goal:** To become a top 10 arts and culture destination nationally.

## 2.1.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The comprehensive feedback gathered through this process offers a roadmap for advancing the Indianapolis region arts and culture sector. The recommendations are informed by insights and findings from the community, arts professionals, arts organizations, and key stakeholders.

### Increase Public Awareness and Visibility

There is a significant opportunity to enhance the visibility of the Arts Council and its programs. Many respondents, especially in the artist and arts administration focus groups, expressed a need for increased awareness of available opportunities and the Arts Council's role in supporting the arts community. Improved outreach strategies, including better use of social media, expanded storytelling efforts, and board and staff presence at arts events, will ensure a more connected and informed arts ecosystem.

### Expand and Diversify Funding Opportunities

A recurrent theme across surveys and interviews was the need for more equitable and diversified funding opportunities, especially for underserved artists and organizations. The Arts Council should explore dedicated funding sources beyond city support, such as state and corporate partnerships, while advocating for increased city budget allocations. Additionally, a more accessible grant process and new funding categories would help foster greater financial sustainability for the arts community.

### Improve Communication and Inclusivity in Programming

While satisfaction with the Arts Council's services is generally high, respondents highlighted the need for clearer communication,



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St. Paul Office of Arts and Culture

particularly around grant decisions and program opportunities. Ensuring that services and resources are equitably distributed across all art forms, including literary and performing arts, will create a more inclusive and accessible arts environment.

### **Increase Professional Development and Shared Resources**

A major need identified by the arts sector is for expanded professional development opportunities, including business skills, grant writing, marketing, and financial management. Additionally, exploring offering shared services—such as health benefits, HR support, and mental health resources—would help individual artists and smaller organizations. The Arts Council could explore partnerships with corporate and civic organizations to provide these services at reduced costs, benefiting the entire arts community.

### **Support Affordable Space and Resource Access**

The lack of affordable studio, performance, and exhibition spaces is a critical barrier for many artists, and the Arts Council could consider creating more access to low-cost or subsidized spaces for artistic creation and performance, particularly for artists outside the visual arts. This can include partnerships with local businesses, government agencies, or developers to repurpose underutilized spaces for artistic use.

### **Clarify the Role of the Arts Council**

There is a need for the Arts Council to clearly define its role within the regional arts ecosystem. The Arts Council should focus on its core strengths—advocacy, convening, and funding—while reducing efforts in areas such as direct programming that could be handled by other organizations. A clearly articulated strategic vision will guide the Arts Council's activities and help align its resources with the most impactful priorities.

### **Foster Greater Regional Collaboration and Reduce Silos**

Building a more collaborative and unified arts sector is a key priority for the Indianapolis region. The Arts Council should take an active role in convening stakeholders across different art forms and sectors, creating opportunities for networking, mentorship, and partnership. By encouraging collaboration and reducing competition for resources, the Arts Council can help build a stronger, more resilient arts community.

### **Expand IDEA Initiatives**

The Arts Council's leadership in supporting inclusion, diversity, equity, and access initiatives is widely recognized, but there is room for growth. Expanding these initiatives to ensure greater support for marginalized communities and emerging artists will help create a more inclusive and representative arts sector. Prioritizing outreach to underserved communities will strengthen the Arts Council's commitment to equitable access to resources and opportunities.

By implementing these recommendations, the Arts Council can address current challenges, capitalize on its strengths, and ensure a sustainable and vibrant future for the Indianapolis region's arts and culture sector. These actions will enhance the Arts Council's impact, foster a more inclusive and collaborative arts community, and ultimately support the diverse needs of artists and organizations across the city as the Arts Council champions arts and culture.

An aerial photograph of a community event taking place in front of a large brick wall. A massive mural of Etheridge Knight, wearing a flat cap and holding a cigarette, dominates the right side of the wall. The mural is titled 'Etheridge KNIGHT' and 'IN INDIANA'. A crowd of people is gathered in the street, some sitting on white folding chairs, others standing. A white van with colorful geometric patterns and the text 'SHAPING OUR WORLD.' is parked on the left. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

### CHAPTER THREE

# *Community Profile*

### 3.1 Introduction

The community profile is a critical component of the Indy Arts Council strategic plan, offering insights into the demographic and cultural landscape of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). This analysis helps the Arts Council understand the region's needs, ensuring programs and services are designed equitably to serve both residents and the creative community.

### 3.2 Findings

The community profile reveals key trends shaping the region:

- **Population Growth:** The MSA is steadily growing, with projections showing an increase from 2.17 million in 2024 to 2.44 million by 2039, though at a gradually slowing rate.
- **Aging Population:** The median age has risen from 37.0 in 2020 to 37.6 in 2024 and is expected to reach 38.7 by 2029. Older age groups, particularly those 75+, are growing, while younger age segments are declining.
- **Increasing Diversity:** The region's racial and ethnic diversity is expanding, with significant growth in Hispanic/Latino (9% in 2024 to 11% by 2039) and Asian populations.
- **Higher Income Levels:** The MSA boasts higher income levels than state and national averages, with a per capita income of \$42,972 and a median household income of \$79,790.
- **Underserved Populations:** Challenges persist, including 15.7% of the population living in poverty, a 9.8% uninsured rate, and a homeownership rate of 55.5%, below state and national averages.
- **Arts Engagement:** Strong arts participation potential is demonstrated by above-average engagement in theater, museums, and visual arts, as reflected in the Market Potential Index (MPI).

### 3.3 Key Takeaways

- The MSA is growing and becoming increasingly diverse, creating opportunities to tailor arts programs for changing demographics.
- Higher income levels suggest financial capacity to support arts initiatives, but disparities highlight the need for targeted strategies to address poverty and access issues.
- The aging population underscores the importance of inclusive programming for older adults while maintaining relevance for younger age groups.
- Marion County, as the cultural hub, is critical for engaging the region's diverse communities.

### 3.4 Summary

The community profile underscores the Arts Council's opportunity to build on the MSA's enthusiasm for arts and culture. By addressing socioeconomic challenges and fostering equity, the Arts Council can advance its vision of "a creative life for all." This dynamic, data-informed understanding will ensure arts programming remains accessible, relevant, and impactful across the region's evolving landscape.



Art and Soul 2024 | Photo by KP's Photography

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CHAPTER FOUR

*Learning & Recommendations*

## 4.1 Public Input Summary

<b>1,575</b> household surveys	<b>2,800+</b> participants
<b>806</b> community surveys	<b>50+</b> stakeholder interviews
<b>323</b> sector interviews	<b>125+</b> arts + culture orgs

### 4.1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Indy Arts Council strategic plan is grounded in community voices, ensuring alignment with the needs and aspirations of central Indiana residents, artists, and cultural organizations. The public input summary consolidates insights from over 2,800 participants through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, forming a comprehensive foundation for a plan that prioritizes inclusivity, innovation, and growth.

### 4.1.2 FINDINGS

Statistically Valid Survey: Conducted with 1,570 residents across nine counties, the survey revealed:

- Residents report high participation in local arts (79%), but only 48% feel their needs are fully met.
- Barriers include lack of awareness (46%) and affordability (34%).
- Residents strongly value the arts' contributions to quality of life, education, and community well-being.
- Awareness of the Arts Council is limited (30% familiar with its role), but 79% support private funding for arts.

#### Community and Sector Surveys:

Arts professionals highlighted the need for increased funding, professional development, and equitable resource allocation.

Affordability, accessibility, and communication were emphasized as areas for improvement.

Key priorities include networking opportunities, advocacy, and support for diverse communities.

#### Key Leader and Stakeholder Interviews:

- Stakeholders praised the Arts Council's leadership, advocacy, and role as a connector.
- Opportunities include diversifying funding, increasing public visibility, and clarifying the Arts Council's strategic focus.

#### Focus Groups:

- Artists expressed the need for mentorship, equitable funding, and access to affordable spaces.
- Themes included better artist support, increased community engagement, and visibility for local talent.

#### Key Takeaways

- **High Arts Engagement:** Strong participation in arts highlights a foundation for further growth, though unmet needs and barriers require attention.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Increased diversity in the region underscores the need for accessible, inclusive, and representative arts programming.
- **Strategic Priorities:** Expanding funding, improving communication, and fostering collaboration emerged as key focus areas.
- **Sector-Specific Insights:** Artists and cultural leaders emphasized support for professional development, affordable spaces, and advocacy.

### 4.1.3 SUMMARY

The input showcases a thriving yet evolving arts community. It underscores the need for strategic enhancements in funding, outreach, and inclusivity to meet diverse community needs. By addressing barriers and amplifying support, the Arts Council can strengthen its role as a leader, advocate, and connector, advancing its mission of creating a vibrant, equitable, and accessible cultural landscape for all.



Bicentennial Unity Plaza Mural by Anna Murphy | Photo by Matt Kryger

## 4.2 Benchmarking

### 4.2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Arts Council, in collaboration with Next Practice Partners, conducted a national benchmarking study of arts agencies across the United States. This comparative analysis aimed to evaluate the Arts Council's performance and operations against peer organizations in areas such as budget, staffing, governance, funding, and program offerings. The findings provide insights to strategically position the Arts Council for long-term growth and impact.

### 4.2.2 FINDINGS

#### Organizational Model

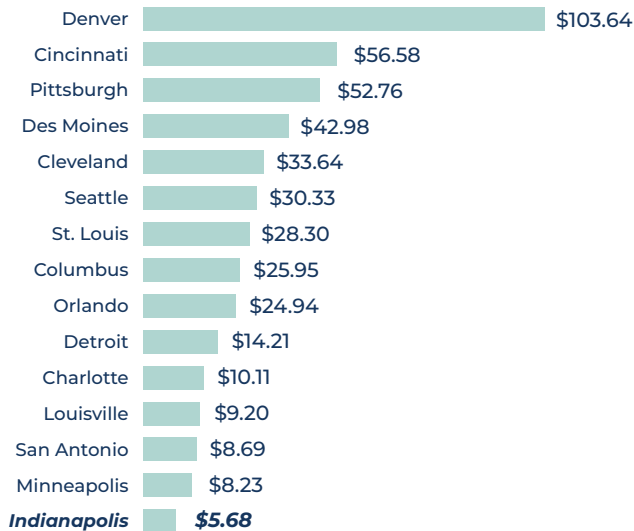
- The Arts Council is a local arts agency (LAA), aligning with 33.33% of peer organizations.
- Many similar agencies operate independently in cities without dedicated arts offices, reflecting the Arts Council's structure.

#### Budget Overview

- The Arts Council has a budget of \$4.99 million, with a per capita expenditure of \$5.68—the lowest among peers.

- Comparable cities like Columbus (\$25.98 per capita) and Cincinnati (\$56.58 per capita) report budgets and per capita spending several times higher.
- Despite its constraints, the Arts Council serves a relatively large population efficiently.

### Budget Per Capita



### Staffing

- The Arts Council employs 15 full-time staff with no part-time employees, while peer agencies like Denver (93 full-time) and Seattle (37 full-time) have significantly larger teams.
- Staffing focuses on key areas such as public art and grants, but adding part-time roles could enhance capacity.

### Board Governance

- The Arts Council has 17 board members, a smaller and longer-serving board (9-year terms) compared to peers.
- Unlike most agencies (73.33%), the Arts Council does not currently include artists or arts organization representatives on its board.

### Funding and Reserves

- The Arts Council receives funding from diverse sources but lacks an endowment. Its operating reserve of \$2.58 million (51.73% of its budget) is

among the highest in proportion but modest in absolute terms.

- Facility revenue (\$400,000) is far below larger agencies like Denver, which generates \$33.9 million (largely due to signature facilities, such as Red Rocks Amphitheater, operated by Denver Arts and Venues).

### Programs and Services

- The Arts Council excels in grants, public art projects, and artist/organization convenings but does not offer services like artist studios or leadership development programs available at other agencies.
- The Arts Council's programs are predominantly free, ensuring accessibility, consistent with most peer organizations.

### 4.2.3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Efficiency Despite Constraints:** The Arts Council operates effectively within a tight budget, serving a large population with fewer resources.
- **Funding Opportunities:** Increasing support from national (NEA) and regional sources, as well as establishing an endowment, could bolster financial sustainability.
- **Governance and Inclusivity:** Adding artists to the board and diversifying governance could strengthen community representation.
- **Expanded Capacity:** Part-time staff roles and new program areas, such as artist studios and leadership development, could enhance impact.

### 4.2.3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

The benchmarking study highlights the Arts Council's ability to deliver high-value services with limited resources. However, to achieve greater impact, the Arts Council can leverage insights to expand funding, diversify governance, and invest in staff and programs. By addressing these opportunities, the Arts Council can enhance its role as a leader in the arts ecosystem, further advancing its mission to create a vibrant, inclusive cultural landscape.



## 4.3 Conclusion

The Indy Arts Council's strategic plan looks to a future shaped by intentional advocacy, visionary leadership, and regional collaboration aimed at enriching the cultural fabric of the Indianapolis region.

This plan, co-created through comprehensive public input, rigorous benchmarking and extensive staff involvement, not only addresses immediate needs but also lays a robust foundation for sustainable growth and innovation in arts and culture.

The challenges of funding, community awareness, and equitable resource distribution present significant hurdles, yet they also open doors to unprecedented opportunities for regional synergy. By embracing these opportunities and leveraging the strategic priorities and recommendations outlined herein, the Arts Council can help foster a collaborative and thriving arts ecosystem that extends across the entire region.

Moving forward, this plan calls for the active participation of a broad network of partners, including artists, cultural organizations, philanthropic entities, businesses, and government entities throughout Indianapolis and beyond.

This strategic plan is not merely a set of guidelines—it is a rallying cry for all who believe in the transformative power of the arts, beckoning us to forge a future where a creative life for all is not just an aspiration, but a reality. Together, we will make Indianapolis a beacon of arts and culture, celebrated both for its creativity and for its collaborative spirit.

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# *Strategic Plan*

2025 - 2030

## *Executive Summary*

A CREATIVE LIFE FOR ALL