

STELLAR PATHWAYS PROGRAM



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A REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Application Guidance & Evaluation Framework



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Roughly 40% of Indiana's population lives across 76 rural counties, and these rural counties are filled with natural beauty, alluring small towns, historic structures and quality natural resources that need to be preserved, developed and enhanced. Rural communities face unique challenges regarding building organizational capacity and identifying financial capital for projects.

The Office of Community and Rural Affairs has been leading the way in rural Indiana to improve local leadership capacity and create sustainable progress through the principles cultivated through the Stellar Communities Program. Stellar Communities was recognized nationally as a premier community development program and has achieved the following outcomes.

- The State dedicated approximately \$193 million to 17 designees to date.
- Local governments allocated around \$154 million towards local investment in the Stellar projects and complementary projects.
- Designees leveraged \$831 million in private investment to support their economic development efforts to create safe, sustainable, and thriving communities.



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Objective

Opening in January 2024, the Stellar Pathways Program is a multi-agency, multi-million-dollar investment initiative led by the Office of Community and Rural Affairs.

The program works with communities within a county boundary on a shared vision for community and economic development, promotes local and regional partnerships, and assists in implementing sustainable solutions to challenges facing Indiana's rural communities. The Stellar Pathways program will provide resources for transformative quality of place, community and regional improvements by:

Enhanced Regional Planning

Stellar Pathways, built on OCRA's extensive experience with Stellar Communities, Regional Stellar and the Hoosier Enduring Legacy Program, is focused on accelerating regional planning. The program is designed to scale up local capacity while regional teams create holistic, collaborative plans for community and economic development.

A Collaborative Approach

The Stellar Pathways program embodies a spirit of collaboration, mirrored by State partners: the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority, Indiana Destination Development Corporation, Indiana Department of Transportation, Indiana Department of Health, and Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

Resource-Rich Partnerships

Through these strategic partnerships, Stellar Pathways is poised to offer the necessary resources for transformative quality-of-place improvements. The program taps into time-tested community development strategies by leveraging existing assets to stimulate increased regional investment through state and local partnerships.

Eligible Communities

A county-wide entity must lead the Stellar Pathways effort. This county-wide entity can be either the county government or a non-profit that serves the entire county such as a county community foundation or economic development entity. This county-wide entity must partner with individual municipalities within the county boundaries to create a region. Regions should be self-determined, but should not include any CDBG entitlement communities, due to funding barriers.

All participating communities must commit at least five years to the program, including capacity building training, community engagement strategies, asset identification and project prioritization and implementation. This collaborative effort brings together mentorships and partnerships to advance comprehensive solutions to regional and local challenges throughout rural Indiana.

Partnerships & Resources

The Stellar Pathways Program partners with a variety of state agencies to assist regions in

creating transformative capital improvement projects.

In 2024, the Stellar Pathways Program partnered with the Lieutenant Governor's Family of Business as well as the agencies below. Each of the two Stellar designees will be able to apply for up to half of the following funding allocations, provided all other match and program requirements are met.

- **OCRA**
 - \$8 million in Community Development Block Grants
- **IHCDA**
 - \$3 million in HOME Investment Partnership Program
- **ISDA**
 - \$200,000 for Stellar Food and Agriculture Program, to address food insecurity and access to local foods
- **IDDC**
 - \$50,000-100,000 in co-op Marketing and Promotional Assistance
- **INDOT**
 - \$3 million in Rural Federal Aid Program
- **IDOH**
 - \$75,000 in Rural Health Funding
- **IDNR**
 - Eligible bonus points for annual rounds of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Historic Preservation Fund

Eligible Projects

Stellar projects are a result of the communities' and region's ability to create a vision through the building of a Strategic Investment Plan. These plans should be transformational, sustainable and address local conditions. Once designated as a Stellar Pathways participant, the regions are provided capacity building facilitation through a partnership with OCRA and Ball State University Indiana Communities Institute.

This helps regions identify priority projects based on three comprehensive pathways:

Enhancing Quality Of Place

- Examples include housing, streetscapes, facades, trails, sidewalks, roads, bridges, stormwater, drinking water and wastewater improvements, gateway beautification, etc.

Promoting Community Wellness

- Examples include mental health initiatives, health and wellness, healthy food markets, substance use and abuse initiatives, physical activities, etc.

Strengthening Local Economies

- Examples include business retention and expansion, economic gardening, small business revolving loan fund development, entrepreneurial ecosystem development, skills for success, work-ready youth program, etc.

Program Structure

Announcement | Letter of Intent

Following the program announcement in January 2024, OCRA and the Stellar partners will host three two-day regional workshops, which will include presentations from state agencies, letter-of-intent training and a full day of capacity building training from Ball State University's Indiana Communities Institute.

These workshops are required to continue in the Stellar Pathways program. Additionally, they will be valuable to communities that wish to learn more about state funding and current topics and trends in community development.

Program Structure (cont.)

Interested communities will submit a letter of intent with all corresponding attachments and documents through the electronic Grants Management System by May 1, 2024.

The Stellar Pathways Committee will then review the letter of intent submissions and determine four regions that will move forward in the Stellar Pathways process.

Each Stellar Pathway participating region is granted \$50,000 towards the development of their Strategic Investment Plan.

Stellar Pathway Process

Stellar Pathways participants will receive facilitated community engagement and customized coaching from Ball State University Indiana Communities Institute.

Stellar Pathways participants will use this time to do pre-planning and project development associated with the creation of their Strategic Investment Plan.

Participants will be provided with the minimum requirements that Strategic Investment Plans should include, but will lead the development of the plan locally.

Strategic Investment Plans will be due to OCRA on Nov. 1, 2024.

Each Stellar Pathway participant will present their Strategic Investment Plan to the Stellar Pathways Committee in November 2024.

Stellar Pathway Designees Chosen

The Stellar Pathway Committee will meet and determine two Stellar Pathway designees.

Stellar Pathway designees will have five years to complete projects and programs in the Strategic Investment Plan.

Stellar Pathway designees will have access to the Stellar Pathways set-aside amounts. Stellar Pathway regions must apply for the funding individually and work with state agencies to acquire the prerequisite requirements.

Proposed Timeline

January 2024

Program Announcement and launch.

February-April 2024

Regional workshops and question period through April 15, 2024. Attendance at a regional workshop is required to submit a Letter of Intent. Questions can be submitted to stellarcommunities@ocra.in.gov.

May 1, 2024

Letter of Intent due by 11:59 p.m. ET through the eGMS portal.

June 2024

Announcement of Stellar Pathway participants. These regions will receive \$50,000 to assist with their Strategic Investment Plan development.

July-October 2024

Stellar Pathway participants will develop their Strategic Investment Plans while receiving support from BSU ICI for community engagement and capacity-building training.

November 2024

Submission of the Strategic Investment Plans and In-person presentations made to the State Team.

January 2025

Announcement of two regions that will be eligible for set-aside Stellar funding (basis will be quality of Stellar Investment Plans and alignment with funding). Those selected for Stellar Funds will have four years to submit applications (five and a half years to complete projects) within the SIP to earn the "Stellar Community" designation.

Scoring Criteria

Multiple state agencies are included in the scoring process to ensure input across disciplines and expertise.

Scoring criteria to be considered include:

- Plan comprehensiveness
- Proposed projects' impact
- Maximizing local and private leverage
- Investment need
- Capacity to administer and deliver
- Long-term viability and sustainability of the interventions
- Financial capacity to manage the project

Learn more at in.gov/ocra/stellar or reach out to stellarcommunities@ocra.in.gov.

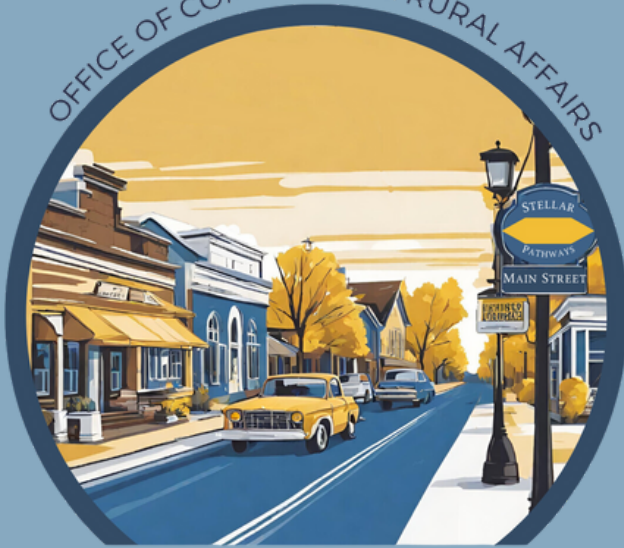


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