



# FY 24-25 Creative District Certification Application Guidelines

## About ArtsWA

Established in 1961, the Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA) is Washington State's arts agency. Its mission is to collaborate with and support artists, arts organizations and communities statewide to conserve, promote, and develop artistic resources. ArtsWA manages several programs that support this mission.

## About Washington Certified Creative Districts Program

The Creative Districts Program works to help communities throughout the state thrive. Our certification can bolster their creative economy, enhance vitality, and improve livability. This can support a region's ability to grow jobs and increase educational and cultural opportunities for residents and visitors.

In 2017, the Washington State legislature passed a bill to fund the Creative Districts program. The legislation tasked ArtsWA to create this program. The program works to promote and support economic development and placemaking opportunities in communities dedicated to growing their arts-related economic sectors.

The Creative Districts program is designed to help communities:

- Attract visitors, creative entrepreneurs, and artists
- Grow jobs and economic opportunities for all citizens
- Improve the designated district area so that it's an appealing place to live, visit, and conduct business
- Empower designated districts to strengthen their economic presence through investments in staff, community partnerships and strategic planning
- Introduce new energy and innovation
- Set the stage to improve or redevelop historic assets
- Celebrate and strengthen a community's unique identity
- Find opportunities around all income housing, live/work, and maker space
- Develop their long-term future in a proactive and sustainable way

## Creative Districts Defined

Districts go through a rigorous and fair planning and application process to become a Certified Washington Creative District. Potential Districts must:

- Encompass a contiguous geographic area
  - Be the site of a concentration of artistic, cultural or creative economy activities. 1 -2 primary arts or creative-economy industries should be identified.
  - Have a clearly defined, unique arts, culture or creative economy identity/brand
  - Be walkable and/or accessible, and attractive to locals and visitors alike
  - Actively promote local arts, culture, creative economy and tourist activities
  - Have unique resources that clearly contribute to the quality of life of the community
  - Include long-term cultural, economic and workforce development plans
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- Create a strategic plan / business plan to guide the district forward once certified
- Consider all income / affordable housing / maker space for creatives and artists living and working in the district to ensure their creative presence

### Program Benefits and Opportunities

In addition to providing designation and official recognition by the State of Washington, the program provides support for Certified Creative districts. Benefits and opportunities include (but are not limited to):

#### *Operational Funding:*

- Newly Certified Districts will receive a cash grant of \$10,000 to help fund the startup of their District. A one-to-one cash match is required; match can include in-kind donations up to \$5000 for rural and/or under resourced communities). Grant funding is subject to availability.

#### *Networking, Collaboration and Ongoing Technical Assistance*

- ArtsWA will facilitate access to technical assistance for Districts as needed and provide a learning and supportive community among Districts. Districts will have the opportunity to attend trainings and conferences with Creative District peer communities, and participate in other activities geared toward Creative Districts.

#### *Marketing*

- In partnership with Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), wayfinding signs will be placed on state highways in and/or near certified Creative Districts to complement a district's own signage efforts. (All signs are uniformly branded for the state program). WSDOT will underwrite 75% of the cost of production and installation, with the districts underwriting 25% of the costs. More information about this program can be shared by the program staff.
- Promotion of Creative Districts – sharing stories and successes with our audiences, both regionally and nationally

#### *Data and Impact Analysis*

- ArtsWA will contract with the Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF) to provide access to the Creative Vitality suite, an online platform for comprehensive creative economy data. ArtsWA will support districts in leveraging data to demonstrate impact and track progress
- ArtsWA will report annually on the collective impact of certified Creative Districts
- Individual districts will be required to file interim and/or year-end annual reports with ArtsWA that describe the economic and quality of life impacts of creative districts. This will be used to help leverage more investment in Creative Districts, and will support districts locally in their efforts to obtain public sector, corporate, grant and foundation monies

#### *Capital Project funding*

- ArtsWA may provide capital project funding to districts certified for one or more years. These funds will be awarded for projects and activities that enhance the built environment within a Creative District and may require a local match from the community. Grant funding is subject to availability.
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## *All income / Affordable Housing for Creatives / Maker Space*

- ArtsWA is researching real estate development tools to find possibilities to create affordable, appropriate places for artists to live and work in or near the districts. Districts and communities will be assisted in ways to support more stable, healthy communities anchored in existing assets.

## Applicant Eligibility

Applicants for Washington Creative District Certification must be:

- A structured entity representing a community located in Washington State. Types of entities include: a municipal, county or tribal government, a designated downtown authority or economic development agency, a 501(c)3 or 501(c)6 or;
- A structured entity representing an area formally recognized as a creative, arts or cultural district  
AND
- An organization with a minimum total \$20,000 cash annual operating budget, or that can demonstrate the ability to effectively manage a district, handle grants and oversee other fiduciary responsibilities. This represents the organization's total budget, not necessarily its Creative District program budget.
- If not a municipal entity, the organization must have approval from the local municipality to be the authorized agent of the Creative District.

## Application Process

Prior to applying, applicants should *read the guidelines thoroughly* and review all Community Readiness tools on the website.

**Step 1:** Review the Pre-Application checklist to ensure community meets minimum requirements. Complete the Community Readiness Workbook. Once these items are complete, move to step 2. Instructions for this step are found in the following section of this document.

**Step 2:** Submit a Letter of Interest (LOI) to the Washington Creative Districts Certification Program. A site visit of the potential district by Creative District program staff must be scheduled before Letter of Interest is submitted. If your planning team makes changes to the district boundary after this visit, but before you submit your letter of interest and/or application, you **MUST** schedule another site visit with our team. Instructions for this step are found in the following section of this document.

**Step 3:** If Letter of Interest is approved, submit full application within 60 days of approval. Site visit must take place before full application is submitted. Instructions for this step are found in the following section of this document.

### Step 1: Meet Minimum Requirements for Application

Communities interested in becoming a Washington Certified Creative District must meet the following minimum requirements:

- Designated, contiguous geographic area recognized by local municipal entity
  - Area is walkable and/or easily navigable
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- Clearly defined concentration of artistic and/or cultural activities and/or minimum of 1-2 primary arts-related industries occurring in region
- Clearly defined arts and culture identity
- Structured entity formally recognized by local government designated as district administrator, with assigned staff role to carry out Creative District activities
- Administrative entity has a minimum \$20,000 total annual operating budget
- Demonstrated broad community buy-in for designation as Creative District
- Partnership agreement amongst entities, to help guide activities in district (if applicable)
- Creative District strategic / business plan (covering 3 - 5 years of activity)
- Complete Community Readiness Workbook
- Formal site visit to proposed district by Creative District program staff has been completed

### Step 2: Letter of Intent

You may submit a Letter of Intent to apply if your community meets the criteria listed in Step 1. The letter should be less than 2 pages and should address the following:

- A brief overview of the proposed district: its general geographical area, and key highlights of activities that take place in it
- Briefly describe the vision of the proposed Creative District and how it will benefit your community
- The district administrator role and their intended work plan duties
- Describe partnerships, and/or members of the community who support or participated in the planning process
- Include full contact information for key individuals / personnel who will lead the process towards certification

### Step 3 Creative District Certification Application

Submit your application using our online form. The following criteria and weights will be used by the review panel to evaluate proposals:

- Creative District Information (30%)
- District Characteristics (40%)
- Community Buy-In, Outreach and Linkages (30%)

### Online Application submission

All applications must be submitted via ArtsWA's online application form, with all attending documents uploaded via this system. Links to online application will be provided to applicant after letter of intent is submitted. Applications will not be accepted in any other format, including via email or hard copy.

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## Application Questions

You will answer the following questions and provide support documents required for Certification.

*Please note that the first section of the application is dedicated to contact information for the administrator.*

1. What type of organization is the lead applicant?
  2. Is there a co-applicant for this Creative District?
  3. What is the name of the proposed Creative District?
  4. Upload a map of the proposed Creative District (PDF or JPEG file format please):
  5. Please describe the Creative District's organizational and/or governance structure (i.e., (501(c) 3, 501(c) 6, local government, Tribal Entity, Business Improvement District, Main Street organization, other):
  6. Is there a governing board/organizational subcommittee that provides oversight of the Creative District?
  7. Describe the designated staff liaison role for the Creative District. How will this position incorporate Creative District activities into its annual work plan? How much approximate time will be spent per month by this person on Creative District activity?
  8. If applicable, please describe additional paid and or volunteer staffing and support of the district: (500 words max)
  9. How is the District funded, and what is the source of funds? What is the Creative District's annual budget? Do you have a plan for financial sustainability? (500 words max)
  10. Upload a budget showing cash and in-kind line items separately. Budget does not need to adhere to a specific format.
  11. Does the Creative District have a membership structure?
  12. If a membership structure exists, how many members are in the district and what is the membership dues structure? (500 words max)
  13. Upload a completed W-9 for the organization that will administer the District:
  14. Please describe in detail the demographics of your community. Include information about gender/ethnicity/age/disability/immigrant status/socioeconomic status/etc. (500 words max.)
  15. Please describe the DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) work your Creative District has done/will do. What kind of outreach have you done to ensure your district reflects the demographics you referenced in the previous question? How are you including underserved groups in your Creative District? What kinds of initiatives are you bringing into the community to support equity?
  16. Describe the unique cultural or historical heritage of your district. Include information about indigenous people, early pioneers, foundational economy, etc. How does the history relate to the current activities and future plan of your District? (1000 words max)
  17. Please describe your Creative District's unique competitive advantage – the thing(s) that sets your District apart from the others. What is your unique niche, and key differentiator(s)? (1500 words max)
  18. Please provide the top three (3) short-term and top three (3) long term goals you have for your Creative District. Describe what you hope to achieve with these goals. (1500 words max)
  19. What do you see as your district's biggest challenge(s), and how do you anticipate overcoming them? (1000 words max)
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20. Upload the proposed Creative District strategic program plan document (PDF or Word format)
  21. Describe how your district engages with the community. Does your district have or will have signature events or activities? Do these events appeal to a broad cross-section of the population? (500 words max)
  22. Describe the mix of uses within your district (is it primarily retail/commercial, residential, industrial, mixed use). What other types of businesses or activities exist in the District that can support or bolster District activity? (1000 words max)
  23. Describe how your district has established/will establish a unique physical sense of place. Do you have wayfinding or signage, distinguishable streetscape, public art, unique geography, etc.? (500 words max)
  24. Describe the accessibility of your creative district. Is it walkable or otherwise easy to navigate? Is it accessible to those who use alternative transportation, such as bike or walking paths, wheelchairs/mobility devices, public transit (if available in the region)? (500 words max)
  25. Please upload 5-8 images or documents that demonstrate arts or cultural activities and/or typify the feel of your proposed District. You can include photos, promotional materials (for an event, for example), news articles, video etc. (PDF or JPEG format please):
  26. How will becoming a Creative District advance your community's goals? How does the Creative District reflect the values of the residents and businesses in your community? (1000 words max)
  27. Please describe public outreach activities you undertook during the Creative District planning process. What types of outreach activities did you engage in? Who were some of the groups that you reached out to? How did you connect to underserved and/or marginalized groups in your community?
  28. If affordability is an issue for your community, how do you intend to use the Creative District to ensure that live/work/studio spaces exist for creatives in your community? Please describe any existing or proposed all-income live-work housing, creative maker space projects in the proposed District. (1000 words max)
  29. Please describe how the Creative District will interface with economic development and/or workforce development plans that may currently exist in the community. Do these plans reflect the activities of the Creative District? Does the Creative District plan include a path toward creation of jobs or investment in business growth or entrepreneurialism the region?
  30. Please provide information related to the creative industries within your district. Please describe the data source and collection method for each data set (PDF, Word or Excel format). Types of data can include, but are not limited to:
    - a. Number of creative establishments within the District currently. Please include the definition(s) of the types of establishments counted.
    - b. Number of creative-sector jobs in the District. Please include definition(s) of jobs counted.
    - c. Estimated number of annual visitors to your Creative District, and the reason(s) for these visits (are they event driven, venue driven, other)
    - d. Estimated number of children and youth directly benefitting through Creative District activities. Please describe activities.
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- e. Other meaningful data that you have collected for your Creative District (property value trends, sales tax revenue data, occupancy rates, etc.)
31. Please upload a local government ordinance and/or planning documents that show local government endorsement of the Creative District
  32. Upload letters of recommendation that support Creative District certification from the following sources. You may upload as many as you feel appropriate, but *no more than 30 letters total*. All letters must be consolidated into one PDF file. Letters of support are required from the following entities:
    - Elected official or county representative, city administrator or director of planning or economic development.
    - Local downtown development authority, business district association or chamber of commerce, tourism association or board
    - Local arts commission (municipal or non-profit) or cultural affairs liaison
    - Tribal support / participation (if applicable)
    - At least one local community agency that focuses on underserved populations
    - At least one creative entrepreneur, such as an artist or business owner that lives or works in the district
  33. Please upload any additional documents that are pertinent to Creative District activities (such as municipal planning documents), or that are directly referenced in your application materials. (Word or PDF format, please)

### REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Certified Creative Districts will be required to submit periodic and/or year-end annual reports to ArtsWA. Failure to do this may make the district ineligible for further support. This may also jeopardize a District's certified status.

ArtsWA has the right to withhold, reduce or cancel funding and/or Certification status if an applicant fails to do the following:

- Adhere to deadlines for reporting
- Notify ArtsWA of changes in project collaborators or other significant management changes
- Comply with terms of any awards
- Demonstrate adequate financial management and oversight
- Properly credit ArtsWA's support

### APPEAL PROCESS

If your application for certification is denied, you may appeal the Commission's decision under the *Appeal procedure* - [Request for review of denied applications](#), per our rules ([WAC 30-12-036](#)).

### STAFF CONTACT

Before you submit your application, you should read the guidelines thoroughly and review all Community Readiness tools on ArtsWA's website.

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