



Executive Summary

**NORTH
CENTRAL
INDIANA**

Executive Summary

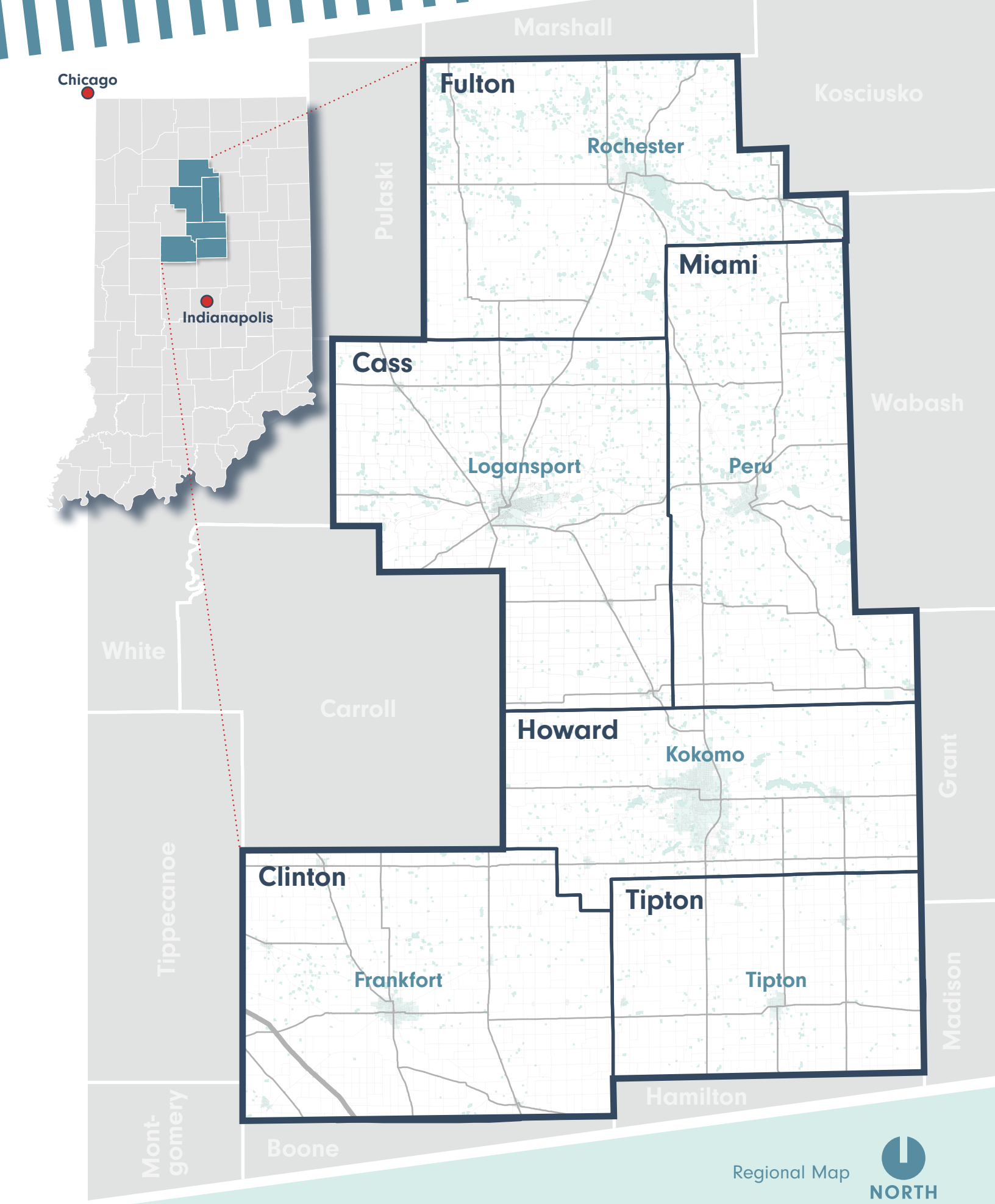
ACCELERATING 21st CENTURY INNOVATION

In 1894, Elwood Haynes made the first successful trial run of his “horseless carriage” on what is now Boulevard Street just east of Indiana 931. Haynes’ “horseless carriage,” of course, went on to be known as the automobile and revolutionized transportation. In 1920, John Powell invented the first mechanical corn picker in North Central Indiana. This device later became known as the combine and exponentially increased the productivity of farmers. Innovation is in the North Central Region’s DNA. In 2023, North Central Indiana sits on the precipice of once again leading a global industrial revolution in Industry 4.0 and E.V. battery technology. While the 21st Century technology driving this revolution is different than before, the North Central Region continues to pioneer innovation in agriculture and advanced manufacturing.

The North Central Region’s historic success in the 20th and early 21st centuries has established a strong foundation to be a global leader in the next generation of innovation. A truly modern, 21st-century economy is inherently different than what has come before. Gains in productivity and a focus on innovation have increased demand for the growth of a skilled and educated workforce. These changes have fundamentally reshaped how the public and private sectors work together to equitably sustain and grow the region.

While the North Central Region is at the forefront of our nation’s evolving economy, the opportunities presented by the innovation and growth of many of our region’s primary anchor employers mean that there is much work to still be done. The region must take the steps now to ensure that the workforce and talent exist to take advantage of these opportunities in the future. First and foremost is the need to grow the regional workforce by growing the regional population. The region has a strong track record of regional collaboration, a bold vision for success, tenacious local leadership and a network of dedicated private sector, public sector and not-for-profit regional partners.

Through the planning process for this regional strategy, the North Central Region’s partners have built upon previous regional consensus and identified the strategies to invest in growing the region’s population base, improving quality of place and quality of life, increasing and diversifying our region’s quality of opportunity, spurring innovation, incentivizing entrepreneurship, and building resiliency: all to attract and retain talent.



THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF THE PARTS

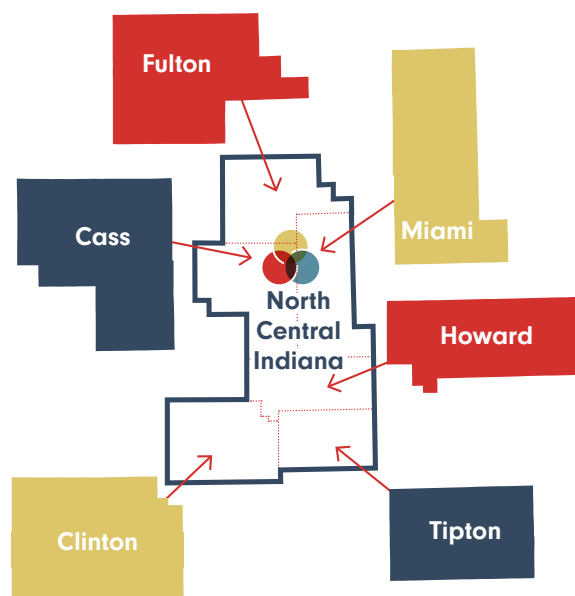
In 2012, the Indiana Business Research Center (IBRC) published population projections for Indiana's counties. It was reported that 54 of Indiana's 92 counties were expected to experience population decline by 2020. All six of North Central Indiana's counties were expected to shrink, and the region was projected to lose 3% of its population by 2020. North Central Indiana has worked tirelessly to invest in quality of place and housing to confound these expectations. The 2020 census numbers have indicated this work and commitment is paying off, and the tide is turning in the region's favor.

Over the past ten years, the North Central Region has made critical place-based investments and, as a result, has outperformed the IBRC's projections. While there has been much progress made, there is much work yet to be done. Continued regional investment in quality of life amenities, expanding housing, and focusing on increasing the region's quality of opportunity are essential. The planning process provided an unprecedented opportunity to take the recent progress being made in the region and accelerate it to new levels for even greater regional success.

Regionalism and the spirit of collaboration are not new concepts for the North Central Region. The region has been planning and working together for years. Formed in 2014, North Central Indiana Regional Planning Council (NCIRPC) has gone through several past planning processes including a 2012 CEDS, 2017 CEDS, READI, and, most recently, earned a 21st Century Talent Region designation. The NCIPRC has garnered more than \$14 million in grants to help improve quality of life, education and infrastructure within the region, as well as securing an additional \$30 million in grants as part of the 2021 READI initiative. These resources will support a diverse set of regional projects totaling over \$2.8 billion in public and private investment in the region by the end of 2026.

The North Central Region is unified by NCIRPC's leadership, but it is strengthened and defined by much more. The region is bound together by a shared industry base, embedded regional commuting and shopping patterns, strong collaborative partnerships and engaged regional private sector and educational partners. The region has core concentrations of agriculture, food processing and advanced manufacturing. These industries provide a strong economic base to leverage and build upon. The similarities of the individual partners within the region also ensure that the region is unified by a set of shared cultures, shared goals, shared opportunities and shared challenges.

During the development of this plan, it was obvious to the region's partners that while they sometimes compete, the rising regional tide raises all boats. The regional partners know that their individual futures are inseparably connected, and none will ever achieve their maximum potential without the overall region being strong. With this in mind, a private-sector-led, non-partisan oversight committee of region-wide stakeholders was formed within NCIRPC to oversee the implementation of the regional plan.



Since 2014, all 6 counties have worked together as a region through the leadership of NCIRPC

UNPRECEDENTED PUBLIC INPUT LEADS TO REGIONAL CONSENSUS

As noted above, significant regional planning had occurred before the development of this plan, but the regional development plan created an opportunity to engage a broader set of stakeholders than ever before. This comprehensive engagement strategy ensured that this regional plan represents broad regional consensus and ownership of the plan from an extensive group of regional stakeholders. Over the course of several weeks, county workshops were hosted in each of the region’s six counties, two public input surveys were conducted, the region hosted a workforce development-focused educator’s summit, private industry leaders were engaged, and two regional workshops were conducted. Overall, more than 700 people were directly engaged during the planning process.

The planning and engagement process was specifically designed to engage a diverse collection of stakeholders including industry leaders, small business owners, school corporations, higher education institutions, youth within the region, not-for-profits, elected officials, the public and local economic development leaders. All of the engagement sessions and tool designed to identify and understand the regional opportunities for population growth and economic success. Participants were asked to develop and refine specific strategies that remove barriers impeding the successful delivery of that growth. The engagement process further confirmed the interconnectivity and consistency of the region’s priorities and what is required to deliver them.



County Workshop: Miami County



Regional Workshop #1 - Ivy Tech Kokomo

MAXIMIZING SUCCESS MEANS REMOVING BARRIERS THAT INHIBIT GROWTH

For each of the priorities identified in this regional plan, stakeholders were asked to identify barriers impeding progress in achieving those priorities, as well as identify a specific set of strategies to help the region remove or reduce the barriers to regional success. This exercise resulted in the refinement of the region's five (5) priorities into a set of detailed objectives. The following is a summary of each barrier and how it could potentially impede progress in the region:

Attract and Retain Talent

Improve the Availability of Diverse Housing Alternatives

- A lack of available housing options has inhibited population growth.
- Employers struggle to find homes for potential employees in all price ranges.
- Residential growth in the region is being inhibited by rising building costs and a need to support properties with infrastructure.
- Successful growth requires public-private partnerships to share risks in strategic and measured ways.

Expand the Regional Quality of Life Amenities

- The North Central Region needs more diverse amenities like restaurants, parks, trails, entertainment, arts and culture to grow our younger and overall population.
- Employers throughout the region identified the need for expanded and affordable childcare as a barrier to activating the region's full workforce.

Develop Talent

Build a Regional 21st Century Workforce

- Current workforce needs up-skilled to meet the demands of an evolving and innovative industrial base.
- Current and future high school students need adequate opportunities to acquire career preparedness training or degree completion in high school.

Support the Next Generation of Regional Workforce with Career Pathways

- High school educators indicated that students need additional support during high school to transition from high school to post-secondary education.
- Local anchor employers noted that graduating high school students did not possess the soft skills and experiential opportunities to best prepare them if they choose to directly enter into the workforce after high school.

Connect Talent

Support Population and Workforce Growth by Expanding the Quality of Opportunity

- Rising development costs mean developers are less likely to develop infrastructure themselves. More public incentives are needed to attract a more diverse range of employers that will raise the region's average wage and support regional population growth.



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Region-Wide Engagement Process

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Region-Wide Engagement Process

UNPRECEDENTED INPUT

The planning and engagement process was designed specifically to engage a broad range of stakeholders including industry leaders, small business owners, school corporations, higher education institutions, youth within the region, not-for-profits, elected officials, the public and local economic development leaders. Though the engagement was broad reaching, the planning exercises and survey questions employed were designed to specifically identify, understand, develop and refine strategies that remove barriers impeding the region's population growth and economic success. This far-reaching engagement revealed the interconnectivity and consistency of the region's priorities and resulted in a process that allowed regional stakeholders to identify strategies to take advantage of regional opportunities and overcome regional constraints.

This chapter details the specific steps that were taken as a part of the planning and engagement process for the development of this regional plan.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

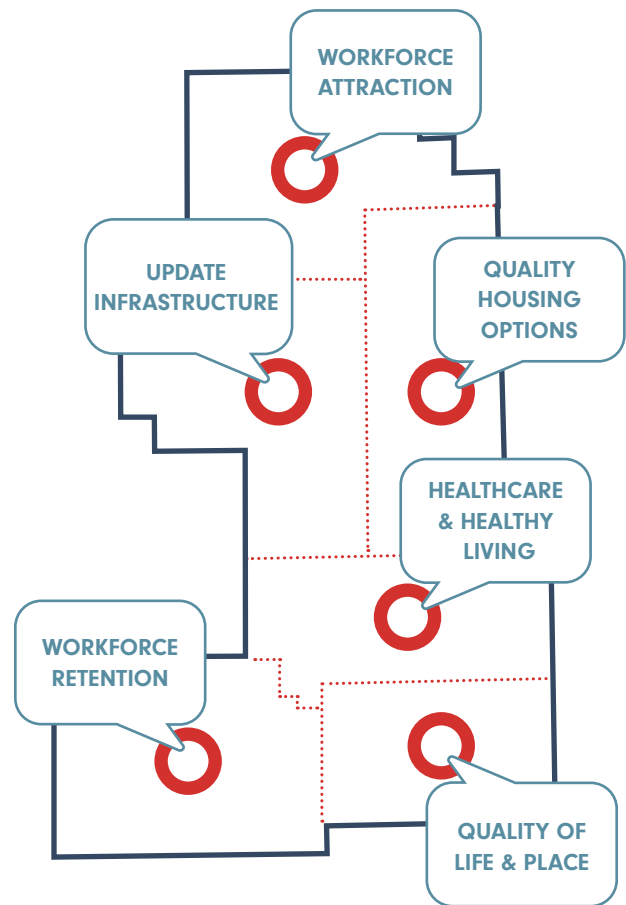


Steering Committee Formation

Before public engagement for the plan began, a steering committee of local leaders was formed. This group consisted of community leaders from each of the counties within the region. Steering Committee members included representatives from the NCIRPC Board of Directors, community development organizations, the region's local economic development organizations (LEDOs), private sector employers, all the region's higher education institutions, local not-for-profit organizations and elected bodies. This committee helped shape and guide the planning process, recommended proposed strategies, and reviewed the draft plan.

County Workshops

The regional planning process brought together community leaders, business leaders and stakeholders to participate in six (6) county workshops (one in each regional county) over the course of two (2) weeks. More than 220 community members participated in the county workshops. County workshops included both presentations about the regional planning effort as well as a series of facilitated engagement exercises. The engagement exercises were designed to achieve a better understanding of the issues and opportunities within each county; identification of key local assets and the status of their utilization; existing barriers to the county and the region to achieving its maximum success; and potential methods to help the counties, as well as the region, deliver on its desired goals.



All 6 counties worked together to host a workshop for each county over the course of two weeks with over 200 participants.



Key Public Input County Workshops

- More and better skilled workers
- More housing options at all price levels
- More things for kids and families to do
- Better education attainment post high school
- Diversify our economy
- Development ready lots for future housing

Regional Workshop #1

A regional workshop was conducted on July 27th, 2021, with more than 50 key stakeholders from the region, some of whom also attended the county workshops. During this workshop, the combined results of the county workshops were shared with the participants. Based on that previous engagement, a series of discussions were facilitated to build consensus around local matters that rose to the level of being regional needs, opportunities and barriers. This approach made it apparent there was clear alignment between the counties' priorities. The regional conversation identified a series of regional priorities that were shared by all of the counties in the region. The five (5) regional priorities included: develop diverse housing alternatives, continue to improve quality of life/place assets, deliver 21st century workforce development, improve broadband connectivity and expand quality of employment opportunity. Participants were asked to identify projects and programs that would lower or remove the barriers to, and best take advantage of, regional opportunities that they had identified. A summary of Regional Workshop #1 can be found in the Appendix.



Key Public Input Regional Workshop #1

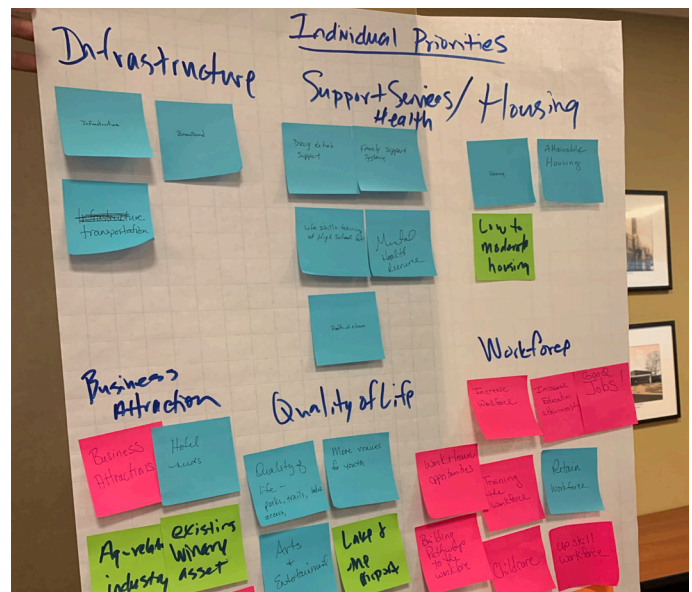
- Better jobs with better pay
- More white collar jobs
- More opportunities for vocational education/training
- More quality of life attractions for the region



County Workshop: Miami County

Public Input Survey #1

A public input survey was conducted using Survey Monkey from July 15th to August 16th and had 409 respondents. Participants were asked questions about their likes/dislikes about the region, what areas participants would like to see improvement in, and how they would like to see those areas addressed. The survey demonstrated clear alignment between the findings of the county-wide workshops, Regional Meeting #1 and the survey respondents. The survey respondents echoed the region's focus on the areas of housing, childcare, quality of life, education and workforce development, broadband, and quality of opportunity. The full results of Public Survey #1 can be found in the Appendix.



County Workshop Priority Exercises

Educator & Workforce Summit

Throughout the engagement and planning process, it became clear that investments in workforce development and education were essential to preparing the region to be a leader in 21st century innovation and help retain the regional population/workforce. Resultingly, an educator's summit was coordinated with local school district leaders and the region's higher education professionals to develop and identify the workforce development and education programs included in this plan. The region's educators expressed a need for completion pathways programs for high school students, career coaches in high school, expanding skilled trades funding, upskilling current workforce, increasing access to micro-credential programs and supporting entrepreneurship and innovation.

Private Sector and Anchor Institution Engagement

Steering committee members directly engaged key members of the community one-on-one, including: anchor institutions, major employers, commercial developers, residential developers, not-for-profits and community foundations. The feedback from these stakeholders was fundamental in the crafting of this region development plan. Support letters from many of those engaged can be found in the Appendix.

Virtual Q&A Open House

A virtual open house was conducted using Zoom on August 10th, 2021. The open house was advertised on community's social media pages and was an opportunity for the public learn more about the regional development plan and to ask questions about the process and the plan.

Public Input Survey #2 - Youth

A second public input survey was conducted to target the region's youth and college student population to better understand their thoughts on the current and future state of the region. The survey's objective was to understand what investments needed to be made to retain the region's youth. The survey asked if students planned to stay in the region after they graduated, what was motivating their feelings and what it would take to keep them living and working within the region. The survey was open from August 23rd, 2021 through September 13th, 2021 and had 115 respondents. Participant's feedback was strongly aligned with what was expressed in the county workshops, regional meetings and larger public survey. Among the key findings of the survey was a desire for expanded job opportunities, better paying jobs and improvements to regional quality of life amenities.



Key Public Input Youth Input Survey

- **Better paying jobs**
- **More cultural diversity**
- **More entertainment options**
- **More festivals and events**
- **Affordable vocational training**
- **Diverse job opportunities**



Regional Workshop #2

Regional Workshop #2

A second regional workshop was conducted on August 20th, 2021 with the objective of building consensus among the region's stakeholders regarding the early plan narrative and project/program identification. Stakeholders offered valuable feedback that helped refine the plan narrative and further detail strategies ultimately included in the final plan.

Advisory Committee Review

Consisting of key not-for-profit and private sector leaders within the region, the NCIRPC Oversight Committee was established to have responsibility for final approval of selected strategies in this plan. Additionally, this committee will be responsible for the approval of the final plan for submission and for the oversight of the plan's implementation. The advisory committee was formed to ensure that the longevity of the plan's implementation is not interrupted by potential transitions in leadership at the local level.

The background features a complex network of light blue and grey lines resembling a circuit board or data paths. A prominent, large, bold blue number '3' is positioned in the upper right quadrant. A thick red diagonal line runs from the bottom left towards the top right, separating the white upper section from the dark blue lower section.

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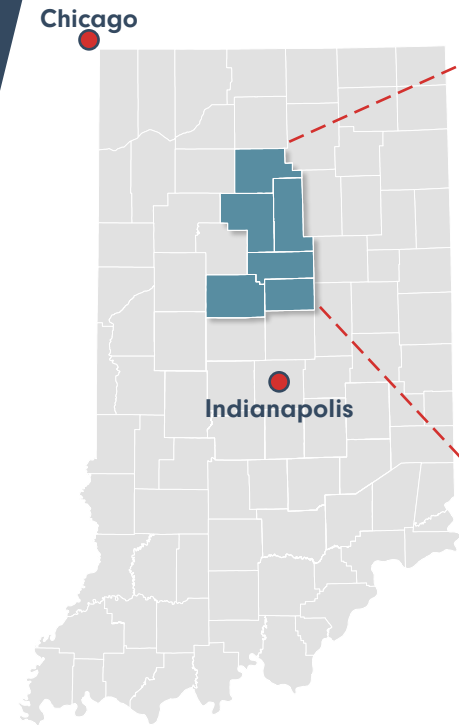
Summary Background

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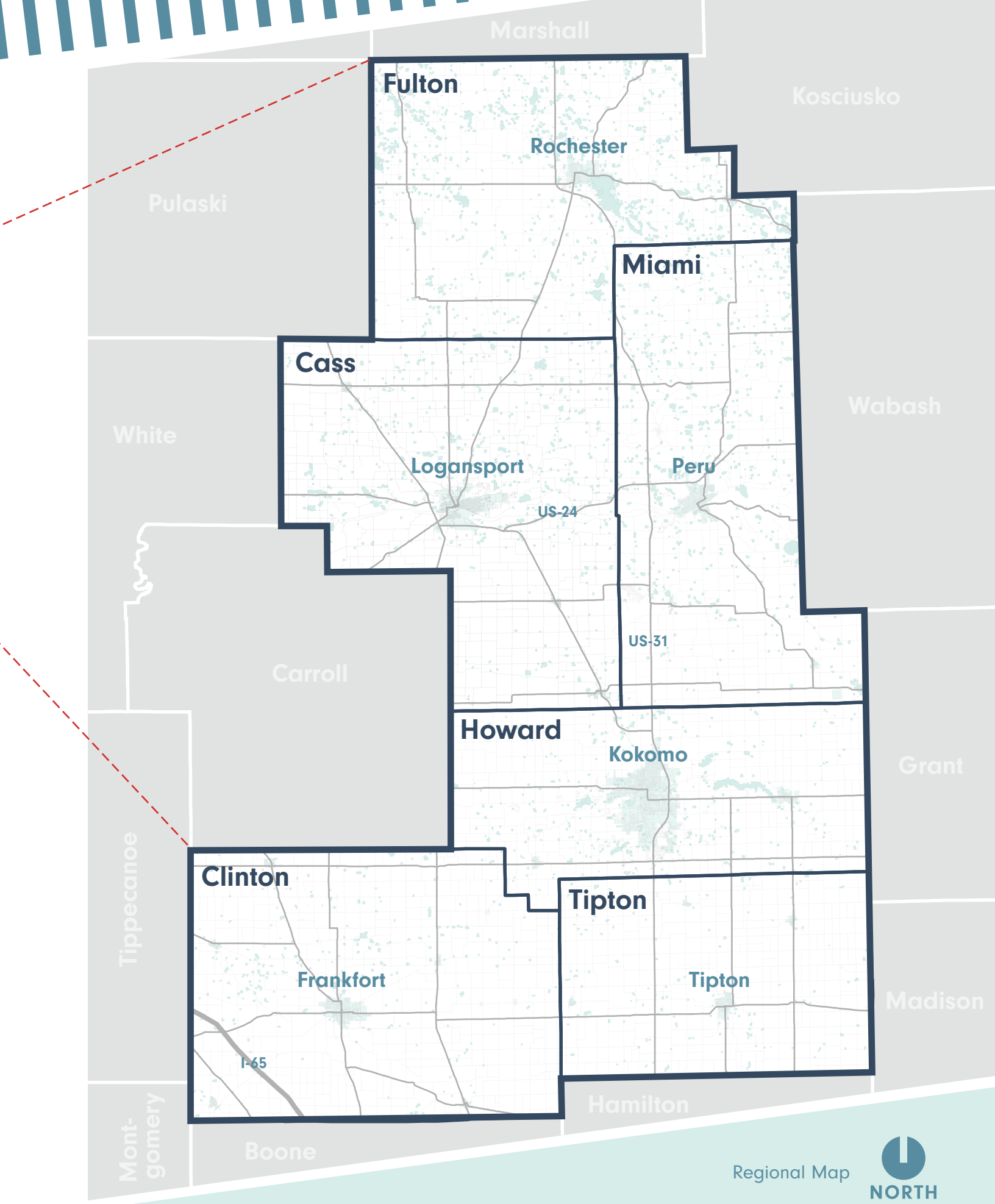
About the North Central Region

PRIMED AND READY FOR ACCELERATION

The North Central Indiana Region, represented by the North Central Indiana Regional Planning Council (NCIRPC) is a regional partnership among Cass, Clinton, Fulton, Howard, Miami and Tipton Counties. The region has known for a long time that to meet demands of a 21st Century economy, it is imperative that the North Central Indiana Region (North Central Region) grow its population to support the workforce it will need to capitalize on its current and future economic opportunities. To attract this workforce, it is essential that the region expand and enhance the amenities that are desired, not just by those that live here today, but also those that the region must attract for long-term sustainability.



Population growth and the development of amenities is a virtuous cycle: as population grows, the market grows and opportunity for amenities increases; and as amenities become more numerous, a community becomes more attractive and its population grows. While much has already been done to make improvements to foster new residential growth opportunities in the region, much work remains to be completed. The CEDS is a tool that will not only help the region build on the work that has already been completed, but will allow the region to deliver this regional enhancement at an exponential pace. The North Central Region is a region with a strong economy, proven record of success and a demonstrated commitment to investing in, and improving, quality of life and economic opportunity in our region. The strategies in this plan will provide the fuel to accelerate the region's progress and help build on existing momentum to help grow the region's population.



HISTORY OF THE NORTH CENTRAL INDIANA REGION

The collaboration amongst the six counties in the North Central Region, that has coalesced into today's Regional Planning Council, began informally more than 25 years ago. Compelled to respond to the Great Recession, the North Central Region began working with the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) to update the CEDS and create a stronger, more focused regional organization. The North Central Region's second CEDS was completed in 2012. A third iteration of the CEDS document was completed in 2017 utilizing the Strategic Economies Together (SET) program in collaboration with Purdue University. In May of 2021, the North Central Region successfully secured its 21st Century Talent Region designation.

Since its formal inception in 2014 and prior to the 2021 READI grant program,, the NCIRPC has successfully worked on more than 100 projects and secured more than \$14 million in grant funding from state and federal agencies, including: FEMA, USDA, Department of Defense Office of Economic Adjustment, EPA, EDA, OCRA, INDOT and Indiana Brownfields. Projects receiving funding include: water, wastewater, stormwater, road improvements, brownfield demolition and redevelopment, health and safety for police and fire departments, community centers, downtown revitalization, workforce training programs, tourism, childcare, mental health services and economic development projects.

Local Community Plans

In addition to the 2017 North Central Indiana CEDS planning process, most of the communities in the region have, within recent years, undergone extensive local planning efforts such as comprehensive plans, strategic plans, downtown plans, transportation plans and parks master plans. Each of these plans informed this plan and assisted in the planning process.

PREVIOUS PLANNING WORK

2012 CEDS

The 2012 CEDS was the culmination of a two-year effort in which community leaders representing over 228,000 residents analyzed current conditions and identified opportunities for future community economic development growth. The CEDS plan identified workforce and education development and quality of life as key strategic priorities to further the growth of the region. Four goals were established to address these strategic priorities:

- Prepare and develop workforce for the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow, while intentionally attracting and retaining talent.
- Improve and further develop downtown space and demand capacity.
- Maximize the potential of the air and highway transportation infrastructure.
- Ensure quality infrastructure to meet the needs of residents and businesses throughout the region.

2017 CEDS

The region's first executive director was hired in late 2014 as there was a need to add capacity to the regional planning council to help drive projects and initiatives. The NCIRPC led the facilitation of the 2017 CEDS plan. The year-long CEDS effort brought together a new and diverse group of participants that included elected officials, economic development professionals, education and business leaders, civic organizations and the general public to develop an updated regional strategy. The 2017 CEDS plan reinforced the existing regional strategic focus areas: workforce and education and quality of life, along with four guiding goals:

- Prepare a workforce for jobs of today and tomorrow.
- Leverage the North Central Region's transportation assets.
- Develop/enhance the North Central Region's downtowns.
- Provide quality infrastructure to the North Central Region's communities.

Additionally, the 2017 CEDS identified a set of objectives correlating to the primary regional goals, including:

- Create a more focused and collaborative agricultural strategy for the North Central Region.
- Support key manufacturers while bolstering and diversifying suppliers.
- Create a culture of excellence for advanced manufacturing.
- Establish a cultural foundation for a network of regionalism.
- Leverage assets by developing infrastructure/broadband connectivity.
- Enhance quality of place to promote talent attraction and retention.

Regional Economic Development and Acceleration Initiative (READI)

In 2021 the state of Indiana announced the Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI). Through READI, the State encouraged neighboring counties, cities and towns to partner to create a shared vision for their future, mapping out the programs, initiatives and projects that are critical for them to retain talent today and attract the workforce of tomorrow. The NCIRPC led the North Central region's efforts. The foundation of this plan was formed using the extensive public engagement and stakeholder planning sessions conducted for READI. The region further refined its vision, solidified its priorities, identified the barriers to economic development and growth, and developed strategies and projects specifically targeted to overcome those barriers. In December of 2021, the region was awarded \$30 million dollars from the State of Indiana to implement its READI plan. What follows on the next four pages is a summary of the projects that were included in the READI plan.

READI FOCUS AREAS

Talent Development

Quality of Place / Quality of Life

Talent Attraction

Quality of Opportunity

Entrepreneurship and Innovation



QUALITY OF LIFE

The North Central Region wants to be intentional and strategic in its ongoing investments in place-based quality of life improvements in the region. The North Central Region understands that growing the population requires improving the region and continuing to make it a more attractive place to live. There are opportunities like the Hotel Conference Center, Hoosier Heartland development and the Silo Concert Center to develop physical quality of life amenities to serve existing residents and create regional destinations for visitors. There are also opportunities like the Turning Point Drop-In Center, Regional Childcare Study and Broadband Phase One that strategically remove barriers to the region's growth potential.

Quality of Life Projects:

Hotel and Conference Center

A 120-room Hilton Garden Inn in Kokomo's downtown city center and an adjoining 40,000 square foot conference center that will include space that can be used for regional conferences, exhibitions, meetings and social events.

The Silo Concert Center

A previously-abandoned farm re-envisioned as a concert venue that will become a regional entertainment destination and host events as large as 25,000 spectators.

Turning Point Drop-In Center

A recovery treatment center that offers resources to those with mental health and substance use challenges and offers preemptive care to keep our community members healthy and engaged in the workforce.

Broadband Phase 1

Funding of broadband projects in Howard and Cass Counties to connect rural parts of the region with broadband internet.

Regional Cultural Center

The redevelopment of the Douglass School Building in Kokomo that will host regional cultural programming.

Kokomo Speedway Upgrade

Planned improvements to this regional attraction will include waste water and storm water systems at the facility as well as making improvements to the grandstands and constructing new concession stands and restrooms.

Roundhouse Redevelopment

The Roundhouse campus is an approximately 11-acre redevelopment project that is a blight removal project that would include restoration of the Roundhouse, new hotel and conference center and recreation opportunities.

Apache Drive

A logical continuation and connection of Apache and Peace Tree to State Road 14 and State Road 25. Additionally, it provides a safe walking route to Rochester Schools for those living in the Country Meadows subdivision. This project improves economic development opportunity along the corridor, with hotel chains and restaurants expressing interest in the location. INDOT has recognized and endorsed this project from a connectivity and safety standpoint.

U.S. 31 Industrial Park

The project is located between US 31 and State Road 931 adjacent to Stellantis' north Kokomo facility. This site where Stellantis NV and Samsung SDI plan to invest more than \$2.5 billion to build a new joint venture battery plant as the Chrysler-parent ramps up electric vehicle production plans.

Grissom Tarmac

Tarmac improvements that will allow the former air force base to attract new businesses, bringing in more high-paying job opportunities that will attract talent to the area and serve as a catalyst for economic growth throughout the region.



HOUSING

Housing was the issue stakeholders discussed most in the engagement process. Employers identified housing as a barrier to continued talent attraction, developers identified rising material cost and risk as barriers to building new product and realtors shared stories of people leaving the region because of a lack of modern housing opportunities. The regional need for complementary and diverse housing stock is a real impediment to continued residential growth throughout the region. The region's housing strategy involves strategically partnering with developers and builders to (1) fill a clear need in the market and (2) provide an improved quality of life to the region. The following projects have been selected to address the region's need for diverse and expanded housing options.

Housing Projects:

Urban Park

A 30-unit market rate residential apartment building in the heart of downtown Logansport that incorporates an adjacent dynamic flex space for planned events and community gatherings. Investment in quality of life amenities will help spark additional redevelopment into the adjacent blocks.

Broadway Landing

This would include a new hotel development, expanded commercial district with nearly 30,000 square feet of space to support local entrepreneurs, nine-acre hospital campus and approximately 85 new single-family homes to anchor this mixed-use development in Peru.

Riverfront Development

A 170-unit, multi-family housing development, adjacent to the YMCA. Facilities will include a splash pad and sports fields, riverfront trail extension that connects to downtown Peru, opportunities for entrepreneurs to develop adjacent vacant properties and much needed affordable housing.

Lexington Village

Fifty-two single-family homes situated within Logansport's easternmost commercial district, allowing for easy access by bicycle or walking to the neighboring restaurants and shopping centers.

Meadowbrook Development

A ninety-acre development featuring a range of home types, including 30 multi-family attached, 60 median income single-family and 60 upper price range single-family homes.

U.S. 28 and U.S. 31 Infrastructure

To facilitate the development of the interchange at US31 & SR 28, Tipton County seeks to expand drinking water and wastewater infrastructure along the 5-mile SR28 corridor. The proposed project will immediately support a new 300 lot residential subdivision along the corridor and a 30-acre retail development at the interchange.



TALENT DEVELOPMENT

The North Central Region is taking a comprehensive approach to talent attraction and development by providing training and support at all levels. The proposed programs will create a network of interconnected pathways to help support workforce development and retain and grow regional talent at all levels. The region wants to prepare high school students for the workforce with career pathways, create an opportunity to train and re-train workforce to be competitive with the region's evolving and innovating industry, connect talent to opportunity and spur entrepreneurship and innovation.

Talent Development Projects:

Industry 4.0 Training Lab

Industry 4.0 specific training lab with state-of-the-art equipment to train current and future workforce to be competitive in the 21st century labor market and support ongoing innovation efforts of major regional primary employers.

Cradle to Career

Local schools, Ivy Tech, private industry and city and county governments are coming together to provide a pathway to career-ready programming in a singular location in Clinton County.

Innovation Hall

Local businesses, not-for-profits and government agencies will be able to turn to Innovation Hall for consultations, interns and meeting space. Innovation Hall will also act as a space where future employees will gain experience with the latest technologies and expertise in the areas of business intelligence/ analytics, cybersecurity, marketing, social media and more.

READI's Successes

The regional plan included many strategies, projects and programs to support delivery of the regional vision. The plan is a living document and will be updated regularly to ensure that a bench of projects exist to take advantage of funding opportunities as they arise. For the first phase of the READI grant program, the North Central Region was awarded \$30 million in grant funding from the State of Indiana ARPA funds. These funds supported 19 carefully integrated regional projects to drive delivery of regional goals. This grant money was paired with more than \$35 million dollars of local money to leverage more than \$2.8 billion in private investment, for a total regional investment by 2026 of more than \$2.9 billion.

21st Century Talent Region

In 2020, the region embarked on the next phase of regional planning by pursuing the State of Indiana's 21st Century Talent Region designation. The effort was spurred by the Howard County Partners in Education seeking more regional collaboration. The 21st Century Talent Region dashboard was an opportunity for the region to bring together all of its past planning efforts and focus on talent attraction/retention, talent development and talent connection.

The 21st Century Talent Region Plan focused on leveraging the region's existing network of assets to build a system to connect talent to employers. Below are the goals and strategies identified in the 21st Century Talent Region Plan:

Talent Attraction Strategies:

- NCIRPC Regional Marketing Plan: Create a marketing plan to bring interest and exposure to the work being done in the region.
- Human Resource Engagement: Create Human Resources Advisory Group and Employer-Educator Council.
- Diversify Housing Stock: Strengthen Realtors Association of Indiana/Home Builders Association relationships.

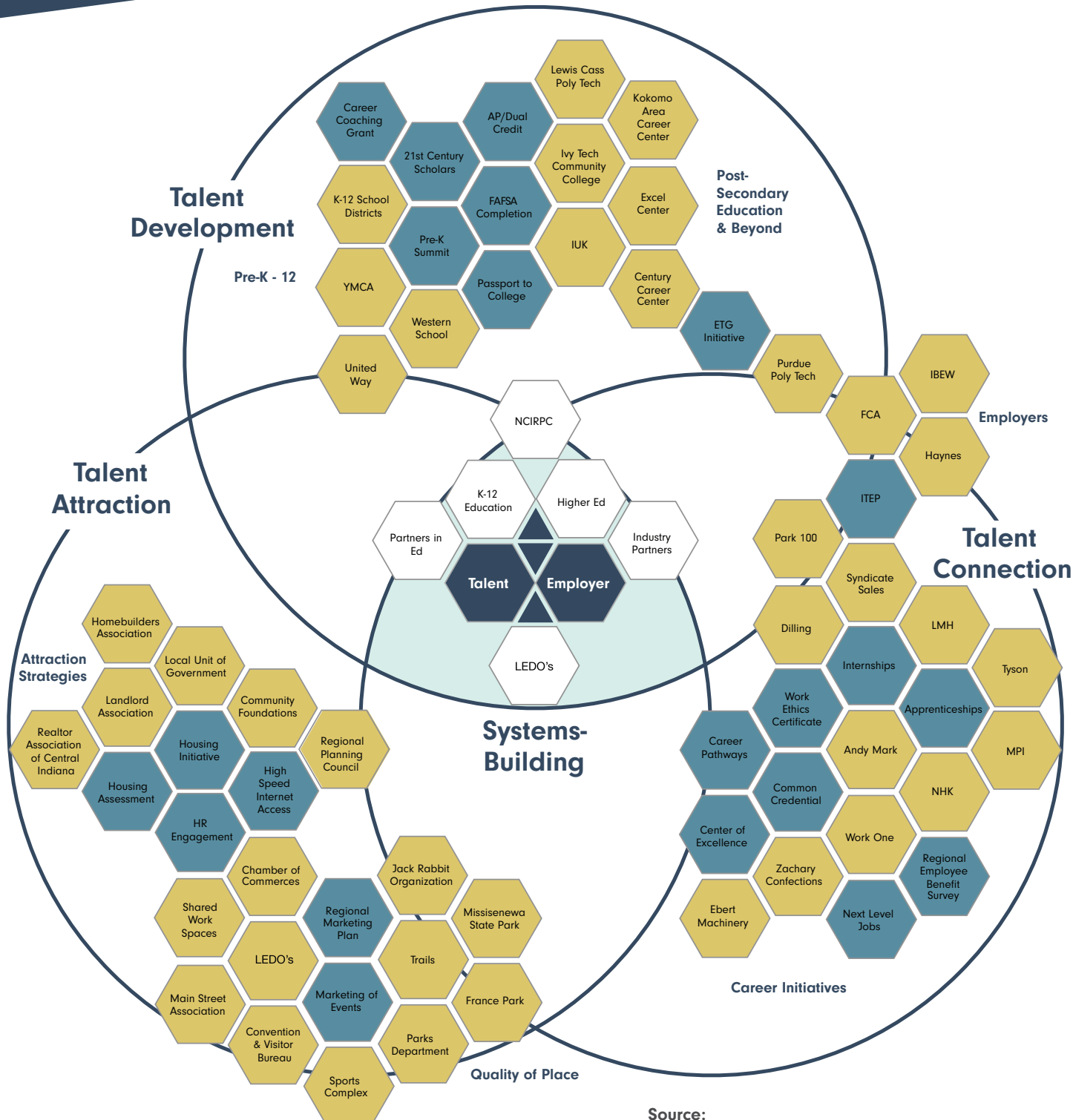
Talent Development Strategies:

- Pre-K Summit - Awareness around needs and support. Provide a way to connect current Pre-K providers with resources.
- Raise FAFSA completion to 60%.
- Increase Advanced Placement/Dual Credit that is earned in our region (K-12).
- Increase regional Employer Training, Employer Training Grant participants and Employer Training Grant submissions.

Talent Connection Strategies:

- Develop a Manufacturing Center of Excellence: Create a clearinghouse for employer engagement for the region.
- Perform a regional benefits survey to get perspective on current deficiencies and needs.
- Create and develop three new Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment pathways.

Both the 2017 CEDS and the 21st Century Talent Region plans act as a strong foundation for the creation of the regional development plan. The CEDS and the region's 21st Century Talent Region goals and strategies align well with the priorities that the READI program has set forth. Despite this alignment, the NCIRPC knew that substantial additional stakeholder and public engagement needed to be completed exclusively for the development of this plan. This grassroots engagement and associated regional conversations, helped refine both the goals and implementation methods to deliver the regional vision. This process helped clarify regional priorities and verify consensus around many of the items that were identified in previous regional plans. While significant strides have been made locally and regionally to help the region grow its business and population base in recent years, the CEDS offers the opportunity for the North Central Region to significantly accelerate the pace and momentum of regional success.



Source:
Next Level Indiana | 21st Century Talent Region

The Talent Ecosystem of North Central Indiana

- Systems Governance and Leadership
- Systems-Building and Coordination
- Initiatives and Projects
- Stakeholder Organizations

This talent ecosystem map, developed for the 21st Century Talent Region designation, illustrates how stakeholders relate to one another and relate to ongoing initiatives and programs.

REGIONAL ASSETS

Strong regional plans identify existing assets and strategies to leverage them to deliver the region's goals. Before a region can understand where its going, it must understand what the current conditions are in their region. The following section details the region's strengths both historically, as seen in the 2017 CEDS, and today, as seen in the updated asset inventory. The North Central Region is rich with assets that can be leveraged to grow regional population through both new attraction and retention efforts.

In 2017, as a part of the CEDS planning process, the region identified the following as its top regional assets/strengths:

Regional Transportation Networks

The region houses the main corridors of US-31, US-24 and I-65 which provide excellent connectivity throughout the region, as well as to Indianapolis and Chicago. It is important the region continue to ensure improvement and logical access points along its transportation infrastructure.



US 31 at SR 28 - Tipton County

Source: Kokomo Tribune

Core Manufacturing Base

The region possesses a strong economic advantage in manufacturing that has seen significant growth within the cluster and has exports of over \$8 billion. However a substantial amount (approximately \$600 million) of supply chain leakage occurs outside the region, which presents an opportunity for the North Central Region.



Rochester Metal Products

Source: Fulton County

Aviation/Grissom Runway

The Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) actions of the Department of Defense provided the region with assets available for development within the aviation industry. These assets include the longest runway within the State of Indiana at 12,500 feet and other opportunities for aircraft manufacturing, aircraft repair and rehabilitation, and general civil aviation use.



Grissom Aeroplex

Source: NCIRPC

Agriculture/Agribusiness

Individually, each county within the region relies heavily upon agriculture and agribusiness as a part of its overall economy. Throughout the region, there are numerous examples where agribusinesses support one another in the movement of products, creating a value-added supply chain.



Cargill Grain Terminal - Tipton

Source: www.estately.com



Tyson Fresh Meats - Logansport

Source: TCU 360

Education/Universities

Collaboration amongst the region's educational institutions provides many career path opportunities for high school and/or adult learners. These collaborations and partnerships include numerous community school districts, at least three (3) vocational education centers and several colleges/universities such as Ivy Tech, IU Kokomo, Purdue Poly Tech and Indiana Wesleyan University.



Ivy Tech Community College Kokomo

Source: Ivy Tech



IU Kokomo Student Events and Activity Center

Source: Indiana University Kokomo

COUNTY-BASED ASSETS

The strength of the region emanates from the collective strength of its counties and communities. This plan has identified assets at the local and county level that support these regional assets. What follows is a brief description of some of the local assets that support the overall regional health.

Cass County

Cass County is located directly within the Hoosier Heartland corridor, which is a driving force for new businesses and industries both within the county and throughout the entire North Central Region. Some of the thriving industries within the county include Tyson Fresh Meats, Kauffman Engineering Inc. and Smalls Parts Inc., all of which are top five employers in the county. In addition to the strong workforce that can be found here, Cass County is also home to the second largest school system in the region with the Logansport Community School Corporation enrolling over 4,500 students. Cass County is also home to two institutions of higher education which include a regional campus of Ivy Tech Community College. Not only has Cass County invested in its school systems, but it has also invested in its parks and recreation, implementing over 20 miles of mixed-use trails and further improving the quality of place for its residents.



Little Turtle Waterway - Logansport

Source: Cass County Online

Clinton County

Clinton County's central location, proximity to both US 31 and Interstate 65 and its close proximity to larger cities and towns (including Lafayette, Kokomo, Indianapolis and Chicago) make it a desirable place to live and work. The Frankfort Industrial Park employs over 3,800 people and is home to over 30 businesses. Clinton County's top employers are Frito Lay, NHK, Indiana Packers, ConAgra, Land O'Lakes and Zachary's Confections. Clinton County's abundant access to sources of water make it uniquely attractive to high water users like food processing and production. Additionally, Clinton County supports a strong parks system as well as a large school system known for having great gym facilities. All of these things contribute to a strong amenity and community base supported by organizations like the Clinton County Community Foundation which helps to improve the quality of life for the citizens of Clinton County.



Hot Dog Festival - Frankfort

Source: Frankfort Main Street



ConAgra Distribution Center - Frankfort

Source: Indiana Steel Fabricating, Inc.



Festival - Downtown Rochester

Source: Fulton County



Lake Manitou - Fulton County

Source: Fulton County

Fulton County

With a well-developed county parks organization, as well as a strong relationship with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), Fulton County provides many parks and recreation opportunities. IDNR-managed lands give access to many of the lakes and nature preserves found throughout the county, including the Judy Burton Nature Preserve, Lake Manitou and Nyona Lake. Fulton County is also home to the northern trailhead of the Nickel Plate Trail which begins in downtown Rochester and extends south to Kokomo. This is only part of the strong trail network that can be found within Fulton County.

Howard County

Howard County is the recreation, education, retail and workforce hub of North Central Indiana. Located in the heart of the North Central Region, Howard County is just a short drive from major city hubs such as Indianapolis, South Bend and Chicago. These strong connections have allowed Howard County to emerge as a strong labor market with a high prevailing wage rate, attracting residents from across the state to live and work within the county. Located just outside of downtown Kokomo, the Stellantis plant is the foundation for the strong workforce that can be found within the county and plays a major role in supporting the region's economic growth. In 2022, Stellantis announced a \$2.5 billion investment to build an E.V. battery plant in Kokomo that is estimated to bring 1,400 new jobs to the region. Other large employers in Howard County include Haynes International, General Motors (GM) and Borg Warner. One of Howard County's most unique assets is the former General Motors Wafer Fabrication Facility. While this facility is currently under the ownership of GM and would require investment to be operational, it is one of only a few of available chip manufacturing facilities in the United States that is nearly turn-key ready. Howard County also has a well-developed parks and recreation system with over 30 parks, as well as the higher education assets including Indiana University Kokomo and Ivy Tech Community College.



Wildcat Creek Walk of Excellence - Kokomo

Source: Kokomo/ Howard County



Kokomo Arts Pavilion

Source: Kokomo/ Howard County

Miami County

Miami County is home to innovative industries such as Arizona Isotopes, Caterpillar/Progress Rail, 434th Refueling Wing USAF Reserves and Dean Baldwin Painting. Miami County is home to many of the museums that can be found in the North Central Region, with six (6) museums focused primarily on transportation and travel. Peru, Indiana is home to the International Circus Hall of Fame.



Circus Parade - Downtown Peru

Source: Miami County Economic Development Authority

Dating back to the late 1800s, many of the country's most famous circuses over-wintered a few miles southeast of Peru. Two of Miami County's museums, the Grissom Air Museum and the American Huey 369 Museum, are located at the Grissom Aeroplex. This former air force base encompasses over 850 acres with existing buildings under the control of Miami County Economic Development Authority. Not only is Miami County home to many of the museums within the region, it is also supported by other quality of place amenities such as the Wabash River, Mississinewa Lake and the Miami State Recreational Area. These natural amenities, along with the Nickel Plate Trail that runs the entire length of the county, provide many recreational opportunities and strong pedestrian connections both within the county and throughout the entire North Central Region.

Tipton County

Tipton County is home to one of Stellantis' transmission plants, employing nearly 1,000 people. Tipton County is also home to some of the state's richest farmland, making it a strong agricultural center for the region as well. Tipton County's agricultural success also includes multiple agri-business companies such as Corteva Agriscience, one of the top five employers in the county. In addition to its strong agricultural base, Tipton County is also known for its world class library, as well as the annual Tipton Pork Festival taking place in downtown Tipton. Other entertainment and educational opportunities that can be found in Tipton include the Tipton Community Theater and the Tipton County Heritage Center and Museum, located just north of Tipton Park and the Tipton City Pool.



Nickel Plate Trail - Miami County

Source: Miami County Economic Development Authority



Pork Festival - Tipton







Source: Kokomo Tribune

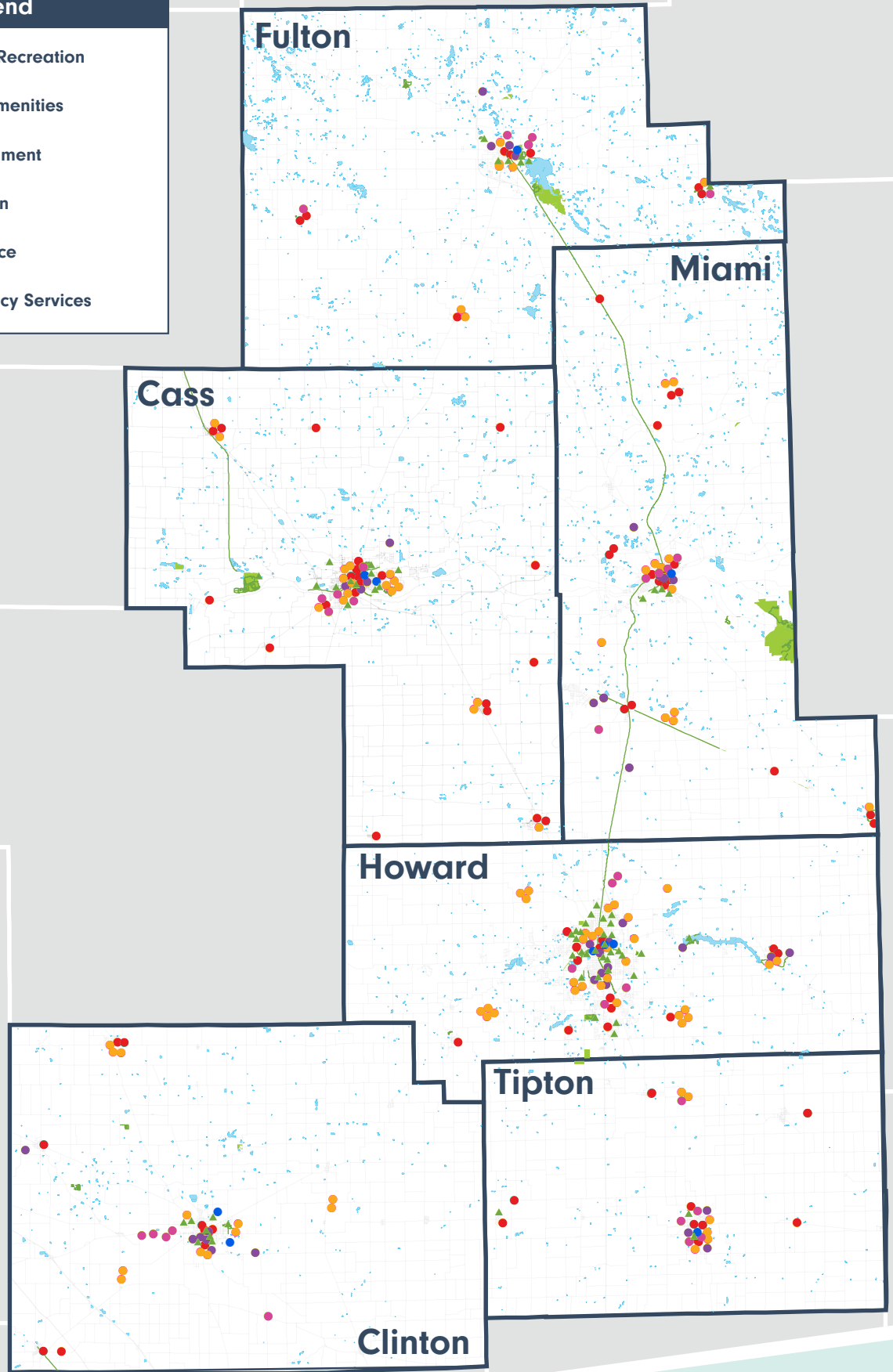


Diana Theater - Tipton

Source: everycounty.org

Assets Legend

-  Parks & Recreation
-  Water Amenities
-  Entertainment
-  Education
-  Workplace
-  Emergency Services





The Elks Halloween Parade - Logansport

Source: Cass County Online

REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Introduction

North Central Indiana is truly a region primed and ready to accelerate its success. Over the last ten years, as a region and as individual communities, the region has planned and executed with one intention: attract and retain talent. The region's strategies are working and the region is reversing population loss and beginning to grow. This positive trend is a direct result of the place-based investments that many of the region's communities have been making.

The North Central Region is united by a strong advanced manufacturing and agriculture base that fuels the regional economy. In fact, the North Central Region has three times the concentration of manufacturing and twice the concentration of agriculture than the nation at large. With strategic investments, these assets can be further leveraged to attract more highly-skilled workers to the region and grow the region's collective wealth and population. Likewise, as the region focuses on long-term sustained growth, it's necessary to diversify the region's economic base so the region's economy is resilient and adaptive. To continue to be leaders in these rapidly changing and advancing industries, the region must also continue making investments in workforce development and education.

Like any region, Indiana's North Central Region has its challenges; however, the region is choosing to define itself not by the challenges it faces, but by how it responds to and overcomes those challenges. The region is aging faster than is ideal, which is why it's more important now to increase the investments regional communities are making in the kinds of amenities that attract young people; like parks, trails and entertainment.

To grow in population, the region needs a larger and more modern housing stock. Throughout the planning process, employers stated that access to housing was a barrier to attracting, and in some case retaining, talent. Employers either could not attract workers because they could not find a house that they desired in the region, or their employees were forced to commute from surrounding areas outside of the region to find their desired housing. In line with national trends, the regional data reflects that there is a housing shortage in the North Central Region that must be addressed to grow the region's population.

In this chapter includes a comprehensive collection of demographics to help illuminate where the North Central Region is today and how the region compares to the State of Indiana and several peer communities. These data points serve in helping understand the region and inform the goals and metrics of the plan. It's important to understand that these data points represent a snapshot in time and do not determine the fate of the region. It is the people of North Central Indiana – the involved community members, private sector partners, and passionate community leaders who were engaged in this process – that breathe life and potential into the region. The stakeholders of the North Central Region are firm in their resolve to grow their community and make it a better place to live, work and play for generations to come.

Population

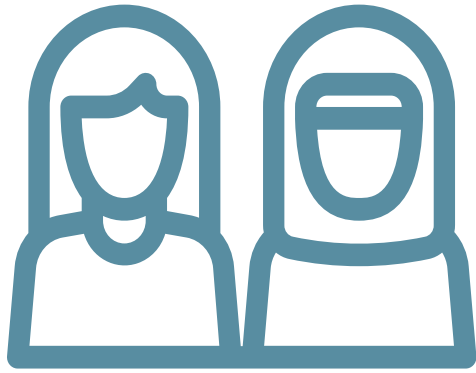
Turning the Tide

In 2012, the Indiana Business Research Center published population projections for Indiana’s counties. It was reported that 54 of Indiana’s 92 counties were expected to see a population decline by 2020 (See Table 2.1). In the 2010 to 2020 period, six of North Central Indiana’s counties were expected to shrink, resulting in a projected -3.03% loss in population as a region. The communities of the North Central Region have worked diligently to confound these projections, and in each county, as well as the region overall, 2020 census numbers have indicated that our work and commitment is paying off. Over the past ten years, the North Central Region has made important investments in quality of place, and has worked hard to outperform the IBRC’s projections. While the tide is turning in the North Central Region, there is much work yet to be done. Howard County has been a model for the region and an example of what can happen when a community invests in quality of life amenities, expands housing and focuses on increasing its resident’s quality of opportunity. Not only did the county beat the IBRC’s projections, but they grew by more than 1,000 people. The region has an unprecedented opportunity to take the success in certain areas of the region, in particular Howard County, and help spread it throughout the region.

Table 2.1: Population Change – Projected vs Real

Statistic	Howard	Cass	Miami	Clinton	Fulton	Tipton	Region	Indiana
2010 Census Population	82,752	38,966	36,903	33,224	20,836	15,936	228,617	6,483,802
2020 IBRC Projected Population	82,388	37,195	35,095	32,128	20,110	14,769	221,685	6,738,573
2020 Census Population	83,658	37,870	35,962	33,190	20,480	15,359	226,519	6,785,528
2010-2020 IBRC Projected % Gain/Loss	-0.44%	-4.54%	-4.09%	-3.30%	-3.48%	-7.32%	-3.03%	3.93%
2010-2020 Census % Gain/Loss	1.09%	-2.81%	-2.55%	-0.10%	-1.71%	-3.62%	-0.92%	4.65%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Indiana Business Research Center



CULTURAL INCLUSION MUST EXIST FOR THE REGION TO MAXIMIZE GROWTH

Diversity

In order for the region to maximize the greatest potential for population growth, it is important that it continue embracing a diverse population. While the overall region is currently diverse from a socio-economic perspective, there is an opportunity to continue to welcome a more diverse set of cultures to the region. The North Central Region is majority white, with 86% of the population classified as white, not Hispanic. The region has a less diverse population overall than the State of Indiana as a whole (14% non-white, non-Hispanic compared to 20%). However, the region has a higher share of Hispanic residents than the state (7% to 6%) with large Hispanic populations present in both Cass and Clinton Counties. With the development of the Stellantis/Samsung EV battery facility in Kokomo, it is anticipated that a significant number of employees from South Korea will be moving into the region to support the facility. Ongoing programming and investments are being made to continue welcoming new and diverse cultures to the region. The North Central Region recognizes that to achieve the desired population growth needed to create long-term sustainability for the region and the state, such growth will need to include continued efforts of support to create an inclusive culture within the region.

Millennials and Retiring Population

To have a thriving economy, a region needs a strong and vibrant working age population. The median age of the region increased from 39.8 (2010) to 41.7 (2020) during the ten year period. The North Central Region has an older population than the state as a whole. Clinton County, which is the youngest county in the region, has a median age of 38 years old, matching the statewide average. The other five counties in the region have median ages above that of the state. The region has a smaller portion of college age residents (8%) than the state (10%), but larger shares of adults 45 and older (45%) than the state (41%). An aging population creates potential challenges for future workforce needs, but also helps identify the types of investments and strategies that are required to reverse the trend. Projects and strategies in the plan target quality of life improvements that will attract young professionals and their families to our region.



THE REGION HAS AN AGING POPULATION FEWER MILLENNIALS - MORE SENIORS

Source: Emsi Q2 2021 Data Set

Workforce

Introduction

The North Central Region saw a slight overall decrease in labor force over the last 10 years, with some counties experiencing a growing labor force (Howard and Tipton), some with a slight dip (Clinton) and others with larger labor force declines (Cass, Miami and Fulton). 2020 unemployment was high throughout the region, but highest in the region's largest counties. Howard, Cass and Miami Counties had higher unemployment rates than any of the other counties, as well as higher than the state and the region as a whole. This, in large part, was a direct result of COVID-19 impacts to manufacturing and service sectors. 2021 unemployment numbers have already begun to reflect significant improvement as the worst of the initial pandemic impacts seem to be receding. Per capita income, average wage per job and median household income lag statewide averages (with the exception of Tipton County) but the COVID-19 impacts on these numbers, and the relative elasticity of impacts post COVID-19, are not completely known.

Wages

The region's average wage per job is \$45,681; more than \$6,000 below the State of Indiana's average wage per job of \$51,925. The region must focus on attracting high-quality, high-wage jobs to the region.



REGIONAL WAGES
LAG BEHIND
INDIANA'S AVERAGE SALARY

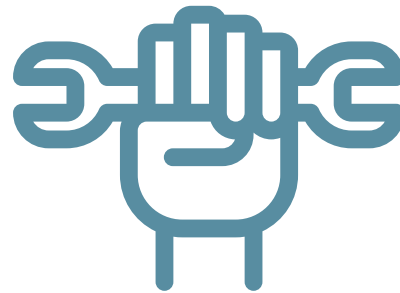
Source: STATS Indiana, using data from the Indiana Department of Workforce Development

Labor Force Participation

The labor force participation in the North Central Region dropped below 56% as a result of COVID-19. As of May 2021, the labor force has recovered and has bounced back stronger than 2019 to above 59%. While unemployment has not returned to pre-COVID-19 numbers, this creates an opportunity for the region to reactivate its workforce moving forward.

Job Trends

From 2015 to 2020, jobs declined by 3.4% in the North Central Region from 93,433 to 90,250. Looking forward, jobs in the region are predicted to bounce back from COVID-19 at a slow rate and not return to the pre-COVID-19 number until 2025. Howard County accounted for 52 of every 100 jobs in the region, as of Q3-2020, and it also accounted for 59 of every 100 jobs during COVID-19.



COVID-19
IMPACTED
REGIONAL JOB GROWTH BUT
RECOVERY IS UNDERWAY

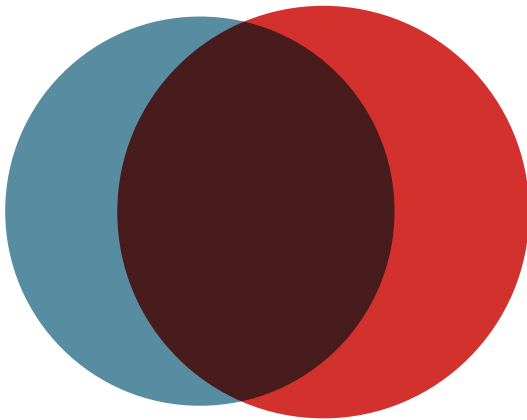
Source: Emsi Q2 2021 Data Set

Commuting Patterns

In the North Central Region, there are 99,681 workers who live in the region and 88,021 jobs (see Table 2.2). Of the jobs in the region, nearly two thirds, or 56,243 are held by residents that both live and work in the region. Of those commuting into the region to work, the majority of those are coming from Hamilton, Tippecanoe and Marion Counties. For those exiting the region to work, the majority of those are going to Marion, Tippecanoe and Hamilton Counties. It is clear that there is an opportunity to entice regional workforce to move closer to work with the right investments in quality of place assets. It is also clear that there is an opportunity to keep workforce in the region with the right investments in quality of opportunity.

Table 2.2: Regional Workforce

	Employee Count	Share
Workforce of Region		
Employed in the Region	88,021	100%
Employed in the Region but Live Outside	31,778	36.1%
Employed and Live in the Region	56,243	63.9%
Population of Region		
Live in the Region	99,681	100%
Live in the Region but Employed Outside	43,438	43.6%
Live and Employed in the Region	56,243	56.4%



INFLOW / OUTFLOW OF REGIONAL WORKFORCE

- 31,778** Employed in the Region but Live Outside
- 56,243** Employed and Live in the Region
- 43,438** Live in the Region but Employed Outside

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, LEHD 2018.

Housing

New residential building activity exists throughout the region, but Howard County accounts for the largest share in new residential permits. The only multi-family construction permits in the region are found in Howard County. This regional plan includes the strategies needed to accelerate its housing growth and diversify throughout the region, including supporting multi-family housing opportunities in the region outside of Howard County. Between 2010 and 2020, the region issued an average of 290 building permits annually. Between 2015 and 2020, the region issued an average of 394 building permits annually. Between 2015 and 2020, 68% of all residential development in the North Central Region occurred in Howard County. Regional demand for housing is increasing, but appears artificially constrained by a lack of adequate product available to the market.

Table 2.3: Housing Permits in the Region

County	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Cass	29	37	5	27	17	12
Clinton	48	42	32	121	26	33
Fulton	15	18	19	14	10	16
Howard	162	239	349	92	318	441
Miami	32	26	26	20	17	20
Tipton	28	26	25	9	7	7
Region	314	388	456	283	395	529

Source: Indiana Association of Realtors



IN THE REGION

68%

OF ALL RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

OCCURRED IN HOWARD COUNTY

Source: Indiana Association of Realtors

Table 2.4: Housing Supply and Prices

County	July 2020 Inventory	July 2021 Inventory	July 2020 Months of Supply	July 2021 Months of Supply	July 2020 YTD Median Sales Price	July 2021 YTD Median Sales Price	July 2020 % of Original List Price Received	July 2021 % of Original List Price Received
Cass	69	91	2.1	2.7	\$88,250	\$119,000	94.30%	98.30%
Clinton	21	13	1.2	0.6	\$137,500	\$145,500	98.10%	98.50%
Fulton	33	41	2.7	3.5	\$105,000	\$130,600	93.80%	97.00%
Howard	192	154	1.8	1.3	\$118,875	\$131,000	96.70%	99.30%
Miami	66	68	2.7	2.7	\$91,900	\$122,000	95.30%	97.50%
Tipton	15	16	1.4	1.4	\$129,500	\$147,000	97.10%	99.80%
Region	396	383	2.0	2.0	\$111,838	\$132,517	96.88%	98.40%

Source: Indiana Association of Realtors

The housing price to income ratio for the region is 1.85. This falls well below the state’s average of 2.21 and neighboring Hamilton County’s, which is 2.71. This suggests that houses are more affordable in the region than elsewhere. In July of 2021, the North Central Region had less housing inventory than they did a year prior. The median price of a house has gone up on average more than \$20,000. These numbers indicate that the housing supply in the region has decreased, while prices and demand has increased.

IN THE REGION
40%
OF RENTERS
ARE COST BURDENED

Source: Census American Community Survey, 2015-2019

Cost Burdened Families

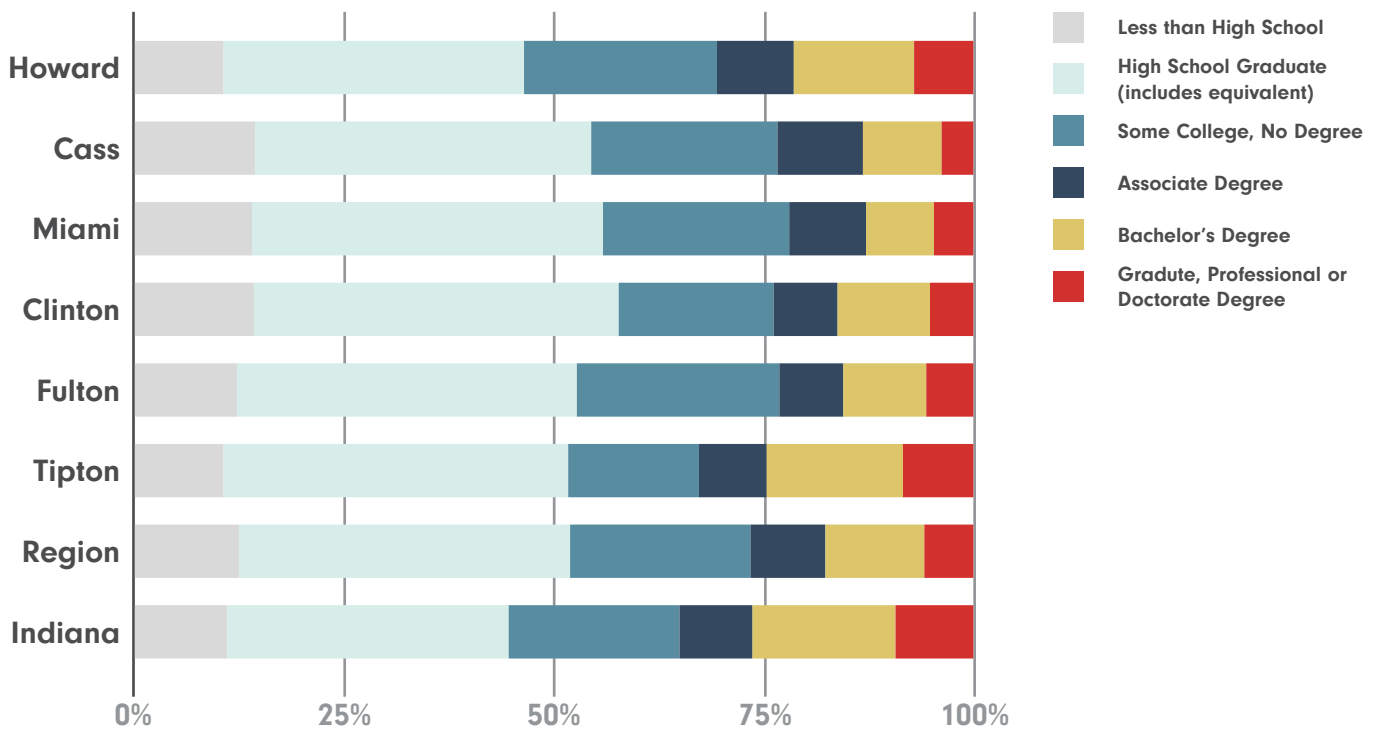
A household is considered cost burdened if it spends more than 30% of its income on housing. A household is considered extremely cost burdened if it spends more than 50% of its income on housing. In the region, 40% of renter households are cost burdened, but only 14% of owner households are cost burdened. This statistic echoes what was heard during the planning process: there is a need for affordable rental housing in North Central Indiana and an opportunity for single-family development across a diverse range of home prices.

Education Attainment

Educational Breakdown

Educational attainment is observably different across the counties of the region. The region is led in educational attainment by Howard and Tipton Counties. More than a fifth of adults 25 and older in these counties have bachelor’s degrees or higher (Howard County: 22%; Tipton County: 25%). The other counties in the region have rates of bachelor’s attainment that range from 13% to 16%; well below the statewide rate of 26%. In several of the counties in the region, however, there is a larger percentage than the state of individual’s in the category of Some College, No Degree. This is likely an indicator of a significant number of the workforce possessing the certifications necessary for employment opportunities within the region.

Figure 2.1

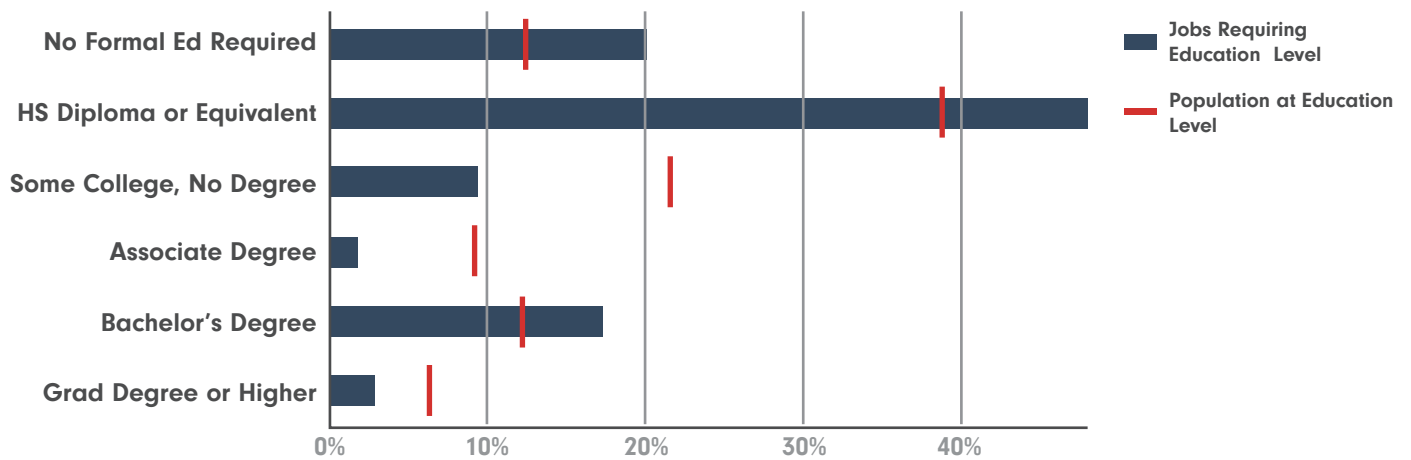


Source: US Census ACS 2016-2020

Under employment

Figure 2.2 indicates that there are currently more regional jobs that require a bachelor’s degree than workers with bachelor’s degrees in the region to fill them. There are also more employees with certifications, Associate degrees and Graduate degrees than there are regional jobs. This creates the immediate opportunity to both attract people to the region with Bachelor’s degrees as well as attract employers in need of employees with certifications, Associate degrees and Graduate degrees.

Figure 2.2

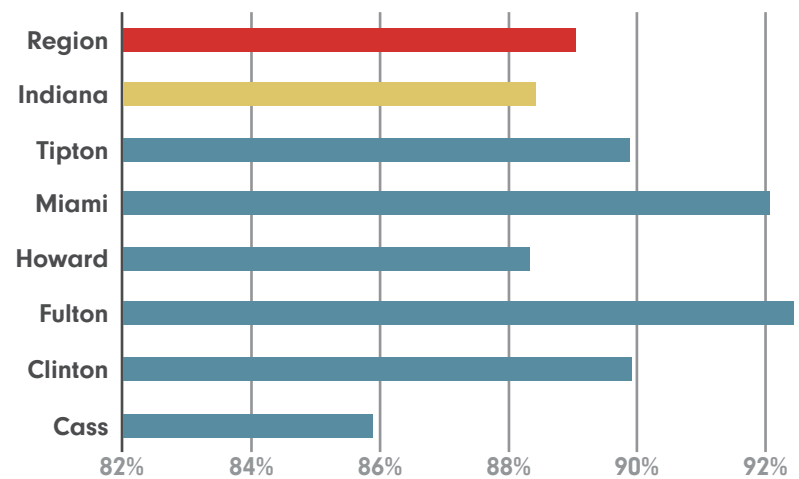


Source: EMSI Q2 2021 Data Set

High School Graduation Rates

As seen in Figure 2.3, the high school graduation rate in the North Central Region is 89% which is higher than the State of Indiana’s average. The region is focused on creating career pathways for high school students. These programs focus not just on graduating, but graduating with a degree or certificate so students can either immediately enter the workforce or successfully transition to college. Making investments in high school pathways will not only increase the workforce in the region, but also increase the overall skill level of the regional workforce

Figure 2.3



Source: US Census Bureau via Stats Indiana
 Calculations: Indiana Business Research Center, IU Kelley School of Business and HWC Engineering

Broadband

Broadband Speeds Vary Widely Across The Region

The Digital Divide Index or DDI is an index created by Purdue Center for Rural Development. The index ranges in value from 0 to 100, where 100 indicates the highest digital divide. The DDI measures primarily physical access/adoption and socioeconomic characteristics that may limit motivation, skills and usage. (Source: Gallardo, R. (2020). Digital Divide Index. Purdue Center for Regional Development)

All counties in the region with the exception of Tipton County have a Digital Divide Index that fall into a “Medium” score, which indicates there is work to be done to close the digital divide, but it is not as bad as other places in the State of Indiana. Howard County has the lowest percent with less than 100/20 speed at 8.64%; however, they still have 16.30% without internet, which is in line with the state’s average.

Broadband Access Is An Issue In The Region

Within the region, 18.63% of residents do not have access to internet of any speed, which is more than 2% higher than the state average.

Region Reliant On Cable And Wireless Providers

58.97% of public survey respondents had cable or wireless internet service, while only 12.53% of respondents had fiberoptic internet service.

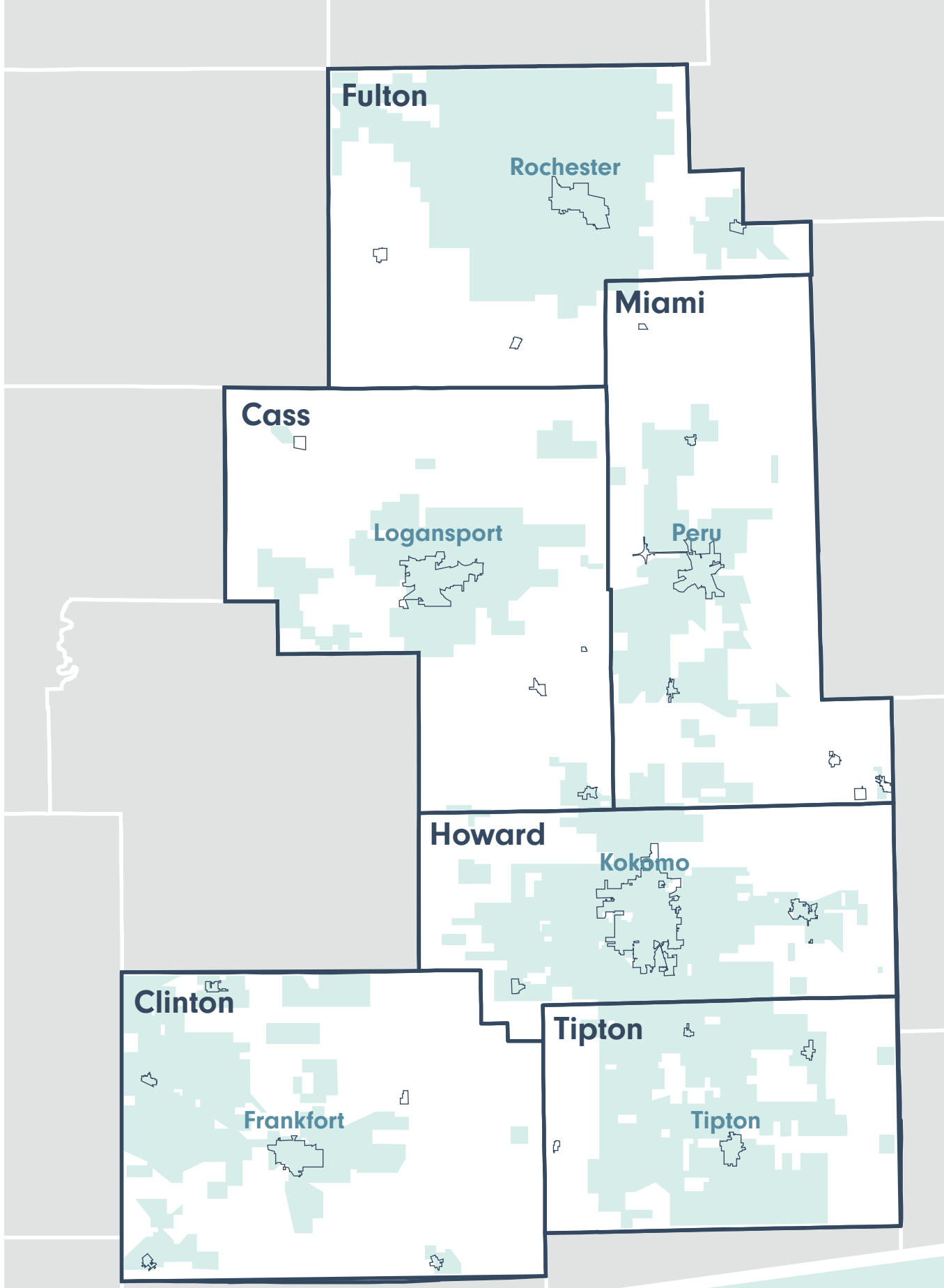
Citizens Want To Invest In Broadband

More than 75% of survey respondents wanted to see the region’s broadband infrastructure improved. Broadband was the number one response and scored 14 points higher than the next category, road infrastructure. Additionally, about half of survey respondents characterized their internet as affordable, and one in four survey respondents said that their internet was not fast enough to adequately work from home.

Table 2.6: Broadband Access Breakdown

Geography	Population with no access to broadband with speeds of 100/20	Population with no internet access	Median Download Speeds (Mbps)	Median Upload Speed (Mbps)	Digital Divide Index
North Central Region Average	-	18.63%	-	-	-
Indiana Average	-	16.30%	24	2	-
Cass County	23.13%	20.30%	12	3	36.1
Clinton County	28.00%	19.60%	15	5	36.7
Fulton County	33.00%	19.00%	25	3	36.2
Howard County	8.64%	16.30%	50	10	33.1
Miami County	37.04%	19.10%	15	5	43.1
Tipton County	28.49%	15.70%	50	10	28.4

Source: Gallardo, R. (2020), Digital Divide Index, Purdue Center for Regional Development



Current Broadband Coverage in the Region

Based on 25 (Mbps) Download Speed and 3 (Mbps) Upload Speed



BENCHMARKING NORTH CENTRAL INDIANA

North Central Indiana has a long history of measuring and tracking its growth and success. Since 2015, the North Central Region has been tracking its performance in the areas of gross assessed valuation, average earnings per worker, number of establishments, population, associate degree attainment and bachelor’s degree attainment. These metrics were identified by the Purdue Center for Regional Development as a part of the 2017 CEDS process.

To identify benchmarks and metrics for this regional development plan, the North Central Region looked outside its region and the state to other successful regions in the country who are similar in assets, demographics and local economies, but who are outperforming the North Central Region. It was especially important that the cohort regions outperform with regards to population growth and talent attraction. The foundation of the North Central Region’s Benchmark Dashboard is IEDC’s 2014 study *Benchmarking U.S. Region Cities: A Study and Guide for Transformations*.

The North Central Region selected one peer region from *Benchmarking U.S. Region Cities*: the Fayetteville, Arkansas metro area. This region has seen significant growth over the last decade, with a higher proportion of millennials and a

high percentage of residents with post-secondary education. The Fayetteville region is reflective of the Regional Cities model: one large city that drives regional growth. In the North Central Region, Kokomo plays that role. However, the North Central Region has more balance among its communities than Fayetteville.

For that reason, the North Central Region has selected two additional peer cities outside of IEDC’s benchmarking who more accurately reflect the North Central Region’s balance, but have also seen high population growth. The Bowling Green, Kentucky metro area and the Joplin, Missouri metro area have been selected as similar peer regions to aim for. Both metros share a similarly strong advanced manufacturing base and agricultural heritage to the North Central Region. These two regions also have a similar proximity to larger metropolitan areas – like the North Central Region’s geographic relationship to Indianapolis and Chicago. Most importantly, both metro areas have seen significant growth over the last twenty years. The table below shows various data points to compare the four regions; highlighting their similarities and differences.

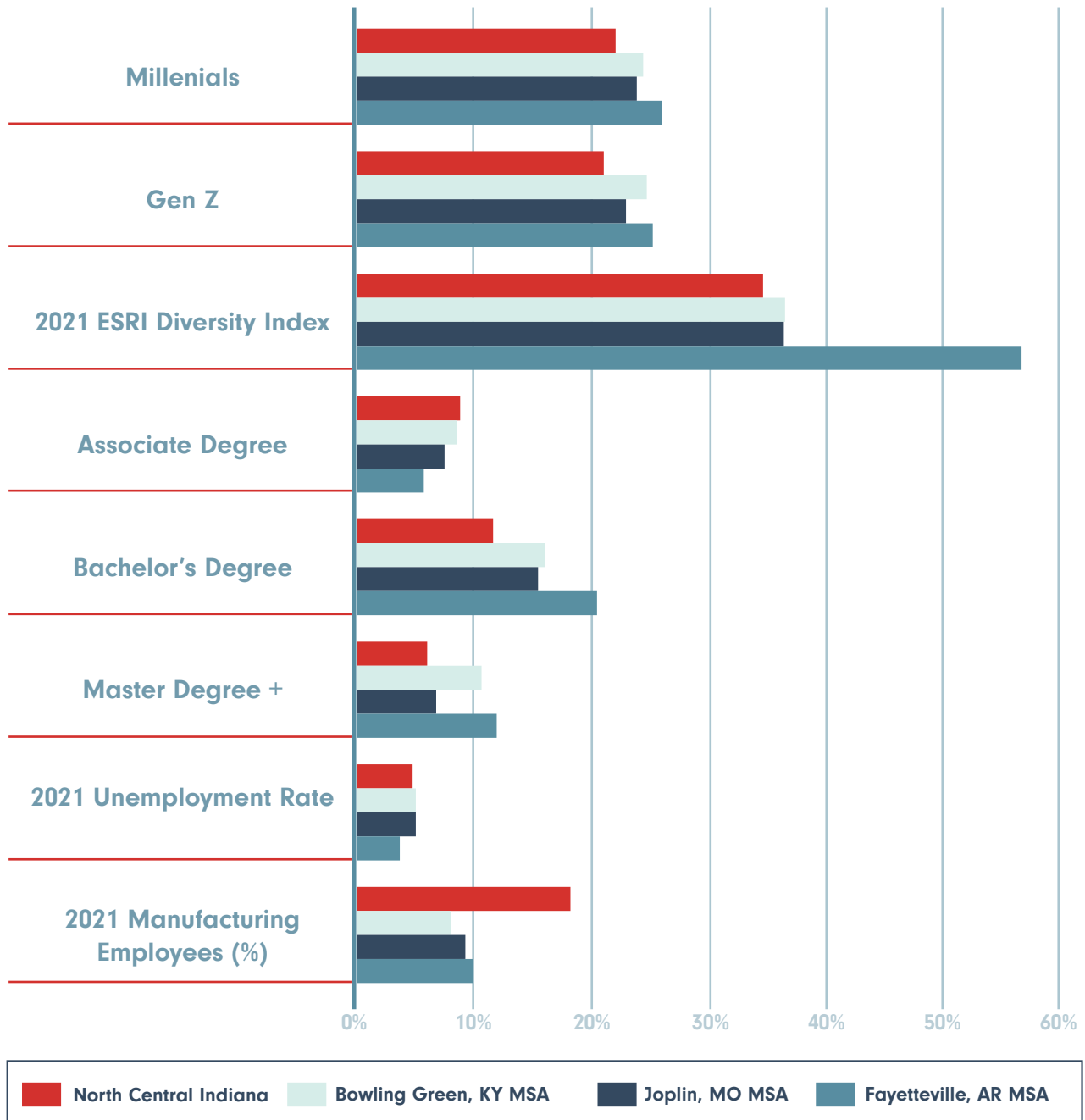
Table 2.6: Region Population Growth Comparison

	North Central Indiana	Fayetteville, AR MSA	Bowling Green, KY MSA	Joplin, MO MSA
2019 Population Estimate	223,557	536,120	176,816	178,100
Population Change Since 2010 (%)	-3%	21%	45%	3%
Population Change Since 2000 (%)	-4%	53%	69%	13%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2015-2019

While the North Central Region is trailing behind Fayetteville, Bowling Green and Joplin with regard to population growth, investments being made in this plan are targeted specifically to move the needle forward on the indicators listed on the following page. The North Central Region will continue tracking and updating these benchmarks annually in their effort to grow population and improve quality of place.

Figure 2.4: North Central Indiana Benchmark Indicators



Source: ESRI, U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2015-2019

The indicators used to benchmark the North Central Region were selected from a large collection of metrics included in the *Benchmarking U.S. Region Cities* study. As the benchmarking graph indicates, it is clear the benchmark communities have taken steps to drive positive movement in these focus areas and grow their population. The North Central Region lags in key areas such as the attraction of young people, diversity and education; however, the projects and programs in this plan are tailored specifically to move the needle in these areas, such that the region attracts more people and grows its population.

INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

Introduction

An industry cluster analysis is a method used to identify the concentration of similar businesses or industries within a specific geographic region. This analysis provides a clear picture of the industrial base and the economic strengths of the region, helping local and regional officials formulate strategies and policies that can enhance the competitiveness and growth of the region’s economy. The analysis involves examining the nature and composition of the industrial sector, including the businesses, suppliers, and institutions that support the industry.

This analysis helps in identifying the key industries that drive the local economy and their inter-relationships. This information is used to develop a targeted economic development strategy aimed at supporting the growth and competitiveness of these industries. A cluster analysis helps to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a region’s industrial base, which has helped inform the region’s strategic initiatives.

Moreover, industry cluster analysis can help to uncover new opportunities for innovation and growth. For example, identifying a cluster of businesses in a particular industry may highlight the potential for collaboration and the development of new products and services. This is particularly salient in the North Central region, as there is projected to be significant growth in the of E.V. battery manufacturing cluster. Additionally, the industry cluster analysis can help a region to identify the unique skills and expertise of its workforce, which helps inform the region’s educational institutions and workforce development practitioners.

The industry cluster analysis is an essential tool for policymakers, economic development professionals, and business leaders looking to understand and improve North Central’s economic performance. By providing a detailed picture of a region’s industrial base and its inter-relationships, it can help to identify opportunities for growth and innovation and inform targeted economic development strategies that can enhance the competitiveness of the region’s economy.



Stellantis/Samsung E.V. Plant Construction - Kokomo, IN

Source: HWC Engineering

North Central's Clusters

In the 2017 CEDS SET document, an in-depth cluster analysis was completed by Purdue Center for Regional Development. This cluster analysis identified two primary target industry clusters for the North Central Region: "agribusiness, food processing and technology" and a "combined manufacturing industry super cluster"). The plan noted that the Manufacturing Super Cluster Location Quotient had grown nearly five times the national average and the agri-business cluster had grown more than three times the average between 2010-2015.

Given the region's strength in manufacturing, North Central has identified advanced manufacturing as a key strategic focus area. The region possesses a strong economic advantage in manufacturing; has seen significant growth within the cluster. Data from PCRD indicates the following manufacturing sectors have outperformed others from 2009-2015. All of these sectors are within the region's "wheel house" with both experience, capacity to expand, and regional competitiveness.

- Vehicle Transmission and Power Train Parts Manufacturing
- General Purpose Machinery Manufacturing
- Machine Shops
- Other Motor Vehicle Parts Manufacturing
- Farm Machine and Equipment Manufacturing

Agriculture/Agribusiness is the number one industry in the region by way of land use. Agribusiness industries that outperformed others include: Animal (except Poultry) Slaughtering, Frozen Specialty Food Manufacturing, Confectionery Manufacturing from Purchased Chocolate, and Dog and Cat Food Manufacturing. A significant amount of the raw material used within these outperforming industries

are manufactured within the region.

Opportunities exist to capture some portion of the out-of-region supply chain leakage that exists with the Agribusiness Sector to include:

- Animal Production and Aquaculture
- Animal Slaughtering Soybean and other oil processing
- Plastic Bottle Manufacturing

In 2023, these clusters still dominate the region. However, within the manufacturing sector, there is a known emerging cluster that is not found in existing data. With the announcement of 1,400 jobs at the Stellantis / Samsung E.V. battery plant, the region can expect to see a new emerging cluster in E.V. manufacturing and the supporting inputs. Because at the time of writing this plan, the E.V. battery plant is still under construction, there is no existing data to understand the magnitude this will have on the region. However, because of the sheer scale of investment (\$2.5 billion), and the number of suppliers expected to locate in the region, it is estimated that the region's already intense concentration of manufacturing will only grow.

The 2017 SET document identified that in 2015 there was a substantial \$600 million in leakage in the manufacturing sector. Updated 2020-2021 data from the Indiana Department of Workforce Development shows that within the manufacturing and agriculture industries combined, there was more than \$2 billion of total supply chain leakage, including nearly \$500 million in custom roll forming and nearly \$250 million in soybean and other oilseed processing.

The 2017 SET document referenced more than \$8 billion dollars in manufacturing exports. That number has grown to more than \$11.6 billion between 2020 and 2021.

The addition of the E.V. battery plant comes with its own new set of inputs and suppliers. Stellantis has also shown substantial investment in its other regional employment centers. In October of 2021, Stellantis announced a \$229 million investment in Kokomo, Indiana, to help accelerate its electrification plans. The investment, Stellantis said, would retain 662 jobs, will fund the retooling of the three plants to produce electrified eight-speed transmissions

Outside of the initial investment made by Stellantis, additional jobs are expected to come to the region as the Kokomo Industrial Park fills up. Other regional partners also have the opportunity to capture new jobs and new housing opportunities to meet the regional demand.

Local and regional leaders must continue to engage in conversations with Stellantis and Samsung to understand the nature of those inputs and continue developing strategies to attract suppliers to the region. Regional assets such as strong interstate connectivity, available labor force and an abundance of available land, position North Central to seize this opportunity.



Automotive Lab - Ivy Tech Kokomo

Source: Ivy Tech Kokomo



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**SWOT
Analysis**

**NORTH
CENTRAL
INDIANA**

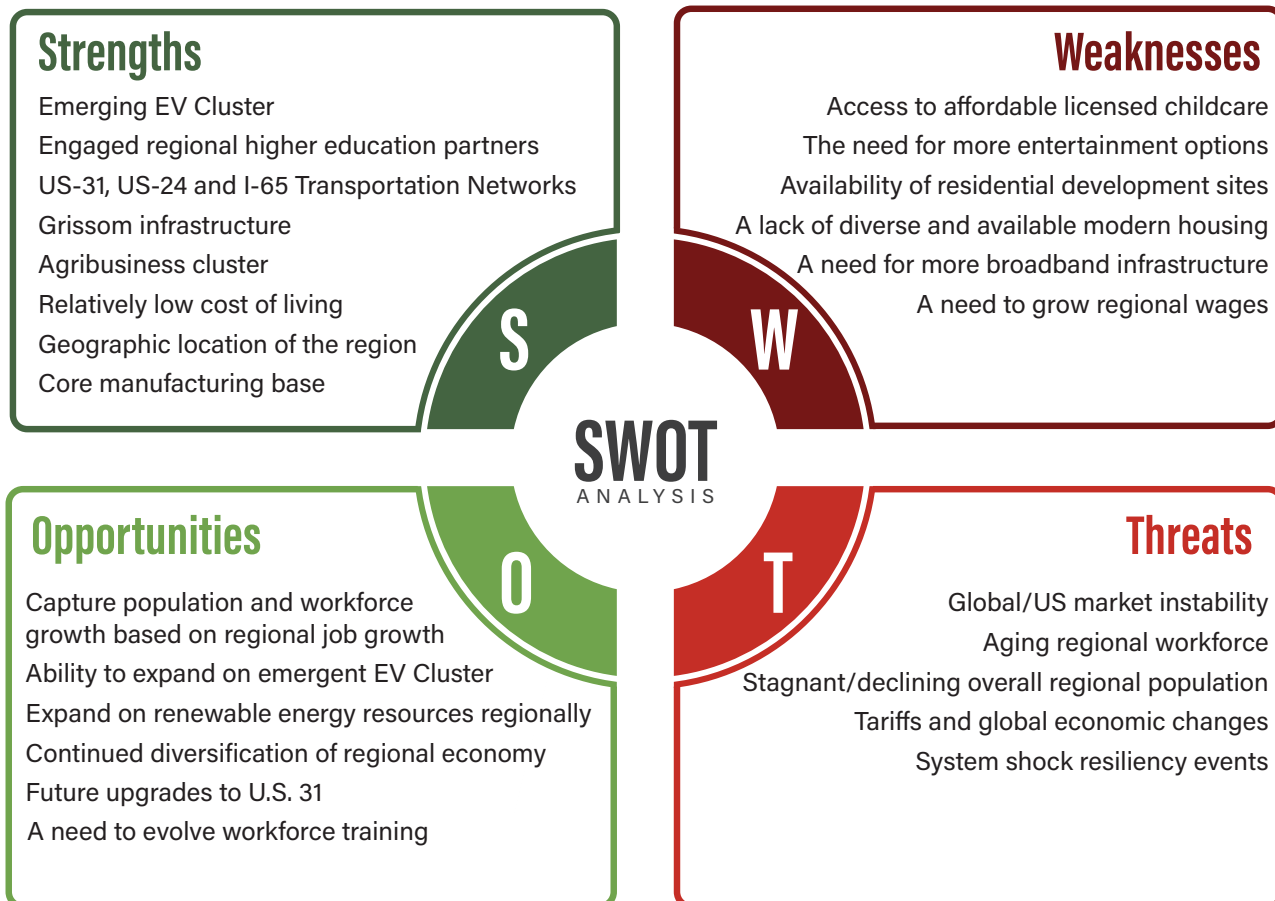
SWOT Analysis

Introduction

A SWOT analysis is a strategic planning tool that communities use to assess their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The acronym SWOT is defined below.

- **Strengths:** Internal factors that give the region a competitive advantage or unique capability.
- **Weaknesses:** Internal factors that could hinder the region's performance or put it at a disadvantage.
- **Opportunities:** External factors that the region can take advantage of to improve its performance or achieve its goals.
- **Threats:** External factors that can negatively impact the region's performance.

Identifying the region's key strengths and weaknesses can guide decision-making on how to allocate resources and prioritize its activities. The analysis enables the region to identify opportunities that it can take advantage of to achieve its goals and threats that it needs to mitigate or avoid. It also helps the region to align its strategies and tactics with its internal and external environment. Additionally, it serves as a basis for developing action steps and monitoring progress towards achieving objectives.



Strengths

Emerging E.V. cluster

The emerging industry cluster in electric vehicle (E.V.) battery manufacturing presents opportunities for the region to drive economic development. By investing in workforce training, creating a supportive business environment, developing necessary infrastructure, and promoting collaboration and networking, the region can position itself to take advantage of this emerging cluster.

E.V. battery manufacturing requires a skilled workforce in fields such as engineering, materials science, chemistry, and manufacturing. By investing in workforce training and education programs, the region can develop a local talent pool, attract E.V. battery manufacturing companies and their suppliers and foster job creation, which can help address unemployment and stimulate economic growth.

Manufacturing operations, supply chain activities, and associated services can create a multiplier effect, driving economic activity in the region. Additionally, the development of an E.V. battery manufacturing cluster can foster innovation and technology development, as companies within the cluster engage in research and development to improve battery performance, efficiency, and sustainability. This can position the region as a hub for innovation in the E.V. industry, attracting further investment and driving economic growth.

To take advantage of the emerging E.V. battery manufacturing cluster, the region can focus on creating a supportive business environment. This can include providing favorable policies, regulations, and incentives to attract investment in E.V. battery manufacturing, such as tax incentives, streamlined permitting processes, and infrastructure support.

Additionally, the region can invest in necessary infrastructure, such as industrial parks, utilities, and transportation networks, to support the establishment and growth of E.V. battery manufacturing operations.

Collaboration and networking among local businesses, industry partners, and research institutions can also play a crucial role in leveraging the emerging cluster. By fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange, the region can promote innovation, create synergies, and support business growth within the cluster. This effort can include partnerships between the region's higher education partners and industry, technology transfer programs, and networking events to connect stakeholders in the E.V. battery manufacturing ecosystem.

Engaged regional higher education partners

Having active and engaged higher education partners allows the region to respond to the changing demands of its employers by providing the necessary workforce training. In the North Central region, the region's higher education providers, Indiana University Kokomo, Ivy Tech and Purdue Polytechnic Institute, are actively engaged with the regional planning council and with key employers.

Not only have they been engaged, but they have also shown a commitment to responding to the shifts in workforce training needs for a modern economy. Ivy Tech has partnered with Stellantis and other employers to develop spaces and curriculum to serve the needs of Industry 4.0 and the region's burgeoning E.V. cluster.

IU Kokomo has worked closely with the region, Kokomo and local businesses to develop programming to provide business planning and strategic communication assistance to businesses. Continuing this deep level of engagement, cooperation and active co-investment among educational institutions, the public sector and the private sector is key to the region continuing its growth and success.

US-31, US-24 and I-65 transportation networks

Strong transportation networks connect people and business. These networks provide the infrastructure that enables businesses to transport goods and services to customers and suppliers. This has become increasingly important to a community's success as just-in-time logistics has become essential to many companies' business models. Road infrastructure also allows people to move around the region more easily, whether for work, education, or play.

This makes attracting and retaining businesses and workers easier. It can also improve access to healthcare, education, and other essential services.

US-31, I-65, and US-24 provide excellent connectivity throughout the region. US-31 connects the region to Indianapolis and South Bend. The improvements being made between Indianapolis, Kokomo and South Bend along US-31 will reduce travel time between the cities and further tie the cities' economies together. The I-65 corridor connects the region to Chicago, Indianapolis and beyond. It plays a key role in the movement of goods and people within the state of Indiana and throughout the country.

US-24 connects many northern Indiana cities including Fort Wayne, Huntington, Wabash, Peru and Logansport and Lafayette. US-24 plays an important role in connecting northern Indiana's manufacturing sectors, including defense and automotive manufacturers. The corridor connects northern Indiana's strong agriculture centers as well as connecting key tourism destinations like the Honeywell Center in Wabash, Parkview Field in Fort Wayne and the future Silo Concert Center in Peru. The North Central Region must continue to leverage the corridor for economic development and make improvements to connecting road infrastructure to facilitate movement within the region.

Grissom Airforce Reserve Base

As the largest runway in the State of Indiana, Grissom presents numerous unique economic development opportunities. Currently, AZIsotopes and SpectronRx, nuclear medicine and radionuclide manufacturing companies specializing in developing and producing medical isotopes and research, and Dean Baldwin Painting, a commercial aircraft painting company, are housed at Grissom. The presence of Grissom has led to emerging clusters in nuclear medicine and aerospace services and has the potential to attract more aerospace or defense-adjacent development

Agricultural cluster

Outside of the region's cities, much of the region is dominated by agriculture production and processing. Agriculture provides employment at all skill levels, from farm laborers to scientists. Agriculture-related industries, such as food processing and distribution, have the capacity create additional jobs. In addition, there is tremendous potential to expand value added agriculture opportunities and expand agriculture user collaboration within the region.

Value-added agriculture offers farmers the opportunity to increase their income and improve their financial stability by tapping into new markets and creating new revenue streams. It can also help to support local economies by creating jobs and promoting economic growth.

Relatively low cost of living

Relative to the Indianapolis area and much of the country, the cost of living in the North Central region is significantly lower. For example, compared to the Indianapolis metro area, housing costs in the North Central Region are between 15-20% lower.

A low cost of living means that housing, utilities, transportation, and other daily expenses are more affordable for residents. This can attract businesses and individuals looking for a cost-effective location to establish their operations or settle down. It can also provide a higher quality of life for residents as they can stretch their budgets further and have more disposable income for savings, investments, or other discretionary spending.

A lower cost of living can also translate into lower business costs, such as reduced labor costs, lower real estate costs, and lower operational expenses. This can be appealing to businesses looking to establish or expand their operations in the region, as it can result in cost savings and improved profitability. Additionally, the lower operating costs can also provide a supportive environment for small businesses to thrive, as they may face fewer barriers related to high overhead costs. This can spur innovation, create job opportunities, and contribute to the growth of the local economy.

Geographic location of the region

The heart of the region is located an hour north of Indianapolis on U.S. 31. Ongoing upgrades to U.S. 31 will further decrease the travel time between Indianapolis and the region. U.S. 31 provides easy access to transportation and logistics networks. This enables efficient movement of goods and services to and from the region, making it an attractive location for businesses involved in manufacturing, distribution, and transportation industries. Additionally, North Central's proximity to Indianapolis, a major transportation hub, further enhances its connectivity to national and international markets, facilitating economic activities and trade.

With Indianapolis being a major metropolitan area and economic center, businesses in the region can tap into a large and diverse market for their products and services. Proximity to transportation routes also enables cost-effective shipping and distribution, allowing businesses to reach customers more efficiently and effectively.

Additionally, the region's geography and transportation networks provide access to a larger labor pool for businesses in the region. Indianapolis and its surrounding areas are home to a significant population, offering a diverse and skilled workforce across various industries, including manufacturing, logistics, IT, and more. This provides businesses in North Central with a larger talent pool to draw from, enhancing their ability to attract and retain skilled workers, which is crucial for economic development and growth.

Weaknesses

Aging workforce

An aging workforce can lead to several economic issues for the region. As a workforce grows older and retires, the region could encounter a workforce shortage. Also, the available labor pool, and the available skilled labor pool, can shrink, limiting economic growth and productivity. Older workers may also be less inclined to innovate and adapt to new technologies and processes, which can hinder the development of new products and services and limit the competitiveness of local businesses. As the population ages, there may be increased healthcare costs associated with age-related health conditions. This can put a strain on the healthcare system and limit resources for other areas of the economy.

A key goal identified in this plan is attracting talent, particularly young talent, to avoid many of the potential adverse impacts of an aging workforce. It is important for the region to address these challenges by focusing on investing in education and workforce training, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, and improving the region's quality of place

Access to affordable licensed childcare

Limited access to childcare was mentioned in every county in the region during the READI planning process. The lack of childcare is a barrier to the current workforce, as it reduces the workforce participation and raises the unemployment of parents, something that disproportionately affects women. The lack of access to affordable childcare also limits economic mobility. The more a family or individual spends on childcare, the less they are able to save for a purchasing a home or retirement. It also acts as a barrier to future economic development as the availability of childcare is a factor taken into consideration when companies evaluate potential future locations. In addition to the direct economic impact to parents today, childcare that provides early childhood education also has the impact to improve education and economic outcome for future generations

Overall, increasing access to affordable childcare in the region is a crucial step in promoting economic growth.

The need for enhanced and expanded entertainment options and quality of life amenities

Quality of place encompasses more than just the built environment. People of all ages, but particularly millennials and baby boomers, want to live in communities that are active and thriving with events. If the North Central Region wants to attract more talent to the region, increasing the entertainment options and quality of life amenities is essential. Building vibrant communities with opportunities for social interaction and cultural engagement leads to places that are attractive for both businesses and people alike.

Increasing entertainment options also has economic benefits beyond attracting a workforce. Increased entertainment options attract people from outside the region to come and spend money in the region, bolstering other businesses like shops and restaurants. Increased tourism has the potential to generate more jobs and ultimately more revenue for local governments.

Availability of residential development sites with infrastructure

A lack of available sites for residential development was cited as a concern in all six counties. This problem is well-documented across rural Indiana. The lack of development sites can, in-part, be attributed to a paradigm shift in residential development following the 2008 housing crisis. Prior to 2008, residential developers were willing to take on more risk. After 2008, communities have had to work with developers as active partners to build the needed infrastructure to support residential sites. Direct public sector involvement in infrastructure development lowers the barrier to entry for developers by sharing risk in strategic and measured ways.

As a result, in areas where communities have been less involved in the development process, there is a shortage of available lots with infrastructure. A lack of available sites, rising construction costs, and a shortage of skilled labor, has driven residential developers to stay near metropolitan and suburban areas, like Indianapolis. The lack of residential development has come with consequences for the North Central Region and many rural communities across Indiana and the midwest. This downturn in development has led to an aging regional housing stock that has resulted in homebuyers looking outside of the region for modern housing options. If the region wants to capture induce more housing unit construction, it must help support site development efforts.

The region lacks a diverse and modern housing options

A lack of diverse, modern housing options has inhibited population growth in a similar way as the lack of available infrastructure for residential development. Diverse housing is defined as a range of different product types at different price points. Communities with diverse housing stocks have housing that is attainable at all income levels. Attainable housing is considered a product that costs less than 30% of a household's monthly income.

Diverse housing is essential to a diverse economy. For example, feedback attained through the planning process indicated that communities in the North Central region want to attract high-paying jobs and also have a variety of entertainment options, like restaurants and things to do.

Having an economy that has both high-paying jobs and entertainment options means that a community must have the housing to support the employees working in those industries.

When housing is not attainable, workers must find housing outside of the region; or worse, never come to work in the region in the first place. This is not a hypothetical weakness for North Central. Throughout the planning process, employers cited the lack of diverse housing as a clear barrier to attracting talent. Attracting residential development to rural communities takes time and effort, but by focusing on developing infrastructure, offering targeted incentives, collaborating with local and regional builders, and focusing on the region's quality of place, the North Central region has the potential to build a diverse and sustainable housing stock.

Lack of rural broadband

Access to quality broadband service has become an essential necessity. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed a clear need for increased broadband connectivity throughout areas around the country and the world. The North Central Region was no exception. Working and learning from home were no longer luxuries but necessities that will continue to be a reality for the future.

Additionally, Industry 4.0 will be driven by connection. Robots, sensors, computers and the cloud are all connected through the "internet of things." To truly lead in Industry 4.0, regions must be better connected. Most anchor cities in each county have access to reliable internet service and some have fiber to homes and businesses. However, rural parts of the region struggle with internet connectivity and affordability.

This issue is compounded by limited availability of affordable providers with reliable service. It is difficult for large providers to service rural areas because the areas are not as dense as micropolitan areas. With this in mind, local investment in expanding broadband services will be a key factor in helping bridge the gap to make financing broadband infrastructure possible. Broadband access is crucial for the North Central region to remain competitive, enhance educational opportunities, improve healthcare services, boost agricultural productivity, and provide access to government services, all of which can lead to an improved quality of life for residents.

Relatively low wages

Raising average wages is essential for the North Central region to remain competitive and grow economically. The North Central region lags the State of Indiana in terms of average yearly wage by an average of \$6,000 per year. Low wages can result in reduced consumer spending at local business, reduced tax revenue for local governments, increased demand for public services, regional brain drain, economic inequality, and slowed economic growth. The region must attract high-paying jobs to sustain and grow a healthy economy. The region aims to grow wages by continuing to strategically leverage assets to attract diversified, high-quality, high-paying employers to ensure that the region's workforce has upward economic mobility. With the announcement of 1,400 new, high-paying jobs at the Stellantis/Samsung battery plant, wages are trending up.

Continued diversification of regional economy

Having an economy largely dominated by one industry is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength because it provides an opportunity for the region to attract suppliers and train a specialized, highly skilled workforce. It does, however, create a "don't put all your eggs in one basket" scenario. Having one industry dominate a region, can leave the region vulnerable to economic shock. Market downturns, technological changes, or changes to international trade or other federal government policy can easily have a negative effect on the region. A region with one prevailing industry might also suffer from a monolithic workforce – that is a workforce that is highly trained in one area but lacks the transferable skills necessary to respond to industry changes driven by new technology.

While the region must leverage the manufacturing industry to its maximum potential, it must also seize strategic opportunities to diversify its economy and workforce training opportunities. A diverse economy is one that is resilient to economic downturn and less vulnerable to industry specific shocks.

Opportunities

Capture the growing workforce as residents of the region

In May of 2022, Stellantis and Samsung announced a \$2.5 billion investment that will bring 1,400 new jobs to Kokomo. In addition to those 1,400 jobs, there are thousands of additional jobs expected to be brought to the region over the next five years as a result of suppliers and additional expansion. This creates a tremendous opportunity for the region to grow its population by capturing that new workforce to live in the region.

Increasing the region's population will grow the market for business in the region. This will lead to more economic growth and more job opportunities. It will also increase the demand for goods and services. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders regularly expressed a desire to have access to more big box stores, like hardware stores or department stores. National chains or big box stores make decisions whether or not to build in an area based on the market size and market potential. Having a bigger population is a win-win. More people in the region give those desired business access to a larger market, while also giving residents of the region access to stores at which they want to shop. This principle also applies to businesses of any size. The larger the market, the more diverse businesses a community can support.

To help capture as many of those employees as regional residents, the region must support policies that improve housing availability and attainability, invest in supporting infrastructure, improve the region's quality of life, ensure workforce development and educational priorities are aligned with in-demand jobs, and create a welcoming environment for new residents. Supporting the increase of new workers will take a regional housing effort. The region should work to ensure that there is enough housing available to new workers and that

it is attainable. The region must also invest in the needed supporting infrastructure including, roads, water, sewer and broadband.

The region can also work to improve the overall quality of life by increasing the availability of amenities such as parks, recreational activities, cultural events, childcare and important healthcare services. Educational opportunities like job training and access to career pathways for younger students is key to attracting and retaining talent. Finally, the region must develop programming that creates a welcoming environment. Many new workers will likely come from outside of the region and even outside of the country. Having resources in place like welcome programming, culturally diverse programming, and community events can help make new members of the community feel at home and develop a sense of ownership in their community.

Increase regional diversity

In order for the region to maximize the greatest potential for population growth, it is important that it continue embracing diverse populations. While the overall region is currently diverse from a socio-economic perspective, there is an opportunity to continue to welcome a more diverse set of cultures to the region.

The region has a less diverse population overall than the State of Indiana as a whole (14% non-white, non-Hispanic compared to 20%). However, as the region grows, so will its population diversity, especially among Hispanic and South Korean populations. Ongoing programming and investments should continue to be made to welcome these new and diverse cultures to the region.

Ability to expand on emergent E.V. clusters

With the addition of the Stellantis / Samsung battery plant comes the opportunity to capture suppliers and other manufacturers in adjacent industries. This is a new opportunity, particularly because the plant will focus on battery development, which has different inputs than the existing manufacturing base. In workshops for this plan, the steering committee expressed a unanimous desire to become known as a global leader in E.V. manufacturing. To accomplish this goal, the region must take a few key steps. First, the region must invest in the workforce development infrastructure needed to supply the human capital for existing and future employers. E.V. manufacturing is an emerging technology that takes a specially trained workforce. Other established leading regions like the Research Triangle or Silicon Valley attract new businesses, in part, because businesses have confidence that if they come, they will have access to a labor pool that has the existing skills needed.

To help foster this, the region may consider developing a Center for Excellence in Advanced Manufacturing (CEAM). The CEAM would work with educational institutions, local government and industry partners to develop training programs, certifications, and apprenticeships; support the transfer of technology between academia and industry; provide consulting and technical services to improve manufacturing and the optimization of supply chain; and serve as a center for collaboration, networking and best practices. The region may also consider creating a formalized regional marketing effort to highlight the advantages of the region, such as low costs of living and doing business, a skilled workforce, and a strong local economy.

Expand renewable energy resources regionally

There are several zones throughout the North Central region that would be prime for solar development if local communities chose to pursue it. Large regional employers, such as Stellantis, have shown interest in solar development. Investing in solar development can have numerous positive impacts on a region, including economic growth, job creation, environmental benefits, community resilience, and educational opportunities.

Solar development can stimulate local economies by creating new job opportunities in manufacturing, installation, operation, and maintenance of solar infrastructure. It can attract private investment, generate revenue from electricity sales, and diversify the local economy. Solar projects can also create opportunities for local businesses, such as suppliers of solar equipment and components, contractors, and service providers, leading to increased economic activity and growth.

It can also promote sustainable land use practices, such as converting degraded lands or brownfields into solar farms, which can have positive ecological impacts. Solar energy can enhance community resilience by providing a local and decentralized source of electricity. Solar development can reduce reliance on external sources of energy, such as imported fossil fuels, and increase local energy production and distribution. This can enhance energy independence, reduce vulnerability to energy price fluctuations, and provide a reliable source of electricity during emergencies or power outages.

An opportunity to continue evolving workforce training

With the rapid pace of technological advancements, industries are constantly evolving. Automation, artificial intelligence, big data, and other cutting-edge technologies are transforming industries, including advanced manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare, and IT. The region has strong assets in Ivy Tech and IU Kokomo who have shown a commitment to collaborating with the region's public and private sectors to develop target workforce training. To remain competitive and relevant in the job market, the region must continue to focus on evolving workforce training so that its residents can upgrade their skills and knowledge to adapt to these technological changes. Investing in workforce training in these areas enables workers to stay up-to-date with the latest advancements, enhance their employability, and contribute to the growth and innovation of their respective industries.

A skilled workforce is essential for driving economic growth and maintaining competitiveness in a globalized economy. Regions that invest in workforce training are more likely to attract investment, retain existing businesses, and foster the establishment of new industries. A workforce trained in Industry 4.0, IT, agricultural science, and medicine can bring innovation, productivity gains, and increased competitiveness to the region.

It can also attract talent and companies seeking skilled workers, leading to economic growth, job creation, and improved living standards for residents. Additionally, providing additional connectivity between K-12 and higher education institutions will help build a talent pipeline for growing the future workforce.

Threats

Global / US market instability

Rising interest rates can have a significant impact on the local economy. As interest rates go up, money becomes more expensive to borrow. As a result, businesses may shift their focus to investments with higher returns, rather than investing in new equipment or expanding their operations. In turn, job growth slows. Higher interest rates can also affect consumer spending. Rate hikes increase the cost of consumer credit as well which can limit spending at local businesses.

The region can engage in many of the same resilience strategies that helped mitigate the impact of COVID on local businesses. Local governments can lower the increased fiscal barrier to borrowing money by giving key local businesses access to low interest loans. Additionally, the region can work to provide support services for businesses. One ongoing example of this in the region is IU Kokomo's KEY Center for Innovation. This is a hub connecting local businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies with faculty and student expertise. The KEY Center helps lower the barrier to local businesses getting access to important services to improve their businesses.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation has been on the rise. For businesses, inflation has led to higher costs such as increased prices for raw materials, energy, and labor. Additionally, inflation has reduced consumer spending, as higher prices for goods and services reduce disposable income. Likewise, inflation can reduce the purchasing power of consumers, meaning that they can buy fewer goods and services with the same amount of money. If not addressed, this can lead to a decrease in the standard of living and limit the ability of consumers to save money.

Manufacturing dominant economies, like that of North Central, could face significant impacts due to global market changes such as tariffs and other policy shifts. Tariffs imposed by other countries on U.S. manufactured goods could result in reduced demand and increased prices for American products, leading to decreased exports and potential job losses in the manufacturing sector. Additionally, changes in global trade policies could disrupt supply chains and increase production costs for U.S. manufacturers, affecting their competitiveness in the international market. This could lead to a decline in manufacturing output, reduced investments in the sector, and potential relocations of manufacturing facilities to other countries with lower production costs. As a result, the U.S. manufacturing sector may face challenges in maintaining its dominant position in the global market if faced with unfavorable changes in global trade policies.

Stagnant/declining overall regional population

In the 2010 to 2020 period, the Indiana Business Research Center projected all six of North Central Indiana's counties were expected to shrink, resulting in a projected -3.03% loss in population as a region. The communities of the North Central Region have worked diligently to confound these projections, and in each county, as well as the region overall, 2020 census numbers have indicated that the work and commitment is paying off. The region saw only a 0.92% decrease between 2010 and 2020. The region must continue to work to reverse population loss.

A stagnant or declining population in a largely rural region like North Central can negatively impact the economy, society, infrastructure, and overall well-being of the region. It may result in reduced economic opportunities, social challenges, inadequate infrastructure, and diminished quality of life for residents.

A smaller population can result in decreased consumer demand for goods and services, leading to reduced business opportunities and economic growth. With fewer people to support local businesses, rural regions may experience declining revenue for local businesses, reduced tax base, and increased pressure maintaining essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

This can result in reduced job opportunities, lower wages, and limited access to essential services, which may further discourage young people from staying in the region or limit the region's ability to attract new residents, leading to a cycle of economic decline.

A declining population can also lead to social challenges. It can result in a shrinking labor force, with a higher proportion of elderly residents and fewer young people to sustain the community. This can lead to a decrease in social cohesion, loss of community services and amenities, and reduced access to healthcare and other social services. The region may also face challenges in retaining and attracting skilled workers, leading to a brain drain and reduced diversity of skills and talents in the region.



Car Show at Grissom Air Force Museum - Miami County

Source: Miami County Economic Development Authority



5

**Strategic Direction
/ Action Plan**

**NORTH
CENTRAL
INDIANA**

Regional Strategy Development

VISION

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe, it became apparent that regions across the United States needed to develop a clear focus on how they would address issues of resiliency and sustainability. This focus would require conversations about issues like diversifying and modernizing economies; onboarding supply chains; building the workforce of the future; and delivering the essential, consistent population growth necessary to sustain critical regional, state and national growth. Given its history of success in delivering economic growth, as well as its ongoing efforts to create unique and attractive places for people to live, work, learn and play, there is the North Central region is positioned to provide an excellent return on investment for public and private sector entities.



Stellantis - FCA Transmission Plant - Tipton

Source: Kokomo Tribune



Downtown Parade - Kokomo

Source: Kokomo/ Howard County

For decades, the lifeblood of the North Central Region's communities has been manufacturing and agriculture. The region's historic success in the 20th century laid the foundation for today's 21st century innovations in technology. The communities and industries of the North Central Region are positioned to take the lead and drive the transition from 20th century technology to the 21st century's Industry 4.0 and everything that comes with it. A truly modern, 21st century economy is inherently different than what has come before. Increases in productivity and a focus on innovation has increased the demand for growth of a skilled and educated workforce. These changes have fundamentally reshaped how the public and private sectors work together to equitably sustain and grow the region. While there are many factors that influence the ability of the region to deliver on building this opportunity, the primary ingredient to success will be growing the overall population of the region.

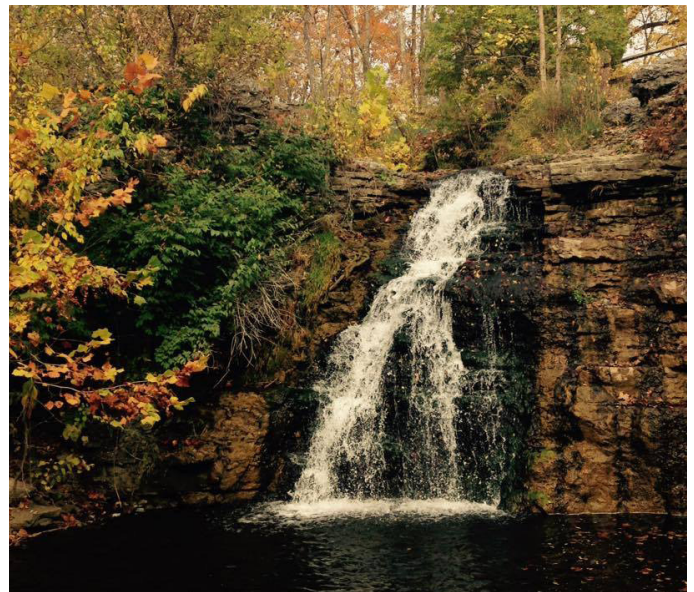
To best capitalize on these future trends, the North Central Region must work to continue to invest in strategies that foster short-term success and long-term sustainability. Through the process of developing of this economic development strategy, the region's local leaders and private sector partners have built consensus and are aligned behind making strategic investments in improving quality of place and quality of life, increasing and diversifying our region's quality of opportunity, spurring innovation, and developing and incentivizing entrepreneurship: all to attract and retain talent.

The North Central Region is at the forefront of our nation's changing economy, but there is still much work to be done. It is clear to the region's stakeholders that a 21st century economy demands a 21st century workforce, and a 21st century workforce demands both maximizing the opportunity of the region's existing workforce, as well as significantly expanding overall population growth to support current and future workforce needs. Employers in the region now need a workforce that is highly skilled, highly educated and highly productive. The region is committed to doing what is necessary to foster the residential growth needed to support its regional workforce, now and in the future. Additionally, the region is focused on providing holistic educational opportunities, from early childhood education to career pipelines and continued education, to upskilling the current workforce to help retain them within the region.

As the region's workforce changes, so do the needs and desires of our workforce. Availability of diverse housing options, increased access to 24/7 childcare, expanding access to education, and improving quality of life amenities (like retail, dining, entertainment, parks and trails, etc.) are essential to attract and retain people within the region. The need for these amenities has been universally identified by private sector stakeholders as barriers

to attracting and retaining the workforce they require. It is critically important to current and future residents that as the region continues to build on the significant investments that have already been made to quality of life amenities in the region, gains are also made in the region's quality of opportunity. The North Central Region aims to grow wages by continuing to strategically leverage assets to attract diversified, high-quality, high-paying employers to ensure that our region's workforce has upward economic mobility.

There can be no doubt that for the North Central Region to achieve the maximum benefit of leveraging its unique opportunity to capitalize on demands of a 21st century economy and Industry 4.0, it is imperative that the North Central Region grow its population. This plan is the catalyst to help build on current successes and accelerate North Central Indiana to long-term success; not just for our region, but for the State of Indiana as a whole.



France Park Falls - Logansport

Source: Cass County

A GOALS-ORIENTED FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS

As previously discussed, the North Central Region’s goals and strategies to deliver those goals have been developed through years of previously successful regional planning efforts. In addition, for this plan an exhaustive stakeholder engagement process custom tailored for the development of this regional strategy. The process to develop this plan was designed to achieve an honest and unbiased understanding of the goals that represent the needs and opportunities that exist today, as well as those anticipated to exist in the future.

In order for the North Central Region to grow its population and retain its current population, as well as support the State of Indiana’s overall population growth, it must focus its attention and resources in three areas: **attract and retain people, develop the talent and skills of its current and future workforce,** and **connect talent with the jobs they need to be successful.**

These three focus areas have been discussed at length in the CEDS and were the organically derived objectives from the engagement process designed to support the implementation of the projects and strategies discussed in this plan.

Within the three primary focus areas of talent attraction and retention, talent development and talent connection, there are five (5) key regional priorities that have been identified to move the needle on the region’s metrics: **develop diverse housing options, continue to improve quality of life/place assets, deliver 21st century workforce development, improve broadband connectivity and expand quality of employment opportunity.**

Table 4.1: Priority Alignment

Overall Objective	NORTH CENTRAL INDIANA’S OBJECTIVE: To attract and retain, develop, and connect talent				
READI Categories	Talent Development	Quality of Place and Quality of Life	Talent Attraction	Quality of Opportunity	Entrepreneurship and Innovation
21st Century Talent Goals	Develop Talent	Attract and Retain Talent		Connect Talent	
North Central Region Priorities	21st Century Workforce Development	Quality of Life/ Place	Diverse Housing	Broadband	Quality of Opportunity

To attract and retain talent our region must:

- **Create a diverse and attractive housing stock that accommodates all income levels of current residents within our community and attracts future residents to our community.**
- **Enrich our community with diverse and unique quality of life amenities that improve our regions' quality of place and make it an even more attractive location to live, work and play.**

To develop talent our region must:

- **Educate future generations, upskill underutilized workforce, and provide continued support to existing workforce to grow wages and meet the demands of a modern, 21st century economy.**

To connect talent our region must:

- **Create a unified regional broadband strategy that provides North Central Indiana's communities with the ability to take advantage of future broadband funding.**
- **Strategically incentivize high-paying jobs with comprehensive benefits to improve and diversify the quality of opportunity for existing residents and attract new, highly-educated community members.**

Housing

There is a housing shortage in the North Central Region of new, modern residential product. The region has just shy of a two-month supply of houses, and Clinton County has less than a one-month supply. In 2021, houses in the region were selling for an average of \$21,000 more than they were in 2020 year and sellers are getting 98.4% of the listing price on average, up from 96.8%. When a community invests in housing development, the region grows. In order to attract young professionals, families and workforce across a diverse income spectrum, there is a need to increase product in affordable and market-rate housing, as well as quality rental units. In particular, regional employers and realtors have identified that a lack of affordable housing options in \$150,000-\$300,000 range is a limiting factor to attracting and retaining top talent. Feedback from employers indicated that high-wage earners have few options in the North Central Region and often end up commuting from outside the region or worse,

not taking a job in the region at all. When high income earners commute from another area, a community in North Central Indiana loses the valuable income and other benefits that individuals and their families bring with them. Fortunately, stakeholders throughout the region have identified land that would be in an ideal location for housing developments. One key to activating these properties, however, is securing the financing to build supportive public infrastructure, in partnership with developers, to deliver the product types that the region needs.

Investment in new residential product can work because the North Central Region is home to the success story of Kokomo. Kokomo has made significant investment in new housing alternatives and other place-based amenities over the last decade. 2020 Census data shows that Kokomo reversed its Census-projected 10-year population loss and actually grew by more than 1,000 residents over the 2010-2020 period.

Quality of Life

Stakeholders from across the region consistently expressed that there is a need for additional quality of life amenities within the region. There is strong support in connecting trail networks, enhancing parks and increasing family activity programming. Additionally, increased entertainment and dining options were noted as a key need. One specific need noted by employers within the region was the need for affordable, expanded childcare alternatives within the region. This was specifically noted as a barrier to population growth and workforce expansion, keeping eligible workers, particularly women, out of the workforce. Stakeholders understood that some of the amenities they desired, like retail options, were not in their community because of a lack of population. Thus, population growth is a critical ingredient to sustaining the amenities that are important to supporting that growth in the long-term. While there has been a great deal of work done throughout the region to expand and enhance quality of life assets, there is more work to be done to move the needle on population retention and growth in the region. The North Central Region will activate new, innovative projects that are specifically tailored to attract and retain population in the region.



Championship Park- Kokomo

Source: Visit Kokomo



Amateur Circus - Peru

Source: Miami County Economic Development Authority

Education and Workforce Development

The State of Indiana is striving to reach 60% attainment of Hoosiers with a post-secondary education certificate by 2025. North Central's education partners and industries are playing a key role in reaching that goal. With ongoing activities at major employers within the region, the North Central Region is poised to be at the epicenter of 21st century innovation. Advanced manufacturing, electric vehicles and precision agriculture are no longer tomorrow's technology; they are now today's technology. Regional industries are making significant investments in retooling facilities for next generation needs, such as electric vehicles. The North Central Region will continue to build the workforce to support this innovation evolution.

Workforce development requires a comprehensive approach. Educators and employers alike agree that the North Central Region must start young. Too often students reach their senior year of high school with no clear idea of what they want to do after high school. Even students that know their next steps often end up without the appropriate credits and classwork to support their desired future pathway.

With Ivy Tech and IUK's existing presence throughout the region, partnerships are possible with the regional K-12 school corporations to build pathways to help graduates stay and grow deeper roots in the region.

High school educators indicated that students do not have the support they need during the transition from high school to post-secondary education – be it degree attainment, skilled trades training or other certifications. Additionally, local anchor employers noted that graduating high school students did not possess the soft skills and experiential opportunities to best prepare them if they choose a pathway directly into the workforce after high school. A successful career pathways program would provide students with career coaches, early experiential learning opportunities, access to diverse dual credit courses and certification programs needed to get a successful start in the workforce no matter which pathway they ultimately choose.

Broadband Connectivity

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed a clear need for increased broadband connectivity. Working from home and learning from home were no longer luxuries but necessities that will continue to be for the foreseeable future. Industry 4.0 will be driven by connection. Robots, sensors, computers and the cloud are all connected through the “internet of things.” To truly lead in Industry 4.0, our region must be better connected.

As stated earlier in this document, most anchor cities in each county have access to reliable internet service and some have fiber to homes and businesses. However, rural parts of the region struggle with internet connectivity and affordability, compounded by limited availability of affordable providers with reliable service. It is difficult for large providers to service rural areas because they are not as dense as micropolitan areas, so local investment in expanding broadband services will be a key factor in helping bridge the gap to make financing broadband infrastructure possible.



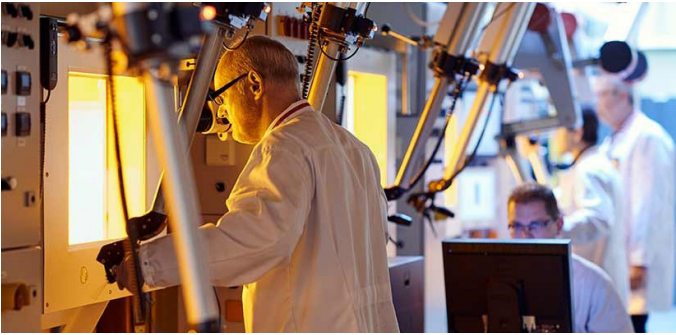
Bonus Pints Beer Garden - Logansport

Source: Cass County



Fiber Installation - Cass County

Source: Cass County



Medical Isotopes Manufacturing at Grissom

Source: Miami County Economic Development Authority

Quality of Opportunity

A diverse economy is a strong and resilient economy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the North Central Region's manufacturing and services industries were hit hard by stay-at-home orders. This reinforced the need for the region to continue supporting its current employers, but also strategically diversify its employer base. COVID-19 also brought about additional supply chain constraints still being felt by the food and automotive industries as of the writing of this plan. Supply constraints and the negative side-effects of the sole reliance on foreign manufacturers for components, like microchips, provides a clear opportunity for the North Central Region.

Many of the jobs in the region are related to automobile manufacturing, agriculture or food processing. The region must leverage these strong anchors while building on their success to diversify the regional economy. Stakeholders throughout the region wanted to see a diversified and resilient economy that would be able to weather an economic downturn or recession. By leveraging the region's assets to attract a diverse offering of employment, the region can remain resilient in the future, despite changing economic and labor trends.

Along with ensuring that the workforce skills align with the evolving regional economy, it is essential that the region continue focusing on expanding the employment opportunities for our current and future population base. It will be very difficult to achieve significant population growth without also helping deliver the employment opportunities that future residents will desire. Quality economic development seldom happens by accident, making it critically important for the region to continue to strategically invest to develop the quality job and wage growth necessary to retain current and future regional population growth.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the North Central Region is an essential aspect of ensuring a vibrant and thriving community that reflects the values of all its residents. In a rural region like North Central Indiana, where close-knit relationships and strong community bonds are central, the importance of DEI lies in harnessing the strengths of the region's diverse population while preserving the region's values. NCIRPC can focus on facilitating open dialogues that allow the region to learn from different perspectives and experiences, ultimately enriching the community's collective understanding.

By acknowledging the significance of DEI in the region's CEDS plan, it is acknowledged that diversity brings new ideas, creativity, and approaches that can revitalize industries and stimulate innovation. Supporting DEI initiative will be crucial to support and fostering a culture of innovation in the North Central region. NCIRPC's history and culture are invaluable assets that can be better celebrated by embracing the region's differences, respecting individual contributions, and creating opportunities for equitable participation.

This approach not only ensures that everyone's voice is heard but also enhances the region's ability to identify common goals and shared values, fostering a sense of belonging that strengthens the community's fabric.

Inclusion and unity should be promoted through a variety of initiatives. NCIRPC can consider measures such as supporting welcoming programming for new residents, encouraging regional participants to update their diversity policies, or supporting community-led projects that highlight the region's shared heritage. This approach respects the diversity of thought within the community, allowing DEI to organically become a part of the region's collective identity. By weaving these principles into the CEDS plan, the region ensures it remains a place where all residents can contribute to and benefit from the community's shared growth and success.

RESILIENCY

Resilient Communities are Strong Communities

Resiliency planning is an essential process that aims to help rural regions adapt to and recover from unforeseen events, disruptions, and changes. Such planning can play a crucial role in their ability to sustain economic development, enhance quality of life, and foster community cohesion.

Resiliency planning identifies potential risks and develop strategies to mitigate them. Factors such as climate change, economic fluctuations, and population decline can pose a significant challenge to the region's sustainability. By conducting a risk assessment, North Central can identify these potential challenges and prioritize the development of strategies to address them.

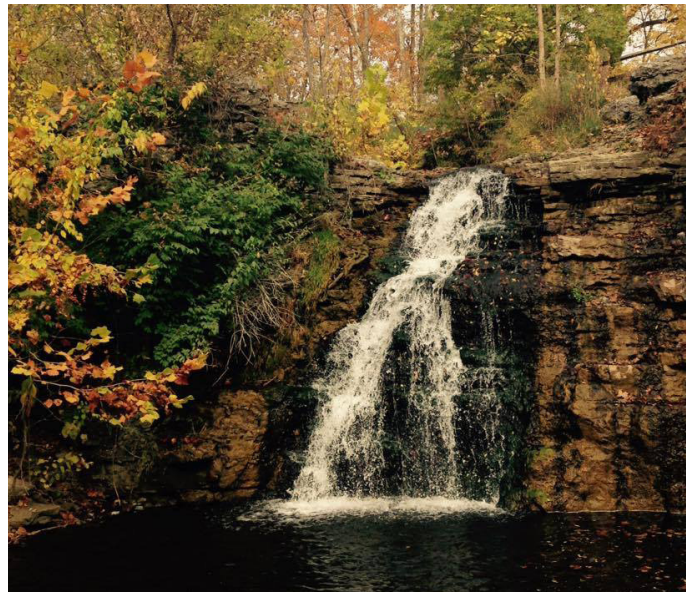
Another benefit of resiliency planning is its ability to foster a sense of collective purpose and pride within the community. By involving stakeholders in the planning process and creating opportunities for collaboration, the region can further its shared vision for the future that reflects their unique cultural and economic identity. This shared vision can then serve as a rallying point for the community, inspiring residents and businesses to work together to achieve common goals.

Resiliency planning can play a vital role in attracting and retaining residents and businesses. By prioritizing sustainability and resilience, North Central can differentiate themselves from other communities and position themselves as attractive locations for investment and growth.

Additionally, by investing in community resilience, the region can provide a more stable and secure environment for residents and businesses, making them more likely to stay and invest in the community over the longterm.

A key component of resiliency planning is its ability to promote environmental sustainability. By prioritizing strategies that conserve natural resources, protect ecosystems, and provide cost savings for businesses and residents through reduced energy costs and other operational expenses.

Resiliency planning can also contribute to the social and economic well-being of the community. By prioritizing equitable access to resources and opportunities, the region's communities can reduce economic and social disparities and improve overall quality of life. This can include investments in attainable housing, healthcare, education, and workforce development, as well as efforts to promote community engagement and social cohesion.



France Park Falls - Logansport

Source: Cass County

By prioritizing strategies that promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and workforce development, the region can attract new businesses and industries, create new job opportunities, and stimulate economic growth. Additionally, by investing in resilient infrastructure and sustainable practices, the North Central region can attract private investment, promote tourism, and enhance the overall quality of life for residents and visitors.

The success of the North Central Indiana region is directly related to the region's ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions to its economy. In community and economic development, resilience includes the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid the shock altogether. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that the ability for community to respond to and recover from shock must be a priority for local and region agencies.

At the regional level, the members of the North Central Regional Planning Council are instrumental in building the capacity for economic resilience. Leadership from local economic development organizations and local elected officials is key to successful post-incident coordination and information dissemination. As in the case of COVID-19, the NCIRPC played a key role in grant administration for shock response.

In building economic resilience, it is critical that the NCIRPC consider its role in the pre- and post-incident environment to include steady-state and responsive initiatives.

Steady-state initiatives tend to be long-term efforts that seek to bolster the community or region's ability to withstand or avoid a shock. Responsive initiatives can include establishing capabilities for the economic development organization to be responsive to the region's recovery needs following an incident. Both steady-state and responsive strategies are discussed in this chapter.

The Role of the NCIRPC in Resiliency

The NCIRPC currently serves as a convener among regional partners to conduct planning and acts as a technical resource to aid its member communities in applying for and winning grants. The NCIRPC's ability to convene, to be a central source of information, and to facilitate communication among its members are essential roles in both steady-state and responsive strategies.

The NCIRPC played this role in the response to COVID-19. The State of Indiana developed the READI program, a \$500 million economic development and COVID-response grant program that allowed region's to seek up to \$50 million in state grant money. The NCIRPC convened its regional members, conducted a region-wide planning process, developed a plan and a list of prioritized projects to submit for funding.

Historically, the NCIRPC has played the role of grant administrator and technical resource to help communities in the region submit for state and federal grants like Community Crossing Matching Grants and EDA funding. The NCIRPC has won more than \$45.7 million in funding for it's communities.

The Regional Planning Council has the opportunity to play an even larger role in resiliency. While every shock to the system will not be as impactful as COVID-19, the NCIRPC must be able to scale its response to events ranging from a tornado or flood to an economic shock like the status change of a regional employer. One of the Planning Council's strongest assets its ability to convene. The NCIRPC can leverage its convening power to respond to an economic shock by bringing together key stakeholders to collectively analyze the impact of the shock, facilitate information-sharing and knowledge transfer, and advocate for policy changes.

By fostering a collaborative environment and coordinating efforts among stakeholders, the council can effectively address economic challenges, identify opportunities for recovery, and advocate for policies that support the region's economic rebound and recovery.

Additionally, the NCIRPC's convening power can be utilized to conduct long-term efforts that enhance the community or region's economic resilience by bringing together stakeholders to collectively develop strategies, fostering collaboration and coordination, and advocating for policies that promote economic diversity, sustainability, and inclusivity. The Council can drive initiatives that strengthen the community or the region's ability to withstand or avoid economic shocks and create a resilient economic environment for the longterm.

The Regional Planning Council can act as a communication hub to promote steady-state and responsive resiliency strategies in the region. This can be done through information sharing, stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnerships, education and training, communication campaigns, and monitoring and evaluation. By sharing relevant information, engaging stakeholders, fostering collaboration, providing education and training, implementing communication campaigns, and establishing monitoring and evaluation systems, the region can effectively raise awareness, build capacity, and empower stakeholders to implement resilient strategies in their communities.

STEADY-STATE STRATEGIES

Region-wide Hazard Mitigation

Engaging in comprehensive planning efforts to define and implement a collective vision for resilience that includes the integration and/or alignment of other planning efforts (e.g., hazard mitigation plans) and funding sources.

Diversify Economy

Undertaking efforts to broaden the industrial base with diversification initiatives, such as targeting the development of emerging clusters or industries that (a) build on the region's unique assets and competitive strengths; and (b) provide stability during downturns that disproportionately impact any single cluster or industry.

Business Retention and Expansion

Adapting business retention and expansion programs (e.g., economic gardening or other enterprise supports) to assist firms with economic recovery post-disruption. This can be especially important in assisting the more rural areas and communities within the region to support existing businesses and help in attracting new businesses to the areas.

Shovel-Ready Project Pipeline

To ensure the region is constantly making progress toward its goals and has a pipeline of projects ready for potential state and federal funding initiatives, the region should develop a living list of projects that fall under the region's priorities. This

list should be updated at least once per year and should have a reasonably equitable distribution among the six participating counties. Priority projects should have a clear scope and a planning-level cost estimate completed.

Workforce Development

Building a resilient workforce that can better shift between jobs or industries when their core employment is threatened through job-driven skills strategies and support organizations.

Regional GIS

Maintaining geographic information systems (GIS) that link with municipal business licenses, tax information, and other business establishment data bases to track local and regional "churn" and available development sites. GIS can also be integrated with hazard information to make rapid post-incident impact assessments.

Communication Infrastructure

Ensuring redundancy in telecommunications and broadband networks to protect commerce and public safety in the event of natural or man-made disasters.

Resilience Business Support

Promoting business continuity and preparedness (i.e., ensuring businesses understand their vulnerabilities—including supply chains—in the face of disruptions and are prepared to take actions to resume operations after an event).

RESPONSIVE STRATEGIES

Region-Wide Safe Development

Employing safe development practices in business districts and surrounding communities. Strategies may include locating structures outside of flood-plains, preserving natural lands that act as buffers from storms, and protecting downtowns and other existing development from the impacts of extreme weather.

Disaster Planning

Conducting pre-disaster recovery planning to define key stakeholders, roles, responsibilities, and key actions.

Disaster Response

Identify an office or team tasked with managing economic incident response and/or recovery.

Regular Communication

Establishing a process for regular communication, monitoring, and updating of business community needs and issues (which can then be used after an incident).

Response Communications

Establishing/using a capability to rapidly contact key local, regional, state, and federal officials to communicate business sector needs and coordinate impact assessment efforts.

Institutional Knowledge

Establishing/using coordination mechanisms and leadership succession plans for short, intermediate, and long-term recovery needs. The regional organization can also be a repository for historical and legacy plans as well as a record keeper for best practices and lessons learned from previous and on-going resiliency and response efforts.

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

The strategies included in this plan were selected from a diverse range of local, county, and regional feedback, representing the most innovative and effective ideas that emerged from the planning and engagement process.

The focus of these strategies is to attract and retain, develop, and connect talent. These efforts are geared towards improving the overall quality of life for residents, promoting 21st-century workforce development, and increasing economic opportunities for all.

The strategies highlighted in this chapter are categorized based on their respective focus areas. The first focus area, build quality of place, includes strategies designed to improve the region's physical environment, cultural amenities, and public health. One key component of talent attraction and retention is to provide diverse and attainable housing through the region. As mentioned earlier in this plan, active public sector support will be necessary to expand the region's housing.

The second focus area, build quality of opportunity, focuses on promoting economic growth, job creation and the development of new businesses and industries. These strategies include leveraging the region's agricultural base, embracing solar energy, marketing and leveraging the Grissom Airforce Reserve Base, expanding broadband connectivity, supporting entrepreneurship and small business development, and expanding the quality of opportunity. By aligning policy and funding to attract industries such as E.V. technology, agriculture technology, and value-added agriculture, the region can attract more diverse employers and raise the average wages.

The third focus area, build regional talent base, is aimed at promoting education and workforce training opportunities and fostering a culture of innovation. To continue growing the region's workforce, the region must invest in career pathways. These pathways involve a wide range of efforts from counselors in the region's high schools, to experiential learning opportunities to professional certifications. NCIRPC plays a critical role in facilitating the type of collaboration and co-investment between the public sector, educational institutions, and the private sector that is essential for the program's successful development and implementation.

The strategies highlighted in this chapter represent a comprehensive and integrated approach to achieving the North Central Region's priorities. Through innovative and effective strategies, the region can attract and retain talent, develop and connect talent, and create diverse housing options, all while improving the overall quality of life for its residents and increasing economic opportunities for all.

Build Quality of Place	
1	Improve the availability of diverse housing alternatives
	a. Encourage each county to develop housing studies and strategies that identify potential development sites and include cost estimates to activate development
	b. Continue to pursue funding that supports the increase of diverse residential development throughout the region
	c. Build relationships with regional home developers to connect them to potential residential development sites.
2	Increase access to quality childcare services
	a. Form a regional childcare task force to lead a childcare study that assesses the regional needs and develop a strategic plan to address the region's needs, including strategic programming, investments and partnerships that will improve regional outcomes. The plan should identify sources of funding, a long-term sustainable funding model and strategies to utilize them in helping expand
	b. Establish partnerships with local childcare providers to expand capacity and availability of quality childcare services, including subsidies or grants to support affordability.
	c. Collaborate with local businesses and employers to explore options for on-site or near-site childcare facilities or partnerships with existing providers to improve access to childcare for employees.
3	Expand traditional quality of place amenities such as retail, healthcare, etc.
	a. Provide support for workforce development programs in the healthcare sector, including job training and skills development initiatives, to ensure a qualified local workforce is available to meet the needs of new or expanding businesses.
	b. Encourage and support placemaking strategies that enhance the attractiveness and accessibility of traditional quality of place amenities, such as streetscape improvements, public transportation enhancements, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.
	c. Continue to support efforts to grow the region's population, thus providing a larger and more feasible market for the region's desire retail options
4	Support development patterns and projects that encourage mixed-use, walkable, and well-connected environments
	a. Support local agencies in updating zoning and land use regulations to allow for mixed-use development, including a mix of residential, commercial, and recreational uses, and to promote walkability and connectivity between different
	b. Consider engaging in community outreach and public engagement efforts to educate residents, businesses, and developers about the benefits of mixed-use, walkable, and well-connected environments, and seek input and feedback to inform development decisions.

5	Support the redevelopment and revitalization of the region's downtowns	
	a.	Establish downtown redevelopment or revitalization programs that provide financial incentives, grants, or low-interest loans to property owners or developers for building upgrades, facade improvements, or other investments that enhance the attractiveness of downtown areas.
	b.	Facilitate the development of public-private partnerships to leverage resources and expertise for downtown redevelopment projects, including collaborations with local businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations.
	c.	Support local agencies in developing downtown plans and design guidelines that outline a vision for the revitalization of downtown areas and provide a roadmap for future development.
	d.	Assist local entities in identifying state and federal resources to support infrastructure development to reduce barriers for residential development within the region
6	Effectively leverage the region's natural resources and recreational assets	
	a.	Consider conducting a comprehensive inventory and assessment of the region's natural resources and recreational assets, including parks, forests, lakes, rivers, trails, and other natural landmarks, to identify their potential for economic development and tourism.
	b.	Work with the region's tourism, Mainstreet, and visitors organizations to develop marketing and promotional campaigns that highlight the region's natural resources and recreational assets to attract visitors, tourists, and outdoor enthusiasts, including digital and print media, social media, and targeted advertising in relevant markets.
	c.	Support sustainable resource management practices to protect and preserve the region's natural resources and recreational assets for long-term economic and environmental sustainability, including conservation efforts, waste reduction, and responsible tourism practices.
	d.	Continue seeking external funding and grants from state, federal, and private sources to invest in infrastructure improvements, facilities upgrades, and other enhancements that can enhance the accessibility, safety, and enjoyment of the region's natural resources and recreational assets.

7	Increase the visibility, patronage, and number of the region's amenities, arts and cultural institutions, and other assets that contribute to the region's quality of place	
	a.	Develop a comprehensive marketing and branding campaign to promote the region's amenities, arts, and cultural institutions to local residents, tourists, and potential investors, including digital and print media, social media, and cultural events.
	b.	Encourage the collaboration among with local amenities, arts, and cultural institutions to create joint marketing efforts, cross-promotion, and collaborative events that can increase their visibility, patronage, and overall impact on the region's quality of place.
	c.	Foster partnerships between local businesses, educational institutions, and cultural institutions to develop workforce training programs, internships, and other initiatives that can support the growth and sustainability of the region's amenities, arts, and cultural sectors.
	d.	Consider programs that provide financial and technical assistance to local amenities, arts, and cultural institutions to improve their facilities, programs, and operations, and enhance their ability to attract visitors, tourists, and residents.

Build Quality of Opportunity

1	Attract new corporate investment in target sectors and existing clusters	
	a.	Develop targeted marketing campaigns to promote the region's strengths and opportunities in the E.V. technology, advanced manufacturing, agriculture and nuclear medical clusters to attract new corporate investment, including digital marketing, industry events, and trade shows.
	b.	Continue to support business-friendly policies and incentives like grants and streamlined permitting processes, to attract new businesses and suppliers to the region, including those in the target sectors.
	c.	Deepen the coordination and partnerships with local economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, and industry associations to leverage their networks and resources in attracting new corporate investment, including joint marketing efforts and business recruitment missions.
	d.	Provide customized support and assistance to potential employers, including site selection assistance, workforce development resources, and business development services, to streamline the investment process and demonstrate the region's commitment to fostering business growth.
2	Facilitate a conversation with the region's LEDOs regarding solar and renewable development at a local level	
	a.	Discuss options for solar-friendly policies and regulations at the local level, such as streamlined permitting processes, net metering incentives, and tax credits, to encourage the development of solar projects in the region and attract solar industry investments.
	b.	Consider identifying and prioritizing strategic locations for solar development and create targeted marketing campaigns to promote these locations to solar developers and investors.
	c.	Engage region's top employers in the solar development conversation
3	Continue to market and leverage Grissom Airforce Reserve Base	
	a.	Align local and regional policy to position the region to take advantage of the aeronautics industry, Department of Defense contracts, just-in-time nuclear medical and training of pilots
	b.	Support a dedicated marketing and outreach campaign to promote the economic benefits and opportunities associated with Grissom Airforce Reserve Base, including its workforce, facilities, and strategic location, to potential investors and businesses.
4	Continue to plan and leverage the I-65 Corridor	
	a.	Support marketing the advantages of a company locating along I-65 such as proximity to Indianapolis and Chicago, available labor pool, proximity to rail, and availability of water and sewer infrastructure
5	Continue to plan and leverage the U.S. 24 Corridor	
	a.	Support the alignment of local and regional policy and marketing efforts to position the region to take advantage US-24's role as a connector of northern Indiana's defense and automobile sectors.

6	Ensure that the US 31 corridor is planned to deliver maximum success for the region	
	a.	Ensure that the improvements being made to U.S. 31 are done so in a manner that improve regional connectivity to places of employment and residential development
	b.	Encourage local agencies to develop a strategic plan for the development of the US 31 corridor, including land use regulations, zoning codes, and design guidelines that promote a mix of compatible land uses, and sustainable
	c.	Work with local and state representatives to ensure that property and adequate local access is maintained along the US 31 corridor as improvements are made
7	Pursue a regional mega-site collaboration within the region	
	a.	Conduct a market and feasibility study to understand the demand and potential for mega-site development in the region, and use this information to develop a marketing strategy and promotional campaign to attract potential investors and developers
	b.	Identify potential mega-site locations within the region that have the necessary infrastructure, transportation access, and zoning to accommodate large-scale development projects, such as manufacturing, logistics, or technology hubs.
	c.	Consider forming partnerships and collaborations with regional governments, economic development organizations, state agencies, and private sector stakeholders to jointly develop and share the benefits from the mega-site
8	Continue to increase the region's broadband connectivity	
	a.	Assist counties in developing a county-wide broadband strategy that identifies each counties current broadband access, develops a plan to address last-mile broadband development, and connects the community to a broadband developer
	b.	Identify and assist counties in applying for broadband funding grants
	c.	Educate and engage with local businesses, residents, and communities on the benefits of broadband connectivity and digital literacy, and provide resources and training programs to help them take advantage of the opportunities afforded by high-speed internet, such as e-commerce, remote work, and online education.

9	Support entrepreneurship and small business development regionally	
	a.	Develop a regional development fund to support small business start-ups and encourage entrepreneurship that integrates with the SBDC business planning program
	b.	Support the development of business incubators or innovation hubs that provide affordable office space, shared resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities for startups and small businesses.
	c.	Connect regional business owners to business training programs and workshops on topics such as business planning, marketing, financial management, and access to capital to equip entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed.
	d.	Improve marketing of the IUK Key Center for Innovation to connect local businesses with the business consulting resources provided by the university
e.	Consider the development of procurement policies that promote local small businesses, such as preferential treatment in government contracts or incentives for local sourcing, to stimulate demand for local goods and services and support small business growth.	
10	Develop a marketing and branding campaign to "tell the regional story" to potential new employers and residents	
	a.	Develop a cohesive marketing and branding strategy that highlights the region's specializations (like E.V. manufacturing) and unique quality of place amenities, positioning it as an attractive destination for businesses and residents, and differentiates it from other regions.
	b.	Support the development of business incubators or innovation hubs that provide affordable office space, shared resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities for startups and small businesses.
	c.	Create a visually appealing and informative marketing collateral, including brochures, websites, social media campaigns, videos, and promotional materials that showcase the region's strengths and opportunities.
	d.	Engage with regional stakeholders, businesses, and community leaders to promote the marketing campaign and encourage them to share the regional story with their networks and contacts.
e.	Collaborate with regional economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, and other partners to amplify the marketing campaign through joint promotional effort	

11	Support programs to expand and retain the region's existing business community
	a. Ensure that local economic development organizations are conducting regular business retention and expansion (BRE) surveys and visits to identify the needs, challenges, and opportunities of existing businesses in the region.
	b. Connect businesses to business assistance programs, such as technical assistance, workforce training, and financial incentives, to help existing businesses expand their operations, invest in new technologies, and remain
	c. Facilitate networking events, industry clusters, and business-to-business collaborations to foster relationships and synergies among local businesses,
	d. Engage with regional stakeholders, businesses, and community leaders to promote the marketing campaign and encourage them to share the regional story with their networks and contacts.
e. Collaborate with regional economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, and other partners to amplify the marketing campaign through joint promotional effort	
12	Provide resources that help entrepreneurs and small business owners realize their
	a. Connect entrepreneurs with the SBDC or other organizations that provides one-on-one counseling, training, and resources to help entrepreneurs and small business owners with business planning, financial management, marketing, and other critical areas.
	b. Offer financial incentives or grants for entrepreneurs and small business owners, such as low-interest loans, matching grants, or seed funding, to help them overcome financial barriers and access capital for their businesses.
c. Continue to foster and expand partnerships with local educational institutions, industry associations, and business organizations to provide access to educational resources, mentorship programs, and networking opportunities for entrepreneurs and small business owners.	
13	Promote regional diversity, equity, and inclusion
	a. Encourage participating entities to update and enforce their Title VI policies
	b. Encourage programming that provides workforces training for all members of the North Central Indiana community, regardless of background
	c. Encourage participating entities have an up to date DBE policy for contractors and city/county vendors
	d. Promote policies that further digital equity, including rural broadband and programs that support digital literacy
e. With the imminent increase of Korean immigrants associated with the EV battery plant, support regional cultural welcoming programming to help mitigate culture shock	

14	Promote regional economic diversification to support economic resiliency	
	a.	Support funding, grants and incentives to industries outside of the region's existing clusters and target industries to diversify the region's economy
	b.	Continue to support programming through educational institutions that the support the education and upskilling of the region's workforce in new and emerging fields like IT, computer science, industry 4.0, etc.
15	Continue to promote infrastructure investment to support employer growth in the region	
	a.	Continue to work with communities to identify key infrastructure investments to support local and regional business development and attraction.
	b.	Continue to help communities and counties identify state and federal funding opportunities to support infrastructure investment and support their applications for securing such funds.

Build Regional Talent Base	
1	Continue to build a 21st Century workforce with upskilling programs
	a. Continue partnerships with local educational institutions (like Ivy Tech and IU Kokomo) and anchor employers to expand upskilling programs that focus on high-demand, high-wage sectors in the region, such as technology, advanced
	b. Support incentives for individuals to enroll in upskilling programs, such as tuition reimbursement, grants, or stipends, to make the programs more accessible and
	c. Promote awareness and participation in upskilling programs through targeted marketing campaigns, outreach efforts, and community events to engage and motivate individuals to take advantage of the opportunities for skill development.
	d. Deepen partnerships with local employers to create customized upskilling programs that align with their workforce needs and offer on-the-job training or apprenticeship opportunities to bridge the skills gap and ensure a pipeline of skilled workers for the region's industries.
2	Support the next generation of regional workforce with career pathways programs:
	a. Collaborate with local K-12 schools, vocational schools, and higher education institutions to develop and implement career pathways programs that expose
	b. Facilitate partnerships between local employers and educational institutions to offer internships, apprenticeships, or mentorship programs for students, allowing them to gain real-world experience and develop relevant skills.
	c. Create career counseling and guidance programs that help students explore different career options, set career goals, and navigate the educational pathways and job market to make informed career decisions.
	d. Provide resources and support for students to obtain industry-recognized certifications, licenses, or credentials that are relevant to the target industries in the region, which can enhance their employability and career advancement
	e. Foster collaboration between educational institutions, workforce development agencies, and employers to continuously assess and update the curriculum of career pathways programs to align with the changing needs of the regional workforce and industries.

3	Create a regional Center for Excellence in Advanced Manufacturing (CEAM)	
	a.	Collaborate with local manufacturers, industry associations, and educational institutions to secure funding, resources, and partnerships to establish and sustain the CEAM.
	b.	Develop and implement a comprehensive training program within the CEAM that offers advanced technical skills training, leadership development, and industry-
	c.	Create a research and innovation hub within the CEAM that conducts research, development, and technology transfer activities to support the growth and competitiveness of the manufacturing industry in the region.
	d.	Offer consulting, mentoring, and business support services within the CEAM to assist local manufacturers in improving their operational efficiency, product quality, and market competitiveness, and foster innovation and entrepreneurship in the manufacturing sector.
e.	Develop programming that supports collaboration, networking and best practice-sharing among the region's industry leaders	
4	Create a North Central specific Workforce Development Board	
	a.	Currently, most of the region is located in the Indiana Department of Workforce Development's Region 4. With the increase presence of Stellantis and the North Central Region's burgeoning EV industry, the region wishes to split from Region 4 and create a region of its own. This new region would allow the North Central Region to better align state workforce development resources to create custom tailored solutions to the unique needs of the region.
5	Ensure that regional training and degree programs are aligned with the needs of regional employers and target sectors	
	a.	Continue to foster strong partnerships between local educational institutions, employers, and industry associations to establish a collaborative approach to curriculum development, program design, and delivery that aligns with the evolving needs of the regional workforce.
	b.	Facilitate ongoing communication and feedback loops between educational institutions and employers to exchange information on workforce needs, emerging trends, and industry demands, and use that feedback to continuously improve and update the curriculum and programs offered.
	c.	Provide resources and support to educational institutions to develop and implement work-based learning opportunities, such as internships, apprenticeships, and co-op programs, that provide students with real-world experience, industry connections, and relevant skills.
	d.	Continue to leverage funding and grant opportunities to invest in the development of new training and degree programs that are aligned with the needs of regional employers and target sectors, and promote these programs through marketing and outreach efforts to attract students and meet the talent

Steady-State Resiliency Strategies

1	Region-wide Hazard Mitigation
a.	Understand the state of hazard mitigation planning among regional members
b.	When appropriate, engage in comprehensive planning efforts to define a collective vision
c.	Assist communities with grant funding for hazard mitigation planning and implementation
2	Diversify the Region's Economy
a.	Continue to support efforts to strengthen the region's emerging industry clusters
b.	Look for opportunities to expand economic opportunities in new areas that are adjacent to, but not dependent upon the region's clusters
c.	Foster local entrepreneurship to support new, homegrown business ventures
3	Business Retention and Expansion
a.	In each county, ensure that there is an organization responsible for BR&E
b.	Continue to engage region employers in regional planning efforts
4	Shovel-Ready Project Pipeline
a.	To prepare for future grant funding opportunities, maintain a prioritized list of projects in each county that are shovel-ready and align with the region's priorities
b.	Aid communities in scoping and developing budgets for projects to get them shovel ready
5	Workforce Development
a.	Continue to engage with regional educational institutions and employers to align educational initiatives in in-demand skills
b.	Collaborate with the region's school districts and institutions of higher education to develop career pathways to support students entering the workforce with in-demand, job-driven skills
6	Regional GIS
a.	Consider developing a regional GIS system that links with municipal business licenses, tax information, and other business establishment data bases to track local and regional "churn" and available development sites
7	Communication Infrastructure
a.	Ensure the redundancy in telecommunications and broadband networks to protect commerce and public safety in the event of natural or manmade disasters.
b.	Continue to invest in projects that expand the region's access to broadband
8	Communication Infrastructure
a.	Form a regional childcare task force
b.	Conduct a childcare study that assesses the regional needs and develop a strategic plan to address the region's needs, including strategic programming, investments and partnerships that will improve regional outcomes.
9	Resilience Business Support
a.	Develop a strategies such as a revolving loan fund to support entrepreneurship
b.	Identify or develop "gap" funds that businesses can utilize during economic downturns
10	Region-Wide Safe Development
a.	Support policy that promotes safe development practices across the region
b.	Common safe develop standards include: locating structures outside of floodplains, preserving natural lands that act as buffers from storms, and protecting downtowns and other existing development from the impacts of extreme weather.

Responsive Strategies

1	Disaster Planning
a.	Conducting pre-disaster recovery planning to define key stakeholders, roles, responsibilities, and key actions
b.	Continue to be a source of regional communication, information dissemination and institutional knowledge
2	Disaster Response
a.	Identify a team tasked with managing economic incident response and/or recovery
b.	Set up and maintain an emergency communication system to disseminate important information to relevant stakeholders
c.	Be prepared to conduct assessments of the extent and impact of the disaster, including damage the built environment as well as economic impacts
3	Regular Communication
a.	Develop regular and predictable communication touchpoints to quickly disseminate new information
b.	Grow NCIRPC's reputation as a technical and informational resource for the region's community leaders
4	Response Communication
a.	Establish a capability to rapidly contact key local, regional, state, and federal officials to communicate business sector needs and coordinate impact assessment efforts
b.	Engage with stakeholders, including businesses, workers, community organizations, and government agencies, to understand their concerns, needs, and perspectives.
c.	Utilize multiple communication channels, such as traditional media (e.g., press releases, interviews), social media, websites, newsletters, and other relevant platforms, to disseminate consistent and coordinated messages.
d.	Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the communication strategies and adjust them as needed. Keep track of sentiment, feedback, and perception of the response efforts, and use data and feedback to refine communication approaches
5	Institutional Knowledge
a.	Establish documented processes and procedures for critical tasks and responsibilities within the organization. This includes standard operating procedures (SOPs), manuals, guidelines, and other documentation that outlines step-by-step instructions, best practices, and key information related to various operations.
b.	Capture lessons learned from projects, initiatives, or other experiences within the organization. Conduct post-project evaluations, debriefings, and retrospectives to identify successes, challenges, and key takeaways
c.	Develop succession plans for key roles within the organization. Identify employees who possess critical knowledge and skills, and establish plans to ensure a smooth transition of responsibilities when key employees leave the organization.

REGIONAL METRICS

Metrics provide a quantifiable way to measure progress towards the region's goals and objectives, such as job creation, business investment, and population growth. Without metrics, it would be challenging to assess the effectiveness of this plan in driving the region's goal of economic development and population growth.

The steering committee, comprised of representatives from local governments and other stakeholders, played a critical role in selecting metrics that align with the overarching goal in this plan. These metrics integrate the existing set of metrics the NCIRPC uses to track their operational performance, in addition to other metrics influenced by stakeholder input. It was important to take into account various factors such as data availability, feasibility, and relevance to the region's priorities in order to choose the most appropriate metrics.

The specific metrics chosen for the plan are derived from the region's unique needs and challenges. They are specifically targeted to track the progress in the areas that the region have identified as top priorities: building quality of place, building quality of opportunity and building a regional talent base. For instance, metrics related to population growth, educational attainment, business establishments and gross accessed value are included. These metrics are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound to ensure they effectively track progress and drive action towards the goal of economic development and population growth.

Monitoring the chosen metrics will be conducted internally by the NCIRPC and updated in a yearly report to the board. It is important to note that not all data may be able to be collected on an annual basis, but as best as possible, regular data collection and tabulation is the goal. The yearly report will give the region an opportunity to assess progress, identify trends and measure performance against the targets set in the plan.

The process of monitoring metrics enables the identification of best practices and areas for improvement. By analyzing the data, the NCIRPC can identify strategies or initiatives that are driving positive outcomes in terms of economic development and population growth and replicate them in other areas. Additionally, if certain metrics are not progressing as expected, the committee can take corrective actions and adjust the plan accordingly to ensure the best possible results for the region.

Regular reporting of the metrics to relevant stakeholders is critical for transparency and accountability. The annual report to the NCIRPC board members, along with regular communication with local governments, community members, and other stakeholders, acts to build reputation of the NCIRPC with in the region. Importantly, this process creates a feedback loop, allowing for adjustments to the plan by identifying areas that require additional attention or resources.

By aligning on a set of common metrics, local governments can work together towards the shared goal of economic development and population growth. This encourages information sharing, joint efforts, and collective problem-solving, which can result in more effective and efficient strategies for driving economic growth and attracting population to the region.

Furthermore, the regular reporting and monitoring of metrics provides a means for evaluating the return on investment of regional initiatives. By measuring the outcomes and impacts of different projects or programs, the region can assess the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of its various strategies. This allows local governments to prioritize resources and investments based on data-driven insights, optimize their efforts, and maximize the return on investment for the region.

Ultimately, the North Central Region's strategies are designed to move the needle on the region's metrics which are below.

By 2027 the region will:



Reverse population decline and increase population by 1%.



Increase the number of regional associates degrees and technical certificates by at least 6,000 recipients.



Increase bachelors degree attainment by 2%.



Increase median income in the region by 6%.



Increase average earnings per worker by 3%.



Increase regional gross assessed value by 5%.



Increase share of population of prime working age by 1%.



Increase number of business establishments by 1%.



Grow the region's Chmura Industry Diversity Index number by 1.5%



Car Show at Grissom Air Force Museum - Miami County

Source: Miami County Economic Development Authority



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Appendix

NORTH
CENTRAL
INDIANA

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Regional Background Information





Public and Private Support





Planning Process





Additional Regional Projects

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NORTH CENTRAL INDIANA

21st Century Innovation Region
Regional Development Plan

North Central Indiana
Regional Planning Council



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