

From Heritage to Innovation

SOUTHERN INDIANA'S CREATIVE ECONOMY STRATEGY

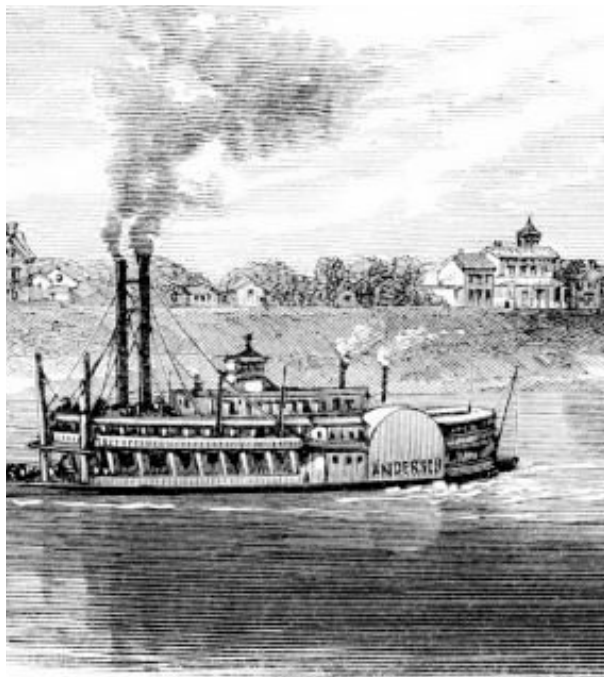
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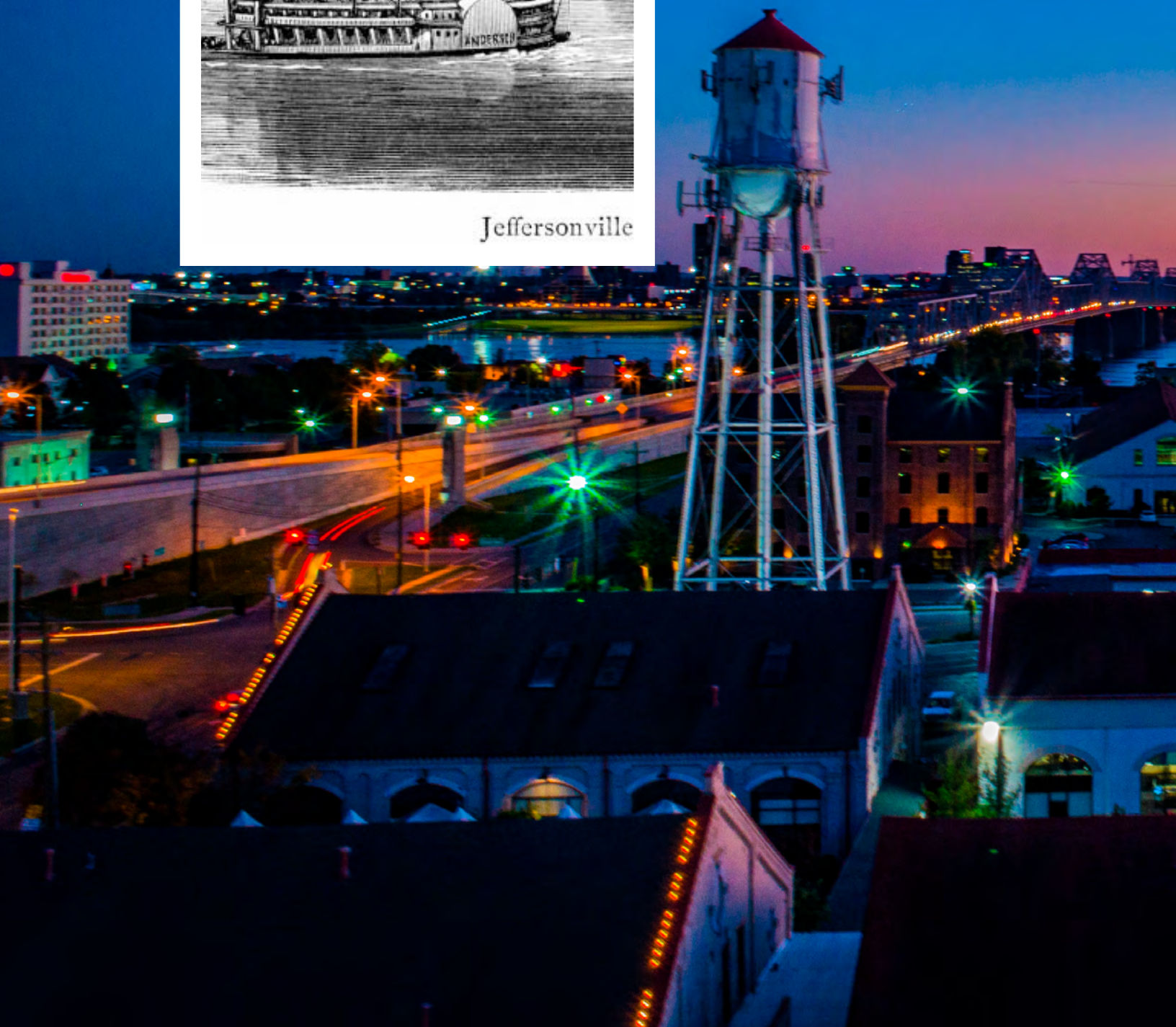
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Jeffersonville



OVERVIEW

Executive summary

This report provides strategies for growing Southern Indiana's creative economy and leveraging arts and culture to drive regional prosperity. It analyzes the arts and culture ecosystem across Clark, Floyd, Jefferson, Scott, and Washington Counties, where nationally significant heritage, a burgeoning outdoor recreation backbone, and community arts organizations create a strong platform for creative economy growth. The work synthesizes interviews and focus groups across the public, private, nonprofit, education, tourism, and creative sectors to identify what is working, where gaps exist, and how to connect efforts across county lines so initiatives add up to more than the sum of their parts. While Indiana's READI 2.0 arts and culture program presents an immediate opportunity, the strategies described in this report are designed to guide implementation well beyond any single grant cycle.

WHY THE CREATIVE ECONOMY MATTERS

Arts and culture are not only essential to Southern Indiana's quality of place; they are an engine for economic vitality. The creative economy is "the people, enterprises, and communities that transform artistic and cultural skills, knowledge, and ideas into economically productive goods, services, and places." Practically, that includes creative industries and workers in sectors ranging from graphic design and architecture to music and the culinary arts. Regions that elevate the creative economy within their community see gains in talent levels, tourism, entrepreneurship, downtown vitality, and economic prosperity—outcomes stakeholders across the Our Southern Indiana region consistently identified as priorities.

VISION

Southern Indiana's vision is to be recognized as one of the Midwest's foremost creative hubs—nationally known as a place where heritage ignites innovation, music and creativity animate communities, and culture drives prosperity. Achieving this vision will depend on regional collaboration, strategic investment, and fully integrating arts and culture into communities so the region's growing cultural vitality translates into sustained economic growth.

WHERE THE REGION STANDS TODAY

Southern Indiana possesses an array of assets: Underground Railroad history, an already established music brand, a system of greenways and outdoor spaces including the flagship Origin Park in Clarksville, connected postsecondary institutions, community champions, authentic main streets, and local festivals. At the same time, persistent challenges constrain progress: funding gaps that stall promising projects, fragmented coordination, uneven access to arts education, and limited region-wide arts infrastructure able to deliver multi-county initiatives at scale. This plan translates those realities into a focused portfolio of strategies and actions.



Imagine.
Empower.
Illuminate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategies for Elevating Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy

The following strategies are organized around seven mutually reinforcing opportunities. Together, they establish the foundation to take action, package the region's best differentiators, and connect cultural vitality to broader economic outcomes.

1

Build the Regional Infrastructure to Deliver.

Stand up shared capacity to plan, fund, program, and measure across all five counties—beginning with a full-time regional Creative Economy Director, a cross-sector Creative Economy Council, a unified regional web presence and calendar, and basic tools for tracking outcomes. This is the prerequisite to delivering complex, multi-jurisdiction projects on time and at quality.

2

Establish an Underground Railroad Freedom Corridor.

Package a multi-county set of sites—Town Clock Church, Eleutherian College, Madison's historic Georgetown neighborhood, museum partners, and more—into a branded corridor with itineraries, curricula, and consistent programs. Align with the National Park Service's Network to Freedom to amplify visibility and unlock technical support, and use artist-led storytelling (film, design, music) to broaden audiences.

3

Get Creative About Funding.

Build stable funding sources for prioritized projects by blending state, local, federal, philanthropic, and other funds.

4

Elevate the Region's Trails as the Spine of the Creative Economy.

Treat the growing trail network as a cultural backbone and integrate the Ohio River as part of the network. Create arts programming along the trails and coordinate regional branding. Pair trail development with the arts so recreation infrastructure doubles as creative infrastructure.

5

Advance Origin Park as the Front Door to Arts and Culture.

Position the next-generation riverfront park in Clarksville as a front door to the region's creative economy through programming and activation strategies.

6

Grow the Region's Music Brand & Identity.

Build on Madison's "Music City" momentum, busking and grassroots platforms, and school-based sound production capacity to create a regional circuit of venues and outdoor stages, a music incubator with rehearsal and recording access, and youth pathways into music technology and stagecraft.

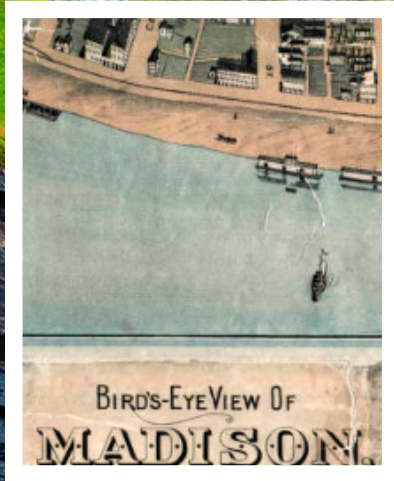
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Harness the Power of the Creative Economy to Drive Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Community Revitalization.

Connect creatives to the region's innovation assets—incubators, employers, and redevelopment projects—so design, media, and maker skills are part of business formation and downtown revitalization. Priorities include linking creative entrepreneurs to training and capital, embedding creatives in cross-sector projects, and aligning with workforce/education partners to turn talent into firms and jobs.

MOVING FROM STRATEGY TO ACTION

Implementation begins with people. The early needs are to hire the regional Creative Economy Director and finalize the council to support this person. This infrastructure will provide the foundational support needed to effectively move forward with the strategies. With intentionality and sacrifice, the region can deliver a cohesive portfolio that grows arts and culture and strengthens economic prosperity for years to come.





Overview and Background

PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

This report synthesizes community input and provides analysis on the region's arts and culture assets, offering a practical guide for strengthening the creative economy across the Our Southern region. The region covers Floyd, Clark, Jefferson, Scott, and Washington Counties. It spans riverfront cities and towns (e.g., Jeffersonville, Clarksville, New Albany, Charlestown, and Madison) and inland county seats and rural communities (e.g., Scottsburg and Salem). This report is written not only for the Our Southern Indiana Regional Development Authority (Our Southern RDA) as the regional convener and owner of the region's Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) programs, but for all stakeholders in the region's economy. This includes funders and partners, arts organizations, Main Street groups, chambers, education and workforce institutions, tourism entities, philanthropy, private employers, and county and city leaders who will champion policies, projects, and investments. The plan will enable the region to compete more effectively for capital, but it also seeks to provide clarity on actions these audiences can take to better leverage arts and culture assets for economic growth.



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\$65M

Indiana's READI 2.0 program, augmented by Lilly Endowment's \$65 million arts and culture investment has created a near-term window for regions to secure meaningful capital for creative-economy projects that will foster greater economic prosperity.

This report was made possible through the Lilly Endowment-funded READI 2.0 arts and culture planning opportunity. Indiana's READI 2.0 program, augmented by Lilly Endowment's \$65 million arts and culture investment via the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), has created a near-term window for regions to secure meaningful capital for creative-economy projects that will foster greater economic prosperity. The State expects regional arts and culture strategies to guide upcoming project submissions. This plan lays the foundation for project development, but the work in these pages is intentionally broader than a single grant program. The region should quickly move toward implementation, as specific implementation details will take time to solidify. Acting now positions the five counties to compete effectively for READI arts and culture funds.

This report is grounded in local voices. It synthesizes interviews and focus groups with artists, business executives, educators, civic and nonprofit leaders, tourism and economic-development organizations, funders, and public officials. It captures input on what is working, where gaps exist, and how to connect efforts across county lines so that initiatives add up to more than the sum of their parts. At the same time, this report does not attempt to capture every good idea or worthy initiative across the region. The strategies described point in the directions of greatest promise rather than trying to map every possible path. These recommendations are those most likely to generate broad and lasting impact—the rising tide that lifts all boats, including the creative sectors and communities not discussed in depth. By concentrating on the most catalytic opportunities, the benefits will accrue to all residents in the region. The goal is a cohesive, investable creative-economy strategy that strengthens communities, drives talent attraction and retention, and adds to Southern Indiana's prosperity.

Methods and Inputs

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The engagement strategy combined in-person kickoff sessions and presentations, targeted virtual focus groups, and interviews to ensure broad, balanced input across the five-county Our Southern region. Engagement efforts were sequenced alongside asset mapping and analysis. The engagement process included six focus groups between May and August 2025, with two in-person sessions in Jeffersonville and Madison followed by four virtual sessions. This work was also heavily informed by various interviews, discussions, and correspondence around specific components of the creative economy, possible priorities, and regional characteristics. Inputs throughout regional engagement efforts were synthesized to understand opportunities and prioritize recommendations.

Valuable input was contributed by dozens of stakeholders from the following constituencies. A list of contributors to this strategic plan is included as Appendix 1.

ASSET MAPPING

This study involved research and analysis of three layers of assets: (1) physical places (e.g., parks, venues, districts, and heritage sites), (2) programs and events (e.g., education providers, festivals, and entrepreneurship supports), and (3) organizational networks (e.g., arts alliances, tourism and economic development organizations, and coalitions). Focus groups and interviews with regional stakeholders validated and refined these understandings, including by capturing on-the-ground realities (capacity, barriers, and opportunities).

The analysis of gaps and weaknesses overlaid those layers to see where strong assets fail to connect or scale. Observations included missing links among assets, capacity bottlenecks or staffing vacuums, governance challenges, and funding constraints. With the help of stakeholder input, assets and gaps were translated into strategies and action steps.

Public sector & regional development.

Mayors and deputy mayors, economic development professionals, and regional chamber leaders.

Private sector & philanthropy.

Corporate community engagement and foundation leaders, community foundation leaders.

Nonprofits, heritage & cultural organizations.

Nonprofit arts and culture executives, cross-sector regional conveners, leaders connected to historic institutions and assets, historical society representatives, and cultural landmark champions.

Education.

Higher education leaders, K-12 educators, career and technical education administrators.

Tourism.

County and city tourism leaders and visitors commission representatives.

Creatives & creative ecosystem builders.

Artists and grassroots music and culture scene leaders.

This project was organized into four integrated workstreams.

1

Economic analysis

of the region involved digging into economic and demographic indicators to identify weaknesses and opportunities in the region. This also included research on the creative industries and occupations to understand under-recognized areas of strength.

2

Engagement

activated a cross-sector set of stakeholders through meetings, focus groups, and interviews to surface priorities, barriers, and ideas.

3

Asset mapping and gap analysis

deepened the understanding of the region's strengths and assets and how they can work together to build outcomes that are greater than the sum of their parts.

4

Strategy and implementation

converted findings into a portfolio of strategies with actions and targets.



Why the Creative Economy Matters

As the goal of this report is to help Southern Indiana strengthen its creative economy, it is important to start with a clear understanding of what that concept means. The creative economy is “the people, enterprises, and communities that transform artistic and cultural skills, knowledge, and ideas into economically productive goods, services, and places.”¹ Practically, this spans five overlapping components: creative industries, creative workers, creative talent developers, creative consumers, and creative resource providers. It includes both the obvious (music, film, visual arts, design, performing arts, etc.) and the less obvious (creative roles embedded in manufacturing, tech, healthcare, and other sectors). The creative economy is, simply put, the intersection of creativity, culture, and commerce.

The creative economy is not a community amenity. It is a must-have—a core factor that determines how successful a region will be at improving economic prosperity. At the national level, arts and cultural industries add over a trillion dollars to the gross domestic product. But more importantly, they are growing twice as fast as the overall economy.² The creative economy is the future, and areas that do not invest in growing it will be left behind by the communities they compete with around the nation.





The Creativity Flywheel

CREATIVE ECONOMY

Creative strength tracks closely with higher incomes across all sectors. Places with deeper concentrations of arts and cultural production post substantially higher average wages for workers throughout the whole economy. The creative economy is not a silo; it permeates industries and communities and lifts them up. The reason for this is perhaps best understood through the Creativity Flywheel.³

The creative economy has the power to directly enhance quality of life and place, talent, innovation, and prosperity. And as each of these pillars is strengthened, it likewise drives improvements in the other three. To oversimplify by using just one flywheel pathway, the creative economy leads to more vibrant communities, which improves talent attraction, which sparks more private-sector innovation, which leads to higher regional incomes.

Quality of life and quality of place are amplified by arts and culture. Creative placemaking animates main streets and riverfronts, extends the business day for local businesses, and boosts tourism.⁴ Cultural events generate significant local spending on dining, retail, and transportation, while raising civic pride and social cohesion. These effects show up in rural and small-town contexts as well as urban neighborhoods.

Talent is a major reason to prioritize the creative economy. Younger workers rank cultural participation nearly as important to their identity as work, and communities with accessible arts and culture retain residents at higher rates.⁵ Arts participation correlates with stronger educational outcomes and higher educational attainment, helping regions both keep graduates and upskill the local workforce. For employers competing in tight labor markets, a visible, active creative scene is a necessary tool for attraction and retention.

Creativity also powers entrepreneurship and innovation. Many of the firms that define modern growth depend on modes of applied creativity such as industrial design, user experience, and branding to translate technology into market adoption. Places with stronger arts and culture footprints have more founders and a deeper pipeline of new firms.⁶ Crucially, the creative economy is also infused in the STEM- and R&D-intensive advanced industries. From mobility to medical devices and semiconductors, these sectors employ substantial creative workers, and the higher-paying advanced industry jobs accompany the job sites that employ designers and artists and other creative labor.

Regions that intentionally strengthen their creative ecosystems unlock durable economic gains that extend far beyond the arts sector itself. This flywheel frames the recommendations in this report, clarifies why the actions matter, and provides a clear line of sight from cultural investments to measurable economic outcomes.



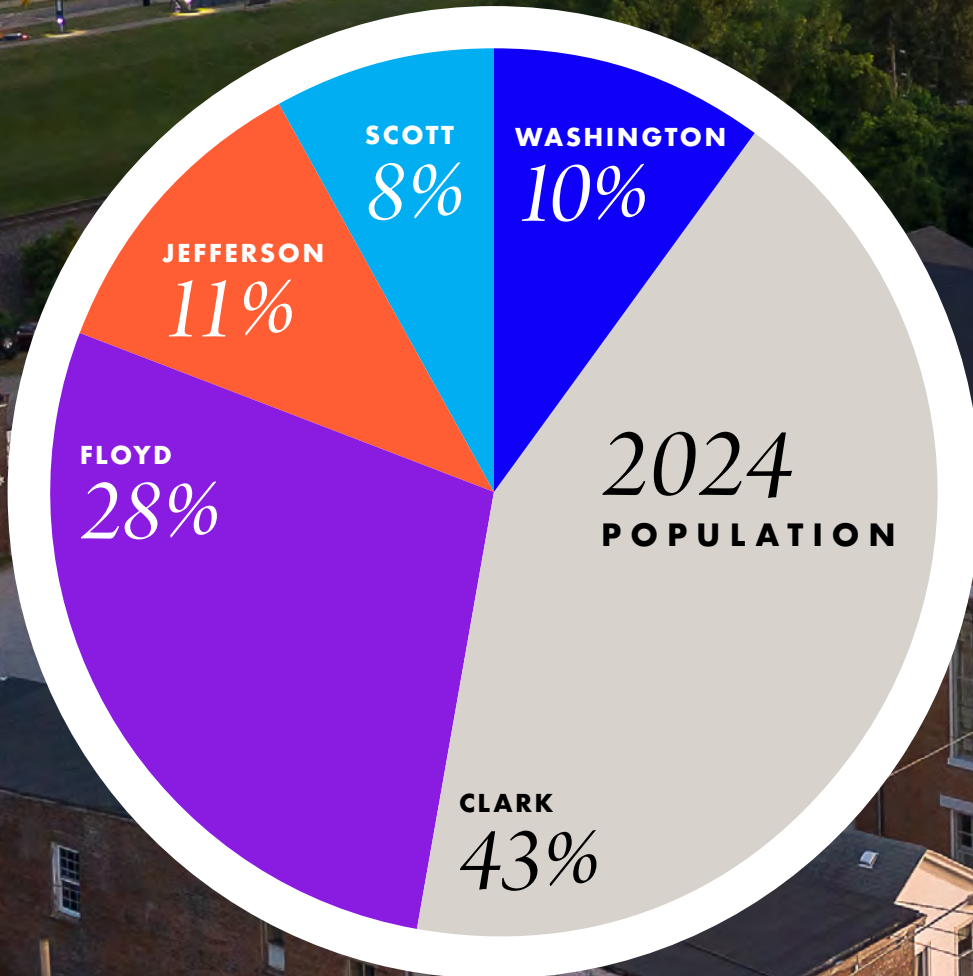
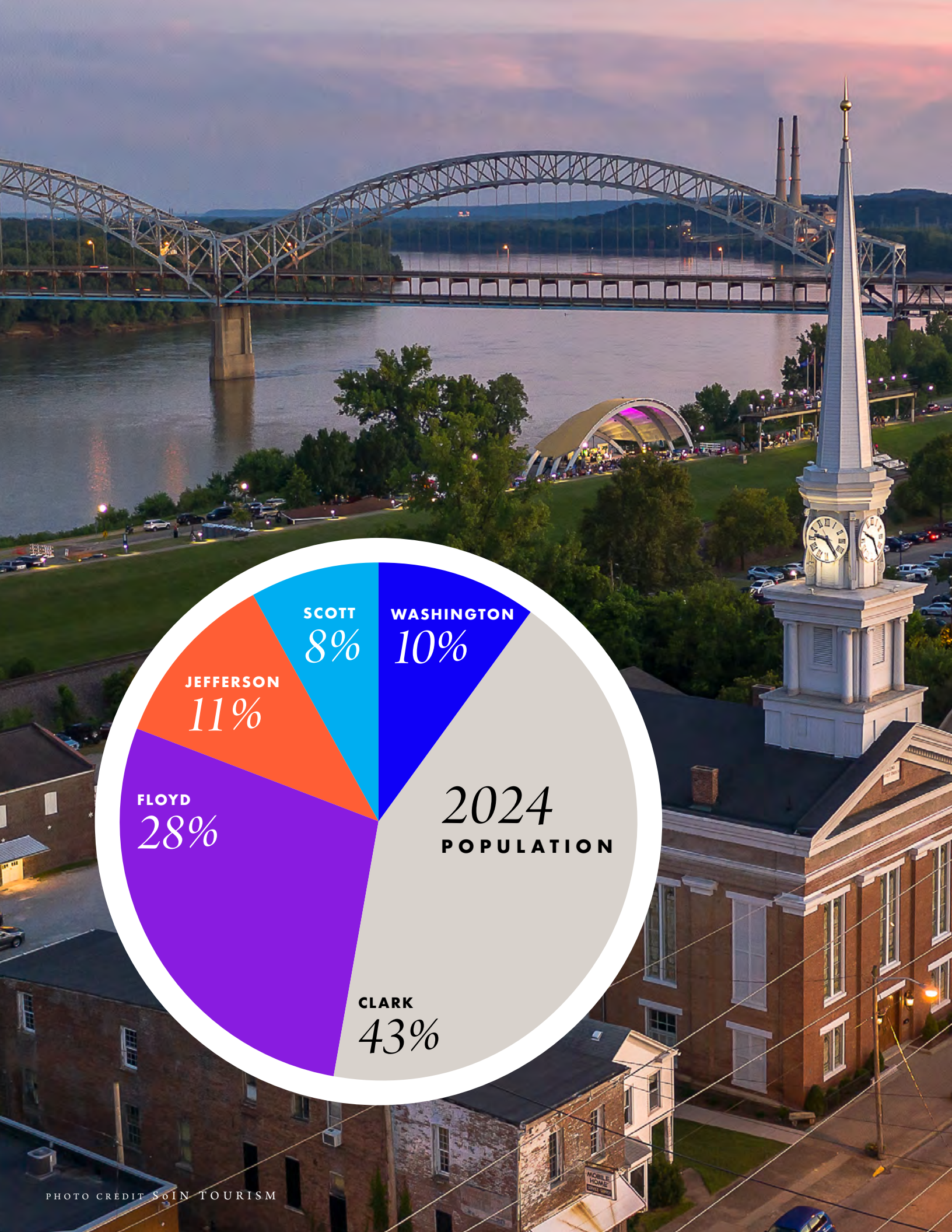
Vision

Southern Indiana's arts and cultural strengths and assets have the potential to shape the future of the region. With its authentic heritage, strong music tradition, vibrant festivals, and expanding trail and park network, the five counties that make up the Our Southern Indiana RDA are uniquely positioned to leverage creativity as a driver of prosperity. To fully realize this potential, the region must embrace a clear, ambitious vision that unites stakeholders and provides a shared sense of direction.

The region's vision is to be recognized as one of the Midwest's foremost creative hubs—nationally known as a place where heritage ignites innovation, music and creativity animate communities, and culture drives prosperity.

By positioning the creative economy as a magnet for talent, tourism, and investment, the region will build a vibrant, connected ecosystem where people increasingly choose to live, work, visit, and create. Importantly, this will lead to greater economic prosperity in rural areas, and will also drive growth in creative fields that transcend the core focus of this report, including visual arts.

Achieving this vision will require sustained collaboration across county lines; intentional investment in infrastructure and talent; and a commitment to more deeply integrate arts, culture, and creative commerce into local communities. When fully realized, Southern Indiana will stand out not only for its cultural vitality, but also for how effectively its communities translate that vitality into stronger economies.





The Current Landscape

READI 2.0

To determine the direction the region needs to go, it is important to first understand its current state. The region's READI 2.0 plan provides a helpful starting point.

Elevating quality of life is a core driver of the Our Southern Indiana RDA's READI efforts. Among other goals, the region's READI 2.0 plan prioritizes increased tourism and the creation of innovation spaces; improvement of gateways and downtown Main Streets within rural communities; and growth in educational attainment, incomes, and population. This builds on the READI 1.0 plan, which included initiatives around regional trails and outdoor recreation, as well as regional marketing and branding. The READI programs have been characterized by investments in signature projects such as the South Monon Freedom Trail, Origin Park, and the Jeffboat redevelopment project, as well as community centers, amphitheaters, and event centers across the five counties. From an arts and culture lens, the region intends to leverage arts and cultural enhancements to improve resident retention and attract new talent.

Southern Indiana's creative economy strategy is intentionally aligned with the vision and priorities that characterize the region's READI plans. For example, READI submissions have emphasized the Ohio River and natural areas as defining regional assets, and this creative economy strategy seeks to leverage those strengths further by better connecting them with arts and cultural opportunities. By tying arts and culture strategies to trails, heritage corridors, outdoor recreation, and more, this plan advances those same themes while embedding arts and culture as a central driver of the experience economy.

The READI plan also underscored the importance of talent attraction and retention, entrepreneurial growth, and quality of place investments. This strategy builds on those commitments by recognizing the power of music, arts, festivals, and creativity to strengthen the region's talent pipeline and entrepreneurial ecosystem. It identifies opportunities for workforce pathways in creative industries and the expansion of hubs that reinforce the region's identity and foster innovation.

ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Since this arts and culture effort is intended to bolster economic development, this report uses economic considerations as a foundation. County-level population data provides helpful insights.

Floyd and Clark Counties comprise nearly three-fourths of the region's population. With almost 300,000 residents, the Our Southern region comprises 4.2% of Indiana's population.⁷ Population density often supports the creative economy, and the Our Southern region is very mixed in its density levels. The five counties' population densities rank 7th (Floyd), 14th (Clark), 29th (Scott), 44th (Jefferson), and 72nd (Washington) in the state.⁸

The five-county region is adding people and income, but at different speeds. Domestic in-migration is one of the best indicators of a community's vitality, as it provides a proxy for a community's desirability by looking at the ratio of people moving in versus exiting the area. All counties recently posted positive net domestic in-migration in 2023-24 that was above the Indiana statewide average, showing the area is attracting new residents from elsewhere. Floyd and Clark Counties lead the region in domestic in-migration, at 1.4% and 1.3%, respectively.

However, overall population growth from 2020 to 2024 shows that the region is gaining total population at lower-than-average rates. Clark County is the growth engine, with 5.3% population growth over four years, followed by Floyd County at 1.8%. In addition to successful community development efforts in these areas, growth in Clark and Floyd Counties also reflects the power of proximity to a major metropolitan area.

Floyd County combines its steady population growth with the region's strongest human-capital and income profile, boasting the highest educational attainment (31.3% of the population ages 25 or older have a bachelor's degree) and per-capita income (\$66,690). In both cases, Floyd County is the only county in the region to exceed the statewide average. Clark County's educational attainment and incomes are below the state average, but its incomes are also growing slightly faster than average.

Jefferson County shows a mixed picture. Overall population slipped (–0.7% since 2020), yet it still eked out positive in-migration (+0.2%) and led the region in per-capita income growth (25.6% since 2018). Madison's isolated location poses an economic challenge, but these figures are further evidence that targeted strategies can reverse negative population trends.

In the interior, Scott and Washington Counties have had modest population growth (1.5% and 0.7% since 2020, respectively), with healthy recent in-migration (+0.8% each in 2024) and close-to-average income gains (22.1% and 24.7% since 2018). However, their per-capita incomes (\$46,902 and \$51,198) dramatically lag the state average by over \$10,000, and their bachelor's degree attainment (12.4% and 13.8%) is over 10 percentage points less than Indiana's. This underscores the critical need for major interventions in talent and private-sector industry, which will be very difficult to address without increased reliance on the creative economy.

Most counties in the region have seen relatively strong income growth, and while Floyd County has had lower growth, its 19.4% change comes off a higher base. However, the education gap is the bigger structural headwind, and only Floyd County exceeds the state average in bachelor's attainment (31.3% vs. 28.8%).

Below is a chart reflecting these figures for the region, with county figures that exceed the statewide average in blue.⁹

County	Population Growth (2020-2024)	Net Domestic Immigration (2023-24)	Percent with Bachelor's Degree (25+)	Per Capita Income (2023)	Per Capita Income Growth (since 2018)
CLARK	5.3%	1.3%	25.5%	\$56,729	24.4%
FLOYD	1.8%	1.4%	31.3%	\$66,690	19.4%
JEFFERSON	-0.7%	0.2%	18.1%	\$54,925	25.6%
SCOTT	1.5%	0.8%	12.4%	\$46,902	22.1%
WASHINGTON	0.7%	0.8%	13.8%	\$51,198	24.7%
INDIANA AVG	2.0%	0.1%	28.8%	\$61,243	24.0%

The creative economy can drive strategies for raising wages, retaining graduates, and attracting talent. Investments in activation of assets, programming, and creative entrepreneurship supports can convert in-migration into durable prosperity, while the education and training ecosystem can help close attainment gaps and supply talent to regional firms.

CLARK COUNTY

With about 128,000 residents, Clark County is the largest in the Our Southern region and the 14th largest in the state.¹⁰ Outside of counties that are contiguous with Indianapolis, Clark County has also had a higher rate of population growth since 2020 than every other county in Indiana. Employment has expanded by 11.8% since 2020.

The sector mix illustrates a diversified base with momentum in services and logistics.¹¹ The largest include Transportation & Warehousing (10,044 jobs), Retail Trade (7,807 jobs), Health Care & Social Assistance (7,228 jobs), Manufacturing (7,204 jobs), and Accommodation & Food Services (5,846 jobs). Each of these five largest sectors has seen between 19% and 35% local employment growth, except for Manufacturing, which has decreased by over 6%. Arts, Entertainment & Recreation is among the fastest growing sectors, but still accounts for just 693 jobs (1.2% of the county's employment). Sector patterns show growth in visitor- and resident-serving sectors, reinforcing the county's positioning for creative-economy activation tied to downtown vitality, hospitality, and programming.

FLOYD COUNTY

With about 82,000 residents, Floyd County is the second-largest county in the Our Southern region and the 21st largest in Indiana.¹² Employment has expanded by 11.4% since 2020.¹³

The county's sector mix is led by Health Care & Social Assistance (7,644 jobs, with 18% employment growth since 2020), Manufacturing (5,731, +5.7%), Federal, State & Local Government (3,847 jobs, +3.9%), Accommodation & Food Services (3,035, +9.8%), and Retail Trade (2,969, +2.5%). Arts, Entertainment & Recreation

remains small (136 jobs) but is one of the fastest growing sectors with a 32% increase in employment. Overall, this shows a diversified local economy with rising service and healthcare anchors and room to expand creative economy activity.

JEFFERSON COUNTY

Jefferson County has about 33,300 residents, or roughly 11% of the region's population.¹⁴ Employment in Jefferson County has grown 9% since 2020.¹⁵

The five largest sectors by 2024 employment are: Manufacturing (2,970 jobs and 7.0% growth since 2020); Federal, State, and Local Government (2,402, +13.0%); Retail Trade (1,888, +5.3%); Health Care & Social Assistance (1,725, +7.5%); and Accommodation & Food Services (1,278, +17.0%). Arts, Entertainment & Recreation remains very small at 29 jobs in 2024, and has declined by 12.1% since 2020. It is worth noting that publicly available data does not include self-employed individuals, so many of the artists and musicians in Madison are likely absent from this data. However, the expansion in hospitality does suggest there is room to better link arts industry growth to downtown activation so cultural activity captures more of the growth already occurring in restaurants, lodging, and retail.

SCOTT COUNTY

With about 25,000 residents, Scott County accounts for about 8% of the region's population.¹⁶ Employment in Scott County has grown 1.7% since 2020, to 8,036 jobs.¹⁷

The five largest sectors by 2024 employment are: Manufacturing (2,563 jobs, a decrease of 1.7% since 2020), Health Care & Social Assistance

(1,250, -1%), Federal/State/Local Government (1,191, +2.4%), Retail Trade (1,019, +5.6%), and Accommodation & Food Services (927, +37.7%). Arts, Entertainment & Recreation has had the fastest rate of sector growth since 2020, but with the smallest sample size—accounting for just 21 jobs in 2024. Scott County is challenged by declines in key industries, with Manufacturing, Warehousing & Transportation, and Real Estate all seeing significant losses. However, with Accommodations & Food Service; Arts, Entertainment & Recreation; and Information as the county's fastest growing sectors, Scott County has an opportunity to capitalize on a modernizing of its economy and drive an economic change that will set it up for more consistent long-term success.

WASHINGTON COUNTY

With a total population of about 28,300 residents, Washington County is by far the least densely populated county in the region.¹⁸ Overall employment has been roughly flat since 2020, rising 0.5% to 5,753 jobs in 2024.¹⁹

The five largest industry sectors by 2024 employment are: Manufacturing (1,208 jobs, a decrease of 6.4% since 2020), Federal/State/Local Government (1,119, -0.2%), Retail Trade (1,039, -5.7%), Health Care & Social Assistance (592, -7.5%), and Accommodation & Food Services (486, +11.5%). Arts, Entertainment & Recreation remains very small at 14 jobs—down 1 job since 2020. While several core industries are shrinking, significant growth in sectors like Professional Services, Real Estate, Construction, and Accommodations & Food Service are encouraging signs for the county.



The Current Approach

TO THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

In general, the Southern Indiana region seems to recognize a vibrant creative economy is beneficial to the community, but that awareness has not yet translated into a groundswell of action. Across the five counties, adopted work plans emphasize connecting existing amenities, building trail linkages, and elevating tourism assets and their marketing. However, while many of the cities and towns have art programs, comprehensive strategies generally have not been developed specifically around arts and culture, nor has the link between arts and culture and economic development been fully realized.

Madison has devoted more attention to public art, with an established Public Arts Commission and the development of a public art master plan underway. The guidelines developed for the Commission emphasize public engagement, clear processes for selection and stewardship, and the role of public art in place identity, social cohesion, tourism, and economic vitality. The Madison Area Arts Alliance and the City of Madison Public Arts Commission, along with the City of Madison Economic Development office, have partnered with developers to advance a series of public art projects.

As for public perceptions, the Community Foundation of Southern Indiana commissioned IU Southeast to conduct a survey of the two most populous counties a few years ago.²⁰ Results show the region still has a lot of work to do to meet the creative needs of its residents. The survey found that less than two-thirds of residents agree that:

- The community offers art & cultural activities that attract visitors (63.6%)
- The community nurtures creativity in children & youth (62.6%)
- They have many opportunities to enjoy diverse forms of art & performance in their community (59.9%)
- The community offers opportunities for adults to engage in creative self-expression (52.8%)
- People at all income levels have access to art & cultural activities (45.2%)

Additionally, in 2020, the Scott County Community Foundation commissioned IU Southeast's Applied Research and Education Center to conduct a quality-of-life community needs assessment.²¹ This work highlights the need for more arts support in the community; the survey that accompanied it found that less than one-fifth of resident respondents believe:

- They have many opportunities to enjoy diverse forms of art and performance in the community (9.7%)
- Their community offers art and cultural activities that attract visitors (12.9%)
- Their community nurtures creativity in children and youth (19.4%)
- However, there were positive findings as well. A majority of Scott County residents (54.6%) believe their community celebrates its history and culture.

As a whole, the region is strong in its tourism efforts and recognition of the strategic importance of trail-and-amenity connectivity. The opportunity now is to evolve from a primarily placemaking and event-focused posture to a more robust creative economy strategy—one that deepens cross-county collaboration and links cultural assets to talent, entrepreneurship, and sector development.

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Counties in the region have higher-than-average concentrations of several industries tied to the creative economy. For instance, there are a lot of used merchandise stores (e.g., antique or thrift stores) throughout the region, with 27 such establishments in Floyd, Clark, and Jefferson Counties driving employment concentrations that far exceed the national average. Screen printing is another cluster in the Floyd and Clark County area, with about 1,000 employees. While not generally considered a creative industry subsector, the volume of civic and social organizations suggests the region has higher rates of volunteerism and civic engagement, a quality that can certainly help support the creative economy. Information on various creative industries and their concentrations in the region can be found on *Appendix 2*.

STRENGTHS AND ASSETS



PHOTO CREDIT SoIN TOURISM



STRENGTHS AND ASSETS

The Our Southern region's stakeholders have identified various high-level strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities that have informed strategy development for the region. The stakeholder engagement and research processes devoted considerable attention to identifying and understanding Southern Indiana's creative economy assets. There are a myriad of established organizations, groups, and physical assets that strengthen the region and can be more fully leveraged for growing the creative economy.

This section includes discussion on many of the thematic strengths and highlights examples of institutions and assets that contribute—or can contribute—to arts and culture-related economic development in different ways. Rather than organizing the asset map as an inventory or a geographic map, the following strengths serve as an asset map by showing how assets can be thematically grouped together to build the foundation for deeper impact.

Arts Organizations, Cultural Districts, and Community Institutions: Entry Points to the Creative Economy

Across Southern Indiana, a network of community arts organizations and cultural districts turns places into platforms and ideas into programming. In Floyd County, the Carnegie Center for Art & History features exhibitions, artist talks, and education tied to regional stories, while New Albany's downtown organizations activate alleys, parks, and storefronts with concerts and pop-ups. In Jeffersonville, the NoCo Arts & Cultural District and The Depot at NoCo serve as visible hubs for creators and music, and cluster public art and makerspaces near Big Four Station Park.

Regional backbone groups extend that reach. The Arts Alliance of Southern Indiana supports artists and presenters across several counties with collaborative programs, youth arts initiatives, and cross-county festivals. SoIN Tourism amplifies this activity through joint marketing that treats the river cities and towns as one cultural destination. The Madison Area Arts Alliance champions the thriving creative sector in Jefferson County.

Community arts infrastructure is increasingly hands-on. Jeffersonville's Maker13 has a reputation that extends far beyond the region, offering fabrication tools and classes that help creatives and entrepreneurs prototype products, stage installations, and launch businesses. Library systems double as cultural producers, hosting residencies and skills workshops that support local venues.

Other organizations, galleries, and groups provide important platforms for featuring and connecting artists. Madison provides a strong example of this. Its ecosystem is bolstered by the History & Art Center, Circe Society Artists, the Southern Indiana Folk School, monthly Madison Area Arts Alliance events, Gallery @ the SPOT artist receptions and gallery talks, CREATIVES monthly meetups, and Madison Art Club, which showcases over 50 local artists. Venues and schools support the local infrastructure, from the historic Ohio Theatre and nearby Hanover College's Parker Auditorium to Madison Consolidated Schools' Fine Arts Academy.

Walkable downtowns are prevalent throughout the region. Salem's courthouse square hosts seasonal arts markets and outdoor performances. Scottsburg and surrounding communities program park stages, school auditoriums, and fairgrounds to keep live music and craft shows circulating year-round. The award-winning Madison Main Street Program encourages makers at the weekly Farmer's Market and provides musical performances through Music in the Park events. The large Madison Cultural District was designated by the Indiana Arts Commission in 2015. Together, these organizations and districts form a cohesive ecosystem: they commission and curate, train and equip, promote and convene—and in doing so, they bring the region's creative fabric to life for the broader public.

Regional Capacity for Collaborative Governance and Civic Leadership

The cultural and community institutions that support the region's identity exist as part of an ecosystem that values and practices civic leadership. Southern Indiana operates as a networked region, with multiple cross-county bodies that plan and deliver projects together. The River Hills Economic Development District & Regional Planning Commission (River Hills), which covers Clark, Floyd, Harrison, Scott, and Washington Counties, manages planning and grant administration for multi-county initiatives. River Hills is also the operator of the Our Southern Regional Development Authority that, among other responsibilities, leads regional economic development efforts connected with the State's READI program throughout Clark, Floyd, Jefferson, Scott, and Washington Counties.

The clearest shared civic fabric exists across Clark and Floyd Counties. The Ohio River Greenway Commission (Jeffersonville, Clarksville, and New Albany) is a standing interlocal model that has coordinated planning, engineering, branding, and programming along the shared riverfront for years. One Southern Indiana (1si)—the chamber and economic development organization serving Clark, Floyd, and Scott Counties—routinely convenes employers, cities, and partners across county lines for business attraction, small-business growth, and policy work. SoIN Tourism markets Clark and Floyd as one destination and coordinates calendars, campaigns, and visitor services regionally.

The region's broader nonprofit and civic infrastructure is equally collaborative. River Heritage Conservancy is a philanthropy-backed organization knitting together riverfront land in Clarksville to serve the region as it develops Origin Park. Align Southern Indiana has facilitated county-to-county compacts such as the Regional Trails Master Plan that links over 20 communities under common priorities. Leadership Southern Indiana is engaging, developing, and mobilizing leaders to serve and transform Southern Indiana. There is much alignment of goals across many of these organizations. Interlocal agreements, standing regional bodies, cross-county marketing platforms, and memoranda of understanding across organizations have supported Southern Indiana's shared priorities.

Philanthropy and community foundations strengthen this shared capacity. The Community Foundation of Southern Indiana (Clark and Floyd Counties), Community Foundation of Madison & Jefferson County, Scott County Community Foundation, and Washington County Community Foundation have a track record of co-funding regional quality-of-place and arts initiatives, often alongside private funders such as the Paul Ogle Foundation and the Caesars Foundation of Floyd County. These institutions provide capital that can help scale multi-county projects and be braided with state tools such as READI/READI 2.0, Next Level Trails, and Indiana Landmarks' historic preservation grants. The structures already in place give Southern Indiana a foundation for future collaborative initiatives.

The Underground Railroad: A nationally significant story.

Southern Indiana's Underground Railroad heritage is both deep and unusually visible—especially along the Ohio River corridor where the free state of Indiana directly faced slaveholding Kentucky. An outsized share of the struggle for freedom occurred in Southern Indiana, and a few anchor sites give the 5-county region national prominence. Jefferson County's Eleutherian College, founded in 1848 by anti-slavery Baptists to educate students regardless of race or gender, is a National Historic Landmark and documented Underground Railroad site. Madison's Georgetown neighborhood—home to a significant free Black community before the Civil War—was a key hub of the Underground Railroad, where residents sheltered and guided freedom seekers. It is recognized by the National Park Service as the first Underground Railroad historic district in the Network to Freedom, and walking tours highlight pre-Civil War homes and churches tied to that history. The Blue River Quaker Settlement near Salem served as another visible safe haven for those escaping slavery. In New Albany, Second Baptist ("Town Clock") Church offers a beacon: its towering steeple once signaled safety to freedom seekers crossing the river. The church is formally listed in the National Park Service's Network to Freedom, and interpretation connects visitors to the lives of local Black residents and allies who defied the Fugitive Slave Act.

The Underground Railroad history is rich with compelling threads, such as the story of Lucy Higgs Nichols, an enslaved woman who worked in the 23rd Indiana Regiment during the Civil War and later settled in New Albany and was awarded a veteran pension. Her story is preserved through exhibits and public art at Town Clock Church and at the Carnegie Center for Art & History. Museum-quality storytelling is already drawing regional and national interest.

Geography is part of the story, too. At the Falls of the Ohio, the river's shallows created one of the most plausible crossing points for enslaved people, making the shoreline from Jeffersonville to New Albany a natural gateway to freedom. Today, the Ohio River Greenway and Big Four Bridge trail network stitch together parks and river towns where interpretive markers, public art, and guided experiences can bring the Underground Railroad narrative to life for residents and visitors alike. Regional leaders have already scoped projects to add design elements to Town Clock Church, install historical markers along the Greenway and at Origin Park, and develop new exhibits—practical steps that would help translate history into a connected heritage experience. Together, these assets position the region to tell a cohesive, place-based narrative about resistance and freedom.

Historic Preservation and Sites

Beyond Underground Railroad sites, Southern Indiana's historic fabric is itself a competitive advantage, offering authentic places that attract visitors and creative enterprises. Madison anchors the region with a National Historic Landmark District of more than 1,800 contributing resources across 133 blocks—the largest contiguous district in the country. Madison's P.A.C.E. (Preservation and Community Enhancement) Program is a model program providing matching grants for property rehabilitation. Historic Madison, Inc. shows the preservation culture runs deep: Madison was an early pilot in the National Main Street program and continues to be recognized for preservation-based downtown revitalization. The community also recently hosted Indiana's statewide preservation conference, underscoring the region's reputation for heritage stewardship and placemaking.

Signature sites showcase the region's architectural range. In Madison, the Lanier Mansion and Shrewsbury–Windle House are Greek Revival landmarks of national significance, while New Albany's Culbertson Mansion State Historic Site offers a rich example of a Second Empire estate.

Other sites have been repurposed or preserved in creative ways that support local placemaking. Madison's 1884 Eagle Cotton Mill has been adaptively reused as a successful riverfront hotel and event venue, illustrating how historic industrial buildings can be catalysts for investment. Jeffersonville's Schimpff's Confectionery (est. 1891) continues to operate with a candy museum and creative demonstrations, while Clarksville's Colgate Clock remains one of the world's largest clocks and serves as a monument for the town.

The region tells powerful stories of history and heritage through an array of institutions that share them with the public. Jeffersonville's Howard Steamboat Museum pays homage to the Howard Shipyards—builders of more than a thousand inland vessels—and preserves a distinctive Victorian mansion tied to the craft tradition. The Jefferson County History and Art Center, Falls of the Ohio State Park's Interpretive Center, the Clark County Museum, the Vintage Fire Museum, and Scott County Heritage Center and Museum all connect the public with the region's history. Salem is home to the John Hay Center, which features the interactive Stevens Memorial Museum, Pioneer Village, and Depot Railroad Museum. Together these institutions provide high-quality exhibits, archives, field-trip destinations, and event spaces that regularly partner with artists, makers, and educators.

Clarksville's Falls of the Ohio serves as the eastern gateway of the Lewis and Clark story, where Meriwether Lewis met William Clark in 1803 and launched their famous Corps of Discovery expedition. The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail was extended in 2019 to include this site, formally adding the Ohio River corridor and Clarksville to the 4,900-mile route. Local sites make the history tangible, including the George Rogers Clark Home Site within Falls of the Ohio State Park, with a reconstructed cabin and interpretive panels. Falls of the Ohio is also currently under federal consideration for designation as a national monument.²²

Beyond marquee sites, the region's preservation ecosystem actively nurtures hands-on craft and small-business vitality. Madison's Schroeder Saddletree Factory Museum, the nation's only restored 19th-century saddletree (wooden frames inside saddles) factory, keeps belt-driven woodworking and heritage skills in public view. The Madison Main Street Program offers grants for improving business signage in the National Historic Landmark District. Local Main Street and facade-grant programs in Jeffersonville and New Albany, combined with formal historic districts, channel resources into storefront rehabilitation and adaptive reuse—helping creative enterprises take root in buildings with character. Indiana Landmarks' training, workshops, and grants further expand capacity across communities.

Indiana Landmarks is also advancing efforts to ensure the region has the skilled workforce and planning expertise needed to sustain its historic fabric, including further Main Street restorations. In collaboration with Ivy Tech Community College, the organization is developing a Historic Building Trades Initiative to recruit and train new generations of workers in masonry, plaster, windows, and carpentry—skills essential to restoring and maintaining historic cultural assets. Cultivation of these important trades needs to be coupled with planning expertise at the local government level to balance land use decisions with the community's character and unique sense of place, as well as incentive-based preservation programs such as local historic district designations to help rehabilitate and protect historic assets.

Together, these assets and organizations provide authentic stages and stories that offer fertile ground for heritage-driven entrepreneurship, creative work, festivals, and preservation-trades education that can support the broader creative economy.

Boats and River Culture

Southern Indiana's identity is inseparable from the Ohio River, and its boatbuilding and steamboat legacy still fuels tourism, storytelling, and its maker culture. In Jeffersonville, the legacy of the Howard family and its Jeffboat shipyard lives on at the Howard Steamboat Museum, housed in the Howards' 1894 mansion. That shipyard lineage produced hundreds of boats for inland waterways and helped seed a regional skill base in fabrication, woodworking, metalwork, and ornamentation that translates naturally into today's creative trades and exhibits. The Jeffboat site's legacy is taking a new form as the foundation for the mixed-use Jeffboat redevelopment project, which will bring visitors, workers, and residents to a vibrant new site.

Across the river, the Belle of Louisville, a National Historic Landmark paddle wheeler, runs sightseeing and dining cruises that animate the Ohio River. River cruising is also popular in Madison, where national cruise lines make regular ports of call. American Cruise Lines now features Madison and Louisville on its Ohio River itineraries, and Madison has new docking facilities built to capture that traffic. Seasonal voyages like the Celebration Belle day cruise from Madison to Cincinnati further diversify offerings and put more visitors on the riverfront—growing audiences and creating opportunities in ports of call for markets, performances, expanded tourism.

The region also stages one of America's most storied power-boat spectacles: the Madison Regatta known as the Indiana Governor's Cup. For more than 70 years, H1 Unlimited hydroplanes have turned the riverfront into a high-energy festival with racing, music, and vendor activations—mixing sport, sound, design, and river culture in ways that showcase local venues and creative businesses. Add in homegrown operators like Rockin' Thunder River Tours, and the "boat economy" becomes more than heritage—it's a platform for events, jobs, and regional brand identity.

Trails and Parks: A Cultural Backbone for the Region.

Southern Indiana's trails and parks form a contiguous cultural backbone that connects towns, natural landmarks, and gathering places across the five-county region. The Ohio River Greenway links Jeffersonville, Clarksville, and New Albany, tying neighborhoods and cultural districts to riverfront festivals and pop-up markets. The Big Four Bridge, colorfully illuminated at night, extends this network into Louisville, expanding audiences and accessibility for events and cultural tourism in Southern Indiana. Anchoring the region are signature natural destinations—the fossil beds at Falls of the Ohio State Park, the bluffs and waterfalls of Clifty Falls State Park in Madison, and the expansive woodlands of Charlestown State Park—each drawing visitors in and connecting them to the region. The natural areas also provide unique backdrops for intersections with music and creativity, with the Falls of the Ohio's Rock the Rocks concert series providing just one example.

Trails are among Southern Indiana's most leverageable regional assets. The Regional Trails Master Plan developed by Align Southern Indiana envisions a connected system across the Our Southern region and into Harrison County, linking 22 communities to destinations, cultural and historical sites, and parks. The plan creates a durable spine for arts, heritage programming, and placemaking, and implementation is underway. The Hanover-Madison Connector Trail is under construction, with support from Lilly Endowment, READI, and the Next Level Trails program.

Origin Park in Clarksville is the region's next-generation anchor, with over 300 acres of reclaimed riverfront being transformed from landfills and brownfields into a destination for nature, recreation, and culture. Plans include a recirculating whitewater course, aerial adventure and zip lines, climbing walls, new trails and paddling access, and an event center overlooking the Ohio River that is already under construction. With over one million residents within a 20-minute drive, Origin Park is poised to become a regional hub for festivals, outdoor performances, public art, and more—positioning it well to support creative economy activity.

The trail network's expansion is accelerating. Inland, the Monon South Trail and the Monon South Freedom Trail will extend 60+ miles from New Albany to Bedford. Portions are completed in portions of Washington County such as Campbellsburg, Salem, and New Pekin, and New Albany's trail segment honors Underground Railroad history. This regional trail system is an engine for talent attraction, tourism, and even entrepreneurship, with the Monon South Trail Pitch Competition seeking ideas for creative trail-connected businesses.

Interior parks and forests deepen the recreational and cultural fabric. The Knobstone Trail—Indiana's longest hiking footpath—threads Clark, Scott, and Washington Counties, connecting sites such as Deam Lake State Recreation Area, Clark State Forest, and Delaney Park. Hardy Lake in Scott County and community lakes and parks in Washington County, such as Lake Salinda and John Hay Lake, offer accessible venues for the creative economy to blend nature and culture while distributing benefits to smaller towns.

Louisville Adjacency and Cross-River Reach

Southern Indiana's location within the Louisville metropolitan area gives the five-county region immediate access to a larger customer base, workforce, philanthropy, and media market. Three of the region's counties—Clark, Floyd, and Scott—are officially part of the metropolitan statistical area, connecting local venues, festivals, and businesses to a metro area of well over a million residents. The Louisville media market likewise covers multiple Southern Indiana counties, expanding the reach of event promotion and tourism marketing across the Ohio River.

Physical connectivity is a daily advantage. The illuminated Big Four Bridge carries walkers and cyclists between Louisville's Waterfront Park and Southern Indiana's riverfront, including Origin Park. Multiple interstate bridges connect the region across the river, creating reliable access between downtowns and the eastern suburbs.

Louisville's cultural gravity boosts Southern Indiana programming. Marquee institutions such as Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts and the Speed Art Museum help attract touring artists and audiences who also explore Southern Indiana destinations. SoIN Tourism, Southern Indiana visitor's bureau, maintains joint calendars and actively markets Clark and Floyd Counties as part of a single urban river destination to capture visitors already in Louisville.

The adjacency also opens doors to a larger philanthropic and corporate sponsorship ecosystem. Louisville-based Fund for the Arts mobilizes private giving for regional arts and directly serves Clark and Floyd Counties, including through a regional Cultural Pass that provides individuals 21 and under free access to over 50 arts and culture-related venues and programs. The Fund for the Arts' Southern Indiana services also include 5x5 and Teacher Arts Grants to enhance arts instruction, community access grants to local arts organizations, the NeXt! Ambassador program to prepare professionals for leadership roles in the region's arts community, and promotion services in collaboration with SoIN.



PHOTO CREDIT SoIN TOURISM

Music: A Signature Sound

Southern Indiana's music scene runs deep. Madison has embraced a clear identity as "Indiana's Music City," supported by the Madison Music Movement—a business-led initiative that pairs coordinated marketing with venue support, live concerts, and paid busking to activate public spaces. The Thomas Family Winery has a longstanding tradition of weekly live music, and other local businesses follow suit. A consistently full calendar of live music attracts fans and puts dollars in artists' pockets, while giving visitors a reason to linger downtown.

While not as emphasized outside Madison, the theme of music ripples across the Ohio River towns. The region features a mix of outdoor stages, amphitheaters, breweries, and other venues that suit everything from emerging acts to regional draws. Festivals and riverfront concerts layer on seasonal momentum, giving local venues steady opportunities to book talent and experiment with new formats.

The ecosystem is reinforced by other elements as well. A roster of musicians helps organizers and venues source local talent quickly; the education system offers programs in music engineering and recording studios; and grassroots platforms such as Madison's Music on the Porch Day turn neighborhoods into stages. These entry points can help young artists test material, build audiences, and learn the business of performing.

A Capable Education and Talent System

Southern Indiana's higher education ecosystem is unusually collaborative. Leaders from IU Southeast, Ivy Tech Sellersburg, Ivy Tech Madison, and Hanover College are connected, and in certain instances the institutions operate with active pathway agreements that take advantage of each other's strategic advantages. New Albany's Prosser Career Education Center ties classroom learning to real projects so graduates can contribute immediately to the region's industries, including in creative fields such as culinary arts, design technology, entrepreneurship and marketing. The career and technical education provider serves high schools throughout the region, and the region's institutions enable students to stack dual credit, industry certifications, and degree options with minimal friction. Upstream from these training providers, Southern Indiana Works offers a powerful array of workforce and employment offerings as the regional Workforce Development Board serving four of the five counties in the region.

At IU Southeast, programs in the arts and media are paired with the Ogle Center to give students production experience and public-facing platforms. The planned Monon South Freedom Trail corridor will run by the edge of the IU Southeast campus, creating more opportunities for students and community members to deepen performing and visual arts connections. Hanover College offers a range of study programs in the arts, including Design, Art History, Creative Writing, Music, and Theatre. Its Lynn Center for Fine Arts Parker Auditorium supports exhibitions, rehearsals, and performances. Coursework and student experiences in creative fields often extend off campus, helping graduates build portfolios and experience that translate directly to creative careers.

K-12 schools add early exposure and practical skill-building. Madison Consolidated Schools initiated a new program in sound and music production and invested in the development of a sound studio. This connects directly to the local music scene, giving students live-sound, production, and business experience that feeds paid gigs and internships. District media labs, theater and performing arts programs, and visual arts departments across the five counties provide student entry points and community connections with the arts. While student opportunities vary widely across districts, art teachers and a small but mighty set of arts education champions play a critical role in exposing students to creative forums.

Taken together, these assets form a connected pipeline that can equip students with both creative and career-ready skills. Additionally, the redesigned high school diploma and launch of Indiana's new Employment Honors Plus Seal,²³ with its emphasis on work-based learning and credentials of value, adds a timely opportunity for Southern Indiana to demonstrate statewide leadership in integrating the arts into career pathways.

Cultural Events & Festivals

Southern Indiana's festival calendar is a year-round engine for foot traffic, spending, and cultural visibility. Harvest Homecoming in New Albany has grown into one of the largest festivals in Indiana, drawing half a million visitors for a week of parades, concerts, booth days, and riverfront activities. Jeffersonville's Abbey Road on the River is the world's largest Beatles-inspired music festival, welcoming tens of thousands to Big Four Station Park each Memorial Day weekend. Madison layers multiple events that pull visitors downtown and to the waterfront. The Madison Regatta combines racing with the Roostertail Music Festival, Ribberfest blends a state-sanctioned barbecue competition with blues headliners, Unbroken Circle Music Festival showcases artists, and the Madison Chautauqua Festival of Art brings 200+ juried artists each fall.

Outdoor concert series throughout the region are also a big draw. Jeffersonville's Jammin' in Jeff series delivers several weeks of free summer concerts on its floating RiverStage and caps the season with Steamboat Nights on the riverfront. New Albany's Bicentennial Park Summer Concert Series further activates downtown on Friday nights throughout the summer. Madison's Music in the Park series adds to the city's music brand.

Beyond the big events, markets, seasonal events, county fairs, and community traditions and festivals keep calendars full year-round. Lanthier Winery in Madison hosts seasonal festivals and gallery shows that merge culinary and visual arts. In Washington County, New Pekin's Fourth of July bills itself as the nation's oldest consecutive Independence Day celebration (dating to 1830), drawing crowds for parades, music, fireworks, and hometown pageantry. Downtown Salem's Friday Night on the Square and Old Settlers' Day animate the courthouse square each September. Other neighborhood and rural festivals like Sellersburg Celebrates! and Scott County's Leota Country Frolic extend activation into smaller communities.

Agritourism is also a cultural driver. Huber's Orchard & Winery in Starlight attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors annually for you-pick seasons, tastings, concerts, and holiday markets—an anchor that ties creative retail and live entertainment to the regional brand. Madison boasts one of the oldest farmers' markets in the state, a forum that blends culinary and creative vendors. Together, these festivals and recurring programs knit the five-county area into a cohesive cultural circuit, reliably bringing residents and visitors into historic downtowns, parks, wineries, and riverfronts and creating dependable platforms for local artists, makers, musicians, and creative businesses to reach larger audiences.

Creative Businesses and Entrepreneurs

The heartbeat of the creative economy is its creative businesses and entrepreneurs, and Southern Indiana has quite a few creative establishments. On the music side, Maxwell's House of Music in Jeffersonville is more than a music store, hosting a range of community programming including lessons, workshops, and shows at its 100-seat theater. Its unique approach won Maxwell's the National Association of Music Merchant's 2024 Innovation Award.²⁴ Nearby, Sister Ray Records adds music-centric retail to a growing cluster of independent businesses. Scottsburg's Moxie Music Center brings music retail, lessons, and events to the northern part of the region. Up the road in Madison, the House of Jane Barbershop offers songwriting sessions and a listening room, bringing together local musicians and nationally-known songwriters in an intimate setting. The standing roster of independent musicians activates the paid busker program, and the Kindred Folk Society adds to the grassroots music scene with events such as Play Music on the Porch Day and weekly Jam Shops gatherings of songwriters, bridging hobbyists and professionals.

The region has many sites and businesses that support creatives and activate Main Streets and other spaces. For instance, the Jeffboat redevelopment project is transforming an industrial site into a flagship mixed-use development that will attract entrepreneurs and creatives. Meanwhile, small businesses throughout the region provide the bedrock for the creative ecosystem. Java Station 56 in Scottsburg is one of several "third-place" coffeehouses and small venues utilizing a landmark space and hosting local creators and performers. The Ink Spot Creative Café fills a similar niche as a coworking and meeting space in New Albany. Jeffersonville's The Laboratory Creative is a shop and business specializing in fabrication and scenic design, creating sets and displays for live events, theater, and film production. Other firms support creative organizations through marketing, branding, and design, such as New Albany's Mind's Eye Creative. Main Street businesses like Salem's Creekside Art Space and Jeffersonville's Pinot's Palette help all members of the public tap into their creative sides with art classes in a social setting.

A robust maker and fabrication backbone helps creatives prototype and scale. Little Golden Fox is a boutique and workshop space in Madison that hosts creative events and offers classes. Maker13 in Jeffersonville provides 3D printers, laser cutters, and CNC tools that artists and product founders use to move from concept to small-batch production, while the adjacent NoCo Arts & Cultural District and The Depot container park turn that creative energy into public-facing markets and pop-ups. Madison takes a different spin on the maker culture, with a 50-plus woodturners cohort.

Foodie culture and unique restaurants are one of the best indicators of a strong creative economy, and culinary entrepreneurship is a proven downtown activator. New Albany's MESA offers a unique chef-driven showcase and live dining experience while maintaining a culinary incubator and training platform, helping cooks test concepts, build brands, and connect with patrons. Nearby, Lady Tron's, Board and You Bistro, and The Exchange Pub + Kitchen prove New Albany is a Southern Indiana foodie magnet. Clarksville's Derby Dinner Playhouse combines dinner and entertainment. Agritourism and destination dining can serve as bridges between cities and towns or urban and rural, as in the case of Huber's Orchard & Winery and Starlight Distillery, Cornucopia Farm between Salem and Scottsburg, and 1894 Lodge in New Washington. Chefs and culinary artists have to hone their skills, and Prosser and Ivy Tech both offer culinary arts programs. The Mesa Kids Cooking School is also training up the next generation of culinary artists.

Experience-driven retailers and tour operators are also part of the entrepreneurial mix and turn culture into bookable product. Rockin' Thunder River Tours in Madison packages the Ohio River as an adventure draw, pulling day-trippers into shops, galleries, and venues. Downtown storefronts and galleries give the public an experience while they purchase art for their homes and workplaces. The Georgetown Drive-In gives a retro vibe, letting drivers take in movies from their cars. The Salem Apothecary and Lyon Parlor Soda Fountain blend culinary arts, historic design, and retail storytelling. New Albany's J&B Magic Shop & Theater combines retail with shows and classes in its 30-seat theater.

All five counties in the region are fortunate to have Main Street areas with character and walkability. These small businesses drive the creative scene throughout the region, reinforcing the case for coordinated programming and cross-promotion of assets.







WEAKNESSES AND THREATS

Many of Southern Indiana's strengths have flip sides that can also be weaknesses. The proximity to Louisville, for instance, can also overshadow Southern Indiana's brand and take attention away from its defining features. Below are several additional weaknesses and threats that have been identified through research and discussions with stakeholders.



WEAKNESSES AND THREATS

PHOTO CREDIT SoIN TOURISM

Collaboration and Geographic Challenges

While the region in general scores high on collaboration, geography sometimes works against it. Many civic organizations serve overlapping but misaligned territories, and there are very few organizations besides the Our Southern RDA that serve this five-county region. This can make joint planning more difficult.

The cultural and market identities also vary widely across the footprint: communities adjacent to Louisville have a shared identity that would be expected with views of the Louisville skyline across the river. Scott and Washington Counties (portions of which reside outside the Louisville media market) are more rural and do not have the shared river identity. Madison, an hour's drive from much of the population center, has more of an independent identity and associates with Cincinnati and Indianapolis in addition to Louisville. Some stakeholders even questioned Madison's inclusion in this study region. The result is a brand and audience fragmentation problem—different travel patterns and local priorities complicate efforts to tell one coherent regional story or introduce programming without duplication.

Transportation gaps and geographic isolation of assets represent another facet of the geographic challenges. The education institutions, rather than serving as downtown anchors, are generally semi-isolated nodes located off interstates or outside of core cultural districts. Other arts and cultural assets have similar challenges, and limited public transit or trolley systems make for less connectedness and contribute to a lack of density in the creative economy.

Another challenge is that collaboration in the public sector can be very uneven. Staff teams frequently report wanting to work across boundaries, but elected officials—especially at the municipal level—sometimes resist cross-jurisdiction projects, even when they would deliver shared benefits. These dynamics slow execution, raise transaction costs, and make it harder to sustain multi-county projects that depend on consistent branding, coordinated fundraising, and long-term governance.

Organizational Infrastructure for the Creative Economy

Across the five counties, the organizational infrastructure to execute new, major programs is thin. There are dozens of capable groups—tourism bureaus, Main Streets, arts alliances, chambers and economic development organizations, historical societies, and more—but little clarity in who is best equipped to lead various cross-county creative economy efforts. Many projects have stalled when their execution is no one's full-time job or part of a job description. Coalitions tend to be episodic and personality-driven, forming around a grant cycle or a charismatic champion, then losing momentum when staffing changes or initial funding ends. A major effort can only succeed if an organization has the mandate, capacity, and funding to own it on behalf of the region.

The practical costs show up everywhere. Branding is inconsistent across counties; calendars and communications are fragmented; data lives in silos; and no one entity is resourced to run the unglamorous but essential work of project management, vendor coordination, and long-term maintenance. Until a backbone function exists—whether embedded in an existing regional body or established via interlocal agreement—the region will keep relying on ad hoc committees to do heavy lifts that really require a dedicated operator with authority, budget, and accountability.

Varying Levels of Public and School Commitment to the Creative Arts

Across the five-county region, arts opportunities for students are uneven—strong in some districts and thin in others. Stakeholders described a pattern in which a school's arts footprint often hinges on one or two educator-champions rather than on systemwide commitment. In Scott County, for example, sources credited a single high-school teacher with driving the breadth of arts offerings and community touchpoints. Sustaining attendance and momentum is challenging without broader institutional support, and dependence on isolated champions leaves programs vulnerable to turnover.

There are structural headwinds that extend beyond the region. School accountability frameworks that prioritize tested subjects and career-specific pathways can crowd out arts and creative education, especially in smaller or rural schools with staffing limitations. Schools in Floyd County have the widest range of student offerings in creative fields, followed by Jefferson County. A listing of arts programs at the region's schools is included as Appendix 3.

Chronic Funding Constraints

Despite enthusiasm and a deep bench of assets, the five-county region faces persistent funding challenges. Relatively low public investment in arts and culture suggests public leaders undervalue the economic benefits of the sector. Public dollars for arts and culture are very limited, and one-time funds do not solve ongoing operating and capital needs. With significant constrictions in property tax revenue and discretionary funds, local leaders have pointed out that arts funding is often the first cut in public budgets. This is already proving true, and some cities are cutting arts and culture budgets by as much as half.

These constraints translate into stalled or delayed projects, even when there is strong cross-county collaboration. The Lighting the Path of the Underground Railroad artistic lighting initiative mobilized partners on both sides of the Ohio River and raised over \$100,000 toward a \$320,000 goal, yet remains in limbo due to a funding gap that prevents implementation. The Scott County Heritage Center and Museum, like several other institutions in the region, operates entirely with volunteer staff. Capital needs at key sites also stack up, and Eleutherian College has struggled to obtain necessary funding for the replacement of a leaky roof that threatens its long-term stability. Even with broad coalitions of public, private, and philanthropic partners, funding is fragmented and episodic rather than sustained, leaving volunteer-heavy groups to shoulder complex projects with limited bandwidth.

Inspiration from Peer Markets

Many regions or communities with similarities to Southern Indiana have seen successful creative economic growth. Southern Indiana recognizes the importance of using insights from other local laboratories to inform the region's future plans. Below are a few examples of programs and interventions that have been effective economic drivers in other areas which helped inform the strategies in this report.

PADUCAH ARTIST RELOCATION PRO- GRAM

(PADUCAH, KY)

Paducah, Kentucky is another city on the banks of the Ohio River, with roughly twice the population of Madison, Indiana. In the 1990s, Paducah's Main Street area (its LowerTown neighborhood) was in steep decline. Vacant houses, disinvestment, and social challenges defined the area. City leaders took a bold approach: invite artists to relocate, offering generous incentives to purchase and restore historic properties.²⁵

Launched officially in 2000, the Paducah Artist Relocation Program offered low-interest loans, rehab support, and zoning flexibility for artists willing to live and work in the district. Managed by the Paducah Renaissance Alliance (a nonprofit Main Street model organization), the initiative recognized the importance of creative entrepreneurs as the drivers of neighbor-

hood revitalization.

More than 75 artists and creative businesses relocated to the area, leveraging just \$2 million in public incentives into more than \$30 million in private investment. This investment had ripple effects throughout the economy, with creative anchors such as the National Quilt Museum, local galleries, and festivals expanding the city's cultural footprint. This earned Paducah international recognition, including a rare UNESCO Creative City designation in 2013.²⁶ Despite being far removed from any metropolitan center, Paducah's population grew 8.4% from 2010 to 2020.²⁷

Paducah has continued to build on this foundation. Downtown and riverfront redevelopment projects are extending the legacy of the original initiative, showing how creative placemaking can evolve into a full-spectrum economic development strategy.

Application to Southern Indiana:

Paducah's story proves that relatively small public investments in creative infrastructure can catalyze massive private investment and national visibility. Strategic, artist-led revitalization sparks long-term transformation. Models such as this can be especially valuable for Southern Indiana's more rural communities.

Inspiration from Peer Markets

NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREEDOM CENTER

(CINCINNATI, OH)

Cincinnati was a central crossing point on the Underground Railroad, where enslaved people risked crossing the Ohio River into free states. Recognizing the national importance of this heritage, civic leaders invested in the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, which opened on the riverfront in 2004.²⁸

The \$110 million center was developed as both a museum and a civic space.²⁹ It features permanent and traveling exhibitions, school programming, and community dialogues around freedom, justice, and human rights. The Center draws over 150,000 visitors annually, and provides an anchor on Cincinnati's riverfront alongside sports stadiums and the entertainment district.

Relevance to Southern Indiana:

Southern Indiana cities and towns hold a rich array of authentic Underground Railroad assets. While these may not equate to a \$110 million national museum, they can serve as a decentralized living museum with scaled-down but powerful interpretive centers and heritage experiences that tie into a national narrative.

THE GATHERING PLACE

(TULSA, OK)

Tulsa's Gathering Place is a 66.5-acre, free riverfront park opened in 2018 and conceived as a civic commons on the Arkansas River.³⁰ Backed by more than 80 corporate and philanthropic partners, the project transformed a little-used shoreline into an impeccably designed, award-winning landscape. In its first full year, the park earned national recognition and recorded over three million visits—triple original expectations.

The financing and governance model is a standout. Gathering Place represents roughly \$465 million in private investment, including the largest private gift to a community park in U.S. history, paired with City of Tulsa infrastructure work (e.g., Riverside Drive reconfiguration) and a \$100 million operating endowment to ensure long-term maintenance and high-quality programming. The public River Parks Authority owns the park, while operations are supported by the endowment and partner contributions. The city has continued to strengthen the riverfront with voter-approved projects.

Programming and placemaking are continuous and intentional: architecturally significant play environments and facilities, gardens and wetlands, and a robust calendar of concerts and cultural events have made this a model for public space that blends nature, play, and culture.

Application

to Southern Indiana

Gathering Place offers a practical model for the Origin Park vision and the broader Ohio River corridor. It shows the power of visionary philanthropy to transform a community through public-sector collaboration. It also reveals the public draw that results from investing in unique and significant design and placemaking, as well as the importance of sustainable revenue streams to ensure spaces are activated with consistent programming—which can often be costly

THE CROOKED ROAD: VIRGINIA'S HERITAGE MUSIC TRAIL

(SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA)

Southwest Virginia's The Crooked Road is a 330-plus-mile driving route that stitches together 10 major venues and over 60 affiliated venues and festivals across 19 counties.³¹ More than a map, it is a non-profit organization with a mission of supporting economic development by promoting the region's rich heritage of traditional music. Its platform markets year-round live music and curates itineraries that turn travel into place-based learning. The trail is headquartered at the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace in Abingdon—the "homeplace of traditional music" and retail gateway for regional artisans—which helps convert trips for music into spending on local craft.

The Crooked Road operates as a regional consortium supported by a staff of two. The organization coordinates marketing, venue alignment, and signature programming like the Mountains of Music Homecoming—a nine-day festival presenting concerts and community events across dozens of towns. This structure allows small venues, jam nights, radio shows, and museums to unify as one coherent destination while maintaining local flavor.

The model intentionally connects music to the broader economy, including by directing participants to other businesses in the region. The Crooked Road has a total direct economic impact of millions of dollars annually and sustains 131 jobs,³² contributing to Southwest Virginia's \$1.3 billion tourism impact.³³

Application to Southern Indiana

Lessons and inspiration from The Crooked Road can be applied to several facets of Southern Indiana's creative economy, from its opportunities for an Underground Railroad heritage trail to its music ecosystem.

It shows the impact of:

1. **Organizing venues, festivals, schools, and jam sessions under a single brand and calendar.**
2. **Using a cultural center and marketplace hub (physical or digital) to convert audiences into local spending in the economy.**
3. **Programming a marquee week for the whole region that routes shows through multiple counties.**
4. **Making instrument-makers, studios, and education programs visible so the supply chain of music (from makers to stages) is part of the visitor experience.**
5. **Amplifying one facet of the creative economy (such as music) to support other media, such as crafts and visual art.**

As with The Crooked Road, the power lies in coordinated marketing, consistent storytelling, and an operating backbone that turns many small stages into one big destination.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Southern Indiana has an array of valuable arts and culture assets, as well as many talented people doing impressive work. At right are high-impact programmatic strategies and actions, informed by the region's stakeholders, that will best leverage existing strengths, address identified gaps, and elevate the regional economy.

1

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Build the Regional Infrastructure to Deliver

None of the strategies laid out in this report will be accomplished without first having people in place devoted to leading their implementation. Capturing the economic benefits from growing arts and culture will require the right organizational infrastructure behind it. The region should take the following actions:

A

Identity the right person to lead regional creative economy efforts.

The region's best strategies cannot scale without dedicated, shared infrastructure to coordinate planning, coalition-building, fundraising, programming, and measurement across all five counties. With its five-county geography and the full-service offerings of its partner River Hills staff, the Our Southern Indiana RDA is well positioned to house this infrastructure as the backbone. The first step is people: Our Southern and River Hills will need to fund and identify a full-time regional Creative Economy Director whose job is to manage the creative economy strategies described in this report. To take advantage of the region's creative economy momentum, this person should be in place before the start of 2026.

Once hired, the director will convene partners and funding sources, own timelines and budgets, support existing arts and culture organizations toward shared priorities, and manage a portfolio of cross-county projects. This person will also oversee the work of others enlisted to lead specific strategies such as Underground Railroad efforts and building the region's music brand and ecosystem.

B

Develop a formal governance and advisory structure.

Develop a formal governance and advisory structure. To collaboratively advise on the implementation of these strategies, Our Southern will need to establish a five-county Southern Indiana Creative Economy Council with representation at monthly meetings from arts, tourism, economic development, education, and private creative sectors. This Council should be stood up simultaneously with the installation of the Creative Economy Director, and members of the Council (even before its finalization) can inform the selection of the Director. The Council will report to the Our Southern RDA and will set priorities, resolve boundary frictions, and align the work across the region to support the Creative Economy Director's execution.

C

Coordinate strategic efforts across the region.

With the formal structure in place, the region will be positioned to drive stronger coordination among the many local efforts. The coalition should oversee the creation of a regionwide digital presence that builds on existing platforms such as SoIN Tourism's well-developed website. This shared web resource should bring together many of the impactful art and culture offerings in one place, providing the public with a regional calendar and eventually a public arts and culture directory and map. Each county should develop a database of cultural assets for each county, which can be combined into a regional database available to the public. This should also involve a shared brand, showing visitors and residents that the region is greater than the sum of its parts.

Coordination will also involve facilitating shared policies and funding streams across the region. The Creative Economy Director, with the support of the newly established council, will need to work with local municipalities, counties, and tourism agencies to align and tackle shared priorities with the help of memoranda of understanding. These could be related to regional promotion of events, live music policies, education system coordination, revenue sharing or local contributions, and more. A stronger visual identity can also be created through public art. Murals, sculpture installations, and community-based art projects not only beautify spaces but also deepen community identities and connectedness. This

can be especially true in small towns and rural areas, and regional coordination must intentionally embrace Southern Indiana's rural communities to ensure they realize the benefits of a thriving regional creative economy.

Regional coordination should also involve Louisville. Designing Local is currently working with Louisville Metro Government to finalize a Comprehensive Cultural Plan for the city. In collaboration with Louisville Metro's Office of Arts + Creative Industries, this will result in a 10-year roadmap for the city's arts and cultural ecosystem. There is no better time to strengthen creative ties with Louisville, and Southern Indiana should seek ways to support Louisville's plans in order to develop future opportunities for collaboration that will benefit the Southern Indiana region.

D

Measure, evaluate, and iterate.

Creative economy growth efforts should be continually evolving and adapting. To determine what is working well and what needs to change, and to tell the story of its impact, it will be important to develop and measure against key performance indicators. The shared infrastructure described here will also be tasked with conducting participant surveys, monitoring foot traffic and ticket sales, understanding spending and pay patterns, developing dashboards to showcase these outcomes, and more. These results will be used to strengthen the region's work.

E

Operate with urgency on an ambitious timeline.

Competition and peer markets are moving fast, and the region will need to act quickly to ensure it is not left behind. Below is the basic timeline the region should follow for its initial year of work. Strategies for funding this are described in the following recommendation.

- **2026 Q1:** Hire the Creative Economy Director; finalize the Creative Economy Council.
- **2026 Q2:** Launch shared regional creative economy website and calendar; initial programmatic efforts are launched.
- **2026 Q4:** Develop key performance indicators and release dashboard for tracking.

With this backbone in place, the region can reliably deliver complex, multi-jurisdiction projects, measure impact, and keep the creative economy growing year after year.

2

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Get Creative About Funding

Equally as important as the necessary staffing infrastructure to support the creative economy is the seed funding to launch it. With very few predictable philanthropic or public funding streams available, the region will need to be inventive, opportunistic, and collaborative in how it finances programs and projects. Below are some tactics the region and its new Creative Economy Council should pursue:

A **Build a stable stream of diverse funding sources**

As READI dollars will be scarce and competitive, Southern Indiana should design every priority program and project so that available public resources (READI, historic preservation incentives, trail program dollars, tourism and placemaking grants, etc.) can be braided with philanthropy and private sponsorship. It will be important for the community foundations to see the local benefit from this work and to be invested in its success. Also, the region should incorporate creative elements into other projects that receive funding as eligible scopes inside larger infrastructure projects so creative add-ons can benefit from shovel-ready capital. Earned revenue through efforts such as VIP passes, discount programs, or trendy merchandise sales can help seed sustainable dollars for ongoing operations. Origin Park provides a model for this, as its planned events center and white-water loop are designed to capture revenues that sustain future operations.

Additional funding sources to explore for creative economy projects could include the following, many of which may not have funds available currently but could present opportunities in the future: National Endowment for the Arts' Our Town program (creative placemaking), Network to Freedom Grant Program (Underground Railroad preservation), U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development program (rural business and community infrastructure), U.S. Economic Development Administration (various), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Indiana Finance Authority Brownfields Programs (assessment and site cleanup that can unlock land reuse for creative economy purposes), the Indiana Trails Program (trail development and construction), and various opportunities through other leading organizations like the U.S. Small Business Administration, Indiana Landmarks, and Indiana Humanities (including its Historic Preservation Education Grant program).

B

Activate corporate philanthropy and sponsorships.

Corporate philanthropy is underdeveloped in Southern Indiana, and the region will need to devote significant attention to making the case for how corporate public investment in the region's arts and culture ecosystem will benefit private industry and help meet their talent needs. The region can package opportunities that businesses can easily support, such as an Adopt-a-Stage program or concert series, artist or musician residencies, student creative apprenticeships, or cobranding of visible assets. Simple seasonal permits and a Trail-Friendly Business program could pull storefronts and restaurants into the revenue flywheel.

C

Develop new regional funds devoted solely to creative investments.

One challenge the region faces is that public funding sources that could be available for arts and culture are frequently routed instead to projects or needs that are deemed more urgent. This is especially true in the current environment, as municipalities and childcare centers are contending with budget cuts and burdens from increased property tax limitations. Working with community foundations, municipalities and county governments, local banks (with their Community Reinvestment Act goals), casino foundations, and major employers, the region should establish a flexible fund for pre-development, small capital, and grants that enable activations of creative economy assets and de-risk early phases.

D

Leverage powerful capital models to rehabilitate Main Street structures and increase creative engagement.

Main Street charm in each county is a strength the region's creative economy should build upon, and Renewing Cities' model for continued Main Street redevelopment and revitalization is one the region should closely explore.³⁴ Sagamore Institute's Commonwealth Ventures is growing the Renewing Cities program to stack Main Street funds and equity alongside bank debt, State and New Market Tax Credits, and National Historic Tax Credits in order to leverage local funds multiple times over for the restoration of downtown infrastructure and buildings at a large scale. Purchased and rehabilitated properties would be held in community trust by the local stakeholders.

Rehabilitated properties can be used to provide creatives with affordable spaces to live and work. Preserved or repurposed vacant buildings should be used as studios, rehearsal halls, and galleries, taking a page out of Paducah, Kentucky's playbook.

An effort such as this requires community champions and is something a handful of more creative community foundations are pursuing around the state. Some regions, such as Northeast Indiana, are growing a regional fund for this purpose, and Our Southern could take a similar approach to Main Street transformations across the region.

E

Tap local revenue tools.

Growing the creative economy will require local “skin in the game.” Southern Indiana can fund a meaningful slice of its creative economy agenda by combining multiple local revenue tools that are available under Indiana law. All five counties have an innkeeper’s tax ranging from 5% to 8%³⁵ which collectively contributes millions of dollars (\$4.1 million in 2024) annually.³⁶ These county-level funds, managed by tourism commissions, are designed to drive visitation and can legitimately underwrite creative programs and arts and culture efforts. It is essential that the region align tourism and innkeeper’s tax strategies with arts outcomes. Even if just 10% of these funds were contributed into a regional arts and culture fund, it would be enough to cover significant programming costs and multiple full-time positions.

Tourism funds can only be used for tourism development and promotion³⁷ (which is compatible with many components of this plan, including focuses on Underground Railroad heritage and music activations). Additional funding streams will need to be identified to cover responsibilities the regional Creative Economy Director position and other priorities. Community foundations can play an important role in this, and there is precedent for their alignment and collaboration across county lines.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) can help finance capital improvements and even serve as the local match on state or federal grants. Beginning in 2028, cities and towns with fewer than 3,500 residents will be able to adopt their own Local Income Tax (LIT) rate for municipal purposes without county approval. That creates a powerful option to dedicate a small slice of LIT to fund creative infrastructure and activations. Until then, any municipality can coordinate with county adopting bodies on countywide LIT expenditure rates that include creative placemaking and destination development.

Locals should be careful not to overlook fees and impact mechanisms that are already in their hands. User fees (parks and facilities), permitting and right-of-way fees, and impact fees tied to new development can help fund creative infrastructure when such features are included in adopted capital plans. Payments in Lieu of Taxes, especially from municipal utilities, can also be earmarked to seed recurring arts activation or maintenance of creative assets.

Sustainability in funding will be imperative for these regional arts and culture efforts to continue to drive economic impact. The region will need to work together to identify the optimal permanent funding stream. Local communities will all need to make financial sacrifices for these regional efforts, but their dollars will be stretched and leveraged into a payoff greater than any one community could realize on its own.

Importantly, funding strategies should ensure support is not limited to large projects in more populous areas, but that resources reach the arts programs and initiatives that directly benefit more rural communities. Also, program funding without the people to shepherd it results in limited impact, so it is important that implementation of these funding strategies is done in tandem with the buildout of the regional infrastructure described in the previous strategy.

F

Seek new state funding mechanisms.

Some funding tools exist in other states but have been underutilized or absent from Indiana's creative economy toolbox. The Our Southern Indiana RDA should work with regional stakeholders—including the many state legislators who represent portions of the region—to advocate at the state level for dedicated sources of revenue that can help sustain the region's creative economy long-term.

One such tool that would add significantly to the region's resources is enabling legislation for Tourism Improvement Districts (TIDs). Unlike the innkeeper's tax, which can be subject to shifts in county or state policy, a TID is structured as a more stable—albeit time-limited—assessment. Under this concept, a majority of creative economy-related businesses within the district could elect to assess a small fee or percentage charge added to transactions, in proportion to the expected benefit each business would receive. Funds could flow directly to a nonprofit, with oversight tied to a district plan approved in advance. A TID could theoretically cover the entire five-county region and would have fixed terms, as well as mechanisms for renewal or repeal. Indiana's tourism industry has advocated for legislation to authorize this for several years, most recently through House Bill 1223³⁸ in the 2025 legislative session. If authorized, TIDs could allow regions like Southern Indiana to create stable, industry-driven revenue streams that fund creative economy needs and help drive increased tourism without reliance on local general funds. For a region facing tight municipal budgets, this kind of mechanism could provide the long-term sustainability needed to implement the recommendations in this plan.

Because Jeffersonville's NoCo Arts and Cultural District and the Madison Arts and Cultural District comprise one-sixth of the state's certified cultural districts,³⁹ the region should also seek state funding for cultural districts. Many other states such as Massachusetts, Colorado, and Texas have dedicated state resources for their cultural district programs through operating grants, tax incentives, and marketing support. In Massachusetts, state-designated cultural districts receive annual operating support through the Cultural District Investment Grant program.⁴⁰ Colorado's certified creative districts receive cash awards, technical assistance, matching grants, and tourism branding.⁴¹ Texas operates one of the largest cultural district networks in the country, with districts eligible for competitive State grants to support operations, cultural assets, and arts-related economic development.⁴² These programs work because they combine consistent operating dollars with visibility, incentives, and technical assistance. If Indiana had consistent, dedicated funding behind its cultural districts, Southern Indiana could better convert its cultural districts' creative assets into economic growth engines while supporting the establishment of new districts that could realize similar benefits.

G

Share fundraising infrastructure.

While River Hills offers grant writing assistance, the Our Southern Indiana RDA should expand on this support with a focus on benefiting creative organizations. The RDA, or a partner it identifies, could run a shared grant and sponsorship shop that would help public, private, and nonprofit organizations raise new funds to support their growing efforts. Possible services could include grant writing workshops, budget tools, return-on-investment dashboards, and more. This could include a fiscal sponsorship service so small towns and volunteer groups can apply for funds they otherwise would not be able to access. Additionally, the region should seek to standardize county and local match policies, so partners can move fast when a match is required.

3

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Establish an Underground Railroad Freedom Corridor

The region already has a coalition of champions for the Underground Railroad's story. It should harness this momentum to connect and amplify its Underground Railroad heritage.

A **Activate a Southern Indiana Underground Railroad Freedom Corridor**

The region has a clear opportunity to elevate its Underground Railroad assets from a set of powerful but dispersed stories into a branded and more visible corridor. This would stretch from Jefferson County's Eleutherian College to the Falls of the Ohio's river crossing site and beyond, with stops in Madison's Georgetown neighborhood, New Albany's Town Clock Church, the Blue River Friends Settlement near Salem, and various other sites in the region that have historical significance related to the Underground Railroad. Research should be conducted to better understand the role different areas of the region played in the clandestine Underground Railroad, particularly in Scott County. Southern Indiana's corridor should support the state's Indiana Freedom Trails effort, and could play a leading role in helping the rest of Indiana honor its legacy and history⁴³ The corridor should be more closely connected to the National Park Service's Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program to gain national visibility and access to technical assistance or competitive grants.

Madison has connected with the Network to Freedom program the most with eight featured sites: (1) the Lyman Hoyt House, (2) the John Tibbets House, (3) the Samuel Tibbets House, (4) the John Gill and Martha Wilson Craven Home, (5) the Isaiah Walton House Site, (6) Historic Eleutherian College, (7) the Georgetown Neighborhood, and (8) the Chapman Harris House Sites. However, few of these locations have websites, and only Eleutherian College and the John Gill and Martha Wilson Craven Home are listed as open to the public. The only other sites in the region are the Carnegie Center for Art and History, which features exhibits and shares stories related to the Underground Railroad, and the Hannah Toliver Historical Marker in Jeffersonville.⁴⁴ Sites should also be added to the Network to Freedom's virtual passport program, which currently features Eleutherian College and Wayne County's Levi Coffin House as its only destinations in Indiana.⁴⁵

The region's efforts to activate its Underground Railroad assets should draw inspiration and lessons from other successful efforts around the country. Ohio has been a leader in this, with Cincinnati's well-known National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and state and regional trail systems like the Ohio Historical Underground Railroad Trail⁴⁶ and the Clermont County Ohio Freedom Trail.⁴⁷

Southern Indiana's Underground Railroad story links with Louisville, Southwest Ohio, Indianapolis, Wayne County, and beyond. For instance, Eleutherian College's founders were connected with Ohio abolitionists John Parker and Rev. John Rankin, as well as Wayne County's Levi Coffin. By building intentional heritage relationships with surrounding areas, Southern Indiana can situate its corridor at the heart of a larger regional narrative that crosses state and county lines. Joint marketing and coordination with these neighboring areas would amplify the visibility of Southern Indiana's assets while ensuring visitors experience the rich depth of the broader region's Underground Railroad story.

B

Build a strong digital presence and package stories into itineraries:

To fully realize the potential of the Underground Railroad corridor, the region needs to invest in a robust digital platform—both a website and a mobile app—that connects people, places, and stories in one accessible hub. A central platform can serve as a living database for researchers, educators, and advocates, while also providing the public with interactive driving tours, interpretive content with audio and film features, and real-time visitor information accessible on smartphones. This will help generate and sustain the higher levels of tourism needed to create measurable economic returns for the counties and stakeholders involved.

Using these digital tools, Southern Indiana should package its many assets into themed routes. These could include, for example, Faith & Freedom (anchored by Town Clock Church), Education & Abolition (Eleutherian College), River Crossings & Resilience (Falls of the Ohio and George Rogers Clark Home Site), and Lives & Legacies (Carnegie Center's storytelling). This should also connect with Louisville, which features several Underground Railroad sites of its own.

C

Program the corridor and connect with the broader creative economy:

To amplify the Underground Railroad as an asset, the region will need to invest more attention into its programming. It can link the Underground Railroad to annual festivals, increase school field trip programming, and expand artist-led projects and storytelling. The region should also intentionally seek ways to tie programming to other facets of the creative economy (particularly important in applications for State arts and culture funding), especially in the education system to give students hands-on experiences. Theater programs should be partners, providing students with experience as docents and live reenactors, supporting their careers while helping them hone their skills. Film and digital media will be a major component of this work, and students can partner with actors and others to share content with the public. Public art will be important for adding visibility, and artisans, sculptors, and visual artists can contribute installations and live demonstrations. This should connect with other large installations like the (Un)Known Project's On the Banks of Freedom exhibit in Louisville. The "Lighting the Path of the Underground Railroad" initiative should also be revived as a tangible way to expand cross-river collaboration, particularly between Louisville and New Albany. The region will need to establish consistent way-finding and interpretive signage so the corridor reads as one experience regardless of jurisdiction.

Staff it and clarify ownership:

Importantly, this effort will only succeed if growing it is someone's primary job. While there is enthusiasm for the mission, prior efforts have stalled due to the lack of a dedicated backbone. There needs to be a paid coordinator who can serve as the project manager with clear authority to convene, contract, and fundraise. The region should designate the Our Southern RDA or build consensus around another entity as the corridor's operator. Friends of the Town Clock Church (or a similar entity) can serve as a fiscal agent if needed.

While there is already a coalition of champions to support this work that includes representatives from Indiana Landmarks, regional historical societies, authors of leading books on the region's Underground Railroad stories, and more, this steering group needs to be formalized and include the right people who are able to connect with tourism efforts and build bridges across the Ohio River. This will need to turn into standing governance with coalition-led timelines, budgets, and metrics. The coalition will determine the proper governance structure moving forward, including whether a new nonprofit organization should be established or whether the effort should be housed within an existing organization.

Chief among the coalition's responsibilities will be the hiring of a coordinator and raising the funds to support the role. This person will be tasked with leading the coordination of regional Underground Railroad sites, helping share and publish compelling stories and ensuring the initiative's sustainability. With Eleutherian College's leaking roof and other critical, near-term threats, funding will be a challenge. The Network to Freedom Grant Program⁴⁸ is one source of funding the coalition should look to in addition to applying for funds from the State, Lilly Endowment, National Landmarks, and local community foundations.



4

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Elevate the Region's Trails as the Spine of the Creative Economy

Southern Indiana has a valuable—and growing—trails system. As this continues to be built out, the region should treat this network as one of the clearest public entry points to the creative economy.

A

Develop multi-modal trail system:

The Our Southern region would be well served by finishing the development of its planned trail network, combining its trail assets with the Ohio River, and growing it even further into a two-modal, river + land network that links all five counties (and Louisville) along both the Ohio River and via the dozens of miles of trails. This would create interconnected routes where residents and visitors can bike, walk, paddle, and linger at programmed stops—connecting historic downtowns, rural areas, parks, and venues across all five counties. The ingredients are already in place: a 7.5-mile greenway across Jeffersonville, Clarksville, and New Albany that links to the Falls of the Ohio and Louisville's riverfront via the Big Four, trails in development such as the Monon South Trail (and Monon South Freedom Trail) and Hanover-Madison Connector Trail, and other existing trails.

Doing this effectively will require as many touchpoints between the water and land as possible, and river recreation will need to expand even more. Ohio River Way plays an important role as a champion for the Ohio River's treatment as a recreational water trail. The organization will be an important collaborator in building connectedness with the region's trail system. Through coordination and branding, the region will be able to derive even more benefit from its trail and water assets.

B

Program the corridor:

To integrate with the creative economy, the region can create cultural waystations at regular intervals. There should be a series of arts and culture-infused stops at trailheads, overlooks, and confluences, which could be places with shade, power, water access, bike parking (or boat docking), and interactive art. The Jeffboat redevelopment project will provide a dynamic riverfront access point with mixed-use residential, commercial, and cultural spaces, and the Ohio River Greenway should be leveraged to connect this to other communities in the region. This and other sites along the regional corridor can be used for busking (an expansion of Madison's successful program could be piloted in other parts of the region) and micro-performances, as well as rotating maker markets, pop-up galleries, and quick-set-up classes. The region could develop new ties to groups like the Indiana Plein Air Painters Association⁴⁹ to more frequently feature Southern Indiana as an attraction for future arts-related events originating outside the region.

The trail network could also use signage, QR-linked storytelling, and artist-designed elements to highlight the region's signature stories and brands, including the Underground Railroad, steamboat culture, and the Lewis & Clark expedition. This should start with areas that are the most well-trafficked along the river and trails before growing over time as new businesses and amenities draw in more people. With better and more connected trail infrastructure, a paid bike-share installation should be reintroduced. This would create a small funding source for operations or maintenance while connecting more residents to rural areas and driving new traffic and interest in the trail system and businesses it serves.

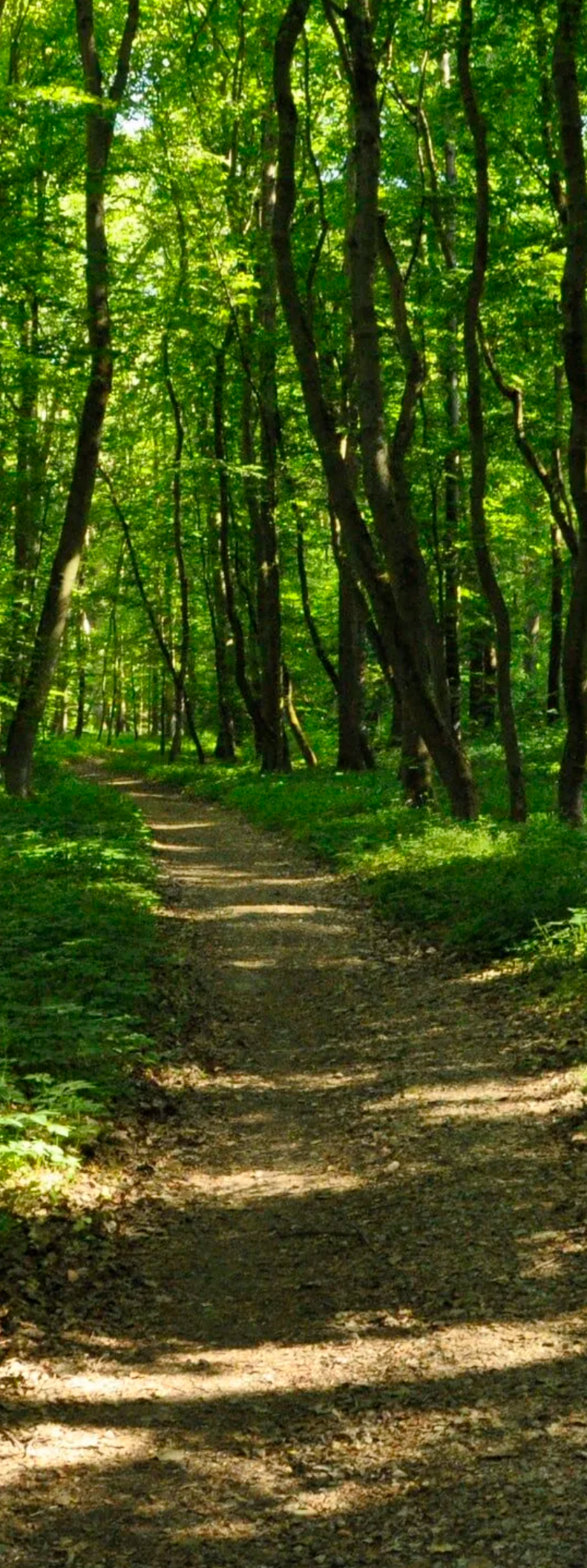
The trails network could create a regional Trail Weekends calendar that aggregates details about all the arts and culture-related offerings along the corridor in one place so visitors can easily access information and develop itineraries. Riverfront concerts and festivals should be paired with staggered inland activations the same day in order to drive usage of the trails for major events.

A big part of programming will involve adding small and creative businesses along the trail network. The region should encourage—and remove barriers related to—rentals, coffee kiosks, outfitters, and bed and breakfasts near trailheads. A "Trail-Friendly Business" certification could be developed, and low-cost leases for pop-ups and micro-businesses could be piloted. Central Indiana's trail system has been the subject of a recent study⁵⁰ that identifies best practices for integrating creativity within a regional trails system, and Southern Indiana can draw insights from this.

C

Brand and market creatively.

Success of this initiative will require significant effort around branding and marketing from tourism agencies and beyond. A single Southern Trails brand could be launched, with one tourism agency-led map and website that covers routes, waystations, events, services, and lodging. This should also involve standardizing trail signage, mileposts, and other markers so the experience reads as one system across five counties. This can be cross-promoted with Louisville's Waterfront Park to mutually benefit areas on both sides of the river. Traffic and spending can be monitored to improve programming in future years.



D

Develop new funding streams.

The region has already secured Next Level Trails (NLT) awards—most visibly for the Monon South and Monon South Freedom Trail (including a \$2 million grant to New Albany and a \$29.5 million package to acquire and build the corridor).⁵¹ The region should continue to build on that record of delivery, documenting early wins and deepening support from sponsors and foundations to show how creative elements lift small-business revenue and drive additional impact. The region can continue to pursue future Department of Natural Resources funds through the Indiana Trails Program, which offers up to 80% reimbursement (a maximum of \$400,000). The region can pair this with a standing county-level match policy, then layer in philanthropic and private sponsorships (adopt-a-waystation, interpretive series, etc.) to cover creative features that traditional grants don't fully fund.

E

Solidify the coalition:

As part of a big priority with so many moving parts, it will be important to empower existing bodies (e.g., the Ohio River Greenway Development Commission and other partners) to steward design standards, permits, maintenance, and a shared programming calendar, while River Hills helps with federal and state grants. At the micro level, the whole region should be welcoming to businesses and invite them to the trail, as the Monon South Trail is doing. If the region treats trails as infrastructure for culture and not just recreation, it can convert existing investments into steady audiences, sales for local creatives, and a clear, marketable identity that ties five counties together.

5

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Advance Origin Park as the Front Door to Arts and Culture

Origin Park in Clarksville has been cited by many stakeholders as among the most transformative opportunities for Southern Indiana's economic vitality. As the park is further developed, the region should ensure arts and culture are focal so the park can be a driver of the creative economy.

A

Make Origin Park the front door to Southern Indiana's creative economy—not just an outdoor amenity:

As the riverfront park takes shape along the Ohio, its scale (over 300 acres), visibility from the Big Four Bridge, and connection to the Ohio River Greenway position it to welcome metro-wide audiences and connect them to the region's creative economy. The park's plans for wetland restoration, miles of trails, an event center, and adventure elements like a recirculating whitewater course and zip lines will create year-round reasons to visit and stay. With more than one million residents within a 20-minute drive,⁵² Origin Park should be treated as the anchor for a regional "arrive here, explore everywhere" experience that connects culture, history, and nature throughout the region. This should extend beyond Floyd and Clark Counties, directing visitor attention to destinations and features in Scott, Washington, and Jefferson Counties.

B

Emphasize connections with art and culture:

Early concepts for Origin Park contemplated cultural components such as an arthouse and artist residencies—elements that have been set aside, but that could still become defining features of the park. These concepts, or others like them, should be reintroduced to position the park as a hub where creative expression can intersect with natural landscapes. Incorporating more spaces and programs to ensure creatives feel at home in the park could help the attraction serve as a cultural incubator while deepening its role as the creative front door to Southern Indiana.

Wildwater, the planned whitewater center offers a particularly compelling opportunity to elevate culture. Charlotte's U.S. National Whitewater Center, which is a national model, demonstrates how cultural amenities can enhance outdoor recreation. The center features regular concerts and cultural events, and its programming has proven so popular that revenues from event spaces exceed the income generated from the whitewater loop itself, together bringing in an annual total of as much as \$6 million. Origin Park's whitewater center development is planning similar features that include a performing arts space. By moving forward with plans to pair the adventure elements of Origin Park with a substantial mix of cultural programming, Southern Indiana will dramatically expand the park's public appeal and generate revenue streams that support both recreation and the arts.

Other creative opportunities abound. The stretch of land from Falls of the Ohio to Origin Park served as the launchpad of the Lewis and Clark expedition and a conduit for the Underground Railroad, and the park can leverage its heritage and incorporate creative storytelling throughout. It can also serve as a living gallery for the community by hosting regional arts festivals, establishing a sculpture trail with rotating installations and student projects, and more. Partnerships with local schools and arts organizations can keep programming fresh and community-driven. Together, these features will distinguish Origin Park, ensuring that art and culture are not add-ons but central to the visitor experience.

C

Go big and embrace uniqueness:

Origin Park is frequently cited by stakeholders throughout the region as Southern Indiana's most transformative opportunity. The park's power to build the region's brand depends on its ability to capture attention beyond the region. This requires big, bold ideas and differentiation from other parks and conservation efforts. It also requires significant funding. Developing the closed-loop whitewater rafting center carries an estimated \$180 million price tag. Funding this massive expense—even before considering the purchase of additional land or other capital needs—will require one or more philanthropic megagifts. Philanthropy from both within and outside the region must recognize and respond to the immense impact the park can have on the region's economy, quality of life, land conservation, and arts and culture ecosystem.

With sufficient philanthropic support, Origin Park can distinguish itself not only as a regional amenity but as a unique destination of national significance. The most transformative parks lean heavily into their differentiators and find creative ways to blend recreation, culture, and community identity. Like Tulsa's Gathering Place, Tom Lee Park in Memphis⁵³ has drawn national attention for

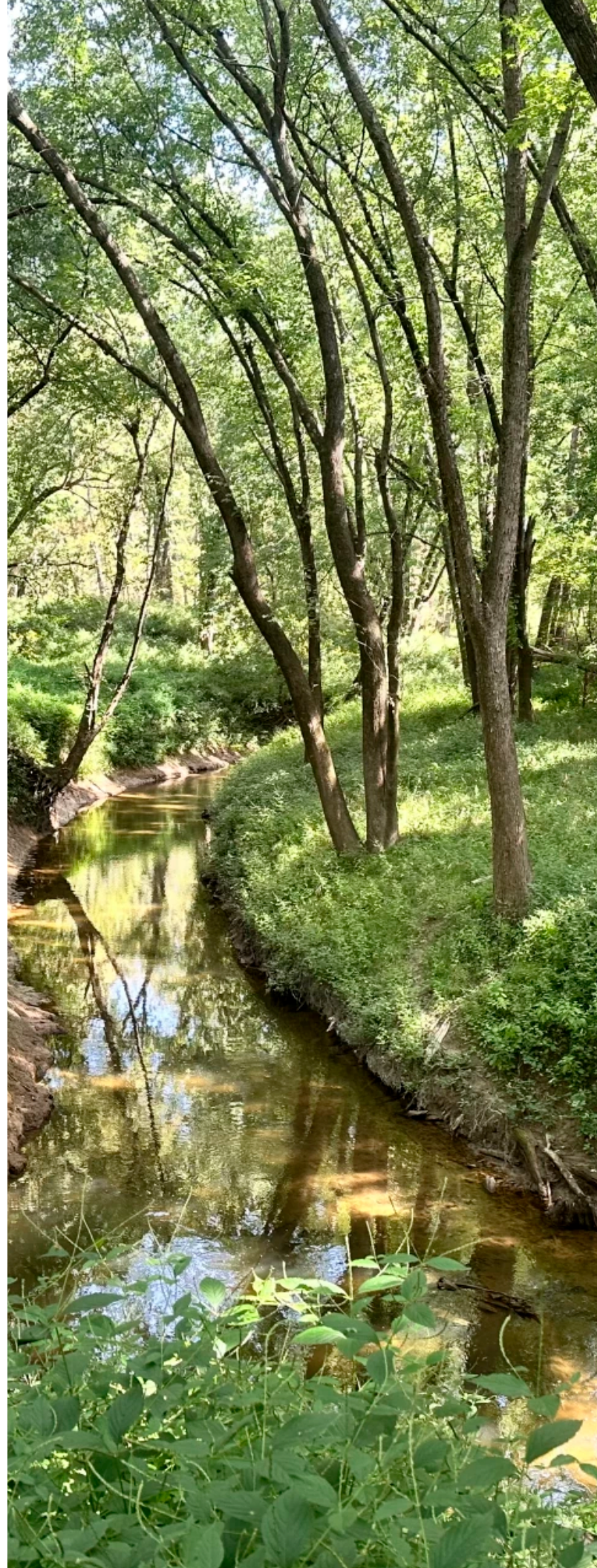
its imaginative design. Situated on the Mississippi River, the park combines large-scale green space with integrated art, cultural storytelling, and one of the nation's most unique playgrounds.⁵⁴ Origin Park and its funders draw inspiration from other success stories such as these. The Southern Indiana park's size, location along the Ohio River across from Louisville, integration of conservation and ecological restoration, and community backdrop provide a firm foundation for the development of a nationally iconic destination.

D

Create a “Park Partners” programming network:

Cobranding and shared marketing efforts can provide mutual benefit to both Origin Park and surrounding organizations. As the park adds to its programming that becomes more integrated into SolN Tourism's regional calendar, this will add critical mass to the coordination of programming throughout the region. This can be formalized with the creation of a park partners network, populated by creative economy programming organizations in the region that can add to Origin Park's platform. Storefronts for these partners could be featured on park maps and websites to drive spillover spending in nearby commercial districts. New, creative events like buskers nights and markets could showcase talent and creative entrepreneurs from around the region. Throughout its development, the park should intentionally build in spaces for creatives to increase their interaction with the public.

Origin Park can be the most visible, shared asset the region will build in a generation. As a community gem, the region must treat it as one of its foremost gateways, organize the partners around it, and program it with creativity at the core—making it a doorway into Southern Indiana's artists, stories, and creative businesses.





STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Grow the Region's Music Brand and Identity

Success in building a creative economy is defined by how well an area capitalizes on its strengths. Music is one of Southern Indiana's strengths, and there is much more the region can and should be doing to leverage it.



Brand the “Ohio River Sound” and market one music scene.

No part of Indiana has done a better job of marketing itself around music than Madison. While Madison may always be known as Indiana's Music City, the region can become more of a national destination for grassroots music if the marketing and branding efforts permeate the whole region, elevating Madison while benefitting the surrounding area. There can be a powerful, unifying music identity across counties. Madison's marketing efforts should be supplemented with a regional music website and calendar that lists every show, open mic night, porch concert, music festival, school performance, and church-gospel night. An artist directory and venue map should be added so bookers, media, and visitors can have access to the music scene in one place. This should also position the region as a prime stop between Louisville, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis for musicians touring the Midwest. A grassroots music passport or membership with stamps, merchandise, and discounts can build repeat attendance while amplifying the brand.

B

Stand up a regional music incubator and studio network.

There are several important music industry assets in Southern Indiana, but these have not been connected in any meaningful way. Madison Consolidated Schools sound engineering program and music recording studio should be elevated and made part of a regional community-facing incubator (perhaps primarily during evenings and weekends), with rehearsal space, entry-level engineering services, and a demo track program. This incubator could build youth pathways and apprenticeships in audio engineering, stage management, and festival operations tied to offerings throughout the region and in Louisville. Prosser, Ivy Tech, Hanover College, and IU Southeast could coordinate students and faculty involvement and facilitate stackable credit and industry certifications, as well as internships with venues, churches, and festivals. Maxwell's House of Music, Moxie Music Center, other local studios, and postsecondary sound labs and venues should be integrated into a shared booking system so artists can find rooms, sound engineers, and mentors in one place.

C

Leverage Indiana's high school diploma seals to drive arts-integrated pathways.

Relatedly, Indiana's redesigned high school diploma requires 12 credits of personalized electives in addition to other coursework, and students can add the Employment Honors Seal and the Employment Honors Plus Seal to show employment readiness. The Indiana Department of Education encourages students to use these new seals to align their elective credits with their career goals. The seals require work-based learning as well as a credential, career and technical education courses, or an approved career preparation experience or locally-created pathway.⁵⁵

These seals provide a strong use case for the region's collaborative postsecondary institutions to work hand in hand with the K-12 and career and technical education system. Southern Indiana should position itself as a statewide leader by creating Seal-eligible pathways focused on music and connected fields such as sound engineering, live production, design technology, and arts entrepreneurship. Education partners should jointly design coursework, apprenticeships, and certifications that align with diploma-eligible classes⁵⁶ and Seal requirements, with features such as the Avid Certified User – Pro Tools (sound engineering) credential.⁵⁷ Students earning the Employment Honors Plus Seal can receive dedicated career support and be connected to Indiana employers and apprenticeship programs. By taking these steps, the region can ensure more high school students graduate with credentials that recognize creative competencies while also connecting them directly to employment, internships, and postsecondary advancement.

D

Activate the region with music and develop shared music assets.

Madison has activated its Main Street area with music through daily performances, a public busking program, and the elevation of grassroots music. The rest of the region should seek to expand on this, and other regional assets provide the perfect forum for doing so. Trails and parks could have stages or busker pads with electricity at regular intervals, and Main Street areas should showcase musicians through their programming. This will connect music to tourism, dining, and downtown retail.

Some parts of the region are more connected to performance venues than others, and new facilities may need to be developed to drive a more complete music scene. However, before breaking ground, communities should come together as a region to first understand ways neighboring communities can fill gaps in the performance ecosystem while leveraging each other's strategic advantages. Not every community needs a big stage, and individual municipalities should carry unique roles in the music ecosystem that play to their strengths and leverage what they already have to offer.

The creative economy does not thrive with bland interventions, so the region will need to get creative and take risks if its music ecosystem is to take off. Another possibility worth exploring is the purchase of shared infrastructure and a mobile stage that can serve the entire region. There have been successful conversions of camper vans or trailers into fun stages that could serve as inspiration for a regional asset that would generate buzz and attention. To go with a mobile stage, the region could invest in a full backline library with a drum kit, amplifiers, sound systems, lighting, and more, which any county could reserve. As demand for the program grows, it can be expanded to serve other creative needs such as film production. These offerings could be supported by a network of technology crews that could draw from high school students or participants in the regional music incubator concept described earlier in this section.

This could be a significant driver of regional collaboration. A small equipment pool unlocks dozens of new "venues"—parks, plazas, streets, and depots—without each town or city needing to buy duplicate gear. A regional asset like this, connected with the broader goals and efforts to elevate the music ecosystem, could be a candidate for State funding given alignment with the mission of regional economic development efforts tied to arts and culture.

The region's music and performance ecosystem will increasingly need to "do more with less. With local budget tightening, some communities are planning to cut the number of annual performances they offer in their public concert series by as much as half. Yet keeping venues activated is critical—not only to maintain community engagement, but also to preserve the visibility and relevance of the creative economy.

Low-cost programming can ensure stages remain vibrant gathering places. Well-executed open mic nights are one format the region should lean into. Blumenthal Performing Arts in Charlotte, North Carolina, offers a successful model for regular open mic nights that provide both audiences and lottery-selected participants with free entertainment and forums for creative expression.⁵⁸ Over its multi-year history, this has attracted audiences of thousands of adults and children. It provides amateur musicians, poets, storytellers, and comedians a chance to explore new creative fields, while giving professionals a chance to hone their craft and try new material. Replicating models like these across Southern Indiana will help activate underused spaces and also build stronger connections between creatives and the rest of the public.

E

Create a music-friendly policy toolkit across jurisdictions.

Another helpful way to build out the music ecosystem is shared policies throughout the region that support it. Municipal leaders throughout the region should consider standardizing busking rules and programs, noise ordinances that encourage creative outlets while protecting neighbors from unreasonable sound intrusions, and centralized performance permitting. This could also include quick-pay processes so artists can cross city lines without friction.

F

Govern and measure like a bigger industry.

This effort should be governed and overseen like the industry it can become. The region should create a small Regional Music Council comprised of venue, artist, school, and tourism representatives. This coalition should fund a Music Coordinator or contract with existing capacity in Madison to manage the regional circuit and formalize a music incubator program. Evaluation of key performance indicators such as total gigs, artist income, attendance, venue sales, and visitor origin will foster accountability and drive continuous growth and improvement. Taken together, these moves will turn existing assets into a single, visible brand and a functioning pipeline where artists advance, venues fill, and audiences keep coming back.





STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Harness the Power of the Creative Economy to Drive Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Community Revitalization

The community benefits of arts and culture extend far beyond quality of place. To fully realize the power of arts and culture, the region will need to tap into its power to drive significant economic outcomes through integration with innovation, entrepreneurship, and community revitalization. Below are several pathways the region could pursue.

A

Grow the innovation economy.

Innovation is best defined as applied creativity, and the most prosperous regions have creative and innovation sectors that are well integrated. The region should position the five-county creative ecosystem as a research and development (R&D) partner to the region's innovation economy. This is especially the case at River Ridge Commerce Center and other advanced-industry nodes. The region could stand up a prototyping program that deploys mixed teams of designers, filmmakers, musicians, writers, and digital creators alongside engineers and product managers to solve real firm problems (e.g., user experience and user interface, training media, packaging and industrial design, product storytelling, augmented reality simulations, etc.). The region could offer innovation vouchers that River Ridge tenants and high-growth businesses redeem for services from a curated bench of local creatives, with work delivered through Maker13, independent studios, or school labs such as Prosser, Ivy Tech, or IU Southeast. Creative fellows-in-residence could be placed inside anchor employers for several months to accelerate prototypes and build permanent hiring pathways. Cycles could be capped with demonstrations or showcases that feature public-facing music or film content to attract investors, customers, and press.

Part of growing the innovation economy is simply producing more creatives and keeping them in the region. The Creative Economy Director should work with the area's postsecondary, career and technical education, and K-12 leaders to identify ways their institutions' offerings in creative fields can be expanded and promoted. To take advantage of economies of scale and reduce duplication, schools can offer specialty courses to students at other institutions.

B

Foster entrepreneurship.

To carry this further, the region can build a studio-to-startup pipeline so creative work births new ventures. Expanding community production and recording access, mentorship, and early founders support delivered by regional Small Business Development Centers, chambers, and university partners would create a more attractive sandbox for creative entrepreneurs to start high-growth businesses. These entities could offer supports related to intellectual property, pricing, e-commerce platforms, awareness of federal Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) grants that support research and development commercialization, and more. The region can also develop funding programs to support creative entrepreneurs, drawing inspiration from nearby regional models such as the Horizon Community Foundation's Northern Kentucky Entrepreneur Fund⁵⁹ or Cincinnati's Main Street Ventures,⁶⁰ which provide entrepreneurs with non-dilutive grants and strategic support.

Entrepreneurial support should creatively develop connections to the broader innovation economy. The region can host a curated Creative Supplier Directory and fast-track vendor onboarding so manufacturers, logistics firms, and healthcare providers can easily hire local creatives for ongoing content, training, and design needs. The region could also support a creative-innovation concierge service to broker corporate matches with creatives, recruit cross-river partners, and provide capital support. The education community should be a leader in this work and should leverage the entrepreneurial pathways and credentials in the State's new Employment Honors Plus Seal such as the entrepreneurship technical certificate.⁶¹

Transformative projects like the Jeffboat riverfront redevelopment will not only reshape the landscape but also serve as magnets for new talent. To maximize this momentum, the region should intentionally channel the entrepreneurial energy these projects generate into supportive infrastructure—co-working spaces, incubators, cultural programming, and creative business networks—that build density and foster collaboration. By wrapping these supports around high-profile developments, Southern Indiana can cultivate a thriving creative innovation hub. Together, these moves will turn the region's artists and creative businesses into innovation multipliers that can attract new investment, nurture new ventures, and strengthen the region's cultural identity.

C

Create a Historic Preservation Community of Practice.

The region could establish a five-county Historic Preservation Community of Practice that convenes preservation leaders (particularly from Madison), municipal staff, archivists, craftspeople, postsecondary partners, and cultural organizations to share best practices and support projects across the region. This could start with three shared functions: (1) a regional inventory and project pipeline (buildings, archives, industrial artifacts, and boats), (2) a micro-grant program for emergency stabilization and documentation (scanning, cataloging, oral history), and (3) continued expansion of Ivy Tech's and Indiana Landmarks' Historic Building Trades Initiative, pairing classroom instruction with hands-on preservation and pre-apprenticeships or on-the-job training with local contractors. This could identify job sites for learning throughout the region, in which students and volunteers work alongside preservation professionals on small, visible wins. Promoting and publishing information from the regional historic preservation efforts, such as through an annual Ohio River Preservation Institute, could help grow Southern Indiana's reputation as a nationally recognized leader in creative historic preservation and community revitalization.

D

Launch a Rural Residency Network.

To better connect the creative economy in rural areas, the region could create a Rural Residency Network. This program would rotate artists through small towns around the region for one- or two-month placements to activate underutilized assets such as vacant storefronts, depots, libraries, parks, and heritage sites. The concept draws inspiration from similar efforts in Indiana through Indiana University's Rural Artist Residency Program.⁶²

The region could provide a turnkey package (housing, stipend, a materials micro-grant, and a local co-host such as a library or Main Street office) and require each residency to deliver: one public program (workshop, porch concert, pop-up exhibit), one place-based installation or prototype, and a brief activation playbook the town can carry forward. Residencies should be tied to regional themes (e.g., river life, music, freedom stories, maker heritage) and to existing festival or community calendars. For the program to be truly regional, it should use a single application portal for all five counties. Business sponsorships or arts grant funding could be used to support residencies.

E

Lean into steamboats.

The Ohio River is one of the region's most distinctive cultural storylines, and steamboats are the most evocative way to tell it. While the Southern Indiana region has an impressive steamboat history, it does not currently control passenger steamboats of its own. Two sternwheelers, the *Belle of Louisville* and the *Mary M. Miller*, are owned and operated from Kentucky and drive steady cruise traffic and attention to Louisville rather than Indiana.

Focus group participants frequently expressed that bourbon and horseracing have built a brand for Louisville that overshadows Southern Indiana's identity. But Louisville's brand is also associated with steamboats, and given their mobility and Indiana's history, steamboats may offer the best opportunity for Southern Indiana to share in Louisville's identity. To boost regional vitality, Southern Indiana should take advantage of any opportunity to treat steamboats as a cross-river brand asset and systematically pull more traffic—and the branding that comes with it—to Indiana's side of the river. This can start with increased collaboration and negotiations for more Indiana embarkations and regular stops for the steamboats. The region can deepen programming at Indiana's waterfront areas and a shared events calendar to entice visitors so cruise operators can count on crowds and curated experiences each time they tie up. New Albany, Clarksville, and Jeffersonville can apply learnings from Madison, which has intentionally developed programming around steamboat visits.

Simultaneously, Southern Indiana should continue to capitalize on modern river cruising. American Cruise Lines now runs multiple Ohio River itineraries with scheduled calls in Madison. The region should formalize a joint tourism outreach team to expand cruise line stops and build creative programming around those calls such as heritage tours and riverfront music. As new features such as the Wildwater whitewater rafting center are developed at Origin Park, these should be used to attract more cruise traffic and excursions.

Finally, the region should embed steamboats in place-based identity. Steamboat culture should permeate public art installations, and the historic brand should be increasingly paired with modern recreation—kayak outfitters, trail tie-ins, and waterfront dining—so steamboats become shorthand for a river-centric lifestyle. Done creatively, steamboat nostalgia will add to the many reasons to visit Southern Indiana and support its businesses.

INVESTIBLE ENGINE FOR GROWTH

Collectively, these strategies turn Southern Indiana's existing assets into an investible engine for growth, but they require at least a minimal organizational infrastructure to move from plans to action. From a baseline perspective, the region needs to identify annual funding sources of between \$300,000 and \$400,000 to stand up core capacity: a regional Creative Economy Director to coordinate cross-county priorities and funding, plus two ecosystem leads—a Music Coordinator and a Heritage/Underground Railroad Coordinator—to program, broker partnerships, and track results. Additional detail with two models for possible baseline budgets is included in this report as Appendix 4. With this in place, partners can blend public and private dollars to launch visible pilots and programs and scale what works. This, in turn, will convert creativity into jobs, small-business revenue, and a stronger regional identity.





SOUTHERN INDIANA

Conclusion

Southern Indiana has the ingredients of a distinctive creative economy—cities and towns with compelling stories, a fast-growing trails and parks backbone, Origin Park as a future gateway, and a network of schools, venues, and community organizations that already make culture part of daily life. Now the region must act on the opportunity to continue toward a unified vision for arts and culture. That means putting shared infrastructure in place and identifying funding that will enable the region to amplify its trails, parks, historical assets, music, and more as part of its creative economy growth.

This report closes with a simple charge: start where the region already has momentum, prove value quickly, and expand what works. As the five counties move together with this disciplined, collaborative approach, Southern Indiana will not just compete for grants; it will build a durable creative economy that attracts talent, strengthens main streets, and tells the region's story with the scale and confidence it deserves.

APPENDIX 1

Contributors

Pathemy Strategies, Pattern, and the Our Southern Indiana RDA are grateful for the invaluable input received from many residents of the region, civic leaders, and individuals representing the below organizations (among others):

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Align Southern Indiana | 23. Jefferson County Historical Society |
| 2. City of Jeffersonville | 24. Madison Area Arts Alliance |
| 3. City of Madison | 25. Madison Music Movement |
| 4. City of New Albany | 26. Meta |
| 5. City of Salem | 27. New Albany Floyd County Schools |
| 6. Community Foundation of Madison and Jefferson County | 28. One Southern Indiana |
| 7. Community Foundation of Southern Indiana | 29. Prosser Career Education Center |
| 8. D Terrell Associates | 30. River Heritage Conservancy |
| 9. Designing Local | 31. River Hills Economic Development District and Regional Planning Commission |
| 10. Duke Energy | 32. Scott County Community Foundation |
| 11. Eleutherian College | 33. Scott County District No. 2 School Corporation |
| 12. Extol Media | 34. Scott County Indiana Visitors Commission |
| 13. Floyd County Historical Society | 35. SolIN Tourism |
| 14. Hanover College | 36. Temple and Temple |
| 15. Historic Madison Inc | 37. Town Clock Church |
| 16. Indiana Arts Commission | 38. Town of Clarksville |
| 17. Indiana Landmarks | 39. Town of Georgetown |
| 18. IU Southeast | 40. Visit Madison |
| 19. Ivy Tech Madison | |
| 20. Ivy Tech Sellersburg | |
| 21. James Graham Brown Foundation | |
| 22. Jefferson County | |

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This strategy was developed in collaboration with the Our Southern Indiana region and its stakeholders by Pathemy Strategies and Pattern. Project leads were Tim George and Polina Osheroov, and their biographies are included below.

TIM GEORGE is the CEO of Pathemy Strategies, a consulting firm that empowers organizations to creatively grow their vision and impact at the intersection of economic development, talent, innovation, and policy. Pathemy has served statewide organizations in developing strategies to grow the creative economy, boost entrepreneurship, improve workforce delivery, and more. Before founding Pathemy, Tim worked as executive vice president for innovation & collaboration at the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership (CICP), served as director of policy for former Indiana governor Eric Holcomb, and practiced corporate law in Charlotte, NC. Tim has a law degree from the University of Texas School of Law and a bachelor's degree from Wheaton College in Illinois. Now a proud Hoosier, Tim is passionate about seeing Indiana thrive.

POLINA OSHEROV is the Executive Director and co-founder of Pattern Inc, a nonprofit dedicated to growing Indiana's creative economy by connecting creative talent to opportunity, infrastructure, and capital. Named one of Indiana's Top 250 Most Influential People, she is recognized as a visionary leader who bridges entrepreneurship, design, and economic development. With three decades of entrepreneurial experience—15 of them championing creative professionals—she has helped Pattern Inc become a statewide force, launching careers, sustaining businesses, and paying over \$1 million directly to creatives for services in photography, writing, art, design, and performance. In addition to leading Pattern and serving as Editor-in-Chief of PATTERN Magazine, Polina serves on workforce and advisory councils and has contributed to initiatives like NBA All-Star and RALLY. She continues to lead critical conversations around creative entrepreneurship, talent retention, and inclusive innovation, with a clear mission: making Indiana a national model for creative economy success.

APPENDIX 2

Creative Industries

Below is a listing of various creative industries in the Our Southern Indiana RDA region, ranked by their concentration of employees relative to the national average for that industry in 2023.⁶³ This metric is called a location quotient, with a location quotient of 2.0 indicating that the regional industry has twice as many employees per capita as that industry nationwide. Note that federal government databases suppress data for certain industries as well as for self-employed individuals, so data for many creative industries is unavailable and not included in the below listings.

<i>County</i>	<i>Industry Subsector</i>	<i>Location Quotient (1 = Average Concentration)</i>	<i>Number of Employees</i>	<i>Average Pay Per Employee</i>	<i>Number of establishments</i>
FLOYD	Beverage manufacturing	8.70	607	\$64,499	4
FLOYD	Used merchandise stores	7.22	146	\$19,760	7
CLARK	Sporting goods, hobby, and musical instrument stores	6.91	264	\$23,492	9
FLOYD	Printing and related support activities	5.48	528	\$49,093	11
CLARK	Specialized design services	5.11	45	\$72,800	9
CLARK	Used merchandise stores	3.95	219	\$24,123	12
JEFFERSON	Civic and social organizations	2.94	40	\$25,250	8
CLARK	Printing and related support activities	2.89	441	\$46,011	14
JEFFERSON	Special food services	2.51	184	\$10,728	4
CLARK	Radio and television broadcasting	2.18	42	\$57,357	3
CLARK	Florists	1.99	10	\$26,600	3
FLOYD	Florists	1.93	42	\$24,190	5
CLARK	Civic and social organizations	1.83	92	\$18,609	9
CLARK	Drinking places (alcoholic beverages)	1.68	49	\$18,898	7
CLARK	Motion picture and video industries	1.54	43	\$24,791	4
CLARK	Architectural, engineering, and related services	1.35	189	\$60,979	30
FLOYD	Grantmaking and giving services	1.31	22	\$60,545	6
CLARK	Special food services	1.30	95	\$31,305	13
JEFFERSON	Used merchandise stores	1.26	70	\$16,643	8
CLARK	Restaurants and other eating places	1.22	5,500	\$20,820	205

From Heritage to Innovation
Southern Indiana's Creative Economy Strategy

<i>County</i>	<i>Industry Subsector</i>	<i>Location Quotient (1 = Average Concentration)</i>	<i>Number of Employees</i>	<i>Average Pay Per Employee</i>	<i>Number of establishments</i>
JEFFERSON	Grantmaking and giving services	0.89	15	\$64,400	4
CLARK	Computer systems design and related services	0.82	113	\$84,982	25
FLOYD	Motion picture and video industries	0.77	59	\$32,576	5
FLOYD	Advertising, public relations, and related services	0.73	135	\$46,163	12
FLOYD	Other amusement and recreation industries	0.73	261	\$15,686	14
SCOTT	Florists	0.73	10	\$5,300	3
FLOYD	Restaurants and other eating places	0.72	3,263	\$20,163	147
CLARK	Other amusement and recreation industries	0.71	401	\$14,703	23
JEFFERSON	Drinking places (alcoholic beverages)	0.68	20	\$17,800	5
CLARK	Bakeries and tortilla manufacturing	0.61	48	\$19,479	5
FLOYD	Bakeries and tortilla manufacturing	0.58	46	\$19,848	3
FLOYD	Architectural, engineering, and related services	0.57	249	\$61,369	30
JEFFERSON	Book stores and news dealers	0.54	7	\$6,000	3
WASHINGTON	Restaurants and other eating places	0.53	550	\$15,540	27
FLOYD	Drinking places (alcoholic beverages)	0.50	86	\$15,012	9
FLOYD	Civic and social organizations	0.49	39	\$16,949	7
FLOYD	Special food services	0.43	28	\$42,679	9
CLARK	Newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers	0.42	42	\$39,548	3
FLOYD	Sporting goods, hobby, and musical instrument stores	0.39	41	\$23,024	8
SCOTT	Civic and social organizations	0.36	29	\$17,586	4
FLOYD	Computer systems design and related services	0.35	282	\$66,394	24
JEFFERSON	Other amusement and recreation industries	0.27	35	\$6,743	4
SCOTT	Restaurants and other eating places	0.25	720	\$18,049	26
WASHINGTON	Civic and social organizations	0.24	19	\$9,105	4
JEFFERSON	Restaurants and other eating places	0.22	1,004	\$19,827	57
WASHINGTON	Architectural, engineering, and related services	0.14	22	\$92,636	4
FLOYD	Specialized design services	0.12	6	\$20,000	6
SCOTT	Architectural, engineering, and related services	0.09	37	\$38,162	3
JEFFERSON	Sporting goods, hobby, and musical instrument stores	0.08	13	\$31,308	4
CLARK	Grantmaking and giving services	0.08	4	\$103,000	3
WASHINGTON	Special food services	0.07	14	\$35,286	3
SCOTT	Other amusement and recreation industries	0.06	34	\$11,735	6
JEFFERSON	Computer systems design and related services	0.02	19	\$56,421	4

APPENDIX 3

Arts Education in Schools

Below are the art programs taught in the region's public schools that are shared on public-facing school websites.

Clark County

Advanced Two Dimensional Art I/II
AP 2D Art & Design
AP 3D Art & Design
Ceramics I/II/III/IV
Intro to 3 Dimensional Art
Intro to 2 Dimensional Art
Sculpture I, II
Painting I, II
Photography I/II
Principles of Digital Design
Digital Design Graphics
Graphic Design Layout
Band

Washington County

Color Guard
Drama
Marching Band
Vocal Music
Art
Concert Band

Scott County

Introduction to Two Dimensional Art
Introduction to Three-Dimensional Art
Advanced Two Dimensional Art
Advanced Three-Dimensional Art
Studio Art AP - Drawing 2D Design, or 3D Design
Ceramics
Dance Performance
Intermediate Band
Advanced Band
Intermediate Chorus
Advanced Chorus
Musical Theatre
Music Theory & Composition

Jefferson County

Principles of Digital Design
Digital Design Graphics
Graphic Design and Layout
Digital Design Capstone
Introduction to 2-D Art
Introduction to 3-D Art
Advanced 2-D Art
Advanced 3-D Art
Drawing
Painting
Jewelry
Printmaking
Photography
Ceramics
Sculpture
AP Humanities
AP Art History
AP 2-D Studio Art
AP 3-D Studio Art
Theatre Productions
Theatre Arts
Advanced Theatre Arts
Advanced Acting
Technical Theatre
Advanced Fine Arts, College Credit
Beginning Chorus
Intermediate Chorus
Advanced Chorus
Beginning/Intermediate Concert Band
Advanced Concert Band
Jazz Ensemble
Piano and Electronic Keyboard
Music Theory
Dance Choreography: Ballet, Modern, Jazz, or Ethnic-Folk

Floyd County

Introduction to Two Dimensional Art
Three Dimensional Art I & II
Ceramics I & II
Ceramics III & IV
Ceramics V & VI
Sculpture I, II
Fiber Arts I, II, III, IV
Drawing I & II
Drawing III & IV
Drawing V & VI
Drawing VII & VIII
Printmaking
Painting I, II
Media Arts I & II
Media Arts III & IV
Media Arts V & VI
AP Art History
AP 2-Dimensional Studio Art
AP Drawing/Studio Art
AP 3-Dimensional Studio Art
Beginning Chorus (Girls Chorus) I & II
Intermediate Chorus III & IV, V/VI, VII & VIII
Advanced Chorus (Mixed Chorus) I & II, III & IV, V & VI, VII & VIII
Beginning Concert Band I & II
Intermediate Concert Band III & IV, V & VI
Jazz Ensemble I & II, III & IV, V & VI, VII & VIII
Advanced Concert Band I & II, III & IV, V & VI, VII & VIII
Beginning Orchestra I & II, III & IV, V & VI, VII & VIII
Intermediate Orchestra III & IV, V & VI
Advanced Orchestra I & II, III & IV, V & VI
Piano and Electronic Keyboard I, II
Electronic Music
Applied Music: Handbell Ensemble I & II, III & IV, V & VI, VII & VIII
Instrumental Ensemble: Percussion Ensemble I & II, III & IV, V & VI, VII & VIII
Music Theory and Composition H
Music Theory AP
Music History and Appreciation
Introduction to Theatre Arts I & II
Advanced Theatre Arts I & II
Advanced Acting I & II
Advanced Acting III & IV
Stage Management & Theatre Management
Technical Theatre I & II
Advanced Technical Theatre I & II
Theatre Production I & II
Musical Theatre & Dance Performance
Dance History Appreciation & Dance Choreography
Directing Fine Arts Connections
Careers in Educational Theatre
Theatre Arts SL
Visual Arts SL
Music SL
Theory of Knowledge

APPENDIX 4

Sample Baseline Budget Packages

For illustrative purposes only, below are two models of sample budget packages that could be applied to the baseline creative economy infrastructure and staffing needs. The first assumes full funding, while the second assumes a three-year ramp-up period.

MODEL 1: Flat \$400,000 Per Year (Three Years)

ELEMENT	DETAILS
Inputs	\$400K annually × 3 years (total \$1.2M); 3 FTE staff (Director, 2 Coordinators) in place from Year 1
Activities	Launch creative economy backbone with staff; convene Creative Economy Council; regional brand + website live in Year 1; implement several programs and projects (number dependent on size and cost); publish annual dashboards and evaluation reports; shared fundraising support and staff to raise additional funds for scaling programs
Short-Term Outcomes (1–3 yrs)	By Year 3: Region recognized as a state leader in creative economy strategy; multiple high-visibility projects demonstrating measurable economic impact; \$1–2M leveraged annually for programs; unified regional brand increasingly visible statewide
Long-Term Outcomes (10 yrs)	Region positioned as a national leader in creative economy development; \$1M+ sustained annual backbone budget by Year 5–6 derived from multiple funding sources; measurable growth in creative jobs (+10%), tourism (+15%), and youth participation in creative pathways (+25%); \$5–10M leveraged annually for programs

MODEL 2: Ramp-Up to \$400,000 (\$100,000 Year 1 → \$250,000 Year 2 → \$400,000 Year 3)

ELEMENT	DETAILS
Inputs	Year 1: \$100K (Part-time Director + Fellow/Intern); Year 2: \$250K (Full-time Director + Part-time Coordinator + Part-time Fellow/Intern); Year 3: \$400K (3 FTE staff)
Activities	Year 1: Convenings + baseline creative economy alignment efforts + baseline projects; Year 2: Formalize Creative Economy Council, launch website, expand programs, publish impact report, other grant applications submitted; Year 3: Full staff, multiple programs, dashboard publication, secure initial external grants
Short-Term Outcomes (1–3 yrs)	By Year 3: Backbone structure fully staffed, Council operational, website + brand visible; initial programs tested and growing; \$800K–\$1M leveraged; region positioned to scale up
Long-Term Outcomes (10 yrs)	Sustainable \$1M budget achieved by end of decade; creative economy recognized regionally but not yet at national visibility; creative job/tourism growth begins (5–7% increase); stronger case-making capacity but slower early impact

POSSIBLE SPENDING BREAKDOWNS

(Model 1 aligns with Year 3) *Model 2 - Slow Ramp Up*

YEAR 1: \$100K (PROOF OF CONCEPT / LIGHT BACKBONE)

- Part-time Creative Economy Director / Lead Convener (contract or 0.5 FTE): \$50K
- Research & Communications & Operations Support (0.25 FTE / fellow): \$15K
- Convening & Operations (meetings and travel expenses): \$5K
- Mini Seed Fund (pilot collaborations and programs—e.g., music passport, trail activation): \$30K

Focus: Lay foundation for impactful collaboration; produce a few early wins.

YEAR 2: \$250K (BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE / EXPAND COORDINATION)

- Full-time Creative Economy Director: \$100K (incl. benefits/overhead)
- Heritage Coordinator (2/3 FTE): \$50K
- Music Ecosystem Coordinator (2/3 FTE): \$50K
- Convening & Operations (stakeholder workshops, travel, digital tools): \$20K
- Seed Fund for collaborative pilot projects: \$30K

Focus: Move from “proof” to “portfolio.” Pilot regionwide programs, deepen partnerships with stakeholder groups.

YEAR 3: \$400K (FULL BACKBONE / VISIBLE MOMENTUM)

- Creative Economy Director (full-time): \$100K
- Heritage Coordinator (full-time): \$75K
- Music Ecosystem Coordinator (full-time): \$75K
- Admin/Support (shared services or part-time staff): \$30K
- Convening & Operations (branding, regional website, events, travel): \$50K
- Seed Fund / Program Co-investment: \$70K

Focus: Full backbone structure in place, visible across all five counties; equipped to secure multi-million external investment (federal dollars, philanthropy, corporate, partnerships).

POSSIBLE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS TO TRACK

Backbone & Governance

- 3 FTE staff hired (by end of Year 1 for Model 1).
- Creative Economy Council with representation from all 5 counties active (in Year 1).

Programs & Projects

- 5 high-visibility collaborations launched in first 3 years (music, trail activations, heritage/Underground Railroad, placemaking, etc.).
- Depending on programs and projects: Number of residents/visitors engaged; number of monthly website visitors; number of cross-regional events, sites with collaborative programming, etc.
- 25% increase in youth/student participation in creative economy pathways (music, design, production, etc.).

Funding & Leverage

- \$400K/year in backbone funding generates at least \$1M per year in leveraged or aligned dollars by end of Year 3.
- At least 5 new grant awards or major corporate sponsorships secured.

APPENDIX 4

Comparable Creative Economy Models:

Below are two examples of creative economy programs that provide funding insights relevant to Southern Indiana.

<i>Case</i>	<i>Starting Point</i>	<i>Budget / Staffing</i>	<i>Growth and Impact</i>	<i>Relevance to Southern Indiana</i>
Paducah, KY – Artist Relocation Program	1990s: Vacant downtown, high disinvestment	City put in ~\$2M incentives over several years; 1–2 staff + Main Street org backbone	Attracted 75+ artists, leveraged >\$30M private investment, earned UNESCO Creative City designation	Shows how relatively small, focused public investment can spark national visibility and huge private leverage. Supports \$400K Model 1 (go big early, reap bigger/faster results).
Southwest Virginia – Crooked Road Music Trail	Early 2000s: Dispersed rural music culture	Started with ~\$200K budget	Now ~\$500K annual ops, supports 131 jobs in the community, millions in annual tourism impact	Demonstrates the Model 2 / Ramp-Up model (start lean with staff + pilots, prove value, then scale into a sustainable backbone).

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