

Cultural Districts - Guidelines

What makes a cultural district?

- They are contiguous areas of concentrated arts and culture which contribute to the creative economic vitality of a place.
- Applications are accepted from cities or towns anywhere in South Carolina.
- The accessible area should have artistic and creative assets within a concentrated geographic range.
- Creative placemaking, public art programming, artist + designer studios, installations, buskers, and performance venues are just some of the resources that draw visitors and residents to a cultural district.
- Dedication to community, economic, and cultural development within the designated area confirms the city or town's ongoing commitment to the district's overall success.

Legislation

[Read the 2014 legislation](#) passed by the South Carolina General Assembly which designates the Arts Commission as the state agency charged with guiding and certifying the state's cultural districts.

Goals of the program:

- ATTRACT artists, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural enterprises.
- ENCOURAGE economic development.
- FOSTER local arts and cultural development.
- CELEBRATE unique arts and cultural identity.

Outcomes of the program:

- Tourism benefits and geographic visibility.
- Historic property preservation and reuse development.
- Creative placemaking and strategic arts planning and cultural programming.
- Arts and cultural growth and vitality.

Requirements

General information

- The application must be submitted by the local government where the district is located and signed by the municipality's chief elected official or appointed chief administrator.
- The city or town may designate a municipal department or community partner organization to serve as contact for the application and to co-manage the proposed district.
- Entities such as an arts council, Main Street program, chamber of commerce, empowerment zone, historic district, visitor's bureau, or other capable bodies may serve in this capacity.

Governance + Planning

- Prior to applying, the city or town must develop a cultural district steering committee of at least five members composed of organizations and individuals that represent the interests of the district. The steering committee information must be reported on each year.

Your steering committee must include:

- A representative from at least one arts organization or arts business located within the district.

- At least two artists and/or designers of different disciplines that live or work within the district.
- Representatives from other types of organizations may include non-profits, local tourism agencies, the disability community, for-profit arts-based businesses, chamber of commerce, cultural councils, town/city staff, private businesses, educational institutions, faith-based organizations, economic development groups, residential associations, merchant associations, or other stakeholder groups.
- This group must provide a governance and accountability structure for the district.
- This governing organization should engage in community-based planning activities that establish locally defined goals and outcomes for the district, identify incentives and resources for sustaining the district, create evaluation measures and baseline data to determine progress towards achieving the set goals.
 - Among your initial planning activities, your committee must invite the Public Art Coordinator to conduct a cultural mapping workshop. See information, tools, and guidance for this mandatory creative placemaking exercise.
 - <https://artsandplanning.mapc.org/cultural-asset-mapping/>
 - <https://www.artsengaged.com/chapter-nine>
 - <https://www.artscapediy.org/guide/an-introduction-to-cultural-asset-mapping/>
 - It is highly recommended to appoint an accessibility lead, which will ensure your committee includes best practices during all planning and implementation stages.
 - Find out more! Check out our Accessibility resources page.
<https://www.southcarolinaarts.com/resources/accessibility/>

Resolution

- Any city or town applying for state designation of a cultural district must hold a public hearing with adequate notice regarding the proposed district and pass a resolution making a commitment to establish a state-designated cultural district.
- This resolution must be passed within one year of making a full application to be certified.

Application Process

After creating and working with your steering committee and passing a resolution in your local council. You will review these steps towards making a full application.

Confirm eligibility:

1. Confirm that there is sufficient municipal & local interest and support to seek the designation.
2. Confirm that the area you are seeking designation for has arts and cultural assets and/or programming that is in line with the guidelines, goals, and requirements.
3. Contact Public Art Coordinator, **Margot Lane Strasburger** (803.734.8253 | mstrasburger@arts.sc.gov) to discuss the program, community readiness, and any questions you may have.

Site visit and district map

1. Create a map of the proposed district that identifies proposed boundaries, arts and cultural facilities, public artworks, locations of public art programming, and other cultural assets.
 - It is strongly recommended that the map include accessibility indicators using recognized [accessibility symbols](#).
2. Include a spreadsheet that lists each asset by name and street address. The map can be created by your local government planning office, GIS department or by using online tools such as Google Maps.

3. Schedule a visit by S.C. Arts Commission staff to tour the proposed district, meet key stakeholders, and assess the accessibility.
 - This must be conducted by strolling the district. Non-essential locomotive devices (car, bike, horses) are not permitted for the site visit.

Submitting your application

Your completed application will include the following:

1. Application (link provided by Public Art Coordinator)
2. Required Support Materials
 1. A narrative (no more than two pages) describing the community (members/stakeholders, culture bearers, artists, arts organizations, etc.) found within the proposed district, existing key characteristics of the area, include details about what makes your proposed district unique, as well as programming/events that occur regularly.
 2. A copy of the resolution adopted by your city or town council within one year of the application.
 3. Map of proposed district with accompanying spreadsheet, which must include:
 - the proposed boundaries
 - cultural facilities
 - public artwork locations
 - creative placemaking hotspots/efforts
 - relevant public infrastructure (e.g. wayfinding, technology)
 - any other cultural assets
 4. A strategic plan, resulting from input and support from key partners and stakeholders, describing desired outcomes, goals, strategies for management, and baseline data of the district.
 - If you are unable to provide some of the baseline data, please contact the Public Art Coordinator, Margot Lane Strasburger, to discuss prior to submitting your application.
 5. A marketing plan to inspire visitors and residents to visit the district.
 6. Budget and Potential incentives
 - A budget for your district's arts and cultural development for the first years including intended public artwork projects.
 - Incentives are intended to spur economic growth and community development – signifying your district's recognition and support of the arts as a catalyst. Other districts have included elements like tax incentives for artists and arts businesses, allocating tourism-related taxes towards public artworks and public art events for the community, or even special planning/zoning designations.
 7. Steering Committee information.
3. Supplemental Support Materials (limited to 5 items).
 - You may submit more support for you application at your discretion. This may include elements such as tourism brochures/marketing, currently circulated collateral, or letters of support from the community.

Review + recommendations

S.C. Arts Commission staff will review the application materials using an evaluation tool, known as a rubric (see Attachment 1), seek more information if required, and make recommendations to our board. If the application reviewed is satisfactory, the district will be invited to a Board of Commissioners meeting to make a brief presentation. The Board will make the final decision regarding designation.

If approved, we will work with local contacts to arrange appropriate announcements, publicity, and public events. If designation is not approved, staff will work with local contacts to address staff and/or board concerns and determine the feasibility of reapplying.

Reporting Requirements

Annual report

To document and measure the impact of a cultural district on its community, a state-designated cultural district must provide an updated steering committee list and an annual report to the S.C. Arts Commission which includes a narrative describing activities in the district during the previous year and reporting data that measures the impact and reflects the stated goals of the district. Unless otherwise informed by the Public Art Coordinator, your annual report will be due in May each year.

Along with reviewing and measuring your district's outcomes and goals as laid out in the strategic plan, your annual report is a place to celebrate the arts and cultural progress made. In line with the data provided during the application stage, this data collection and measurement is intended to evaluate the program in your area. It is used to identify areas of success as well as places for greater focus as your program continues to grow and develop.

Required data points:

- visitors – track the number of visitors to the district (local and non-local)
- building occupancy – track changes in occupancy rates
- demographics (must include artists who live/work in the district, volunteers, leadership, race, age, and disability statistics)
- sales tax collections
- employment numbers
- current numbers of public art experiences (festivals, concert series, poetry readings, etc.) and public artworks (murals, sculptures, art installations, temporary work, land art, etc.)
- arts-based businesses data (sales volume, occupancy, taxes generated by)
- property values within the district
- education data (all levels - pre-K through higher education, if applicable)

Recertification

Every five years, S.C. Arts Commission staff will evaluate the annual reports, action plans, goals, and outcomes of designated cultural districts to assess the district's impact and continued viability for state designation. Each district that is up for recertification should prepare a new five-year plan including desired outcomes, goals, and objectives. Prior to submitting this, the district representatives will be required to have a meeting to discuss the evaluation, baseline data, and new plan with Arts Commission staff.

Districts demonstrating substantial progress or success at accomplishing goals and outcomes, and that demonstrate a continued local commitment to management and promotion of the district, will be recertified for another five-year period.

Process:

1. SCAC staff reviews previous reporting forms.
2. SCAC and cultural district coordinators have a review meeting (Zoom or in-person).
 - a. In this meeting, we will discuss:
 - i. The information found within the reporting and in coordination with your original application materials.
 - ii. Quantifiable goals with measurable outcomes for the next five years to assess your district's success along the way.
 - iii. Cultural district program details and recommendations.

3. Submit data/documents for future planning:
 - a. A brief strategic plan + marketing plan for the next five years.
 - i. Strategic plan must address desired outcomes, goals, and objectives for the next five years of certification; and it must include arts-related programs, activities, or projects.
 - ii. Marketing plan must address promotional strategy, any active and planned collateral, and a social media plan.
 - It is strongly recommended that marketing plan include accessibility considerations and indicators using recognized [accessibility symbols](#).
 - b. Updated cultural district steering committee information including a list of the steering committee members and a brief reason for their inclusion as representative of all interests of the district.
 - c. A map that identifies the boundaries or new proposed boundaries, arts and cultural facilities, public artworks, locations of public art programming, and other cultural assets.
 - d. Baseline data to measure progress.
 - i. If you are unable to provide some of the baseline data, please contact the Public Art Coordinator, Margot Lane Strasburger, to discuss prior to submitting your recertification documents.
4. Receive approval + a press release/social media announcing the recertification.