

Spirit & Place Festival

Application Guidelines



All meetings are optional but strongly recommended.

Visit our [web event page](#) to register for the session of your choice.

January – May	Meet with staff! Schedule time to chat about your ideas and learn more about the application process. Email festival@iu.edu or call 317-274-2462 .
Feb. 19, 2026 10:30 – 11:15AM, Zoom	Connections Lessons. What did festival attendees say mattered most to them concerning “Connections?” Explore community feedback from last year’s festival and how it can help shape your event. We’ll also look at this year’s theme prompts .
Mar. 26, 2026 10:30AM & 3:30PM College Ave. Library (4180 N. College Ave.)	Festival Info Session (In Person) – Unpack the festival application process and discover how to craft a successful pitch for the selection committee to consider. Same session offered twice on March 26. Click here to register.
April 1, 2026	Online Application Opens – All applications must be submitted using the online form. Visit spiritandplace.org .
April 15, 2026 - 10AM	VIRTUAL Festival Info Session (Same content at March meetings) Click here to register.
April 16, 2026 11:30AM	VIRTUAL Festival Info Session (Same content at March meetings) Click here to register.
April 21, 2026 3:30PM	VIRTUAL Festival Info Session (Same content at March meetings) Click here to register.
Friday, May 22 Midnight	Application Deadline
Nov. 5 – 15, 2026	Spirit & Place Festival <i>*Your event should be scheduled between Friday, Nov. 6 through 4PM on Sunday, Nov. 15.</i>

What is the Spirit & Place Festival?

Founded in 1996, Spirit & Place is a community-centered initiative housed at IU Indianapolis. Our mission is to **catalyze civic engagement through the arts, humanities, and religion**. Our signature offering, the Spirit & Place Festival, is a multi-day, community-created festival—the nation’s only festival dedicated to the arts, humanities, and religion.

Our goal is to create and support welcoming events that invite the public to reflect on a common theme through meaningful arts, humanities, and/or religion experiences with friends and strangers. These shared moments enrich our sense of place, strengthen civic bonds, and help counter the loneliness, isolation, and polarization many people experience today. [Watch a short video here!](#)

To propose an event, applicants submit an application describing:

- **What audiences will experience**
- **How the event explores the annual theme through the arts, humanities, and/or religion**
- **The community partners involved**

Festival applications are reviewed by a diverse panel representing a range of faith traditions, races, genders, and ages. Events are selected in June. Selected partners receive a **\$200 stipend** to support event costs, along with access to training opportunities, one-on-one event coaching, and marketing support.

Except for the opening *Public Conversation* and closing event, the Spirit & Place Festival is entirely community-created – **that means created by YOU!**

Individuals and organizations from all sectors are invited to propose events for the annual November festival. Each year, artists, musicians, writers, clergy, scholars, educators, museum and library staff, social service workers, activists, storytellers, and others contribute creative events rooted in one or more of our civic tools—the arts, humanities, and/or religion—and developed in partnership with at least one other community collaborator.

What Attendees Say about the Festival:

I needed this reminder in my life. It felt good for my soul.

I felt connected to my community and the kindness of strangers.

*Hearing different perspectives and chatting with my neighbor let me know **I am not alone.***

When to Schedule Your Event

Events may be scheduled between **November 6–15**, with all events concluding by **4:00 PM on November 15**. Spirit & Place will officially kick off the festival with an opening event on **November 5**. When scheduling your event, please check community calendars and be mindful of major local happenings, including **Election Day (November 3)** and the **Monumental Marathon (November 7)**.

HOW DOES THE SPIRIT & PLACE FESTIVAL WORK?

1

Dream up an awesome event inspired by the yearly theme.



2

Root your event in the arts, humanities, and/or religion.



3

Work with at least one community partner.



4

Attend an info session or schedule time to talk with Spirit & Place.



5

Turn in your application by the deadline!



6

If selected, you'll receive a modest event stipend and other support.



»» THE SPIRIT & PLACE FESTIVAL IS TRULY CREATED BY YOU.

Spirit & Place does not try to control what you do or how you do it, but events should avoid proselytizing, welcome multiple points of view, and strive to create a shared sense of belonging. Events can be entirely new or an inventive spin on existing programming.

As the event creator, you pick the date, time, and (Central Indiana) venue for your event.

We provide marketing support, coaching, and stipend.

Big Three: Theme, Civic Tools, & Community Partnerships

The best chance of having your event chosen for the festival is by strongly connecting to the **REQUIRED** elements of **the theme, use of our civic tools, and developing meaningful partnerships.**

#1 The Theme

This year's theme is *Connections*. Your event should be inspired by the theme *and* invite participants to reflect on the meaning, nature, or importance of connection in their own lives or communities. While Spirit & Place events often help people feel more connected to one another, *Connections* asks creators to go further by using the arts, humanities, and/or religion to explore *how* connections are formed, strengthened, challenged, or repaired. In other words, ***what is your event saying about connections?***

Use our [theme prompts](#) for help.

#2 Civic Tools

The arts, humanities, and religion are part of everyday life. Even if you don't consider yourself artistic, you likely listen to music, watch performances, or enjoy a good movie. Even if you're not a history buff, humanities subjects like history – and also economics, sociology, ethics, and political science – shape the world around us. Religion and spirituality have influenced every human society and continue to shape millions of lives. Festival events must engage **at least one** of these civic tools. You're welcome to incorporate more than one, but only one is required.



Explore the importance of our civic tools under the [FESTIVAL TAB](#) of our website.

#3 Community Partnerships

Partnering with others lets you share the workload, gain creative input, and avoid blind spots. The festival requires **at least one external partner**. What does that mean? If you work for a university, seek at least one off-campus partner. If your organization has affinity groups, include them—but also consider who else from the community could help. Individual events are often naturally collaborative, but independent creators are encouraged (not required) to work with an organizational partner.

Collaborating partners can help with logistics, venue, registration, marketing, and other support. The Selection Committee tend to favor partnerships that are **deeply collaborative rather than transactional**. However, venue, promotional, or staff support partnerships do count toward this requirement. Just keep in mind proposals that show partners working together to explore the theme and create a meaningful community experience will receive higher marks.



WHAT MAKES THE SPIRIT & PLACE FESTIVAL SPECIAL?



THE THEME

By creating events around a common theme, we invite the community to slow down, think deeply, meet new people, and form rich connections between ideas and each other.

COLLABORATION

Festival events should be collaborative. It takes teamwork to create dynamic public events that open hearts and minds and create a sense of belonging!



CIVIC TOOLS



Engaging the **ARTS** opens our senses, liberates our imaginations, and unlocks fresh perspectives. Through the **HUMANITIES**—history, literature, philosophy, sociology, ethics, etc.—we can explore the complex interactions between people, place, and time. The world's **RELIGIOUS** and **SPIRITUAL** traditions invite us to examine what it means to be human and how to live in relationship to one another.

Learn more at spiritandplace.org or email festival@iu.edu.

Selection Committee Criteria

1.) ***Theme (required).** Your event should center the festival theme while leaving room for creative interpretation. The theme should be clearly reflected in both planning and audience experience.

2.) ***Civic Tools (required).** Identify which civic tool(s) your event uses and how. For the arts, describe your approach. For the humanities, specify the disciplines involved. For religion or spirituality, explain how your event engages beliefs, practices, or texts.

3.) ***Collaborative (required).** Your event must involve at least one external partner. Partnerships can take many forms—venue, promotional, or organizational support—but co-creative, cross-disciplinary collaborations that share authority will rank highest.

About Our Civic Tools

- **Arts:** engage participants creatively and provide examples.
- **Humanities:** explore disciplines like history, philosophy, or ethics in relation to the theme—general reflections on “humanity” aren’t enough.
- **Religion:** engage beliefs, practices, or texts meaningfully; hosting at a place of worship alone does not fulfill the requirement.

4.) **Clarity & Capacity.** Clearly describe what the audience will experience and demonstrate that you have the capacity to execute your plan. The committee needs to understand your event from start to finish.

5.) **Inventiveness.** Your event should offer fresh insights or approaches, whether a new offering or an adaptation of existing programming. Highlight bold topics, creative partnerships, inventive formats, or unique venues that make your event stand out.

6.) **Audience Care.** Identify your audience and design your event for their needs. Consider accessibility, family-friendliness, public transit access, timing, or other supports that ensure a positive experience.

7.) **Commitment Beyond Self.** Spirit & Place values communal engagement. Your primary goal should not be visibility or brand promotion. Events should contribute to the collective festival experience, reflecting our values of reciprocity, abundance, emergence, and people-centeredness.

Nothing for us, without us.

If your event is about a community, that community should be part of the process from the start. Involve partners early—including in your application—and collaborate with those whose stories or experiences you are highlighting.

Hints & Tips from the Selection Committee

- **Be detailed.** You don't need every plan finalized by the application deadline, but the more specifics you provide, the stronger your score.
- **Clarity & focus.** Know your "why." Be intentional about the theme and your use of the arts, humanities, or religion. Go deep rather than broad—don't try to do everything for everyone.
- **Paint a picture.** Make your title memorable. Clearly describe the format and flow of the event. What will participants see, hear, feel, think, and do?
- **Timing & audience needs.** Schedule events between Nov. 6 and 4PM on Nov. 15. Be mindful of Election Day on Nov. 3 and the Monumental Marathon on Nov. 7. Consider accessibility, convenience, and audience comfort. Timing, food, family-friendliness, and duration (generally under 2 hours) all matter!
- **Surprising juxtapositions & locations.** Pair unlikely topics or speakers. Use familiar spaces in unexpected ways or try new venues.
- **Thoughtful partnerships.** Collaborate with partners who bring relevant expertise, especially when engaging communities outside your experience. Shared authority and co-creation are encouraged.

Don't Make it Weird!

Always ask before listing someone as a community partner. They might be on the Selection Committee—and nothing is more awkward than finding out you added them without permission.

Special Preferences

The Selection Committee awards higher scores to events that:

- Use multiple civic tools (e.g., Arts + Humanities; Religion + Art)
- Offer "never-before-seen" or interactive experiences
- Demonstrate collaborative, co-creative partnerships
- Include interfaith programming, especially non-Abrahamic traditions
- Highlight and intentionally include diverse community perspectives

Resources, Support, & Benefits

Spirit & Place is here to support you during the application process and beyond.

<h3 style="text-align: center;">Application Support</h3> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>We offer multiple ways to help you craft a strong festival application.</i></p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Festival Benefits</h3> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>If selected for the Spirit & Place Festival, we continue to support.</i></p>
<p>1. Applicant Meetings One-on-one Zoom meetings are available most Tuesday mornings and Wednesday afternoons in February. These sessions are a great opportunity to discuss your ideas, explore partnerships and venues, or unpack the nuts and bolts of creating a compelling application.</p> <p>2. Online Resources The Events That Matter: A Spirit & Place Toolkit provides step-by-step guidance for designing meaningful festival events.</p> <p>3. Application Review Staff are available to review and advise on your application. Early requests are encouraged. Review requests can be submitted through May 20.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Questions? Never hesitate to reach out by emailing festival@iu.edu or by calling 317-274-2462.</p>	<p>1. \$200 Event Stipend All lead partners¹ (or their designee) receive \$200 to support their event.</p> <p>2. Equipment Loans Festival partners can borrow a portable sound system (speaker + two hand-held mics) or an OWL 360 Meeting Pro camera for their event.</p> <p>3. PR & Marketing In partnership with Bohlsen Group, Spirit & Place promotes the festival through press releases, media alerts, community calendars, and social media. Events are also shared with a 7,000+ subscriber email list. Well-attended events combine festival promotion with their own marketing efforts. During the summer, Bohlsen Group will provide one-on-one strategy sessions and tutorials to help partners maximize event marketing and PR.</p> <div style="text-align: right;">  </div>

Photography & ASL Interpretation

Spirit & Place provides a limited number of professional photographers for festival events. If a photographer attends your event, you will receive copies of the photos.

Spirit & Place also partners with IU Indianapolis' **Program in American Sign Language (ASL) and English Interpreting** to provide student interpreters at a limited number of events.

¹ The "lead partner" is typically the person/organization responsible for submitting the application and serves as the chief point of contact during the festival application process and beyond.

Accessibility is not an afterthought

Please consider ways you can make your event more accessible by checking out Spirit & Place’s online resources like our [Event Planning with Spirit & Place ACCESSIBILITY video](#).

For blind & visually impaired guests, consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large font versions of materials• Reserved seating for clear sight lines• Dark text on light backgrounds• Audio description services	For deaf & hearing-impaired guests, consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ASL services• Using a microphone• Assisted listening devices or audio captioning
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Event Parameters

The Spirit & Place Festival celebrates arts, humanities, and religion in community life. It is a space for experimentation, relationship-building, civic engagement, amplifying unheard voices, and exploring community solutions. The festival embraces difficult conversations with a spirit of [adventurous civility](#).

The festival is **not** a platform for preaching to your choir, proselytizing, repackaging existing events without deeply and intentionally considering the theme, or marketing your organization. Learn more about our values by exploring our [Who We Are webpage](#).

Limitations and restrictions include:

- **Accessibility.** All events must take place in ADA-compliant facilities. Some exceptions exist for designated historical sites or outdoor locations. Event partners should make every effort to accommodate accessibility requests.
- **No personal development workshops.** The festival seeks community-focused events rather than individual self-improvement sessions.
- **No research studies.** The festival is not a site for conducting research, including community-engaged research. **Scholars are encouraged** to share discoveries or insights from prior research and to use the festival as a platform to deepen community relationships, but research activities may not be part of the event itself.
- **No fundraising & limited fee-based events.** Fundraisers are not permitted, and free events are preferred. Some exceptions apply. Speaking with Spirit & Place staff is strongly encouraged if charging a fee.
- **Date restrictions.** Events should begin the first Friday of November and conclude by 4PM on the second Sunday of November.

Funding & Sponsors

Event creators may seek sponsors or donors and do as much pre-event fundraising as needed. Spirit & Place values **intentionality and quality over size**, and events can be successful without large budgets or expensive production.

Festival Partner Agreement

If selected for the festival, all partners must agree to the following:

1.) Festival Partner Meeting (Required)

- Tentatively **July 7**. Lead partners and/or collaborating partners must attend.
- Can't make it? Send a team member in your place.

2.) Promotions & Marketing

- You can't rely solely on Spirit & Place to bring an audience.
- Training sessions, PR resources, and consultations are provided.
- **All partners commit to distributing event guides before the festival.**

3.) Withdrawals & Event Essentials

- Event selections announced late June/early July.
- Deadline to withdraw or confirm event details: **August 3**.
- "Event essentials" include date, time, venue, title, short description, and image (jpg or tif, 300dpi).
- Need help? We'll guide you through it.

4.) Event Registration

- You manage your own registration (some exemptions apply).
- Spirit & Place offers an Eventbrite 101 tutorial if needed.
- Registration forms must include email permission language.
- Registration link due to Spirit & Place by **October 1**.

5.) Event Framing & Logistics

- Do not repeat your festival event between August 1–December 31, 2026 (some exceptions apply).
- Use Spirit & Place talking points at the beginning and remind attendees to complete the survey at the end.
- **Make all collaborating and venue partners aware of event guide distribution in late September/early November.**

6.) Festival Volunteers

- Spirit & Place will provide 1–3 volunteers per event. They will need a table in a visible location.
- Volunteers greet attendees, maintain sign-in sheets, distribute guides, and collect surveys.
- They have talking points but do not deliver remarks or help with setup/tear-down.

7.) Post-Festival: Partner Survey & Registration List

- Lead partners must submit a partner survey by **December 1, 2026**.
- Supply your registration email list (.xls or .csv).
- Submitting the survey is required for future festival participation.

Funding Your Event

Festival events don't need big budgets to be meaningful. Many successful Spirit & Place partners get creative by leaning into relationships, shared resources, and what they already do well.

- **Skill for Support.** *Trade what you do best for what your event needs.*
One partner offered free meditation sessions for an organization's member to secure a reduced venue rate. Other attendees were encouraged to buy a ticket with the proceeds going towards the festival event. Think about a similar trade or small fund-raising effort, especially if that feels more natural than asking for cash.
- **Right-Size Support.** *Small contributions add up.*
Approach people and places you already know—favorite shops, neighborhood business, or trusted professional. One partner received support from her dentist and local music store. Support doesn't need to be formal or large to make a difference.
- **In-Kind Support.** *Ask what others might offer.*
In-kind contributions can cover venue, equipment, staffing, printing, or refreshments. Be specific about your needs when you ask.
- **Collective Cost Sharing.** *Share resources with other festival partners.*
Share resources with other festival partners. Partners can co-host speakers, share venues or equipment, or coordinate marketing materials. This reduces costs and strengthens collaboration.
- **Community Circles.** *Invite a small group to help bring the event to life.*
Some partners host an informal gathering—like a dinner conversation, salon-style discussion, or creative preview—where attendees are invited to contribute modestly toward the upcoming festival event. These gatherings center relationships, not pressure, and often deepen community investment in the event itself.
- **Grants.** *Search and apply for local grant dollars.*
Festival events rooted the humanities might be eligible for \$1,000 mini grants from **Indiana Humanities** (rolling monthly deadlines). The **Indy Arts Council's** Project Grants fund art activities in public spaces (due March 15).

Remember . . .

Spirit & Place values **intentionality and quality over scale**. Your event does not need to be expensive to be powerful. Thoughtful partnerships, creative exchanges, and small acts of support often go further than large budgets.