Innovation. A decade ago, Downtown Indianapolis was struggling with how to get people out of their cars and walking and biking more, and how to connect Downtown's major arts and cultural institutions, districts and neighborhoods as well as the region’s vast greenway system. The concept of a Cultural Trail was born.

Today, the Indianapolis Cultural Trail: A Legacy of Gene & Marilyn Glick is complete. The beautiful 8-mile bike and pedestrian path that loops around Downtown Indianapolis seamlessly connects neighborhoods, cultural districts and entertainment amenities while serving as the downtown hub for central Indiana’s greenway system.

Replication. The objectives of the Cultural Trail are relevant and applicable to every urban setting: Share our roadways and make our urban areas more walkable, more bikeable and more connected. Capitalize on our city’s unique features and assets. Encourage our residents to be more active. Indy’s solution was to create a path, a linear park of sorts, and to make it beautiful and make it fun. Develop a mobile experience.

Representation. The Cultural Trail exemplifies partnership, collaboration and engagement. The route of the trail was stretched to connect all of Indy’s cultural districts, including an emerging district south of Downtown and the historic African-American cultural district. Sixteen community partners, ranging from the chamber of commerce to the arts and sports councils and the downtown and visitors organizations, signed on early to lend their support and serve as a communication conduit to their constituents. Numerous one-on-one meetings and public gatherings were held to enlist the community’s ideas and provide information to mitigate construction inconveniences. And everyone -- foundations, corporations and individuals -- was asked to donate. An electronic newsletter and social media were used to engage and inform adjacent businesses, neighborhood associations, the biking community, media and anyone that wanted to sign up. This outreach process will continue.

Sustainability. The Cultural Trail was designed with sustainability in mind. The Trail was built in phases, capitalizing on lessons learned yet staying true to a well-defined look that differentiates the trail from vehicular travel lanes. Stormwater planters were designed to improve water quality by using natural, plant systems to clean and filter stormwater instead of directing water into the city’s already overburdened storm sewer system. Plant materials were selected to withstand the challenges of a harsh urban environment and non-performers were designed out of future phases. Hardscape materials were selected for their durability and high quality. The City and utility providers used trail construction as an opportunity to upgrade and improve aging infrastructure. Additionally, the Trail added recycling bins and bike racks to the downtown landscape, helping Indy become a more sustainable city.
As importantly, a separate organization, Indianapolis Cultural Trail, Inc., was established with its own board, staff and mission to maintain and program the trail. A multi-million dollar endowment was created as part of the fundraising campaign to provide a dedicated revenue stream each year to cover landscape maintenance, snow removal and other year-round maintenance expenses. Ongoing fundraising efforts help to supplement the endowment revenues. In addition, agreements with the City of Indianapolis and major neighboring institutions, including Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and the State of Indiana, help offset routine maintenance responsibilities and expenses.

**Execution.** The Cultural Trail, from concept to completed construction; grand opening celebration to ongoing operation, is a case study in vision, leadership, persistence and collaboration. Four years in the planning stages and six years in construction, the Trail overcame numerous opportunities to be shelved and forgotten including a change in mayoral administrations, a recession, multiple land owners, traffic engineering objections and more.

Leadership and private fundraising were spearheaded by the local community foundation, whose president, Brian Payne, was relentless in his vision, advocacy and effort. The City of Indianapolis, from Mayors to public works employees, have been and continue to be actively involved. Now that construction is completed and grand opening confetti has been cleaned up, Indianapolis Cultural Trail, Inc. focuses on day-to-day maintenance, management and programming. Businesses, artists, performers, residents and visitors are discovering fun and creative ways to engage and maximize the trail.

**Outcomes.** While the Cultural Trail serves as a stunning public space, it serves a more intentional purpose of improving transportation options. It inspires use. In a recent study by IUPUI, 50% of those surveyed responded that they use the Cultural Trail several times per week (IUPUI Cultural Connections, 2012). The main reasons cited for use were commuting to class, commuting to work and exercise or recreation. Nearly 50% of users surveyed by Butler University responded that the Cultural Trail has decreased their number of automobile trips made per week (The Environmental Practicum Course, 2012).

As importantly, several new residential properties and restaurants have opened adjacent to the Cultural Trail, giving evidence to the impact and attractiveness of the Cultural Trail and its influence as an economic driver of development.

In summary, the Indianapolis Cultural Trail is a bold testament to the economic and community benefits of a thoughtfully planned and well maintained public space. Promoting art and design, health and active transportation; the Cultural Trail improves Indianapolis’ quality of life while serving as an economic driver for continued investment.