



Pennsylvania Creative Districts

Foundational Activities

Workbook



Pennsylvania

Creative Industries

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Creative Districts Workbook Content

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Dear Community Partners,

May 2026

As we introduce the Pennsylvania Creative Districts program, I want to take a moment to reflect on the collective effort that shaped these materials. These resources are the result of extensive research, conversations with communities, and the lived experience of creative and community development practitioners and partners across the Commonwealth. It also draws from national best practices, lessons learned from community development and creative district program staff around the country, and the practical experience of Pennsylvania Creative Industries staff who work with communities on creative sector development.

Many people contributed their time, expertise, and feedback throughout the development of this workbook. Their perspectives helped refine the tools, clarify the guidance, and ensure that the materials reflect the realities and opportunities facing communities today. I am deeply grateful for their generosity and commitment.

As you work through these activities, do so with intention and a commitment to thoughtful decision making. Creative Districts thrive when communities take the time to listen deeply, consider multiple viewpoints, and center inclusivity in every decision. This process is not only about defining district components — it's about examining who is represented, who is missing, and how the district as a whole can reflect the full richness of the community.

Thank you for your commitment to building places where creativity, culture, and community can flourish. We look forward to seeing how your vision takes shape.

To the creative spirit that continues to shape your community's story,



Sarah Merritt
Senior Director of Community Development
Pennsylvania Creative Industries



Note About these Materials

To support clarity, consistency, and accessibility, portions of this workbook were also reviewed and refined with the assistance of AI-based proofreading and editing tools. All final content was developed and approved by Pennsylvania Creative Industries staff.

Creative District Program Timeline

- **Letter of Intent Form Deadline:** June 12, 2026, by 5PM ([LOI Form](#)).
- **Applications with the Completed Foundational Activities Workbook Submitted:** January 15, 2027, by 5PM
- **Site Visits:** February 2027
- **Panel Review Period:** March and April 2027
- **Panel Convenes:** May/June 2027
- **Council Approval:** July 2027 Council Meeting

An Invitation to Reflect, Engage, and Imagine

Before you begin this journey, we invite you to pause. A Creative District program is more than a designation — it is a commitment to place, people, and possibility. Exploring Creative District designation challenges communities to look inward and outward: to engage their creative and cultural assets, involve their residents, local businesses, government and community organizations, and plan for a future shaped by creativity, vision, and collaboration.

This program is not one-size-fits-all. It is not a checklist or a race to the finish. It is a framework for intentional growth — one that thrives when rooted in local values, authentic partnerships, and a shared vision.

Based on evaluations of similar programs across the country, communities exploring Creative District designation should anticipate that completing the Foundational Activities may take six months or more. Some communities may move more quickly if existing structures are in place, while others may need more time for dialogue, trust-building, and planning. Both paths are valid — what matters most is that the process reflects your community's readiness, values, and aspirations.

We encourage you to take time for strategic thinking and honest dialogue. Ask yourselves:

- What community development work is already underway? Will a Creative District enhance or conflict with the efforts that are currently in motion?
- What narratives, creative assets, traditions, and histories do we want to highlight and showcase through a Creative District?
- Who is already doing creative work here, and how are they engaged and connected?
- What does a Creative District mean for our community, and who must be at the table to shape it?
- Are we ready to invest in long-term stewardship, not just short-term visibility?

If your community is ready to explore these questions collaboratively, this program offers tools, guidance, and support to help you shape a district that reflects the community's unique identity and aspirations. Think of this as a foundation for an ongoing process of creativity and community building.

What is a Creative District?

A Creative District is a walkable, geographically defined area that is characterized by a high concentration of cultural facilities, creative businesses and entrepreneurs, artists, and culture bearers. Creative districts promote and benefit from a community's unique assets, enhance residents' quality of life, and attract visitors, talent, and investment.

Creative District Designation Step-By-Step

1. Explore Feasibility & Form an Advisory Committee

- Assemble a working group of local stakeholders and partners to ensure the exploration of a Creative District reflects community priorities and perspectives.
- If needed, use the **Guiding Questions** to structure early conversations.
- If the community decides to move forward toward designation, individuals from the working group can transition into a more permanent **Advisory Committee** to support ongoing district development.

2. Designate a District Coordinating Organization (DCO)

- Identify the organization that will serve as the District Coordinating Organization (DCO) if the proposed Creative District receives designation.
- The DCO will submit the Letter of Intent Form (LOI) via ESA no later June 12, 2026, by 5PM.

3. Submit Letter of Intent Form

- An interested community begins by the DCO submitting a completed **Letter of Intent Form (LOI) via ESA**. Deadline: June 12, 2026, by 5PM (Note: PA Creative Industries staff will not accept late submissions).
 - **New to ESA?** Register **through** Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's (DCED) grants management system: <https://grants.pa.gov/>.
 - Note: You must register for a Keystone Login in order to apply through the grants management system. You may register here if you have not already: <https://keystonelogin.pa.gov/Account/Register> - should this be "you must have registered"
 - Please note that the Commonwealth uses ACH to make grant payments. Register for ACH Authorization at the following link, if you have not already done so: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/pennvest/programs-and-services/financing/ach-authorization-change-form>
 - Read and comply with the checklist for applicants and grantees: [grants management checklist for applicants and grantees as of 7.17.25.pdf](#)

4. Connect with PA Creative Industries Staff

- After submitting the LOI, schedule a virtual pre-application meeting with staff to discuss the designation process and answer questions.

5. Conduct a Community Asset Mapping Project

- Identify the community's assets in the areas defined in the **Asset Mapping Guide**.
- Document both established strengths and emerging opportunities.

6. Define the District Map and Boundaries

- Establish clear, walkable geographic boundaries for the proposed Creative District.
- Include the creative assets and other key community resources located within those boundaries.

7. Develop a 5-Year Action Plan

- Develop a **5-year Action Plan** outlining goals, strategies, partnerships, and anticipated outcomes in the following areas – Management & Governance, Community Engagement & Partnerships, Creative Economy & Small Business Support, Placemaking & Programming, Branding & Marketing, and Sustainability & Resource Development.

8. Complete and Submit the Foundational Activities/Application in ESA

- Communities complete the required Foundational Activities and submit the finished **Foundational Activities** along with all required application materials via ESA. **Application deadline is January 15, 2027 by 5PM.**

9. PA Creative Industries Staff Site Visit (If needed)

- Agency staff may conduct a site visit to better understand the district's readiness and context.

10. Panel Review & Recommendation

- Panel reviews all applications and recommends proposed Creative Districts for designation to be approved by Council.

11. Designation Begins

- Official Creative District designations take effect **July 1, 2027**, pending passage of the state budget and Council approval.

Guiding Questions

Thinking about a designated Creative District for your community?

Deciding whether your community should pursue Creative District designation is an important choice. The path to designation requires commitment and collaboration. Perhaps this is a strategy your community has already been considering—or maybe it's a new idea. Either way, the following guiding questions are designed to help you reflect on the feasibility of such an undertaking. You may use these questions as a starting point for deeper conversations that spark dialogue and reflection.

- **Community Vision & Identity**

- How does arts and culture contribute to our community's identity, and how should the Creative District reflect and strengthen that role?
- How do we want the Creative District to highlight the uniqueness of our community's creative assets, landscape, people, and culture?
- How does the idea of a Creative District align with our broader goals for revitalization, community engagement, and economic growth?
- How might establishing a Creative District strengthen—or potentially conflict with—existing community development initiatives (such as Main Street designation, Business Improvement District, or neighborhood revitalization programs), and are current efforts already sufficient, or could a Creative District provide additional benefit?
- How does the proposed Creative District align with or enhance priorities identified in existing community plans such as its comprehensive plan, cultural plan, economic development plan, or other local strategies?

- **Assets & Location**

(Note: For the purposes of this guide, 'creative and cultural assets' are defined in the Glossary and include the full range of artistic, cultural, and creative resources that contribute to a community's vitality and economy.)

- Do we have a walkable, identifiable area with a concentration of creative and cultural assets?
- Can the existing creative assets anchor the district's identity?
- In addition to creative assets, what other existing assets or features could help shape the district's identity?
- Within the proposed boundaries, which stakeholders or organizations are positioned to collaborate on district activities, events, and ongoing programming?

- What existing collaborations, events, or creative activities within the proposed district area could serve as a foundation for future district programming?
- **Community Engagement & Leadership**
 - Who are the people and organizations—across arts, culture, business, education, government, and community life—who could champion this effort?
 - Are we ready for the essential work of engaging people across our community—ensuring inclusive community representation in shaping the vision?
 - What mechanisms do we have (or need) to ensure ongoing community-driven input?
 - Which organization is best positioned to serve as the District Coordinating Organization, and what existing capacity, relationships, or experience make it a strong fit?
 - What role should the Advisory Committee play in guiding the district’s development, decision-making, and ongoing community engagement?
 - What structures, leadership practices, or partnerships will be needed to effectively manage the district over time and ensure accountability, transparency, and community alignment?
- **Partnerships & Capacity**
 - Do we have good relationships with local government, small businesses, nonprofit community organizations, businesses, and arts and cultural institutions?
 - Which partners—within or near the proposed district footprint—are well-positioned to collaborate on programming, events, public space activation, or other district initiatives?
 - What technical assistance or external support might we need to move forward?
 - Do we have organizations with the staffing, expertise, or infrastructure needed to support district development, or will we need to build or strengthen this capacity?
 - How might our partners contribute over time (e.g., leadership, programming, fundraising, marketing, space activation), and what commitments or agreements may be needed to sustain those roles?

- **Funding & Sustainability**

- What funding sources (grants, sponsorships, public investment) could support planning and implementation?
- How will we protect and expand affordable spaces (to work and live) for artists, residents, and small businesses so the district remains inclusive and reflective of the community?
- What economic development strategies (tourism, entrepreneurship, workforce development) could be tied to the district?
- What long-term funding strategies (such as diversified revenue streams, earned income, or multi-year partnerships) will help sustain the district beyond initial grants or start-up support?
- How will we build the district's capacity to manage resources responsibly, track outcomes, and demonstrate impact to funders and stakeholders over time?

- **Readiness & Next Steps**

- Do we have the capacity to complete the Foundational Activities? If not, what resources do we need to complete them?
- What is our timeline for completing the Foundational Activities (assembling an advisory committee, completing asset mapping and geographic boundaries mapping, and action planning)?

Establishing a Creative District is not simply a designation—it is a long-term commitment. Taking time to consider feasibility ensures that the effort is grounded in local realities, aligned with existing initiatives, and supported by strong partnerships.

Creative Districts Program: Community Readiness & Application Checklist

Explore Feasibility & Form an Advisory Committee

- Assemble a working group of local stakeholders.
- Use Guiding Questions to structure early conversations.
- Decide whether the community will move forward.
- Transition working group members into an Advisory Committee.
- Review the Advisory Committee Guide & Worksheet.

Designate a District Coordinating Organization (DCO)

- Identify the organization that will serve as the DCO if designation is achieved.
- Confirm the District Coordination Organization is a Pennsylvania-based 501(c)(3), 501(c)(6), or unit of local government and meets the eligibility requirements in the Creative Districts Guidelines.
- Review the DCO Letter of Commitment Template.
- Identify district partners and complete letters of commitment as needed.
- Obtain a Local Government Resolution (template provided).

Eligibility & Requirements

- Review the [Pre-Application Checklist](#) in detail and ensure all required steps have been completed.
- Review funding restrictions and match requirements.

Submit Letter of Intent (LOI)

- Complete the LOI in ESA. (Note: LOI must be submitted by the DCO)
- Submit LOI by June 12, 2026 at 5PM.

Pre-Application Meeting with Creative Industries Staff

- Schedule a virtual meeting with staff after LOI submission.
- Discuss community readiness, capacity, and available resources.
- Review any previously completed plans for alignment with program goals.

Conduct a Community Asset Mapping Project

- Review the Asset Mapping Guide.
- Conduct community asset mapping activities.
- Complete the Asset Mapping Inventory Spreadsheet.
- Document strengths, emerging opportunities, or gaps that exist.

Define District Map & Boundaries

- Review the Geographic Mapping Guide & Toolkit.
- Establish clear, walkable geographic boundaries.
- Ensure boundaries include key creative and community assets.
- Confirm the district footprint aligns with program expectations.

Develop a 5-Year Action Plan

Plan must address the following areas:

- Management & Governance
- Community Engagement & Partnerships
- Creative Economy & Small Business Support
- Placemaking & Programming
- Branding & Marketing
- Sustainability & Resource Development

Complete the Foundational Activities Workbook

- Document all activities in the Workbook.
- Ensure all required attachments are included.
- Review for completeness and clarity.
- Prepare for submission with the full application.

Submit Application

- Submit the completed Foundational Activities Workbook and all required materials via ESA by January 15, 2027 at 5PM.

Creative District Program Letter of Intent Form (LOI)

Before beginning the Foundational Activities, each community must submit a Letter of Intent to Apply (LOI). This first step confirms a community's readiness to plan and complete the required activities. Communities should [download and complete the LOI form](#).

LOI Submission Deadline: June 12, 2026 by 5PM, EST.

The identified District Coordinating Organization (DCO) must submit the LOI Form via [ESA](#).

The LOI is not a full application. It is a short document that:

- Confirms your community's intent to pursue Creative District designation.
- Acknowledges your understanding of the Foundational Activities (advisory committee and District management, asset mapping, defining geographic boundaries, and developing an action plan).
- Indicates that your local government is aware of and pledges support of the effort.
- Recognizes that the identified District Coordinating Organization will guide the Foundational Activities, the designation process, manage the district, and serve as the administrator of any Pennsylvania Creative Industries grants for the district.

This step ensures alignment and readiness. **Once your LOI is submitted, your community must contact the program director to schedule a brief consultation meeting.** This meeting will confirm next steps, answer questions, and help you prepare to begin the Foundational Activities.

We look forward to working with you as you build on your community's assets and move toward Creative District designation.



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Creative Districts Letter of Intent Form

Submit this form via ESA to no later than **June 12, 2026 by 5PM.**

Before completing this form, please ensure you have reviewed the full *Creative Districts Program Guidelines* and understand the expectations for designation. **The identified District Coordinating Organization (DCO) must submit this form via ESA.** Please refer to the [Pre-Application Checklist](#) for links and information.

Date: Click or tap to enter a date.

Organization Legal Name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Organization address: Click or tap here to enter text.

Phone: Click or tap here to enter text.

Website: Click or tap here to enter text.

Primary Contact Name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Title: Click or tap here to enter text.

Email: Click or tap here to enter text.

Phone: Click or tap here to enter text.

Briefly describe the community and the general location of the potential Creative District. (300 word limit. If available, you may include a map as an attachment.) Click or tap here to enter text.

Provide an overview of the selected District Coordinating Organization (DCO). Include the organization's mission, a brief description of its programs, and the reasons it was chosen to serve as the DCO. (200 word limit.) Click or tap here to enter text.

Provide a list of the organizations partnering to pursue Creative District designation. If the District Coordinating Organization (DCO) is not a community and economic development entity, identify the partner fulfilling that role as outlined in the Eligibility section of the Creative Districts Program Guidelines. Include a brief description of past or ongoing collaborations that demonstrate strong working relationships. (300 word limit.) Click or tap here to enter text.

What planning or implementation activities, if any, has your community undertaken and/or completed so far in exploring or developing a Creative District? (300 word limit.) [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Why does the community want to pursue Creative District designation and what outcomes do you hope to achieve for residents, businesses, and local talent? (300 word limit.) [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

By submitting this Letter of Intent Form, we acknowledge:

- All required **Foundational Activities** must be documented, completed, and reviewed by Pennsylvania Creative Industries staff and designated panelists in order to be invited to apply for designation.
- Local, municipal government** leaders are informed about and supportive of pursuing Creative District designation, and that a formal resolution of support must be passed and submitted with the application.

By signing this Letter of Intent, I certify that the information is correct to the best of my knowledge.

X

What is a Creative District Advisory Committee?

An advisory committee is a group of dedicated community members who support district management and help guide the work toward shared goals. It brings together residents and representatives from civic, business, nonprofit, and community organizations to provide insight, coordination, and community perspective. The committee functions as a working body—offering strategic guidance, fostering collaboration, and serving in an advisory capacity that supports development, activation, promotion, preservation, programming, and community engagement—while giving each community the flexibility to decide how formally they want the committee to operate, including whether to establish term limits, defined roles, or other structural elements. The advisory committee will guide the Foundational Activities and, if designated, the Creative District.

Due to the nature of this project, it goes without saying that the Advisory Committee must include strong creative-sector representation to ensure the district reflects local creative, arts and culture strengths, ideas, and perspectives.

Cultural district programs emphasize that community support and inclusive planning are essential for success. Having a committee that reflects residents, artists, businesses, and cultural organizations strengthens buy-in and ensures the district is rooted in authentic local identity. – City of San Antonio Department of Arts & Culture

A Creative District Advisory Committee that has been thoughtfully recruited is important to the vibrancy of the district. Ensuring that all stakeholder groups are represented in governing, planning, and implementing projects and activities in the district. Additionally, this group will help lead community engagement activities and ensure a thorough and equitable community asset mapping endeavor.

It is important when recruiting members that you are being mindful of each member's input and contributions. Additionally, laying out a committee member's duties at the outset is vital to ensure that members understand the scope of

their commitment in terms of their times and talents. Arming members with this information at the outset will help alleviate any miscommunication or lack of participation.

The number of committee members is important to keep in mind. You don't want the committee to be so big that it's difficult to get things done however you want to be sure that there are enough people representing all of the stakeholder groups as this will alleviate burnout and ensure that a representative is at the table. An effective Advisory Committee typically includes 10–15 members, which is large enough to represent diverse creative-sector and community perspectives while still being manageable for decision-making and collaboration.

Consider your expectations and communicate them at the beginning of the recruitment process.

A few considerations:

- How often will the committee meet? What day of the week and time of day will meetings be held? Will you need to host meetings in the evenings to ensure the small business owners can be in attendance? Will you provide a meal, perhaps a working lunch meeting? Will you need to provide day care?
- The District Coordinating Organization will be responsible for leading recruitment and engagement of the advisory committee.
- Do you know how many hours per month members will be asked to commit for meetings?
- Do you know how often and the number of hours each year members will be asked to volunteer to help with district event planning and execution?
- Will members be expected to advocate for the district in local government and with the wider community?

Characteristics to keep in mind when recruiting members:

- Talents and expertise that support and strengthen the District.
- Deep community connections and trusted relationships across different neighborhoods, cultures, and sectors.
- Recognized community roles, both formal and informal (including grassroots leaders, culture bearers, and emerging voices).
- Ability to forge connections; trustworthy, collaborative, and committed to inclusive engagement.
- Artists, makers, craftspeople, or culture bearers passionate about place-based work and community storytelling.
- Commitment to broad, equitable, and culturally responsive community engagement.
- Big-picture thinking and the ability to imagine a shared future for the district.
- Willingness to promote the work and advocate for the district in ways that uplift all community voices.
- Passion for planning innovative, community-centered projects.
- Reliability, follow-through, and an action-oriented mindset.
- Pride in the community and its assets, including those that may be overlooked or underrepresented.
- Strong communication skills, including the ability to listen deeply and engage respectfully across differences.

Creative District Advisory Committee Recruitment Worksheet

Purpose: Use this worksheet as a guide to recruit Creative District Advisory Committee members. The committee is a group of dedicated community members who support district management and help guide it toward its identified, shared goals.

Step 1: Identify Stakeholder Categories

The Committee should reflect the breadth of the community. Think about the groups you've engaged or plan to engage:

- Local Artists & Creatives, and Culture Bearers
- Arts & Cultural Organizations (museums, theaters, galleries, heritage groups)
- Small Businesses (retail, hospitality, creative industries, etc.)
- Youth & Educators (schools, colleges, youth programs, teaching artists)
- Community Leaders (corridor development, neighborhood associations, service organizations, faith groups, civic clubs)
- Planners & Policymakers (municipal staff, elected officials, economic development)
- Inclusive Community Representation (BIPOC, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, immigrants residents, and community members across income levels)
- Funders & Investors (foundations, corporate giving, developers)

Step 2: Recruitment & Engagement Strategies

Recruitment should be **intentional and support meaningful participation**—focus on practices that build trust and ensure accessible participation:

- Personal invitations matter most – ask people directly, in person or one-on-one, so they feel valued.
- Keep it clear – use plain language about the committee's purpose and expectations.
- Engagement channels – choose a mix that fits your community:
 - Word-of-mouth through trusted connectors.
 - Social media posts or short videos.
 - Flyers in familiar places (libraries, cafes, rec centers, schools, businesses).
 - Community message boards (online forums or physical bulletin boards in neighborhood hubs).

- Local news outlets (radio, newspapers, community newsletters).
- Quick info sessions at existing gatherings (school events, business mixers, neighborhood meetings).
- Make participation easy – offer flexible meeting formats (in-person, virtual, hybrid) and consider small supports like meals or childcare if needed.
- Build trust from the start – be transparent about time commitments and how member input will shape decisions.

Step 3: Convening the Group

Plan your first meeting to cover:

- What Creative Districts are and how they work
- Foundational Activities (required to be completed as part of the application process):
 - Advisory Committee
 - Asset Mapping
 - Geographic Mapping
 - Action Planning

Next Steps:

- Develop the initial planning process, set early strategic direction, and outline preliminary geographic boundaries.
- Work together as a committee to develop a plan for completing the foundational activities.
- Establish a timeline for completing initial tasks.
- Develop a future meeting schedule to maintain progress and accountability.
- Identify and compile a list of materials, supplies, and resources needed to carry out the foundational activities.

Building Trust

A successful committee depends on trust. Trust is built when expectations are clear, voices are respected, and commitments are honored. Recruitment should prioritize transparency—members should know how their input will be used, how decisions will be made, and how their time and talents contribute to the district’s success.

SAMPLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE RECRUITMENT INFO

Join the <Name of Community or District> Creative District Advisory Committee

What is a Creative District?

A Creative District is a walkable, geographically defined area by a municipality that is characterized by a high concentration of cultural facilities, creative businesses and entrepreneurs, artists, and culture bearers. Creative districts promote and benefit from a community's unique assets, enhance residents' quality of life, and attract visitors, talent, and investment.

The Creative Districts Program, **an initiative of Pennsylvania Creative Industries**, an agency of state government, supports communities in transforming walkable, culturally vibrant areas into centers of economic growth, local identity, and inclusive revitalization. By investing in creative assets, the program supports public art and community arts and culture activities, fosters entrepreneurship and small business development, retains and attracts talent and visitors, advances a community's development and revitalization goals, and strengthens long-term planning.

Help Shape the Future of Our Community's Creative District

The Creative District Advisory Committee brings together community members who care deeply about local culture, creativity, and inclusive development. We welcome community members from all backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences to help shape a district that reflects our community. Committee members help guide the vision for the proposed Creative District, ensuring it reflects community priorities, elevates local creative identity, and supports a vibrant, welcoming place for all.

We're looking for people who bring passion, perspective, and a commitment to strengthening our community.

What the Advisory Committee Does

Advisory Committee members play a key role in:

- Helping shape the district's vision, goals, and identity
- Offering insight into community needs, opportunities, and priorities
- Supporting inclusive community engagement and outreach
- Identifying creative, cultural, and community assets
- Building relationships with artists, businesses, organizations, and residents
- Championing the district and promoting its value
- Contributing ideas that support long-term sustainability and resource development

Time & Talent Commitment

Committee members contribute their time, leadership, and lived experience to help build a strong foundation for the district. This typically includes:

- Attending regular meetings (monthly or bi-monthly)
- Participating in community engagement activities
- Reviewing planning materials and draft documents
- Helping identify partners, collaborators, and opportunities for district activation
- Supporting efforts that strengthen long-term financial sustainability, such as identifying funding opportunities or connecting the district with local resources
- Providing steady leadership and accountability as the district develops

Who We're Looking For

We welcome people who bring:

- Community connections and trusted relationships
- Experience as artists, makers, culture bearers, and arts administrators
- Experience as small business owners, local government and community development, and community organizers
- A collaborative spirit and willingness to engage across differences
- Commitment to broad, equitable community engagement
- Big-picture thinking and pride in the community
- Reliability, follow-through, and good communication skills

You don't need to be an expert — just someone who cares about the future of our community and wants to help shape it.

Interested in Joining Us?

If you're excited about helping shape the future of our community's Creative District, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact [< insert contact info >](#) to express your interest.

What Makes a Strong District Coordinating Organization (DCO)

A quick guide for communities exploring Creative District designation

A District Coordinating Organization (DCO) is the entity responsible for leading the Creative District effort. It manages planning, grant administration, reporting, partnerships, and long-term stewardship. Selecting the right DCO is essential to building a district that is vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable.

A strong District Coordinating Organization has the capacity, relationships, and community trust needed to lead a Creative District from planning to long-term stewardship.

Eligible DCOs include 501(c)(3) organizations, 501(c)(6) organizations, and units of local government. Examples include local arts and culture organizations, Main Street programs, or downtown development corporation. Keep in mind that when the DCO does not hold a community and economic development mission, a primary partner within the district must fulfill that role, consistent with program guidelines.

Key Qualities of a Strong DCO

Strong Organizational Structure

- Clear mission that aligns with or complements community development, creative sector support, or revitalization goals.
- Stable leadership and transparent governance.
- Ability to make timely, responsible decisions.

Administrative & Grant Management Capacity

- Experience managing grants or public funding
- Reliable and up-to-date financial systems and bookkeeping.
- Staff or volunteers who can manage documentation, invoices, and reporting.
- Ability to meet deadlines and maintain compliance.

Deep Community Relationships

- Demonstrated understanding of the community's creative assets and existing relationships with the artists, organizations, and businesses that make up the local creative ecosystem.

- Trusted and valued by the creative sector – local artists, organizational leaders and staff, creative small businesses.
- Strong connections with local government, small businesses, and community organizations.
- Reputation for collaboration, transparency, and responsiveness.

Commitment to Inclusive Engagement

- Demonstrated experience engaging diverse voices.
- Culturally responsive and inclusive practices.
- Willingness to share power with the Advisory Committee and community partners.

Capacity for Planning & Implementation

- Ability to lead or coordinate planning processes.
- Skill in organizing partners, stakeholders, and community activities.
- Capacity to support programming, placemaking, and district activation.
- Strong communication and project-management skills.

Focus on Long-Term Sustainability

- Ability to cultivate partnerships and resources.
- Understanding of funding opportunities and resource development.
- Commitment to maintaining affordable, accessible spaces for artists, residents, and small businesses.
- Long-term vision for district growth and stewardship.

Alignment With Local Government

- Positive working relationship with municipal leaders.
- Ability to secure a Local Government Resolution.
- Shared understanding of district goals and responsibilities.

Examples of Organizations That Often Serve as DCOs

- Local arts or cultural nonprofits
- Main Street or downtown revitalization organizations
- Community development corporations (CDCs)
- Business improvement districts (BIDs)

- Municipal departments or authorities
- Chambers of commerce or 501(c)(6) organizations

The strength of the Creative District begins with the strength of its coordinating organization—one that understands its community, collaborates across sectors, and is prepared to guide the work forward.

Creative District Coordinating Organization Letter of Commitment Instructions

The **District Coordinating Organization (DCO) Commitment Letter** serves as confirmation that the selected DCO accepts responsibility for overseeing the development, coordination, and administration of a designated Creative District. This letter ensures that the eligible organization has the capacity and commitment to manage the district's activities, partnerships, and long-term vision, and to administer any grant funds awarded to the district.

Commitment Letter Requirements

The Commitment Letter must:

- **Confirm programmatic leadership**, including the DCO's role in guiding and coordinating the district.
- **Affirm that the DCO will administer grant funds responsibly**, including:
 - Maintaining transparent financial practices
 - Meeting all reporting requirements
 - Ensuring funded activities align with Creative District program goals
- **Be no more than two pages**, on the DCO's official letterhead.
- **Be signed by an authorized representative** of the DCO.
- **Clearly outline the DCO's role, responsibilities, and readiness** to steward the district throughout the designation period.

This letter ensures that the eligible organization has the capacity and commitment to manage the district's activities, partnerships, and long-term vision, and to administer any grant funds awarded to the district.

Partner Letters of Commitment: Overview and Guidance

As part of the Creative District planning process, the District Coordinating Organization (DCO) and Advisory Committee should request Letters of Commitment from key partner organizations. These letters help demonstrate the strength of the district's collaborative foundation and the community's readiness to support the work ahead.

Letters of Commitment, while not required, strengthen the community's application. The DCO and Advisory Committee should identify the partners whose involvement is most essential to the district's success—such as arts and cultural organizations, local government departments, Main Street or downtown groups, community development entities, educational institutions, business associations, and other cross-sector collaborators.

These letters serve multiple purposes:

- **They demonstrate commitment** to funders, municipal leaders, and the broader community.
- **They clarify partnership roles**, expectations, and contributions.
- **They help district leadership think intentionally** about the structure of partnerships and how each organization will support the district's goals.
- **They reinforce shared ownership** of the Creative District effort.

What a Partner Letter of Commitment Should Include

A strong Letter of Commitment typically includes:

1. Statement of Support

A clear expression that the organization supports the Creative District effort and recognizes its value to the community.

2. Description of the Organization

A brief overview of the partner's mission, role in the community, and relevance to the district's goals.

3. Defined Role or Contribution

A description of how the organization intends to participate. This may include:

- Participation on the Advisory Committee
- Providing staff time or expertise
- Supporting planning, programming, or outreach
- Offering space, resources, or in-kind support

- Serving as a liaison to specific sectors or communities
- Contributing to public art, placemaking, or activation efforts
- Providing financial support or helping advance funding strategies

4. Commitment to Collaboration

A statement affirming the partner's willingness to work collaboratively with the DCO, Advisory Committee, and other district partners.

5. Duration or Nature of Commitment

A general indication of whether the commitment is ongoing, tied to planning, or connected to specific phases of district development.

6. Signature and Contact Information

Signed by an authorized representative with name, title, and contact details.

Guidance for the DCO and Advisory Committee

The DCO and Advisory Committee should work together to determine:

- Which partners are most critical to the district's early success
- Which sectors should be represented (arts, business, education, government, community development, tourism, etc.)
- Where Letters of Commitment will help strengthen the district's application, credibility, and collaborative structure
- How partner roles align with district goals and planning needs

Letters of Commitment should reflect **authentic, meaningful partnerships**, not just endorsements. They help ensure that the Creative District is grounded in shared responsibility, cross-sector collaboration, and long-term community investment.

TEMPLATE

A RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE INCLUSION OF [NAME OF COMMUNITY] IN THE PENNSYLVANIA CREATIVE INDUSTRIES CREATIVE DISTRICTS PROGRAM, AS PROPOSED BY _____ [DISTRICT COORDINATING ORGANIZATION].

Whereas, the _____ [NAME OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODY] recognizes the value of the Pennsylvania Creative Industries Creative Districts Program in supporting communities as they advance walkable, culturally vibrant areas as centers of economic growth, local identity, and inclusive revitalization by highlighting and investing in local creative assets; and

Whereas, _____ [SELECTED DISTRICT COORDINATING ORGANIZATION], as the selected District Coordinating Organization, has successfully completed the application process and has been selected to participate in the Creative Districts Program, receiving up to \$50,000 per year over the five-year designation period to support district development; and

Whereas, the _____ [NAME OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODY] acknowledges the importance of cross-sector partnerships and the role of local government support in advancing the goals of the Creative Districts Program;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the _____ [BOROUGH/MUNICIPALITY/TOWNSHIP/COUNTY] hereby supports the work of _____ [SELECTED DISTRICT COORDINATING ORGANIZATION] and its partners in the Creative Districts Program, and pledges its support through a minimum 10% match—provided as cash or in-kind contributions—to advance this effort;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the _____ [NAME OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODY] affirms its commitment to collaborating with Pennsylvania Creative Industries, the selected District Coordinating Organization, and community partners to support the development and long-term success of the Creative District.

Resolved this ____ day of _____, 2026, by the _____ of the [BOROUGH/MUNICIPALITY/TOWNSHIP/COUNTY] of _____, Pennsylvania.

Dated: _____

[Borough/Municipality/Township/County] of _____, Pennsylvania

Attested signature: _____, Attested signatory title: _____

CC: _____

Asset Mapping Guide

Across Pennsylvania, communities are rich with creativity, cultural heritage, and deep local pride—even as many continue to navigate the long-term effects of deindustrialization and underinvestment. Acknowledging those realities is important, but so is recognizing the resilience, talent, and commitment that have carried communities forward. Every place faces challenges, some shared and some unique, and naming them upfront creates space for more honest and productive conversations. The work ahead invites you to look at your community through a lens of abundance, focusing on the assets, talents, strengths, and opportunities that already exist.

What is an Asset?

Assets are the resources, strengths, and sources of value that already exist within a community and contribute to residents' quality of life — and many also draw visitors who are eager to experience what makes the place unique. They include the people, places, stories, histories, traditions, and institutions that a community values, takes pride in, or relies on. Assets can be cultural, social, economic, creative, environmental, or industrial—and they often overlap across these categories (see a full definition of assets in the Asset Categories section on page 3).

It can't be stressed enough that at the heart of every community's assets are its people. Their stories, talents, networks, and cultural practices form the foundation for everything else. People carry the knowledge, traditions, and relationships that give a place its identity and resilience.

Additionally, it's important to remember that assets aren't limited to these examples. They are broadly defined, because community members themselves are the experts on what matters most. Their lived experience shapes what they see as valuable, and those insights should guide the process.

Every single person has capacities, abilities, and gifts. Communities are built on the assets of their people.

– John McKnight, co-founder of Asset Based Community Development at DePaul University

What is Asset Mapping?

Asset mapping is the process of bringing a broad, cross-sector group of community members together to identify and document the community's strengths. Through shared input, the community builds an asset inventory that reflects local people, places, organizations, cultural resources, and economic drivers. While Creative District planning centers arts, culture, and creativity, it's equally important to identify assets outside the creative sector—such as schools, parks, businesses, community organizations, and civic

institutions—because they all contribute to the district’s vitality and support the creative ecosystem. This process should also consider assets both within the proposed district boundaries and throughout the wider community, since many important connections, partnerships, and resources exist beyond the district footprint. There is no single “right” way to conduct an asset-mapping project; communities can adapt the process to their needs, capacity, and context. A wide range of approaches and tools are available to support this work (see resource links at the end of this toolkit).

Why Asset Mapping matters?

Deep, intentional community engagement is key to a successful asset mapping process and is most effective when everyone has the opportunity to contribute, and when lived experience is honored as expertise. Asset mapping depends on community knowledge—it validates residents’ perspectives, encourages multiple viewpoints, and makes space for assets that may have been invisible to others. It’s important to remember that what residents view as community assets may differ from your own assumptions, and every voice brings valuable insight. Be ready to uncover assets you didn’t anticipate or even know about and to learn about strengths in the community that may not be widely known.

Meaningful involvement has tremendous benefits: it opens early conversations about the project, invites people to participate in shaping their environment, and helps redistribute power by honoring their input. This builds trust, fosters a sense of ownership, and lays the groundwork for early adoption—an essential ingredient for successful community work.

Take your time with this process. Use it as a moment to think deeply about the community and the full range of strengths it offers. This is also a chance to begin gathering ideas about a shared vision for the community’s future.

Why is thinking from a place of abundance important?

A community is, first and foremost, a place filled with the people, stories, and

Community doesn’t just create abundance—community is abundance. –Parker J. Palmer, author, activist, and educator

assets/strengths that make it a home. Whatever brings individuals to live there, the community deserves to be something its residents, neighbors, future generations, visitors, and everyone who experiences it can feel proud of.

Approaching this work from a mindset of abundance often requires new ways of seeing the place, so

encourage the community to lean into that shift. Deficit thinking places people on the defensive, focusing their attention on what isn’t possible and on the barriers in their way. When a community is framed through its shortcomings, trust erodes and momentum stalls, making it harder to move forward together. Abundance thinking sets the foundation for

sustainable work by strengthening community identity and connectedness, fostering a culture of collaboration instead of competition, building momentum, and opening people up to thinking creatively about possibilities and opportunities.

Leading the Work

The asset mapping process should be led by the partners identified through the steps outlined in the Creative District Guidelines, the District Coordinating Organization (DCO) and the Advisory Committee. Together, they guide and steward the asset-mapping work—ensuring that the process is community-driven, inclusive, and aligned with the district’s emerging goals and values. Their leadership helps maintain continuity, coordinate outreach, and ensure that the findings reflect the lived experience, cultural strengths, and priorities of the community.

Asset Categories

With the goal of Creative District designation in mind, The asset categories provided in this toolkit can be used as they are, or the group may adapt them to better reflect local context, as long as **creative and cultural assets remain a distinct category**.

For this toolkit we have categorized assets into the following areas:

- **Creative & Cultural**
- **Natural & Outdoor Recreation**
- **History, Heritage & Innovation**
- **Institutions & Community Organizations**
- **Business & Industry**
- **Investors & Funders**

Creative & Cultural

These assets, as defined by Pennsylvania Creative Industries, encompass the full range of artistic, cultural, and creative resources that contribute to a community’s social, cultural, civic, and economic vitality. These assets reflect the Commonwealth’s broader creative-industry ecosystem and strengthen local identity, deepen engagement, and generate opportunities for creative expression, economic activity, and shared belonging.

- **Arts & culture facilities and venues** — Arts centers, arts councils, dance studios, theatres, craft schools, museums, galleries, maker spaces, and performing arts spaces (both indoor and outdoor) that anchor cultural life and provide opportunities for people to gather, learn, and experience arts and culture.

- **Creative organizations, associations, and collectives** — Nonprofit arts and culture organizations, artist collectives and co-ops, volunteer-run groups, and membership-based associations that organize creative activity, support artists and cultural participation, and contribute to a community’s cultural ecosystem, regardless of whether they operate a permanent physical space.
- **Creative businesses and industries** — For-profit enterprises operating within the creative industries including, manufacturing, artisan shops, design studios, creative service firms, and other businesses that produce or support creative work.

2023 US Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) data shows that Pennsylvania’s creative sector:

- Added \$30.4 billion to the state economy (ranking 8th among all states in value added).
- Represented 3.1% of total GDP
- Supported 189,700+ jobs
- Generated \$14.6 billion in compensation

Creative assets strengthen communities *and* economies.

- **Artists, creative entrepreneurs and creative workers** — Individuals whose creative skills, practices, and leadership generate cultural, social, and economic value across Pennsylvania’s creative industries. This includes artists, makers, designers, performers, architects, marketing and advertising professionals, media and film producers, digital game developers, writers, and other creative professionals.
- **Public art and cultural landmarks** — Murals, sculptures, land and environmental art, artist designed creative lighting and media installations and infrastructure (i.e. bike racks, storm drains, utility boxes, pavement art, etc.), architecture, and culturally significant sites.
- **Events and programming** — Festivals, creative activities, workshops, performances, exhibitions, and markets.
- **Community identity and traditions** — Local stories, foodways, heritage, folk art and artistic traditions, and cultural practices. Culinary arts and foodways are essential creative and cultural assets. They express local identity, heritage, and storytelling through food traditions, recipes, and culinary practices. These assets also support creative entrepreneurship and community gathering, and they often overlap with both the Creative & Cultural and Business & Industry categories.

Other Assets to Consider:

- **Partnership networks** — Collaborations among arts groups, creative businesses, civic organizations, schools, and public agencies that expand opportunities and strengthen community ties.

- **Spaces with creative potential** — Vacant, underused, or adaptable properties that can be transformed into community-serving creative spaces.

Use of NAICS codes for the Creative Assets Inventory Spreadsheet

As part of the Creative Districts asset-mapping process, communities should use the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) to identify and categorize creative businesses, organizations, and practitioners located within the proposed district boundaries. NAICS codes provide a standardized method for classifying creative-sector activity and help ensure consistency across all participating communities.

However, Pennsylvania Creative Industries recognizes that many creative workers, entrepreneurs, and cultural practitioners do not fit neatly into a single NAICS code or may operate across multiple creative disciplines. If a business, organization, or individual does not align clearly with an existing NAICS code, communities should still include them in the asset map and document their role in the local creative ecosystem. In these cases, applicants should:

- Select the closest applicable NAICS code, or
- Provide a brief description of the asset's creative function or contribution.

This flexible approach ensures that all relevant creative activity is captured, including emerging, hybrid, or culturally specific practices that may not be fully represented in the NAICS system.

Natural & Outdoor Recreation

Natural and outdoor recreation assets are the places, landscapes, and amenities that support a community's connection to nature, physical activity, and outdoor enjoyment. They include the gardens, green spaces, parks, parklets, trails, waterways, open spaces, and recreational facilities that contribute to quality of life, environmental health, and a community's sense of place.

History, Heritage, & Innovation

History, heritage, and innovation assets include the places, people, preservation organizations, and institutions that reflect Pennsylvania's deep cultural roots and long-standing influence on the nation's identity, industry, and creative and innovative spirit. These assets encompass historic makers, craftspeople, inventors, and community members whose work shaped the community and the Commonwealth's past, as well as the innovators and emerging technologies that continue to spark new ideas today.

This category also includes historic sites, landmarks, archives, and architecturally significant buildings that preserve and interpret the stories of Pennsylvania's communities. Equally important are the histories that have been overlooked or not widely known—stories that reveal the resilience, creativity, and contributions of people who built and continue to shape the state.

Together, these assets highlight how Pennsylvania's legacy of creativity, leadership, and innovation continues to evolve and fuel its future.

Institutions & Community Organizations

Institutions and community organization assets include the governmental, nonprofit, and for-profit entities that support a community's education, youth development, community and economic development, health, human services, wellbeing, environment, safety, civic life, and social support networks. These organizations form the systems of care, learning, leadership, and civic engagement that help a community remain resilient, connected, and positioned for long-term growth.

This category also includes regional offices and programs of other Pennsylvania state agencies that play a role in local capacity-building and community & economic development. Examples include PREP and Engage partners, Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), Heritage Areas, Conservation Landscape programs, and similar statewide initiatives that provide technical assistance, training, funding, and cross-sector collaboration opportunities.

Business & Industry

This category includes the businesses, industries, entrepreneurs, and business-support organizations that make up the community's business and industry ecosystem. These assets highlight the kinds of work people do, the skills and traditions present in the community, the vital goods and services available locally, and the ways local businesses contribute to the community's economy.

Keep in mind that many assets naturally overlap across multiple areas, and that is expected. Above all, approach this work with the understanding that asset mapping is an ongoing practice—as communities transform, the assets transform too.

Investors & Funders

Investors and funders include the individuals, foundations, financial institutions, public agencies, philanthropic partners, and developers that bring financial resources and investment capacity to a community. These assets may include local and regional foundations, community development financial institutions (CDFIs) banks, donor-advised funds, corporate giving programs, real estate and community developers, and state or federal funding sources. Together, they help communities launch new initiatives, strengthen creative activity, support small businesses, and leverage additional public and private investment to advance long-term community and economic development.

Steps for Asset Mapping

1. Explain the “why”

Ground the process in the purpose of building a Creative District. Help people understand how asset mapping strengthens local creative ecosystems, supports cultural and economic goals, and ensures the district reflects community identity and priorities.

2. Define what asset mapping is

Clarify that asset mapping identifies community strengths across six categories: Creative & Cultural, Natural & Outdoor Recreation, History, Heritage & Innovation, Institutions & Community Organizations, Business & Industry, and Investors & Funders. Explain how documenting these assets will shape the Creative District’s vision, strategies, partnerships, and investment priorities.

3. Align on shared goals

Ensure everyone involved understands that this asset-mapping activity is designed to support the planning and implementation of a Creative District program. At the same time, emphasize that the process brings broader benefits to the community: it strengthens relationships, reveals under-recognized strengths, builds shared understanding, and creates a clearer picture of the community’s creative, cultural, and economic landscape. The findings don’t just inform the Creative District—they become a resource the community can use in many ways, from partnership development to grant applications to long-term planning. When people share a common sense of purpose, the process becomes more meaningful and the results more valuable for both the district and the wider community.

4. Consider the district’s boundaries — and how assets inside and outside connect

As you engage community members, stay mindful of the district’s potential boundaries — whether they are already defined or still being shaped. Pay attention to the assets within the area you’re considering and note assets outside it. Understanding how these internal and external assets connect will help you refine boundaries that make sense for the community. It will also help you identify outside assets that could be valuable partners in planning, programming, and implementing activities and projects that strengthen the district as a whole.

5. Plan activities and root the process in deep community engagement

Work with your group to plan asset collection activities. Prioritize people over projects. Deep community engagement is key to a successful asset mapping project. Work with organizations, artists, cultural leaders, and residents and community leaders who hold trust and relationships. Make space for lived experience, cultural knowledge, and informal networks that shape creative life and community identity.

6. Be clear about the timeline

Set expectations about how long the process will take, when engagement will occur, and when findings will be shared. Transparency builds trust and keeps partners aligned.

7. Gather & Organize Assets

Collect assets across all six categories using the community engagement activities outlined in the guidelines (along with any existing data you already have). As you identify assets, track and inventory them systematically using the Asset Mapping Inventory Spreadsheet to capture key details. Then sort assets into the appropriate categories, looking for patterns, gaps, clusters, anchor institutions, and potential partnerships that can inform district development.

As you organize assets, maintain an up-to-date Asset Mapping Inventory Spreadsheet (**please download the spreadsheet on the Creative Districts page at art.pa.gov**) and note any potential roles or partnerships for each asset. This becomes a working tool for planning, outreach, and long-term Creative District development.

Important Note: When completing the Asset Mapping Inventory Spreadsheet, you will need to provide a NAICS (for businesses/organizations) or SOC (for individuals). Please follow the instructions on the NAICS and SOC list for guidance.

8. Celebrate

Share what you've learned with the community and celebrate the people, places, stories, and strengths that make it unique. Acknowledge the work and the many contributors who helped surface these assets. Celebration builds momentum, reinforces community pride, deepens relationships, and invites continued participation in the Creative District's next phase.

What does the timeline for community asset mapping look like?

The answer depends on your community. Some places may already have asset-mapping work from previous plans or projects; if so, start by reviewing that information and updating it to reflect current realities. If you're beginning from scratch, expect the process to take time. Inclusive asset mapping requires space for meaningful engagement, thoughtful reflection, and community-driven input. Whatever your starting point, build in enough time to do the work well rather than rushing through it.

For Pennsylvania's Creative District rollout, plan at least 3-6 months for asset mapping as part of the Foundational Activities.

Activities for Community Asset Mapping

Your community can explore its assets through many different activities – from surveys to walkabouts and asset walls to small group listening sessions. The list below offers examples.

- **Community Conversations** Host community conversations in locations that are accessible, welcoming, and familiar to residents—places like libraries, community centers, cafés, parks, or neighborhood gathering spots. These sessions should feel less like formal meetings and more like open, inclusive dialogues where people can share what they value about their community.

Use these conversations to invite participants to identify assets, cultural touchpoints, and places that matter to them. Encourage people to talk about:

- Where creativity already shows up in daily life
- Spaces where people gather, celebrate, or make things
- Local businesses, traditions, or stories that shape community identity
- Places that feel inspiring, historic, or culturally significant

There are multiple ways to gear the asset-collection process—large-group discussions, small breakout circles, sticky-note walls, asset-mapping worksheets, or even a big, printed map where participants can place dots or write in locations.

Make sure facilitators create space for a wide range of voices, especially those who may not typically be included in planning processes. Consider offering food, childcare, or translation support to reduce barriers to participation.

Community conversations are not just about gathering data—they help build trust, deepen relationships, and ensure the district reflects the community.

- **Tabling at Community Events** Set up a table at well-attended community events to meet people where they already are and gather input from residents who may not participate in formal meetings. This approach helps you reach a broad cross-section of the community in a casual, approachable setting.

Examples of events where tabling works well include:

- Farmers markets
- Street fairs and block parties
- Cultural festivals
- School or library events
- Holiday celebrations
- Outdoor concerts or movie nights
- Neighborhood association gatherings
- Community days or municipal events

Bring a large, printed map, simple asset-mapping worksheets, and a few easy, interactive tools that help people mark places they value—creative spaces, local businesses, institutions, heritage sites, and natural assets. You might offer dot stickers for quick input, short story cards where people can jot down memories tied to specific places, or a quick “circle your favorite spots” activity for kids and families. Encourage people to share stories, memories, and ideas as they identify assets. Tabling is especially effective for connecting with families, young people, and residents who are often underrepresented in planning processes.

- **Surveys and Questionnaires** Collect input from a broad base of residents about what they see as community strengths through a simple community survey. Make the survey available in multiple formats so people can access and complete it in the way that works best for them—paper copies at public locations, digital versions shared through email or social media, and QR codes posted at community hubs or events. Offering several options ensures that residents of all ages, abilities, and

Community events reach people digital tools miss.

Neighborworks America found that tabling at existing community events is one of the most effective ways to reach residents who do not participate in formal meetings or online surveys, especially youth, elders, and lower-income residents.

comfort levels can participate and that the survey reaches people who might not otherwise engage in planning processes.

- **Community Walkabouts** Organize guided walkabouts through the proposed district area to observe how people actually use the space, where activity naturally clusters, and what assets might be overlooked on a map. These walks help participants experience the district at street level—its energy, rhythms, challenges, and opportunities.

You can structure these as informal strolls or as more intentional Jane Jacobs-style walks, inspired by the urbanist’s belief that the best way to understand a place is to walk it, observe it, and listen to the people who live and work there. A Jane Jacobs-style walk encourages participants to pay attention to:

- How people move through the area
- Where social interaction naturally happens
- What feels welcoming or unwelcoming
- The mix of uses—businesses, homes, institutions, creative spaces
- Street life, gathering spots, and “eyes on the street”
- Places with strong character, history, or cultural meaning

During the walk, invite participants to identify assets of all kinds—creative spaces, local businesses, heritage sites, institutions, natural features, and the people who animate the district. Encourage them to take notes, photos, or mark observations on a printed map.

Walkabouts are especially effective for surfacing insights that don't show up in surveys or meetings—like the feel of a block, the importance of a small gathering spot, or the presence of informal creative activity. They also help build shared understanding and spark new ideas among participants.

- **Mapping Workshops** Use large maps, sticky notes, or digital platforms to mark assets (arts venues, parks, businesses, cultural organizations).
- **Story Circles / Listening Sessions** Small group conversations where participants share stories about places, traditions, or people they value. These highlight intangible assets like heritage, networks, and local knowledge.
- **Photo Documentation / Asset Hunts** Invite residents to take photos of places, people, or activities they consider assets. This creates a visual record and engages younger participants.
- **Partnership Mapping** Chart organizations, institutions, and informal networks that contribute to community vitality. Identify overlaps and gaps to strengthen collaboration.
- **Public Displays / Asset Walls** Create a community wall or board where residents can add sticky notes naming assets. This makes the process visible and participatory.

Why These Activities Work

- They foster community pride by **centering on abundance/strengths** rather than deficits/challenges.
- They **invite broad participation**, ensuring inclusive community representation.
- They **generate multiple formats of data** (stories, visuals, lists, maps) that can be synthesized into planning documents.
- They **build ownership and trust**, laying the groundwork for designation and other Foundational Activities.

Celebration Strengthens Engagement: A growing body of research from around the world shows that public events that share findings significantly increase community engagement and support for a project, because residents see that their contributions are acknowledged and valued. -Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Celebration or Showcase Events

If possible, end the process with a community gathering that celebrates the community's assets. This could be in conjunction with an existing community event, or it could be a stand-alone event. Either way, bringing people together to share what was learned helps

strengthen pride, deepen connection, and build momentum around a proposed Creative District program in your community.

Note: For Creative District applicants please download the Asset Mapping Inventory spreadsheet on the Creative Districts page at pa.arts.gov.

Explore more resources

Some of the resources listed here are designed for specific sectors or focus areas but they still offer valuable ideas, best practices, and examples that communities can adapt to their own context. Even if a tool wasn't created specifically for creative districts, it can spark useful approaches to engagement, planning, and asset identification.

- [Asset-Based Community Development Institute](#)
- [A Guide to Asset Mapping – Bank of I.D.E.A.S.](#)
- [IMLS Asset Mapping Resources](#)
- [Participatory Asset Mapping – Community Research Lab Toolkit](#)
- [A Toolkit for Community Assessment: Community Asset Mapping – C4 Innovations & Georgia Health Policy Center](#)
- [The Community Mapping Toolkit- Preston City Council](#)
- [Asset Mapping with Youth](#)
- [Asset Mapping - National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#)
- [Asset Mapping 101 – American Press Institute](#)
- [Jane Jacobs Walks](#)
- [Community Tool Box – Center for Community Health & Development, University of Kansas](#)

Links to Asset Mapping Tools

[Asset Inventory Spreadsheet](#)

[Asset Mapping Worksheet](#)

Example view of the Asset Mapping Inventory Spreadsheet.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
	Asset Name	Address	Phone:	Website	Contact Name	Contact Email	NAICS/SOC Code	Brief Description	Notes	Geographic Coordinates (optional)
1										
2										
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Asset Mapping Brainstorming Worksheet

Identifying Community Assets:

- Use your best judgement—there are no wrong answers!
- Keep it clear and specific.
- Include places and people.
- Think broadly
- Optional: When you're finished brainstorming, complete the list on the back with as much information as possible.

Natural & Outdoor Recreation

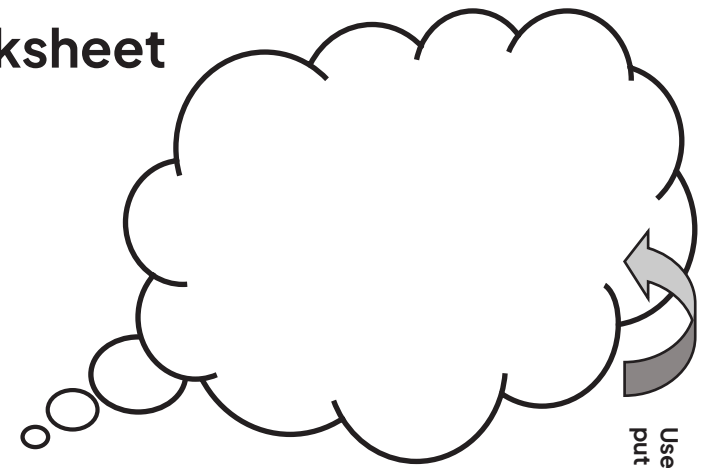
Creative & Cultural

Institutions & Community Organizations

COMMUNITY

Business & Industry

History & Innovation



Use this space if you aren't sure where to put an asset or if it's emerging or unique.

Creative Asset North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Codes & Standard Occupation Codes (SOC)

This list helps communities identify creative workers (SOC codes) and creative businesses/organizations (NAICS codes) during the asset-mapping process.

Using SOC and NAICS Codes in Creative Asset Mapping

Pennsylvania Creative Industries recognizes that creative activity includes both creative workers and creative businesses and organizations. To support consistent data collection across communities:

- SOC codes should be used when identifying creative occupations and workers.
- NAICS codes should be used when identifying creative businesses, organizations, and industry sectors.

We also recognize that many creative practitioners and businesses/organizations do not fit neatly into a single SOC or NAICS code. If an asset does not align clearly with an existing code, communities should still include it in the asset map and provide a brief description of its creative role. The goal is to ensure that all relevant creative activity is captured, including emerging, hybrid, or culturally specific practices.

NAICS Codes

As part of the Creative Districts asset-mapping process, communities should use the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) to identify and categorize creative businesses, organizations, and practitioners located within the proposed district boundaries. NAICS codes provide a standardized method for classifying creative-sector activity and help ensure consistency across all participating communities.

However, Pennsylvania Creative Industries recognizes that many creative workers, entrepreneurs, and cultural practitioners do not fit neatly into a single NAICS code or may operate across multiple creative disciplines. If a business, organization, or individual does not align clearly with an existing NAICS code, communities should still include them in the asset map and document their role in the local creative ecosystem. In these cases, applicants should:

- Select the closest applicable NAICS code, or
- Use the “Other Creative Asset” category provided in the Asset Mapping Worksheet, and
- Provide a brief description of the asset’s creative function or contribution.

This flexible approach ensures that all relevant creative activity is captured, including emerging, hybrid, or culturally specific practices that may not be fully represented in the NAICS system.

Visual Arts & Design

- **541430** – Graphic Design Services
- **541410** – Interior Design Services
- **541490** – Other Specialized Design Services
- **541420** – Industrial Design Services
- **541310** – Architectural Services
- **541320** – Landscape Architectural Services

Performing Arts & Entertainment

- **711110** – Theater Companies and Dinner Theaters
- **711120** – Dance Companies
- **711130** – Musical Groups and Artists
- **711190** – Other Performing Arts Companies
- **711510** – Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers

Media, Publishing & Film

- **512110** – Motion Picture and Video Production
- **512120** – Motion Picture and Video Distribution
- **512240** – Sound Recording Studios
- **519130** – Internet Publishing and Broadcasting
- **511110** – Newspaper Publishers
- **511120** – Periodical Publishers
- **511199** – All Other Publishers

Fashion, Jewelry & Artisan Goods

- **315210** – Cut and Sew Apparel Contractors
- **315240** – Women’s, Girls’, and Infants’ Apparel Manufacturing
- **315280** – Other Cut and Sew Apparel Manufacturing

- **316992** – Women’s Handbag and Purse Manufacturing
- **339910** – Jewelry and Silverware Manufacturing
- **448310** – Jewelry Stores

Culinary Arts & Specialty Foods

- **311340** – Non-chocolate Confectionery Manufacturing
- **311351** – Chocolate and Confectionery Manufacturing from Cacao Beans
- **311520** – Ice Cream and Frozen Dessert Manufacturing
- **311813** – Frozen Cakes, Pies, and Other Pastries Manufacturing
- **311919** – Other Snack Food Manufacturing

Furniture, Craft & Home Goods

- **337110** – Wood Kitchen Cabinet and Countertop Manufacturing
- **337121** – Upholstered Household Furniture Manufacturing
- **337122** – Non-upholstered Wood Household Furniture Manufacturing
- **337124** – Metal Household Furniture Manufacturing
- **337127** – Institutional Furniture Manufacturing
- **453220** – Gift, Novelty, and Souvenir Stores

Technology & Creative Services

- **541511** – Custom Computer Programming Services
- **541512** – Computer Systems Design Services
- **541513** – Computer Facilities Management Services
- **541519** – Other Computer Related Services
- **541810** – Advertising Agencies
- **541820** – Public Relations Agencies
- **541830** – Media Buying Agencies

SOC Codes

Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Codes

The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system is a federal framework used to classify and categorize occupations based on the type of work people perform. **SOC codes describe jobs and workers, not businesses or industries.** They are used by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and other federal agencies to track employment trends, analyze workforce data, and understand the composition of occupational groups across the economy.

In the context of Creative District asset mapping, SOC codes help communities identify creative workers, including artists, designers, performers, makers, digital creators, cultural practitioners, and other occupations that contribute to the creative economy. SOC codes are especially useful for capturing the diversity of creative work, including freelancers, independent artists, and individuals whose creative practice may not be tied to a formal business or organization.

Because creative work often spans multiple disciplines, some practitioners may not fit neatly into a single SOC code. In these cases, communities should select the closest applicable SOC code or indicate “Other Creative Worker” in the NAICS/SOC column on the spreadsheet and provide a brief description of the individual’s creative role.

27-0000 — Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media Occupations

27-1000 Art and Design Workers

- **27-1010** Artists and Related Workers
- **27-1020** Designers

27-2000 Entertainers and Performers (Sports removed)

- **27-2010** Actors, Producers, and Directors
- **27-2030** Dancers and Choreographers
- **27-2040** Musicians, Singers, and Related Workers

27-3000 Media and Communication Workers

- **27-3010** Broadcast Announcers and Radio Disc Jockeys
- **27-3020** News Analysts, Reporters, and Journalists
- **27-3030** Public Relations Specialists
- **27-3040** Writers and Editors
- **27-3090** Miscellaneous Media and Communication Workers

27-4000 Media and Communication Equipment Workers

- **27-4010** Broadcast, Sound, and Lighting Technicians
- **27-4020** Photographers
- **27-4030** Television, Video, and Film Camera Operators and Editors

15-0000 — Computer & Mathematical Occupations

(Creative tech, digital media, game design)

15-1200 Computer Occupations

- **15-1210** Computer and Information Analysts
- **15-1220** Software Developers and Software QA Analysts
- **15-1230** Computer Support Specialists
- **15-1240** Database and Network Administrators
- **15-1250** Programmers, Web Developers & Digital Interface Designers
- **15-1290** Miscellaneous Computer Occupations

17-0000 — Architecture & Engineering Occupations

17-1000 Architects, Surveyors & Cartographers

- **17-1010** Architects, Except Naval
- **17-1020** Surveyors, Cartographers & Photogrammetrists

17-3000 Drafters, Engineering Technicians & Mapping Technicians

- **17-3010** Drafters
- **17-3030** Surveying and Mapping Technicians

25-0000 — Education, Instruction & Library Occupations

(Creative-sector roles only)

25-1000 Postsecondary Teachers

- **25-1120** Arts, Communications & Humanities Teachers

25-2000 Primary, Secondary & Special Education Teachers

- **25-2020** Arts and Music Teachers

25-4000 Librarians, Curators & Archivists

- **25-4010** Archivists, Curators & Museum Technicians

- **25-4020** Librarians and Media Collections Specialists

51-0000 — Production Occupations

(Creative makers, artisans, craftspeople)

51-7000 Woodworkers

- **51-7030** Model Makers and Cabinetmakers

51-9000 Other Production Workers

- **51-9190** Miscellaneous Production Workers *(includes craft artisans, makers, set builders, prop fabricators, etc.)*

11-0000 — Management Occupations

(Creative-sector management roles)

11-2000 Advertising, Marketing, Promotions, PR & Sales Managers

- **11-2010** Advertising and Promotions Managers
- **11-2030** Public Relations and Fundraising Managers

11-9000 Other Management Occupations

- **11-9160** Entertainment and Recreation Managers *(sports-related management excluded)*

Community Asset Mapping Survey (Sample)

If needed, you can use this survey template as a starting point — you're welcome to change, add, or adjust anything to fit your community's needs.

Hello!

Thanks for taking a few minutes to help us identify the assets that make our community special. This short survey should take no more than five minutes to complete, and there are no wrong answers. We simply want to hear what you notice, value, experience, and love in our community.

As you respond, feel free to think outside the box. Well-known people, places and organizations certainly help make a community unique, but there are also other important elements that shape a place — traditions, beloved oddities, informal gathering spots, local stories, community member talents, or everyday strengths that people often overlook. Remember, people are assets too, be sure to include the community member assets whose talents and commitment help make this place our home.

Your insights—big or small—help paint a fuller picture of the people, places, and qualities that shape **<insert community name>**. Just answer with whatever comes to mind. Your perspective matters, and we're grateful you're sharing it.

1. About You

People contribute to community life in many ways. Please select all the roles that describe you.

Creative, Arts, or Culture Sector Worker

(This includes artists, culture bearers, creative small business owners, freelance creative workers, arts administrators, and others who contribute to the creative and cultural life of the community. See the Asset Mapping Guide for the full definition.)

If selected, please tell us a little more about your work or role: Open response:

Resident

Business Owner

Community Organization / Nonprofit

Local Government / Public Agency

Youth (under 18)

Other: _____

ZIP Code (optional): _____

2. Creative & Cultural Assets

What places, organizations, events, or people contribute to your community's creative and cultural life? (Examples: arts organizations, festivals, public art, creative businesses, cultural traditions)

- Open response: _____

3. Natural & Outdoor Recreation Assets

What natural features or outdoor recreation spaces are important to your community? (Examples: parks, trails, rivers, scenic areas, outdoor gathering spaces)

- Open response: _____

4. History, Heritage & Innovation Assets

What places, stories, traditions, or innovations reflect your community's identity and history? (Examples: historic sites, heritage organizations, remarkable architecture, local inventions and traditions, stories that reflect the important contributions of people from all walks of life who have shaped the community.)

- Open response: _____

5. Institutions & Community Organizations

What institutions or organizations help support community wellbeing, learning, safety, and connection? (Examples: schools, libraries, health providers, social services, faith communities, neighborhood groups)

- Open response: _____

6. Business & Industry Assets

What businesses, industries, or economic partners contribute to your community's economic activity? (Examples: major employers, small businesses, entrepreneurs, industry clusters)

- Open response: _____

7. Community Strengths

What do you see as your community's greatest strengths? (Select up to three)

- Creative and cultural life
- Natural environment and outdoor spaces
- Local history and heritage
- Community organizations and institutions
- Local businesses and industries
- Community spirit and volunteerism
- Other: _____

8. Community Opportunities

Where do you see opportunities for improvement or investment? (Open response)

9. Anything else you would like to share?

10. Stay Connected (Optional)

If you'd like to receive updates about this project, upcoming events, or opportunities to get involved, you're welcome to share your contact information below. This is completely optional.

Name (optional): _____ **Email (optional):** _____
(optional): _____ **Phone (optional):** _____

Would you like to be added to the mailing list? • Yes • No

Preferred way to receive updates: • Email • Text message • Both • Other: _____

Privacy Note

Your contact information will only be used to share updates related to this project and opportunities to participate. It will not be sold, shared, or used for any other purpose, and you may opt out at any time.

Geographically Defining the Creative District

A Creative District should be walkable, compact, and easy to navigate. While Pennsylvania Creative Industries has not set a required size for a district, in most communities, this means an area between 0.25 and 1 square mile, or roughly 5–20 contiguous blocks, depending on block size. Smaller districts often work best—they feel cohesive, are easier to activate, and allow visitors to experience the district on foot. Districts are especially strong when they connect naturally to nearby outdoor recreation assets such as trails, parks, waterways, and historic corridors.

As you map the district, think about the full ecosystem of assets. While the focus is on creative resources, the district does not exist in isolation. Consider:

- Existing events, partnerships, and community relationships
- Places where people already gather
- Public spaces and mobility patterns
- Planned developments, future collaborations, or upcoming projects that may shape the district over time

This broader view helps ensure the district reflects how people actually use and experience the area.

Core Geographic Tenets of a Creative District

- **Defined Boundaries** A creative district is a *geographically designated area*—often walkable—that concentrates cultural, artistic, and economic activity. Boundaries are typically mapped and formalized through planning or certification processes.
- **Mixed-Use and Multi-Modal** These districts bring together residential, commercial, and cultural spaces in ways that fit the local context. They support easy movement through the district—whether by walking, biking, driving, or other locally available modes—encouraging regular activity and spontaneous engagement.
- **Cultural Anchors and Clusters** Depending on the size of the community, the district may be organized around the creative and cultural assets that matter most locally—ranging from museums and theaters to grassroots arts groups, maker collectives, studios, heritage sites, or small creative businesses. These anchors and clusters help spark activity and strengthen the district’s identity.
- **Public Space, Public Art, and Placemaking** Streetscapes, parks, plazas, and alleys are activated through placemaking strategies like murals, pop-ups, outdoor performances, and wayfinding. These spaces foster gathering, visibility, and creative expression.

- **Underutilized or Transitional Areas** Many creative districts emerge in places with vacant buildings, aging infrastructure, or areas in transition. These geographies can offer opportunities for adaptive reuse, revitalization, and affordable creative space—but only when approached with intention. District planning should prioritize strategies that prevent displacement, support existing residents and businesses, and create pathways for people to remain, participate, and thrive as the district grows.
- **Economic and Cultural Overlay** The district’s geography reflects both economic intent (e.g., tourism, small business growth) and cultural identity (e.g., heritage, artistic disciplines). It’s not just about where things are—it’s about what they mean and how they connect.
- **Scalable and Contextual** The footprint can range from a few blocks to a broader downtown corridor, but it’s always tailored to local assets, community needs, and planning capacity. There’s no one-size-fits-all model.

Creative District Boundaries

It’s common for communities to struggle with defining boundaries—there is often a desire to include everything and avoid leaving anyone out. But a district that is too large becomes difficult to manage, dilutes its identity, and loses the walkable, people-centered character that makes Creative Districts successful. Boundaries should reflect where creative activity is already happening, not where a community hopes it might develop someday. Communities should also be prepared to clearly explain why the chosen boundary makes sense—how it reflects existing assets, activity patterns, and community priorities.

When navigating these conversations, it can help to emphasize that:

- A district is not a value judgment about who or what matters
- Boundaries are a practical tool, not a statement of exclusion
- Assets outside the boundary can still be important partners, contributors, and beneficiaries
- Districts can evolve over time as new projects, relationships, and opportunities emerge

Framing the district as a starting point, rather than a final or permanent line, often helps communities feel more comfortable making strategic, manageable choices that reflect real activity on the ground.

Creating the Map

Creating a Creative District map doesn’t require specialized software or a GIS expert—there are a variety of mapping tools available, and many of them are free and easy to learn. At the outset, check with your advisory committee members and partners; someone may

already have experience with Google My Maps, ArcGIS StoryMaps, or similar platforms. Regardless of which tool you choose, producing a clear district map is a required part of the Foundational Activities for the application.

For this process, communities will need to create a clear map of their proposed Creative District that shows both the district boundary and the assets located within it. The map should highlight creative assets first—such as studios, galleries, maker spaces, grassroots creative organizations, venues, and public art—since these form the core of the district’s identity. It’s also helpful to show how the district connects to nearby assets outside the boundary, such as trail systems, outdoor recreation areas, educational institutions, or major destinations. Finally, noting any significant current or upcoming projects or developments will help illustrate how the district may evolve over time.

A variety of free or low-cost mapping tools can support this work, and someone on your team may already have experience with them. Regardless of the tool you choose, producing a clear, accurate map is a required part of the designation process and will become an essential digital asset for promoting and communicating the district.

Required Elements for the District Map

- Proposed district boundaries
- All identified creative & cultural assets located within the district footprint
- Other assets that the group identifies as important to the Creative District
- Asset categories clearly distinguished (using symbols, colors, or labels)
- Key geographic features (such as major streets, landmarks, or natural features) that help orient viewers
- Any clusters, corridors, or concentrations of activity that emerged during asset mapping
- A legend explaining symbols, colors, and categories
- A clear title and date to show when the map was created or last updated

Additional Elements Communities May Include on the District Map

- Gateways or entry points to the district (existing or proposed)
- Overlays of other district programs or designations, such as:
 - Main Street districts
 - Historic districts
 - Business improvement districts
 - Special planning or zoning overlays

- Major transportation routes and access points, including transit stops, bike routes, or trailheads
- Public spaces and event-ready areas, such as plazas, parks, or pedestrian zones
- Wayfinding or signage locations (existing or proposed)
- Parking areas or key access nodes
- Streetscape features that support activation (lighting, seating, gathering areas)
- Historic or cultural landmarks not already captured as assets
- Proposed or potential development sites beyond those already required
- District gateways or branding elements planned for future implementation

Mapping Tools

Communities may use any mapping platform they prefer to create their district map, and there are many free, user-friendly tools available. Options include Google My Maps, Google Earth Web, ArcGIS Online (public accounts), Mapbox's free tier, OpenStreetMap with uMap, Scribble Maps, and even simple design tools like Canva for basic boundary illustrations. Each platform offers different features and levels of complexity, so districts can choose the tool that best matches their technical comfort and available resources. Regardless of the platform selected, the final map must clearly mark the district boundary and identify all required assets as outlined in the Required Elements section of this guide.

Using Google My Maps

Google My Maps is a free, easy-to-use tool that lets you draw your district boundary, highlight key routes, and map assets both inside and outside the district. Use the steps below to create and share your map.

1. Open Google My Maps

1. Go to **Google My Maps** (search “Google My Maps” in your browser).
2. Sign in with any Google account.
3. Click **Create a new map**.

2. Add Your Base Layers

Google My Maps automatically starts with a “Untitled Layer.” You can rename layers to organize your map.

Common layers include:

- **District Boundary**
- **Creative Assets**
- **Community Anchors and Organizations**
- **Public Spaces and Public Art**
- **Opportunity Sites**

To rename a layer:

- Click the three dots next to the layer name
- Select **Rename this layer**

3. Draw the District Boundary

1. Select the **Draw a line** tool (icon looks like a zig-zag line).
2. Choose **Add line or shape**.
3. Click around the perimeter of your district to create a closed shape.
4. Double-click to finish the shape.
5. Name the boundary (e.g., “Proposed Creative District Boundary”).
6. Adjust the color or line weight if needed.

4. Add Required Assets

For each asset:

1. Select the **Add marker** tool (pin icon).
2. Click on the map where the asset is located.
3. Enter the asset name.
4. Add optional details (website, description, category).
5. Choose an icon or color that matches your asset categories.

Repeat for all required assets.

Tip: Use **different colors or icons** for different asset types to keep the map clear.

5. Organize Assets into Layers

Drag each marker into the correct layer. This helps reviewers quickly understand your map.

6. Add Optional Elements

If helpful, you may also add:

- Gateways or entry points
- Key corridors or pedestrian routes
- Planned projects
- Notes or labels

Use the **Draw a line** tool for routes and the **Add marker** tool for points.

7. Share Your Map

1. Click **Share**.
2. Change the setting to **Anyone with the link can view**.
3. Copy the link and include it in your application.

Make sure the link does **not** require login or editing access.

8. Create a Separate Map Key

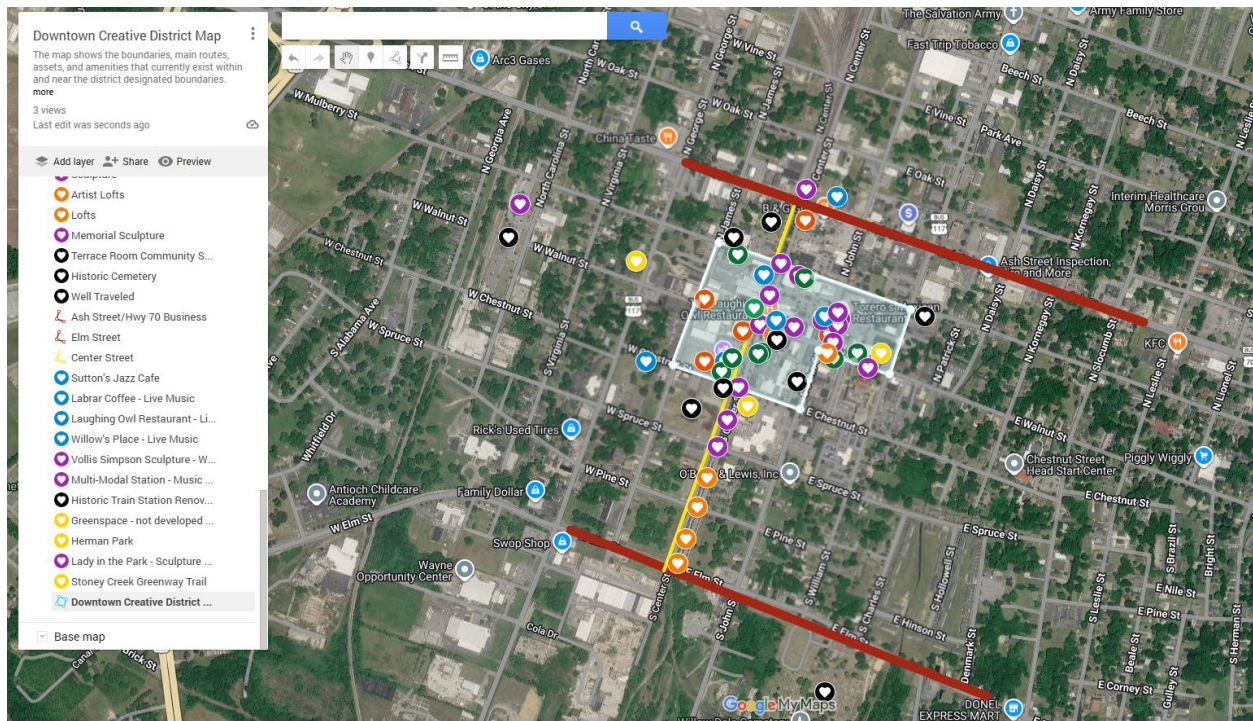
Google My Maps does not include a built-in legend. Please create a **separate key** that explains:

- Your colors
- Your icons
- Your layers
- Any symbols used

You may include the key as a PDF, image, or text in your application.

This example map was created using Google My Maps (free and accessible) to demonstrate the level of clarity and detail expected in your Creative District boundary map. It shows how districts can visually organize their assets using color coded pins, highlight key features, and clearly communicate the geographic focus of their proposed district. Applicants may use any mapping platform they prefer; however, the final map should include the components indicated in the Required Elements section.

Additionally, Google My Maps can also share a link to your map, allowing people to explore it in more detail. An added benefit is that the map can be updated over time as the district evolves. Here's a [link to the map below](#). (Note: To keep the example simple, we used a real place outside Pennsylvania as the base map. The district shown is fictional and created solely for demonstration.)



Map Key

Orange – Creative Assets

Green – Creative Small Businesses

Purple – Public Art

Black – Community Gathering Spaces – Indoor

Green – Natural and Outdoor Recreation Assets

Blue – Music & Performing Arts Venues and Locations (Locations refers to places and spaces that have another, primary function but also serve as a community space)

Red Lines – Main routes to downtown

Yellow Line – Center Street – Downtown main corridor

5-Year Action Plan Overview

Each Creative District will develop a 5-year Action Plan that outlines how the district will grow, strengthen, and activate. This plan should be grounded in the findings from the asset mapping community engagement activities and the district map. The Action Plan focuses on five required planning areas, with goals, objectives, and actions identified for each.

The Action Plan should be forward-looking, realistic, and aligned with the district's unique strengths and opportunities. It is not intended to restate information already provided elsewhere in the application.

Communities that have already completed an action plan or strategic plan must consult with Creative Industries staff to ensure alignment with Creative District program goals and requirements. The guide and template are provided to support communities at the very beginning of the Creative District process, offering a framework to organize priorities, engage partners, and outline strategies. Communities may adapt the template as needed, but all plans should clearly demonstrate how priorities were developed, how partners and community members were engaged, and how the district intends to move its goals forward.

Definitions

Goal - A broad, long-term outcome the district wants to achieve within a specific planning area. *Goals describe direction and intention – the “what” you want to accomplish.*

Objective - A focused, measurable component of a goal that breaks it into smaller, actionable parts. *Objectives clarify the “how” you will move toward the goal.*

Action - A specific step the district will take to achieve an objective. *Actions identify the concrete tasks – who will do what, and when.*

Required Planning Areas

For each of the following areas, districts will identify at least:

- **2–3 Goal(s)** for the next five years
- **1–3 objectives** that support each goal
- **1–3 actions** for each objective

Actions should include:

- Lead partner and supporting partners
- Timeline (Years 1–2, Years 3–4, or Year 5)
 - Years 1–2: Foundational work
 - Years 3–4: Expansion, deeper partnerships, and program growth
 - Year 5: Evaluation, refinement, and sustainability planning

- Resources needed
- Success measures

The required planning areas are:

1. District Identity, Branding & Marketing

The strategies and tools the district uses to express its unique character, tell its story, and build recognition. This area focuses on defining what the district stands for, how it presents itself visually and verbally, and how it promotes its creative assets to residents, visitors, and partners. It includes branding, messaging, marketing campaigns, digital presence, and other efforts that strengthen visibility and reinforce a cohesive district identity.

2. Creative Economy & Business Support

The district's approach to supporting, strengthening, attracting, and retaining its creative assets. This area focuses on how the district will nurture its creative workforce, arts and culture nonprofits, makers, cultural organizations, creative entrepreneurs, and small businesses by building partnerships and providing resources that advance their work. It includes identifying gaps in the local creative ecosystem, offering professional development and business support, fostering collaboration among partners, and—when needed—working together to recruit new creative enterprises that enhance the district's overall economic vitality. It also emphasizes ensuring that creative individuals, organizations, and businesses are meaningfully involved in planning, shaping, and implementing district activities and development, reinforcing their role as core contributors to the district's growth and identity.

3. Public Art & Placemaking

The district's approach to creating, maintaining, and activating public art and placemaking projects that reflect local culture and enhance shared spaces. This area includes stewardship of existing artworks, planning and implementing new projects, and identifying the artists, designers, and placemaking practitioners who contribute to the district's creative identity. It also emphasizes integrating public art into district development and ensuring creative practitioners and community members are engaged in shaping and enlivening public spaces.

4. Community Engagement & Participation

The district's approach to involving local entities, creative practitioners, and the broader community in shaping and participating in district activities and development. This area focuses on ensuring that planning and decision-making are informed by community voices, that people are invited into the process in meaningful ways, and that district initiatives create opportunities for connection, belonging, and shared ownership. It includes strategies for

outreach, communication, collaboration, and participation that strengthen relationships and ensure the district reflects the people who live, work, and create within it.

5. **Governance, Partnerships & Sustainability**

The Creative District’s approach to building and maintaining the structures, partnerships, and resources needed for effective coordination and long-term sustainability. This includes supporting the District Coordinating Organization (DCO) as a central hub for communication, leadership, and accountability. The area focuses on strengthening existing partnerships, developing new collaborations, and establishing clear roles, communication practices, and decision-making processes. It also encompasses strategies for financial sustainability, resource development, and cultivating the people, leadership, and organizational capacity required to sustain the district over time.

Connection to the Asset Map

The Action Plan should reflect and reference how it works with and builds on the assets:

- How existing assets support planned work
- Where new partnerships or opportunities may emerge
- Gaps or needs identified through mapping

Monitoring & Updating

Districts will briefly describe:

- Who is responsible for tracking progress
- How often the plan will be reviewed (recommended annually)
- How community input will continue to inform updates

This ensures the plan remains a living document throughout the 5-year designation period.

Example view of the Action Plan Workbook. The downloadable version includes all fields and instructions.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
10	Identity, Branding & Marketing							
	Goal 1:							
	Objective 1:1		Description	Timeline	Resources Needed	Success Measures	Lead Partner	Supporting Partners
	Action 1							
	Action 2							
	Action 3							
	Objective 1:2							
	Action 1							
	Action 2							
	Action 3							
	Objective 1:3							
	Action 1							
	Action 2							
	Action 3							
	Goal 2:							
	Objective 2:1		Description	Timeline	Resources Needed	Success Measures	Lead Partner	Supporting Partners
	Action 1							
	Action 2							
	Action 3							
	Objective 2:2							
	Action 1							
	Action 2							
	Action 3							
	Objective 2:3							
	Action 1							
	Action 2							
	Action 3							

Glossary

Activation — Programming or events that bring energy and people into a space.

Action Plan — A short-term, implementable plan that outlines specific steps, timelines, and responsibilities needed to advance district goals.

Adaptive Re-Use — Repurposing an existing building or landscape for a new use that differs from its original purpose.

Affordable Space — Housing or workspaces available at below-market rates, often essential for artists and creative workers.

Anchor Institutions — Key organizations or venues — such as theatres, museums, cultural centers, or major creative businesses — that serve as central hubs of activity and help define the district’s identity.

Anti-Displacement Strategies — Policies and practices that help existing community members remain and thrive during revitalization.

Artist-in-Residence — A program where artists work within a school, community, or organization to create projects or lead engagement activities.

Asset Mapping — Identifying and documenting a community’s assets, strengths, and resources to guide planning. Community asset mapping is a participatory, strengths-based process of organizing the people, institutions, physical spaces, cultural traditions, and social networks that contribute to a community’s vitality.

Business or Downtown Improvement District (BID or DID) — A defined area where businesses pay an additional fee to support improvements, marketing, or services within the district. (A Downtown Improvement District, or DID, functions similarly.)

Co-Creation or Co-Design — A collaborative process where community members actively help design programs, spaces, or solutions, ensuring outcomes reflect lived experience.

Community-Driven — Inclusive decision-making led by residents and local voices, rather than imposed from outside.

Community Engagement — A collaborative, ongoing process in which residents, local organizations, businesses, and other stakeholders actively participate in shaping decisions, priorities, and outcomes that affect their community.

Contiguous Area — A district boundary that is connected and walkable, without gaps or isolated pockets.

Creative & Cultural Assets — These assets, as defined by Pennsylvania Creative Industries, encompass the full range of artistic, cultural, and creative resources that contribute to a community's social, cultural, civic, and economic vitality. These assets reflect the Commonwealth's broader creative-industry ecosystem and strengthen local identity, deepen engagement, and generate opportunities for creative expression, economic activity, and shared belonging.

- **Arts & culture facilities and venues** — Arts centers, arts councils, dance studios, theatres, craft schools, museums, galleries, maker spaces, and performing arts spaces (both indoor and outdoor) that anchor cultural life and provide opportunities for people to gather, learn, and experience arts and culture.
- **Creative organizations, associations, and collectives** — Nonprofit arts and culture organizations, artist collectives and co-ops, volunteer-run groups, and membership-based associations that organize creative activity, support artists and cultural participation, and contribute to a community's cultural ecosystem, regardless of whether they operate a permanent physical space.
- **Creative businesses and industries** — For-profit enterprises operating within the creative industries including, manufacturing, artisan shops, design studios, creative service firms, and other businesses that produce or support creative work.
- **Artists, creative entrepreneurs and creative workers** — Individuals whose creative skills, practices, and leadership generate cultural, social, and economic value across Pennsylvania's creative industries. This includes artists, makers, designers, performers, architects, marketing and advertising professionals, media and film producers, digital game developers, writers, and other creative professionals.
- **Public art and cultural landmarks** — Murals, sculptures, land and environmental art, artist designed creative lighting and media installations and infrastructure (i.e. bike racks, storm drains, utility boxes, pavement art, etc.), architecture, and culturally significant sites.
- **Events and programming** — Festivals, creative activities, workshops, performances, exhibitions, and markets.
- **Community identity and traditions** — Local stories, foodways, heritage, folk art and artistic traditions, and cultural practices. Culinary arts and foodways are essential creative and cultural assets. They express local identity, heritage, and storytelling through food traditions, recipes, and culinary practices. These assets also support creative entrepreneurship and community gathering, and they often overlap with both the Creative & Cultural and Business & Industry categories.

Creative Businesses — For-profit enterprises operating within the creative industries including manufacturing, artisan shops, design studios, creative service firms, and other businesses that produce or support creative work.

Creative Cluster — A concentration of creative people, businesses, or organizations that generate activity and identity within a district.

Creative District — A geographically defined, easily navigable area where arts, culture, and creative businesses are concentrated as part of a community's cultural and economic life.

Creative Economy — The economic activity generated by people, organizations, and businesses engaged in arts, culture, design, and creative production.

Creative Entrepreneurship — The creation and growth of new businesses within the creative sector, including artists turning their work into sustainable enterprises.

Creative Placemaking — A community development practice that integrates art, local creative-sector assets, cultural identity, and design to transform community spaces into vibrant, inclusive, accessible, and engaging places.

Cultural Ecosystem — The interconnected network of artists, organizations, venues, traditions, and creative businesses that shape a community's cultural life.

Cultural Facilities — Places such as theaters, galleries, museums, and arts centers that support cultural activity.

Cultural Heritage — Traditions, practices, stories, and expressions passed down within a community, including both tangible and intangible heritage.

Cultural Programming — Events, performances, workshops, and activities that activate cultural spaces and engage the community.

Cultural Tourism — Visitors drawn to a community's arts, heritage, and cultural experiences.

District Boundary — The clearly defined geographic area that outlines the Creative District and determines which assets fall within it.

District Coordinating Organization — The lead entity responsible for managing, supporting, and sustaining the Creative District — often a nonprofit, municipality, Main Street program, arts organization, or similar group.

District Map — A visual representation of the district boundary and the assets located within it.

Displacement — When rising costs or development pressures push out existing residents and businesses.

Economic Vitality — The overall health and growth of local businesses, jobs, and economic activity within a district.

Entrepreneurship — The creation and growth of new businesses, including creative enterprises.

Equitable Development — Development that ensures all community members benefit from growth and investment.

Foundational Activities — The required early-stage tasks a community must complete to establish or apply for a Creative District, such as asset mapping, boundary definition, community engagement, and creating a district map.

Gateway — A visual or physical marker that signals you are entering the district, such as signage, an archway, a landmark, or a recognizable feature.

Gentrification — A process in which reinvestment and rising property values attract higher-income residents or businesses to an area, often resulting in increased costs that can displace long-time residents, small businesses, and cultural communities.

Grantmaking — The process of awarding funds to support projects, organizations, or initiatives.

Impact Investing — Investments made with the intention of generating positive social or cultural impact alongside financial return.

Inclusive Design — Designing spaces, programs, and processes that are accessible and welcoming to people of all abilities and backgrounds.

Infrastructure — The physical systems that support the district, such as utilities, lighting, broadband, and transportation networks.

Maker Spaces — Shared workspaces that provide tools, equipment, and collaborative environments for artists, craftspeople, and creative entrepreneurs to produce work.

Master Plan or District Plan — A long-range planning document that guides development, investment, and priorities within the district.

Mixed-Use — Areas that combine residential, commercial, cultural, and/or civic uses within a walkable or connected environment.

Multi-Modal — A district designed to support multiple ways of getting around — walking, biking, transit, and driving — based on what’s available locally.

NAICS Codes — The federal system used to classify businesses and organizations based on the type of economic activity they perform. NAICS codes help identify what a business does, allowing for consistent data collection, analysis, and comparison across industries.

Overlay — An additional planning or designation layer — such as a Main Street district, historic district, or zoning overlay — that sits on top of the Creative District boundary and may influence how the area is managed or developed.

Philanthropy — Charitable giving that supports community or cultural initiatives.

Pop-Up — Temporary creative or commercial activity, such as markets, installations, or performances.

Public Art — Art intentionally created for public spaces, designed with consideration for context, community, and place.

Public Realm — The publicly accessible spaces — streets, sidewalks, parks, plazas — where community life happens.

Public Spaces — Plazas, parks, streetscapes, and gathering areas that support cultural activity and community interaction.

Revitalization — Efforts to strengthen or renew a district’s economic, cultural, or physical environment.

SOC— the federal system used to classify workers based on the type of job they perform. SOC codes identify occupations—such as artists, designers, performers, and other creative workers—and support consistent data collection and analysis across the workforce.

Sense of Place — The unique character, identity, and story of a community as expressed through its cultural, historic, and creative assets.

Small Business Support — Programs or resources that help local entrepreneurs start or grow businesses.

Social Cohesion — The strength of relationships and sense of solidarity among community members.

Stakeholders — Individuals or groups with an interest in the district’s development, including residents, businesses, artists, and institutions.

Streetscape — The look and feel of the street, including lighting, seating, landscaping, sidewalks, signage, and other features that shape how people experience the district.

Tactical Urbanism — Low-cost, temporary interventions — such as street murals, pop-ups, or pilot projects — used to test ideas and activate spaces.

Vision Statement — A concise description of the long-term aspirations for the district.

Walkability — How easy and comfortable it is for people to move through an area on foot, with connected streets, safe crossings, and destinations close together.

Wayfinding — The signs, markers, maps, and visual cues that help people navigate the district and understand where key destinations, assets, and pathways are located.

Zoning — Local regulations that determine how land and buildings can be used within the district.



Pennsylvania Creative Industries

Powered by Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

2027–2028 Creative Districts Program Guidelines

Letter of Intent Form Due: June 12, 2026

Application Opens: November 30, 2026

Application Closes: January 15, 2027

Performance period: July 1 to June 30 each year of the five-year designation period

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About Pennsylvania Creative Industries

Pennsylvania Creative Industries is the new flagship brand of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency. With this name, the Council aims to elevate the creative sector's visibility, engage broader audiences, foster collaboration across disciplines, and underscore creativity's vital role in innovation, economic growth, and community vitality.

In 2025, our Council adopted a new strategic plan with the **mission** to empower, connect, and amplify creatives and creative industries and their contributions to Pennsylvania's communities, economy, and workforce. Our **vision** is that Pennsylvania becomes the national leader among states for creative communities, talent, and industries.

To maximize impact and align with state community and economic development goals, Pennsylvania Creative Industries invests resources in five key areas:

- **Asset Development** (e.g., creative organizations, entrepreneurial ecosystem, technical assistance, regional networking)
- **Workforce Development** (e.g., creative skills, career awareness, and employment pathways)
- **Community Development** (e.g., creative placemaking, engagement with local governments, and networking for practitioners)
- **Visibility** (e.g., promotion of creative industries, products and services, and of the contributions and opportunities within our commonwealth's creative sector)
- **Policy** (e.g., creation of policies that promote and foster relevancy and opportunity for creative industries, within governmental and non-governmental agencies and businesses)

Creative Industries Defined

Creative industries encompass individuals, organizations, and businesses that generate goods, services, and intellectual property through creative work. This includes advertising, architecture, performing and visual arts, design, crafts, music, media and film production, publishing, and digital games. Innovation, technology, and creative expression unite these diverse sectors.

In 2023, our commonwealth's creative industries contributed \$30B to Pennsylvania's economy and supported nearly 190K jobs. Learn more [here](#).

About the Creative Districts Program

What is a Creative District?

A Creative District is a walkable, geographically defined area by a municipality that is characterized by a high concentration of cultural facilities, creative businesses and entrepreneurs, artists, and culture bearers. Creative districts promote and benefit from a community's unique assets, enhance residents' quality of life, and attract visitors, talent, and investment.

The **Creative Districts Program** supports communities in transforming walkable, culturally vibrant areas into centers of economic growth, local identity, and inclusive revitalization. By investing in creative assets, the program fosters entrepreneurship and small business development, retains and attracts talent and visitors, advances a community's development and revitalization goals, and strengthens long-term planning.

Program Features

- **Grant Funding:** Access to support for activities including, but not limited to, activities that address key elements of the district such as district management, planning, promotion, programming, public art, community engagement, and creative organization or small-business development, attraction, and retention.
- **Statewide Promotion:** Inclusion in official, branded marketing campaigns that boost visibility and tourism.
- **Technical Assistance:** Guidance and tools to help assist with mapping, planning, and implementation.
- **Peer Learning and Networking Opportunities**
- **Recognition & Branding:** Formal designation that elevates local identity and community pride.

- **Support for Planning, Evaluation & Sustainability:** Resources and support to develop a 5-year action plan, with encouragement for continued reflection, progress tracking, and adaptive planning over time.
- This is a **reimbursement-based grant program**, which means grantees must first incur and pay for eligible expenses, then submit an invoice/final report with required documentation, such as receipts, invoices, and proof of payment to receive funding.
- Grant awards may be subject to the National Endowment for the Arts' (a federal agency) General Terms and Conditions-Appendix A:
[GTC-PARTNERSHIP-FY25-PLUS-6-25-25-FINAL.pdf](#).

Eligibility

To be eligible to apply for Creative District designation:

- **Interested organizations must submit a completed Letter of Intent Form (LOI) via ESA by Friday, June 12, 2026, by 5PM.**
- **Applicant organization must be a Pennsylvania-based 501(c)(3), 501(c)(6), or unit of local government.** Nonprofit applicants must be registered as a Pennsylvania Nonprofit Corporation with the Pennsylvania Department of State Bureau of Corporations and Charitable Organizations and be in compliance with all required annual report filings.
- If the District Coordinating Organization (DCO) is not a municipality or a local entity that serves as the community and economic development organization, the district must include at least one partner that fulfills this role. Eligible partners include a community development corporation; a municipal or county planning or community and economic development department; or a designated Main Street management organization, Business Improvement District (BID)/Downtown Improvement District (DID), Local Development District (LDD), or Redevelopment Authority, among others. This partnership must be documented through a Letter of Commitment submitted with the application, as outlined in the Letter of Commitment guidance provided with the Foundational Activities materials.
- Note: Fiscal agents or fiscal sponsors are not . The applying organization must be the selected District Coordinating Organization, the legal entity responsible for District management, grant administration, and reporting.

Funding Amount

- Anticipated grant amount up to \$50,000 per year for 5 years
- 1:1 match is required (up to 50% can be in-kind; at least 10% of the match must come from the local government).

Funding Restrictions

- Activities that occur outside the performance period.
- Activities that have a religious purpose.
- Payments to lobbyists.
- Cash prizes and awards.
- Benefit activities.
- Hospitality expenses (e.g., receptions).
- Competitions.
- Performances and exhibitions that are not available to the public.
- Activities for which academic credit is given.

Crediting Pennsylvania Creative Industries

Grantees must prominently acknowledge Pennsylvania Creative Industries funding in promotions, flyers, programs, media announcements, press releases, websites, social media that relate to this grant, by utilizing approved logos, branding, and materials. Pennsylvania Creative Industries will provide said materials to the grantee.

Creative District Designation Process

To be eligible to apply for Creative District designation, a community must submit the Letter of Intent Form (LOI) by the stated deadline and participate in a pre-application meeting with PA Creative Industries staff. This initial meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss any existing local plans, answer questions, discuss community readiness and available resources and toolkits that can support the community's efforts.

Note: Some communities may have undertaken planning or other foundational-type activities prior to the launch of the Creative Districts program. Previously completed plans or related work **may be considered** and will be reviewed **on a case-by-case basis** to determine alignment with program goals and requirements.

Creative District Designation Step-By-Step

1. Explore Feasibility & Form an Advisory Committee

- Assemble a working group of local stakeholders and partners to ensure the exploration of a Creative District reflects community priorities and perspectives.
- If needed, use the **Guiding Questions** to structure early conversations.
- If the community decides to move forward toward designation, individuals from the working group can transition into a more permanent **Advisory Committee** to support ongoing district development.

2. Designate a District Coordinating Organization (DCO)

- Identify the organization that will serve as the District Coordinating Organization (DCO) if the proposed Creative District receives designation.
- The DCO will submit the Letter of Intent Form (LOI) via ESA no later June 12, 2026, by 5PM.

3. Submit Letter of Intent Form

- An interested community begins by the DCO submitting a completed **Letter of Intent Form (LOI) via ESA**. Deadline: June 12, 2026, by 5PM (Note: PA Creative Industries staff will not accept late submissions).
 - **New to ESA?** Register **through** Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's (DCED) grants management system: <https://grants.pa.gov/>.
 - Note: You must register for a Keystone Login in order to apply through the grants management system. You may register here if you have not already: <https://keystonelogin.pa.gov/Account/Register> - should this be "you must have registered"
 - Please note that the Commonwealth uses ACH to make grant payments. Register for ACH Authorization at the following link, if you have not already done so: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/pennvest/programs-and-services/financing/ach-authorization-change-form>
 - Read and comply with the checklist for applicants and grantees: [grants management checklist for applicants and grantees as of 7.17.25.pdf](#)

4. Connect with PA Creative Industries Staff

- After submitting the LOI, schedule a virtual pre-application meeting with staff to discuss the designation process and answer questions.

5. Conduct a Community Asset Mapping Project

- Identify the community's assets in the areas defined in the **Asset Mapping Guide**.
- Document both established strengths and emerging opportunities.

6. Define the District Map and Boundaries

- Establish clear, walkable geographic boundaries for the proposed Creative District.
- Include the creative assets and other key community resources located within those boundaries.

7. Develop a 5-Year Action Plan

- Develop a **5-year Action Plan** outlining goals, strategies, partnerships, and anticipated outcomes in the following areas – Management & Governance, Community Engagement & Partnerships, Creative Economy & Small Business Support, Placemaking & Programming, Branding & Marketing, and Sustainability & Resource Development.

8. Complete and Submit the Foundational Activities Workbook/Application in ESA

- Communities complete the required Foundational Activities and submit the finished **Foundational Activities Workbook** along with all required application materials via ESA.

9. PA Creative Industries Staff Site Visit (If needed)

- Agency staff may conduct a site visit to better understand the district's readiness and context.

10. Panel Review & Recommendation

- Panel reviews all applications and recommends proposed Creative Districts for designation to be approved by Council.

11. Designation Begins

- Official Creative District designations take effect **July 1, 2027**, pending passage of the state budget and Council approval.

Foundational Activities Overview

PA Creative Industries staff are available throughout the process to support communities as they complete the required Foundational Activities. Staff can talk through each step, review existing community work, and help you think through plans and possibilities. While guides, toolkits, and worksheets are provided to help communities move through each activity, you are not required to use these materials. If you prefer to use your own tools or locally developed resources, please discuss them with the Program Director before beginning the activities to ensure they meet the program's expectations. At the end of the process, **communities will submit their completed Foundational Activities Workbook as part of the application.**

Foundational Activities Tools

Advisory Committee:

- Advisory Committee Guide
- Advisory Committee Worksheet
- Advisory Committee Recruitment Flyer

Community Asset Mapping:

- Asset Mapping Guide
- Asset Mapping Worksheet

- Asset Mapping Inventory Spreadsheet

Geographic Mapping:

- Geographic Mapping Guide
- Geographic Mapping Worksheet

District Coordinating Organization

- District Administrator Organization Letter of Commitment Template
- District Partners Organization Memorandum of Understanding Template
- Local Government Resolution Template

District Action Plan:

- Action Plan Guide
- Action Plan Template

Foundational Activities Workbook

Glossary of Terms

Other Resources

Creative District Program Timeline

- **Letter of Intent Form Deadline:** June 12, 2026, by 5PM (see LOI Form submission instructions)
- **Applications with the Completed Foundational Activities Workbook Submitted:** January 15, 2027, by 5PM
- **Site Visits:** February 2027
- **Panel Review Period:** March/April 2027
- **Panel Convenes:** May/June 2027
- **Council Approval:** July 2027 Council Meeting

Required Application Materials

- Completed Foundational Activities Workbook.
- DCO Commitment Letter.
- Most recently completed audited financial statement, compilation, or review (including any management letters) (if applicable).
- Most recently submitted IRS Form 990 tax filing (if applicable).
- Letters of Support from at least three community partner organizations (nonprofit, business, local government). – should this elaborate on the partnerships and should they be required – should we indicate a required or optional from legislative
- A passed local government resolution pledging support for the project and committing to provide at least 10% of the required match must be submitted with the application.

Application Review Process

- Proposals will be reviewed by a committee based on the review criteria below with considerations for geography and reach. Committee recommendations will be presented to the Council, Pennsylvania Creative Industries' governing body.

- Council will act on recommendations and has final authority in the awarding of grants. Applicants will be notified about the status of their proposals. Selected proposals will be notified via email with next steps outlining the grant award process.

Review Criteria:

Completion and Quality of Foundational Activities

- All required activities in the Foundational Activities Workbook are complete and clearly documented.
- The materials demonstrate an understanding of the Creative Districts program and a shared vision among partners.
- The selected District Coordinating Organization shows a stable track record and alignment with the proposed district's goals.

Community Engagement and Partner Commitment

- Documentation shows meaningful engagement with artists, cultural organizations, local government, businesses, and residents.
- Partners demonstrate clear support for the district's development and long-term vision.

Capacity of the District Coordinating Organization and Advisory Committee

- The District Coordinating Organization's Commitment Letter and financial documents demonstrate operational capacity to manage district activities, partnerships, and long-term planning.
- The District Coordinating Organization and Advisory Committee show the ability to steward a Creative District and administer any grant funds awarded.

Appeals Process

The Council recognizes that errors may occur in the application process. The Council is committed to acknowledging any errors and responding to rectify the effects of an error. The appeals process enables applicants to identify these errors and omissions and bring them to the attention of the Council. Appeals may result in a change in the determination of eligibility or the award amount if the applicant can satisfactorily document that an error or omission occurred through no fault of the applicant. Appeals are awarded only if the error or omission had a substantial effect on the evaluation of an application or on the determination of an applicant's eligibility.

Appeals are not intended to provide the applicant with an opportunity to challenge the qualitative assessment of the application. Missing the published application due date or failure to submit required information or documentation are not grounds for appeal.

Applicants considering an appeal should contact the applicable [program director](#) for advice and guidance. The appeal must be made in writing (hardcopy letter) to the Council's [Chief of Staff](#) within ten business days of the date of the notification of the award status from the Council. Appeal letters should identify the error or omission and the effect such error had on the Council's application review process. If the appeal is supported, funds will be awarded only if they are available.

Grants under this program are processed under the authority of the act of January 25, 1966 (P.L. 1542 (1965), 71 P.S. Section 1530.1 et seq., as amended, and 58 Pa. Code §301.32.

Questions?

- For questions, concerns, and issues with Keystone Login call: (877) 328-0995.
- For technical and login questions, contact the Enterprise eGrants Customer Service Center: (833) 448-0647 or egrantshelp@pa.gov.

- For questions about grant application content and required attachments, contact Sarah Merritt, Senior Director of Community Development: skmerritt@pa.gov or (717) 787-1521

It's not the destination, it's the journey.

Created in 2026 to support the creative vision and vitality of Pennsylvania's vibrant and unique communities.

For questions or guidance please contact:

Sarah Merritt

skmerritt@pa.gov

Senior Director of Community Development

Pennsylvania Creative Industries

pa.gov/arts



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