



# 2020 SCHWARTZ PRIZE NOMINATION

## *IN Slow Moments*

### Indiana Humanities

#### OVERVIEW

Indiana Humanities' award-winning Next Indiana Campfires program connects nature and literature to spark conversations about Indiana's future. In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic changed our daily lives and our communities, it was about something more.

#### **Renewal. Refuge. Relaxation. Reflection.**

This year, we reinvented our favorite outdoor program for the age of social distancing and invited Hoosiers to join us (virtually). We designed four ways to find renewal, refuge, relaxation or reflection over the months of May and June 2020: attending a virtual trek, watching or making a Slow Moment film, using our Next Indiana Campfires anthology to plan a hike, or reading a short essay by an Indiana writer.

We also published a social media campaign featuring the film and essays, discussion prompts, literary quotes and more to help locked-down Hoosiers explore our key themes on their own until it was safe to gather in person again.

We believe IN Slow Moments is utterly unique, combining as it does "slow TV"-style films, original essays, experimental virtual programs, a social media campaign and prompts for individual or small group reflection and conversation. It's a wonderful expression of our organizational culture, which values nimbleness and a willingness to experiment, projects that lay at the

intersection of programs and communications, as well as a commitment to collaboration and to producing resonant, beautiful multi-media products. We are proud of the way our small team imagined and implemented this project on a short timeline, during an incredibly stressful period, as well as of the ways it provided our audiences with calm, comfort, escape and opportunities for quiet and reflection in the midst of COVID-19's chaos. **For all of these reasons Indiana Humanities is excited to nominate IN Slow Moments for a 2020 Schwartz Prize for outstanding council programming developed or adapted in response to COVID-19.**

## PROJECT ORIGIN & GOALS

IN Slow Moments (<https://www.nextincampfires.org/>) grew out of our existing Next Indiana Campfires program, as well as our more recent work with Indiana filmmakers to tell Indiana stories and our work to highlight contemporary Indiana authors. It genuinely was rooted in a desire to respond to the particular moment when the anxiety and isolation in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded even as spring wrought its changes slowly, inexorably across our landscapes.

After months of planning, we were set to announce our 2020 season of hikes and paddling trips on March 16. But instead, like everyone else, we found ourselves in lockdown, pressing pause on all planned spring programs, and scrambling to determine how we could best serve our partners and audiences during an unprecedented time. We quickly put together a mini “Facebook film festival” of three short films we had funded about Indiana’s White River (it took place March 24-26) and a longer, month-long online film festival and social media campaign for April, featuring our [INseparable films](#). These early pandemic experiments in engaging audiences online through film would heavily inform IN Slow Moments.

In the first week of lockdown, we talked with our board member Chad Priest, director of the American Red Cross—Indiana Region, who helped us think about what people need in moments of crisis: **calm, comfort and a sense of agency**. This profound insight was really at the heart of our organization’s approach to programming during the pandemic. We asked ourselves how we could provide comfort and respite, rather than overwhelm overwhelmed people with more noise. We also were attuned to the ways—emotionally, professionally, socially—our own team was stretched during the pandemic, so we made the choice to focus on repurposing or building on existing content and relationships, rather than invent new projects or programs.



We identified these goals for IN Slow Moments:

- **Design opportunities for Hoosiers to engage with the key ideas of Next Indiana Campfires**, since we weren't going to do in-person events for the foreseeable future.
- **Design experiences that provided calm and comfort even as they conveyed humanities ideas** and prompted humanities-style reflection and discussion.
- **Build on our film work**, including our emerging reputation for supporting surprising films about Indiana, our knowledge of how to maximize online audiences for film on social media, and our relationships with creative Indiana-based filmmakers.
- **Do something only we could do**. Lots of organizations were creating virtual programs so we didn't want to create a program or initiative that duplicated what others were doing.
- **Pay creators**. The creative arts economy was quickly crashing in the spring so if we could use our resources to support creatives, like writers or filmmakers, we intended to do it.
- **Engage partners and board members by making fun yet doable asks**. We reached out with specific requests, such as to film their own "Slow Moments" for the social media campaign.
- **Unleash the creativity of the team**. Last spring was hard; IN Slow Moments was fun, gratifying and sometimes even therapeutic for team members to work on. We got to experiment with building simple yet beautiful, film-forward Wix webpages, to use 360-degree cameras to take people somewhere special, and to debut a crowd-sourced Instagram campaign.

## PROJECT FORMATS

IN Slow Moments combined a variety of project formats and also included a social media campaign throughout the months of May and June. These were the key elements:

### SLOW MOMENT FILMS

Life may be slower than usual due to COVID-19, but one of the eternal pleasures of spending time in nature is that it always forces us out of our busy, work/childcare/technology-addled rhythms. Slow Moment films work the same way: imagery unfolds in real time, creating a meditative, immersive escape that rewards close attention but works equally well as a soothing background.

We partnered with 12 Stars Media, a local media production company, to produce a meditative, exploratory short film that takes viewers to a riparian woodland on an early spring day in Indiana. Over the course of about 16 minutes, viewers hear the cacophony of birds, creaks of swaying trees, trickle of running water and sighing breezes through grasses and branches. We also incorporated a few of our favorite nature writings, for further reflection.

The film was designed to be watched on your own, or as a "text" around which to gather with housemates or to watch with friends online. To guide viewing and thinking, we featured a few prompts (which could double as conversation or writing starters). Examples include:

- Pay attention to your own attentiveness. Is watching a slow film easy or hard? What makes it so? How does it subvert your normal experience of watching film?
- In each shot, choose an image or sound to follow closely. What is it? What do you notice the longer you watch or listen?



• Appelman’s poem is called “Memo to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”—an elegiac dispatch to the future describing what it was like in Indiana. If you were writing to the future about what Indiana is like now, what images or ideas would you convey?

We recommended that viewers disconnect from phones or other distractions as they watched. Like lockdown, slow film disrupts the way we normally experience time and it can be very hard, especially at first, to adjust.

We also invited Hoosiers to create their own “Slow Moments” and post them to social media. Learn more about that in the section below about the social media campaign.

## VIRTUAL TREKS

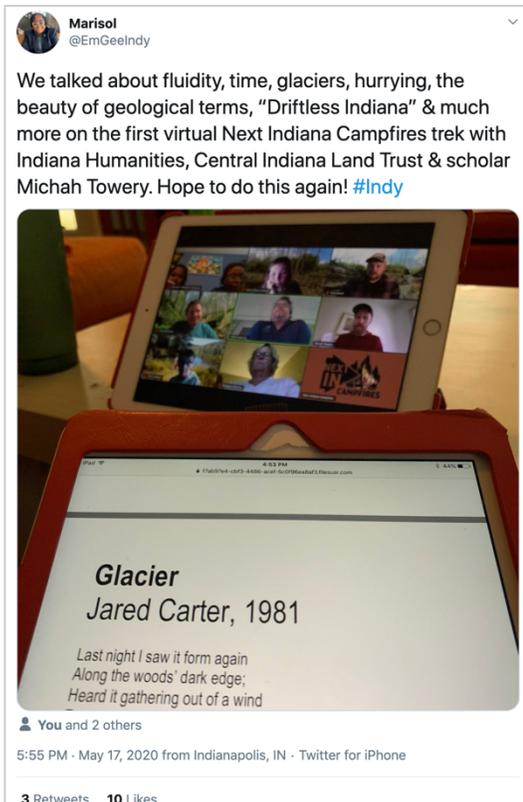
Early on, we dismissed the idea of trying to reproduce our indelible Next Indiana Campfires treks virtually. It felt like there were too many essential elements to try to incorporate and, especially in March 2020 when these discussions began, we just weren’t sure what kind of technical expertise it would require (or cost!). But as spring unfolded, we determined that if we were to try, these were the essential elements of a virtual Campfires experience:

**The ability for participants to “look around.”** Most virtual explorations of an area are one-directional—you look where the camera points, and someone else chooses where to point the camera. But a key ingredient of our treks is that you can choose where you want to look and what to pay attention to at any point along the walk, or even as we pause to read short literary passages out loud and discuss them. We wanted to preserve this ability for participants to focus on whatever was most valuable to them.

**Texts and place.** Next Indiana Campfires treks combine a guided walk or paddle through an Indiana landscape, interspersed with short readings of environmental literature. Treks are co-led by expert naturalists and humanities scholars. We knew we wanted to keep these elements in place.

**Lean into the benefits of technology.** In our exploratory conversations with our humanities scholar and naturalist, we decided to embrace the opportunity afforded by a virtual trek to visit places that were otherwise inaccessible (due to topography or preservation status), or that were geographically distant from each other but ecologically connected. Rather than just be sad we couldn’t do our normal trek, we tried to create an experience that wouldn’t be possible if not for virtual media.

We were fortunate to work with partners and humanities scholars who were game to try something new. We approached our two virtual events as experiments: we weren’t quite sure how they would work out, and our goal going in was to learn and to operate with a generosity of spirit that something (technical glitches, especially!) might go wrong.



We settled on a combination of Zoom (to gather participants, naturalist and scholar together virtually) and a series of 360-degree videos of “stops” on our trail. Participants received a link to access the readings and the 360-degree videos ahead of time, as well as virtual Zoom backgrounds of the places we’d be “trekking.” As with our normal treks, events started with a welcome and introductions, then we set out to three virtual stops, accompanied by short readings and discussion along the way. After arriving at each stop, we gave participants a minute or so to “look around” in the virtual space, and our naturalist oriented us to where we were and pointed out ecological features. Next the humanities scholar led the reading and discussion. We used Zoom chat to share links to videos and readings, to generate conversation and elicit questions and observations from attendees, though people could also unmute themselves to speak to the group.

We chose themes inspired by the landscape and the moment and sold out both treks:

### **Trek 1 (May): White River Bluff and Mossy Point**

We “journeyed” to two places shaped by the unique geological history of Indiana and each closed to the public. We learned about the unique geology and ecology of two nature preserves, but also played with the idea of “time” (fitting for life in a pandemic and change on a geological timescale) that suited the moment. We read “Glacier” by Jared Carter, “The Driftless” by Austin Segrest and an excerpt from the 1941 WPA Guide to Indiana.

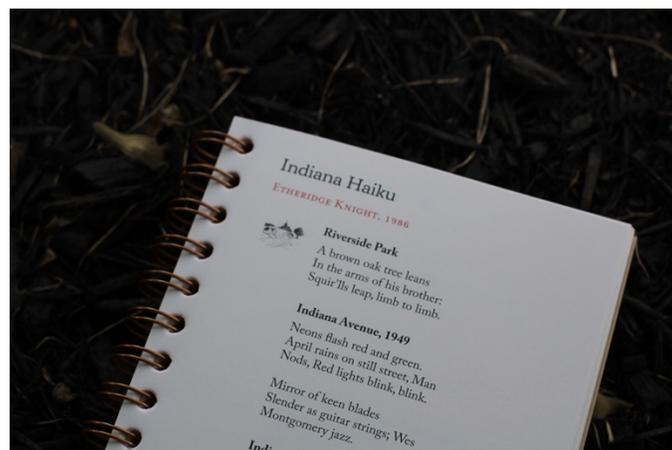
### **Trek 2 (June): White River**

The White River has been a focus of our programs since 2017 thanks to grant funding from the Pulliam Trust. But following the Central Park birder incident, then the murder of George Floyd and weeks of widespread protest, we wanted to address questions around environmental justice, equity and access, and the meaning of freedom, using the White River as a jumping off point to explore these ideas. We “paddled” to three stops along the river, reading “9 Rules for the Black Birdwatcher” by J. Drew Lanham, “Black Lives and a River Road” by Njaimeh Njie, and “Go West, Young Brown Girl” by Lillian-Yvonne Bertram.

To do the virtual treks, we bought a 360-degree camera and staff members headed out to capture the films. There was some trial and error to figure out what would work and we created a detailed step-by-step event plan (and practiced!) for our staff, scholars and partners.

## **DIY TREKS**

In addition to our organized hikes, we did a sales push for the anthology of Next Indiana Campfires readings that we published last fall and encouraged Hoosiers to slip it into their backpack as they headed out on safe socially distanced hikes, bike rides and paddling trips.



## ESSAYS ON RENEWAL, REFUGE, RELAXATION AND REFLECTION

To explore the key themes of IN Slow Moments, we reached to seven Indiana writers to select a theme and write a short essay relating nature and life in the pandemic. We published these weekly on our website. Looking back the essays are incredible snapshots of life in lockdown. It was great to be able to pay creators during an otherwise very uncertain time.

- [“Renewal”](#): Taking time to notice, describe and appreciate the precise beauties in our own backyards, as Kevin McKelvey does here, is a common theme in Indiana nature writing.
- [“Refuge”](#): Susan Neville provides a meditation on observing the arrival of spring from behind a suburban picture window, even as a pandemic unfolds.
- [“Relaxation”](#): Time loosens in a pandemic, as Valparaiso University’s Jillian Snyder describes, and our rhythms begin to mirror those of “horticultural time.”
- [“Renewal”](#): COVID has pushed us to spend more time in nature this spring, and IU’s Patrick Kindig asks if this in turn will lead us to renew our commitment to caring for the earth.
- [“Reflection”](#): Micah Towery considers the links between spending time in nature and feeling joy and happiness, even in an anxious season.
- [“Reflection”](#): Zach Garcia, director of education, natural resources and research for Evansville’s Wesselman Woods, asks us to contemplate the beauty of the new world that will be formed out our current pandemic moment.
- [“Refuge”](#): Ball State’s Katy Didden considers how “poems are a place,” and explores how this idea plays out in the work of Indiana poet Ross Gay.

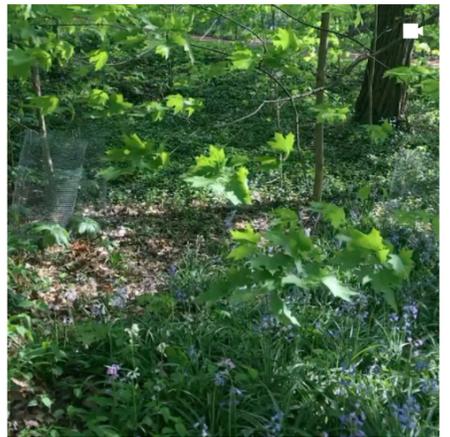
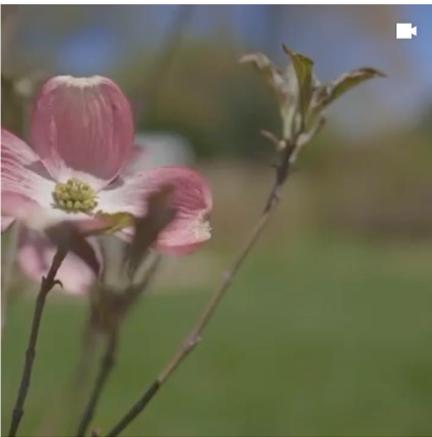
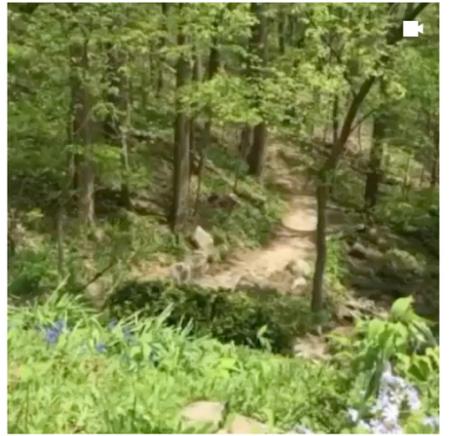
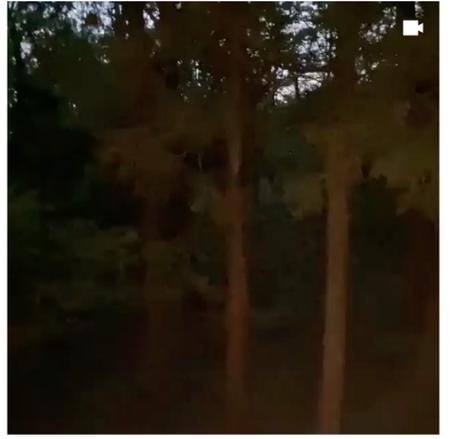
## SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Throughout the pandemic, and especially in its early stages, we saw communications campaigns as a key way to engage Hoosiers in our mission. (Implementing communications strategies also freed up other members of our team to work on CARES grants, rather than design a lot of virtual programs.) We selected a theme for each week of May and June, then planned and designed social media content and assets accordingly. Across our channels, we shared the essays, discussion prompts and quotes by Indiana writers on our key themes, as well as featured the work of our environmental partners.

We built a microsite for the Slow Moments campaign (<https://www.nextincampfires.org/>). We picked Wix because it is designed for film and photography but is simple to build a beautiful site. The microsite allowed us to corral the disparate elements of the campaign: virtual trek information, book-buying information, essays, the Slow Moment film and discussion questions, and crowd-sourced content, in one place. (To date, it’s had more than 2,000 unique visitors.)

But the heart of our social media campaign was an invitation to create and share your own “Slow Moment” video. Our communications team had been looking at different Instagram-friendly crowd-sourcing campaigns for a while, and at last we had the right project to try it with. We drafted directions for how to film and post your own short (one minute or less) #INSlowMoment and built out a portion of the microsite to feature contributions (<https://www.nextincampfires.org/inslowmoments>). We “seeded” the page with a few contributions by staff and each week of May and June, featured a contribution by a board member or external partner. More than sixty posts were created by people and tagged #INSlowMoments. In addition to being a fun way to engage online, in order to create the posts, users actually had to slow down and spend time in nature—in other words, they had to embody the themes of the entire campaign.





## COMMUNITY REACH & IMPACT

We announced the campaign to our list of more than 900 individuals who've attended Campfires events over the years, as well as with a special blast to our full e-news list and across our social media. We immediately began receiving positive feedback on the campaign, with particular praise for the Slow Moment film as a source of respite and reflection in a chaotic time.

In the later weeks of the campaign, we shared the videos on Facebook. Using what we had learned in our March and April online video experiments, we boosted the posts and coordinated board and staff sharing the films to use Facebook's algorithm in our favor and reach more people organically. More than 1,000 people watched full Slow Moments video content (our Slow Moment film and films contributed by others that we shared, as well as short clips of the longer film) organically, and more than 11,000 viewed part or all of the video content from paid and organic sources.

On Instagram, where the crowd-sourced Slow Moment films were shared, we saw an 87% increase in engagement over the prior month. We also saw 152% growth in new followers over the previous month. Our multimedia coordinator notes that this particular campaign did a great job of targeting our Instagram users, who are younger than our overall audience and younger than our Twitter or Facebook audiences as well.

Another aspect of the virtual treks we'd like to highlight is the way that it allowed people with mobility issues to attend a Next Indiana Campfire trek. For the most part, our treks are not ADA-accessible (though we've done a few on paved paths or ADA-compliant boardwalks over the years). We had several attendees to the virtual treks who stated how excited they were to at last be able to participate in the program. In staff discussion afterwards, we committed to doing at least one virtual trek per year going forward, even at a time when the pandemic isn't forcing us to socially distance.

One of our goals was to engage creators and the writers and filmmakers we worked with reported that this was a meaningful project for them. As our key contact at 12 Stars Media said, "I wish you could have been in the Zoom when I told my guys we were going to head out into the woods to make these slow films."

Finally, the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, our major funder for Next Indiana Campfires, was so pleased by the campaign that they paid to advertise the campaign in both the Sunday Indianapolis Star and on the Central Indiana NPR station. Both kinds of paid advertising significantly expanded the number of people who heard about the campaign.

## PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION

It was really exciting to experiment with film not to convey an idea (like a documentary or other typical "humanities" film), but rather to create an experience or feeling. This feels like a rich area for future programming innovation. We were intentional in how we wrote directions and viewing prompts to help people understand how to view the film and enter its pace, rather than simply to preview or talk about the ideas present in the film.

Films are a collaborative medium, and this was no exception. The idea to do a "slow TV" style film grew out of exploratory, off-the-cuff conversations between the staff and the team at 12 Stars Media, who had been advising us on some other aspects of our work with film and to grow online audiences for film work. Rocky Walls and the 12 Stars team pointed us to some examples of "slow TV" films and even helped us name what this particular kind of real-time, slowly paced filmmaking is. We had a lot of



formative discussions weighing locations, imagery and how, if at all, to incorporate texts into the films (we settled on two short passages delivered in voice over). We ended up creating two films, one of which was offered as a premium to those who bought the Next Indiana Campfires anthology during the promotion. 12 Stars also provided high-quality photography and short clips suitable for social media for the campaign.

When we decided to do virtual treks, we knew we'd need environmental partners and humanities scholars who were game to experiment, and to put in the extra prep time to gather footage, practice the tech set up, in addition to the usual work of selecting texts, advising on routes, and co-leading the event itself. We turned to two tried-and-true partners who are also part of the Pulliam Trust's Partners for the White River group, Central Indiana Land Trust and Indiana Wildlife. (In the case of CILT, in order to access the two closed nature preserves they steward, our partner Cliff Chapman met members of the staff, with our trusty 360-degree camera, for what turned out to be private guided hikes—a real high point in Spring 2020!)

We also reached out to some of the most skilled humanities facilitators who've been part of the program. We were able to rely on a lot of what we've learned about what makes these (in-person) programs work over the years, and this was really helpful thinking through how to adapt for a virtual setting.

We invited the other Partners for the White River to contribute #INSlowMoments, as well as a few filmmakers we've worked with previously, former interns and board members. This helped us populate the Slow Moments microsite and these contributions were featured during the campaign.

## FINANCIAL STRUCTURE & SUSTAINABILITY

Our primary funder for Next Indiana Campfires, the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, was very proactive in letting grantees know that they understood if our scopes of work might change or be delayed due to COVID-19. Not knowing if or when we'd be able to resume in-person programs in 2020, but knowing at the very least our April, May and June events wouldn't take place, we decided to reallocate the costs of those canceled events into the campaign. Pulliam funding covered the cost of new equipment (the 360-degree camera), the minimal costs of building the microsite, the partner and scholar honoraria for the virtual treks, and honoraria for essayists. Direct costs for the above totaled approximately \$4,168. It covered our staff time too.

Our original proposal to Pulliam also included a request to fund new/additional films about the White River (building on the three films catalyzed by their funding that we produced in 2018), so working with 12 Stars Media to create a Slow Moment film along the White River was in line with that scope. 12 Stars had also worked on other Pulliam-funded White River projects, so they came into the partnership well grounded. The cost of the two Slow Moment films, photography and digital assets for social media was \$6,600.

## WHAT'S NEXT

It's our sincere hope that we return to in-person programming for Next Indiana Campfires in 2021, though we anticipate that the IN Slow Moments campaign will live on in the following ways:

- Now that we've figured out how to offer virtual treks, which make it possible for those with mobility impairments to attend, we plan to offer at least one virtual trek each year, even if/as in-person events resume. We will likely do some targeted outreach to groups that serve mobility-impaired individuals to explore the possibilities of private treks, as we have been doing the last few years to increase low-income and non-white audiences for the program.
- We were so pleased with the results of the Slow Moments campaign that we built in non-grant funding for FY2021 to do something similar during the winter months (a time of year when we don't do treks).

- We will continue to collaborate with local filmmakers and to experiment with film as a medium to share ideas and to create unique, transportive experiences.
- We will apply what we learned last spring about engaging audiences online, through digital/social media-only tactics, paid and organic social traffic, crowd-sourced content and calls to action, during the rest of the pandemic and afterwards. Since the campaign ended, we experimented with social tactics like an “Indiana Lit Bot” on Twitter and maximizing the reach of the Indiana Authors Award winner announcement videos.

It turns out that the idea of pairing texts and literature to spark conversations about Indiana’s future also makes for social distancing-friendly programming. We were incredibly pleased to be invited by Visit Hamilton County to collaborate on their “Reflections on the Riverwalk” project. For Fall 2020, they have created a temporary installation of 21 banners featuring literary quotes about the landscape, by Indiana and midwestern writers. The banners, which also include viewing/discussion prompts, have been installed along White River walking and biking trails throughout Noblesville, Indiana. Visit Hamilton County asked us to advise on texts and the prompts and have generously acknowledged us on all the signage. Visitors can walk or ride the trails at their own pace and contemplate these prose and poetry excerpts. As always, we know we’ve been successful when those in our network take an idea and run with it, then invite us to be involved.

