



## The PLACES Initiative: Powering Local Authentic Community Experiences & Spaces

***Building places people love to live and visit.***

The PLACES Initiative is a destination development grant program from Visit Hendricks County that supports vibrant spaces, authentic experiences, and community-driven projects that make Hendricks County a better place to live, visit, explore, and enjoy.

The program is designed to help bring local ideas to life — from events and public art to accessibility improvements, outdoor recreation, wayfinding, placemaking, and other projects that strengthen the quality of place across Hendricks County.

### **Program Purpose:**

The PLACES Initiative supports projects, experiences, and initiatives that help Hendricks County become a more appealing, connected, competitive, and welcoming destination. The program is rooted in [Visit Hendricks County's Strategic Plan](#), with a focus on investing in projects that improve both resident quality of life and visitor experience.

Through The PLACES Initiative, Visit Hendricks County aims to support projects that make Hendricks County more active, attractive, accessible, and experience-rich.

### **Destination Development Priorities:**

Projects supported through The PLACES Initiative should generally align with one or more priorities identified in the Visit Hendricks County Destination Development Plan, including:

- Arts and culture
- Accessibility and inclusivity
- Outdoor activities and amenities
- Connectivity
- Wayfinding
- Event development initiatives
- Placemaking
- Quality-of-place improvements

Projects that support multiple priorities or demonstrate broader community and visitor impact may receive stronger consideration.

### **Funding Priorities:**

In 2026, Visit Hendricks County intends to award up to \$200,000 through The PLACES Initiative. The goal is to support a diverse range of projects and initiatives that align with destination development priorities and contribute to the overall strength, appeal, and visitor readiness of Hendricks County.

Funding recommendations may consider:

- Alignment with [Visit Hendricks County's Strategic Plan](#)
- Community and visitor impact
- Geographic distribution
- Project diversity
- Organizational capacity
- Partnership opportunities
- Overall balance across priority areas

Funding priorities may evolve based on organizational goals, community needs, application demand, available funding, and strategic opportunities.

**Eligible Applicants:**

Eligible applicants may include:

- For-profit or nonprofit organizations/businesses
- Municipalities and government entities

Partnership and collaborative applications are encouraged.

The proposed project area **MUST** be physically located in Hendricks County.

**Eligible Projects:**

Examples of eligible projects may include but are not limited to:

- Experience development initiatives
- Activation of underutilized spaces
- Pilot or innovative tourism-related experiences
- Festivals, events, and event expansion
- Public art and placemaking initiatives
- Destination-focused beautification projects
- Visitor-facing accessibility improvements
- Wayfinding and connectivity enhancements
- Cultural programming and installations
- Tourism-supportive recreation amenities
- Agritourism and rural tourism initiatives
- Projects that improve resident and visitor engagement

**Ineligible Applicants:**

The following applicants will not be eligible for funding:

- a. Those that discriminate in their programs, activities, or hiring policies.
- b. Those affiliated with any national organization or chapter that discriminates based on race, color, national or ethnic origin, ancestry, age, religion, disability, medical condition, sex, or gender (including pregnancy), gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, military or veteran status, or any other characteristics protected under applicable federal, state, or local law.
- c. Political organizations of any sort.
- d. Individuals are **NOT** eligible to apply.

**Ineligible Uses:**

The following are generally not eligible for funding:

- Ongoing operational expenses unrelated to the proposed project
- Debt reduction or refinancing
- General fundraising campaigns or activities
- Political activities
- Projects occurring outside Hendricks County
- Requests submitted after project completion
- Religious programming primarily intended for worship activities
- Projects inconsistent with the goals of the [Visit Hendricks County Strategic Plan](#)
- Requests to support travel, lodging, or participation in activities, tournaments, conferences, or competitions outside Hendricks County

**Funding Structure:**

PLACES is designed to remain flexible so it can support a wide range of destination development opportunities.

Funding amounts may vary based on project scope, impact, readiness, leverage, and strategic alignment.

Visit Hendricks County reserves the right to award partial, full, or no funding. Available funding and award amounts are subject to annual review and budget approval by the Visit Hendricks County Board of Directors.

**Matching and Project Leverage:**

Visit Hendricks County seeks to support projects that demonstrate appropriate commitment, partnership, readiness, and leverage based on the size and nature of the request.

Project leverage may include:

- Matching funds
- Sponsorships
- Municipal support
- Volunteer labor
- Donated services
- In-kind contributions
- Organizational investment
- Other forms of partnership and support

**Requests up to \$5,000:**

No match is required.

**Requests from \$5,000 to \$10,000:**

A 1:1 match is required, but the match can be made up of a combination of cash and in-kind contributions.

**Requests over \$10,000:**

A minimum 1:1 cash match is required.

Visit Hendricks County reserves the right to adjust match expectations, payment structures, reimbursement schedules, or funding timelines based on project scope, readiness, organizational capacity, strategic alignment, or other relevant considerations.

Visit Hendricks County may also structure certain awards using phased payment or reimbursement schedules based on project progress, implementation milestones, or reporting requirements.

**Parks Foundation of Hendricks County Partnership:**

Visit Hendricks County is partnering with the Parks Foundation of Hendricks County to support parks, trails, and outdoor recreation-related grant opportunities.

Through this partnership, Visit Hendricks County will allocate annual funding to support grantmaking and related initiatives administered by the Parks Foundation of Hendricks County.

Generally, public parks and trails-focused applicants seeking financial support will be directed to the Parks Foundation-administered process rather than the standard Visit Hendricks County annual grants cycle. This partnership is intended to support and strengthen the work already led by the Parks

Foundation, while avoiding duplication of effort and maintaining a coordinated approach to destination development and quality-of-place investments across Hendricks County.

### **Application Timeline:**

The anticipated annual grants cycle timeline is:

|                          |                                          |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <b>August 3, 2026</b>    | Program launch                           |
| <b>October 9, 2026</b>   | Application deadline                     |
| <b>October 26, 2026</b>  | Committee review                         |
| <b>November 5, 2026</b>  | Board approval                           |
| <b>November 9, 2026</b>  | Agreements finalized for approved awards |
| <b>November 19, 2026</b> | Awards announced and distributed         |

Visit Hendricks County reserves the right to adjust timelines as needed.

### **Review Process:**

The Visit Hendricks County Grants Committee will review applications. The Committee will evaluate projects using the adopted scoring rubric and provide funding recommendations to the Visit Hendricks County Board of Directors for final approval.

The review process may include:

- Eligibility review
- Staff clarification requests
- Individual scoring
- Committee discussion and evaluation
- Funding recommendations
- Board approval

Visit Hendricks County reserves the right to request additional information during the review process.

### **Scoring Criteria:**

Projects will be evaluated based on:

- Proper completion of application
- Project's ability to improve Hendricks County for residents and/or visitors
- Project's projected impact
- Project's support of the [Visit Hendricks County Strategic Plan](#)
- Readiness to proceed
- Project budget and matching funds
- Project's development of something new or potential for future investment

Additional consideration may be given to:

- Partnerships and collaboration
- Geographic distribution
- Long-term impact
- Accessibility and inclusivity
- Ability to activate underutilized spaces or assets
- Alignment with identified destination development priorities

**Reporting and Recognition Requirements:**

Grant recipients will be expected to provide:

- A progress report, if requested
- A brief final narrative report
- Project photos or materials, as requested
- Acknowledgment of Visit Hendricks County support
- Collaboration with Visit Hendricks County marketing and promotional efforts, where appropriate

Specific reporting and recognition requirements will be communicated as part of the award process. Failure to meet reporting or recognition requirements may negatively affect future funding eligibility.

**Staff Support:**

Visit Hendricks County staff will provide support to applicants throughout the process, including:

- Answering application questions
- Providing clarification on eligibility
- Helping applicants understand program priorities
- Assisting with project alignment and readiness discussions
- Coordinating communication and reporting requirements

Staff support is intended to improve accessibility, clarity, and applicant success while maintaining a fair and transparent review process. Staff may also provide guidance related to application fit, project readiness, funding structure, and request scale to help applicants submit competitive and realistic proposals.

**Final Authority:**

Visit Hendricks County reserves the right to:

- Determine applicant and project eligibility
- Request additional information
- Award full or partial funding
- Decline funding requests
- Revise program guidelines and timelines as needed

**All funding decisions are subject to final approval by the Visit Hendricks County Board of Directors.**

## **Glossary of Terms as Related to the Grant Program:**

**Agritourism:** a commercial enterprise that links agricultural production with tourism, inviting visitors to a working farm or ranch for education, recreation, or direct retail

**Destination Development:** the planned process of building and improving a location's infrastructure, visitor services, and local experiences

**Geographic Distribution:** VHC reserves the right to decide to distribute funds in a way that represents more of the county instead of distributing a majority of funds to one area or community within the county

**In-Kind Contributions:** a non-cash offering of goods, services, or professional expertise given to an organization or project

**Matching Funds:** cash pledged and on-hand at the time of application toward the proposed project that matches or exceeds the amount of funding requested within the application

**Placemaking:** a people-centered approach to planning, designing, and managing public spaces that highlights community engagement, local identity, and social connection

**Quality of Place:** the collection of physical, social, and cultural features that make a community distinct, attractive, and livable

**Recreation:** any activity done for pleasure, relaxation, or amusement when you are not working

**Wayfinding:** signage, maps, etc., used to help people find their way to and through a place