



## **State-Designated Cultural Districts 2025 NODO**

### **FAQs**

#### **State-Designated Cultural District Eligibility**

*Q: Who can apply to become a State-Designated Cultural District?*

A: Municipalities or 501(c)(3) organizations located in Illinois are eligible to apply to be a State-Designated Cultural District if the applicant:

- Demonstrates the community seeking certification has been historically impacted and is currently at risk of losing their cultural identity because of gentrification displacement, or the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Demonstrates a history of economic disinvestment.

*Q: Are there any “pre-requisites” for a prospective State-Designated Cultural District?*

A: Yes. Eligible applicants must be able to demonstrate the following:

- The community seeking certification has been historically impacted and is currently at risk of losing their cultural identity because of gentrification, displacement, or the COVID-19 pandemic
- The community seeking certification has a history of economic disinvestment [20 ILCS 605/605-1057(c)(2)]
- There is strong community support for the cultural district designation through active and formal participation by community organizations and municipal and regional government agencies or officials

*Q: What is an example of a State-Designated Cultural District?*

A: The definition of State-Designated Cultural Districts is intentionally broad in state statute in order to empower communities and geographic areas to collaborate on applications based on the shared characteristics and experiences that bind them together, such as ethnic identity or shared history. There are no population or geographic limitations on what defines a Cultural District, and it could take many forms, for example, a main street business corridor, an entire rural town, or a historic geographic cluster in a larger city. Applications will be evaluated based on the needs of the community, capacity to serve as a Cultural District, and quality of the application submitted.

#### **Applying for a State-Designated Cultural District**

*Q: How do I apply to become a State-Designated Cultural District?*

A: Visit the [online weblink](#) in the NODO or our webpage for this opportunity linked here.

*Q: What do I need to include in my application package?*

A: A Standard Application Package Must Contain:

- Designation Program Application

- Letters of Support from Members of the Community
- Map outlining geographic parameters of the District
- Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form
- Mandatory Disclosure Form
- Other supplemental documentation

**\*NOTE:** *If you or any of your co-applicants are a current DCEO grant recipient or awardee, you must disclose it in your application submission*

DCEO will screen applications to ensure all required components of the application package have been received. If deficiencies are found, DCEO will notify the applicant, after which the applicant will have **30 days** to correct those deficiencies.

**Q: *How do I submit the required supplemental documentation?***

A: Documents are submitted via the File Upload Option in the online Smartsheet Application form. Please note that there is a 10-file max when submitting documents, so if you have more than 10 documents, you will need to combine some of them together. Make sure your documents are clearly named to reflect what is contained within the document, and that any questions where guidance was given on how to name a document (Q1, Q15 in the Program Application) is followed. Refer to our [Preparing Your Application Documents for Smartsheet Upload](#) for detailed instructions on how to properly name and combine your documents. The guidance set forth in this document must be followed.

**Q: *What is considered a "conflict of interest?"***

A: See 30 ILCS 708/35; 44 Ill. Admin Code § 7000.40(b)(3); 2 CFR § 200.112. A conflict of interest exists if an organization's officers, directors, agents, employees and/or their spouses or immediate family members use their position(s) for a purpose that is, or gives the appearance of, being motivated by a desire for a personal gain, financial or nonfinancial, whether direct or indirect, for themselves or others, particularly those with whom they have a family business or other close associations. In addition, the following conflict of interest standards apply to governmental and nongovernmental entities.

**Q: *Can I submit more than 1 application?***

A: Yes. Eligible entities may apply for more than 1 Cultural District Designation, but **each designation requires a separate application.**

**Q: *There are several municipalities and/or 501(c)(3) organizations in my area that want to apply for a State-Designated Cultural District. Can we partner together and apply for one State-Designated Cultural District?***

A: Yes. As a matter of fact, it is **strongly encouraged** that municipalities, 501(c)(3) organizations, and other units of local government **partner together** and apply for a State-Designated Cultural District. Please note that when submitting your application, only **ONE** eligible entity can be listed as the primary applicant.

## **Timeline and Expectations for State-Designated Cultural Districts**

**Q: *What is the deadline to apply for a State-Designated Cultural District?***

A: The deadline to apply for a State-Designated Cultural District is, **Monday, December 16, 2024, 5:00 pm.**

**Q: *How are applications reviewed?***

A: DCEO will designate an Evaluation Committee to review and grade each application. Applications will be reviewed on a competitive basis and scored on a 100-point scale based on need, capacity, and quality.

The final score of each Committee member will be calculated and the average of all scores will be the applicant's final score. The top 5 scoring applicants will be awarded Cultural District Designations.

*Q: How many State-Designated Cultural Districts will be awarded?*

A: Five (5) designations will be awarded in calendar year 2025.

*Q: When will I know if I've been selected as a State-Designated Cultural District?*

A: DCEO anticipates issuing Designations 8 weeks after the application closes. This time frame can change depending on the volume of applications received. The Department reserves the right to not issue any designations.

*Q: For how long will my Cultural District Designation be valid?*

A: The initial designation is valid for a period of ten (10) years. Cultural Districts may renew their designation thereafter every 5 years.

*Q: What would be expected of me as a State-Designated Cultural District recipient?*

Entities working on behalf of a prospective Cultural District should seek to:

- Promote a distinct historic and cultural community
- Encourage economic development and support entrepreneurship in the geographic area and community
- Encourage the preservation and development of historic and culturally significant structures, traditions, and languages
- Foster local cultural development and education
- Provide a focal point for celebrating and strengthening the unique cultural identity of the community
- Promote growth and opportunity without generating displacement or expanding inequality

*Q: As a State-Designated Cultural District recipient, what program measures or deliverables does DCEO expect from me/us?*

A: Within 12 months of receiving Designation, the district must report current accomplishments and goals for the next 4 years of its designation to DCEO, including:

- Detailed development plans that include and prioritize preservation of existing residents and businesses
- Description of existing infrastructure needs
- Description of affordable housing needs
- Development plans for transportation improvements
- List of opportunities for cultural celebration

Each year thereafter a comparable report must be submitted to DCEO detailing the status of the program and future developments of the district.

*Q: What happens if I don't submit the required annual reports?*

A: If a report is not filed with DCEO each year as required, you will be placed on a warning list. If a report is not filed for 2 consecutive years, the cultural district designation will be revoked.

### **Future Funding Opportunity**

*Q: What can the \$3M in future funding be used for?*

A: The purpose of providing funding to State-Designated Cultural Districts is to uplift the unique contributions of historic cultural districts with the goal of increasing economic development opportunities. The State-Designated Cultural District Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is a work in progress. Exact details of the State-Designated Cultural District NOFO will be shared once finalized.

Last Updated: 10/30/2024

*Q: Will each State-Designated Cultural District receive \$3M or is that the total amount available?*

A: The \$3M funding opportunity is the total amount available to all 15 State-Designated Cultural Districts. Funding will be made available through a separate Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) which will be open to State-Designated Cultural Districts after they have been selected. The funding distribution criteria has not yet been established and will be included in the NOFO.

*Q: Will the \$3M be a one-time award, or will it be an annual award?*

A: The \$3M available to State-Designated Cultural Districts is a one-time award.

*Q: Even though the initial designation as a State-Designated Cultural District is valid for 10 years, funding will only be available in the first year?*

A: As of right now, the only confirmed funding is the \$3M, which will be made available after the designees have been selected.

*Q: Where will the funding come from within the State Budget?*

A: No funding is associated with this Designation opportunity, though the Department anticipates future opportunities to apply for funding per Article 123, Section 155 of Public Act 103-0006. The applicants issued a designation will be able to represent their district using the titled designation as well as receive technical assistance from the Department. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate capacity for applying for and managing a grant from private, local, state, and federal sources.

## **Other**

*Q: Will Districts receive a plaque or sign recognizing their Cultural District Designation?*

A: Districts will receive special State-Designated Cultural District decals.

*Q: Does a proposed State-Designated Cultural District have to be geographically contiguous and connected or can there be gaps in the area?*

A: The proposed State-Designated Cultural District should be geographically contiguous and connected.

*Q: Is there a geographical preference for the location of prospective State-Designated Cultural Districts?*

A: Priority will be given to proposed Cultural Districts in regions that do not already have a State Designated Cultural District. The Department welcomes proposals from all Illinois Regions; however, priority will first be given to proposed Cultural Districts located in regions where there is no State Designated Cultural District and proposals that include underserved areas. This includes North Central Region, Northern Stateline Region, Northwest Region, Southeast Region, Southern Region, Southwest Region, and West Central Region. Please refer to the Regional Map on page 10 of the NODO for a visual representation of the regions listed above.

*Q: Is there a minimum or maximum size of the geographic area?*

A: No

*Q: Can the State Cultural District Designation be used in conjunction with other historic preservation designations (local, national) and their associated incentives?*

A: Yes

*Q: Is there a maximum word count for each question in the application?*

Last Updated: 10/30/2024

A: No, but we encourage concise replies to the Program Application questions.

*Q: Will the State-Designated Cultural District NODO be posted online in other languages?*

A: No. It is only posted in English.