

NEBRASKA CREATIVE DISTRICTS

Program Overview and Guidelines

September 2022

NEBRASKA CREATIVE DISTRICTS OVERVIEW

The Creative District Program is a program ran by the Nebraska Arts Council, with legislation passed by the Nebraska Legislature that will show the arts as an economic driver, support communities in Nebraska in telling their stories, and elevate the value of the arts.

A Creative District is a well-defined geographic area with a high concentration of creative resources and activities. Creative Districts works to help communities throughout the state thrive. The 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 creative opportunities for residents and visitors.

In 2020, the Nebraska State legislature passed a bill to create the Creative Districts program. The legislation tasked the Nebraska Arts Council 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.

Creative Districts will be selected through an open application process. Selected districts for the first Nebraska Creative Districts cohort will receive a host of benefits and will participate in a developmental evaluation process to refine the program for the future. Selected districts will help shape the final Creative District certification process and will help to define the most relevant and effective services for state-designated districts.

WHAT GOALS CAN A CREATIVE DISTRICT HELP A COMMUNITY ACHIEVE?

The Creative District program can help communities achieve multiple goals. Each district will identify what their goals are as they complete the Eligibility Assessment and write their own Creative District Plan.

- Attract artists and creative enterprises
- Encourage business and job development
- Establish the district as a tourist destination
- Preserve and reuse historic buildings
- Promote the district's cultural and historical heritage

CREATIVE DISTRICT PROGRAM BENEFITS

Benefits of participating in the Nebraska Creative District program:

- Official state certification and branding materials
- Attract artists and creative enterprises to the community
- Create hubs of economic activity, maximizing the various cultural assets, to create a unique identity that enhances the area as an appealing place to live, visit, work and create new economic activity.
- Attract visitors through joint marketing efforts such as the Nebraska Passport Program
- Enhance property values, revitalize and beautify historic buildings and communities
- Creative District Certification Grants for districts that become certified
- Join a cohort of other Creative Districts for support and growth
- Opportunity to apply for a Creative District Development grant

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Program Overview and Guidelines

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ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible to apply for certification as a Nebraska Creative District, the following minimum requirements must be met:

- Only organizational partnerships are eligible to apply. At a minimum, the partnership must include three organizations. One of those partners must be a representative from an agency of local government. Other partners can include: a cultural non-profit or artist collective, a local business or business association, and/or a community development corporation.
- The majority of organizations in the partnership must be located in the district.
- Evidence of partnership: A memorandum of understanding or letter of agreement between the partnering entities, which includes a representative from an agency of local government.
- One organization must serve as the lead applicant for the purposes of completing the application and will be known as the District Administrator. The District Administrator will be the contact for the Nebraska Arts Council and will assume the fiscal responsibility for the grant programs associated with the Creative District program. Examples may include municipal or tribal government, Chamber of Commerce, registered neighborhood organization, downtown development authority, or development organization.

District Administrator organization must:

- have a minimum \$10,000 annual operating budget.
- Be an incorporated nonprofit organization, physically located in the State of Nebraska, with articles of incorporation current and on file in the Nebraska Secretary of State's office; or a subdivision of government.
- have a Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN).
- have received federal tax-exempt status. Divisions of government must submit a copy of the sales tax exemption certificate from the State Department of Revenue.
- The cultural non-profit partner must have a two-year history of arts programming or activities.
- Map indicating the boundaries of the proposed district. The district must be walkable, or easily navigable.
- Evidence of community support: (3) Three letters of support from individual community members or organizations in the proposed district are required. Examples include individual artists, social service organizations, local elected officials, creative businesses, etc.
- Cultural asset survey or inventory
- A Strategic Plan with a clearly defined mission, vision and core beliefs for the district. The plan must also identify the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of becoming a district. Note: The workbook will begin to identify these details and a complete strategic plan will be required when the Creative District Plan is submitted.

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Program Overview and Guidelines

September 2022

APPLICATION PROCESS

The Nebraska Arts Council seeks qualified organizational partnerships to apply through a multi-tiered process adjudicated by a review panel that will include the following:

Step 1: Submit a Letter of Interest (LOI) to NAC staff

A one-page letter of interest (LOI) should be sent to nac.grants@nebraska.gov and should include the following:

- Name of community/district
- Contact information for the District Administrator
- Major partners
- A brief description of the community and its cultural or historical heritage
- Why the community would be a good candidate for the Creative District program
- Identify what the Creative District Certification Grant of \$10,000 will be spent on if it is awarded.

The letter will be followed up by a discussion with NAC staff. If the letter of interest is approved, NAC staff will provide the Eligibility Assessment.

Step 2: Submission of an Eligibility Assessment

NAC staff and a committee of outside reviewers will review the eligibility assessment, also known as the workbook. Based upon their feedback, potential districts will be given items to continue working on and/or accepted as a Creative District Candidate, invited to create a Creative District Plan, and contacted about a potential site visit. The workbook and supplemental materials should be emailed to nac.grants@nebraska.gov. The submission of an eligibility assessment in no way implies or guarantees that the community will be granted a Creative District certification. However, if the review committee approves the eligibility assessment, the district is considered pre-certified.

Step 3: Preparation and Submission of Creative District Plan

After a site visit and planning session with Nebraska Arts Council staff, the pre-certified Creative District will submit a strategic plan that outlines the goals of the Creative District, how they plan to achieve them, and how they will be measured. The Creative District Plan will be submitted via email to NAC staff.

Benefits of being certified include:

- Official state certification and branding materials
- Create hubs of economic activity
- Attract visitors
- Join a cohort of other Creative Districts
- Receive a Creative District Certification grant
- Opportunity to apply for a Creative District Development grant

Step 4: Certification as Nebraska Creative District (5 year)

This is a five-year designation. Once the Creative District Plan has been approved by NAC staff and a panel of outside reviewers, the Creative District is considered 'certified' and will be awarded a \$10,000 Certification Grant.

Once a community has been certified as a Nebraska Creative District, they will be eligible for a Creative District Development Grant of up to \$250,000 if they meet the eligibility requirements.

NEBRASKA CREATIVE DISTRICTS

Program Overview and Guidelines

September 2022

Grant amounts will be based upon need and available funds and will be reviewed by a committee of outside reviewers.

Step 5: Submit yearly **Evaluation and Interim Plan**

Interim reports will be required every year, which will help the Creative District track their goals and specific data points.

Step 6: Apply for **Re-Certification** (for another 5-year certification)

Creative Districts in good standing will be eligible for re-certification pending approval of a new five-year plan.

TIMELINE (First Year)

August 2021	Program details announced Informational Webinar
Ongoing	Eligibility Assessments will be reviewed as they are received Site visits will be set up after the workbooks are approved Creative District plans will be reviewed as they are received Districts are eligible for Creative District Development Grants once their plan is approved, and they are certified.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Districts will be selected for certification based on the strength with which they demonstrate the following:

- Clearly defined, qualified, **strong leadership**
- Clearly defined mission and **driving vision** for the district
- Quality, diversity, and commitment of **key participating partners** from civic, business and arts communities
Demonstrated by economic workforce development plans to bolster the creative economy for the region.
- Authentic **community engagement** from diverse stakeholders
Evidenced by letters of support from creative entrepreneurs, investment and/or other related economic development activities.
- A thorough **inventory of the cultural assets** in the community and demonstrated understanding of the role of each in a Creative District
Including local arts, culture and tourist activities as well as preservation or promotion of cultural or historical heritage and architecture
- Thorough study and understanding of the **district's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats**
Including opportunities around maker spaces and/or affordable housing for artists and creatives
- Recognized impact of the Creative District designation and **evaluation plan**
Economic development data that demonstrates the current or project growth of the arts sector in the region.

NEBRASKA CREATIVE DISTRICTS

Program Overview and Guidelines

September 2022

REVIEW PROCESS

The assessment, subsequent findings from the site visits, and Creative District plan will be reviewed by a multi-disciplinary and multi-sector selection panel.

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| • LOI | Reviewed by NAC Staff |
| • Eligibility Assessment | Reviewed by outside reviewers and NAC staff |
| • Creative District Plan | Reviewed by outside reviewers and NAC staff |
| • Creative District Development Grants | Reviewed by outside reviewers and NAC staff |

Grant Programs

The Creative District Program will include two separate grant programs. Details on each grant program are identified below.

Creative District Certification Grant

This grant award of \$10,000 is available once the Creative District Plan is approved by the review panel and the district is considered certified. The funds are non-matching in nature and a final report will be required to show how the funds were spent. Some examples of how the grant award can be used are as follows:

- Consultants to help with town hall meetings, asset mapping, or strategic planning
- Marketing materials such as website development, signage, or banners
- Community enhancement projects
- Events that will help attract visitors to the district

Creative District Development Grant

Certified Creative Districts are eligible for a Creative District Development Grant. The maximum grant request amount for new Districts is \$250,000 (there is no minimum amount). New Districts may submit multiple applications until they reach the \$250,000 maximum request amount. Once \$250,000 in requests has been reached, districts may apply again, but priority will be to fund new districts that have not reached the \$250,000 limit.

Funds awarded can be used for the following:

- **Construction:** Building, renovation, and/or expansion of existing buildings
- **Marketing:** Promotion of the district; this may include the district's website, branding, and marketing. Can also include improved signage and wayfinding for the district.
- **Operational Support:** Organizational support for the management and operations of the district (only for designated District Administrator organizations in certified Creative Districts)
- **Physical Enhancements:** Enhancements to the Creative District to make it more accessible, attractive, cohesive-looking, and safe for visitors
- **Planning:** In-depth strategic planning and/or planning related to the development or rehabilitation of eligible projects such as engineering or technical studies.
- **Programming:** High quality arts programming that will attract a significant number of visitors to the Creative District

A separate application will be required for this grant program. The applicant will be required to show how the funds requested support the approved Creative District Plan and will further the economic development of the district. The application will be reviewed by an outside panel of reviewers.