

Removing Barriers to State Programs for Rural Communities:

The Creative District Example



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NACDEP 2025



INTRODUCTION



My role: Consultant and advocate for rural communities



NEBRASKA ARTS COUNCIL

Launched the Creative District
Program in 2021

Purpose: Support placemaking and
enhance quality of life

COMMON BARRIERS



Awareness



Capacity



Expertise

THE CREATIVE DISTRICT PROGRAM

Certified Creative Districts

Creative Districts are designated cultural and economic areas where innovation flourishes and neighborhoods come together in the name of art.

Here, you can see the districts that have been certified so far, with more to come. Each district brings its own unique vision to celebrating and highlighting the arts, so click any of the pages below to see how.



 1 - Creative-Districts_Guidelines_3.24

 1.5 - Grants Grid

 2 - Capacity Grant Guidelines

 2.5 - Creative District Capacity Grant F.

 3 - Creative-Districts-Workbook_Flllab.

 3.5 - Data-Collection-Instructions

 4 - Creative District Plan Template

 4.5 - Rubric - Strategic Plan

MY APPROACH

Promoted program:

- Email Lists
- Webinars
- Personal Contacts

Developed tools:

- Checklist and resource folder
- Simplified documentation

Provided technical support:

- Meeting facilitation
- Strategic planning help
- Application review



Creative District Steps

Step 1 – submit a letter of intent to the Nebraska Arts Council (information in the guidelines)

[1 - Creative-Districts Guidelines 3.24.pdf](#)

Step 2 – (optional – or can be done later) the capacity grant can be applied for at any time, though you may have to ask Rachel Morgan at the Nebraska Arts Council before applying (Rachel.morgan@nebraska.gov or 402-595-2142) The capacity grant is most useful to hire someone to complete the workbook and/or the strategic plan. It does require matching funds from the community – you can apply for up to \$4000, with 1:1 matching funds.

[2 - Capacity Grant Guidelines.pdf](#)

[2.5 - Creative District Capacity Grant Form.pdf](#)

Step 3 – they will invite you to submit the Eligibility Assessment (also known as the workbook)

[3 - Creative-Districts-Workbook Fillable-1.pdf](#)

[3.5 - Data-Collection-Instructions.pdf](#)

Step 4 – review of workbook/site visit – they will give you feedback on the workbook to help prepare you for any potential changes needed when you submit your strategic plan

Step 5 – they will invite you to submit a strategic plan

[4 - Creative District Plan Template.pdf](#)

[4.5 - Rubric - Strategic Plan.pdf](#)

Step 6 – notification of 5-year certification as a Nebraska Creative District and grant of \$10,000

Step 7 – they will invite you to apply for the Creative District Development Grant of up to \$100,000, which requires another application and a detailed budget (I don't have the template for this step – just bits and pieces of the narrative required). This used to be a rolling deadline, but because there are so many certified districts now, they are moving it to once a year [applications](#). From the arts council website: ***Next application window is July-November 2025 (tentative).**

Step 8 – you will submit annual evaluation reports

Step 9 – you can apply for re-certification after the initial 5 years (I'm not sure what kind of timeline they are planning for re-certification. I assume the process will be a little less intense than initial certification, but you should probably allow several months to complete it.)

Creative District webpage: <https://www.artsCouncil.nebraska.gov/explore/creative-districts/>

Compiled by Jamie Bright, Rural Prosperity Nebraska Extension Educator

***updated** 6/2/25

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OUTCOMES

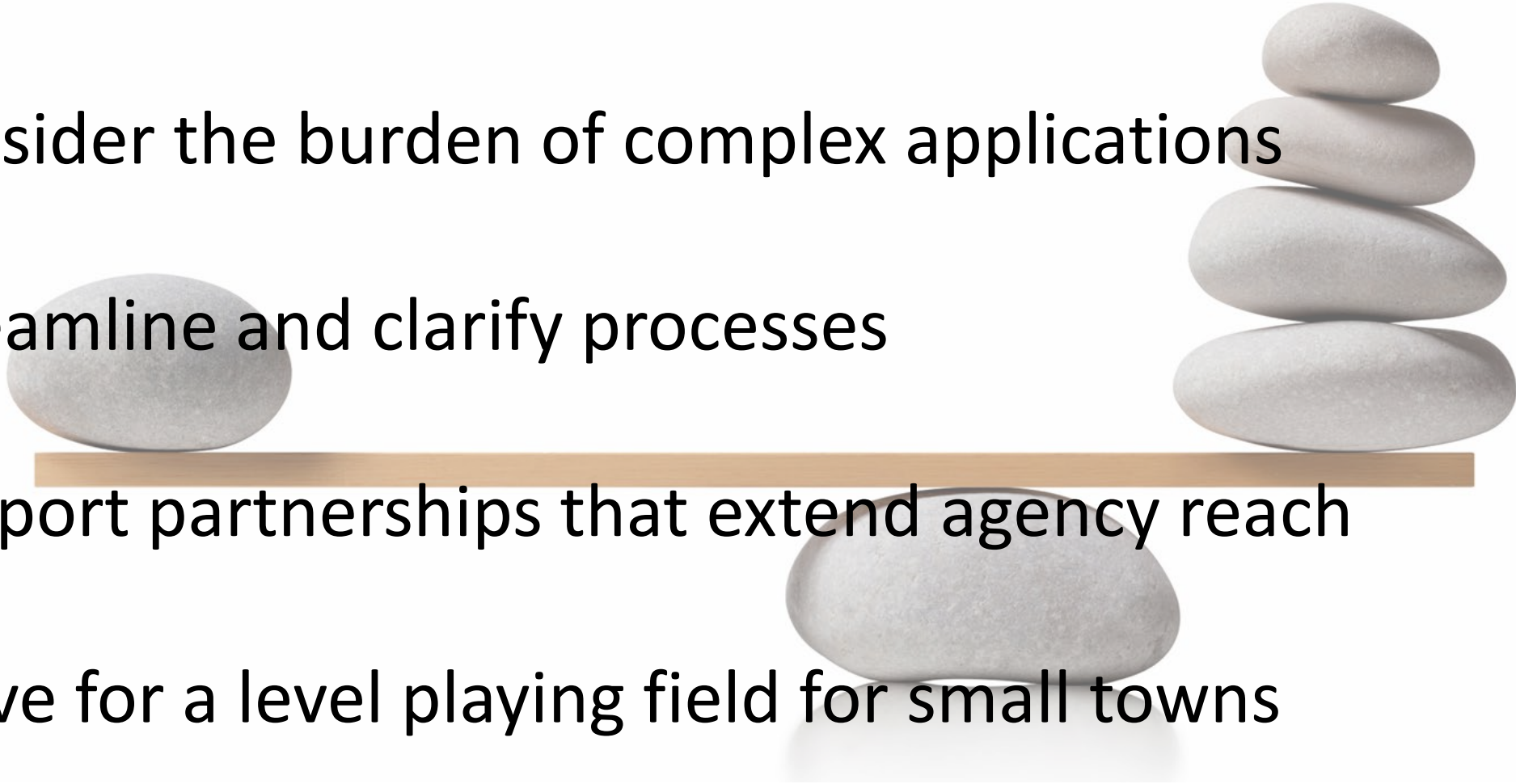
1. Sidney Creative District – achieved certification in 2023
2. The Creative Beet (Scottsbluff Creative District) – achieved certification in 2023
3. Oshkosh Creative District 77 – achieved certification in 2025
4. Gering Creative District – has just started the application process



Created a “Western Nebraska Creative District Cohort” for peer learning, information sharing and collaboration

IMPLICATIONS FOR STATE AGENCIES

- Consider the burden of complex applications
- Streamline and clarify processes
- Support partnerships that extend agency reach
- Strive for a level playing field for small towns

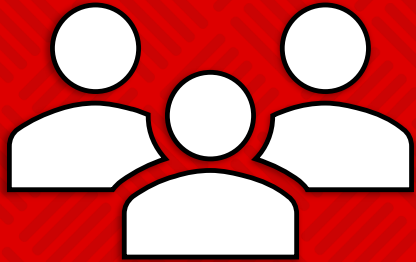


RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXTENSION

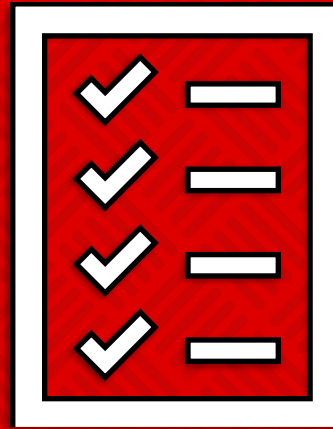


- Proactively promote new programs
- Create simplified, shareable guides
- Be available for hands-on support
- Tailor assistance to community needs

REPLICABLE FRAMEWORK



Outreach



Simplification



Support

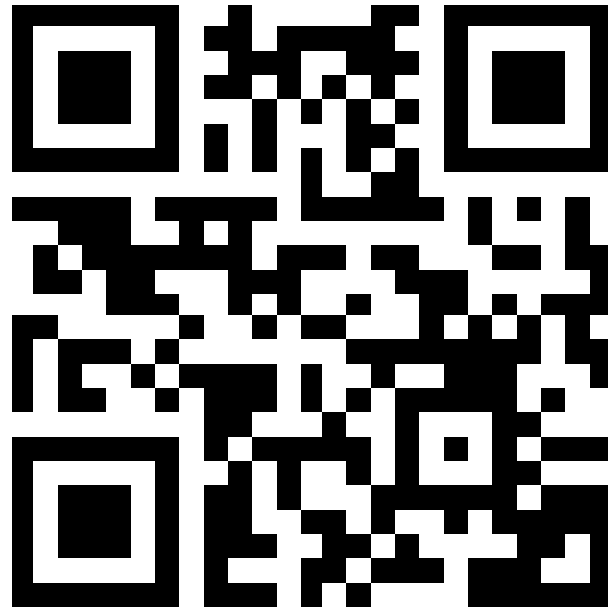
CLOSING THOUGHTS

- Rural communities have the passion—just need a path
- Replicable framework: outreach, simplification, support
- Let's work together to remove barriers and build vibrant communities



EVALUATION

<https://bit.ly/4dG4bLO>





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