

★ Create Your State Convening

October 24–26, 2025 | Princeton, WV

Friday, October 24

Begins at Stages Music School, 855 Mercer Street

5:00 PM – Creative Mixer & Welcome Reception

Start your weekend in a relaxed, welcoming space designed for connection. Gather with fellow dreamers, doers, and creators over hearty hors d'oeuvres, dig into some hands-on art activities with local artists Isaac and **Loren Preston** of Rainbow Art Farms, and let the sparks of conversation begin.

6:00 PM – Opening Session: Setting the Stage

We'll open the convening with words of inspiration from CYS Founder **Lori McKinney**, collective intention-setting, and a glimpse at what's ahead. Learn about Princeton's next-level momentum after two decades of creative groundwork, including bold new projects like *We Need to Talk* (WN2T). Experience two of *We Need to Talk*'s powerful music videos, then enjoy live performances from their creators — multitalented artist and creative entrepreneur **Je'Dah Madison** and gifted songwriter, musician, and educator **James Hart**.

An Evening in the Grassroots District

The evening continues with a guided journey through Princeton's vibrant creative core. We'll move together from space to space, each stop offering a unique spark of inspiration. Along the way, you'll meet some of the core creators, imagineers, and sparkplugs who helped ignite Princeton's cultural renaissance.

7:00 PM | Renaissance Theater

We'll begin at the historic Renaissance Theater, where local possibilitarian, nonprofit director, and county commissioner **Greg Puckett** will share insights on environmental change, followed by an interactive community art experience inside this treasured space currently under renovation.

8:00 PM | Dream Bean Coffeehouse

Next, head just down the street to the cozy Dream Bean for acoustic music and meaningful conversation about youth engagement and empowerment with powerhouse musician and youth development leader **Melissa McKinney**, founder of Stages Music School and the One Voice Project, and now Director of Programming at LEAF Global Arts in Asheville, NC.

9:00 PM | The Room Upstairs

Then, we'll gather for a laid-back jam session featuring local musicians **James Hart** and **Old Soul Reunion**, plus a tour of the RiffRaff recording studio and media command center — the creative brain of the movement — led by the Wizard of Mercer Street himself, **Robert Blankenship**.

9:30 PM | Boc-Hord Brewery

Head down to our neighborhood brewery for a special after-hours mingle with fellow attendees. Enjoy local craft brews, live music by WV songwriter Andrew Adkins, and relaxed conversation to close out your first night in the Grassroots District.

Saturday, October 25

9:00 AM–6:00 PM – Learning & Exchange

A full day of inspiration, insight, and creative exchange. Hear from practitioners doing powerful work across West Virginia, engage in peer-to-peer learning, join a public art walk, and take part in dynamic workshops and collaborative labs. Breaks are built in so you can explore the neighborhood, connect with fellow attendees, and soak up the creative current of the district.

Schedule Highlights

8:30 - 10:00 AM | Continental Breakfast in The Dream Bean

9:00–10:00 AM | Calling in the Creatives

Start the day with a powerful session on gathering a critical mass of creatives, launching and sustaining grassroots arts movements, and supporting artists as catalysts for change. Featuring **Jim Padjarillo** (*The HeART of WV*), **Kabrea James** (*Inner Sunshine Arts*), and **Lauren Kemp & Denise Poole** (*RenewALL*).

10:00-10:30 AM | Studio Visit / Rest Break

Drop in on the studio of textile entrepreneur **Reid Miller** and hear about her innovative textile research and made-to-measure women's apparel— or take this time to recharge.

10:30 AM–12:00 PM | Painting the Town: Public Art Talk & Tour

From wild idea to final brushstroke to community unveiling, this session dives into the art of making art public. Join a lively conversation about how murals and installations come to life, how they transform space and spark dialogue, and what it takes to get them off the ground. Then hit the streets for a guided walking tour of Princeton's vibrant public art scene with **Jeff Pierson**, director of Public Art for the City of Charleston, nationally known muralist and Princeton native **Patch Whisky**, and hometown imagineer Lori McKinney.

Lunch

Enjoy a delicious catered lunch accompanied by live music from local artist Jacob Brooks.

1:00–2:00 PM | Galleries & Art Collectives as Community Building

Explore how art spaces can serve as anchors for connection, creativity, and transformation. This conversation features **Vicki Queen** (*House of Art*), **Cecil Ybanyez** (*Bloomfield Richwood*), art curator and cultural supporter **José Rizo**, and **Hannah Mitchell** (*Love Hope Center for the Arts*).

2:00 PM | Gallery Visits

Stroll through Holler Contemporary Appalachian Art Gallery and meet the creators, Rita Montrosse and Richard Shrewsbury, then experience the Diamonds & Gold Look Gallery and meet artists from the Appalachian Artists Association.

2:30–3:30 PM | Resources for Your Community Movement

Discover tools, programs, and connections to help build a team, grow your work, and support creatives, with **Robby Moore** (Creative Network) and **Amanda Workman** of the WV Hub.

3:30–4:00 PM | Studio Visit / Rest Break

Drop

in on the studio of visual artist Promise Sloane and see her beautiful work — or take this time to recharge.

4:00–5:00 PM | The Culture of Coming Together: Collaborative Events, Music & Thinking Outside the Box

This session showcases the power of music and collaborative, culture-driven events that energize communities, spark tourism, and bring fringe ideas to the forefront. Hear from the big thinkers and creative minds behind *Back Home Festival* (**Robby Parsons**), *BEX* (**Saja Montague**), and **Lori McKinney** (*Culturefest World Music & Arts Festival*).

5:00–6:00 PM | Explore the Neighborhood

Take this hour to unwind, wander, and experience the district at your own pace. Visit shops and galleries, grab a bite or a coffee, or simply soak in the creative energy all around you. (see the map for recommendations)

Evening

6:00 PM | Dinner with Live Music & Star Changemaker Awards

Gather for a shared meal, live music, and a celebration of creative leaders making bold moves in their communities.

7:30 PM | Open Stage Night at The Dream Bean

Celebrate the power of open mic culture and creative expression. Share your voice, your vision, your verses — whether it's a song, a poem, a work-in-progress, or simply an idea you want to speak into the room. All forms are welcome.

Featuring a special set by local artist Jon Bolt.

Throughout the day — Podcast: Born & Bred

Visit with Born & Bred as they record an on-site podcast and share their journey celebrating West Virginia's musical heritage. From new music releases to heritage stories and artist features, discover how they amplify local voices and keep the beat of our mountain culture alive.

Ongoing Throughout the Day

🎨 *Make & Take*: Create your own tie-dye CYS t-shirt with artist Jillian Firth — a wearable keepsake of your journey.

Sunday, October 26

Closing Sessions & Reflections

Ease into the final day with food, fellowship, and a full heart. Sunday is all about reflecting, connecting, and integrating what we've shared and sparked together.

10:00 AM | Continental Breakfast at The Dream Bean

Start the morning with coffee, light bites, and easy conversation in the welcoming space where so many creative journeys have begun.

11:00 AM | *Creative Fundraising: Grants & Beyond*

Whether you're just starting your grant journey or looking for fresh ways to fund your work, this session is for you. CYS Founder Lori McKinney and special guests (TBA) will share practical insights on identifying and writing successful grants, building relationships with funders, and thinking creatively about income streams that go beyond the application cycle. Bring your questions, your ideas, and your curiosity.

12:00 PM | Lunch, Reflections & Practitioner Showcase

Share a meal and reflect on what's moved you so far — then get inspired by a showcase of outstanding practitioners from across West Virginia who are using the arts to transform their communities.

1:00–3:00 PM | Theater as a Tool for Community Building

Discover how live performance can spark empathy, connection, and transformation. This immersive session explores theater as a creative practice for dialogue, participation, and community healing.

First, Sarah Young (she/her) and Jason A. Young (he/him), co-founders of *The Rustic Mechanicals*—West Virginia's professional Shakespeare troupe—lead an engaging, hands-on workshop, *Creating the #Shakespeareance*. Through a lively mix of scenes, songs, and improv, they'll reveal how centuries-old texts come alive through collaboration, shared light, and a joyful, community-centered approach.

Next, hear reflections from Dan Henthorn (*The Griffin Players*) and Beach Vickers (*Shakespeare Studio of Montgomery, WV*) on how local theater can inspire belonging and creative participation.

Finally, theater artist and facilitator Moriah Plante leads *Acting Together: The Power of Community and Connection*—a participatory experience exploring performance as a tool for healing, collaboration, and authentic expression.

1:00–4:00 PM | Podcast: *The Biz* with NormBeezy & Lady T – Drop in with these entrepreneurs and podcasters to reflect on the weekend, share your insights, and experience their community-building podcast practice up close.

Throughout the Day – Last Chance!

 **Make & Take:** Create your own tie-dye CYS t-shirt with artist Jillian Firth — a wearable keepsake of your journey and a splash of color to take home with you.