



REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

September 30, 2021



PLAN PREPARED BY



AMERICAN
STRUCTUREPOINT
INC.

Acknowledgements

EAST CENTRAL INDIANA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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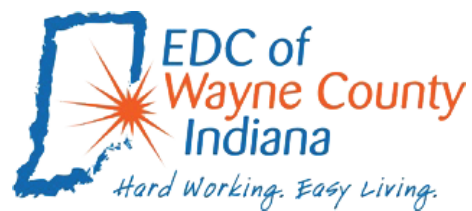
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Unless otherwise noted, photography can be credited to the following sources:

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership, Blackford County Economic Development Corporation, Muncie-Delaware County Economic Development Alliance, Grant County Economic Growth Council, New Castle-Henry County Economic Development Corporation, Jay County Development Corporation, Randolph County United, Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County, Fayette County Economic Development Group, Tony Roach, the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and Taylor Siefker Williams Design Group



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September 30, 2021

Dear East Central Indiana Community and Indiana Economic Development Corporation:

Enclosed is the **Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan**: an action plan focused on talent enhancement, talent attraction, talent development and talent growth.

This plan was forged on the anvil of over thirty years of collaboration. The most recent foundation is the 21st Century Talent Region Designation and subsequent on-going East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative, hosted by Ball State University.

This plan includes eight counties under the capable leadership of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership. In less than a month, each county committed \$30,000 to create this plan and also provide for its successful management and execution.

The regional leadership structure responsible for the creation and execution of this RDP is based on lessons learned from Regional Cities. The East Central Indiana READI Governing Body has two representatives from each county along with a liaison from Ball State University. Members represent small business, large employers, anchor institutions and the philanthropic sector.

Thank you to the East Central Indiana community for the on-going feedback and support.

Thank you to the Indiana Economic Development Corporation for the opportunity to compete for READI investment.

Mindy Kenworthy
President/CEO
East Central Indiana Regional Partnership



A RESOLUTION IDENTIFYING A REGION FOR THE CREATION OF A REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (RDP) AND PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIANA REGIONAL ECONOMIC ACCELERATION AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (READI)

WHEREAS, the state of Indiana, through its Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) launched the Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI); and

WHEREAS, House Enrolled Act No. 1001, of the 2021 Session of the Indiana General Assembly provided \$500 million in state appropriations to promote strategic investments that will make Indiana a magnet for talent and economic growth; and

WHEREAS, the READI program guidelines call for Indiana communities (counties, cities and towns) to identify their regions, coordinating organization and notify the IEDC by July 1, 2021 of their intent to seek implementation funding up to \$50 million for each region; and

WHEREAS, the IEDC will make available up to \$50,000 with matching funding required for a planning grant to assist in the creation of a Regional Development Plan (RDP) for submission to the IEDC by August 31, 2021; and

WHEREAS, the READI program guidelines discourage more than one RDP from the same region and the guidelines state, “overlap between regions could indicate a lack of regional collaboration;” and

WHEREAS, support from local government elected officials of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership area (www.forgeeci.com) are important in the creation of the RDP and critical for its subsequent execution; and

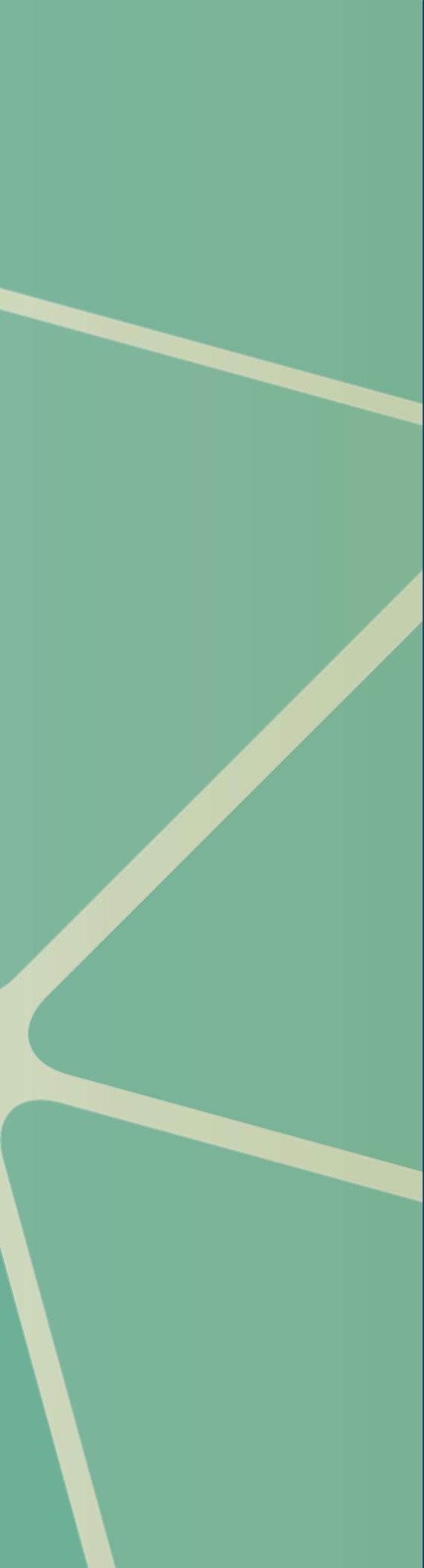
WHEREAS, the East Central Indiana 21st Century Talent Region Designation’s application, data and relationships will provide the framework for the creation of the RDP; and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the undersigned _____ (Commissioners, County Council, City or Town Council) determine that _____ (County, City or Town) shall join the East Central Indiana Forge Your Path READI Regional effort as described herein.

ALL PARTICIPATING COUNTIES, AND SEVERAL PARTICIPATING CITIES AND TOWNS HAVE SIGNED
THE RESOLUTION

(Signed Documents Are Available Upon Request)

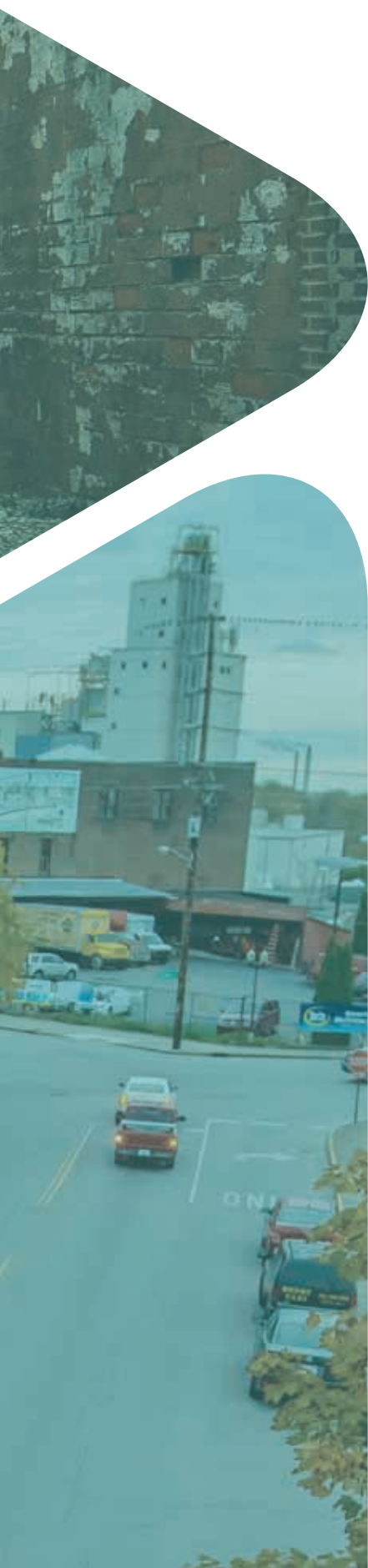




SECTION ONE

Identification of the Region





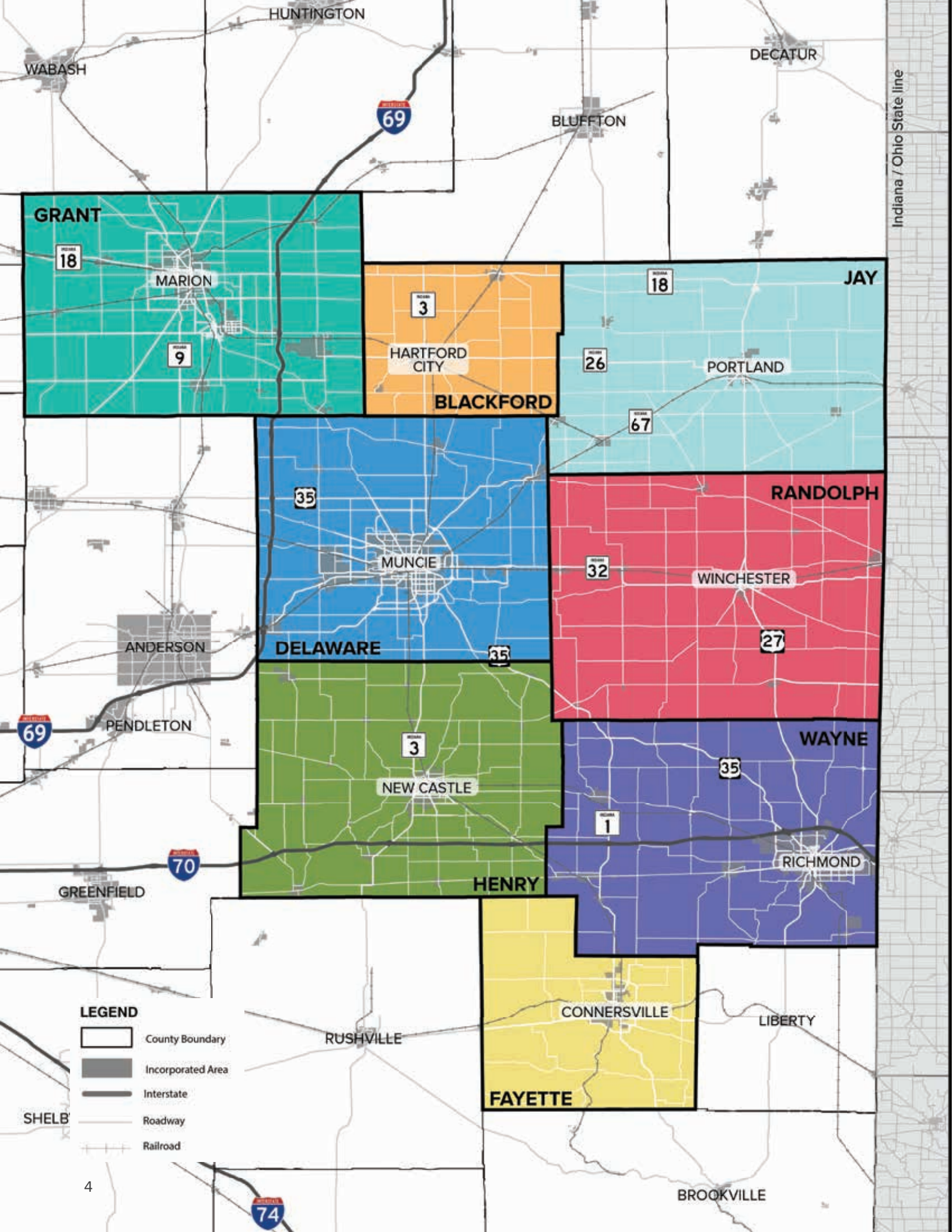
Identification of the Region

What ties us together is our common geography, our shared rural heritage, our mutual goals and our commitment to working together.



Indiana has 92 counties, but only eight have the distinct honor of being part of East Central Indiana. These eight counties are a mosaic of opportunities available for residents, transplants, and visitors to the region. While full of possibilities, these eight counties could also be identified as outliers or places situated away from or classed differently from our surrounding neighbors. While different and often separated, outliers often possess hidden advantages, extraordinary opportunities, and a sense of responsibility that requires hard work to overcome shared challenges. Today, our eight-county region is determined to take the variety of conditions that make us different and turn them into the characteristics that make East Central Indiana a story of success and determination.

The well-traveled path isn't for everyone. Sure, it can be the safer route. Perhaps it's the most direct, but not everyone thrives in a cookie-cutter life. Outliers need to forge their own paths. East Central Indiana is the place where you can design the life YOU want to live. It is the place where you matter. It is a place where you can make a difference. Smaller communities mean a chance to be a part of something. It means there's time and opportunity to chase your dreams.



GRANT

18

MARION

9

3

HARTFORD CITY

BLACKFORD

18

JAY

26

PORTLAND

67

35

MUNCIE

DELAWARE

35

RANDOLPH

32

WINCHESTER

27

ANDERSON

PENDLETON

69

WAYNE

35

NEW CASTLE

3

HENRY

1

RICHMOND

GREENFIELD

70

RUSHVILLE

CONNERSVILLE

LIBERTY

FAYETTE

BROOKVILLE

SHELBY

74

Indiana / Ohio State line

LEGEND

- County Boundary
- Incorporated Area
- Interstate
- Roadway
- Railroad

The member counties of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership and the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative includes Madison and Rush counties in addition to the eight counties listed below. Because of these existing relationships, both Madison and Rush counties will participate in and benefit from regional activities.

Based on their proximity, both counties chose to align themselves with different regions as a part of this READI planning effort.

East Central Indiana

East Central Indiana is comprised of 379,808, total residents, eight counties and 67 local cities and towns.

Our participating counties, cities and towns

BLACKFORD COUNTY

City of Hartford City
City of Montpelier
City of Dunkirk
Town of Shamrock Lakes

DELAWARE COUNTY

City of Muncie
Town of Albany
Town of Eaton
Town of Selma
Town of Yorktown
Town of Daleville
Town of Gaston

FAYETTE COUNTY

City of Connersville

GRANT COUNTY

City of Marion
City of Gas City
City of Jonesboro
Town of Upland
Town of Fairmount
Town of Folwerton
Town of Van Buren
Town of Mathews
Town of Converse
Town of Sweeter
Town of Swayzee

JAY COUNTY

City of Portland
City of Dunkirk
Town of Bryant
Town of Redkey
Town of Pennville
Town of Salamonina

HENRY COUNTY

City of New Castle
Town of Blountsville
Town of Cadiz
Town of Dunnrith
Town of Greensboro
Town of Kennard
Town of Knightstown
Town of Lewisville
Town of Middletown
Town of Mooreland
Town of Mount Summit
Town of New Lisbon
Town of Spiceland
Town of Springport
Town of Straughn
Town of Sulpher Springs

RANDOLPH COUNTY

Town of Farmland
Town of Losantville
Town of Lynn
Town of Modoc
Town of Parker City
Town of Ridgeville
Town of Saratoga
City of Union City
City of Winchester

WAYNE COUNTY

City of Richmond
Town of Boston
City of Cambridge City
City of Centerville
Town of Dublin
Town of East Germantown
Town of Economy
Town of Fountain City
Town of Greens Fork
Town of Hagerstown
Town of Milton
Town of Spring Grove
Town of Whitewater





Our Region

East Central Indiana is comprised of roughly 2,800 square miles of geography, 379,808, total residents, eight counties and 67 local cities and towns.



Each one of our counties and local communities offers unique features in history, art, recreation, industry, and anything else you could want, and we invite you to get to know us better.

- **Blackford County** is the birthplace of astronaut Kevin A. Ford and home to Indiana's largest Civil War reenactment.
- **Delaware County** is home to the country's oldest continuously operating print shop and the current home of Garfield creator Jim Davis.
- **Fayette County** is the birthplace of Howard Garns, the creator of Number Place, which was used as the basis for the famous puzzle Sudoku, and home to ECI's own Polar Express train ride on the historic Whitewater Valley Railroad.
- **Grant County** is home to the largest War of 1812 living history event in the nation and the birthplace of actor James Dean – who also gets an annual festival in his honor.
- **Henry County** is the birthplace of aviation pioneer Wilbur Wright and three iconic basketball history locations.
- **Jay County** is home to one of the most competitive and sought-after robotics programs in the nation and the Key Palace Theatre: a Top 10 Historic Blues Venue.
- **Randolph County** is home to the Indiana State Pie: the sugar cream pie. You'll also find tributes to The McCoys throughout the county.
- **Wayne County** is known as the birthplace of recorded jazz music and home to the Meltdown Winter Ice Festival, where you can watch nationally recognized ice carvers create beautiful art before your eyes.



What Binds Us Together

We share a common geography, a rural heritage, mutual goals and a willingness to think outside the box about our future.



While we are all located within the easternmost part of central Indiana, what truly ties the eight counties of East Central Indiana together is our common geography, shared rural heritage, mutual goals, and willingness to think outside the box.

Common Geography

Bounded by I-69 on the west and I-70 to the south, East Central Indiana is 60% of the US population within a day's drive. What that means is that we are nestled between the major metropolitan areas of Fort Wayne (IN), Indianapolis- Carmel- Anderson (IN), Cincinnati (OH), and Dayton (OH).

Three hours in any direction will get you into four of our neighboring states, and just a little farther opens up a variety of places for you to explore. That makes East Central Indiana a logical, affordable location for people to call home while still enjoying excursions to your favorite Midwestern destinations.

Shared Rural Heritage

This region started as small agricultural communities, and a lot of that heritage still exists to this day, with just over 73% of the land area in the region being cultivated. With over 4,200 farms in the region, East Central Indiana is responsible for 10% of the state of Indiana's agricultural sales.

Our region's rich cultural heritage and abundance of natural resources, and fertile agricultural land have East Central Indiana positioned to remain a leading contributor to the farming industry. Our shared interest in modernizing the industry and practices will only strengthen our role across the state.

Shared Challenges and Goals

Through multiple strategic planning efforts and collaborative conversations, the East Central Indiana region realized we faced the same problems. Every county in the region is seeing a consistent population decline over the last decade. While our region is home to 18 institutions of higher learning, local college and trade-school graduates are leaving the region for more lucrative locations to start their careers. The East Central Indiana region is bleeding talent and highly skilled workers. As we face these challenges, some residents and stakeholders have lost track of the valuable assets located across the region and are exhibiting a general apathy regarding our future.

Each county in our region has been working hard to chip away at these colossal problems, but it will take time and continued investment to turn the corner.



Innovation For the Future

Each county in our region has been working hard to chip away at our colossal problems, but it's going to take time and continued investment to turn the corner.



Our local and regional efforts to overcome our challenge have forced us to think and work outside of the box. Our region knows that we cannot make individual, small decisions if we want to make significant transformations. Not only can we think outside of the box, but we can also do the hard work to implement those ideas. The historic partnership between Ball State University and the Muncie Community School (MCS) yielded unprecedented legislation to grant Ball State oversight of MCS, which showed that members of our region cannot only identify concerns but can develop innovative solutions and forge a path towards meaningful change.

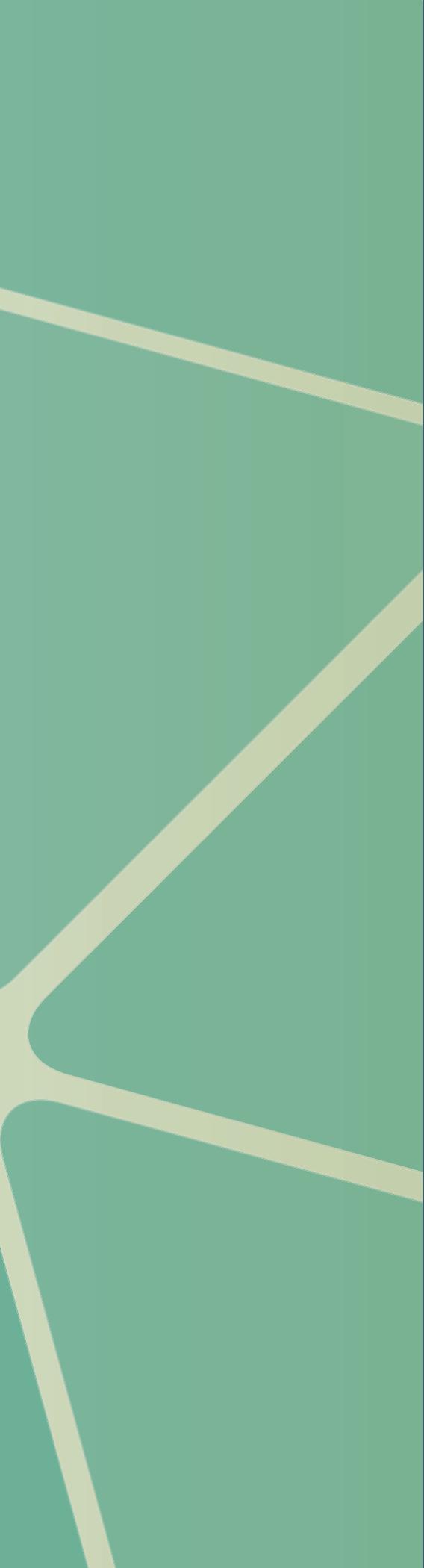
As a region, we are now shifting that creative thought and implementation process to tackle our challenges collaboratively. In 2018, the Indiana Office of Career Connections and Talent, now a part of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, launched the state's 21st Century Talent Region designation. To achieve the designation, stakeholders in regions across the state were challenged to work together to define the current talent landscape and develop regional goals and strategies for talent attraction, talent development, and talent connection.

The George and Frances Ball Foundation began convening leaders from our region to pursue the designation and invited our office to assist. Seven counties (Delaware, Grant, Jay, Henry, Randolph, Rush, and Wayne) elected to participate in the initial designation process, which was received in 2021, and two additional counties (Blackford and Fayette) are working now to fulfill the designation requirements to join the East Central Indiana regional plan officially.

We came face-to-face with the sobering statistics of our local communities, our counties, and our region as a whole through this process. We are projected to continue our population decline, and we significantly lag behind the state average in educational attainment and median household income. Our participating counties set aggressive goals and established the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative to provide the necessary infrastructure for achieving our goals to address these issues. Together, we have worked to build a coalition of change and a platform for collaboration and communication. The *Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan* is our next step on our unique path forward.

We hope you are **READI** to join us as we forge our path--together.





SECTION TWO

Current State of the Region



bike
munc



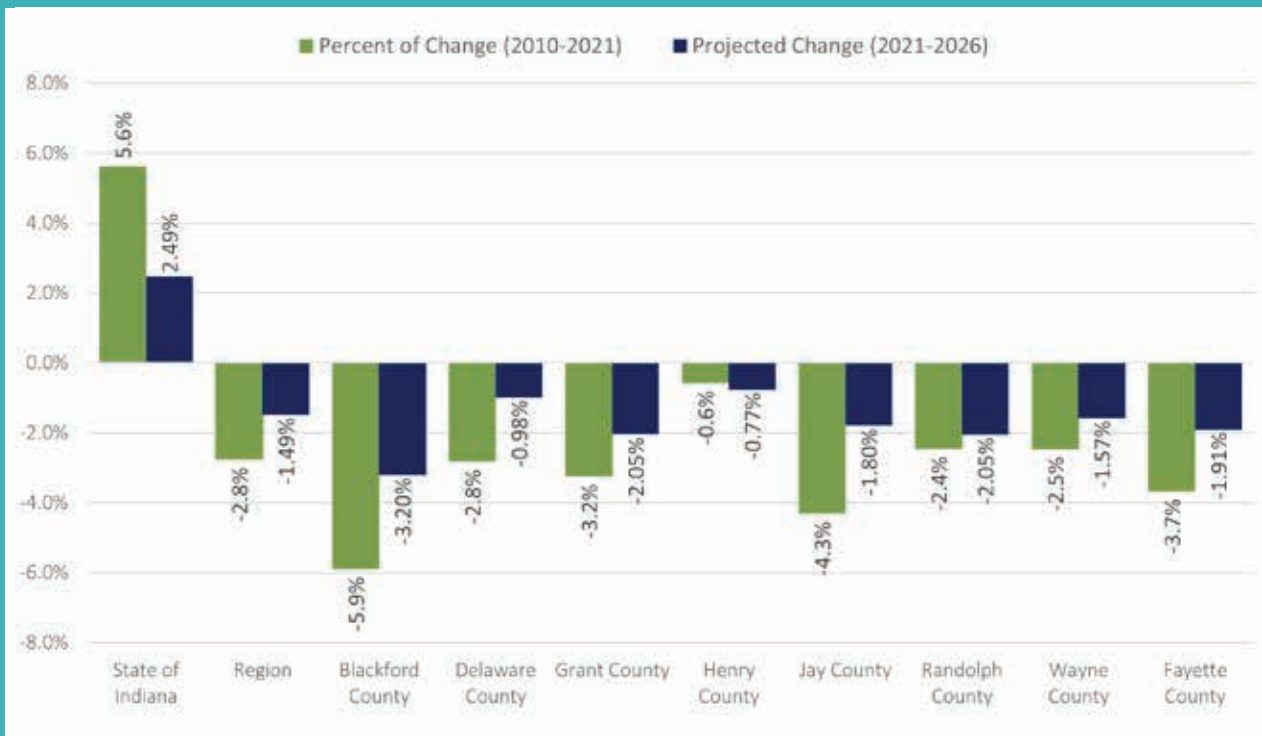
Current State of the Region

Through this data collection and analysis, the region can better understand what is happening today and what can be expected for the future.

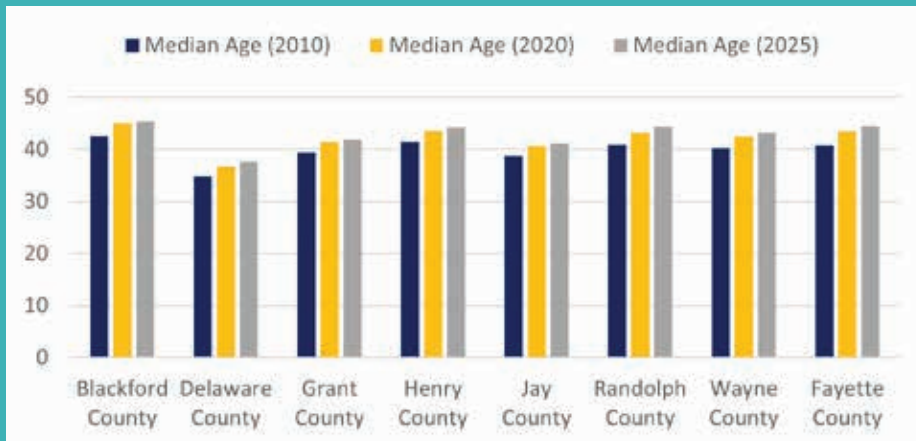


The following sections highlight key demographic and economic information for the East Central Indiana Region. Through this data collection and analysis, the region can better understand what is happening today and what can be expected for the future. How the ECI Region chooses to respond to opportunities and challenges outlined below will impact the future. The critical conclusion statements, highlighted within each section, set the stage for the goals, objectives, and projects outlined within the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan. Unless otherwise noted, all data points were gathered from ESRI Community Analyst.

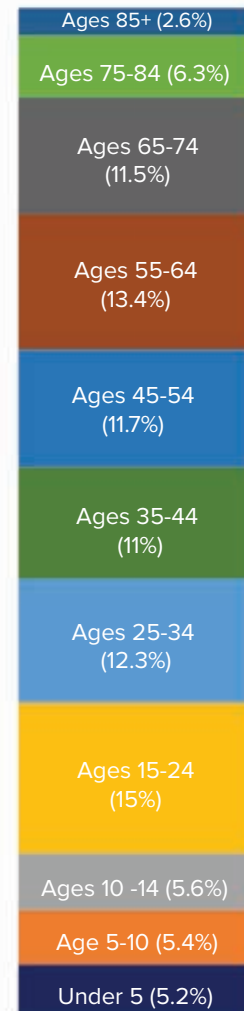
POPULATION CHANGE (%)



CHANGE IN MEDIAN AGE BY COUNTY



REGIONAL AGE STRUCTURE



RACE & ETHNICITY



90%
of our region's population
identifies as white

MEDIAN AGE

40.9
ECI's median age





Population: While the rate of decline is expected to slow, the ECI population is expected to continue decreasing.

In 2021, it is estimated that the eight-county region of Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, and Wayne counties is home to 379,808 residents meaning the region makes up about 5.5% of the state's total population of 6,847,004. Since 2010, Delaware County experienced the most significant loss in the population of any county in ECI, and Henry County experienced the least. ECI lost approximately 10,700 people from its population in the same timeframe. Estimates show ECI may lose about 1,000 more people in the next five years, and all the counties are expected to experience some population loss.

Implications: Population loss translates into fewer customers and workers for local businesses and a diminishing tax base for public services and infrastructure improvements.

Age Structure: ECI is at-risk for losing a critical component of it's workforce pipeline – emerging and young adults.

Age structure data reveals that the 15-24 age group makes up the highest percentage (15%) of the regional population in 2021. That is important because individuals in this age group are thinking about what to do after graduation and where they might want to live and/or work. Compared to 2010, this age group decreased by 1.5%, indicating that the region could be losing this demographic as they go to college or enter the workforce elsewhere.

Overall, the median age of the ECI region is 40.9, which is slightly older than the median age for the entire state at 38.8. The county with the lowest median age is Delaware (36.7), and the highest median age is in Blackford (45).

Implications: Out Migration of emerging adults exacerbates the challenges related to an aging population and reduces the number of skilled workers in the regional workforce.

Diversity: The residents of ECI are primarily White (89.6%) with very little change expected to occur in the next 5 years.

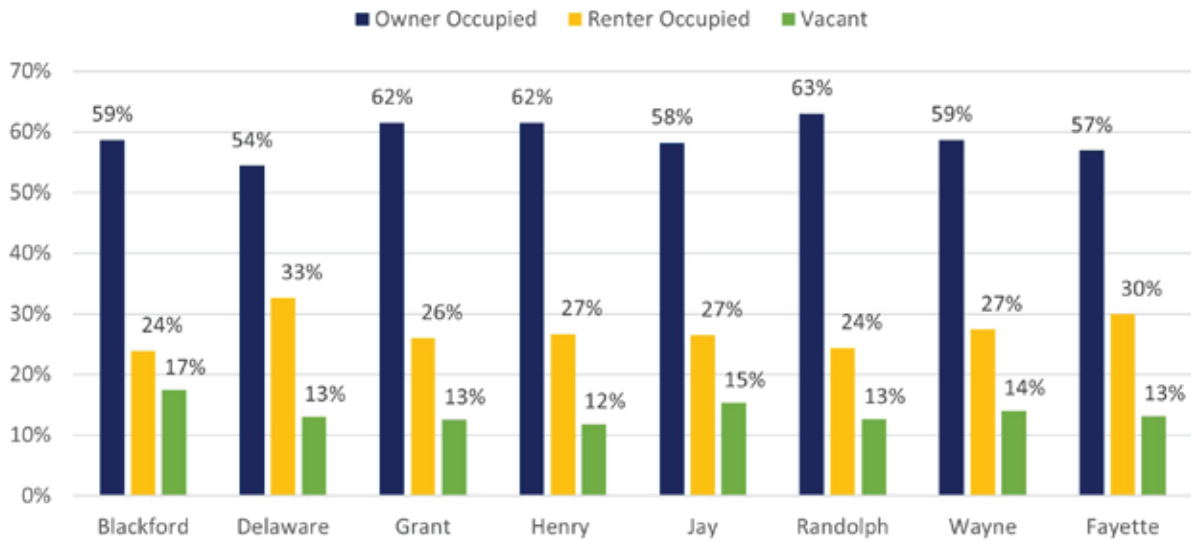
Racial diversity has remained the same since 2010 throughout the region and is projected to hold steady until at least 2026. The population percentage projected to grow the most is people of Hispanic origin, with an increase of 0.5%. Populations that are Black alone and two or more races will have gains of 0.2% and 0.4%, respectively, with all other races/ethnicities besides White alone staying within 0.1% of their current population percentage. The White alone population is projected to decrease around 1.1% by 2026.

ESRI's Diversity Index captures the racial and ethnic diversity of a geographic area in a single number, from 0 to 100.¹ The counties with the highest diversity indexes are Grant and Delaware, with current index scores of 32.2 and 27.1, respectively. Wayne County has the third-highest diversity index score of 26.5, while Blackford has a score of 11.0. Fayette County has the lowest score, with a 10.7.

Implications: Attracting new residents and businesses that are looking for a more inclusive environment may be difficult. ECI will need to make a concerted effort to provide a welcoming, inclusive environment for residents, employees, and employers to thrive.

¹ Source: Methodology Statement: 2019/2024 Esri Diversity Index.

HOUSING OCCUPANCY

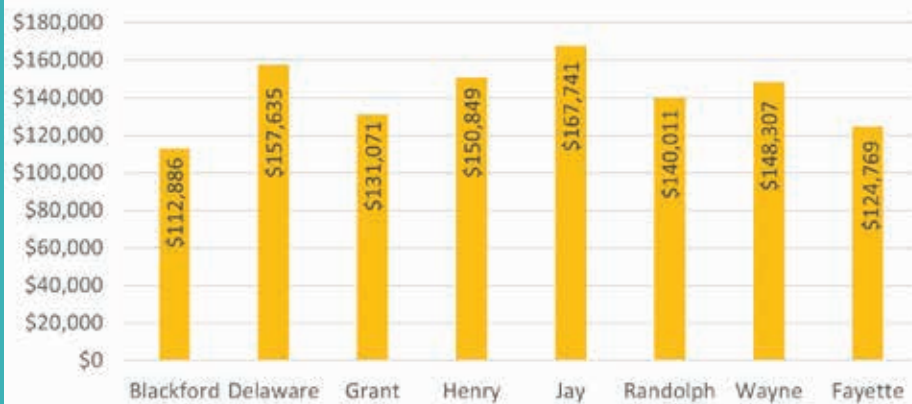


58.4%
Owner-occupied

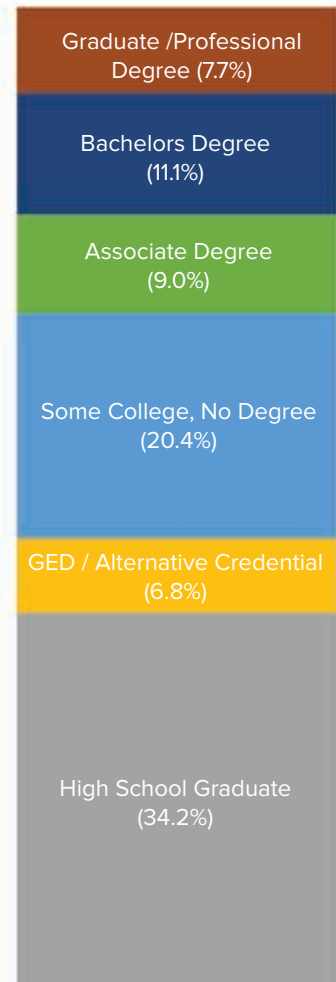
28.4%
Renter-occupied

13.2%
Vacant

MEDIAN HOME VALUE BY COUNTY



REGIONAL EDUCATION



HOME VALUE




\$106,434
median value of ECI's
housing stock

MOST EDUCATED



34%
of DELAWARE COUNTY'S
population has earned a
Graduate / Professional
Degree



Housing Occupancy and Home Value: The ECI Region has seen a shift in housing occupancy over the last 10 years with less owner-occupied and more renter-occupied housing units.

Across the ECI region, the total number of owner-occupied homes decreased from 61.3% in 2010 to 58.4% in 2021 and will fall to 58.0% by 2026. Vacant houses increased from 11.1% in 2010 to 13.2% in 2021 and are expected to increase another 1.4% by 2026. These occupancy rates are similar to those of the State of Indiana. If rates of vacant houses keep increasing, almost one-fifth of the housing stock in Blackford County will be vacant in 2026.

Implications: Increasing vacancy and rental rates often coincide with reduced expenditures for maintenance and upkeep. They also underscore the difficulties that rising housing costs impose on homebuyers.

Varied Homes Values: At the county-level, the ECI Region has the full spectrum of housing price points that directly impacts the conditions and quality of the regions housing stock.

The ECI median home value is projected to rise approximately \$25,200 in the next five years. That is more than the statewide median home value is expected to increase, at around just \$5,600. However, the median home value in Fayette County is about \$11,000 less than the ECI average and almost \$80,000 less than the statewide average value of homes. The median home value in Delaware County is expected to increase by approximately \$71,000 by 2026, which suggests that more high-end housing is being built there than in the other counties.

In 2010, the ECI region's urban/rural housing makeup was a bit less than 70/30 and similar to the rest of the state. Delaware County is slightly more urban than the average ECI county, at almost 80/20, and Randolph County is the least urban, at around 40/60.

Implications: Communities with low median home values are likely facing challenges related to inadequate living conditions and the need for stricter code enforcement. On the other hand, communities with high median home values may struggle to provide attainable housing that aligns with the types of employment and wages offered nearby. As we move forward, the region will need to take a closer look at the desired housing types that may be lacking, including market-rate apartments.

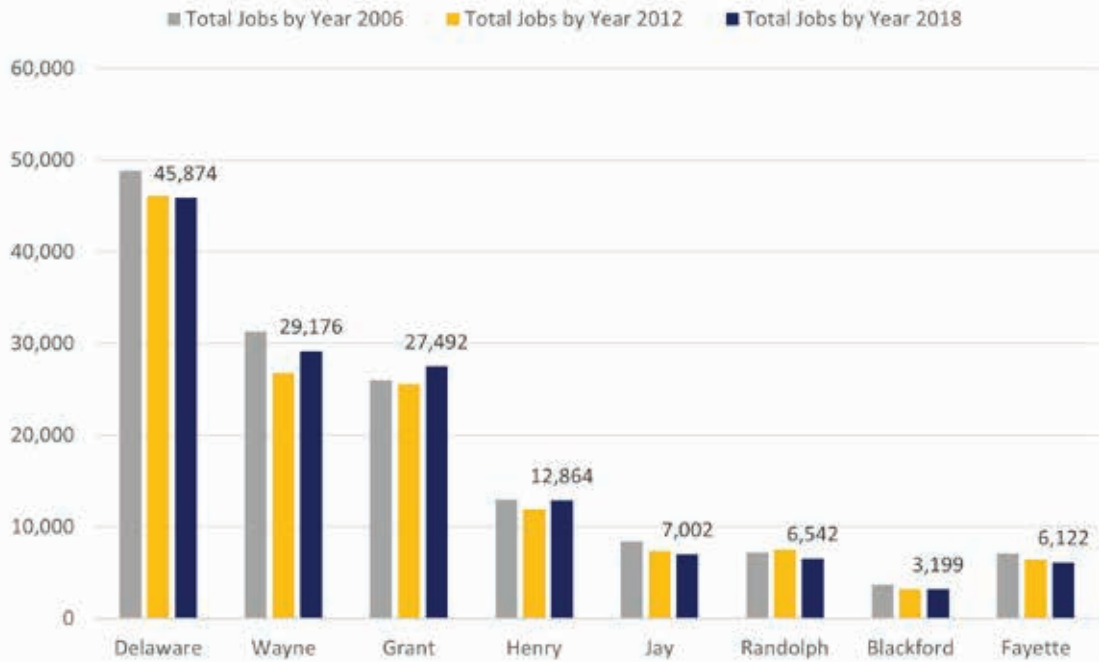
Educational Attainment: ECI has a lower percentage (27.8%) of residents that have earned an associate degree or higher compared to the state at 36%.

At first glance, it appears that education attainment is generally high, with almost 90% of the ECI population 25 and over having a high school diploma/GED or higher. Still, when looking at residents earning an Associate Degree or higher, the attainment level is much lower at 28%.

About 41% of the region's population have earned a high school diploma, GED, or similar credential. Furthermore, just over 20% of residents went to college but did not earn a degree. Approximately 1 in 10 residents 25 and older do not have a high school diploma or similar credentials, which reflects statewide averages. Delaware County has the most educational disparity in the region, likely because of the presence of Ball State University.

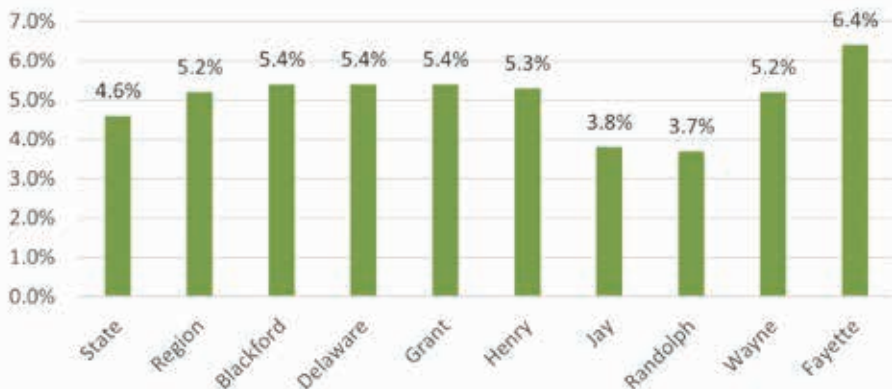
Implications: With lower post-secondary education attainment, ECI is likely struggling to find qualified workers to fill higher-paying management positions. That also directly impacts the region's ability to attract new businesses and industries that require an educated workforce.

AVAILABLE JOBS



138,271 TOTAL JOBS

UNEMPLOYMENT



SELF-EMPLOYED



17.3%
of our region's workers are self-employed

16.9%
of Indiana's workers are self-employed

GDP


\$12,809,143,000

total gross domestic production

MANUFACTURING

has the highest GDP in East Central Indiana





Workforce: While the region's employment rate is high, the number of people in the workforce has been and will continue to decrease.

As of the 2021 U.S. Census, 94.8% of ECI residents aged 16 and over are employed, which is comparable to the 95.4% of Hoosiers of the same age who are employed. With the highest rate of all the counties in ECI, 96.3% of Randolph County residents over the age of 16 are currently employed, although the other counties are close to that rate.

Currently, COVID-related job losses are still occurring in ECI just as they are statewide and nationwide. 22,000 fewer people were employed in ECI in May 2021 than in February 2020.²

Employment in ECI dropped from approximately 162,000 people in 2015 to about 157,000 currently and is projected to drop around another 10,000 in the next year.³

Implications: Several factors can play into why a region's workforce is shrinking. One factor could be the region's demographic makeup. An aging population and net migration of emerging adults have a direct impact on the workforce. As older workers exit the workforce to retire, there is a lack of younger workers to take their place. Another factor could be the misalignment of educational attainment and the jobs available to workers and/or the unwillingness of individuals to participate in available employment opportunities.

Production: As of 2017, total GDP in the East Central Indiana was \$12,809,143,000 reflecting a 3.3% increase.

Manufacturing has the highest GDP, followed by health care/social assistance, educational services, real estate/rental/leasing, and the retail trade. All other sectors generate \$580 GDP or less.⁴ While manufacturing has the highest GDP of all the ECI industries, it is losing its competitiveness relative to manufacturing throughout the state.

From 2009 to 2019, the industry sectors that saw the highest amounts of growth were utilities, mining/quarrying/oil & gas extraction, and agriculture/forestry/fishing/hunting. The sectors with the highest amounts of decline were arts/entertainment/recreation, professional/scientific/technical services, the retail trade, and health care. The industry sectors in the ECI that were the least competitive relative to their same numbers at the state level were manufacturing, healthcare, the retail trade, accommodation/food services, and professional/scientific/technical services.⁵

Implications: The growing sectors of the regional economy are not high-wage. At the same time, the decline in professional and health care occupations is coupled with difficulties in securing an educated workforce. It is alarming that the largest sector contributing to Regional GDP – manufacturing – is rated as less competitive than the State.

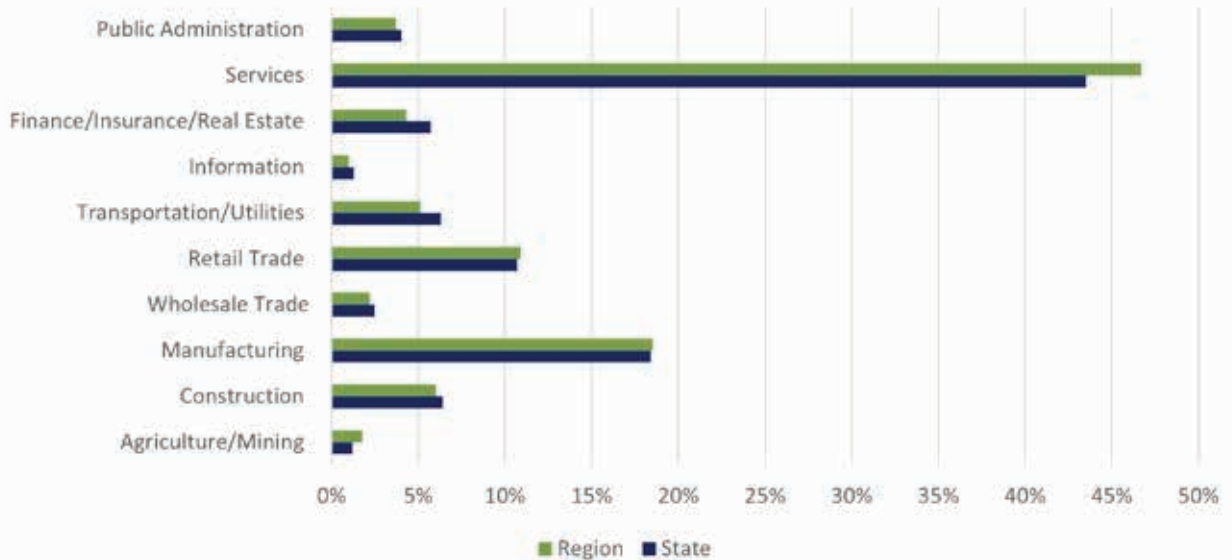
2 Source: Brookings Analysis of LAUS data.

3 Source: [2021 Indiana Economic Outlook](#).

4 Source: [East Central Indiana Demographics Profile](#).

5 Source: [U.S. Census County Business Patterns](#).

INDUSTRY BREAKDOWN

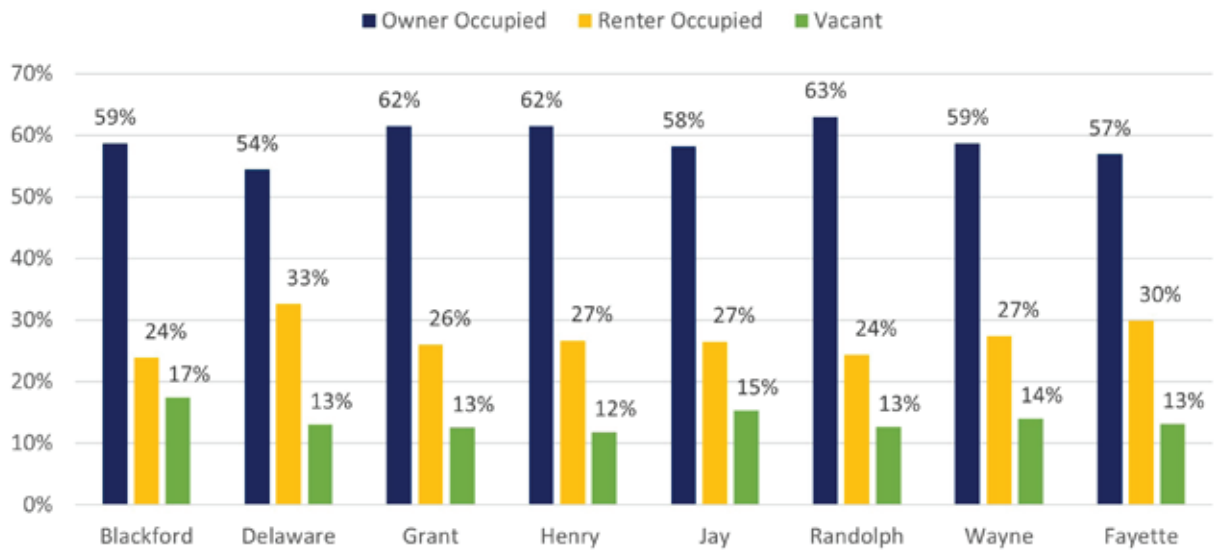


46.7%
Service Industry

18.5%
Manufacturing

10.9%
Retail Trade

HOUSING OCCUPANCY



BROADBAND

6



total providers in the more URBAN areas of East Central Indiana



2



total providers in the more RURAL areas of East Central Indiana



Industries and Income: ECI has three primary industries including services, manufacturing, and retail trade with a median household income that is notably less than the average of the state.

Almost half of ECI residents are employed in the service industry; nearly 1 in 20 in manufacturing and just over 1 in 10 in retail trade. All other sectors employ 6.0% of the population or less each. Notably, approximately one-third of Randolph County residents are employed in the service industry, substantially lower than ECI's proportion of service workers. But around 6% of residents are employed in the agriculture/mining sector, which is much higher than the same proportion of those workers at the state level.

The median household income for ECI residents is currently \$47,246 and is projected to increase to \$51,142 by 2026. Per capita income is only projected to rise by approximately \$3,000 in the same amount of time. All the ECI counties have income levels very close to the ECI average, while the median Hoosier household earns \$77,458 a year, which is projected to rise to \$86,942 in the next five years. A key consideration when considering income is the prevalence of Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households. These individuals make more than the federal poverty level but not enough to pay for the actual cost of living. In situations like this, they are not eligible for support services because they make a certain amount of money.

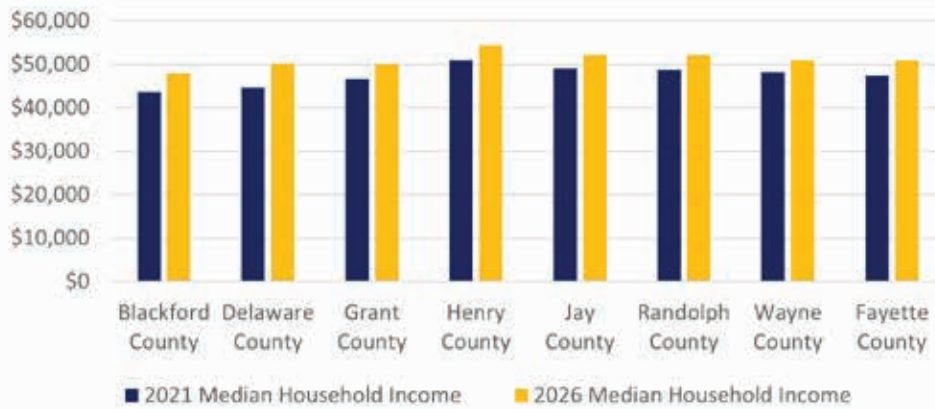
Implications: In general, the three primary industries are blue-collar, lower-skilled jobs that directly impact household income. Lower household income affects the type of home a family can afford, the nutrition and medical care of individuals, and the level of education they choose to attain. Frequently, low household income becomes a multi-generational challenge. ECI needs to provide opportunities for children and adults to help break the cycle.

Broadband Access and Adoption: Internet speeds and reliable technology are lacking, especially in predominately rural areas of the region.

According to the Federal Communications Corporation, broadband providers are widely available in larger cities and towns within the region, with many municipalities have six or more broadband services providers. However, rural areas fare differently, with many having no more than two providers. Furthermore, there is little consistency in rural areas with availability; rural areas in Henry County, for instance, have fewer choices than rural areas in Blackford County.

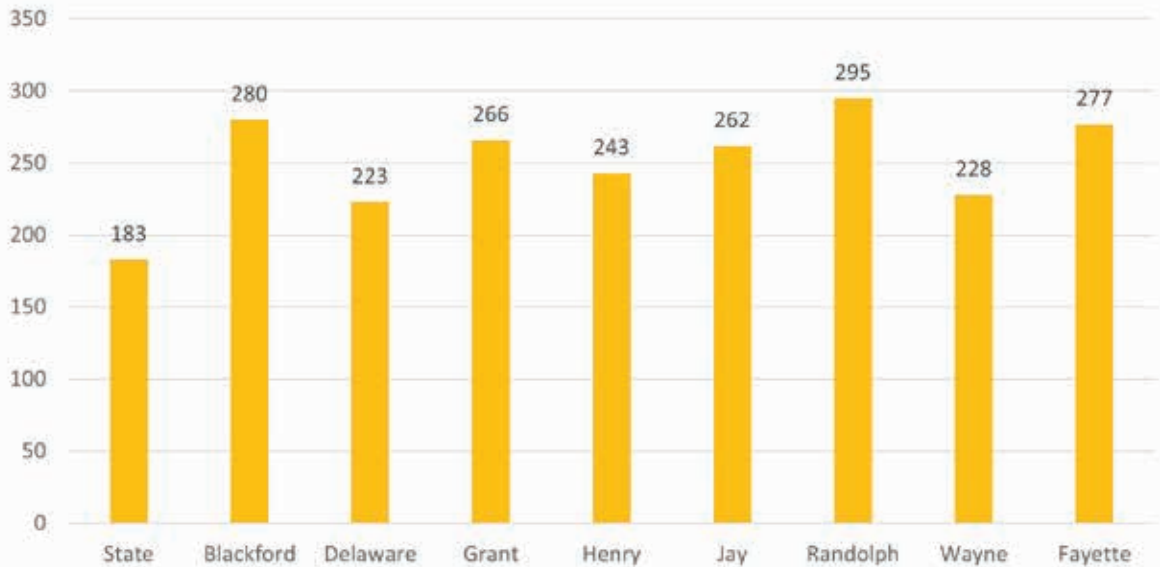
Implications: With telecommunications becoming increasingly crucial in site decisions, the lack of broadband options puts rural areas in the region at a competitive disadvantage for residents and jobs.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

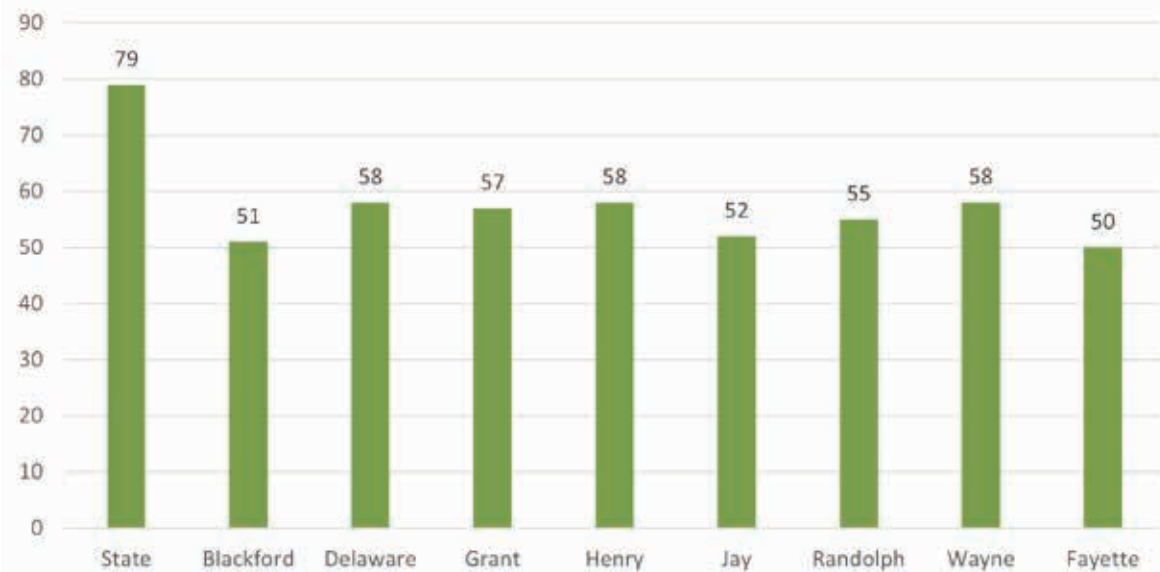


\$ \$47,246
ECI's median household income

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY INDEX



WEALTH INDEX



Entrepreneurialism: The number of self-employed ECI residents is rising much like they are across the state and nation.⁶

The share of self-employed Indiana residents was 16.92% in 2020, a sizable increase from the 11.8% of self-employed Hoosiers in 2019. This increase tracks with a similar rise in self-employed workers in the United States, which rose from 12.4% in 2019 to 16.93% in 2020.

The respective percentages of self-employed workers in the ECI region range from 15% to 19.64% and are similar to observed state and national percentages. All individual counties experienced growth, ranging from 0.98% (Randolph County) to 5.63% (Delaware County). Almost one-fifth of Wayne County residents were self-employed in 2020. That most likely reflects the continued increase of workers who participate in the “gig” economy. The gig economy refers to a labor market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work instead of permanent jobs. Some estimates predict that around 35% of the United States workforce are self-employed. The noted uptick from 2019 to 2020 in self-employed workers follows the national trend of a higher percentage of individuals turning to the gig economy during the COVID-19 pandemic where many full-time employees joined the gig economy out of necessity.⁷

Implications: An increase in self-employed residents can be an opportunity for ECI. The development of local entrepreneurship can lead to a diversified economic structure that can protect the local economy from over-dependence on one firm, increase trade within the local economy, and improve quality of life. The flipside to this is self-employed individuals have the freedom to take and do their business from wherever they choose. ECI needs to offer a high quality of life and great places to live to retain these self-employed individuals.

Personal Prosperity: While homes in the ECI region are affordable, the average resident does not have a great deal of material wealth or resources.

ESRI's housing affordability index (HAI) measures the financial ability of a typical household to purchase an existing home in an area. An HAI of 100 represents an area that on average has sufficient household income to qualify for a loan on a home valued at the median home price.⁸ The ECI region currently has an HAI of 248, and the average household spends 9.5% of their income on their mortgage; however, the region only has a Wealth Index score of 54. ESRI's Wealth Index is compiled from several indicators of affluence that include average household income and average net worth. ESRI captures both income and the accumulation of substantial wealth, or the abundance of possessions and resources, in identifying the wealthiest areas in the country. The index represents the wealth of an area relative to the national level. Values exceeding 100 represent above-average wealth.⁹

Statewide, Indiana has an HAI score of 183, significantly less than the affordability of dwellings in ECI. Also, ECI residents spend less of their income on their mortgage than the average Indiana resident: statewide, residents spend 12.8% of their income on their mortgage while ECI residents spend 9.5%. ECI has a lower Wealth Index score than residents of the state in general: ECI's score is 56 while Indiana scores 79. Fayette County has the lowest Wealth Index score, at 50, and Blackford County has the second-lowest, at 51. Delaware and Wayne counties have the highest score, at 58.


6 Source: <https://youreconomy.org/>

7 Source: Forbes: How COVID-19 Has Transformed The Gig Economy.

8 Source: Housing Affordability Index in the United States.

9 Source: Essential Vocabulary.





Implications: While affordable housing and low cost of living are sometimes viewed as assets to a community, some tradeoffs come into play. While residents are spending less on their mortgages, they are likely earning less due to limited economic opportunities. The primary difference between the lower cost of living and higher cost of living areas is the quality of housing and amenities offered within the neighborhoods. Communities with a lower cost of living probably have less tax revenue to help fund public services and infrastructure improvements.

Current property tax rates: Taxes are variable throughout the ECI region.

East Central Indiana has a total real property assessed value (2020 payable 2021) of \$20.1M, with a net assessed value of \$12.9M.¹⁰ That represents about 4.3% of the State's complete assessed valuation, while the region has about 5.5% of the State's population. An alternative way of looking at this is that the ECI region has a per-capita assessed valuation of \$53,024, compared to the State figure of \$67,622. Raising tax revenue in East Central Indiana requires a higher property tax rate to yield the exact revenue figure as other areas in the State.

Implications: East Central Indiana is at a disadvantage relative to the rest of the State in raising public services and infrastructure revenue. This disadvantage is particularly profound for those taxing districts that have a greater reliance on property taxes, such as school districts.

Alternative Energy: ECI is home to both wind and solar installations.

There are several clusters of wind farms throughout the region. These wind farms include Headwaters, Bluff Point, and Union City. The majority of wind farms are located in Jay and Randolph counties. Henry County has one wind turbine at the Shenandoah School Corporation.¹¹ Approximately 2,100 solar energy systems are producing around 87,000 Kilowatts in the state of Indiana. There are 38 solar installations around the ECI region.¹² Fayette is the only county with no solar installations. The region is fortunate to have several power transmission lines with the capacity to allow renewable energy ready access to the power grid.

Implications: Utilizing alternative sources of energy could set the ECI region apart. Wind and solar energy projects provide many economic benefits to neighboring communities: jobs, a new source of revenue for farmers and ranchers in the form of land lease payments, and an increased local tax base. If desirable, the region can leverage its rural landscape and acres of farmland to expand this industry. That also offers companies concerned about their environmental footprint the opportunity to utilize green energy in their operations.

¹⁰ Source: Indiana Gateway: Report Builder: Certification of New Assessed Values by District Report.

¹¹ Source: ESRI.

¹² Source: <https://www.sirensolar.org/solar-map/>





Funding Sources

With a reliance on local tax funding, the local community and county budgets remains constricted and is at risk for future challenges based on economic pressures and declining population trends.



With a reliance on local tax funding, the local community and county budgets remain constricted and risk future challenges based on economic pressures and declining population trends. While specific facilities and programs can keep themselves afloat, long-term capital improvements and maintenance expenses are challenging to plan for and incorporate into operational budgets. That is especially true for pilot projects and programs that may test ideas and partnerships.

To combat budget restrictions, the leaders of East Central Indiana are continually seeking traditional and alternative funding and implementation tools. The list below highlights the type of federal, state, local, and private funding opportunities that have been, will be, and could be used to close the funding gaps outlined with Section 8 of this document.

State and Federal Funding and Technical Resources

East Central Indiana has access to various federal and state resources to assist in developing the quality of place and quality of life improvements. In some specific instances, any particular county or community's rural nature and demographic status is a competitive advantage over other potential applications.

State and Federal Tax Credits

Many state and federal tax credit programs are administered by IEDC, including Community Revitalization Enhancement District Tax Credit; Economic Development for a Growing Economy (EDGE) - Payroll Tax Credit; Hoosier Business Investment Tax Credit (HBI); Industrial Development Grant Fund; Industrial Recovery Tax Credit; and Venture Capital Investment Tax Credit (VCI).

Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA)

IHCDA assists residents through providing housing opportunities, promoting self-sufficiency, and strengthening the community through programs such as the Business Expansion and Entrepreneurship Development (BEED) Program, Community Enhancement and Economic Development (CEED) Loan Program, and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits.



Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA)

OCRA works with local, state, and national partners to provide resources and technical assistance to aid communities in shaping and achieving their vision for community and economic development. They award grants to fund projects including, but not limited to, public gathering places, water/sewer infrastructure, restoration of historic structures, community facilities, broadband infrastructure, and revitalizing commercial districts. OCRA focuses on infrastructure, quality of place, economic development, and capacity building (including the Stellar Communities Program and HELP). Some of the specific programs the East Central Indiana Region targets include:

- Planning Grants
- Public Facilities Program (PFP)
- Stormwater Improvement Program (SIP)
- Wastewater and Drinking Water Program
- Blight Clearance Program (BCP 2.0)
- Next Level Connections
- HELP

Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH)

The Indiana State Department of Health's mission is to promote, protect, and improve the health and safety of all Hoosiers. The organization oversees multiple divisions within the state, covering a wide range of healthcare needs such as drug overdose prevention and long-term care/nursing homes. They also provide grant opportunities for communities within the state.

Indiana Office of Tourism Development (IOTD)

This organization offers matching grants to cities, towns, counties, and non-profit groups in Indiana for marketing and destination development projects.

Indiana Arts Commission (IAC)

This state program works to positively impact the cultural, economic, and educational climate of Indiana by providing opportunities to enhance the artistic resources of Indiana communities. The organization offers multiple supporting programs and grants to support the growth of arts in local settings. It provides resources for regional or local organizations trying to influence and culture of arts in their community.

Residential Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (RITC) - Investment Tax Credit Programs

An adjusted gross income tax credit is available for the rehabilitation of historic residential properties. The qualified expenditures for the preservation or restoration of a historic property must exceed \$10,000. The tax credit is equal to 20 percent of the qualified expenditures that the taxpayer makes.



Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit (RITC) - Investment Tax Credit Programs

The federal government offers a Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit (RITC) equaling 20% of rehabilitation costs for qualified work at income-producing properties that are certified historic buildings. Eligible properties include commercial buildings, factories, or even old houses, but they must be income-producing, such as rental properties. A structure must have been determined to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for participation in the program. The cost of repairs should be equal to or greater than the value of the building.

Redevelopment Tax Credits (RTC)

The Redevelopment Tax Credit (RTC) provides an incentive for investment to redevelop vacant land, buildings, and brownfields. Established by Indiana Code § 6-3.1-34, this credit provides companies and developers an assignable income tax credit for investing in the redevelopment of communities, improving the quality of place, and building capacity at the local level.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

LWCF federal grants can be used to protect important natural areas, acquire land for outdoor recreation and develop or renovate public outdoor recreation facilities such as campgrounds, picnic areas, sports/playfields, swimming facilities, boating facilities, fishing facilities, trails, natural areas, and passive parks. It provides grants for 50% of the cost of acquisition and/or development. To be eligible, the group must be a legally established park board and have a current 5-year park and recreation master plan on file in the Division of Outdoor Recreation. The minimum grant request is \$50,000, and the maximum request is \$250,000 with a local match requirement.

Indiana Trails Program (ITP)


The matching assistance program provides funding for the acquisition and/or development of multi-use recreational trail projects. The minimum funding available is \$10,000, the maximum funding available is \$200,000, and a 20% match is required. Both motorized and non-motorized projects may qualify for assistance. This program was formally recognized as the “Recreational Trails Program” but was changed to reflect federal to state funding in 2021.


Local Public Agency (LPA) Program

INDOT shares gas tax revenue from the state Motor Vehicle Highway Fund and Local Road and Street Fund with LPAs towards capital improvement needs. Communities must have a local employee in charge of ERC training, and projects must be ADA compliant, provide matching funds and meet project eligibility.

Community Crossings Matching Grant Fund Program

In 2016 the Community Crossing Matching Grant Fund program provided a 1-1 match for eligible projects up to \$1 million. In the second year (2017), INDOT funded 75% of communities under 10,000. Eligible projects included bridge and road preservation projects and ADA sidewalk projects that intersect with road projects, roundabouts, and road reconstructions. Trails and enhancement-type projects are not eligible, and only





construction costs are eligible. This program is expected to change in the upcoming years, and the community should reference INDOT's website for more information.

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)

The main goal of the CMAQ Program is to fund surface transportation improvement projects to reduce overall congestion and improve air quality. These funds are released in collaboration between INDOT and local Indiana MPOs. They can be used for a variety of projects, including, but not limited to, acquiring alternative fuel vehicles for public transit applications, purchasing alternative fuels, and establishing publicly-owned alternative fueling stations and other needed infrastructure.

Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)

The HSIP's goal is to significantly reduce traffic fatalities and severe injuries on all public roads by implementing infrastructure-related highway safety improvements. There are several improvements this program helps fund, such as improving the visibility of curves through signs and markers, installing emergency power battery backups on traffic signals, installing raised medians, upgrading guardrails to meet current standards, and more.

Transportation Alternatives Funding

The Transportation Alternatives (TA) program will receive approximately \$780 million to carry out all TA projects, including SRTS and RTP projects across the country, representing about a 35% reduction from the current \$1.2 billion spent on these programs. Under the bill, states will sub-allocate 50% of their TA funds to Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) and local communities to run a grant program to distribute funds for projects.

Indiana Landmark Foundation

Indiana Landmarks operates grant and loan programs available only to local nonprofit preservation organizations to spark community revitalization and bolster preservation in towns throughout the state. Nonprofit preservation organizations can apply for grants from Indiana Landmarks for various projects, including architectural and engineering analyses, adaptive use feasibility studies, appraisals, and legal assistance to defend or compel conformance with a local preservation ordinance.

Local Public Funding and Technical Resources

East Central Indiana has many local public funding opportunities that will continue to be utilized to support projects that will benefit the region's vitality and enhance the quality of place and quality of life. While some of the outlined opportunities do not exist in every county or within each municipality, efforts will be made to assist all areas of the region in identifying, finalizing, and securing local funds during implementation.

Bonds

A bond is a government debt issued to raise money for needed capital improvements. Bonds are backed by the credit and taxing power of the issuing jurisdiction. Its retirement is paid for by property tax and other predictable forms of local income.



Capital Improvement Planning

A Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a system of documenting the capital investments that a community plans to make in the short-term, often five years. A CIP identifies projects, timelines, estimated costs, and funding sources linked to a community's budgeting process. It is a means of planning for capital improvements and ensuring the implementation of specific projects by closely connecting them to the budgeting process. A Town's CIP would include funding needed for any capital improvement the Town is planning to invest, regardless of the department responsible for operating and maintaining a given investment.

Developer Funded Infrastructure

Similar to impact fees, communities can also fund infrastructure improvements by having the developer cover those costs directly. These can include roadway improvements, stormwater infrastructure, and other related utilities that need to be expanded due to development. However, the modification must be directly related to and proportionate to the new development's impact.

Impact Fees

An impact fee is a charge on new development to pay for infrastructure and related services necessitated by and benefit the new development. The fee is based on the type of development assessed for the increase in the burden on infrastructure. Fees contribute to a non-reverting fund and can be used for infrastructure improvements and amenities, including park and recreation and multi-modal projects.

Renewable Energy Payments

Renewable Energy Payments (REP) are the mechanisms or instruments at the heart of the specific state and local renewable energy policies. REPs are incentives for homeowners, farmers, businesses, etc., to become renewable energy producers or increase their renewable energy production.

Food and Beverage Tax

Food and beverage tax applies to any transactions where food or beverages are furnished, prepared, or served by a retail merchant for consumption at a location or on equipment provided by a retail merchant in counties/ municipalities that have enacted this tax. Food and beverage funds support economic growth initiatives within the jurisdictions that have adopted the tax.

Economic Development Income Tax (EDIT)

Economic development income tax (EDIT) is an income tax paid by individuals. If the individual lives in a municipality that collects EDIT, then that municipality pays the tax. If the individual lives outside of municipal boundaries, then the tax is paid to the county. When first enacted, EDIT revenue could only be used on projects with an economic development component. However, the state has broadened the uses for EDIT revenue in previous years. Proceeds are used to fund the EDC along with other economic development projects.



American Rescue Plan Funds

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) is a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill issued as a part of the COVID-19 stimulus package in 2021. The Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund within the ARP provides \$350 billion for states, municipalities, counties, tribes, and territories, including \$130 billion for local governments split evenly between municipalities and counties.

Infrastructure Revolving Loan Fund

This revolving loan fund can be used to provide low interest loans for infrastructure projects that facilitate economic development.

Residential Tax Increment Financing

Effective July 2019, new legislation was signed by Governor Holcomb to allow TIF for residential property (SEA 566). This legislation is targeted at rural communities to fund infrastructure for single-family housing growth. Residential TIFs must be executed through a Redevelopment Commission.

Tax Abatement

Tax abatement is a phase-in of property taxes and is intended to encourage development in areas that would not otherwise develop. Tax abatement is one of the tools widely used by municipal governments to attract new businesses to the community. It encourages investment in new equipment or facilities to improve the company while stabilizing the community's economy. Communities may develop procedures for abatement application and policies regarding the amount and length of the abatement. Methods may also be developed to ensure compliance with the terms in the statement of benefits.

Tax Increment Financing

Many communities use a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to fund local infrastructure improvement projects. Tax rates for developments within the district are locked at a set rate. As property values rise within the district, any additional tax revenue generated is used to fund improvement projects.

Local Private and Philanthropic Funding

The numerous regional employers, local businesses, and higher education institutions with roots in East Central Indiana provide a diverse offering of potential private funding sources. The specific private and philanthropic partners within the region are numerous. Through project development and implementation, outreach efforts and relationship development will ensure that the private and charitable communities become integral partners in all proposed efforts.


Public/ Private Partnerships

Communities are already using public/private partnerships to plan and implement new projects and programs across the region. Currently, partnerships include local government agencies as well as for-profit businesses and non-profit community organizations.

Revenue Sharing

A revenue-sharing financial model is a specific type of public/private partnership. In these instances, a local





entity would partner with a company to offer a service or amenity. While the local agency may be asked to invest a nominal amount of capital initially, the bulk of the operating and maintenance expenses become the responsibility of the private partner. This agreement limits the expenses of the local agent and provides a needed service or amenity to the community. In exchange for their initial investment, the local agent would receive a share of the revenue earned by the business, amenity, or program.

Donations

Donations of time, resources, and in-kind services can be given to any jurisdiction or organization at any time. These resources can help with the development and care of facilities, programs, and amenities and often bridge the gap between available capacity and necessary resources. As an implementation resource, donations should not be relied on as a primary source since donations can ebb and flow depending on availability and interest.

Foundations and Institutions

A foundation is an independent, tax-exempt, non-profit organization that champions a specific community or topic area. Since a foundation is a charitable organization (501c3), it is structured to easily accept monetary donations from individuals, organizations, or corporations. Through partnerships with local municipalities, larger financial resources can often be raised with annual fundraising campaigns, grants, major gifts, capital campaigns, planned giving, and endowment funds. The foundation can also lead community efforts such as public engagement, volunteerism, and advocacy in some instances.

Sponsorships

Sponsorships are simply an investment of cash or in-kind resources in return for access to visibility and recognition at a facility or event. Sponsorships can be implemented on a per event basis as part of a yearly recognition program. Within a local municipality, sponsorships can occur in various ways. They could result in resources being exchanged for banners on park grounds, naming rights at specific facilities, or signage at local community events. At any level, sponsorships should be used to leverage the relationships between vendors, organizations, and businesses within the community.





Previous Planning Efforts

The intention of this plan is to be additive to all previous work done at a regional and local level.



The East Central Indiana region has been geographically defined in various ways. Still, the cities, towns, and counties involved have been working independently to address similar social and economic challenges for over a decade regardless of the makeup. While ongoing efforts were underway, at a local level, municipal leaders and regional anchor institutions realized that there was opportunity and strength in working together across geographic boundaries. Out of that realization came a regional partnership that fostered innovative ideas and implemented strategic and game-changing initiatives.

The *Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan* builds directly on previous planning efforts. This plan intends to be additive to all previous work done at a regional and local level. At the onset of this regional planning process, over 40 municipal strategic plans were reviewed and assessed for relevant information, insights into the region, and the identification of projects and programs that could support the plan's goals. In addition to visionary strategic plans, individual, project-specific studies were reviewed to determine the applicability of specific programmatic and capital improvement efforts. When possible, the proposed projects outlined in Section 8 have been referenced back to those previous planning efforts that further identify the local and regional needs and anticipated local and regional benefits.

Regional Plans Reviewed:

- East Central Indiana Regional Development Plan (2015)
- Advance ECI Regional Development Plan (2018)
- Transform East Central Indiana – Regional Stellar Application (2018)
- East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative Designation Packet (2020)
- Forge Your Path Meeting Materials (2019/2020)
- Ongoing East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative Correspondence (2021)

Blackford County

- Blackford County Comprehensive Plan (2011)
- Blackford County Hotel Market Demand and Financial Feasibility Study- Draft (2020)
- Blackford County Broadband Assessment (2020)
- Blackford County Focus Forward (2016)

Delaware County

- Innovate Delaware County Broadband Infrastructure Master Plan (in progress)
- Muncie Action Plans 1-3
- Vision 2021 Economic Development Plan
- Muncie-Delaware Comprehensive Plan (2000)
- Delaware Muncie Comprehensive Plan (2021-in progress)
- Muncie Strategic Investment Plan (2021-in progress)
- City of Muncie 2021-2025 Parks & Recreation Master Plan
- Delaware-Muncie Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2019)
- Delaware-Muncie Long-Range Transportation Plan for 2018-2045 (2018)
- Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for East Central Indiana, 2018-2022 (2018)
- Ball State University Campus Master Plan 2040
- 2018-2045 Delaware-Muncie Transportation Plan (2018)

Fayette County

- Fayette County Early Childhood Comprehensive Strategic Plan, Prenatal through age 3 (2021)
- Fayette County Health and Education Data (2021)
- Strategic Planning Analysis Economic and Residential Outlook (2021)
- Fayette County Broadband Feasibility Study (2021)

Grant County

- Central Marion Revitalization Plan (2014)
- Grant County Resource Guide
- Grant County Comprehensive Plan (1997)
- Marion 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update
- City of Marion Downtown Revitalization Plan (2019)
- Sweetser Economic Development Plan (2014)
- Forging Ahead Faithfully, The Strategic Plan for Taylor University's Future
- Grant County Target Industry Analysis
- Grant County Stellar
- Business Climate Survey (2020 and 2021)

Henry County

- New Castle Comprehensive Plan
- New Castle Main Street 2021
- Henry County Comprehensive Plan
- Safe and Welcome- Henry County, Knightstown and New Castle Stellar Communities Plan

Jay County

- Jay! Region Stellar Communities Plan
- Jay County Economic Development Plan

Randolph County

- Randolph County Comprehensive Plan

Wayne County

- Richmond Comprehensive Plan
- Richmond Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- Wayne County Indiana Residential Strategy Analysis
- Hagerstown Indiana Comprehensive Plan
- Cambridge Comprehensive Plan
- EDC of Wayne County Annual Report
- 2019 Reid Health Community Health Needs Assessment
- Wayne County Economic Development Strategic Plan



Planning at the Local Level

Within the region, there is a long history of strategic thinking. The region's local communities have been planning for the future of their individual jurisdictions by implementing projects and programs consistently over the last ten years. While each planning effort is unique to the local community, there are four primary commonalities found across the various planning efforts.

1. There is a strong desire to leverage historic and existing economic strengths.

Plans identified this as an area of focus in order to create the next wave of job creation.

2. There is an interest in building stronger relationships with local partners.

Some plans showed a particular interest in partnering with educational institutions, to cultivate the next generation of entrepreneurs and workers.

3. People want to see reinvestment in existing built and natural assets.

Many plans either spoke to or were directly focused on the importance of existing downtowns as centers for commerce and culture. Others spoke of the need to focus on bringing back natural and recreational resources like the region's trails, ponds, and rivers.

4. People want to live in more attractive communities with a higher level of amenities.

Plans spoke to a desire for more beautiful places with accessible and connected civic and green spaces. Many focused on the need for new housing to support existing and desired demographics.

As individual communities, and even as larger counties, the strategic planning initiatives have led to improved policies, stronger local partnerships, innovative programming and restorative capital improvement projects. All municipalities have shown that they cannot only plan for change, but that they can adapt to change as well. While improvements have been made, measuring positive change on social and economic issues is challenging at a local level. Through local initiatives, the communities within East Central Indiana saw opportunity in leveraging their local efforts into something at a grander scale.

Our Recent History of Working Together

In January of 2021, East Central Indiana's efforts were rewarded when the Office of Career Connections and Talent designated the region and the state's tenth 21st Century Talent Region. The East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative, a new backbone organization anchored by Ball State's Office of Community Engagement, is now set to oversee regional progress in the priority initiatives of:

- Marketing and talent attraction;
- Regional partnerships and the prioritization of diversity;
- Equity and inclusion in talent attraction; and
- Development and connection efforts.

Ongoing strategic planning efforts are underway to further organize and initiate regional planning and implementation efforts in support of the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative. This Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan is intended to be used not only as a tool in the state's READI program, but also as a guiding document to the Talent Collaborative, the Forge Your Path Coalition, and the local counties, cities and towns.

In 2019, a group of representatives from the East Central Indiana counties met to determine how they could work together as a coalition to ensure that the region was accurately portrayed based on things needing to be offered. Forge Your Path, a 10-county coalition in East Central Indiana, united when it was realized that each county had a goal to attract talent and establish the region as a destination and place where people want to live, work, and play. The coalition worked to build the lifestyle brand of Forge Your Path, which now serves as the central platform for regional promotion.

2021

2019

In 2018, the ADVANCE ECI region gathered again to provide an updated assessment of the regional economy and reevaluate the goals and projects, in anticipation for future Regional Cities funding-type opportunities. The newest section of the plan outlined the primary investment opportunity in the region: a regional network of trails that strive to connect the communities in the ECI region. The 2018 Advance ECI Regional Development Plan was used to successfully apply for implementation funds through the IEDC.

Also in 2018, the Indiana Office of Career Connections and Talent, now a part of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, launched the state's 21st Century Talent Region designation. Building upon the previous regional efforts, East Central Indiana worked to complete a regional ecosystem map of the current talent-development resources and a regional data dashboard identifying the current statistics, high-potential industry sectors, and proposed strategies to develop talent for those industries. Additionally, participating counties worked to provide a more detailed view of their ecosystem by preparing a county-level assessment as a part of the designation process.

The Indiana Regional Cities Initiative (RCI), a state-supported program headed by the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), issued a call-to-action for the State and its local communities in 2015. The initiative encouraged communities to self-identify their geographic region and work together to proactively plan for transformative projects that would eventually shape their regions into nationally-recognized destinations to live, work, and play. The RCI outlined that by bettering the places in which we live, work, and play, a bigger shift in local development, workforce attraction, and educational attainment would inevitably follow. As a response to the initial RCI program in 2015, the ADVANCE ECI region (Blackford, Delaware, Henry, Jay, Madison, and Randolph Counties) prepared an economic development plan that provided a baseline assessment of the overall region as well as its current economic state, assets, and potential economic development projects. This report outlined 14 specific projects that fell into one of three strategic themes. The themes were focused around building a new economy, creating destination communities, and unleashing the potential of real estate to support growth and redevelopment.

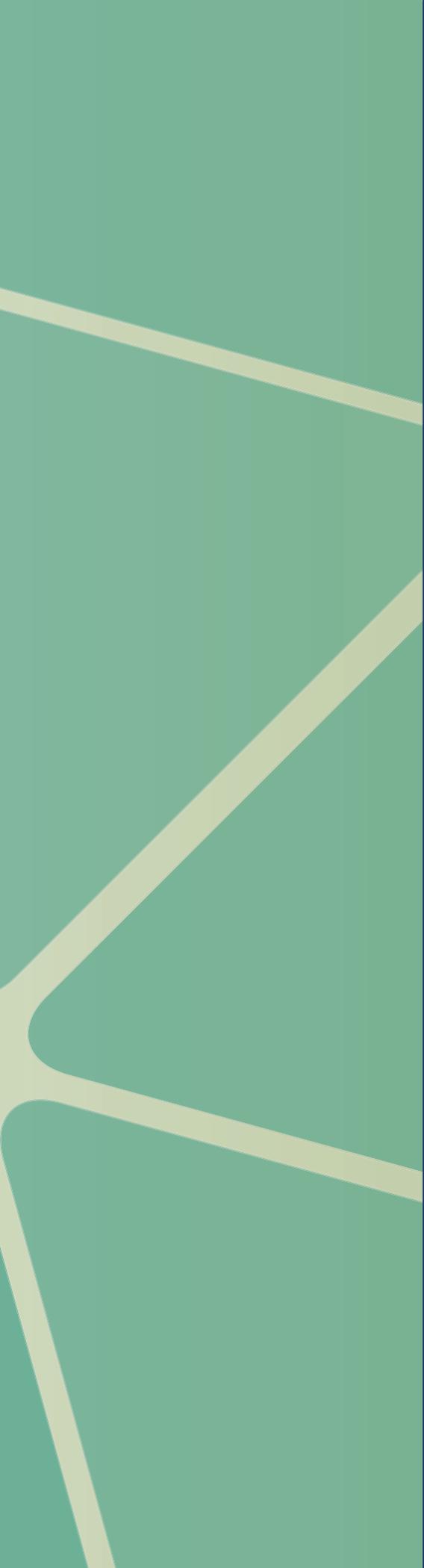
While the 2015 ADVANCE ECI Regional Development Plan was completed, the region was unsuccessful in their bid for RCI funding.

There was value in the planning and the partnerships that formed, however, so the regional work continued.

2018

2015





SECTION THREE


Stakeholders and Execution





Stakeholders and Execution

By bringing people together to define problems collectively, we can create a shared problem-solving vision.



The *Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan* was developed with numerous community stakeholders' engagement, input, and support. As a region, East Central Indiana has been working to convene local and regional stakeholders since 1984.

The East Central Indiana Development Council (LEDO Group) was incorporated in 1984 and was one of the first regional efforts in the State. It has made great strides in engaging and partnering with local and county leaders, philanthropic organizations, private sector businesses, and noteworthy anchor institutions to address and overcome our region's challenges. Within East Central Indiana, we understand the unique perspective our stakeholders can bring to a process and value the role that they can play in our future. Our stakeholders provided critical information, guidance, and support to determine our shared vision and supporting goals and objectives through the regional planning process. We are committed to continuing the relationships developed by engaging these same stakeholders in the implementation process following the planning process.



Collective Impact Principles of Practice

Design and implement the initiative with a priority placed on equity.

Include community members in the collaborative.

Recruit and co-create with cross-sector partners.

Use data to continuously learn, adapt, and improve.

Cultivate leaders with unique system leadership skills.

Focus on program and system strategies.

Build a culture that fosters relationships, trust, and respect across participants.

Customize for local context.

Source: The Collective Impact Forum- <https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/>

Images (facing page): East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative Cradle to Career Meet Up, July 2021





Regional Planning

While stakeholder engagement has occurred at local and regional levels for several years, the region's most recent collaboration effort, the 21st Century Talent Region designation process, has proved to be the most successful. While previous efforts, including the 2015 and 2018 ADVANCE ECI Regional Plan, focused on using stakeholder relationships as input to a process, the 21st Century Talent Region designation process focused on developing stakeholder relationships that inform the process and advance physical change and regional improvements during implementation efforts.

The 21st Century Talent Region designation challenged regional stakeholders to work collaboratively in defining the current talent landscape and developing goals and strategies for the areas of talent attraction, development, and connection. Spearheaded by the George and Frances Ball Foundation, with support from Ball State University's Office of Community Engagement, the region's stakeholders recognized a way not only to define a series of problems but to attack the region's challenges collaboratively.

Leadership and Participation

While all leading East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative members had previously participated in and led strategic planning efforts, the group realized that true regional collaboration was needed to move forward. In response to past regional planning challenges, the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative sought out individuals who recognized the need for regional collaboration across counties and sectors. These individuals, rather than specific titles, formed the foundation for our talent region work. Through the 21st Century Talent Region process, local government members, businesses, K-12 education corporations, higher education institutions, philanthropic organizations, local economic development organizations, and representatives from local employers and the business community came together to discuss the region's future. This initial engagement of the "coalition of the willing" led to early successes and broader engagement around our region's significant challenges paired with the current trajectory. These early success stories around engagement and idea-sharing built momentum for this Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan process. Through leadership provided by the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership and the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative, a series of new ideas and solutions to our region's challenges were identified through a regional Call for Projects. By identifying new initiatives and reviewing previously identified initiatives, our region has been able to identify our best path forward.



THE TALENT ECOSYSTEM OF THE EAST CENTRAL INDIANA TALENT COLLABORATIVE

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

Version 3: 12/17/2020



Career Connections and Talent
 Focusing on Indiana's premier challenge: creating solutions in career connections and talent pipelines

Indiana Economic Development Corporation
 Attracting and supporting new business investment, creating new jobs for Hoosiers, and furthering our legacy as one of the top states in the nation for business

Management Performance Hub
 Providing analytics solutions tailored to address complex management and policy questions enabling improved outcomes for Hoosiers

Governor's Workforce Cabinet
 Realigning Indiana's workforce development programs and services to help more Hoosiers learn the skills they need to secure great jobs

CivicLab
 Serving Indiana communities and regions by advancing the practice of civic collaboration and systems-building



Talent ecosystem maps are available for Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph and Wayne Counties.

Stakeholder Mapping and Ongoing Relationship Building

To apply for the designation, our region was required to submit a regional data dashboard identifying our current statistics, our high-potential industry sectors, and proposed strategies to develop talent for those industries. Additionally, we needed to create a regional ecosystem map of our current talent development resources, including a comprehensive list of local and regional stakeholder organizations.

While the process only required a regional stakeholder identification, we took a different approach from other regions – we needed each participating county to complete their ecosystem and dashboard before establishing regional goals. That helped us to involve more stakeholders and develop greater buy-in across the region. This stakeholder identification process also unearthed a new generation of leaders across the region, with many offering creative solutions to our local and regional challenges.

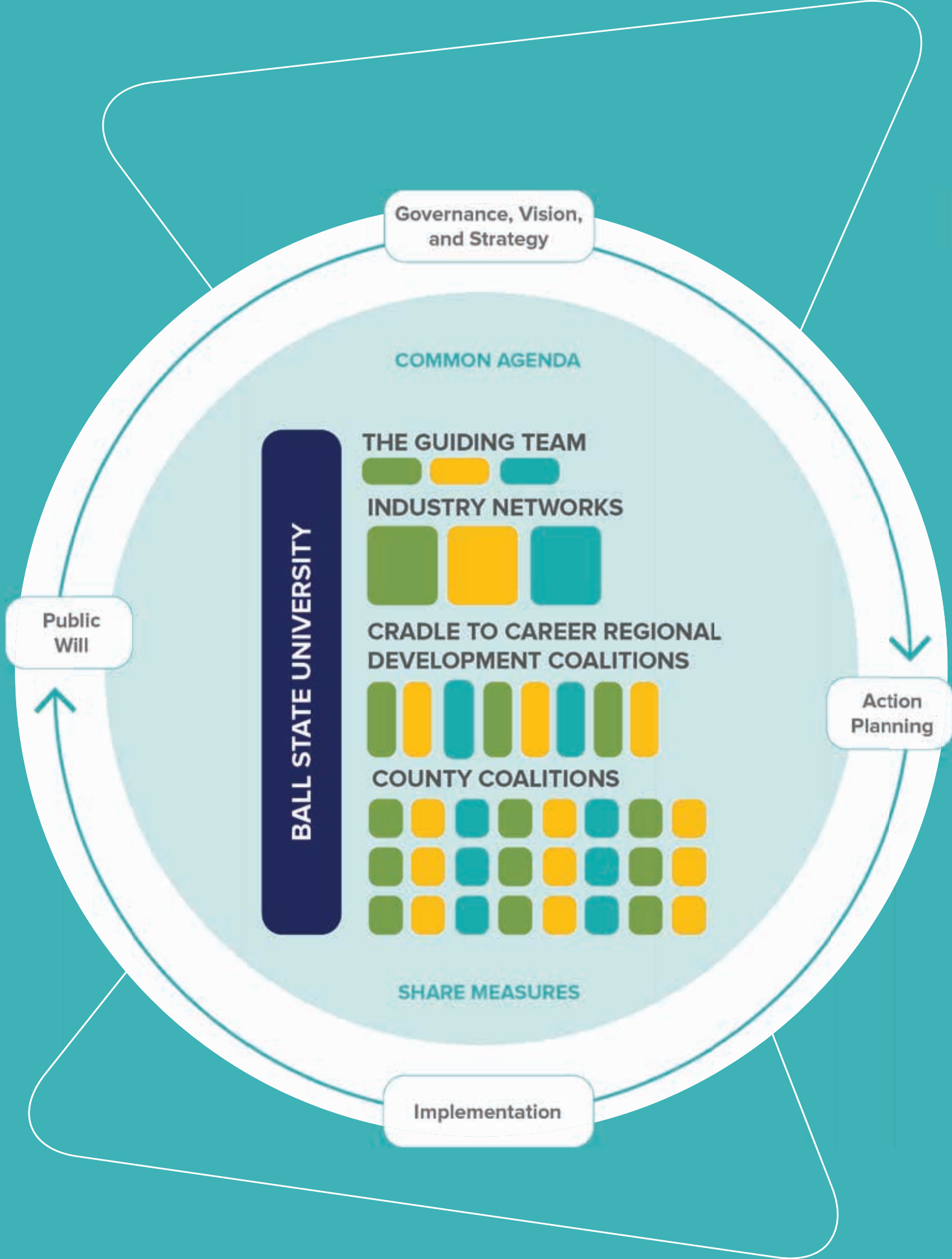
To date, nine counties have elected to participate in the Talent Collaborative organization, with seven counties having already completed their regional stakeholder identification process. Fayette and Blackford Counties are currently identifying their regional stakeholders, and it is anticipated that their mapping process will be complete by the end of 2021. Across the region, active participants vary by county. Some places have the economic development corporation taking the lead, while others have community foundations or other philanthropy groups, Ivy Tech representatives, K-12 educators, or elected officials leading the way. Regardless of the leading entity, the 21st Century Talent Designation process has allowed us not only to identify but actively engage leaders across municipalities, private businesses, institutions, and the philanthropic community.

Ongoing Stakeholder Collaboration

In January 2021, East Central Indiana was awarded Indiana's tenth 21st Century Talent Region designation. Following the designation, the Talent Collaborative's leadership team refined and developed the group's guiding mission, vision, and goals. Additionally, the Talent Collaborative is implementing the Regional Strategy Coalitions and County Workforce/Employability Coalitions ideas. These coalitions will develop plans to identify and leverage existing programs (e.g., Next Level Jobs, career center-industry partnerships, Forge Your Path ECI) and launch new programs (e.g., specialize upskilling programs, regional pipelines for high need/growth industries) specific to their assigned topical or geographical scope.

READI Planning and Guidance

In a parallel effort to the work underway by the Talent Collaborative, the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership (ECIRP) led the effort to establish a regional guiding body in response to the IEDC's READI planning and funding program. The governing body, which consists of 17 individuals, 16 of which have voting rights, includes representation from each participating county and several anchor institutions, functioned with the primary purpose of ensuring that the development of the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan aligned with the needs and interests of the region. The guiding body met both virtually and in person over three months to complete the planning process. The process also featured three stakeholder engagement sessions that allowed participants to weigh in on regional challenges and priorities as a part of the READI planning process.



East Central Talent Coalition Collective Impact Model Organizational Diagram

Regional Implementation

Our regional challenges are significant, and our current trajectory is sobering. The common goal of the 21st Century Talent Region designation has catalyzed new relationships and collaborative planning that are essential for East Central Indiana's future. We have linked arms across counties and sectors to fight for our region's long-term wellbeing. The official designation has cemented regional collaboration around talent attraction, development, and connection and provides us with the best practices and resources available through the Indiana Talent Network.

As we move forward with implementing projects and programs, East Central Indiana and the Talent Collaborative will facilitate stakeholder engagement and participation through a collective impact organizational model. Collective impact brings people together in a structured way to achieve transformational change. This model allows us to build momentum around our common goals by undertaking joint efforts that maximize the results. Most importantly, the collective impact model encourages continuous communication, which leads to increased trust across all Talent Collaborative participants.

Organizational Model

In previous efforts, a collaborative environment was reinforced as a tool for successful implementation. In the case of the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative, we are moving beyond collaboration by building a model that encourages the region to be intentional about its approach to solving a problem, or multiple issues, as a concerted effort.

Each participating county within the region has tested its ideas against our region's challenges, and marginal improvements have been made. By shifting to a collective impact approach, East Central Indiana will build on those previous strategic plans and initiatives, moving the initiative forward using a community-wide strategic lens. This process to address regional changes in a meaningful way will allow our future endeavors to be inclusive of voices representing the community, businesses, industries, and special interest groups.

Collectively, our power is in our knowledge, creative and innovative thought, and ability to work together towards common goals.

County Coalitions

Our talent development and connection strategies involve building coalitions and networks across the region. We see these groups complementing one another and building greater consensus through collaboration during the implementation process.

Currently, there are county-level coalitions in place or development in all participating counties. The current County Coalitions are actively working to integrate both local and regional stakeholders, identified during the stakeholder mapping process, into the Talent Collaborative's broader work. During the implementation of any specific project or program, the County Coalitions are tasked with fostering and strengthening relationships between identified stakeholders.

Cradle to Career Regional Development Coalitions

The Cradle-to-Career Coalitions bring together people from multiple counties to address talent enhancement, development, and attraction in four areas: safety, health and wellness, lifelong education, attractions and destinations, and innovation and entrepreneurship.



Collectively our power is in our knowledge, our creative and innovative thought and our ability to work together towards common goals.



During the implementation of any specific project or program, the Cradle-to-Career coalitions are enlisted to thinking outside of the box about regional advancement within their focus area. These Coalitions will not only work together to generate new projects and programs for regional implementation, but they will share information and feedback regarding in-progress or completed initiatives to improve and refine future regional strategies.

Industry Networks

It's essential that representatives from local businesses and industries are involved in this work and connected with the county and regional coalitions. As we look to implement many strategic projects or programs, especially those related to workforce attraction and development, participation from local employers will be vital. Our primary efforts will be focusing on convening industry networks around the high-potential industries of healthcare, education, technology, trades, advanced manufacturing, and agriculture.

Guiding Team

The Guiding Team is the Talent Collaborative's central steering committee, working across counties and sectors to set the strategic vision and support our collective work. The team has met regularly and will continue to do so moving forward to build relationships, learn about areas of experience and expertise, and begin to chart a long-term course for the Collaborative. The ECITC Guiding Team has ultimate oversight of the Talent Collaborative and backbone organization.

Backbone Support

Ball State's Office of Community Engagement will continue to serve as the backbone organization for this important work in connection with the University's current strategic plan.

Continued Oversight

Ball State University's Office of Community Engagement is prepared to fulfill the role of backbone organization through the duration of the university's current strategic plan. Over that time, ECITC guiding team members will determine the best, long-term "home" for backbone staff and services. As an anchor institution, Ball State is committed to leveraging its resources, connections, and influence to ensure the long-term viability and success of the Talent Collaborative. The University is seeking support from other anchor institutions (e.g., higher education, healthcare, philanthropic foundations, industry partners) to secure funding outside of those resources that Ball State University provides in-kind. At the time of this Plan's publication, the ECITC was actively looking to fill the position of Assistant Director to provide ongoing, full-time support to the Talent Collaborative's efforts.

As a complement to Ball State University's efforts, the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership's operational budget provides funding for Forge Your Path, the region's newest marketing effort focused on talent attraction and new investment. Funding sources for the annual budget include the private sector, foundations, local economic development, and tourism organizations. Established in 2005, the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership is the only regional organization dedicated to marketing the assets and amenities of the East Central Indiana region for business and talent attraction. ECIRP is governed by a dedicated volunteer board of directors composed of private sector representatives and local economic development officials that have committed time and resources for the region's success. The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership will be responsible for implementing the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan. As a part of that implementation, ECIRP will assume ultimate responsibility for updating the plan, budget, and execution. To assist in this effort, Ball State University will continue to serve as the backbone organization providing expertise and resources focused on developing the organization's structure and infrastructure.





SECTION FOUR

Community Engagement



side: the River
ed: Change
Part: collaboration
co-participation

headline!
age is to be bold about future possibilities for our regional community. If you have a story
al news outlets write about East-Central Indiana in 5-10 years? What will be happening that will
prior. Please write the headline of the story.

The New York Times

Tuesday, June 9, 2023


OL CENSTIV BOX 13 144

Muncie Becomes Hub for Cr



Community Engagement

Engagement allows for local participants to come to a consensus around shared assets, current challenges and future trends.



Community engagement increases the visibility and understanding of local issues and empowers communities to have their say over decisions that affect their lives and towns, cities, and neighborhoods. Engagement also allows community members and stakeholders to contribute to the public decision-making processes that help inform and educate residents on policy and projects that may impact their daily lives. Community engagement effectively allows local participants to come to a consensus around shared assets, current challenges, and future trends. Providing these opportunities for open dialogue lets the strategic planning process be informed and guided by local insight and aspirations. While significant at a local level, community engagement is critical during a regional effort. We must establish common ground around ideas and recommendations and also create and strengthen cross-jurisdictional relationships that foster an environment of collaboration.

The process of collecting information, reviewing ideas, and generating a consensus is often lengthy. Replicating these efforts across municipal boundaries and amongst varying stakeholders often prolongs the process. While the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan team understands and values the engagement process, the timeline of the 2021 regional planning process was such that several focused events were needed to gather information and ideas quickly. Throughout the Forge Your Path process, community engagement, and outreach were primary goals; however, the final plan's inputs and recommendations also relied heavily on previously completed efforts, including those done as a part of the 21st Century Talent Designation and Regional Cities processes.

The region shared ideas and we listened to their concerns.

The following statements reflect the common themes that were revealed during the community engagement opportunities, conducted as a part of this regional planning process, as well as efforts completed previously:

REGIONAL CONCERNS

Maintaining Quality Infrastructure: As the region's population continues to shrink, there are implications on the tax base and funding allocation to infrastructure improvements.

Providing Multi-modal Transportation Options: Our region's demographic requires a stronger emphasis on alternative modes of transportation.

Managing Social Services: Our residents need access to affordable childcare and mental-health resource for people to works.

Access to Attainable Housing: Our region has a limited supply of market-rate, non-income-qualified apartments, and quality, single-family homes.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Education (Early Learning to Adult Learning): Our region recognizes that the early years of a child's life play an instrumental role in the success of their adult years.

Maintaining What We Have: Our region should focus on becoming a better place to live. We must preserve what we have and concentrate on the fundamentals of infrastructure, housing, and education while building on the stellar post-secondary offerings of Ivy Tech, BSU, Earlham, Taylor, and Indiana Wesleyan.

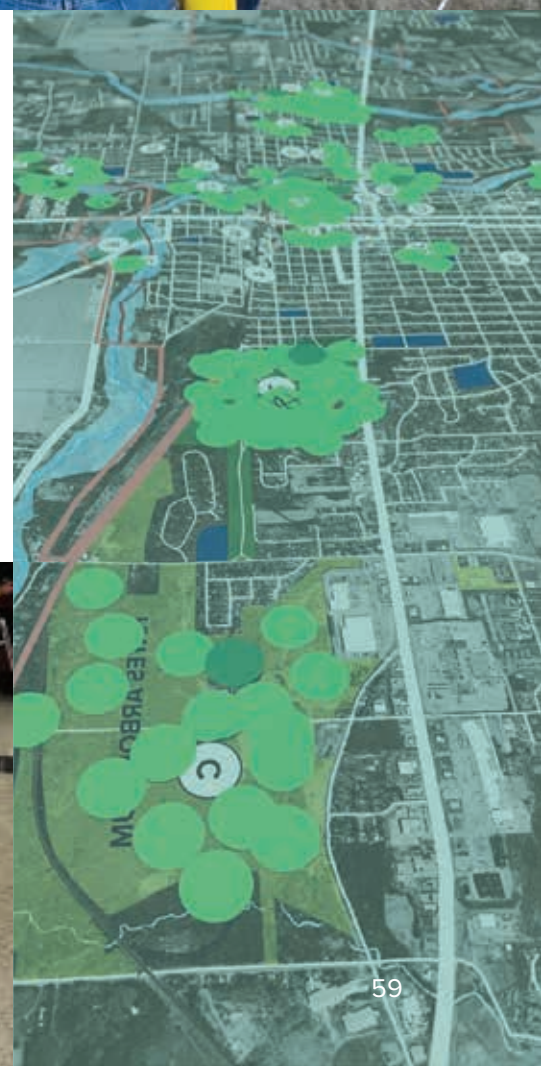
Broadband Infrastructure: The COVID-19 Pandemic has shown that people with professions that allow them to do so can live and work anywhere. The ECI region strives to provide dependable, high-speed internet for residents and businesses.

Long-term sustainability: The region's stakeholders understand the importance of choosing projects and programs with a long-term maintenance and operations plan.

Images (facing page): Public engagement events held in conjunction with Henry County, Jay County, Randolph County, and City of Richmond strategic planning initiatives.



Throughout the Forge Your Path process community engagement and outreach was a primary goal.



Regional Engagement Timeline

Cradle to Career Coalition Meet Up

This interactive and engaging meetup served as an opportunity to bring together key stakeholders from East Central Indiana to discuss the biggest challenges facing our region and begin thinking about what is possible for our future if we leverage the power of collective action. In total, over 60 participants attended and learned about the broader stakeholder engagement and the innovative thinking process that will allow our region to come together and solve complex challenges.

Stakeholder Interviews

In addition to the stakeholder meetings that were facilitated during the 2015 Advance ECI planning process, the Forge Your Path planning team hosted a series of stakeholder meetings during the week of July 19. Throughout three sessions, there were 120 stakeholders engaged in discussing regional concerns and priorities. The purpose of the stakeholder meetings was to provide a project overview, review the vision and goals of the region, and facilitate discussion on regional concerns and priorities.

Call for Projects

While a lengthy inventory of projects and programs has been generated at local levels, the Forge Your Path process encouraged local community engagement through a digital Call for Projects in July 2021. This opportunity ensured that the planning process included initiatives that represent all areas of our diverse region. The Call for Projects received over 150 entries from across the region with representation from all eight participating counties. Project sponsors included elected officials, business owners, community foundations, health and wellness institutions, elementary and secondary education providers, workforce training programs, and non-profit organizations.

21st Century Talent Designation Roundtables

In partnership with CivicLab and the Indiana Career Connections and Talent (now the IEDC), local leaders worked through a custom-designed process to develop a comprehensive, systems approach to attracting, developing and connecting Hoosier talent. Through this facilitated process, regional leaders identified the top three challenges facing the region, our top goals for improving regional conditions, and our regional stakeholders that can be an active part of the implementation. In total, seven meetings were held to facilitate this planning process.

2021

2020

Ongoing Local Community Outreach

The region, collectively, has worked tirelessly to ensure that all community members knew they had a choice to participate in the process. The following events served as primary data sets for the Forge Your Path planning process. The East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative, the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership, and the READI Governing Body are committed to continuing their community engagement efforts as the implementation process begins.

The *Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan* builds directly upon previous planning efforts. This plan intends to be additive to all previous work done at a regional and local level. At the onset of this regional planning process, over 40 local strategic plans were reviewed and assessed for relevant information, insights into the region, and the identification of projects and programs that could support the plan's goals. These previous strategic plans included a diverse community engagement process with surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, public workshops, and public hearings.

Forge Your Path East Central Indiana

In 2019, the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership recognized the need to develop a robust marketing strategy to address our region's alarming facts and trends. The ECIRP kicked off the initiative in 2019 with a region-wide convening of professionals from the fields of tourism and economic development and the region's anchor institutions. A smaller committee representing all ten counties worked over 18 months to develop the Forge Your Path ECI brand and content.

County Roundtables

Early in the ADVANCE ECI planning process, the Team worked with leadership from each of the counties to organize a roundtable meeting with key stakeholders from each community. Meetings were held in Delaware, Madison, Henry, and Jay counties over three weeks. The Team fielded questions and facilitated a two-hour conversation with each group focusing on key issues, opportunities, and assets. The meetings generated hundreds of comments and served as the starting point for project deliberation.

Regional Summit I: State of the Region

This was the first large-scale community event for the ADVANCE ECI process. It was designed as an open forum to brainstorm and discuss the future of the six-county region. Participants gathered to learn about the region to share their big ideas for the future and how the communities can work together to ensure greater prosperity.

Regional Summit II: Shaping the Vision

The ADVANCE ECI team hosted its second community workshop, Summit II, Shaping the Vision, as a follow-up to the successful Regional Summit. Summit II focused on the region's vision, capabilities, and strategic direction. Entering the final phases of plan preparation, the planning team used the meeting to elicit feedback from attendees of the draft plan contents and to help affirm the direction of the final development plan.

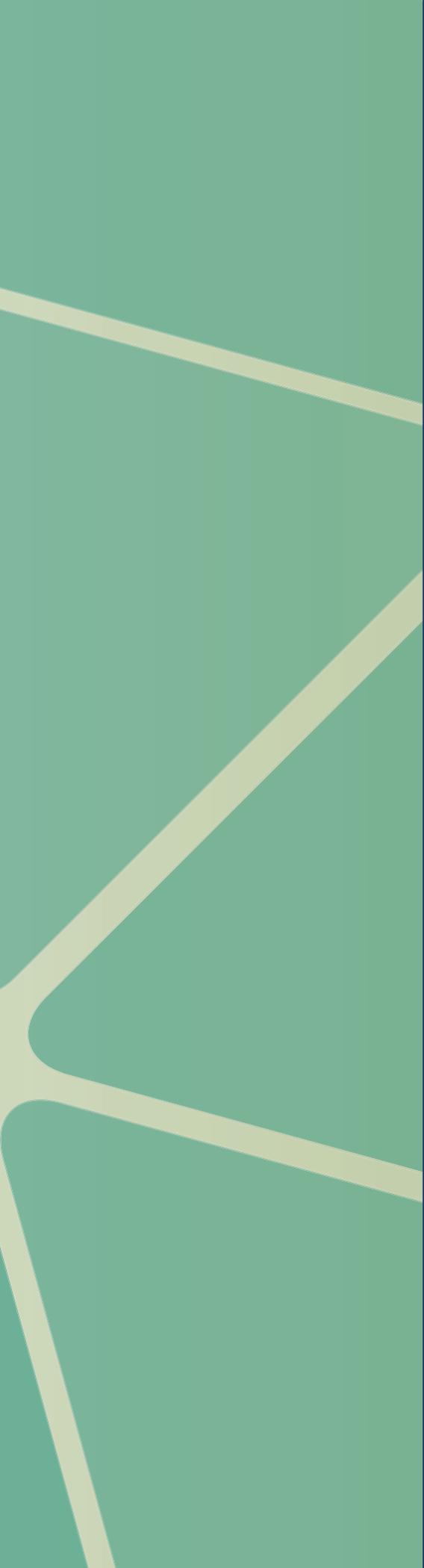
Stakeholder Interviews

A series of interviews were conducted throughout the ADVANCE ECI planning process with community leaders from across the region. The team employed a variety of meeting styles to maximize the number of voices reflected in the final plan.

2019

2015





SECTION FIVE

*Regional
Vision*





Regional Vision

We have convened our region's diverse leaders to pursue shared prosperity through equitable and dynamic talent attraction, talent development, and talent connection.



Our region faces a declining population, lagging educational attainment, low median household incomes, and difficulty filling complex positions. East Central Indiana is coming together to build regional coalitions and networks around shared goals in a way that prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Through our increased collaboration, the East Central Indiana region is prepared to leverage our natural, built, and social assets to empower our current residents, attract talented people, and establish our region as a destination committed to nurturing lifelong learning, technical innovation, and entrepreneurship.



Our Regional Vision

East Central Indiana will become the region of choice for talent and industry by focusing strategic improvements across five key themes.



Regional Partnerships:

Facilitate collaboration amongst our organizations, agencies, and local governments.



Talent Enhancement:

Ensure the safety, health, wellness, and prosperity of our existing residents, employers, and anchor institutions.



Talent Development:

Foster a homegrown learning system to cultivate talent and increase educational attainment.



Talent Attraction:

Leverage our regional assets to grow the population of the community and region.



Talent Growth:

Connect talent with diverse and equitable economic opportunities.





SWOT Analysis

These are the issues and opportunities that are inhibiting or advancing our regional growth.



A regional SWOT analysis was conducted as part of the regional development planning process to identify the issues and opportunities inhibiting or advancing East Central Indiana's growth. A SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) is a framework often used to evaluate a region's competitive position and develop appropriate strategic planning tools for implementation. A SWOT analysis assesses internal and external factors on the region, as well as the current and future potentials of the region by inventorying the following items:

Strengths

Strengths describe what a region excels at and what separates it from any other area within the state.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses stop a region from performing at its optimum level. These are areas where the region, and its local communities, need to improve to remain competitive.

Opportunities

Opportunities refer to favorable external factors that could give the region a competitive advantage.

Threats

Threats refer to factors that have the potential to harm an organization.

Following the exercise, the East Central Indiana READI Governing Body worked to align the goals and objectives of the *Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan* (Section 7) and the Regional Strategies (Chapter 8) in a way that leveraged and maximized our strengths. Because of that effort, we can make improvements in specific areas of weaknesses and minimize trending threats.

S

STRENGTHS

CHARACTER AND CONDITION

- Strong local cities and towns
- Established downtown areas
- Low cost of living

ECONOMY AND INDUSTRIES

- Manufacturing and agriculture strengths
- High percentage of cultivated agricultural land

PLACES AND DESTINATIONS

- Regional recreational assets (Cardinal Greenway, Whitewater Gorge)
- 26 local public schools
- 18 higher education institutions
- Strong arts and culture community

RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERS

- 21st Century Talent Designation
- Forge Your Path digital platform
- East Central Indiana Development Council

W

WEAKNESSES

CHARACTER AND CONDITION

- Decline in overall housing structures
- Aging housing structures
- Lower individual/ family incomes
- Need for improved broadband technology, especially in rural areas

ECONOMY AND INDUSTRIES

- Limited post-secondary educational attainment
- High number of low wage jobs

PLACES AND DESTINATIONS

- Downtown building structures and facades in need of improvement

RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERS

- Previous regional planning relationships were strained



OPPORTUNITIES

CHARACTER AND CONDITION

- Rural quality of life
- Shared value in strategic planning across local communities
- Existing interest in development

ECONOMY AND INDUSTRIES

- Existing strong anchor institutions and employment centers
- Available land for development
- Establishment of existing business incubators and business support programs

PLACES AND DESTINATIONS

- Regional proximity and transportation routes
- Support for destination development and tourism support services

RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERS

- Talent Collaborative Leadership and County and Cradle to Career Coalitions
- Higher education facilities can support cross jurisdictional relationships



THREATS

CHARACTER AND CONDITION

- Continued population decline
- Aging population
- Change in household make up
- Growth will need to be targeted to protect agricultural land

ECONOMY AND INDUSTRIES

- Limited post-secondary educational attainment
- Limited supply of skilled workers
- Projected loss of existing workforce
- Decreasing number of new businesses starts
- Ongoing support and innovation are needed in the agriculture industry

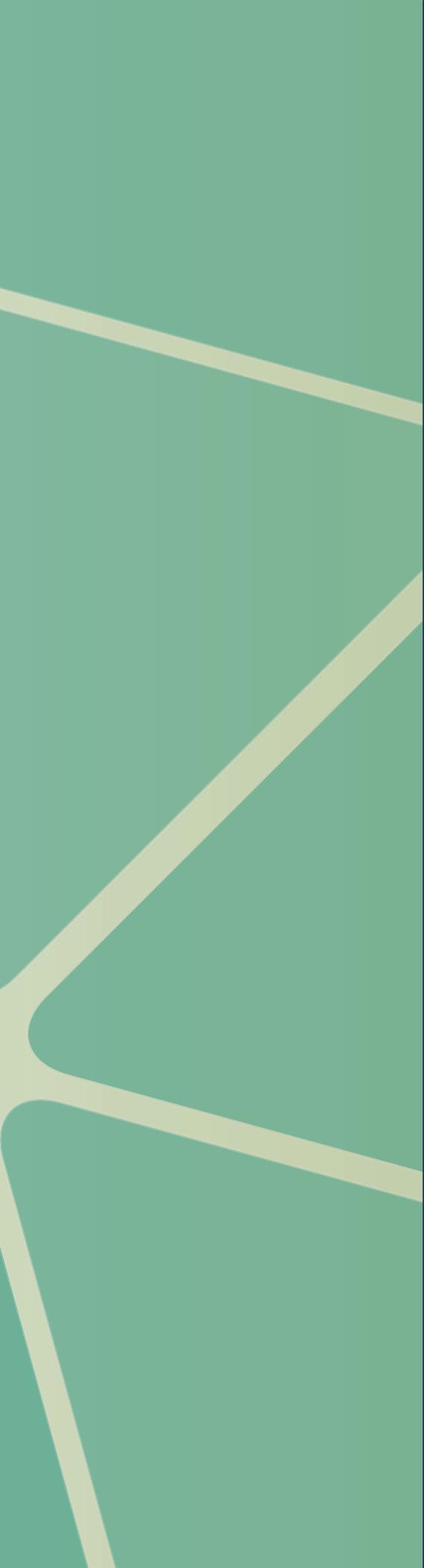
PLACES AND DESTINATIONS

- Increased cost to maintain infrastructure and utilities

RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERS

- Limited financial resources at a local level





SECTION SIX


Trends





Trends

It is our responsibility to hold one-another accountable for nurturing our assets and opportunities to leverage the positive outcomes and reverse the unfavorable trends.



As the data collection and analysis evolved throughout the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan process, it became evident that 8 interrelated trends have been, and could continue, to occur throughout the East Central Indiana region. Several of these trends are directly related and have created a set of systemic and generational impacts that are impacting the success of local communities, counties and the entire region. **It is our responsibility as a collaborative region to hold one-another accountable for nurturing our assets and opportunities to leverage the positive outcomes and reverse the unfavorable trends.**





Demographic Shifts

The region's population is getting smaller and older.

What is the data telling us?

The 2021 population estimates indicate that the East Central Indiana region is home to 379,808 residents meaning the region makes up about 5.5% of the state's total population of 6,847,004. Between 2010 and 2021, the region lost approximately 10,700 (2.8%) people from its population. During this same timeframe, the median age increased from 38.7 to 40.7. Looking into the future, population projections suggest the region's population will continue to age and will continue to decline. The region is losing individuals between the ages of 15-24, which directly impacts the region's population and workforce. These emerging adults are making decisions regarding where they want to go to receive secondary education and training or they are determining that they want to enter the workforce and are identifying regions of employment interest. Furthermore, this age group also includes individuals who are their child-bearing years and may be ready to set down roots in a community.

Key Considerations

Population loss coupled with an aging population can have obvious ripple effects throughout the regional economy. As we plan for the future, East Central Indiana should be thinking about how to leverage our assets and identify projects that strive to address the challenges tied to these trends. The decline and aging of the region's population raises important questions to consider such as:

- Where will the future workforce come from to meet the needs of a region increasingly focused on labor intensive service economy?
- Who will purchase the homes that will come on to the market as people downsize during their empty-nester phase?
- How to support and sustain a range of services, amenities, and infrastructure with diminishing tax revenue?
- How to increase capacity to address the support needed for an aging population?



Dwindling Workforce

The region's workforce has lost 5,000 people over the last 5 years and is expected to lose another 10,000 in the next year.

What is the data telling us?

This region is experiencing a reduction in workforce talent due to a lack of diverse employment opportunities as evidenced by a total loss in the numbers of jobs in the region. Employment in East Central Indiana has dropped from approximately 162,000 people in 2015 to about 157,000 currently and according to 2021 Indiana Economic Outlook is projected to drop around another 10,000 in the next year.

When considering a shift in workforce, it is important to consider the types of jobs available. In 2018, the top 4 industries employing the most workers in East Central Indiana included Healthcare and Social Services, Manufacturing, Education Services, and Retail Trade. Out of those industries, Healthcare and Social Services is the only one that has been consistently growing since 2006. Manufacturing took a hit from 2006 to 2012 with the assumption it was because of the recession in 2008. Although since 2012, the manufacturing industry has seen some growth. Education Services and Retail Trade are both declining, with the assumption that the overall population decline is impacting the number of students within the school system and the demand for retail establishments. With the population getting smaller and older, East Central Indiana needs to make sure they are providing quality employment opportunities and a high quality of life to retain those individuals we do have that are able and willing to work.

Key Considerations

Population loss has a direct impact on the availability of workers to existing and future employers within the region. As we plan for the future, East Central Indiana should be thinking about how to leverage our assets and identify projects that strive to address the challenges tied to these trends. A dwindling workforce raises important questions to consider:

- How to replenish the workforce as the aging population begins to retire?
- What we can do to make the region more attractive in terms of housing options, curb appeal, amenity availability, and career options for accompanying partners?
- What programs or incentives can we offer to entice people to stay in or move to East Central Indiana?



Lower Wealth Index

The region's population is struggling with prosperity.

What is the data telling us?

East Central Indiana's median household income is \$47,246 which is roughly 10,000 less than the state of Indiana. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the region has a Wealth Index average score of 54 whereas, the state of Indiana scores at 79. This score captures both income and the accumulation of substantial wealth, or the abundance of possessions and resources. The lower wealth or personal prosperity that is seen in East Central Indiana can be directly related to the educational attainment levels and the economic opportunities that exist within the region.

Key Considerations

A primary goal of the Talent Collaborative is to build upon equitable economic opportunities to increase household income and earnings by 7.5% in the next 4 years. Equitable economic opportunities can range from providing quality, accessible education to attracting and retaining high wage jobs and supporting entrepreneurship. As we plan for the future, East Central Indiana should be thinking about how to leverage our assets and identify projects that strive to address the challenges tied to these trends. A lower wealth index raises important questions to consider:

- How can we improve our education system to support individuals wanting to advance their education?
- How can we expand our workforce development programs to support individuals wanting to advance their career?
- What types of facilities could we provide to support regional innovation and connect people to a larger makerspace network?



Limited Housing Supply

The current housing stock is aging faster than we can build new housing options.

What is the data telling us?

Between 2010 and 2021, the total number of housing units in the region decreased and the vacancy rate increased. One influencing factor could be the age and condition of existing structures. We know that new housing units have been built over the last 10 years, but since the total number of units has barely shifted, it is likely because the number of units being torn down has off-set the data. Another influencing factor could be the rural setting of the region. While the region has an abundance of undeveloped land that could provide residential development, expanding transportation and utility infrastructure to these areas can be difficult.

The quality of the housing stock could also impact the vacancy rate and median home value. According to Zillow, home prices in the state of Indiana have increased 13.2% from May of 2020 to June of 2021. The ECI area has seen an increase in home values as well, but not at the same level as observed for the state of Indiana. While housing is generally affordable in ECI, the number of vacant houses is increasing rapidly, and the region as a whole struggles with low wealth scores.

Key Considerations

Providing diverse, and quality, housing options is a key component to talent attraction and retention. While the job might be ideal for a candidate, if there isn't a home available that meets the individual's needs and preferences, they will likely turn down the employment opportunity. This could also speak to why emerging and young adults are leaving the region. As we plan for the future, East Central Indiana should be thinking about how to leverage our assets and identify projects that strive to address the challenges tied to these trends. Limited and aging housing stock raises important questions to consider:

- What types of housing are we lacking to improve our ability to attract new residents?
- What types of programs could we provide to help with blight elimination, renovations, etc.?
- How is our current housing supply meeting demands for specific housing types and price points?
- Do we have a market to support a higher quality housing product?



Low Cost of Living

The cost of living is 15.3% lower in East Central Indiana compared to the U.S. average.

What is the data telling us?

The East Central Indiana region is a substantial bargain compared to nearby areas of Indiana. The region borders the most expensive housing markets in the state, so it is only natural to market our lower cost of living for resident and business attraction but the downside of affordability is a lack of desirable housing products and amenities.

Current data is telling us that the lower cost of living is not working to attract or retain talented workers or residents. This suggests that quality of life and lack of employment opportunities could be the driving forces behind the population and workforce challenges.

Key Considerations

While lower cost of living can be an asset, it is a balancing act to maintain affordability while still providing quality housing and amenities. As we plan for the future, East Central Indiana should be thinking about how to leverage our assets and identify projects that strive to address the challenges tied to these trends. Lower cost of living raises important questions to consider:

- Which of our existing assets can be enhanced or expanded upon to enhance our quality of life?
- What types of facilities or programs might we need to expand our arts and culture, health and wellness, and parks and trails amenities and services?
- How can we make East Central Indiana a place for destinations and tourism?
- What amenities are we lacking as a tradeoff to our region's affordability?
- What types of housing are we lacking to improve our ability to attract new residents?



Less Business Startups

While the number of new businesses starts has been decreasing, entrepreneurship presents an opportunity for ECI.

What is the data telling us?

All large businesses started off as a small business. The economic history of the region demonstrates the value of an active, successful entrepreneur in helping to build the wealth and value of the region. The increased interest in entrepreneurship, particularly among the millennials or those in midcareer, is an opportunity for the East Central Indiana region.

However, data suggests that starting a business is becoming more uncommon. In 2011, 9,221 businesses were five years or younger. In 2017, this number had receded to 8,838 indicating a 4% decrease in the number of new businesses starting in the region. This could be a direct result of the region lacking a robust business startup engine or supporting business amenities, infrastructure and resources. While the area does have a set of incubators and business support programs, for the most part, they lack the range of services and support infrastructure needed for business launch and mentoring.

Key Considerations

While the ECI region has seen a decline in the number of new business starts, the region can build upon its interest in entrepreneurship by providing resources to people seeking to create something new and innovative. As we plan for the future, East Central Indiana should be thinking about how to leverage our assets and identify projects that strive to address the challenges tied to these trends. A shift in new business starts raises important questions to consider:

- How can we utilize incentive programs and quality of life investments (trails, bike lanes, etc.) to make ECI stand out to businesses and site selectors?
- How can we foster a local entrepreneurial ecosystem that will entice young professionals to create businesses and jobs in the ECI?



Agriculture as a Leading Industry

The total number of acres dedicated to farming and the total number of agriculture-related jobs is increasing in ECI.

What is the data telling us?

The Midwest represents one of the most intense areas of agricultural production in the world and consistently affects the global economy. East Central Indiana is home to a significant portion of the agricultural land in Indiana.

According to the Census of Agriculture, just over 73 percent of the total land area in the region is cultivated. Agriculture is more than an industry for East Central Indiana, it is highly valued and seen as a key component to the region's identity and heritage. In many areas, Agriculture is a dying industry with less acres of land dedicated to farming each year, primarily because of sprawling development patterns. This is not the case for our region. Compared to 2007, the region has more (+17,000) acres now dedicated to cropland. Not only is it occupying a larger amount of our land, but the number of jobs is also continuing to increase. Looking at historical data, the number of agriculture-related jobs had increased from 597 in 2006 to 913 jobs in 2012. Another increase occurred between 2012 and 2018. In 2018, there were 1,093 jobs indicating as 83% change in the total number of jobs since 2006.

Key Considerations

If taken advantage of properly, agriculture can be one of our region's greatest assets and opportunities. Just like anything else, there are challenges or barriers that come with an opportunity. Technology continues to evolve within the agricultural industry. Majority of the newest, best equipment depends on broadband. Additionally, caring for the soil properly and making appropriate measure to prevent erosion is critical to the long-term success of farming. As we plan for the future, East Central Indiana should be thinking about how to leverage our assets and identify projects that strive to address the challenges tied to these trends. A growing agriculture industry raises important questions to consider:

- What infrastructure improvements can be made to support the agriculture industry?
- What types of facilities or programs could promote the agriculture industry and/or heritage?
- What can we do to protect and preserve our farming land?



An Abundance of Educational Institutions

The region is home to 18 community colleges, universities, and learning centers.

What is the data telling us?

While 41% of the region's population 25 and over have earned a high school diploma, HSE, or similar credential, only 28% have earned an Associates Degree or higher. This can create challenges for employers when looking for qualified workers to fill management-level and/or industry-specific positions. Lower educational attainment level has been on East Central Indiana's radar for quite some time. Because of this, one of the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative's primary goals is to mobilize our learning system to increase education attainment of 9,000 Hoosier by 2025.

Fortunately, our region is home to a large number of higher educational institutions. There are 18 community colleges, universities, and learning centers across the ECI region that provide countless career paths, training programs, and resources for everyone that is interested. Each of these institutions are regional assets that can be leveraged to attract new residents and support community initiatives related to education and workforce development.

Key Considerations

With a passion for education and deep pockets, these 18 anchor institutions are key stakeholders that play a major role in talent attraction and development. As we plan for the future, East Central Indiana should be thinking about how to leverage our assets and identify projects that strive to address the challenges tied to these trends. An abundance of educational institutions at our fingertips raises important questions to consider:

- How can we leverage these anchor institutions to support our education-related initiatives?
- What partnerships already exist that can be expanded upon? What partnerships should be created?
- What local programs already exist that can be replicated throughout the region?
- What improvements can be made to our existing facilities to better support our region?
- How can we create an environment or system that instills lifelong learning habits at an early age?



Regional Assets At a Glance

67

Cities and Towns

2

Interstates within the Region

8

Community Foundations

12

Main Street Programs

11

Chamber of Commerces

8,031

Acres of Local Recreational Land

166

Miles of Recreational Trail

1,923

Square Miles of Agricultural Land

28

K-12 Public School Corporations

18

Community Colleges, Universities,
and Learning Centers



Nurturing Our Assets and Opportunities

East Central Indiana is home to an abundance of assets and opportunities that can be leveraged to reverse unfavorable trends.



While several of the trends identified above highlight undesirable circumstances for East Central Indiana, the region is home to an abundance of assets and opportunities that can be leveraged to reverse unfavorable trends and maintain and even expand the benefits of the positive trends. An asset-based approach strives to maximize the advantage of each asset to overcome challenges and enhance opportunities that exist now and in the future. This approach also highlights the importance of quality of place.

Quality of place emphasizes features of the physical environment and characteristics that make a location a desirable, competitive, and economically vibrant place to live. The planning and maintenance of neighborhoods, transportation infrastructure, public education, healthcare, recreational assets, tourism features, and the natural environment play a major role in determining if a place is desirable to live or work.

As the East Central Indiana region thinks about how they can distinguish themselves from other regions, it is important to identify a strategy that embraces the region's strengths and assets. The following sections provide an inventory of our existing regional assets that can be leveraged to build a strong foundation for attracting and retaining residents, workforce, and businesses.

Cities, Towns, and Downtowns

The ECI region has 67 cities and towns that vary from more densely populated cities to smaller satellite towns that are located along travel corridors. Within several of these cities and towns, there are downtown districts that have their own unique sense of place that sets them apart from one another. Downtowns are sometimes referred to as the heart of a city and region, and accordingly, play a strong role in the health of their respective communities. The ECI region is unique in that it has several established downtown areas that feature historic courthouse squares that serve as civic events and community centers of activity.

*Continuing to invest in our **cities, towns and downtowns** will have a direct or indirect impact on the following trends:*



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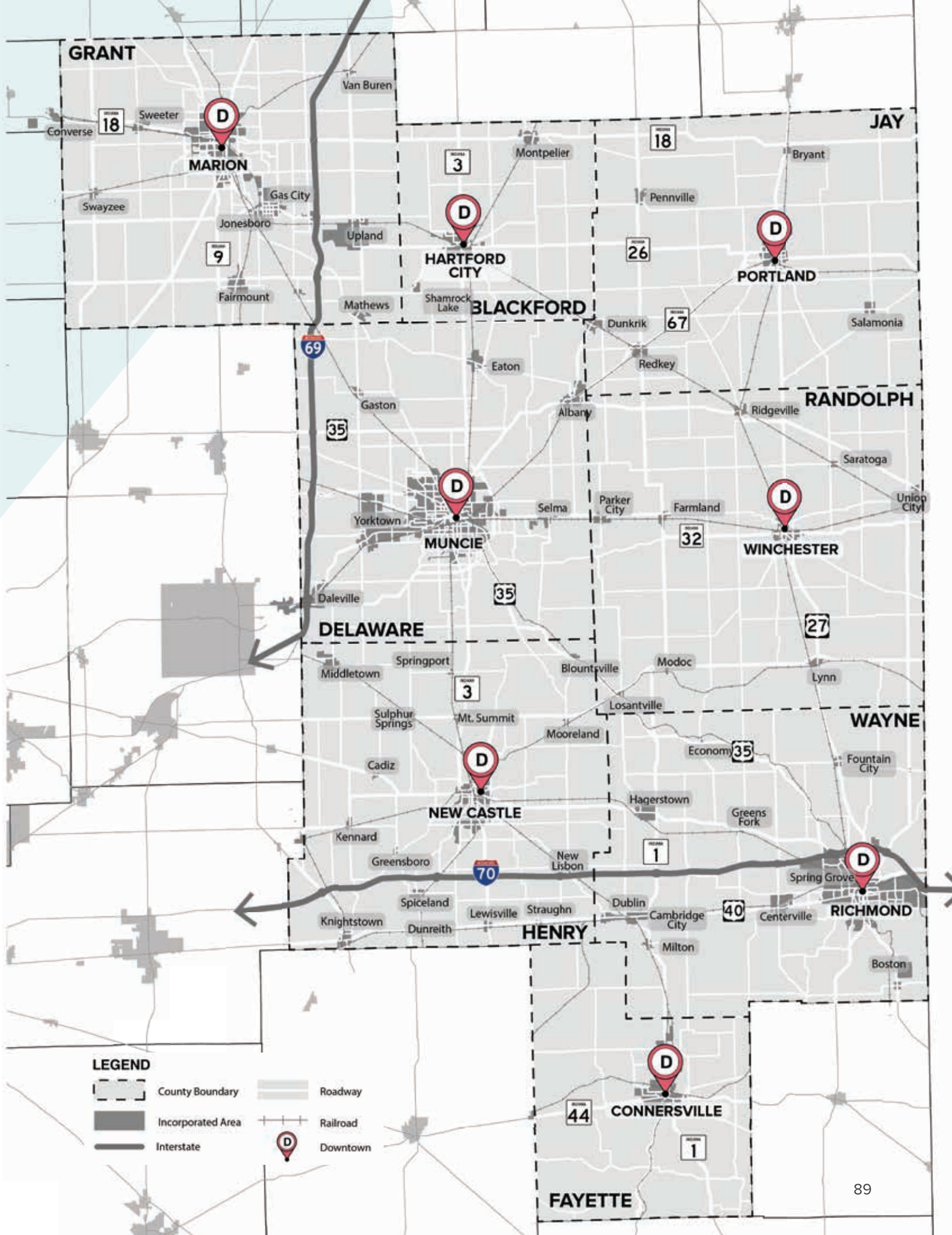
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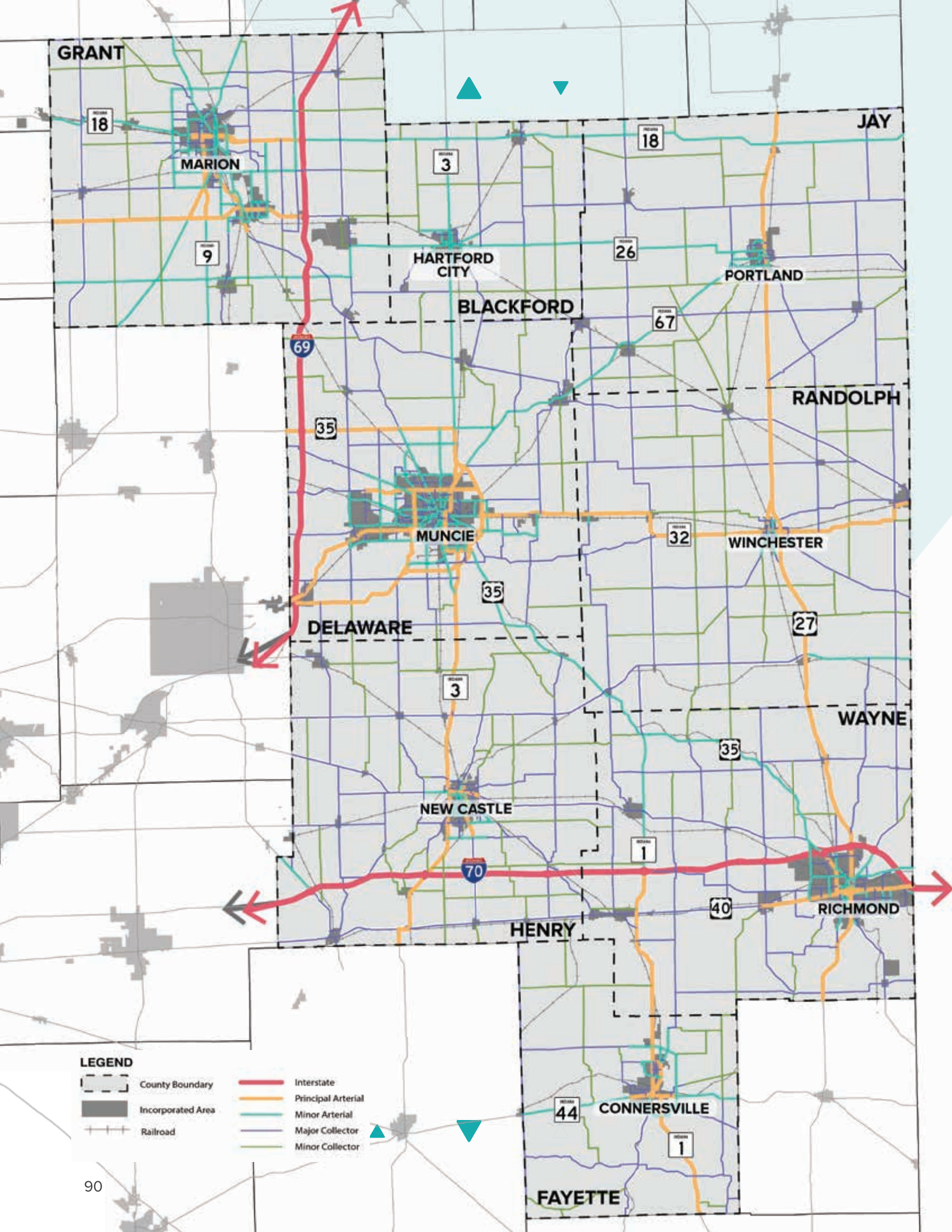


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GRANT

JAY

MARION

HARTFORD
CITY

PORTLAND

BLACKFORD

RANDOLPH

MUNCIE

WINCHESTER

DELAWARE

WAYNE

NEW CASTLE

HENRY

RICHMOND

CONNERSVILLE

FAYETTE

LEGEND



County Boundary



Incorporated Area



Railroad

Interstate

Principal Arterial

Minor Arterial

Major Collector

Minor Collector

Assets Connecting Us to People and Places

Whether it's convenient access to neighboring communities where family lives or the convenience of moving goods across the county, a well-connected transportation network is critical to the success of a region. The ECI region is fortunate to have 2 interstates within proximity. Interstate 69 runs through portions of Delaware and Grant Counties providing direct connectivity to larger metropolitan areas such as Indianapolis to the southwest and Fort Wayne to the north. Spanning a much larger area, Interstate 70 runs through Henry and Wayne Counties providing significant east-west connectivity. This interstate spans most of the United States going as far westward as Las Vegas and then eastward to Pittsburgh.

*Continuing to invest in our **transportation system** will have a direct or indirect impact on the following trends:*



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Assets Connecting Us to Nature

The region also has rich natural and recreational resources to complement our historic downtowns and Main Streets. The region's parks and recreational land covers 12.5 square miles which translates to 22 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. For comparison, the statewide level of service recommendations for local parkland is 20 acres per 1,000 residents indicating that as a region, ECI is aligning with statewide standards. When looking at level of service data for each county, data reveals that Delaware, Randolph, Henry, and Wayne Counties meet recommendations for local outdoor recreation acres while Grant, Blackford, and Jay are deficient in local-level public outdoor areas.

While resources exist, there is room for improvement in how they are celebrated and connected. Some of these possibilities require that success can be demonstrated on a smaller scale first like adding to existing trail systems within counties. There are 166 miles of existing trails making up the network running through east central Indiana. The existing trails vary in material from paved pathways to gravel and dirt trails. Ownership of these trails also varies from park agencies to natural preserves to governments depending on the type of lands they exist on.

*Continuing to invest in our **parks and recreation network** will have a direct or indirect impact on the following trends:*



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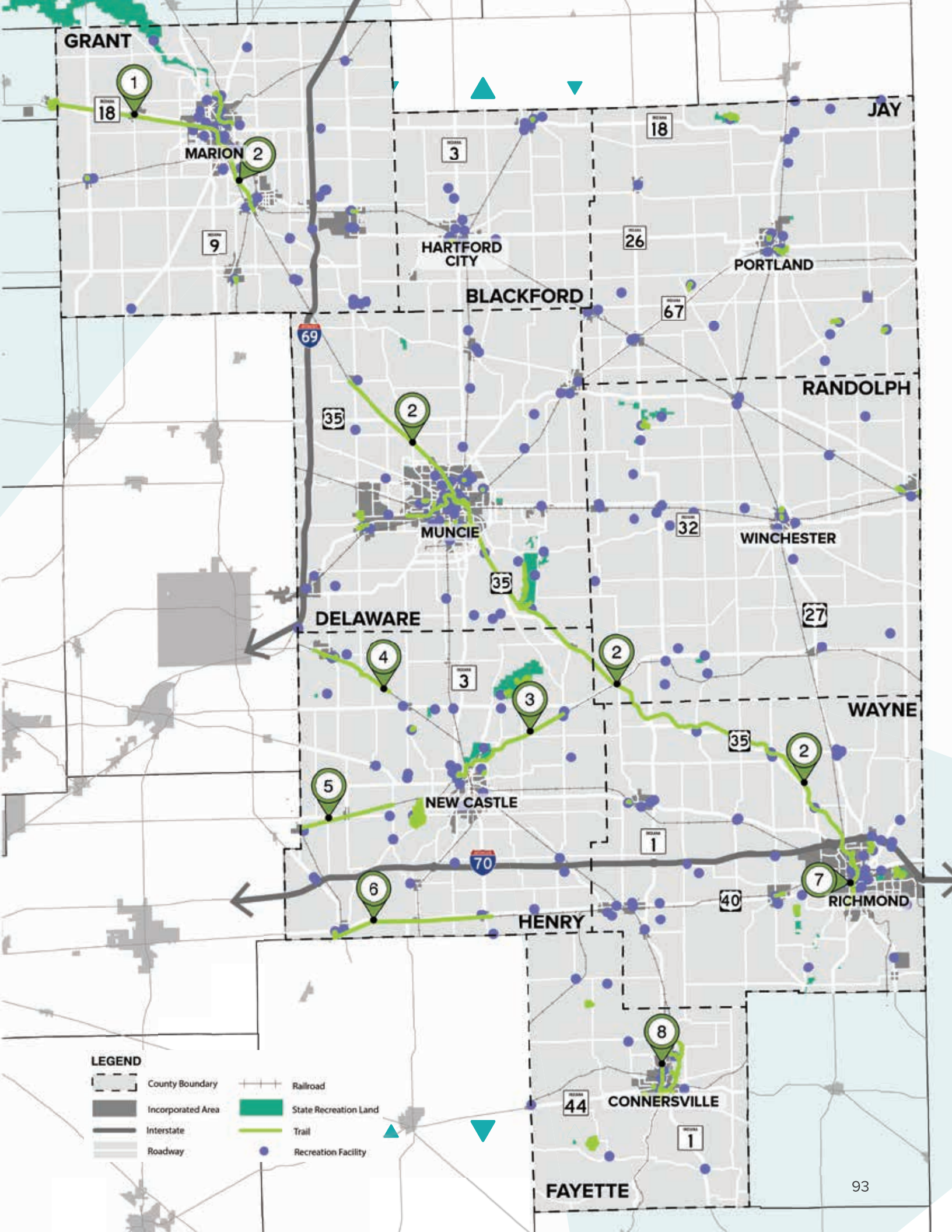
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GRANT

JAY

MARION 2

HARTFORD CITY

PORTLAND

BLACKFORD

RANDOLPH

MUNCIE

WINCHESTER

DELAWARE

WAYNE

NEW CASTLE

RICHMOND

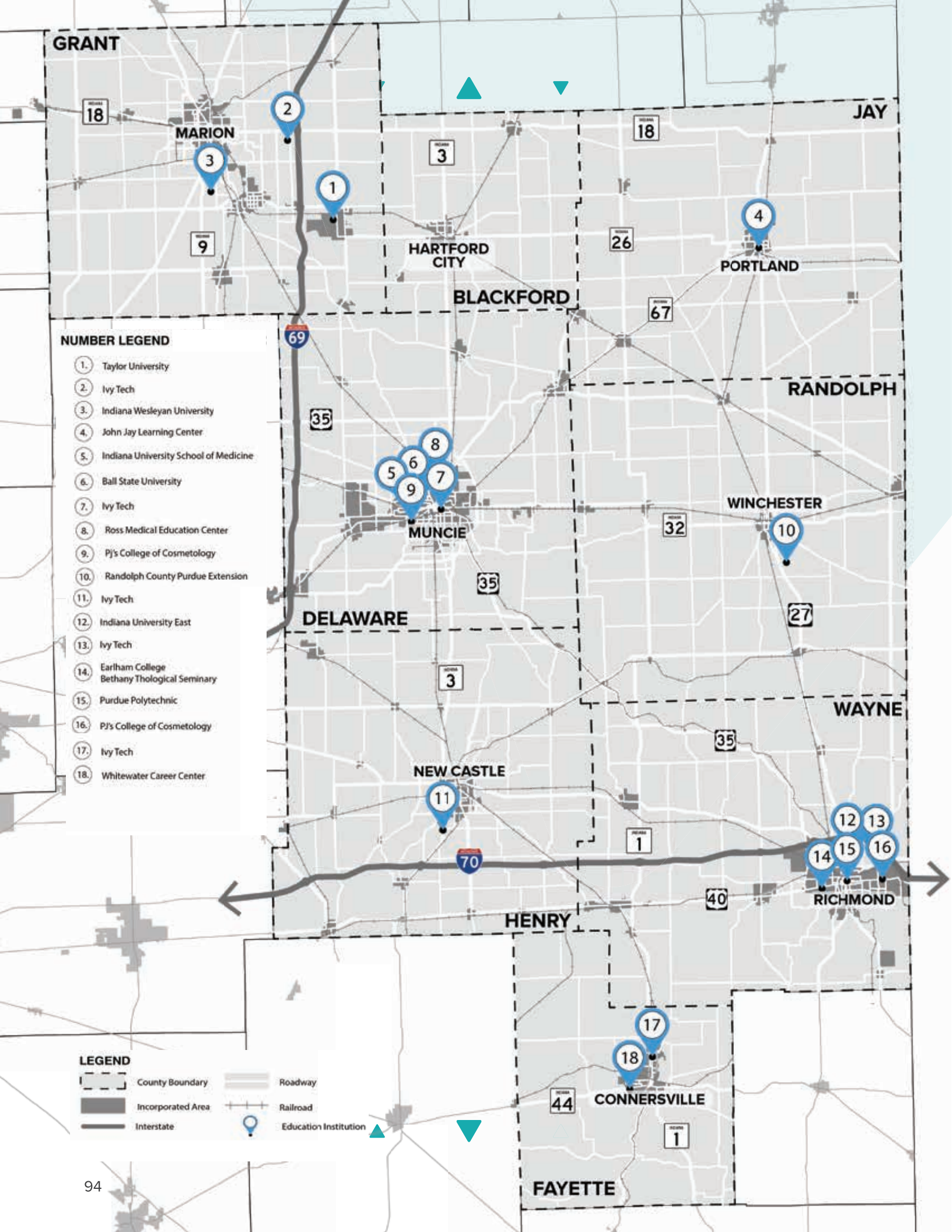
HENRY

CONNERSVILLE

FAYETTE

LEGEND

- County Boundary
- Incorporated Area
- Interstate
- Roadway
- Railroad
- State Recreation Land
- Trail
- Recreation Facility



Assets Connecting Us to Ideas

Today, our K-12 schools are expected to not only teach academics but are also tasked with caring for children with mental and physical effects of trauma brought on by stress of poverty, addiction in families, and exposure to violence and racism. The ECI region recognizes how impactful high-quality education can be on the development of children. East Central Indiana is home to 26 public school corporations that play an instrumental role in generating educated, hardworking individuals that will eventually feed into the region's workforce.

Equally as important, access to post-secondary education can spur workforce development, employment, and economic prosperity, and as well as social outcomes as health and family stability.¹ This is even more so true for the ECI region as many communities are rural in nature. In 2012 a study published by the Sociology of Education found that rural counties with an established community college or university experienced significantly more job growth than those without one.² There are 18 community colleges, universities, and learning centers across the ECI region that provide countless career paths, training programs, and resources for everyone that is interested.

*Continuing to invest in our **lifelong learning facilities and programs** will have a direct or indirect impact on the following trends:*



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¹ Source: <http://www.sfaz.org/making-difference-community-colleges-key-drivers-rural-development/>

² Source: <https://journalistsresource.org/economics/community-colleges-jobs-budget-cuts/>

Assets Connecting Us to Resources and Organizations

Within each community there are countless organizations that contribute to making things happen. Whether it is providing funding assistance, offering additional staff capacity, or promoting the availability of resources, these organizations are valuable assets to the community. While compiling a list of all active organizations within the 8-county region would become an enormous task, there are a few key organizations that exist to improve community and economic development.

Community Foundations are a public charity that focuses on supporting a geographic area, primarily by facilitating and pooling donations used to address community needs and support local nonprofits. Each county within the ECI region has a Community Foundation that serves their geography.

Main Street America empowers communities to set their own destinies by helping revitalize older and historic commercial districts. Their approach focuses on 4 key points including economic vitality, design, promotion, and organization. The ECI region has 12 established Main Street organizations including Main Street Richmond, Cambridge City Main Street, Heart of Hagerstown, Centerville Main Street, New Castle Main Street, Muncie Downtown Development Partnership, and Discover Connersville.

Chamber of Commerce's are another key community organization. A chamber of commerce is a voluntary partnership of businesses and professionals working together to build a healthy economy and improve quality of life. There are 11 chambers of commerce that provide various functions to their community by serving as an economic developer and planner, tourism information center, business spokesperson, government relations specialist, and public relations practitioners.

Most recently formed, the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative is a coalition that is striving to integrate the Forge Your Path lifestyle marketing initiative, improve educational attainment levels, develop the region's talent pipeline, and prioritize inclusion and equity in talent attraction and retention.

*Continuing to invest in our **local organizations** will have a direct or indirect impact on the following trends:*



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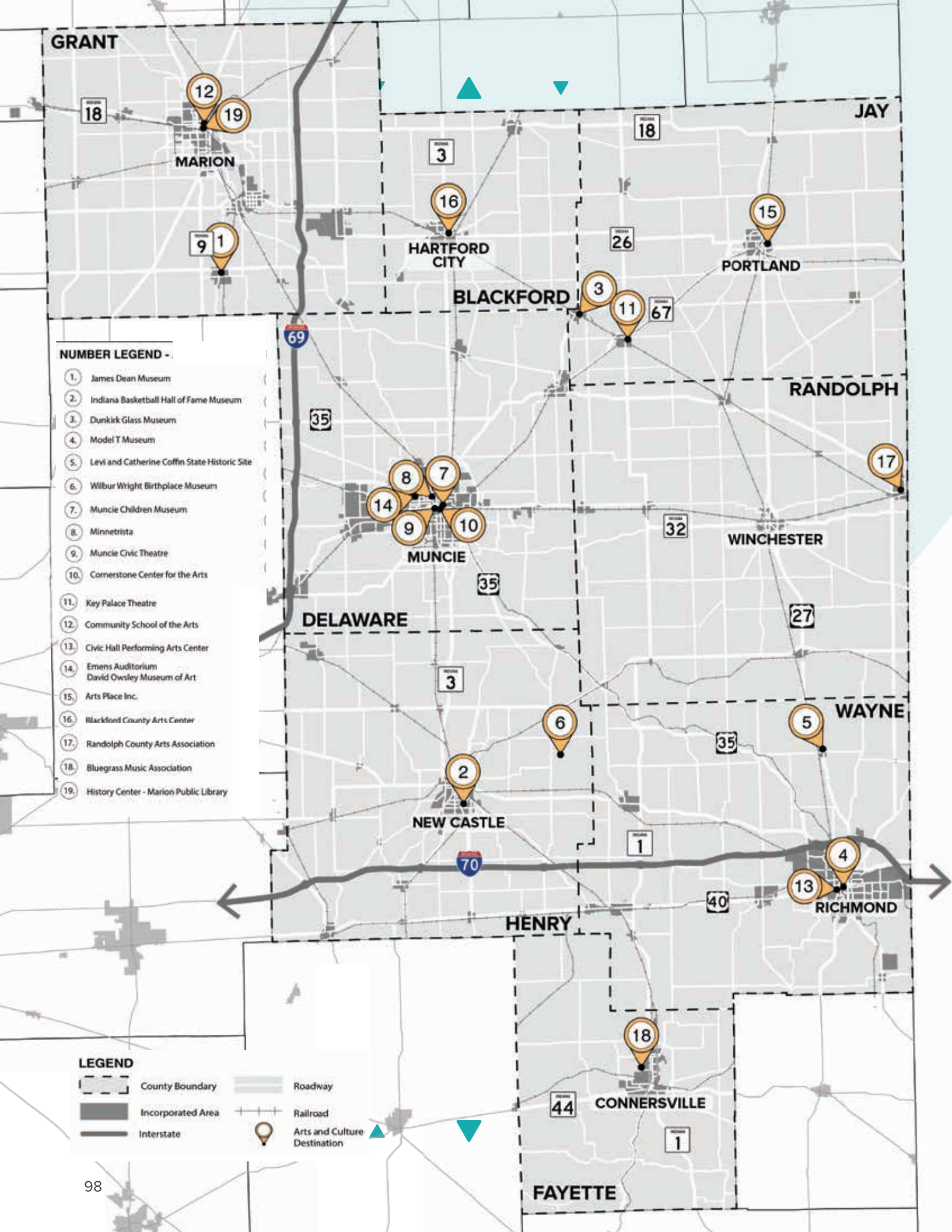


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- NUMBER LEGEND -**
- 1. James Dean Museum
 - 2. Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame Museum
 - 3. Dunkirk Glass Museum
 - 4. Model T Museum
 - 5. Levi and Catherine Coffin State Historic Site
 - 6. Wilbur Wright Birthplace Museum
 - 7. Muncie Children Museum
 - 8. Minnetrista
 - 9. Muncie Civic Theatre
 - 10. Cornerstone Center for the Arts
 - 11. Key Palace Theatre
 - 12. Community School of the Arts
 - 13. Civic Hall Performing Arts Center
 - 14. Emens Auditorium
David Owsley Museum of Art
 - 15. Arts Place Inc.
 - 16. Blackford County Arts Center
 - 17. Randolph County Arts Association
 - 18. Bluegrass Music Association
 - 19. History Center - Marion Public Library

- LEGEND**
- County Boundary
 - Roadway
 - Incorporated Area
 - Interstate
 - Railroad
 - Arts and Culture Destination

Assets Connecting Us to Arts and Culture

Arts and culture can mean many things including visual arts, performing arts, architecture, places of historical significance, and much more. These types of assets serve many purposes ranging from providing a creative outlet for residents to offering weekend entertainment, and attracting tourists to the community. From a regional perspective, the Region 5 Regional Arts Partnership is intended to promote and expand participation in the arts. Based out of the Community Foundation of Randolph County, the Region 5 Partner provides resources and information for arts in Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Madison, Randolph, Rush, Union, and Wayne Counties.

At the local level, there are over 60 arts and cultural destinations and groups dedicated to providing and promoting the arts. Ranging from theaters, art galleries, and cultural centers to museums, historic societies, and antique malls, the ECI region is well-positioned to leverage these assets for tourism and promote them as a strategy for attracting artists and performers to the region.

*Continuing to invest in our **arts and cultural facilities and programs** will have a direct or indirect impact on the following trends:*



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Assets Connecting Us to Our Rural Identity

According to the Census of Agriculture, just over 73 percent of the land area in the region is cultivated. In 2017, there were just over 4,545 farms in the region with Jay County leading the way with the highest number of farms reported. In terms of land coverage, cropland covers 2,058 square miles of the region. Blackford County has the most land (87%) dedicated to agricultural land followed by Jay County and Randolph County.

Compared to 2007 data, the land area dedicated to agriculture has actually increased within the ECI region. Over the course of 10 years, just over 17,000 additional acres of land became active cropland. This is unique because agriculture is a dwindling industry in many areas across the Midwest.

LAND DEDICATED TO AGRICULTURAL USE		
Place	Square Miles	Percentage of Total Land
Blackford County	144	87.3%
Grant County	297	71.5%
Jay County	324	84.3%
Randolph County	378	83.4%
Wayne County	255	63.1%
Henry County	263	66.6%
Delaware County	262	66.2%
Fayette County	134	62.3%

*Continuing to invest in our **agricultural industry and heritage** will have a direct or indirect impact on the following trends:*



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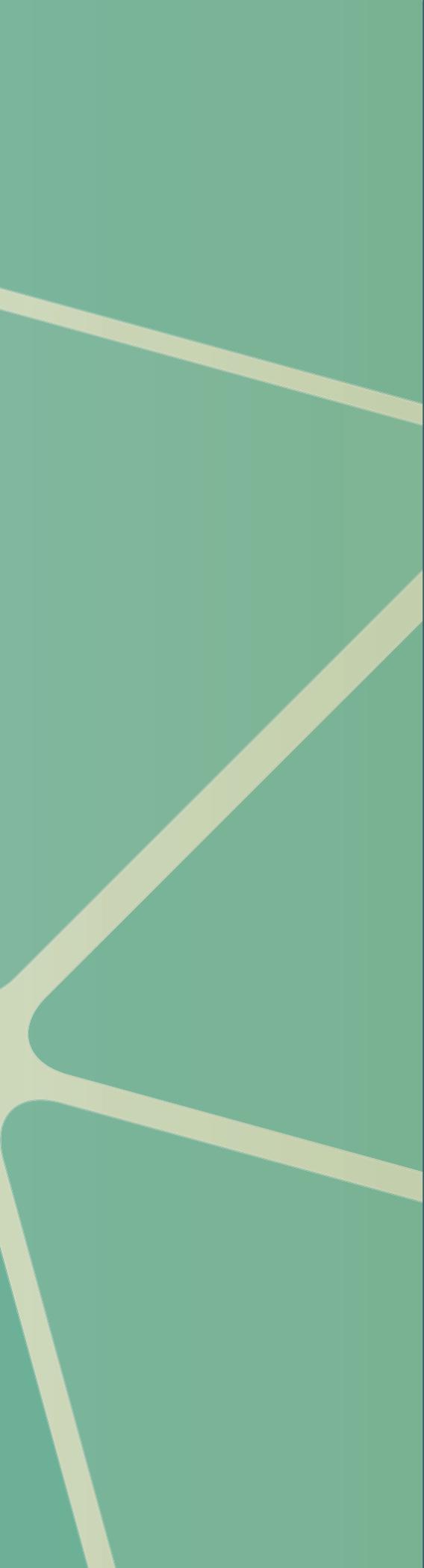
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SECTION SEVEN

Goals and Objectives





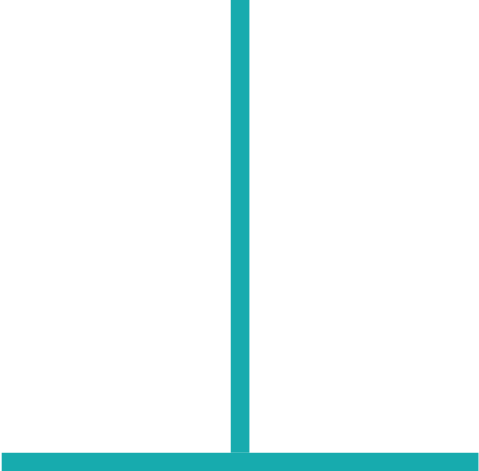
Regional Goals and Objectives

Through our continued work, the region's reputation will grow from the strengths of its anchor institutions, existing economic strengths, and emerging industries.



East Central Indiana's long-term vision capitalizes on existing assets and synergistic momentum to reinvent economic opportunities and enhance the regional quality of place. Through the 21st Century Talent Region designation process, public, private and philanthropic leaders from all eight counties agreed that by working together, we could make East Central Indiana a competitive choice for talent, whether it's homegrown or from far away. Through our continued work, the region's reputation will grow from the strengths of its anchor institutions, existing economic strengths, and emerging industries. This economic story will be coupled with one about a high-quality place to become a destination of choice for people throughout Indiana and the nation seeking a community with the amenities of a large urban center but the feel of a smaller, more personal community.





Our Regional Goals

As a region we have acknowledged our challenges and identified our assets and collectively we have identified our shared aspirations.



Now, as we continue to forge our path, we have defined three lofty, yet measurable, priorities for our region:

- 1. Boost population trends by 11% resulting in a net 0% population change by 2030.**
- 2. Mobilize our learning systems to increase the educational attainment of 9,000 Hoosiers by 2025.**
- 3. Build upon equitable economic opportunities to increase median household income and earnings by 7.5% by 2025.**

To tackle these significant challenges and move the needle at local and regional levels, we must move from disconnected thinking to interconnectedness, from silos to emergence, from isolation to relationships. We must become systems thinkers, and we must work collaboratively across boundaries and jurisdictions.

Our systems-thinking approach is rooted in the Talent Collaborative's collective impact organizational model. Together, by strengthening our county coalitions, regional cradle-to-career development coalitions, and regional industry networks, we are prepared to complete the following measurable objectives in support of our aforementioned talent attraction and development priorities.



Regional Partnerships:

We will facilitate collaboration amongst our organizations, agencies, and local governments.

1. *Together, we will improve our region by fostering cross-jurisdictional partnerships to strengthen our collective organizational capacity.*



Talent Enhancement:

We will ensure the safety, health, wellness, and prosperity of our existing residents, employers, and anchor institutions.

1. *Together, we will improve our region's quality of place by working together to expand, improve, and modernize transportation and utility infrastructure to meet the needs of current and future demand.*
2. *Together, we will improve our region's quality of life by working together to develop diverse, complete, and economically viable neighborhoods.*
3. *Together, we will improve our region's quality of life by working together to diversify the types of facilities and services available to the public so that we can improve the livability of our local communities.*



Talent Development:

We will foster a homegrown learning system to cultivate talent and increase educational attainment.

1. *Together, we will improve our region's quality of opportunity by investing in lifelong learning opportunities.*
2. *Together, we will improve our region's quality of opportunity by strengthening and growing the region's workforce.*



Talent Attraction:

We will leverage our regional assets to grow the population of the community and region.

- 1. Together, we will improve our quality of place by expanding, enhancing, and activating our regional recreational and cultural destinations and attractions.*
- 2. Together, we will improve our quality of place by enhancing and revitalizing our local downtowns.*
- 3. Together, we will improve our quality of place by developing a regional network of trails and pathways.*



Talent Growth

We will connect talent with diverse and equitable economic opportunities.

- 1. Together, we will support innovation in our industries by investing in agriculture and the rural character of our Region.*
- 2. Together, we will improve our quality of opportunity by creating an environment for innovation and entrepreneurship.*
- 3. Together, we will improve our quality of opportunity by support individuals in recovery and/or post-incarceration as they become reintegrated into the workforce.*





Benchmark Cities

The East Central Indiana region sees value in reviewing our progress against like communities and organizations.



The East Central Indiana region sees value in reviewing our progress against communities and organizations. For our implementation purposes, benchmarking will be our collective tool for assessing and comparing our regional performance to achieve continuous improvement.

East Central Indiana has identified three collective impact case studies to help us improve and refine our organizational efforts. Additionally, we have selected three benchmark regions against which to measure progress.

Case Studies

Shape Up Somerville (Somerville, MA), Communities that Care Coalition (Rural Franklin County, MA), and Memphis Tomorrow (Memphis, TN)

Regions

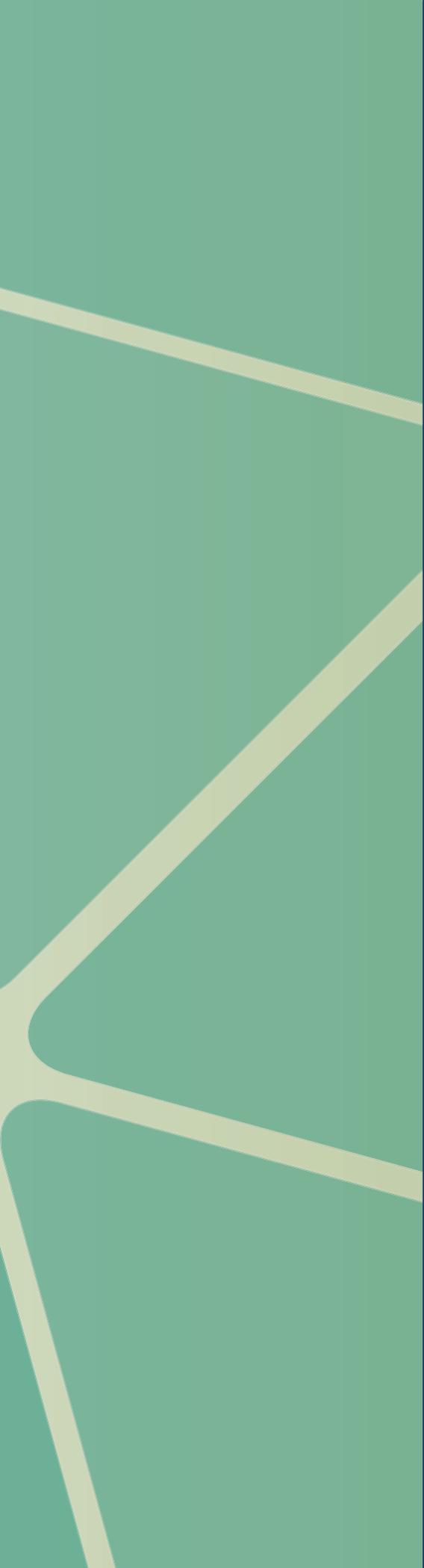
Southwest Kentucky (Bowling Green), North Central Illinois (Dekalb) and North Central Virginia (Harrisonburg).

These organizational efforts, communities, and regions were chosen based on their aspirational achievements and social, economic, and geographic similarities to our eight-county area.

The East Central Indiana region is prepared to work with the identified benchmark communities, in partnership with Ball State University's Office of Community Engagement (Talent Collaborative Backbone Organization), to establish a baseline of data that matches our proposed success metrics, as identified in Sections 8 and 10.

As the Region implements the *Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan*, we will use predetermined criteria from the identified benchmark cities to evaluate the impact of strategic investments and measure competitiveness.





SECTION EIGHT


*Regional
Strategies*





Regional Strategies

The region's goals, and supporting strategies and objectives, have roots that date back over thirty years.



The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership has put forth a series of strategic projects, programs, and hybrid initiatives that address the five core strategies outlined in Chapter 7 that support our region's talent attraction and development priorities. The region's goals, and supporting strategies and objectives, have roots that date over thirty years. Through that time, we have not only worked as a region to generate ideas, but we have conducted intensive research, public outreach, and strategic planning. That has allowed us to physically improve our regional and local quality of place, quality of life, and quality of opportunity in physical and programmatic ways.

We've made tremendous advances over the past thirty years. We have improved and strengthened our relationships. We have learned how to compromise and work together, and we are beginning to see the fruits of our labor in our local cities and towns and across the greater East Central Indiana region.

The *Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan* is our collaborative framework to address our region's current state, unique opportunities, and barriers to growth. It serves as our strategic plan to make public-private investments to propel our future.

The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership and our planning and implementation partners seek to make East Central Indiana one of America's great comeback stories. The great advantage of investing in our region is that our residents have already taken steps to change the storyline of our communities.





Hometown Wins

Through hard work, determination and resourcefulness, our local communities have showed that we are able to think and act big in order to overcome our shared challenges.



The East Central Indiana region has demonstrated our ability to succeed without any outside help. Within our local cities, towns, and across our eight counties, the leaders of East Central Indiana have a history of “pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps.” Through hard work, determination and resourcefulness, our local communities have shown that we are not only willing, but we can think and act big to overcome our shared challenges.

Across our eight-county area, we have accomplished a series of hometown wins to improve our local communities. These successes include capital improvements, programmatic improvements, and private investment that have resulted in statewide recognition, improved health and wellness programs, downtown reinvestment, accessible education programs, investment in the performing arts and innovation in businesses, and manufacturing and agricultural industries.

As a region, we have taken a moment to celebrate our efforts and congratulate ourselves on a job well done. We are now ready for more. We believe that our proposed projects and programs will be improved by the work we have already completed. **We are prepared to continue investing in ourselves and our local communities. We are ready to leverage our continued momentum, knowledge, expertise, and resources to improve the lives of our residents, businesses, and industries.**



Hometown Wins

As a region, we have taken a moment to celebrate our efforts and congratulate ourselves on a job well done. We are now ready for more.









Regional Project Methodology

Over 150 ideas were submitted from across the region's eight county area through our regional Call for Projects.



As a part of the regional planning process, ECIRP issued a Call for Projects with the primary goal of identifying potential projects and programs that, when implemented, will remove barriers to growth and advance economic activity across the region. In total, over 150 ideas were submitted from across the region's eight-county area. Submitted ideas included capital improvements and strategic programs that focused on enhancing local communities, expanding educational programs, improving regional destinations and facilities, and creating opportunities for innovation and advancement in businesses, industry, and agriculture. In total, the projects submitted represented over \$900 million in proposed investment, with nearly \$225 million being requested in READI funds.


The East Central Indiana READI Governing Body, which consists of two representatives from each participating county, reviewed each submitted project to better understand the proposal and its alignment with the region's goals around talent development and talent attraction. To ensure that each project submittal was reviewed similarly, the governing body developed and utilized a Regional Project Scorecard to identify how and to what extent proposals met the region's primary goals.

Following the review, scoring, and deliberation process, the Governing Body grouped projects into common themes aligned with our strategic goals and objectives. The group then classified all project proposals into two primary categories: Catalyst Projects and Supporting Projects and Programs.

Catalyst Projects

The Governing Body identified 14 catalyst projects that would deliver over \$375 million in proposed investment. These catalyst projects combine several public or private initiatives that will move the needle on local challenges and cause a corresponding and complementary development reaction across the region. The selected projects offer innovation and improvements of sufficient magnitude to stimulate development and redevelopment, activate and enhance regional assets, and create an environment of lifelong learning and advancement.

Each catalyst project includes both local and regional efforts. While some projects and programs will be initially implemented locally, those efforts can be scaled and replicated in all areas of our region.



Supporting Projects and Programs

In addition to the catalyst projects, the Governing Body acknowledged the ongoing strategic planning within each of the eight counties. This acknowledgment results in the identification of 100 supporting projects and programs that would benefit local communities. Implementing these supporting projects and programs will improve our region's quality of place and provide opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship; however, they will do so in a more localized way.

The supporting projects and programs build upon the recommendations included in locally completed strategic plans. As a region, we are committed to assisting our local community partners in determining appropriate project champions, identify available resources and tools, and create a realistic implementation plan for these efforts.

Through the ongoing partnership with the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative's coalitions, we will continue to review and develop these supporting projects and programs so that they, too, are ready for implementation soon.

Our role in regional projects

The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership's mission is to market the assets and resources of our East Central Indiana region. The Partnership teams with local economic development organizations and the state's lead economic development agency, the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, to bring capital investment and new jobs to the region and assist existing businesses to grow and prosper. The Partnership serves as the initial point of contact for economic development for the area.

The *Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan* and the identified catalyst and supporting projects and programs build upon our existing efforts by providing a new set of targeted goals and realistic implementation ideas. While we are excited to oversee the implementation of these strategic efforts, we also acknowledge that our primary role in the region is to convene our regional leaders, organizations, and stakeholders in a way that allows for ongoing collaboration and innovative thought. Through implementing our catalyst projects, the ECIRP will embrace our role as a project partner in alignment with the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative. Together we will convene project leaders and supporting organizations to provide input, guidance, and assistance in implementing these needed efforts.



Regional Project Organization

To align with our region's three key goals around population growth, increased educational attainment, and equitable economic opportunities, the 14 catalyst projects are organized into five strategic themes. The themes represented continued improvements to regional collaboration and talent enhancement, development, attraction, and growth. Each theme provides opportunities for advancement in multiple ways. As defined in Chapter 7, a series of detailed objectives were developed under each thematic topic to provide measurable outcomes within each theme. Each strategic theme and supporting objectives will make measurable gains allowing the region to meet, and even exceed, our lofty goals.

The project summary pages are designed to provide the reader with a concise, written, and graphic summary of the proposed project. Refer to the listing below to further understand the project summaries, the provided information, and how the data should be used moving forward.

Project Costs and Estimated Funds

For each catalyst project, an overall estimated cost has been developed using the input and guidance of local economic development organizations, local elected and appointed officials, and project sponsors. Additionally, the majority of projects have some level of funds committed to the project. These committed funds include both public and private contributions and have the opportunity to be expanded following the region's READI designation. In some instances, a funding gap remains. Projects with a gap in project funding will continue to identify and confirm available resources following this regional development plan submission.

Long Term Sustainability and Maintenance

The region focuses on implementing projects and programs that have, or can develop, the resources to maintain and sustain the initiative following regional or state support. For each catalyst project, organizations and resources for ongoing maintenance and sustainability of the initiative have been identified and listed. Following the funding allocation process, formal agreements will be prepared to finalize maintenance agreements for capital projects.


Anticipated Outcomes

The individual metrics of each proposed catalyst project are different; however, they will all work to move the needle on our region's three primary goals. The anticipated outcomes will be measured during and following implementation to track the region's success.

Stakeholders

While we will come together as a region to review our implementation efforts, each catalyst project involves a unique group of project partners to implement the effort. The primary parties involved with the planning, construction, and implementation of the initiative have been listed, and ongoing efforts will ensure that all individuals and organizations who will benefit are included in the implementation effort.

The summary table and project detail pages explain how our proposed catalyst projects align with the aforementioned strategic themes and objective statements. Our shared belief is that these 14 catalyst projects will create the greatest return on our local and regional investment and result in the broadest, most long-term impacts.



▼ ▲ ▼

The summary table, and included project detail pages, provide an overview of how our proposed catalyst projects align with the aforementioned strategic themes and objective statements. It is our shared belief that these 14 catalyst projects will create the greatest return on our local and regional investment and will result in the broadest, most long-term impacts.

Strategic Themes, Objectives and Projects



Regional Partnerships:

We will facilitate collaboration amongst our organizations, agencies and local governments.

East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and Forge Your Path ***Page 129***



Talent Enhancement:

We will ensure the safety, health, wellness and prosperity of our existing residents, employers, and anchor institutions.

Regional Broadband Initiative ***Page 139***

Regional Housing Initiative ***Page 147***

Regional Development of Health and Wellness Facilities and Programs ***Page 161***



Talent Development:

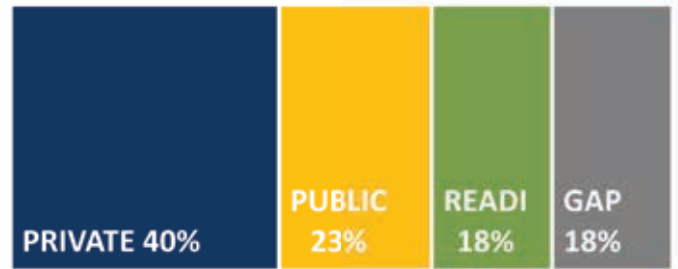
We will foster a homegrown learning system to cultivate talent and increase educational attainment.

Regional Lifelong Learning Systems ***Page 175***

Regional Workforce Training and Development ***Page 195***

TOTAL INVESTMENT

\$379,120,458



Talent Attraction:

We will leverage our regional assets to grow the population of the community and region.

<i>Regional Recreation Enhancements</i>	<i>Page 211</i>
<i>Regional Arts and Culture Investment</i>	<i>Page 221</i>
<i>Regional Tourism Support</i>	<i>Page 233</i>
<i>Regional Downtown Rehabilitation</i>	<i>Page 240</i>
<i>Local Open Space and Recreation Enhancements</i>	<i>Page 251</i>



Talent Growth:

We will connect talent with diverse and equitable economic opportunities.

<i>Sustainable Agriculture</i>	<i>Page 263</i>
<i>Growing our Role in Agriculture</i>	<i>Page 271</i>
<i>Supporting Innovators and Makers</i>	<i>Page 279</i>





Regional Partnerships

Together, we will improve our region by fostering cross-jurisdictional partnerships to strengthen our collective organizational capacity.



Regional Context

East Central Indiana shares a number of multi-dimensional and interrelated challenges: generational poverty, population decline, low educational attainment, limited industry, proliferation of low-wage jobs, and areas of inequity. It is critically important that we address our current trajectory.

Regional transformation requires the work, inspiration, and dedication of diverse stakeholders. Beyond technical knowledge and expertise, it requires big picture thinking and the ability to prioritize the “greater good” of the region. While this seems straightforward in theory, it often is at odds with the mission, objectives, and requirements of local economic development organizations and government officials. ECI has made advances in addressing shared challenges since 2005, but at times our progress is stifled by hyperlocal priorities.

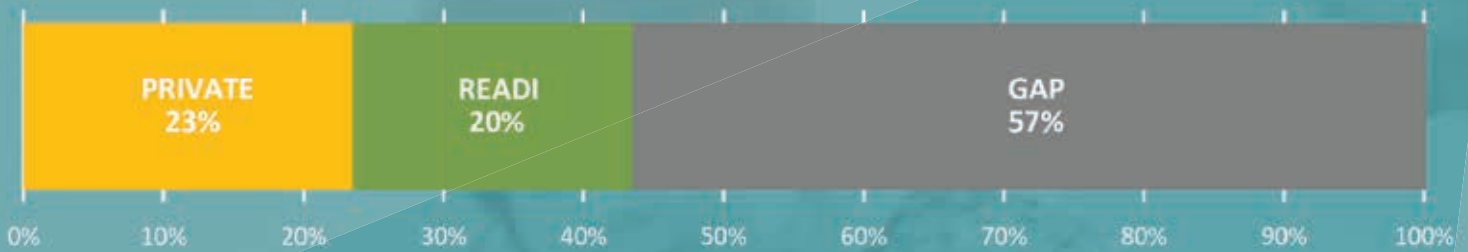
To date, ECI has lacked a regional organization with the jurisdiction, mission, human resources, and regional recognition to assume oversight for cradle-to-career advancement. We significantly lag behind other regions with dedicated staff to ensure consistent progress.

Throughout 2019 and 2020, a coalition of willing stakeholders came together to achieve the State of Indiana’s 21st Century Talent Region designation for East Central Indiana. The East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative officially launched in January 2021 as a collective-impact initiative to achieve our aggressive talent and equity goals. Over the last nine months, this growing “coalition of the willing,” which now includes 176 active participants on county and regional coalitions, has produced significant momentum, gained regional recognition, and now serves as the cornerstone of East Central Indiana’s READI proposal.

With strategic READI investment, the ECI Talent Collaborative is poised to scale its infrastructure and resources to significantly accelerate regional efforts around equitable talent attraction, talent development, and talent connection.



PROJECT COSTS



\$6,332,500



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Blackford County Economic Development Corporation

Muncie- Delaware County Economic Development Alliance

Fayette County Economic Development Group

Grant County Economic Growth Council

New Castle- Henry County Economic Development Corporation

Jay County Development Corporation

Randolph County United

Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County

County and City Partners

Blackford County, Fayette County, Delaware County, Henry County, Jay County, Randolph County, Wayne County
All incorporated Cities and Towns

Supporting Partners

Private Businesses, Higher Education Institutions, Supporting Community Organizations, Supporting Foundations and Private Funding Entities

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership
East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Ball State University's Office of Community Engagement is prepared to fulfill the role of backbone organization through the duration of the university's current strategic plan. Over that time, ECI Talent Collaborative guiding team members will determine the best long-term "home" for backbone staff and services.

The Forge Your Path initiative is managed by the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership and will be maintained and improved as a part of their regular operating procedures.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

Number of coalition members

Number of industries represented across available coalitions

Number of events held throughout the year

Number of active participants in meetings and events

Grant and research dollars awarded

Number of learning programs offered

Number of learning programs used or attended

Number of website views

Number of database topic points established

Number of target individuals identified through the Talent Map process

Number of new residents acquired; and

Number of new candidates interested in the region.



East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative

The ECI Talent Collaborative is poised to build public will, and leverage funding to attract, develop, and retain talent in East Central Indiana.



As a 21st Century Talent Region, East Central Indiana established three lofty goals: Reverse population decline, increase educational attainment, and address our region's low median household income across the region, while prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion. It quickly became apparent that a central convener was necessary to create an environment of trust and mutual respect, develop ways for willing participants to engage with one another, and provide a strong backbone for long-term relationships and partnerships.

Recognizing the critical importance of talent attraction, talent development, and talent connection, Ball State University provided initial human and financial resources to serve as such a convener and establish a regional guiding team and county, regional, and industry coalitions. Over the last nine months, we have enjoyed significant momentum, consistent growth in engagement, and increased buy-in across the region.

With expanded financial and human resources, the ECI Talent Collaborative is poised to catalyze and advance regional vision and strategy, promote shared measurement practices, support aligned activities and research, build public will, ensure progress toward equity, and leverage funding opportunities to attract, develop, and retain talent in East Central Indiana.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Building trust through idea sharing and networking.
- Relationship building through research and education.
- Measurable gains through marketing and education.



Cradle to Career Meet Up provided by East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative

The East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative provides the critical infrastructure to align and leverage regional resources around talent attraction, talent development, and talent connection.

Geoffrey S. Mearns, Ball State University President



Building Trust Through Idea Sharing and Networking

East Central Indiana Region | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: 5 years

The importance of trust in pursuing a shared vision cannot be overstated. Purposeful and consistent efforts to foster trust and strong relationships are absolutely essential for transcending local interests to pursue regional transformation. The purpose of the ECI Talent Collaborative is not only to share ideas, but also to share responsibility for a better future.

Our region possesses a rich ecosystem of individuals, organizations, and other assets to support talent attraction, development, and connection. Knowledge of and connections between these rich resources are often limited; it takes time and a particular vantage point to be able to “connect the dots.”

A significant part of the ECI Talent Collaborative’s mission is to foster such connections by building an infrastructure of county, regional, and industry coalitions and networks. These layers of collective impact are designed to complement and reinforce one another by bringing together the active, engaged, and diverse players in each county and facilitating dialogue and networking across sectors.

Over the last year, the ECI Talent Collaborative has provided consultant support to help coalitions identify members and group structure, select coalition chairs, establish SMART goals and strategies, choose metrics, and develop action plans. Coalition members have been challenged to think creatively and innovatively as they explore best practices, identify gaps in knowledge and services, learn from other sectors, and connect to state and national resources. Coalitions report progress to the ECI Talent Collaborative Guiding Team as a method of accountability.

READI funds will dramatically increase the ECI Talent Collaborative’s ability to meaningfully support, empower, and strengthen county, regional, and industry coalitions. Funding will allow for regular stakeholder events and training opportunities where coalition members can share successes and receive knowledge and inspiration from regional, state, and national experts and colleagues. Funding also will support micro-grants for coalitions to pilot new ideas, engage in new research, and/or obtain technical assistance or consultant support for launching new initiatives. These grants reinforce trust by decentralizing funding, incentivizing creativity, and empowering coalitions to put their plans into action.



Relationship Building Through Research and Education

East Central Indiana Region | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: 5 years

Systemic transformation requires continually gathering voices and data that define our current state, understanding the factors that influence our current state, and leveraging expertise within and beyond our region to achieve change. The process of investigation, assessment, and education is essential for establishing shared knowledge about our region and reinforcing shared vision and strategy.

The process of achieving the 21st Century Talent Region designation increased regional awareness of breadth and depth of data available at state, regional, and county levels. Yet making sense of the data, tracking it over time, and translating it into practice requires concerted attention and analysis by experts in many disciplines. Luckily, our region has a robust ecosystem of higher education institutions with such expertise.

The ECI Talent Collaborative is prepared to oversee a research grant program that would incentivize researchers to examine issues in East Central Indiana, with potential to create new knowledge with broader applications. We are uniquely positioned to make connections between researchers in larger counties (Delaware, Grant, Wayne) and talent stakeholders in smaller, more rural counties, which are unlikely to happen otherwise.

To support such work, READI funding would allow the ECI Talent Collaborative to create and sustain a central online data portal, providing reliable data, actionable information, and tools for data analysis. Funding also would support broader ECI stakeholder education in how to collect, analyze, and use data for decision-making.

The ECI Talent Collaborative also seeks to leverage the D2L Brightspace Learning Management System and the Course Merchant e-catalog system recently acquired by Ball State University to provide non-credit, lifetime learning opportunities in on-line, hybrid, or in person formats. Ball State also has invested in instructional design, course development, and marketing expertise to provide a robust, innovative, and high-quality platform for non-credit instruction. Initial professional development modules capitalize on the university's areas of strength: Spanish language for healthcare professionals, behaviorally-based crisis management for educators, social media brand management, and leading and managing in construction. With additional READI investment, the technology platform and supporting infrastructure could become a regional asset, enabling an accelerated build-out of learning opportunities for individual learners and employer-based training programs, including courses and modules from multiple providers such as other East Central Indiana colleges and universities. The potential is to create a one-stop-shop for lifetime learning, upskilling, and professional development in the region.



Cradle to Career Meet Up provided by East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative

I am proud to be a member of the Talent Collaborative and support the proposal to ensure its long-term viability and success.

Acacia St. John, Program Manager, Forward Wayne County



Cradle to Career Meet Up provided by East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative

The ‘ripple effect’ of the unique micro/macro value-add(s) that the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and Forge Your Path Proposal effort will contribute to our region are too numerous to list.

Mike Row, President and CEP, Eastern Indiana Works



Relationship Building Through Marketing and Engagement

East Central Indiana Region | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: 5 years

There is much, much more than corn and soybeans in East Central Indiana. And we want to make sure that everyone knows it! East Central Indiana's Forge Your Path regional marketing initiative highlights all that we have to offer: plenty of amenities, great value for families, a high quality of life, and growth and vision within our communities. Our current campaign seeks to build pride and empowerment among ECI residents, welcome visitors to our region, and connect with individuals with existing ties to ECI. Now, we are poised to amplify these efforts and invest in a broader and more aggressive talent engagement strategy.

The ECI Talent Collaborative's primary talent attraction strategy is fully leveraging East Central Indiana's Forge Your Path lifestyle marketing initiative, managed by the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership. The beauty of the Forge ECI brand is that it elevates and celebrates all of the quality-of-life efforts already underway, and provides web, print, and social media channels to amplify the impact of current and future projects across our counties, including those in this proposal.

The Talent Collaborative has committed to reinforcing the value and importance of the Forge ECI brand, increasing awareness and adoption among Collaborative stakeholders, and articulating how regional branding strengthens local and regional economies. READI funds would allow us to develop new and innovative collateral materials to meet our employers' recruitment and retention needs.

The success of Forge ECI provides the necessary foundation to engage with talent beyond our region and even beyond our state. In the last few years, Ball State University has participated in the Indiana Brain Gain Initiative, an effort to recruit talented and motivated alumni to live and work in Indiana, in partnership with Forge ECI and the Hoosier company TMap. Through READI funding, we want to expand our regional relationship with TMap to take advantage of their state-of-the-art consumer marketing platform and database to target talent who have an affinity for our specific region and are primed to take advantage of our professional opportunities, including remote working. This would include identification of the ECI talent market, developing connections with regional employers of choice, and launching a remote worker incentive program.





Talent Enhancement

Together, we will improve our region's quality of place by working to expand, improve, and modernize transportation and utility infrastructure to meet the needs of current and future demand.



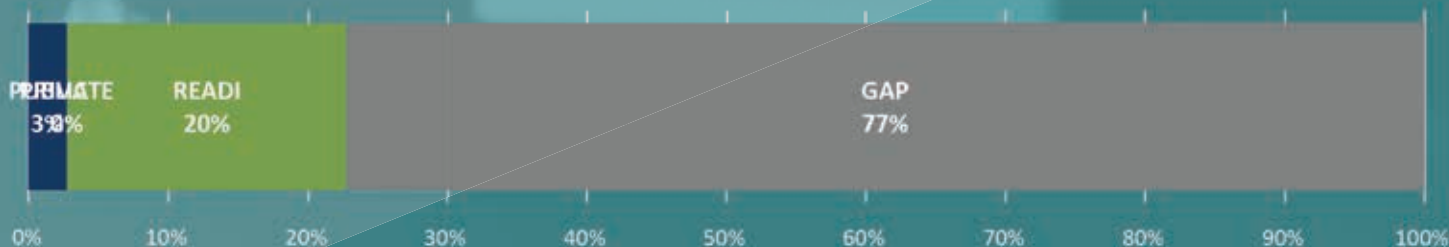
Regional Context

Reliable and fast internet service has become an essential part of our everyday lives. Broadband infrastructure is used in the majority of daily tasks including researching a school assignment, ordering groceries, applying for a job and filing a critical work deadline. While the world seems to revolve around the internet, and its supporting infrastructure, 17.7% of East Central Indiana residents report that access to the internet at high speeds (100/20 Mbps) is a major problem in their local community. Indiana's rural communities are not immune to the nationwide concerns centered on broadband infrastructure.

Beyond its importance as economic infrastructure, access to the internet is also a key component of quality of place; a topic discussed in several recent long-range planning initiatives within the region. There are a number of factors in the rural segments of East Central Indiana that many people find desirable, but in order to remain attractive, especially to young professionals, there is an increasing need for these areas to become connected to reliable and fast internet. As future generations identify locations in which to settle down and raise families, the economic and educational opportunities that broadband infrastructure provides are critical.



PROJECT COSTS



\$31,385,000



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Blackford County Economic Development Corporation

Fayette County Economic Development Group

Muncie- Delaware County Economic Development Alliance

Randolph County United

County and City Partners

Blackford County, Fayette County,
Delaware County, Randolph County
All incorporated Cities and Towns

Supporting Partners

Local Utility Providers, Private Businesses

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership

East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Through the development of long term lease agreements, the final determination of maintenance and oversight will be finalized. Revenues from internet customers will be used to fund maintenance, infrastructure expansions and any customer subsidy programs offered to lower the subscription costs to applicable customers.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

Number of new internet subscribers

Measurement of individual, and average speeds (download/ upload)


Miles of infrastructure installed

Number of new cell towers installed



Regional Broadband Initiative

Broadband infrastructure is becoming more commonplace and ultimately more critical in our expanding society and there is still a large divide between areas where internet connectivity is available and affordable and those where it is not.

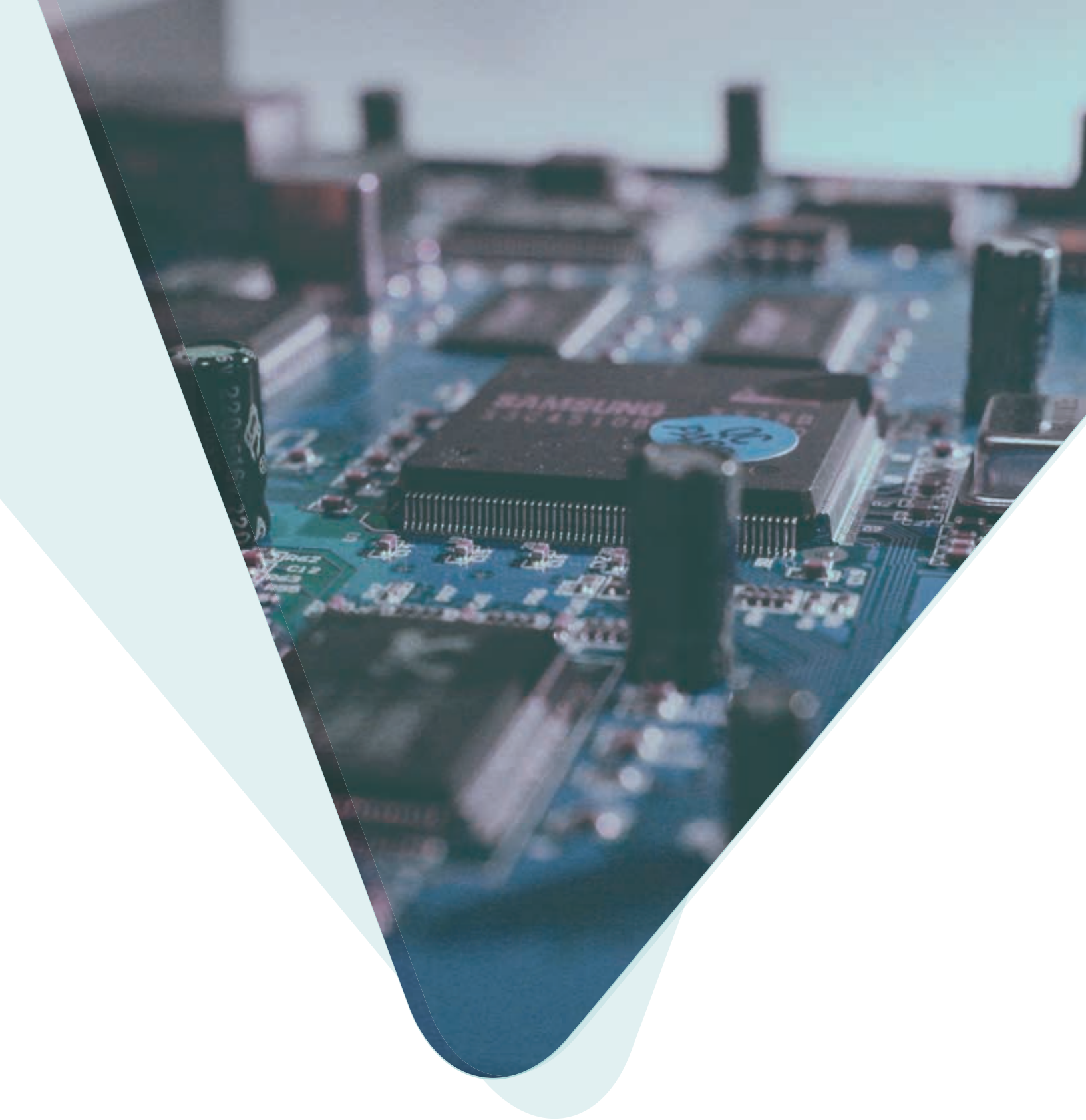


Broadband infrastructure is being defined as the fifth utility, prioritized along with electricity, water and sewer, gas and telephone service. While broadband infrastructure is becoming more commonplace and ultimately more critical in our expanding society, there is still a large divide between areas where internet connectivity is available and affordable and those where it is not available or is too costly for the average household. This gap, or the differences between these two distinct groups, is being defined as the 'digital divide'. While the digital divide concept is oftentimes used only to describe the gap in access and usage of broadband technology, some communities and organizations have created metrics to use the digital divide as a form of measurement.

With average upload and download speeds being reported by service providers through FCC Form 477 as 24/5 Mbps, the East Central Indiana region is lagging behind our regional neighborhoods. The reported speeds are considered borderline when compared to the FCC's definition of broadband (25/3 Mbps), but based on the definition, many of our region's communities are being classified as "served" leaving them unable to qualify for funding assistance, even though field survey data reports that the FCC's data is incorrect and inconsistent. While reported speeds are sometimes higher in our more urban cities and towns, our rural areas are remarkably different with a high level of inaccuracy when comparing datasets, which is leaving pockets of residents and businesses without reliable and affordable options for broadband access. Ultimately the readiness of a community depends on their ability to make improvements and upgrades in the future. Adoption or implementation of new programs, policies or capital improvements takes not only financial commitment but flexible policies, willing partners and long-term subscribers. Within these predominantly rural areas, local communities are often forced to lead and incentivize the implementation process for private service providers due to the lack of density and prolonged return on investment timeline.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Municipal Led Improvements to Incentivize Interest.





Municipal Led Improvements to Incentivize Interest

Blackford, Fayette, Delaware and Randolph County | Status: In Development | Duration: 1-2 years

The East Central Indiana region, as a whole, is currently served by numerous private companies, all of which offer varying coverage areas, available technologies, speeds and price points. While a large number of available providers exist, the region's rural areas are predominantly served by wireless and satellite providers who market upload speeds anywhere between 1 Mbps and 25 Mbps, with some areas having no wired or wireless service options at all. Most new terrestrial landline broadband networks rely on subsidies, or state/ federal grant funding to make any sense in a rural area due to the cost of construction. The reliance on outside funding is challenging when the digital story of East Central Indiana is being conveyed through inaccurate and inconsistent data. The incomplete picture leaves rural communities in a difficult situation with the only solution being a government funded approach.

While reaching high, symmetrical speeds (above 25/3 Mbps) will be the long-term goal, there are interim improvements that can be made to ensure that all areas of the region have reliable and affordable broadband options. To facilitate increased access and higher, more consistent speeds, projects including **Blackford County Broadband** and **Randolph County Broadband** are moving forward with the planning and implementation of new cellular towers in hopes of providing fiber optic infrastructure to the towers in initial project phases.

While both municipal governments are prepared to lead the implementation and finalize the lease/ purchase agreement of necessary land, they are doing so in an effort to subsidize the initial investment to bring the overall capital costs down for future internet service providers. Once complete, both Blackford and Randolph Counties will offer their infrastructure to local service providers through an RFP process to ensure that local residents and businesses have access to reliable business class service regardless of geographic location.

While fiber to the tower investments serve to meet the needs of many of the region's residents, the **Delaware County Broadband** project and **Fayette County Broadband** projects intend to take one additional step by ensuring that fiber optic service is provided to every residential and business address by implementing a system of infrastructure in anticipation of future partnerships with private service providers. Fiber optic technology converts electrical signals, that carry data, to light and sends the light through transparent glass fibers, which are about the diameter of a human hair. While the initial investment of a complete system is higher, both counties see the advantage to ensuring that service reaches all areas of their respective counties. Through a phase implementation, both Delaware and Fayette County are prepared to plan, design and construct infrastructure which will provide a ready to launch service.

County governments can facilitate the development of infrastructure; however, they are not equipped to become service providers. When Delaware and Fayette Counties complete their infrastructure systems, they will then complete a process by which they can lease the installed fiber optic infrastructure to private service providers. These long-term lease agreements would then provide both Counties with a revenue stream that could be used to pay off bond debt. Both Delaware and Fayette Counties have ongoing conversations underway with local internet service providers to discuss future public-private partnerships. At the time of this document's publication no final commitments have been made and interested parties preferred to remain undisclosed.

Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

SUPPORTING TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVES			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Construction of Access Road for National-Based Retail Development	Wayne	\$3,900,000	****
Trojan Lane 1st Impression - New Castle, IN	Henry	\$300,000	\$240,000
Walkable Winchester	Randolph	\$2,000,000	\$130,000
Washington Street Corridor	Henry	\$600,000	****

SUPPORTING UTILITY INITIATIVES

Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
100 South Project, New Castle, Indiana	Henry	\$200,000	\$160,000
Bundy Avenue Project, New Castle, Indiana	Henry	\$184,000	\$147,200
Drinking Water Improvements to the intersection of I70 and SR 109	Henry	\$13,573,600	****
Dudley Property Project, New Castle, Indiana	Henry	\$500,000	\$400,000
Gateway Industrial Park Water System Improvements	Wayne	\$13,500,000	****
Infrastructure Investment at I69 & SR 332	Delaware	\$50,000,000	****
Silver Towne Mint - Vision Business Park Infrastructure	Randolph	\$8,113,000	\$7,000,000
Spiceland Drainage Improvements	Henry	****	****
Spiceland Water System Improvements	Henry	\$7,000,000	****
Trailview Addition	Henry	\$137,500	\$137,500
Utilities Upgrade	Henry	\$195,000	\$25,000
Wastewater Improvements to the intersection of I70 and SR 3	Henry	\$5,765,000	****
Winchester Estates Project	Henry	\$4,500,000	\$3,600,000





Talent Enhancement

Together, we will improve our region's quality of life by working to develop diverse, complete, and economically viable neighborhoods.



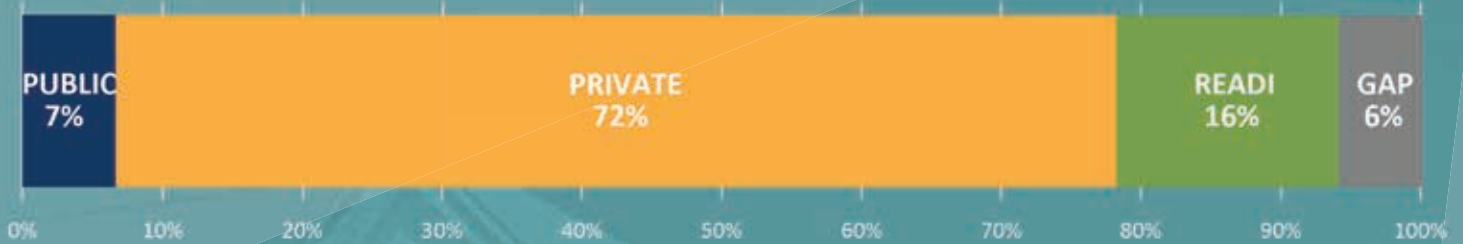
Regional Context

Between 2010 and 2021, the region's total number of housing units decreased by 54 units, and the vacancy rate increased by 2%. We know that new construction homes have been built over the last ten years; however, the total number of units has barely shifted. That is likely because the number of units being torn down has offset the data. While we recognize that the region is lagging in new construction, we are also aware that our targeted audience is changing. Currently, married-couple family households occupy most housing units in the region, but since 2000 we have seen a 20% increase in households headed by a single parent.

In the future, it will be necessary for local and regional leaders to consider reducing the burden of cost for developers. Then, we can increase homeownership rates, lower regional vacancy rates, increase the diversity in housing structures, and increase the number of units available at various price points. To overcome these known challenges, East Central Indiana is prepared to maximize the efforts in our local communities so that we can scale and replicate our successful, innovative efforts across the region.



PROJECT COSTS



\$65,870,000



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Blackford County Economic Development Corporation

Muncie- Delaware County Economic Development Alliance

Jay County Development Corporation

New Castle- Henry County Economic Development Corporation

Randolph County United

Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County

County and City Partners

Blackford County (City of Hartford City), Delaware County (City of Muncie), Henry County (City of New Castle, City of Knightstown), Jay County (City of Portland), Wayne County (City of Richmond)

Supporting Partners

Local Utility Providers, Private Developers, Private Businesses

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership

East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative

NATCO Empowerment Center



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Repairs would be funded through the establishment of local Home Owners Associations (HOA) or would be the responsibility of individual home owners depending on the type of development and housing unit.

For all new utility and infrastructure systems completed as a part of the ECIRP Regional Housing Initiative, maintenance and repairs would be funded through available local funds or utility user fees once residents are connected to utility services.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

Number of total building permits

Number of new housing structures built broken down by housing type

Construction value of homes

Market value of homes

Tax base pre and post implementation

Number of homeowners

Vacancy rates

Number of property acquisitions and subsequent property redevelopments

Number of affordable units

Number of participants in home buyer assistance programs

Demographics of the neighborhood/ community



Regional Housing Initiative

The lack of attainable workforce housing makes it difficult for our communities to attract new businesses, industries and employees.



Adequate housing for East Central Indiana's workforce is increasingly hard to find due to a combination of factors, including aging housing stock and rising construction costs. The lack of attainable workforce housing makes it difficult for the existing workforce located within the region. It makes it difficult for our communities to attract new businesses, industries, and employees.

One critical pathway to addressing the housing challenges in our region's communities is increasing the supply of available housing options; however, building that supply is becoming increasingly expensive. Whether building single-family homes or multifamily rental and condominium buildings, development costs often grow through each step of the planning, design, and construction process, leading to increased purchase prices and monthly rents.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Housing through shovel ready sites.
- Housing through the development of infrastructure.
- Housing as a tool for neighborhood reinvestment.
- Housing through public-private partnerships.



SR 109 corridor and I-70 intersection



Housing Through Shovel Ready Sites

Blackford and Henry County | Status: Ready to Launch Long Term | Duration: 3 years or more

Across any community or region site selectors, real estate professionals, and developers can all agree that proposed projects need sites that are ready to go. New development and expansion projects don't necessarily want to spend months undertaking feasibility studies or waiting for local communities to complete utility extensions. Within East Central Indiana local communities are using their limited resources to identify, acquire, and ready hundreds of acres for future residential development. Grant County has a history of successfully enticing market-rate single-family developers to the community creating several hundred new units in the last 15 years.

The **Blackford County Housing Initiative** seeks to leverage Hartford City's ownership of 140 acres of land to incentivize the private development of single-family homes soon. While available land is an added benefit to any developer looking to establish themselves in a community, having shovel-ready single-family sites significantly reduces the developer's risk by lowering initial capital costs. Blackford County is actively working to extend public and private utility services to provide additional incentives to future development partners, including water, wastewater, stormwater, and fiber systems. The land value and the capital costs to extend utility services will be contributed to any future development project as a local match.

With approximately 25% of Henry County's workforce commuting outside of the County for employment and the expansion of commercial uses at the I-70 interchange, the **SR 109 corridor from Knightstown to I-70** is a location for future residential development. While available property along the corridor is plentiful, no current drinking water service is provided along or adjacent to the corridor. Ongoing efforts by the Town of Knightstown Utilities, Henry County, Henry Community Health, and the Henry County Redevelopment Commission are 'ready to launch' the establishment of water service along the SR 109 corridor with the capacity to accommodate future residential development within the approximately 150 undeveloped acres adjacent to the corridor. When complete, the established infrastructure systems will incentivize growth, and the nearly 300 acres of shovel-ready sites will be marketed as a competitive advantage across the East Central Indiana region.



Housing Through the Development of Infrastructure

Henry and Jay County | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: 1-2 years

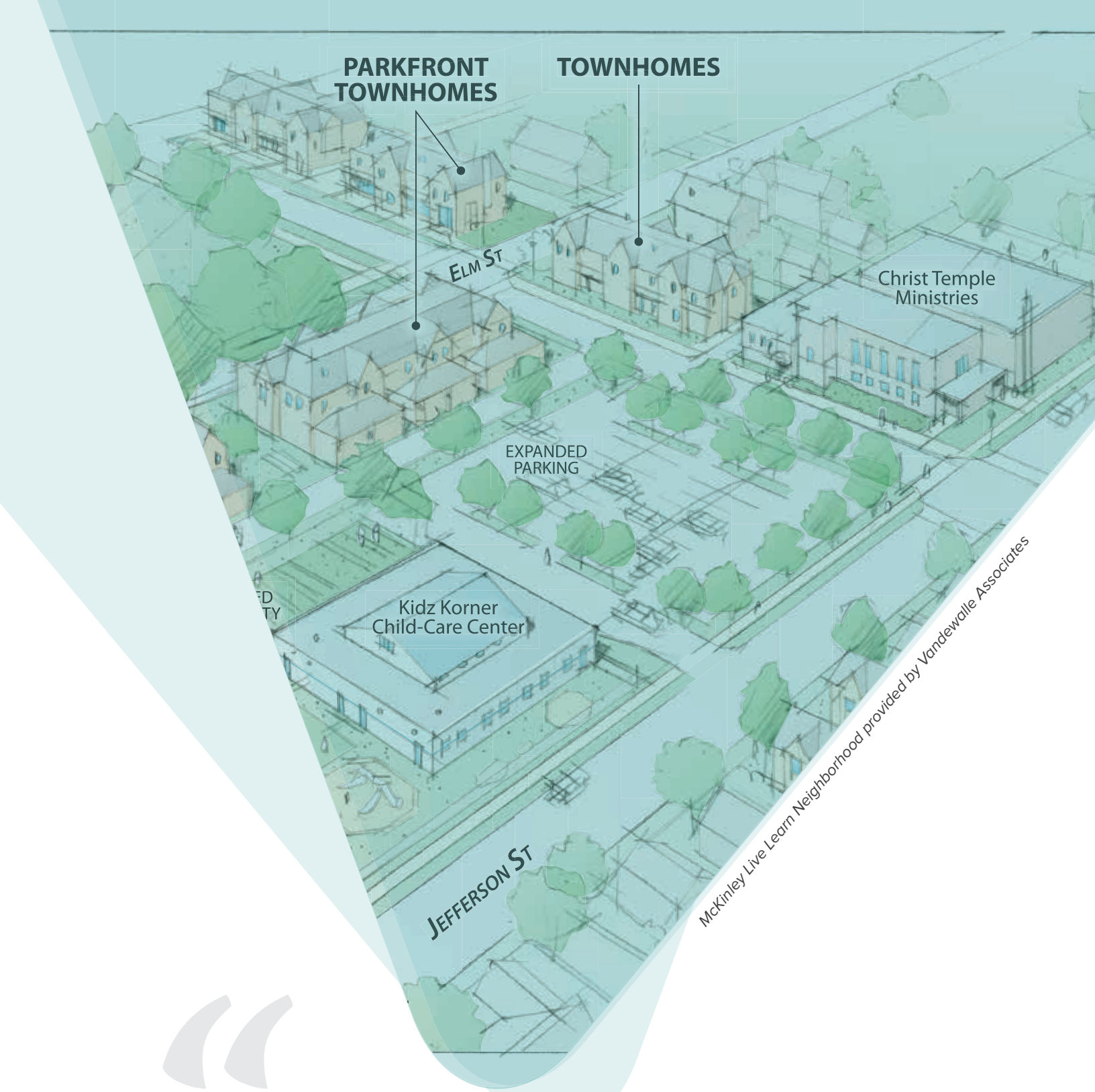
The condition of roads, bridges, water, and wastewater treatment plants, and other physical assets greatly influence the economy's ability to function and grow. Communities of all shapes and sizes rely on well-functioning water and sewer systems to incentivize and support their growth in some way. Within East Central Indiana local communities are strategically investing in water and wastewater improvements to lessen the financial risk on residential developers. As a result, the region will see an increase of over 120 housing units, including a mix of single-family detached, single-family attached, and market-rate apartments following the completion of construction.

Improving and maintaining water and wastewater systems in rural areas is an ongoing challenge due to available capital resources. With general maintenance posing as a constant worry, the need to expand services is often an overwhelming undertaking requiring years of planning. To ensure that existing needs are balanced against future gains, rural communities need to identify and invest in infrastructure improvements that can pay off economically in private-sector investment. **The Preserve at Northfield Park, Broyles Lane Housing Initiative** in New Castle, and the **Middletown Infrastructure initiative** in Middletown, seek to strategically improve and expand public utility systems to encourage local residential growth. Through strategic utility extensions, both New Castle and Middletown will lower the final construction costs for their residential developers, allowing prices to become an estimated 10%-12% below the market rate. That will also increase the total number of available housing units in Henry County.

Housing development in rural areas often requires alternative utility services due to proximity and available services. **Osimonee Point** in Portland, Indiana, will provide 35 new residential housing units targeted explicitly towards young professionals and individuals nearing retirement- two age groups that are currently increasing across the region. The development utilizes a highly visible property that had formerly fallen into disrepair but will rely on individual wells to provide water service to residents. By developing infrastructure systems in partnership with local housing developers, the Osimonee Point development can reduce development costs by an estimated \$192,000 or nearly \$5,500 per unit.



The Preserve at Northfield Park provided by Bridgenorth Homes, LLC



While many great initiatives and projects are underway or have occurred in the neighborhood there is still much to be done to ensure the neighborhood is lifted and improved for the residents and neighbors.

Christopher Smith, Chair, McKinley Live-Learn Neighborhood PMT



Housing as a Tool for Neighborhood Reinvestment

Delaware County | Status: In Development | Duration: 1-2 years

Deteriorating and vacant housing structures are not just a concern at a property level. What may start as an individual home in need of repairs can quickly lead to a block of houses, or an entire neighborhood, in some state of deterioration. This level of disinvestment can continue to grow, leading to aesthetic impacts and impacts on public health, safety, and overall community perceptions. Knowing that one single property can impact an entire community negatively, the opposite should be true as well. By focusing investment at a site and neighborhood level, broader improvements can be made, creating a ripple effect that improves systems, institutions, and businesses.

The **McKinley Live-Learn Neighborhood initiative** in Muncie uses neighborhood redevelopment to bring together multiple neighborhood voices, school and business partnerships, and a clear shared vision to use their collective energy to make the area's existing educational assets the economic lifeblood of a healthy, attractive, and vibrant neighborhood. Located north of downtown in an area defined by the river and by Central High School, the McKinley and Gilbert neighborhoods have the opportunity to become that place in Muncie. Funding provided for this initiative will target the acquisition of blighted riverfront properties that continue to detract from the neighborhood's significant efforts to date. Additionally, funding would provide home rehabilitation and repair grants facilitated in partnership with Muncie Central High School and Muncie Area Career Center students. That initiative provides equitable living opportunities, creates safe neighborhoods by actively targeting blight elimination, empowering residents by offering funds for home rehabs, and growing learning opportunities by creating a neighborhood live-learn campus across the street from the high school.



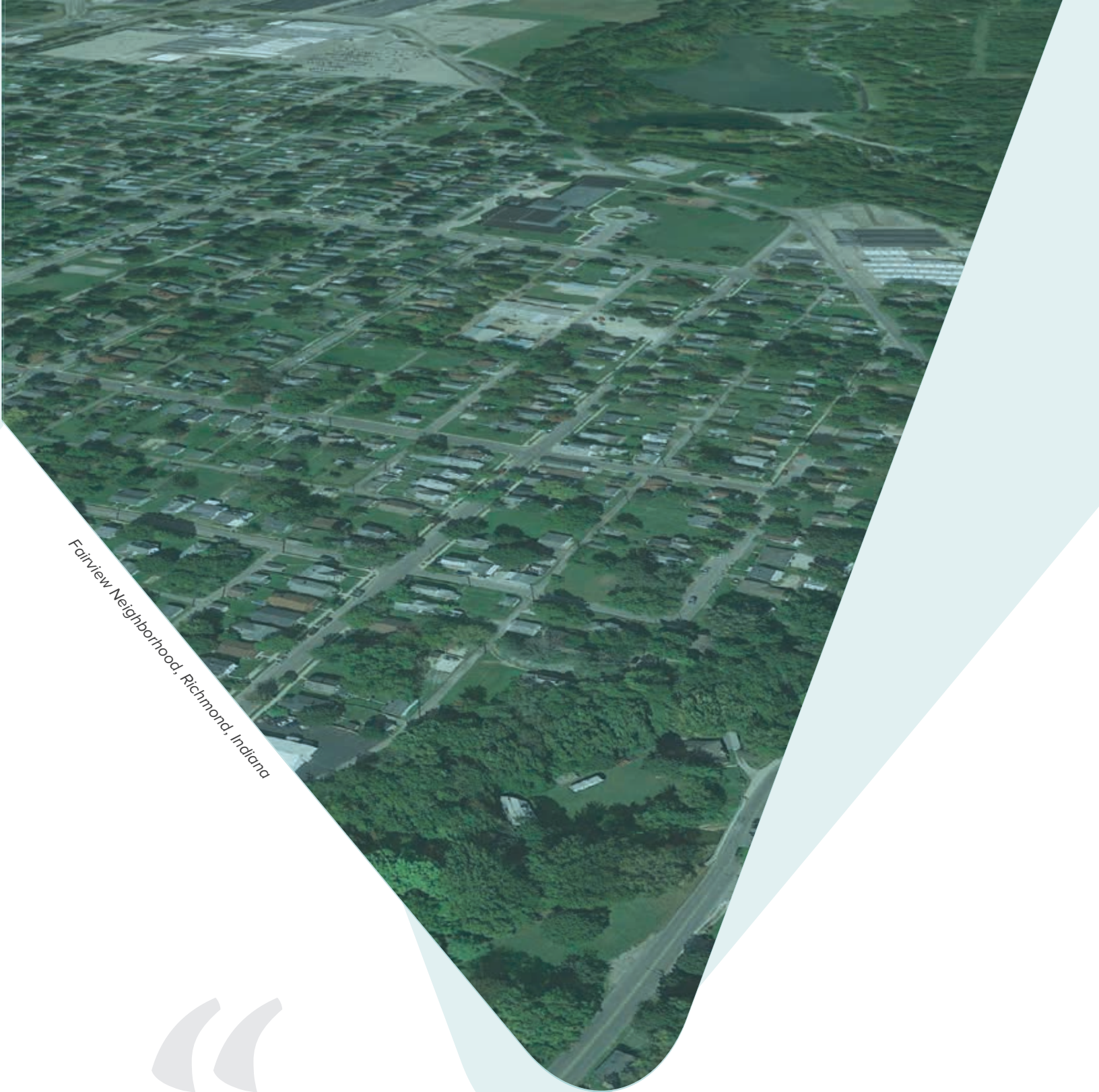
Housing Through Public-Private Partnerships

Wayne County | Status: Near Term | Duration: 6 -12 months

Within private and philanthropic organizations across the country, there is a growing understanding that housing can be used as a platform for improving the local quality of life. This general acceptance has allowed local employers, community service organizations, and philanthropic groups to put a renewed strategic focus on leveraging their position and resources to help solve the housing challenges within their local communities. Within East Central Indiana, some of the most creative workforce-housing solutions result from innovative collaborations among nonprofit groups, private companies, and government agencies. Ongoing partnerships with Reid Health and Good News Habitat for Humanity, both located in Wayne County, are positioned to improve the local housing stock by approximately 340 units with the backing of local and County officials.

Currently, nearly 40% of Wayne County's workforce commutes into the county daily. Knowing that Wayne County has dominant employers and strong quality of life amenities, this influx of people suggests that Wayne County could become home to nearly 12,000 residents if new housing options were available. Reid Health, Wayne county's largest employer, has a drastic need for housing to attract medical professionals and physicians. Seeing the need and acknowledging the tie to talent retention and attraction, Reid Health conceptualized the **South 37th Street Housing Initiative** and then bought approximately 75 acres of land to kick start implementation. The site will be used to develop around 200 apartment units and 130 single-family units to attract new employees and encourage current employees to relocate to Wayne County. While Reid Health is leading the effort, they have formed a unique partnership with the City of Richmond and Wayne County to fund the implementation of site-specific infrastructure, including water, wastewater, storm sewer utilities, and corridor lighting along South 37th Street. TIF revenue generated from the project will be used for infrastructure development; however, it will not cover the entire cost of the proposed systems. Funding provided for this initiative will be used to complete the development of needed site infrastructure, which will then be matched with private development funding as the project progresses.

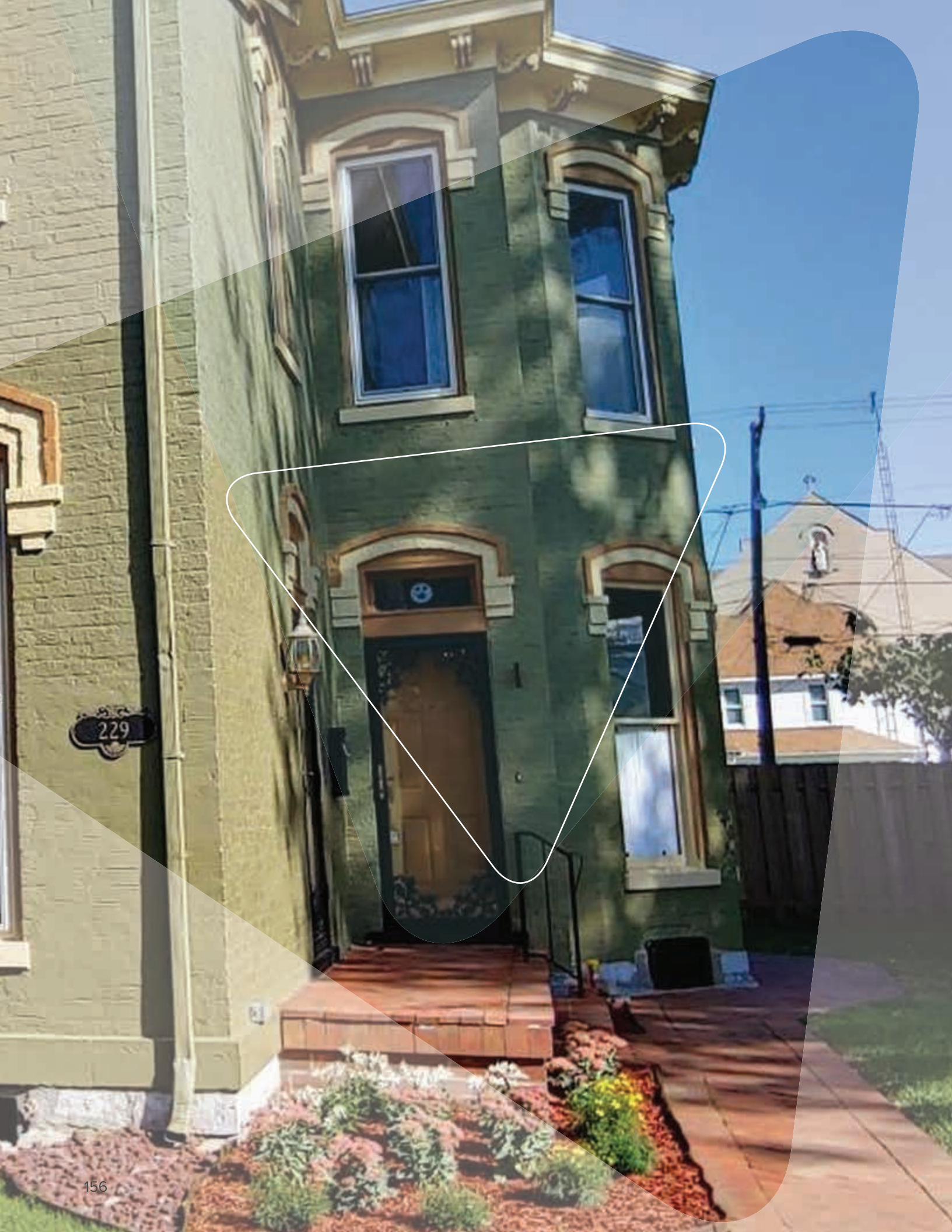
On a smaller scale, through a partnership with the City of Richmond's Blight Elimination Program, Good News Habitat for Humanity has gained control of 15 lots within the Fairview Neighborhood. It is "ready to launch" the construction of 15 modular homes within the neighborhood. The **Fairview Modular Workforce Housing Program** includes the improvement of formerly blighted housing properties. When complete, it will provide new families with the opportunity to purchase a home and better their lives through financial education services offered through Habitat's partner's organization NATCO Empowerment Center. Funding provided for this initiative will allow Good News Habitat for Humanity to establish a revolving loan fund that will give a replenishing revenue stream for continued investment within the Richmond community. When complete, Good News Habitat for Humanity can work to replicate and scale this effort across East Central Indiana's allied organizations, leading to long-term results across the region as families establish roots in our local communities and improve their personal lives.



Fairview Neighborhood, Richmond, Indiana

I fully support the efforts of Good News Habitat for Humanity. I can see the long-term results as families develop good financial habits, address areas of growth and plan for the future.

Jeffery S. Raatz, State Senator



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Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL HOUSING INITIATIVES			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Blight Elimination and Prevention Program	Delaware	\$300,000	\$240,000
Blight Elimination Program	Randolph	\$400,000	\$80,000
Castle Heights Neighborhood	Henry	\$1,250,000	\$750,000
Housing Neighbors: 8twelve Coalition Housing Support	Delaware	\$900,000	****
Kitselman Flats	Delaware	\$20,000,000	\$16,000,000
New Castle Land Banking	Henry	\$50,000	****
Revitalize Richmond	Wayne	\$1,000,000	****
Richmond Rising PLACE	Wayne	\$5,000,000	****
Smiley Estates	Henry	\$7,200,000	\$7,200,000
Spiceland Infrastructure	Henry	\$800,000	\$400,000
Upper Floor Downtown Housing	Henry	****	****
Upstairs Housing Initiative- Main Street Richmond District	Wayne	\$1,000,000	****
Wastewater Improvements to the intersection of I70 and SR 109	Henry	\$4,860,000	****
Castle Heights Neighborhood	Henry	\$250,000	****

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.





Talent Enhancement

Together, we will improve our region's quality of life by working to diversify the types of facilities and services available to the public, so that we can improve the livability of our local communities.



Regional Context

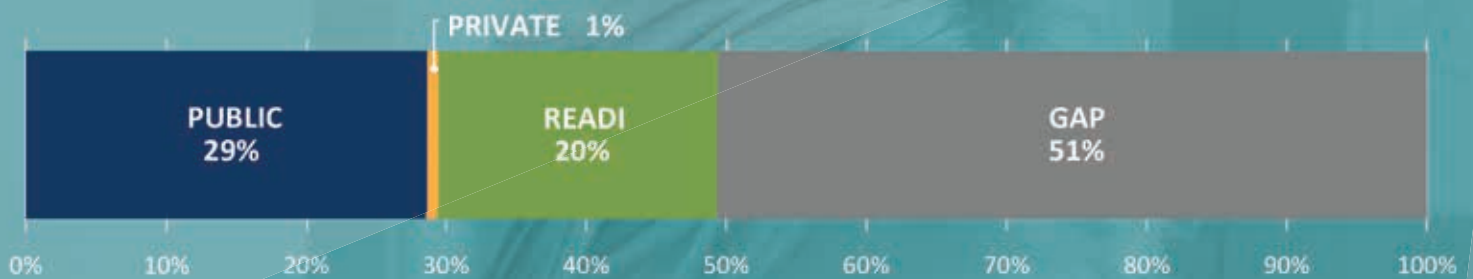
The economic viability of a region is impacted by the health of the residents in that region. According to the Indiana Health Rankings provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, every county in this region except one is ranked among the least healthy counties in Indiana. On average, residents in this region report 4.4 physically unhealthy days and 4.3 mentally unhealthy days in a 30 day period. 21% of adults in the region report feeling in poor or fair health. The counties across the region range from having 4,980 to 1,710 people per primary care physician, except for Delaware County, which has 1,000 people per primary care physician. The majority of the counties in this region are federally designated Medically Underserved Areas (MUA) and Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA).

Per a random sample phone survey conducted by Abt Associates that covered three of the counties in this region, residents reported “not knowing where to go,” “lack of transportation,” and “no money” as the top three reasons for not accessing health care.

This region must continue to address health and mental health services barriers to improve the quality of life and quality of place in East Central Indiana. To this end, there is a focus on ensuring that services are located in easily accessible areas, are near other support services and are provided in non-traditional environments where the target population(s) are already located.



PROJECT COSTS



\$13,500,000



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Blackford County Economic Development Corporation

Muncie-Delaware County Economic Development Alliance

Fayette County Economic Development Group

Grant County Economic Growth Council

New Castle-Henry County Economic Development Corporation

Jay County Development Corporation

Randolph County United

Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County

County and City Partners

Blackford County, Delaware County, Fayette County, Grant County, Henry County, Jay County, Randolph County, Wayne County

All incorporated Cities and Towns

Supporting Partners

IU Health Blackford, Indiana Primary Health Care Association, Indiana Rural Health Association, Grant Blackford Mental Health, Open Door Health Services, Genoa Healthcare, Care Services, Inc., Meridian Health Services, Centerstone, Blue Zones

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership
East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Generation of revenue will be a primary source for financial sustainability for two of the projects in this focus area.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

Number of health sector training slots created

Number of new health care professionals in the region

Number of individuals who receive health and/or mental health services

Number of people who receive social support services

Rate of rearrest

Number of individuals engaged in substance abuse treatment/recovery services

Improved financial wellbeing.



Development of Health and Wellness Facilities and Programs

In rural communities, rising rates of poverty, domestic violence, substance use and social isolation have created a higher need for mental health and social support services.



Given the challenges of transportation across the region (e.g., lack of public transportation, distance from services), it is important to ensure that health, mental health, and support services are easily accessible. That requires attention to the location of the services, identifying opportunities to provide services under conditions convenient to the individual (e.g., early education sites), and providing services in non-traditional settings (e.g., jail).

Considering the workforce challenges faced in the healthcare industry and are exacerbated in rural communities, it is also essential to ensure that the services are accessible and seize the opportunity to leverage these health care initiatives to recruit and retain a skilled workforce in the region.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Creating a One Stop Shop (Co-located Services)
- Healthcare as a Community Development Asset
- Health Care and Public Safety
- Improving Public Health to Impact Generational Poverty



This is a great concept for this community in which we serve, and I look forward to seeing this opportunity move forward for this region.

James R. Allbaugh, President and CEO, Carey Services, Inc.



Creating a One Stop Shop (Co-located Services)

Blackford County | Status: In Development | Duration: 1 to 2 years

Rising poverty rates, domestic violence, substance use, and social isolation have created a higher need for mental health and social support services in rural communities. The ability to access these services can be further complicated by a lack of knowledge about the available services, how to access them, and lack of transportation to physically get to the location(s).

The one-stop-shop model combines multiple providers in a single location, bringing together services in one location to support accessing services. One-stop shops have the most significant impact in easily accessible sites, and the service providers actively collaborate to coordinate services.

Grant-Blackford Mental Health intends to convert a former elementary school into a space for co-located health and social service providers. When complete, the **Blackford County Regional Community Hub**, located in Hartford City, will offer physical and behavioral health services, social service supports (e.g., public benefits enrollment, emergency assistance, etc.), case management, and workforce development services through the myriad of agencies who will be tenants in the centralized location. The organizations will collaborate to ensure that individuals and families can access services without making multiple trips.

It is projected that more than 4,000 people will be using the hub in year one and more than 5,000 in year two. Clients will be accessing a combination of Grant Blackford Mental Health (9%), Community & Family (57%), Open Door Health Services (22%), and Genoa Pharmacy (12%).



Healthcare as a Community Development Asset

Blackford County | Status: In Development | Duration: 3 years or more

Rural communities often experience significant health disparities when compared to the population as a whole. Rural risk factors include geographic isolation, lower socioeconomic status, higher rates of health risk behaviors, limited access to health care providers, and limited job opportunities. Healthcare workforce shortages are prevalent throughout rural communities. The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis reports that less than 8% of all physicians and surgeons practice in rural settings. Reliable transportation to care can be a significant barrier due to long distances, poor road conditions, and limited availability of public transportation. Rural minority populations often experience health disparities in health status, rates of chronic disease, life expectancy, and rates of unintentional injury. Blackford County is a federally designated Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) and a Medically Underserved Area (MUA).

Health care is a key component to the vitality of a community, a strong economic driver, and a career option that provides a thriving wage. Health care facilities can spark new business development and strengthen existing businesses. Taylor University collaborates with a wide range of regional and state partners to expand their ***Inspire Vitality and Transportation in their Neighborhood***. It brings together a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) to downtown Hartford City, providing accessible, affordable health and mental health services.

This facility will also be a cornerstone for the revitalization of the downtown area as it contributes to the coordinated effort to build the infrastructure and spur future capital projects. Revitalization of the downtown area will help recruit/retain the future workforce in Blackford County.

The FQHC will provide training/internships for 24 medical students per year (12 students per provider). It is anticipated that there will be 12 students from IU School of Medicine Muncie and 12 from Marian College of Osteopathic Medicine. In addition to this, it is projected that at least 70 undergraduate students a year will work in the health center, gaining both clinical and administrative experience and training in the healthcare industry.

This project will holistically improve the quality of place and the quality of life in Blackford County. It provides for the physical and mental health of residents in the community, spurs economic development in the downtown core, and provides workforce development and education/training opportunities for students and young adults.



This proposal curates the best thinking on educational innovation that aligns with Taylor's historic mission and propels that mission into the mid-21st century.

Chris Goeglein, Chair, Taylor University Board of Trustees



The JCAP will allow persons who are incarcerated to get the help they need and hopefully allow persons to gain sobriety and return to being productive members of society.

Bob A. Witham, Judge, Henry Circuit Court No. 1



Health Care and Public Safety

Henry County | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: 3 years or more

Residents in rural communities are disproportionately impacted by substance use, with a high prevalence of methamphetamine and alcohol abuse. Individuals with substance abuse issues are often high utilizers of the criminal justice system. In addition to the burden of an addiction, a criminal history can be an enormous barrier to securing employment and housing.

Henry County Sheriff Ric McCorkle estimates that 90% of incarcerated inmates in Henry County Jail are there because of drug-related charges. In 2020, jail intake data indicated that 76% of people coming to the jail lived in a home where at least one parent or sibling misused drugs.

Criminogenic needs are dynamic factors that an individual can change that strongly relate to the likelihood of re-offending and committing another crime. Substance use has been identified as one of the most frequent criminogenic needs that result in criminal behavior. Unmet criminogenic needs lead to repeated encounters with the criminal justice system.

The Henry County Sheriff's Office wants to interrupt the cycle of substance abuse and support individuals in the jail to conquer their addiction and create healthy, productive lives for themselves and their families.

Inmates who enter the Henry County Jail will be offered the opportunity to apply for the **Jail Chemical Addiction Program (JCAP)**. JCAP is an intensive treatment program staffed by a licensed Master's prepared social worker. It uses Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) programming, life skill education, and substance abuse counseling to help people address their addiction issues.

The Indiana Attorney General's Office has identified JCAP as a "best method" for reaching drug users who are most in need of services. JCAP is operational in other counties in Indiana (Including Boone, Dearborn, Shelby, and Scott Counties). Dearborn County has experienced a 25% reduction in individuals who are arrested for a new offense. JCAP will directly impact the county's economic vitality as these individuals enter the workforce and contribute to the community's vitality. Successful implementation of JCAP will increase public safety and improve the quality of life for individuals and families in Henry County.

In year one of the program, it is anticipated that there would be two series of the class for female clients (24 individuals) and one series of male clients (16 individuals). Once the new facility is opened, the JCAP program will be available on an ongoing basis, and all eligible individuals will be able to receive services.



Improving Public Health to Impact Generational Poverty

East Central Indiana Region | Status: Pilot Program | Duration: 5 years or more

According to the Current Population Survey (CPS), the percentage of children living in deep poverty is higher in rural areas than urban areas with increased rates of generational poverty. Generational poverty is defined as a family having lived in poverty for at least two generations. A sense of hopelessness characterizes generational poverty, “surviving” vs. “planning,” and focusing on short-term outcomes. Research shows that “two-generation” approaches that address the cycle of poverty are one of the most effective ways to lift future generations out of poverty.

The 2 Gen approach is a two-generation, intergenerational, multi-generational approach that simultaneously addresses the needs of parents and children to improve outcomes for the whole family.

The **Heart of Indiana United Way THRIVE network** is an innovative collaboration between local nonprofit partners who provide services and one-on-one coaching to help families increase their income, build savings, and acquire assets.

Heart of Indiana United Way will be expanding its THRIVE Network by developing a two-generational (2 Gen) approach to supporting families in the region. THRIVE coaches will work at approved early-learning centers across the region and provide parents one-on-one coaching to develop family success plans for long-term financial stability. The plans will include goals for helping their children reach their full potential. Coaches will work with families to establish goals that include family engagement in their child’s education and the health and wellbeing of the entire family. At the same time, the children will participate in a high-quality early learning program focused on their educational success.

It is anticipated that 50 families would be served in year one of the program, with the number of families growing each year of implementation.





Knightstown Public Library, Henry County, Indiana

Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS FACILITIES AND PROGRAM INITIATIVES			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Control Point 99, Inc.	Randolph	\$950,000	****
Courthouse Annex Window Replacement	Fayette	\$100,000	****
Dunkirk Public Library Upgrades	Jay	\$95,000	****
Eastside Resource Center	Delaware	\$1,750,000	****
Fayette County Courthouse Improvements	Fayette	\$1,000,000	****
Jay County Humane Society New Building Project	Jay	\$950,000	\$275,000
Knightstown Public Library	Henry	\$2,500,000	\$390,000
Ross Center Neighborhood Health & Wellness Impact Project	Delaware	\$2,604,000	*****
The Center: A shared workspace and resource center for the nonprofit sector	Delaware	****	\$651,000
The Guest House Building Project New Castle, IN	Henry	\$1,000,000	\$207,000
Urban Light Social Services Hub	Delaware	\$165,000	\$76,000

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.





Talent Development

Together, we will improve our region's quality of opportunity by investing in lifelong learning opportunities.



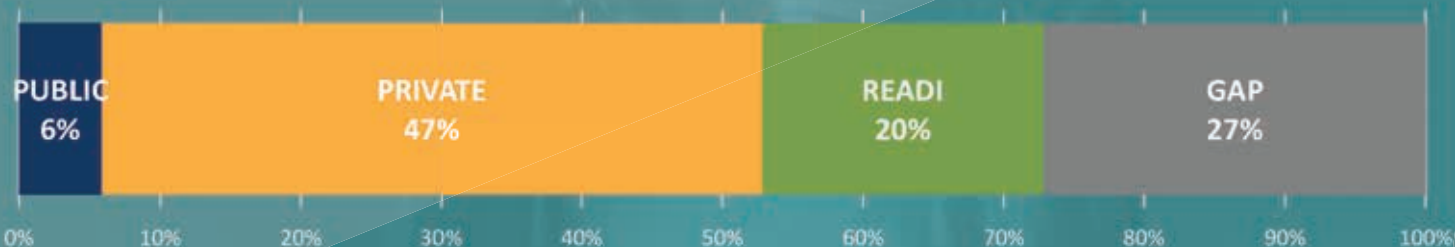
Regional Context

Educational attainment is one of the most significant determinants of regional well-being. Economic benefits include higher levels of productivity and higher wages, which will result in more local expenditures and higher tax revenues. Basic educational expertise and skills, including fundamental knowledge, reasoning ability, emotional self-regulation, and interactional abilities, are critical components of individual health outcomes and improve disparities in public health measures between different racial and ethnic groups. In the elderly, higher levels of education have been shown to improve functionality as age-related cognitive decline sets in, with its associated impacts on physical health and social service expenditures. Because of its long-lasting and pervasive influence on so many measures of well-being, education is one of the essential topical areas to consider for regional public policy.

East Central Indiana's population lags behind the rest of the State in educational attainment. The region has a slightly higher proportion of people (aged 25 and over) who have less than a high school education and a significantly lower proportion of people who have a post-secondary education. Comparisons to 2014 show that regional educational outcomes have been improving, and the gap between the region in the State for less-than-high-school outcomes is narrowing; unfortunately, at the same time, the gap in post-secondary educational outcomes has been growing.



PROJECT COSTS



\$13,610,000



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Blackford County Economic Development Corporation

Muncie-Delaware County Economic Development Alliance

Fayette County Economic Development Group

Grant County Economic Growth Council

New Castle-Henry County Economic Development Corporation

Jay County Development Corporation

Randolph County United

Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County

County and City Partners

Blackford County, Delaware County, Fayette County, Grant County, Henry County, Jay County, Randolph County, Wayne County

All incorporated Cities and Towns

Supporting Partners

Ball State University, IUPUI – Herron School of Art and Design, Taylor University, Lilly Endowment, George and Francis Ball Foundation, Henry County Daycare Ministries, Project Lead the Way, Muncie Community Schools, Randolph Eastern School Corporation, Other school districts in East Central Indiana

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership
East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

While at various stages of development, all of the activities have identified external sources of funding for continuation beyond the READI program window.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

Increase in the number of licensed family care facilities

Increase in the number of children enrolled

Number of participants in the “Path to Quality” rubric

Number of scholarships and vouchers offered

Number of participating not-for-profit organizations

Types of training offered

Number of participating school districts, instructors, and students

Number of certificates offered


Geographic coverage of program participants

Total school corporations engaged in the programming



Regional Lifelong Learning Systems

Childhood instruction is still critical, but not just for initial skills development; education must instill abilities and qualities that support lifelong learning later on.



With the accelerating pace of technological and cultural change, education is not simply a childhood activity but something occurring across an individual's entire lifespan. Childhood instruction is still critical, but not just for initial skills development; education must instill abilities and qualities that support lifelong learning later. Critical reasoning, negotiation, cultural understanding, and communications are skills that advance the region's sustainability and the resiliency of its residents.

The Regional Lifelong Learning Systems initiative intends to build upon existing frameworks of lifelong education to expand their geographic influence, efficiently share resources between different institutions, and develop new options for promoting learning across the entire lifespan.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Developing Early Childhood Programs through Community Development
- Lifelong learning systems through innovations in K-12 education.
- Lifelong learning systems promoting educational resources for all audiences.
- Lifelong learning systems promoting the arts.
- Lifelong learning systems through promoting healthy and active habits.
- Lifelong learning systems through K-12 entrepreneurial education.
- Lifelong learning through vocational training.





Developing Early Childhood Programs Through Community Development

Henry County | Status: Pilot Program | Duration: 3 years or more

Children who take part in early childhood education programs have improved social skills and do better in school. They also learn essential life skills that stay with them forever. Early childhood programs (ECP) also benefit employers by allowing for affordable child care options for employees.

Rural areas typically have greater difficulties in forming early childhood programs due to the lower population density. Across the region, affordable ECP options are essential for ensuring that cognitive and social gaps arising from unequal access to education are addressed. Not only are ECP a critical tool in the development of early and lifelong learners, but these care centers are essential tools in the attraction and retention of talent and industries. Childcare is not a family issue; it is a business issue. It affects how we work, when we work, and for many, why we work.

Acknowledging the urgent need to increase affordable quality care slots, the **Henry County Caring for Children Birth to Five** strives to create more childcare slots, encourage the use of Indiana's Paths to QUALITY guide for excellence, secure scholarships, and reduce the costs of childcare for low-income families. Children who take part in early childhood education programs have improved social skills and do better in school. They also learn essential life skills that stay with them forever. Early Childcare Programs also benefit employers by allowing for affordable childcare options for employees.

Caring for Children Birth to Five will enlist the local career center's carpentry departments to build a facility to house the "Kids building for Kids." Besides showcasing the skill of high school students, the project will be used to build publicity to educate our families about the importance of early learning. Working alongside ministry childcare providers and collaborating with the four-county school partner districts, the project will also put at least one childcare center in each school system, utilizing the "Path-to-Quality" early childhood program rubric.

The program's HOPE Initiative addresses the County's urgent need to increase affordable quality care slots and provides more professional development opportunities. Scholarships and vouchers will be available to families so their children can attend quality care centers, safe surroundings, trained staff, and appropriate curriculum for children birth to five. Public outreach will help our region understand the importance of early learning to the long-term quality of life.



Lifelong Learning Systems Through Innovations in K-12 Education

East Central Indiana Region | Status: Pilot Program | Duration: 3 years or more

Student enrollment drives federal and state public school funding, so the fewer students enrolled in a district, the less the funding. Furthermore, compounding their funding problems, rural schools face a unique problem concerning transportation. Despite making up only 15 percent of the population, rural residents are spread out across 72 percent of the United States. With vast distances to cover, many rural school districts are forced to allocate a greater percentage of their budget to transporting their students.

Resource sharing is one sustainable way to expand educational opportunities for students in rural school districts. Taking advantage of communications technology, costs for training can be spread out over a larger number of students, lowering the burden on individual school districts. Higher quality offerings and more competitive staff salaries can thus be offered, helping to narrow the educational gap in urban areas.

The Classroom Connection project seeks to provide equitable educational opportunities to students across our rural schools by sharing instructors among school districts. That sharing leads to better student academic outcomes and employability skills, programs that enhance the attractiveness of communities to families, and promote attainment of post-secondary education in the region. Students will have access to expanded course offerings, and better connections with industry can be forged to establish vocational education opportunities.

The region can ensure that classroom academic and technical skills are applied in the workplace whenever secondary schools, businesses, and post-secondary entities come together. Furthermore, this collaboration can ensure students can foster employability skills, discover career options, become aware of post-secondary education and training needs, and build relationships with workplace professionals. When complete, this project will have addressed and overcome many of the obstacles to greater resource sharing, such as coordinating teacher contracts and other policy requirements between school districts. It will also address time constraints for school administrators, finding qualified instructors that meet credentialing requirements, and securing participation from regional employers and post-secondary education providers.

The purpose of this pilot program would be to connect, coordinate, and implement a plan to address these issues, so there is greater access to academic and CTE opportunities for area students resulting in a more qualified workforce in East Central Indiana.





The education level of a community's workforce is one of the most important factors in the health of that community's economy.

Bob A. Witham, Judge, Henry Circuit Court No. 1



Lifelong Learning Systems Promoting Educational Resources for All Audiences

Delaware and Wayne Counties | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: 1 to 2 years

Museums are ideal spaces for young children to learn. They allow children to explore their interests through authentic objects, hands-on exhibits, and activities. Museums also provide early learners interactive and multisensory opportunities –honoring the concrete, active way children learn. These opportunities also allow children to associate museums with life-long learning habits by associating their interests – from rockets to comic books – with these facilities’ resources. This model requires that museums continually “reinvent” themselves with new exhibits to match the interests of their young audience. Refreshing material can also help overcome parent resistance to taking their children to museums since new exhibits retain a sense of novelty for adults.

The Muncie Children’s Museum (MCM) is the only dedicated children’s museum in East Central Indiana, serving an extensive area and receiving visits from households and school districts all over the region. Accordingly, the museum plays a vital role in creating a culture of education in East Central Indiana. With the smaller population of the region, the museum must work extra hard to ensure that sufficient resources for building new exhibits continue to flow. Through MCM’s **More to Explore** program, the museum will create intentionally designed spaces for children, ten and under, that combine fun with skill development focused on strengthening collaboration, communication, critical thinking and problem-solving, while fine-tuning motor skills.

New programs will be provided to introduce the museum’s 42,000 annual visitors to careers in the construction, natural resources, meteorological, and railroad industries. These programs will provide hands-on opportunities for children to test their engineering skills at building a dam on a waterway, using math to figure out railroad logistics, understanding cloud formations, or using colors and patterns to create an interior design for a new home. All programs will meet Indiana Academic Standards to support classroom learning and help keep visitors engaged in the exhibits and promote classroom visits.



Lifelong Learning Systems Promoting the Arts

Wayne County | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: 1 to 2 years

Multiple peer-reviewed studies reveal the benefits of arts education for students and educators, such as improved learning capacity, higher levels of achievement for underserved students, enhanced creative thinking skills, and enhanced ability to communicate and collaborate. Despite these benefits, there are many impediments to arts education for East Central Indiana students: distance, weather, lack of transportation, educator retention, funding, and a lack of economic opportunity. Geographic distance is a distinguishing feature of rural areas that impede arts education access, including the investment of time for travel, weather obstacles, reduced professional development opportunities, and lack of transportation.

The **Regional Center for Art and Design** will fully realize the plan to house a significant new regional arts and design learning center in Cambridge City for K-12 and adult education - built through a strategic partnership with the Herron School of Art and Design. The initiative will build a regional satellite facility with associated programs for arts education and training in this more rural part of the state, which will become a fantastic source of learning, training, and skill development for all ages. Currently, three potential building sites in Cambridge City have already been identified. Funding this initiative will allow our region to finalize site selection and purchase the property. Additionally, this initiative will also establish the program, the curricula and offerings, outreach channels, and fee structures.





If we want different health outcomes in rural populations, then we must train leaders in a very different way.

Ben Leedle, President and CEO, Blue Zones



Lifelong Learning Systems Through Promoting Healthy and Active Habits

Grant County | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: 3 years or more

Higher educational attainment leads to better cognitive function as individuals age, meaning the East Central Indiana region is at a disadvantage relative to the State given its lower attainment statistics. Compounding the troublesome impacts of this growing educational gap is the increasing proportion of elderly East Central Indiana adults, with the population over 65 projected to grow from 20.4% of the population in 2021 to 22.4% in 2026.

Lifelong learning, defined as self-initiated and self-directed education focused on personal development and fulfillment, can help overcome these initial deficits. Lifelong learning can be formal or informal and occurs within and outside of educational institutions. Lifelong learning happens daily through formal education, socialization, trial and error, and/or self-initiated study and is based on our natural interests, curiosity, and personal motivations.

Given that academic studies associate educational attainment with better outcomes for individuals, promoting lifelong learning can be one facet in a coordinated strategy for creating an environment that is healthier, happier, and more productive. Encouraging our region to be lifelong learners can result in renewed self-motivation, recognition of personal interests and goals, improved self-confidence, and improved personal and professional skills.

Taylor University intends to launch the **Blue Zone Center of Excellence** program in Upland to train and develop professionals and volunteers to promote “Blue Zones.” These blue zones are defined as places where people live measurably longer and have happier lives with lower rates of chronic disease and a higher quality of life. Blue Zones and Taylor University will work collaboratively to develop the Blue Zones Center of Excellence and implement a Blue Zones Campus transformation. Deploying this initiative will measurably improve well-being across the campus and position the university as the premier destination for training tomorrow’s leaders.

This approach emphasizes the campus environment by shaping the built environment, social networks, culture, and policies to support greater well-being. Lifelong learning plays an essential role within this model by encouraging social networks with educational components and teaching individuals about food choices, the built environment, and stress management.

This project will develop an educational training center for Indiana students and adult learners in East Central Indiana, working with communities to develop blue zones based on community building and education. *That would be the first facility with such an educational focus in the State and one of the only ones in the world.* Student graduates could gain experience with internships with public health organizations and gain full-time employment in city planning, public policy, or public health departments. Lifelong learners would learn the science of healthy aging and build skills pertinent to advancing blue zones within their communities.



Lifelong Learning Systems Through K-12 Entrepreneurial Education

East Central Indiana Region | Status: Pilot Program | Duration: 3 years or more

Media and communications occupations present desirable job opportunities for adequately skilled school graduates. Nationally, employment in media and communication occupations is projected to grow 14 percent from 2020 to 2030, faster than the average for all occupations, and will result in about 151,500 new jobs¹, with a median annual wage of \$61,310. Media and communications training also have crossover benefits to other occupations, as these skills are in high demand.

The **Vision Corner Learning Center** in Union City is partnering with KISSTV and Apache Design to expand into a downtown entrepreneurial space, providing career and technical education in broadcasting, streaming, business, marketing, and communication to all students in Randolph County. The goal of Vision Corner phase one is the expansion of the educational programs. These programs have a history of creating successful entrepreneurs and business professionals. Students will have access to programs that provide an opportunity to learn teamwork, responsibility, creativity, and the work-ready, soft skills needed by all aspects of business today. This initiative aligns with the goals of our county, region, and state. More specifically, this expansion will provide Apache Design, an award-winning school-based enterprise, a downtown storefront, and expanded space to print custom apparel and signage.

The additional studio sets, podcasting studios, and cutting-edge equipment will open the doors for students to enter traditional and online broadcasting, whether in front of the camera or behind it. KISSTV is one of the oldest school-based studios in the state, boasting many graduates in successful broadcasting careers; however, its strength lies in teaching communication and work skills. Tasking the students with creating advertising for local businesses teaches them about small businesses, communication, marketing, sales, and customer service.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/home.htm#:~:text=Employment%20in%20media%20and%20communication,in%20about%2046%2C200%20new%20jobs.>







Lifelong Learning Through Vocational Training

East Central Indiana Region | Status: Pilot Program | Duration: 3 years or more

Entrepreneur and vocational programs are important in building workforce readiness skills in youth (Fields, Brown, Piechocinski, & Wells, 2012). Recent surveys have found that specific skills, including communications, critical thinking, and leadership development, are lacking among young people (Pace, 2012). Ninety percent of respondents in a Center for Creative Leadership survey indicated that education in leadership should begin before age 18. At the same time, 50% noted a need to start in elementary school or before (Pace, 2012). Through program settings that involve youth development professionals, youth can improve upon certain life skills that will aid them in achieving employment or starting a business of their own.

East Central Indiana is committed to teaching students to view life through a lens of innovation and entrepreneurship while building a life of purpose. This program builds a generation of youth with an “Opportunities are Everywhere” mindset through **Innovate Within**, fueling innovation, education, and workforce readiness for East Central Indiana high school students. STARTedUP, the leading organization, has made a lot of traction with the Innovate Within Pitch Competition to garner public and private support interest. In partnership with local corporations, universities, and foundations that want to support Indiana’s next generation of talent, we are building a regional ecosystem of private support to help fuel and sustain the Innovate Within Pitch Competition. Through the READI grant, STARTedUP will secure additional funding through Innovate Within sponsorships, foundation grants, and university engagement, creating a sustainable model to continue the programming in East Central Indiana.



Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

REGIONAL LIFELONG LEARNING INITIATIVES			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Before/After School Program at Henry County YMCA with New Castle School Corporation	Henry	\$4,000,000	****
High School Career Advisor, Randolph County High Schools/ Ivy Tech Richmond	Regional	\$595,023	****
Pathway to Passion Career Guide Navigator - Henry County	Henry	\$249,920	\$40,000
YMCA of Muncie Capital Campaign and Early Childhood Education Center Project	Delaware	\$30,079,500	\$2,000,000

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.





Talent Development

Together, we will improve our region's quality of opportunity by strengthening and growing the region's workforce.



Regional Context

The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership has identified several core industries in the region. Two of these are advanced manufacturing and information technology. However, while these are growing sectors that provide a significant wage, this workforce has steadily declined. County information provided by IEDC shows an adverse change in manufacturing sector employment (2016-2020) in every county in the region except one, Henry County. In four of the counties, there has been a double-digit decrease. The technology sector has fared slightly better, with only four of the counties in the region having an employment decrease.

There is an opportunity to recruit and train a non-traditional workforce to meet this demand.



PROJECT COSTS



\$8,365,000



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Blackford County Economic Development Corporation

Muncie-Delaware County Economic Development Alliance

Fayette County Economic Development Group

Grant County Economic Growth Council

New Castle-Henry County Economic Development Corporation

Jay County Development Corporation

Randolph County United

Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County

County and City Partners

Blackford County, Delaware County, Fayette County, Grant County, Henry County, Jay County, Randolph County, Wayne County

All incorporated Cities and Towns

Supporting Partners

IU Health Ball Memorial, IU Health Jay, IU Health Blackford, Erskine Green Training Institute, Magna, Mursix, Work One, Eleven Fifty Academy, Muncie-Delaware Chamber of Commerce, Regional High Schools, Ivy Tech Community College, Ball State University, Taylor University

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership

East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Philanthropic support will be a sustainability component for several of these projects that target connecting special populations to the workforce.

After start-up/launch, the operations will be absorbed into the applicable operating budgets.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

Number of people who receive certifications/degrees

Job placement

Placement wage

Job retention

Job Advancement

Wage progression

Number of people with disabilities placed in employment

Number of people trained


Number of employers who participate in collaborative efforts/hire program participants

Increased enrollment in and completion of education and training programs



Regional Workforce Training and Development

The goal is to create opportunity in the workforce for individuals who traditionally face barriers to employment and a career path.



Given the challenges of recruiting and retaining a workforce to meet the employment demands of the region and the employment needs of individuals in the region who traditionally face barriers to employment (people with disabilities, behavioral health issues, and/or criminal histories). There is an opportunity for the East Central Indiana Region to redesign its workforce development strategies to address both issues.

The East Central Indiana partners have designed strategies that bring together community and faith-based organizations, post-secondary education institutions, skills training agencies, and employers. Those organizations can identify candidates from non-traditional settings; connect them to education, training, and support services; and place them in employment. The goal is to create opportunities in the workforce for individuals who traditionally face barriers to work and a career path.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Developing a Non-Traditional Workforce
- Providing Wrap Around Supports for Employment Success
- Developing a Healthcare Workforce
- Responding to the Needs of the Manufacturing Industry
- Developing a Technology Workforce



New student class provided by Erskine Green Training Institute



Developing a Non-Traditional Workforce

Delaware County | Status: In Development | Duration: 3 years or more

According to the National Association for Manufacturers, manufacturers in Indiana account for 27.84% of the total output in the state and employ 17.24% of the workforce. Manufacturing activity remains robust, especially demand, as the economy rebounds from the sizable declines in Spring 2020. And yet, significant challenges remain, including supply chain disruptions, worker shortages, and soaring costs.

A 2018 study from the Manufacturing Institute found that the industry would need to fill 4.6 million manufacturing jobs nationwide by 2028. As many as 2.4 million could go unfilled.

The National Council on Disability reports that people with disabilities live in poverty at more than twice the rate of people without disabilities. Their advisory report to Congress states that people with disabilities make up approximately 12 percent of the U.S. working-age population; however, they account for more than half of those living in long-term poverty. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2020, 17.9 percent of persons with a disability were employed, down from 19.3 percent in 2019. For persons without a disability, 61.8 percent were employed in 2020, down from 66.3 percent in the prior year.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics lists production/manufacturing and materials movement as two industries that are opportunities for people with disabilities. The East Central manufacturing industry has a chance to meet some of its workforce needs by providing supportive employment for people who have a disability.

The Arc of Indiana Foundation developed the **Erskine Green Training Institute** in Muncie to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to receive post-secondary vocational training that will lead to meaningful employment. The program is designed for individuals whose academic, social, communication, and adaptive skills are affected due to their disability. The curriculum addresses critical soft skills necessary to succeed in the workforce and incorporates that with industry-specific training. Currently, training programs are targeted at the hospitality, food service, healthcare, and inventory distribution sectors. This project would be an expansion of the training programs.

Erskine Green will develop a new curriculum that incorporates their well-established soft skill and hard skill training specifically for the manufacturing industry. Upon completing the program, students will have a certificate, resume, practiced interview skills, and be ready to seek employment. Both Magna and Mursix have committed to serving as sites for internships/on-the-job training. It is anticipated that open positions will be made available to graduates of this program. Erskine Green seeks to train, educate, and mobilize this workforce segment to prepare them for careers in the manufacturing industry.

Providing Wrap Around Supports for Employment Success

East Central Indiana Region | Status: Conceptual | Duration: 3 years or more

Substance use disorders are a pressing issue for employers and the workforce. Workplaces are a critical point of contact for people struggling with or recovering from a substance use disorder. Ideally, employers would create a work environment that proactively prevents substance misuse, reduces stigma, and encourages sustained recovery. Employment provides economic stability, a meaningful social network and is key to the quality of life for individuals and families.

Individuals in recovery can be highly successful in the workforce but often need soft skill training and a strong network of support to overcome stigma, balance their job and recovery process demands, and navigate continued skill development that could lead to advancement. Collaborations between employers and recovery organizations can have significant benefits for the individual and the workforce.

A Better Life – Brianna’s Hope (ABLBH) offers counseling, peer support groups, and services to people recovering from a substance use disorder. Through their program, ***Transforming Individuals by Empowering Success (TIES)***, they will provide communication and soft skills training across the East Central Region to increase the opportunity for people in recovery to connect to and retain employment. This training will focus on communication skills, digital communications, use of social media, and workforce culture. The TIES program will also engage with employers, post-secondary education partners, and other community partners to host an annual event/job fair to connect participants to employers and employment opportunities. Another component of the annual event will be sessions for employers to educate them on the elements of a recovery-supportive workplace, the benefits of being a “second-chance employer,” and cultivating a supportive workplace.

TIES provides each participant with a mentor/coach to walk beside them as they (re)enter the workforce and a peer support network that will allow them to share their experiences with other people in the program. It also provides a social support network, resources, and encouragement not only while they are in the program but also after graduating and returning as “alums.” This ongoing system of support will increase the likelihood that individuals will be able to retain employment and develop a career track that will impact the quality of life for the individual and their family.

This project will serve approximately 3,000 through support groups. 75-100 people will participate in the job fairs annually.



A Better Life. Brianna's Hope provided by ABLBH

Their unique approach to help those struggling with addiction is a breath of fresh air.

Bishop Julius C. Trimble



If this model becomes successful, IU Health believes it has the potential to become a scalable, national model for other health systems across the country.

Megan Haymaker, IU Health



Developing a Healthcare Workforce

East Central Indiana Region | Status: Conceptual | Duration: 1 to 2 years


The healthcare industry is a high-demand industry that can set individuals on a career path to long-term financial success. However, there is a critical shortage of health and mental health care professionals and a lack of a strong workforce pipeline. The need for a healthcare workforce is significant in the East Central Region. There are several federally designated Medically Underserved Areas, and all of the counties in this region have been identified as Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas.

This critical workforce shortage has resulted in an evolution in the industry to look to non-traditional individuals to help fill the gap. That has resulted in more accessible education and training opportunities, a focus on retention and deliberate career ladders, and targeting efforts at populations who have not traditionally been in this field. Included are youth, particularly from low-income families, rural communities, and youth of color. Those young people often do not view the healthcare field as an opportunity because they are largely unfamiliar with healthcare services. They might see health care careers as “untouchable.” This industry has also traditionally not been an option for people who have been in the criminal justice system, as this has historically been an automatic reason for screening people out, regardless of the position.

IU Health will partner with local secondary and post-secondary institutions to create school-to-employment pathways to connect students and people in recovery to jobs in the healthcare sector, with incentives for those who remain with IU Health. **The Building a Healthier Workforce initiative** will prepare and train individuals for immediate employment and long-term careers in healthcare.

IU Health will expand its IU Health Fellowship, which has been a successful model in Indianapolis. High school students in the Fellowship will participate in a state-approved curriculum that provides focused education in health sciences. These students will be able to secure Medical Assistant/Patient Care credentials, have hands-on experiences – including internships, and be able to work at IU Health immediately upon graduation. Students who immediately move into post-secondary education will continue to be supported through this initiative with tuition assistance and other support opportunities. IU Health will work with post-secondary partners (Ivy Tech, Ball State, and Taylor University) to identify certifications and programs that align with healthcare career pathways, and work with students to provide paid internships, learning cohorts, and mentoring opportunities.

Peer Recovery Specialists have become a vital component of the behavioral health recovery system. This role offers strong employment and career opportunities to people with an addiction who have been in long-term recovery. Once certified, Peer Recovery Specialists can join the behavioral health workforce and provide coaching and support to people entering recovery. They serve as a coach, mentor, and support system for the individual and differentiate between recovery and relapse. IU Health will provide financial support for the certification process and work with regional partners to secure employment. That is an entry point into the healthcare workforce that could set them on a long-term career path.





Responding to the Needs of the Manufacturing Industry

East Central Indiana Region | Status: In Development | Duration: 3 or more years

According to Industry Today, the next five years in the Manufacturing industry will focus on converting digital systems, “going green” in manufacturing, and building a resilient supply chain network. Manufacturing in the future will only bare a faint resemblance to the manufacturing of the past decade. Individuals new to the labor market often are not aware of the depth and breadth of the manufacturing industry across sectors that include computer and electronic products, fabricated metal products, aerospace and transportation equipment, and plastics and rubber products. Manufacturing is a high-demand industry, and recruiting people into these careers is necessary to support an industry that is a primary driver of East Central Indiana’s regional economy. As the region continues to attract new businesses, one of the biggest challenges is finding and developing a skilled workforce to meet the needs of high-demand industries.

The **Work Matters Collaborative** is an initiative by Ivy Tech to partner with the court system and area high schools to offer individuals employment opportunities through “temp” job experiences and enrollment in courses at the community college. Ivy Tech will create “Ivy Temp.” This temporary employment placement agency will allow participants to receive a work-learn experience as temporary employees with short-term assignments primarily in the manufacturing industry.

The partnership with the court system will focus on individuals who are “pre-trial.” That includes people who have been charged with a low-level crime and have been released to the community while they await trial. The initiative will also focus on high school students, increasing their awareness of manufacturing as a career and enrolling students in courses at Ivy Tech that will prepare them to enter this high-demand industry. This work experience will allow students to experience the latest manufacturing trends that are redefining the industry. The wage data for Ivy Tech students indicates that many of the highest-earning potentials lie in the School of Manufacturing Engineering and Applied Sciences area.

Ivy Temp will also provide wrap-around work supports and coaching to program participants. That will ensure that any potential barriers to success can be proactively addressed, and employer participants have a resource to help bridge between the workforce experience and the needs of the students.

Ivy Temp will allow employers who are part of the collaborative to have access to this “pool” of temporary employees to fill in workforce gaps during their company’s peak times. Employer partners will provide valuable real-world experience while students are also taking courses at Ivy Tech. It is anticipated that successful students in the Work Matters Collaborative will transition into permanent employment and continue their journey to a high-wage/in-demand career.

In year one of the program, it is projected that 60 individuals will be served, and that number will grow to 75 students in year two and 100 in year three (and ongoing).



We believe that the Work Matters Collaborative's proposal provides the necessary infrastructure to achieve our talent goals in East Central Indiana.

Todd Murray, President and CEO Mursix



Cardinal Greenway provided by Cardinal Greenway Inc.

Eleven Fifty offered so many things from connections, friends, and provided me with the necessary starting skills to pursue a career that has truly improved my life.

Drew Blincoe, US Military Veteran, SIGMA Equipment, Inc.



Developing a Technology Workforce

East Central Indiana Region | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: 3 or more years

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics is projecting an 11% growth in the coding, web development, and cyber security fields through 2029, compared to overall 4% job growth. Nationally, the demand for IT talent expands across all industry sectors, which is undoubtedly the case in the East Central Indiana Region. As was identified by Forge ECI, information technology is a critical sector that will help propel the economy and strengthen the job market for the region. Additionally, the median annual wage for these occupations is \$91,250, allowing individuals and families to have long-term economic success.

Eleven Fifty Academy is driven by the mission to build an ecosystem of tech talent that financially benefits individuals, employers, and communities. The Academy has specific goals to increase tech talent for three key segments of the population, women, veterans, and minorities (underserved populations). Through the Advancing Tech in Indiana (ATI) initiative, Eleven Fifty Academy will improve wages, educational attainment, quality of life, and digital literacy within the East Central Indiana region.

Through **Advancing Tech in Indiana**, Eleven Fifty Academy will partner with community-based providers across the region to reach out to individuals, introduce them to the opportunities in this industry, provide some hands-on opportunities to experience coding, and recruit interested students into the 12-week training. Students will have the chance to train in software development, UX/UI, web development, IT professionals, and cybersecurity. Graduates will earn certifications in CompTIA Network+, CompTIA Security+, CompTIA A+, and Academy badges. Eleven Fifty Academy will also work with participants to develop interview skills, provide job placement services, and mentor and coach individuals through an active Alumni Network of Eleven Fifty Academy graduates. The current graduation rates are between 75-85%, with direct placement rates between 60-70%, and average starting salaries of \$55,000.

This newly trained workforce will represent nearly \$7–8 million in potential taxable income each year. It will begin to fulfill the current and future demand for the region's growing number of IT positions. In addition to this, the Academy will deepen the overall digital literacy of residents across the region. Eleven Fifty Academy will partner with community-based organizations to serve as local sites for digital literacy sessions. That will increase participant familiarity and comfort with the digital world, improving their ability to navigate the online systems that are now key to functioning in the post-pandemic world.

It is anticipated that at least three coding cohorts will happen each year (total of 60 individuals) and up to 24 digital literacy classes (a total of 360 individuals).



Cardinal Greenway provided by Cardinal Greenway Inc.

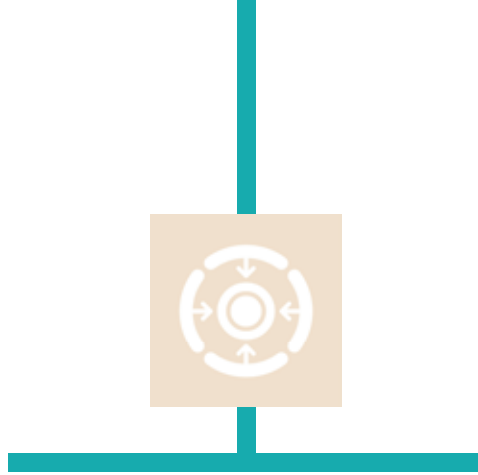
Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

WORKFORCE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Jay-Blackford Healthcare Council Medical Training Facility	Regional	\$2,500,000	****
Curriculum Development Vision Corner Learning Center	Randolph	\$1,000,000	\$700,000
ECI Center for the Trades	Grant	\$25,000,000	\$5,000,000
Opportunity Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative	Wayne	\$136,000	\$30,000
Talent Pipeline Development Targeting the Local Justice System	Regional	\$2,477,569	****
The Talent Ladder	Grant	\$600,000	\$60,000
Work Matters	Regional	\$1,200,000	\$200,000
Workforce Development and Business Incubator	Henry	\$5,000,000	****
Wrapped Together: Home Rehabs & Workforce Education	Delaware	\$500,000	\$190,000

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.





Talent Attraction

Together we will improve our quality of place by expanding, enhancing and activating our regional recreational and cultural destinations and attractions.



Regional Context

Outdoor recreation is breathing new life into the tourism industry. The pandemic has changed how people choose to travel, with many opting to visit destinations close to home to be outdoors and maintain social distance. Tourism plays a significant role in the Indiana economy, with the state seeing \$13.7 billion in visitor spending in 2019. While the tourism industry experienced a sharp decline in 2020 due to the pandemic, it is resilient.

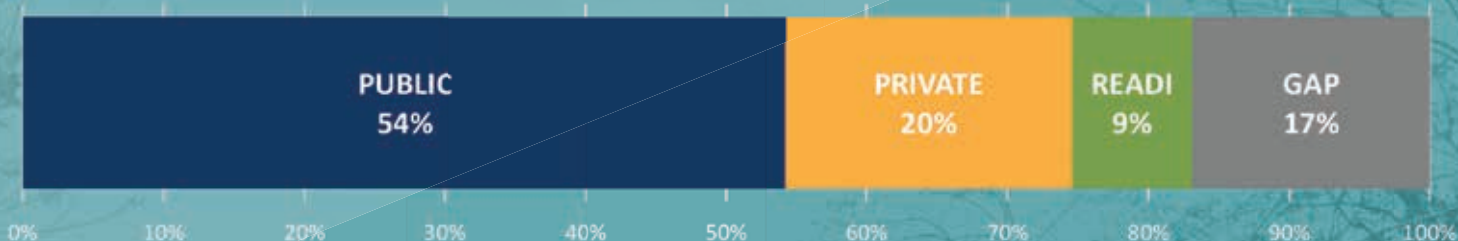
Many families see wide-open spaces, such as parks and trails, as safe places to meet and connect. These outdoor destinations allow people to spread out and socialize without being right next to one other. According to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), the pandemic has inspired more Hoosiers to get outdoors than ever before. The state saw a 21% increase in property usage in 2020 when compared to 2019.

Recreation tourism is the key to helping East Central Indiana communities thrive. With recreational tourism transforming local economies across the United States, the East Central Indiana region is looking to change its regional amenities, including parks, trails, and open spaces, into vibrant destinations meant to be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. To this end, it has the unique opportunity to establish a cohesive brand of outdoor recreational networks that make the region a renowned destination for outdoor recreation activities.

Funding will help provide the dollars needed for the region to develop, maintain and market these recreational assets to attract visitors and boost related industries. By exploring the potential of recreation tourism, the region can attract new investment and create additional opportunities for Hoosiers to vacation locally.



PROJECT COSTS



\$64,000,000



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Muncie-Delaware County Economic Development Alliance

Grant County Economic Growth Council

Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County

County and City Partners

Delaware County (City of Muncie), Grant County (City of Gas City, City of Upland, City of Marion), Wayne County (City of Richmond)

All incorporated Cities and Towns

Supporting Partners

Cardinal Greenways Inc., Richmond Department of Parks and Recreation, Whitewater Valley Gorge Alliance, Wayne County Veteran's Memorial Park, Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership

East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Future funding sources for the maintenance and oversight of these regional destinations will come from grant applications to local foundations, private donations, city/town partnerships, or dedicated funding for parks and trails.

Revenue generated from the operation and use of amenities will assist with financial sustainability.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Community quality of life
- Collaboration with other communities in the East Central Indiana region
- Great American Rail-Trail recognition
- Number of annual visitors
- Number of events
- Number of amenities
- Number of training programs
- Community wellness score
- Value of private investment dollars



Regional Destinations and Attractions

Now, more than ever, communities need to get creative with strategies to fund community revitalization efforts geared towards ensuring equitable access to outdoor recreation opportunities for all.



The outdoor recreation industry plays a critical role in the state's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has prompted communities throughout the East Central Indiana region to embrace parks, trails, and open spaces to encourage physical and mental wellness and bring people together. On a national level, the outdoor recreation industry creates millions of jobs and billions in tax revenue critical for supporting communities, businesses, and families. While the region recognizes the importance of its growing outdoor recreation economy, state budget cuts have resulted in less funding for new outdoor amenities and attractions. Now, more than ever, communities need to get creative with strategies to fund community revitalization efforts geared towards ensuring equitable access to outdoor recreation opportunities for all.

The pandemic has exposed areas of inequitable access to recreational amenities in communities across East Central Indiana. These underserved and under-resourced communities desperately need access to outdoor recreation opportunities. Investment in recreation infrastructure is necessary to ensure that future residents and visitors to East Central Indiana thrive.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Expanding a Regional Destination
- Enhancing a Regional Destination
- Activating a Regional Destination



Cardinal Greenway provided by Cardinal Greenway Inc.

The Cardinal Greenway Gap project would be a nice way to be able to finish off the original intent of having a trail that does not require navigating regular roads.

Jud Fishers, President and CEO Ball Brothers Foundation



Expanding a Regional Destination

Delaware County | Status: In Development | Duration: 3 years or more

The Cardinal Greenway is a multi-use recreational trail system dedicated to pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian trail users. The 62-mile trail, the state's longest rail-trail, runs through five counties and ten communities, including Marion, Muncie, and Richmond. While the rail-trail serves as a regional destination for avid cyclists, runners, and pedestrians, it also serves as an opportunity to connect visitors to local communities throughout the region and our shared history.

The Cardinal Greenway is not only a connection to our history; it quite literally connects nearly all of East Central Indiana. While there are existing gaps, Cardinal Greenways Inc., the body that oversees and maintains the corridor, envisions that in the future, the trail will be continuous, without breaks, and will possibly link to trails in both Illinois and Ohio. The Cardinal Greenway is part of a larger Great American Rail Trail, a nationwide project that aims to provide a 3,700-mile multi-use route from Washington to Washington D.C. The proposed trail would cross through 12 states, including Indiana, where approximately 109 miles of trail have been completed through trail systems including the Cardinal Greenway, the Nickle Plate Trail, and the Pennsy Trail.

A primary goal of Cardinal Greenway Inc.'s most recent strategic plan is to close the gap between Gaston and Jonesboro, which requires coordination with multiple property owners and crossing under the I-69 corridor. **The Cardinal Greenway Gap Project** would begin to close the gap by connecting our existing Cardinal Greenway trail endpoint at Gas City/ Jonesboro to the town of Upland. The project includes remaining land acquisition, engineering, design, and construction. 90% of the needed right-of-way was pledged between Taylor University, Town of Upland, and the City of Gas City. The closure of the gap in the trail system will create a safer route for thousands of East Central Indiana residents using the Cardinal Greenway Trail and encourage trail users to explore Indiana's natural beauty. Further, it will incentivize future generations of outdoor enthusiasts to take advantage of trails nationwide. It will provide the necessary momentum to complete Phase 2 of the effort, which will close our regional gap from Upland through Matthews to the Cardinal Greenway in Gaston.

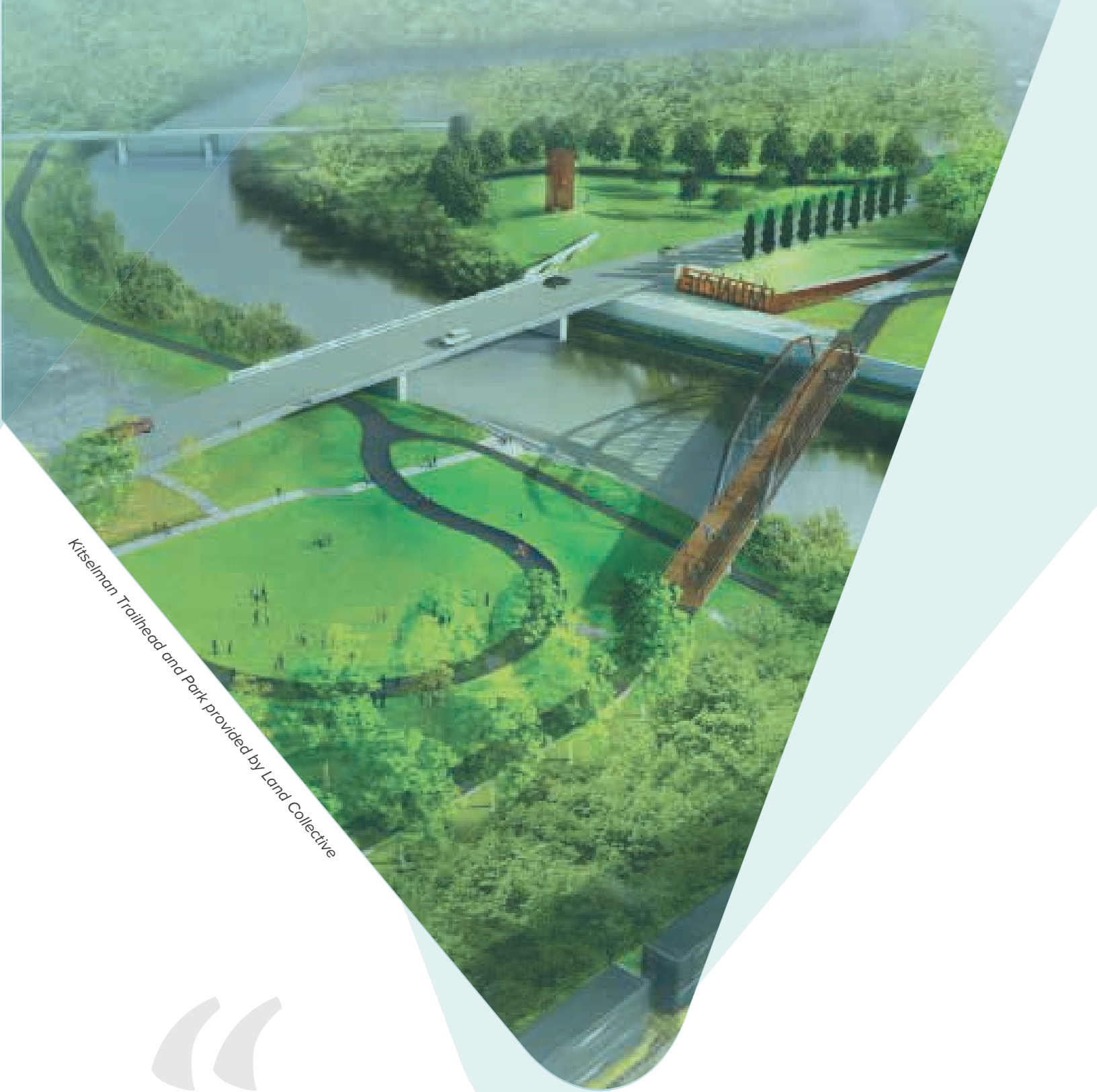


Enhancing a Regional Destination

Delaware County | Status: Capstone | Duration: 1-2 years

The Kitselman Trailhead and Park project is a strategic effort by the City of Muncie to establish a threshold and gateway into the City. It also enhances the Eastern Gateway into the City of Muncie and provides greenspace over a former brownfield. Still, it also enhances three regional assets: the Cardinal Greenway, the White River, and the White River trail system. As part of a 20+ year vision to promote trail connectivity and revitalize the eastern gateway into Muncie, the Kitselman Trailhead and park were designed to enhance and connect the Cardinal Greenway and the White River Greenway Trail Systems.

The Kitselman Trailhead is part of the White River Greenway Master Plan of 2000. The Kitselman Trailhead is the intersection of two vital greenways located in the largest city in East Central Indiana- Muncie. Phase 1 of the trailhead plan established a connection over the White River for the Cardinal Greenway and White River Greenway trail systems by adding a historic metal car bridge. Phase 2 of this plan saw the area east of the bridge be converted from a brownfield to a grassy lawn with a parking lot. The **Kitselman Trailhead Phase 3** is the final phase of the enhancement project to realign the Cardinal Greenway trail and provide a safer crossing for thousands of East Central Indiana residents who use the trail system yearly. Additional interpretive signage will also be added to tell visitors and trail users about the site's rich history and honor the countless organizations and people working together to make this project a reality. In May of 2021, the Kitselman Bridge, installed in the first phase of work, saw 5,500 trail users. With the completion of the enhancement project, more residents and visitors can experience the trail and interact with the local communities along the trail corridor.



Kitselman Trailhead and Park provided by Land Collective

The Kitselman Trailhead project as accelerated the revitalization of the east side of the City of Muncie. It is so important to have a strong finish to this project.

Jud Fishers, President and CEO Ball Brothers Foundation



Thistewate Falls at Whitewater Gorge

We are dedicated to promoting a culture of stewardship, sustainability and ecologically friendly service while continuing to push the limits of innovative and accessible design in the outdoor adventure industry.

Bonsai Design, potential Whitewater Gorge Activation Partner



Activating a Regional Destination

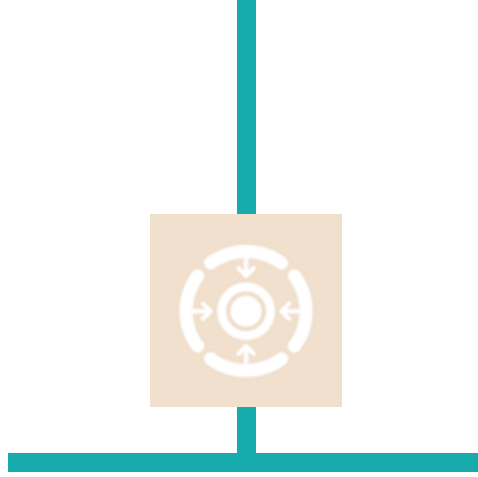
Wayne County | Status: In Development | Duration: 3 years or more

Nestled in the heart of Richmond, the Whitewater Gorge area is a tremendous opportunity for adventure and activation of connectivity in Central Indiana. Overflowing with rich jazz history and musical heritage, the Gorge is a focal point for recreation tourism waiting to be explored. The gorge is a natural amenity with ties to the City's history. The key to increasing the park's usage is better programming — well-planned, supervised activities that help people feel comfortable in and use the space, particularly among seniors and teenage girls, two under-represented populations in parks.

The existing **Whitewater Gorge Park** is a 100-acre regional park located between Test Road and Waterfall Road. The gorge was created by the convergence of the three forks of the Whitewater River during the last Ice Age and runs 2.5 miles through Richmond. It provides various unique geological and historical features and can provide direct connectivity to the Cardinal Greenway. Development of the Whitewater Gorge Park has helped restore the Gorge to a place of honor in the heart of Richmond and preserve the beauty of the Gorge for future generations.

As a component of the *2020 Richmond Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Masterplan*, the Department of Parks and Recreation focused on creating a resilient and sustainable system. It identified ways to diversify its revenue streams by enhancing and activating its parks to expand the available capital resources moving forward. To achieve fiscal sustainability, the city is prepared to activate the Whitewater Gorge area to enhance existing amenities including trails, parking areas, and restroom facilities while preserving the natural features and historic structures within the gorge area. The City is partnering with a third-party vendor to establish a recreation program offering ziplining, tubing, kayaking, and climbing to activate the park. The revenue generated from these activities will be shared with the Parks Department and used to fund maintenance and future improvements.





Talent Attraction

Together we will improve our quality of place by expanding, enhancing and activating our regional recreational and cultural destinations and attractions.



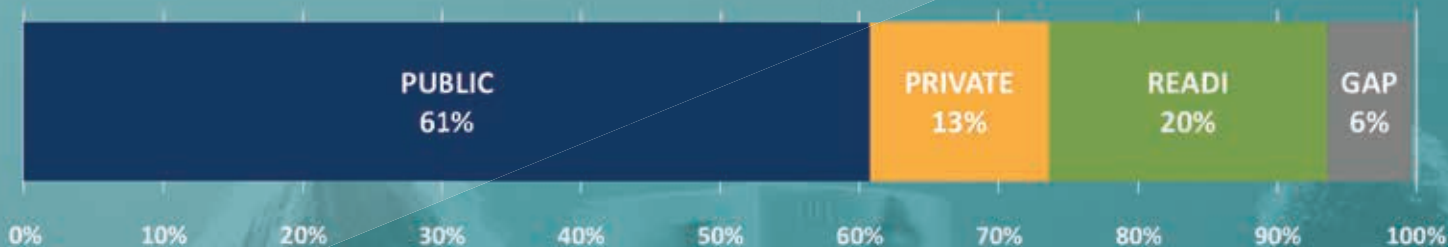
Regional Context

East Central Indiana has a long history of supporting the arts, which some might not expect in a predominately rural area. In 1892, a group of women in Muncie formed the Art Students' League, hoping to raise interest in art in the growing city. The Richmond Art Museum was founded in 1898 as the Art Association of Richmond, Indiana, and the Whitewater Valley Arts Association in Connersville was founded in 1962 as a non-profit organization. Many of the larger towns and cities in East Central Indiana have an art museum, symphony, and local theater. Art galleries and entertainment venues can be found even in the smallest towns and villages throughout the region.

Beyond the measurable economic impact, the arts and culture scene in East Central Indiana significantly adds to the vibrancy of our region. These facilities and programs are not only entertainment destinations, but they also provide outlets for people to explore creativity and self-expression. Attracting talent is an integral part of our economic development strategy because prospective talent considers the quality of life amenities when determining whether to take a job in a community. Equally as important, supporting arts and culture is a way to celebrate East Central Indiana's industry, art, and heritage.



PROJECT COSTS



\$28,400,045



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Muncie-Delaware County Economic Development Alliance

Fayette County Economic Development Group

Grant County Economic Growth Council

County and City Partners

Delaware County, (City of Muncie),
Fayette County (City of Connersville),
Grant County (City of Gas City)

Supporting Partners

Grant County Performing Arts Center,
Mississinewa Community School Corporation

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership
East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Ball State University will manage, maintain, and operate the Brown Family Amphitheater as part of its overall campus operations.

The City of Connersville will oversee and maintain the Connersville Downtown Events Center.

The Grant County Performing Arts Center and Visitors Bureau is implementing a program for sponsorships and advertising to create a financially successful program.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

Number of total performances on an annual basis

Number of community groups engaged


Number of performance spectators (including students, residents, and visitors)

Revenue increase at the organization and business level



Supporting the Performing Arts

Supporting the arts can help to diversify rural economies by creating sustainable small businesses, improving quality of life for residents, and attracting visitors and investment.



The arts are a fundamental component of vibrant communities. Supporting the arts can help diversify rural economies by creating sustainable small businesses, improving the quality of life for residents, and attracting visitors and investment. Furthermore, data suggests that the arts are kindling for the economy—small investments that deliver significant returns. People could also spend money on meals, retail, parking, and lodging for every ticket bought for an arts event. That provides vital income to local merchants, energizes the downtown, and puts people to work. Because of this, our region is strengthening our commitment to providing exceptional arts and culture programs and facilities.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Entertainment as a regional draw.
- Entertainment Adds to Regional Quality-of-Life
- The Arts Bring the Community Back Together



Entertainment as a Regional Draw

Delaware County | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: 1 to 2 years

Artists and musicians have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Across East Central Indiana, symphonies did not rehearse or hold concerts. Theaters, museums, and galleries had to close or limit their number of visitors. Independent artists found it more difficult than ever to sell their work and find commissions. The entire region benefits from the art community, whether from the tourism the arts bring or the jobs they create. Financially bolstering the artists and arts organizations of ECI can help ensure the survival of the cultural, educational, and economic benefits they provide. Furthermore, arts and culture destinations offer entertainment opportunities for local and regional residents. These destinations are valuable community assets that contribute to the sense of place and community identity.

The **Brown Family Amphitheater** in Muncie will be a performance venue located in the Grand Lawn at the center of the Ball State University campus. The facility will host various events, including student performances from Ball State's Music, Theatre, and Dance departments, which will attract people from across the region. The amphitheater was designed to create a cultural core in the center of campus that serves as a reminder of Ball State's commitment to the Muncie community by providing engagement opportunities.

Once completed, our region can utilize this new amenity to catalyze other economic opportunities. The hope is that when people attend an event at the amphitheater, they will also explore and support other nearby areas, including the new East Mall and adjacent Village area. The Brown Family Amphitheater will also help catalyze new commercial and residential development opportunities in nearby neighborhoods by providing a first-class amenity, which serves the entire region and is accessible to everyone.



Brown Family Amphitheater rendering provided by RATIO Architects

Once completed, our Brown Family Amphitheater will provide an important teaching venue for our theatre, dance, and music students.

Geoffrey S. Mearns, President, Ball State University





Entertainment Adds to Regional Quality-of-Life

Fayette County | Status: In Development | Duration: 6 months to 1 year

When looking for a place to put down roots, quality-of-life amenities are typically necessary, if not essential, to most people, and rightfully so. After all, a community's arts, entertainment, and recreation offerings heavily influence its vibe, and having top-notch facilities within easy reach only enhances residents' experiences. While your community is the place you go home to each night after work, it is also the place you spend time with your friends and family. Because of this, providing regional arts and cultural destinations adds to the quality of life offered within East Central Indiana.

The construction of the **Connersville Downtown Events Center** will promote a higher quality of life for residents of ECI and serve as a tourism destination within the region. The project will attract talent and promote nearby residents' health, wellness, and prosperity. The included farmer's market will provide fresh food to locals while giving farmers an additional venue to sell their goods. Drawing more residents and tourists to the area will lead to higher revenue and better outcomes for the downtown business owners.



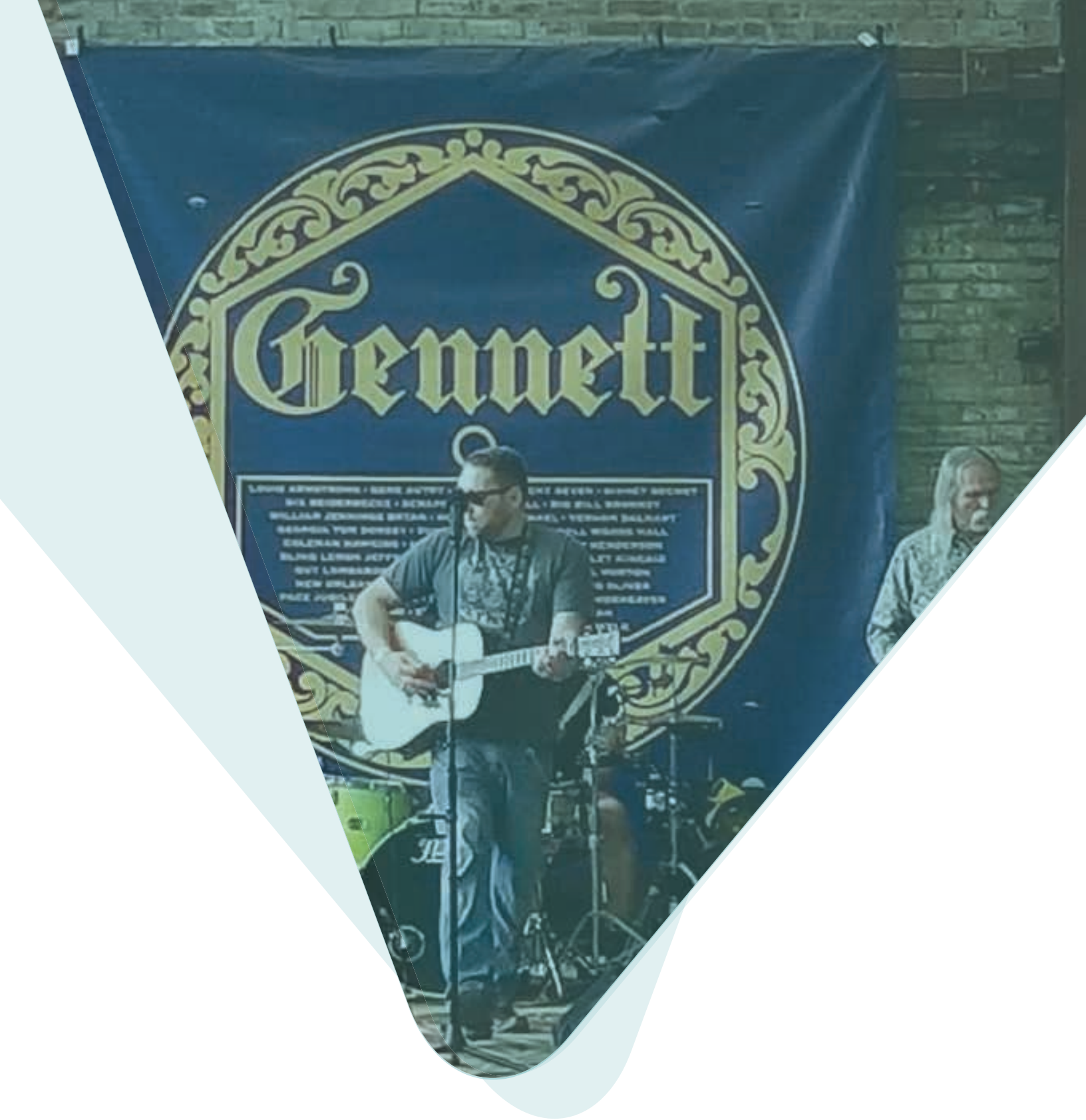
The Arts Bring the Community Back Together

Grant County | Status: Pilot Program | Duration: 1 to 2 years

The Arts have suffered decreases in government funding and grants throughout the years, from arts and music programs in schools through to arts and culture organizations that serve their entire regions. For example, the Indiana Arts Commission, which provides funding for the arts throughout the state, was subject to a 15% funding allocation holdback during the 2021 fiscal year. Because of this, the region must explore alternative funding sources, such as the READI grant, to support arts and culture. Additionally, student participation in the Arts is primarily influenced by the classes and programs provided by primary education institutions. Getting children involved at an early age starts generating interest and skills needed to succeed within the arts industry as an adult.

Through a partnership with the City of Gas City, Grant County, Mississinewa Community School Corporation, Grant County Convention & Visitors Bureau, **Grant County Performing Arts Center** will allow all schools in Grant County a place for school functions. The center will provide a regional entertainment venue for several counties in the East Central Indiana region and beyond. The facility will also be suitable for large corporate and civic meetings. The school corporation will operate and maintained the center, and it is expected to have a capacity of 1,521 seats for performances.





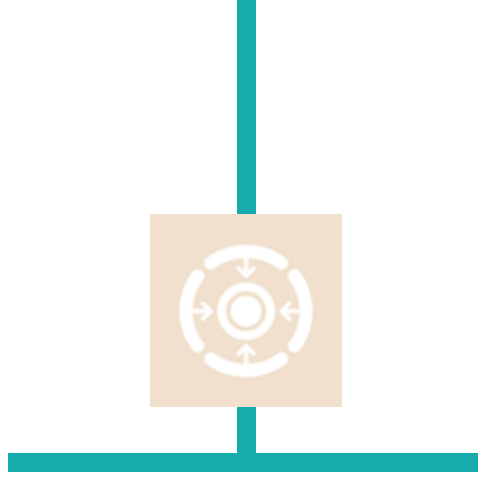
Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

ARTS AND CULTURE INITIATIVES			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Hall-Moser Theatre Infrastructure & Improvements	Jay	\$150,000	\$60,000
Hoosier Shakespeare Festival Amphitheater	Grant	\$400,000	****
Kennedy Art Center	Grant	\$2,380,000	\$380,000
Robert Indiana Arts and Culture District	Henry	\$12,000	\$8,595

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.





Talent Attraction

Together, we will improve our quality of place by expanding, enhancing, and activating our regional recreational and cultural destinations and attractions.



Regional Context

Our eight-county area is within a day's drive of 60% of the US population. While our location and proximity to two major interstate corridors make us a scenic backdrop to commuting traffic, our regional assets make us a growing destination within the Midwest. With thousands of acres of parks and open space, 18 higher education institutions, 60 arts and cultural destinations, regional bicycle and trail facilities, and unique downtown shopping. Local festivals and events such as the James Dean Remembrance attract an international following. We believe that tourism is vital for the success of our region. There are several benefits of tourism to the host destinations. Tourism boosts the economy's revenue, creates thousands of jobs, develops the infrastructures of a community, and plants a sense of cultural exchange between guests and residents.

While our region is rich with destinations, we lack the infrastructure to create a comprehensive tourism experience. Simply put, visitors to our region come for an attraction but are forced to leave the area because they require greater choice in restaurants and accommodations.

While tourism support infrastructure benefits regional visitors, it can also serve a more local need by creating temporary housing opportunities for transient employees and community event space. These crossover opportunities allow traditional tourism-related development to become an integral component of the community where it is developed.



PROJECT COSTS



\$9,000,000



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Blackford County Economic Development Corporation

County and City Partners

Blackford County (City of Hartford City)

Supporting Partners

Private Developers, Private Businesses

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership

East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

The hotel study conducted by the county showed over a 51% occupancy rate based on current needs, which exceeds the amount required for business sustainability.




SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Completion of construction
- Extension of public utilities
- Number of visitors accommodated
- Number of visiting employees accommodated
- Annual occupancy rate



Tourism Support Services

While the region has established themselves as a destination in more traditional forms of tourism we have been unable to leverage our potential within the agriculture, event and industrial/ business markets.



Tourism has always been a favored means of bringing in outside individuals into a local economy to recirculate and energize local industries. While most view tourism as sightseeing visitors with cameras, the industry can capture exterior revenues for local use. When used effectively, the different forms of tourism can be utilized both as a means of enjoyment for residents and a force for business development. While the region has established itself as a destination in more traditional forms of tourism (e.g., festivals, regional attractions), we have been unable to leverage our potential within the agriculture, events, and industrial/ business markets.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Tourism facilities to support development and growth.



Tourism Facilities to Support Development and Growth

Blackford County | Status: In Development | Duration: 1-2 years

Located 86 miles northeast of Indianapolis and 51 miles south of Fort Wayne, Hartford City is within a short drive to regional recreation assets, higher education institutions, and numerous employers. The City's proximity creates a unique advantage for future talent attraction and talent enhancement. Still, it currently lacks branded hotel facilities that would be an accommodation for traveling or visiting individuals. Often, more rural locations are unattractive to large partners because of the perceived return on investment. By investing in tourism support infrastructure within a predominantly rural area, we can showcase how to attract and incentivize development in the future.

A proposed **Hotel Development** in Hartford City seeks to establish the East Central Indiana region as a regional destination for traveling employees, general business, and industry while offering destination-related support to surrounding attractions and institutions with Grant and Blackford Counties. A recent hotel study completed by Newmark, Frank, and Night indicated that the lack of a hotel in Blackford County is a barrier to the community's growth. Developing a new hospitality facility will allow Blackford County and the surrounding areas to attract skilled personnel and general visitors. It will ensure seasonal workers and business development professionals who visit the area have adequate accommodation, and Taylor University can host guest speakers.

Hartford City is less than 50 miles from 61 industrial developments, 38 office developments, and 245 colleges and universities. The Hartford City market area is home to a diverse base of corporate tenants including 3M, American Electric Power, Indiana University Health Blackford Hospital, Purdue University Extension, Taylor University, and Minnestrista, among other regional attractions. Not only is Hartford City home to existing attractions and destinations, but it is primed to see significant growth over the next 3-5 years with the following private investments:

- 3M's job retention project, which includes a \$55.9-million equipment expansion
- Mayco has a \$16-million building and equipment expansion, which includes an 8,000 square-foot expansion and approximately 15 new jobs
- Shalee Oil has a \$1.8-million equipment expansion with three to four new jobs
- Petoskey Plastics has a \$36-million and 11,000-square-foot building and equipment expansion, including approximately 12 new jobs
- Hartford City Foam is undergoing a \$175,000 equipment expansion with approximately three new jobs
- Gillman Home Stores (lumber store) is to be constructed, starting in August, on the north side of Hartford, with construction costs of approximately \$3 million to \$4 million and will add approximately 30 employees

Studies have proven that people are more likely to move to a place they have visited. Communities, especially rural areas, looking to attract new residents or improve talent attraction need to develop the amenities and resources to support potential visitors and future employees. When complete, the development of the Hartford City hotel will open several new vistas for rural communities in the future. By leveraging natural and built tourism destinations Hartford City and Blackford County will raise the economic profile of their community and diversify their revenue streams. The project can also be used as a case study for rural tourism investment and return on investment when complete.





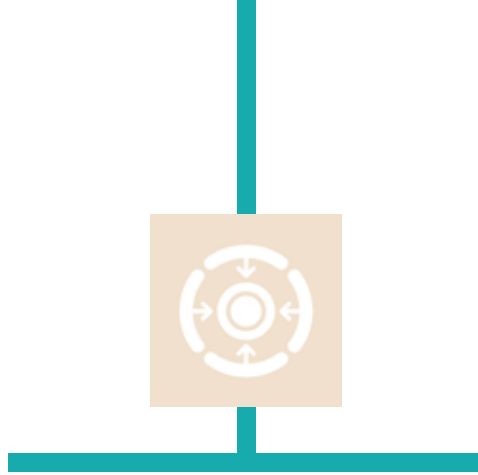
Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

TOURISM SUPPORT INITIATIVES			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Boutique Hotel development	Henry	2,000,000	****
Wayfinding Signs, Henry County	Henry	\$500,000	\$7,000

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.





Talent Attraction

Together we will improve our quality of place by enhancing and revitalizing our local downtowns.



Regional Context

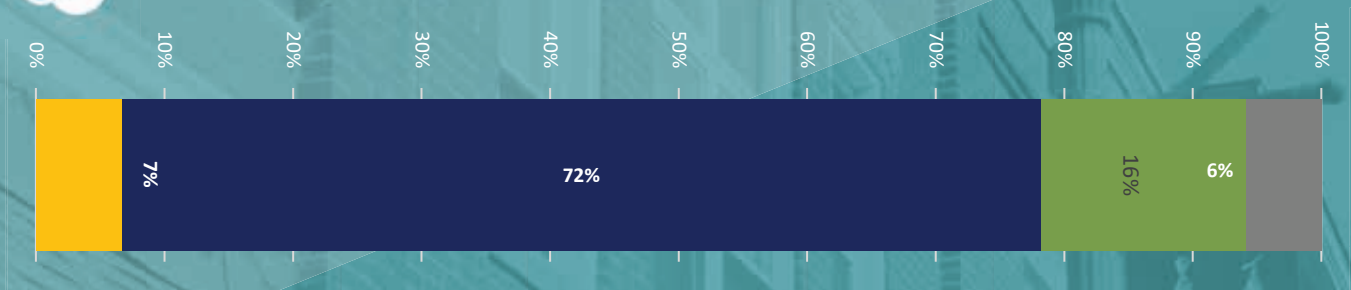
Dating as far back as the 2015 East Central Indiana Regional Development Plan, our region has recognized the value of reinvesting in existing downtowns as a center of commerce and culture. Like many other rural areas, city centers have experienced deterioration and need a new wave of investment. Many of the communities within East Central Indiana face challenges related to the mix and quality of housing stock, the state of infrastructure, and overall lack of maintenance of historic structures in downtowns.

Benefits from investment in downtown revitalization include jobs creation, increases in property values, and attraction of new residents and tourists. On the other hand, redevelopment of downtown structures comes with many challenges to overcome. These structures are usually aging, resulting in high construction costs, especially with ADA regulations, efficiency standards, and historic preservation standards. The key to downtown revitalization is establishing a shared vision and a pathway to get there.

A thriving downtown has a strong sense of place conveyed through storytelling, historic structures, community identity preservation, and civic engagement. East Central Indiana is prepared to support reinvestment efforts in our local communities so that our downtowns can offer a strong sense of place and continue serving as centers of commerce and culture.



PROJECT COSTS



\$59,300,000



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Fayette County Economic Development Group

Grant County Economic Growth Council

Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County

County and City Partners

Fayette County (City of Connersville),

Grant County (City of Marion), Wayne

County (City of Richmond)

Supporting Partners

Private Developers, Private Companies, Main Street Organizations

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership

East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Main Street Façade Program maintenance and project operations, will be funded through the interest income received from the Main Street Revolving Loan Fund.

All housing projects completed as part of the ECRIP Regional Downtown Rehabilitation maintenance and operation will be funded through rental incomes and public contributions.

The projects will be maintained by their developers, such as Halstead Development and Flaherty & Collins Properties.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

Number of successful façade improvements

Number of new units created

Stability of occupancy rates per development

Market Value of the housing units

Number of underutilized structures successfully converted

Amount of public and private dollars committed to reinvestment

Number of new residents in each downtown area

Demographic of the downtown area



Regional Downtown Rehabilitation

Providing housing opportunities within a downtown helps to diversify the types of units offered within East Central Indiana.



In addition to the general redevelopment challenges listed above, the COVID-19 pandemic has created even more hurdles for downtown businesses and property owners. Most of East Central Indiana's downtowns are occupied by smaller, local establishments that did not see many customers for several months. These individuals will likely spend the better part of the next year recovering and trying to keep their doors open. Their priority won't be tackling "extra" expenses like façade improvements or upper story renovations to accommodate new housing units, regardless of how dire the need might be for these types of reinvestments.

Drive through any downtown, and you will see a building in disrepair. Review the housing data in Section 2, and you will see the need for additional housing. Fortunately, the lack of housing supply can be addressed in several ways, including redevelopment and new construction. Providing housing opportunities within a downtown helps to diversify the types of units offered within East Central Indiana. Living in an apartment above retail or a house outside the downtown core provides a much different living environment than a single-family subdivision. Having more options available increases the likelihood of aligning the region's housing stock with the preferences of future residents.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Downtown rehabilitation through façade improvements.
- Downtown rehabilitation through increased residential opportunities.



Downtown Rehabilitation Through Façade Improvements.

Fayette County | Status: Capstone | Duration: 3+ years

The revitalization of a dilapidated downtown or residential neighborhood often begins with improvements to a single building. It is expected that when one property owner makes an improvement, there is a domino effect throughout a downtown district. While sometimes this improvement is spurred by a property owner, communities can accelerate change by creating a façade grant program. Façade improvement programs are incentive programs designed to encourage property owners and businesses to improve the exterior appearance of their buildings and storefronts. By visually enhancing the exterior of buildings, businesses increase their property values, maintain their marketability, and demonstrate confidence.

The **Connersville Main Street Façade Program** will offer Main Street business owners the opportunity to participate in a matching grant for façade improvements. Façade improvement programs are incentive programs created to encourage property owners and businesses to improve the exterior appearance of their buildings and storefronts. They focus on commercial or residential properties in historic or non-historic areas and provide financial incentives such as a matching grant or loan, a tax incentive, and design assistance. Over the last ten years, the Connersville community began to realize the importance of saving our history and preserving our downtown buildings and other significant landmarks. One of the first essential steps taken by the City of Connersville was to establish a Historic Preservation Commission and adopt a Historic Preservation Ordinance in 2011. The City, along with the Main Street Committee at the time, realized the importance of promoting the public's cultural, economic, and general welfare through preservation and protection of structures, along with areas of historical and cultural interest within the downtown area. This program impacted some of the smaller, immediate needs of the downtown businesses, but the costly items were not fundable. With additional resources, our intention is for the program to make a visible impact that will garner interest and encourage business owners to improve their structure. The Main Street Committee plans to offer Main Street businesses the opportunity to enhance the façade of their buildings through a 50% matching grant program.





Richmond Growing Workforce Housing rendering provided by Ffaherty & Collins

New, market rate apartment complexes with amenities do not currently exist in Richmond making it difficult for individuals and families looking for a maintenance free lifestyle to find suitable housing.

David M. Snow, Mayor, City of Richmond



Downtown Rehabilitation Through Increased Residential Opportunities

Grant and Wayne County | Status: Capstone | Duration: 6 months to 2 years


Increasing the number of residents in a downtown has several benefits. First, more rooftops mean more people in a downtown. The increase in foot traffic can have a positive impact on businesses. Locals are likely eating and running their errands where it is quick and convenient. Secondly, more people in a downtown means more eyes on the street. In urban design, this concept refers to increased safety because of the number of people present within the area. Lastly, residential land use in a downtown will likely increase the overall property values and help generate additional tax revenue.

The challenge with residential uses in a downtown is ensuring the housing supply matches the demand for the number of units and price points. Over saturating the downtown with residential units that aren't aligning with the market will leave empty units. To increase downtown housing opportunities throughout East Central Indiana, our region has prepared an approach incorporating redevelopment, infill, and new construction.

The **Ridley Tower** project will redevelop the former Marion National Bank building located in Marion, Indiana. Once completed, the Ridley Tower will provide 29 modern market-rate apartments, the first in market-rate apartments in 35 years, downtown dining, retail and office space, and a community gathering space for special events. This redevelopment project has been ongoing since 2019, with only the second floor left to cap off the complete restoration of the building. The innovative component of this mixed-use development is the partnership. Halstead Development has partnered with Liberty Prep Academy, a Christian postgraduate prep school for men, to provide a place to live and work for young men who want to earn a 4-year degree.

The **Richmond Rising: Filling the Gaps – Growing Workforce Housing** project strives to provide a housing type that currently does not exist in Richmond – new, market-rate apartments. This transformational project will include a 200-unit apartment complex that anchors the western edge of downtown Richmond. Downtown Richmond is a jewel of urban renewal where you can visit boutiques, cafes, colorful murals, a new bike path, a park with a water feature, green space, and plenty of relaxation. Adjacent and within walking distance to downtown is the City's Depot District. Bustling with activity, the Depot District is alive with shopping, dining, entertainment, and historical attractions such as the 1902 Pennsylvania Railroad Depot and the world-renowned National Model T Ford Museum. While both areas within the city are home to businesses and visitors, the areas—especially the City's downtown core—lack residential options for individuals who wish to live in the city's historic heart. Providing this type of housing will make it easier for transplants, young professionals, and retirees to find suitable housing that offers a maintenance-free lifestyle. The goal for the development is to enhance the region's ability to attract additional investment and entrepreneurship interest once 200 residents live downtown and need other retail and services.

The **Cambridge City Downtown Housing** project, located in Cambridge City, takes on a different approach by leveraging public and private resources to rehabilitate existing residential and historic structures within the downtown area. This infill project will generate over 40 new housing units in downtown Cambridge City that work to address our region's housing shortage and increase our workforce by attracting individuals looking to relocate. The housing units will range from one-bedroom entry-level apartments to upscale, condo-style living and four-bedroom homes. When complete, the downtown housing project will help to ensure that the region becomes an attractive destination with vibrant downtowns and diverse housing choices.





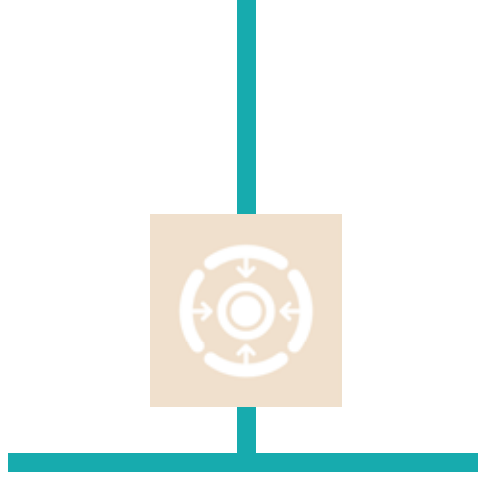
Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Canal River District (also known as White River Canal District)	Delaware	\$300,000	\$240,000
Main Street Improvement	Wayne	\$200,000	\$40,000
Miller Brothers Block	Wayne	\$17,600,000	\$16,000,000
New Castle Annex Building Rehabilitation	Henry	\$1,000,000	****
Reimagining the Ball State Village; Muncie, IN	Delaware	\$100,000,000	\$80,000,000
Sign Grant, New Castle Downtown	Henry	\$10,000	\$2,500
The Heart of Downtown Muncie	Delaware	\$4,395,200	\$1,833,000

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.





Talent Enhancement

Together we will improve our quality of place by developing a regional network of parks, open spaces, trails and pathways.



Regional Context

Parks are more than just places for recreation; they are the heart of the East Central Indiana region, where community members meet, play, and connect. While parks promote the conservation of natural resources and perform critical environmental duties, they also provide various economic, social, and health benefits.

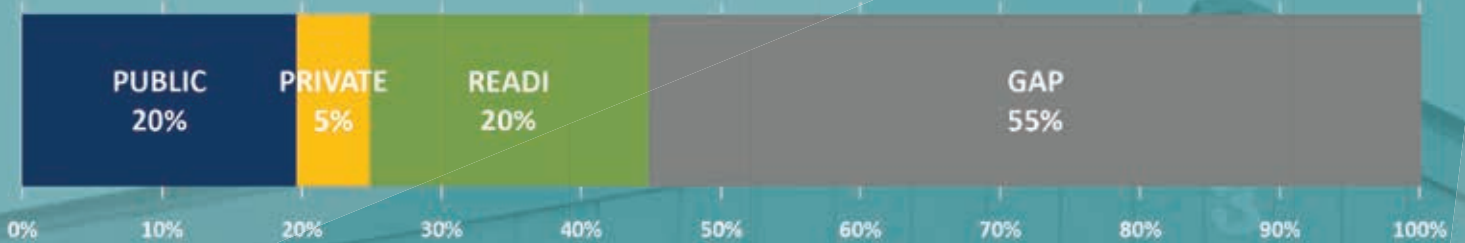
Parks boost local economies by increasing local revenue and attracting and retaining residents. Since homebuyers view parks as a desirable amenity, the location of homes near recreational areas leads to higher property values and more property taxes. These dollars can be reinvested into community assets and amenities that drive tourism, which increases spending at local establishments.

Parks improve social equity by providing recreational opportunities for everyone, regardless of their race, ethnicity, age, gender, physical ability, sexual orientation, or income level. This inclusivity is making it easier for residents to maintain healthy, active lifestyles. National research shows that just 30 minutes of exercise a day can improve one's physical and mental health and reduce the risk of developing chronic conditions later in life. East Central Indiana residents see the positive impacts of outdoor recreation through partnerships between communities and healthcare providers. These partnerships are facilitating access to public health services that help maintain their overall health and wellbeing.

Parks and open spaces provide community-wide benefits that allow us to explore cultural and artistic expression while promoting wellness. Their inclusion in East Central Indiana's future growth is critical to ensuring the region's success.



PROJECT COSTS



\$3,436,320



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Blackford County Economic Development Corporation

Fayette County Economic Development Group

Jay County Development Corporation

County and City Partners

Blackford County (City of Hartford City),
Fayette County (City of Connersville), Jay
County (Town of Salamonia)

Supporting Partners

Blackford County Community Foundation,
City of Connersville Parks Department,
Hartford City Parks Department, Indiana
Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership
East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Parks departments in communities through the East Central Indiana region are funded through taxpayer dollars and event income.

The future maintenance of these projects will be covered by these funds, private donations, and facility rental fees.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

Community quality of life

Collaboration with other communities in the East Central Indiana region

Number of annual visitors

Number of local/regional tournaments held

Number of participants per tournament

Money raised for charitable causes during local/regional tournaments



Community Open Space and Recreation Enhancements

While communities agree that parks and recreation play an important role in solving local issues, they face significant barriers to maintenance and improvements due to limited funding.



Communities in the East Central Indiana region are facing increasing financial constraints. While communities agree that parks and recreation play an important role in solving local issues, they face significant barriers to maintenance and improvements due to limited funding. Indiana tax caps limiting property taxes based on property values are limiting traditional funding sources for parks and recreation agencies. There are no signs that this trend will reverse, as budgets cannot keep up with rising costs.

Financial constraints are also impacting East Central Indiana residents looking to participate in recreation activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an even greater dependence on parks and recreation amenities. A significant increase in park usage and public expectations for park performance and offerings has resulted in higher maintenance and operations costs.

As a result of these challenges, communities are looking to do more with less, with many seeking to establish partnerships with allied organizations and exploring new opportunities to obtain funds. Considering the many economic, social, and health benefits of parks and open spaces, these challenges must be addressed.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Attracting New Talent
- Driving Economic Impact
- Saving the Town Hub





Attracting New Talent

Fayette County | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: 1-2 Years

As the youth sports business grows, the City of Connersville has the unique opportunity to expand tourism benefits by building baseball fields to accommodate thousands of travelers. That will result in many economic impacts for the community. In addition to local purchases for operations, day and overnight visitors will make purchases on food, lodging, and transportation, resulting in benefits for local businesses in the food, transportation, and hospitality industries.

Located on the southern gateway to the City of Connersville, **Rivers Edge Park** is poised to add baseball fields to its regional sports complex, including soccer fields, restrooms, concession stands, amphitheater seating, walking trails, a canoe/kayak launch, and other amenities. The fields are designed to host regional tournaments and local sporting events, which will foster interest in participation amongst our region's young talent.

Phase One of Rivers Edge Park was completed in Fall 2020. The Park, which started as unused land, faced many obstacles due to a lack of funding. The park's current baseball fields are unusable during the rainy seasons, preventing young talent from ultimately developing their skills. The new baseball fields at Rivers Edge Park will create a safe and positive environment that will improve the quality of life for the region's existing talent and attract new talent to the region.



Driving Economic Impact

Blackford County | Status: In Development | Duration: 1-2 Years

Disc golf, an outdoor sport that makes it easy to socially-distance, has increased in popularity throughout the pandemic. According to the Disc Golf Growth Report by UDisc, an app for disc golfers, approximately 50 million rounds of disc golf were played worldwide, with more than 140,000 rounds played per day. Disc golf is a unique sport in that it is accessible to new players of all ages. The sport has simple rules, is relatively inexpensive, and promotes socialization.

As the sport grows, Blackford County wants to transform a former Hartford City dumpsite into a multi-purpose park featuring a professionally designed **Disc-Golf Course**. This 29-acre facility would serve as a regional hub for disc golf tournaments. The exponential growth and relatively low installation and maintenance costs make disc golf a perfect driver for economic impact in Central Indiana.

As the only professional disc golf course in the Central Indiana region, Hartford City will draw regional disc golf tournaments. Day and night visitors will purchase food, lodging, and transportation to benefit local businesses in the food, transportation, and hospitality industries. Disc golf courses in Delaware, Grant, and Jay counties will also likely benefit from the course as part of the regional disc golf trail.







Saving the Town Hub

Jay County | Status: Capstone | Duration: 6 months to a year

A community hub is a public space that brings several community agencies and neighborhood groups together to offer various activities, programs, and services. These community hubs often take the form of public facilities or open spaces- especially in rural towns, because they become the center of activity for nearly all age groups and demographics.

The ***Salamonia Schoolhouse Building and Park***, located adjacent to the Salamonia City Fire Department, are the heart of this close-knit community. It is a place where the community meets, plays, eats, and connects. The schoolhouse building frequently hosts monthly town board meetings, 4H club meetings, family reunions, birthday parties, baby showers, and funeral dinners. Over time, the park and structure have developed several maintenance issues that need to be addressed. However, the Town has been unable to make much-needed improvements due to a lack of funding.

Meanwhile, the damage continues to grow over time. The schoolhouse building has become very costly to heat in the winter and cool in the summer due to the old windows. The roof is leaking, and water damage in the ceiling has contributed to the seepage of water through the exterior brick, resulting in damage to the interior plaster. As a result, the schoolhouse building desperately needs a new roof, interior plastering, and windows. The Park, which features a playground and basketball court, faces safety issues due to a lack of adequate lighting. When improvements are complete, the Town of Salamonia will be able to gather at the beloved schoolhouse and open space again, strengthening the Town's bond to this community resources for generations.

Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE INITIATIVES			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Blue River Park Development - Knightstown IN	Henry	\$500,000	\$240,000
Bridge Street Park	Jay	\$600,000	\$80,000
Fields of Dreams	Jay	****	****
JCC Walking Track Expansion	Jay	\$370,000	****
Mahan County Park Development	Fayette	\$100,000	****
Manlove Park Spillway Renovations	Fayette	\$500,000	****
Maplewood Park	Wayne	\$36,000	\$10,000
Outdoor Updates & Safety Measures	Jay	\$20,000	\$2,000
Portland Golf Course Improvement, Portland, IN	Jay	\$426,615	\$426,615
Riverbend Flats Riverfront Recreation, Muncie, IN	Delaware	\$12,179,426	\$11,279,426

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.

TRAIL AND PATHWAY INITIATIVES

Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Central City Trail: Minnetrista Bridge	Delaware	\$3,290,000	\$1,450,000
Blackford County Trails Project	Blackford	\$3,200,000	\$3,200,000
Downtown Regional Trail Connection	Grant	\$5,000,000	\$475,000
Dunkirk Redkey Recreational Trail	Jay	\$2,114,880	\$475,000
ECI regional trails plan priority projects	Regional	****	****
Muncie Arts and Culture Trail	Delaware	\$6,805,163	\$3,622,464
Pedestrian Trail on CR 600 W north of Lone Beech	Delaware	\$2,000,000	****
Raintree Trails	Henry	****	****
Randolph County Vision Trail	Randolph	\$5,000,000	****
Trail along River Road between Nebo and Woodland Trails Blvd	Delaware	\$1,000,000	****
Yorktown Pedestrian Bridge over Buck creek and Downtown Redevelopment	Delaware	\$24,000,000	****

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.





Talent Growth

Together, we will support innovation in our industries by investing in the agriculture and the rural character of our Region.



Regional Context

The East Central Indiana region is a leader in agriculture, with an ample supply of natural resources and fertile land capable of sustaining livestock and crops. This foundational strength, combined with an increase in investment in agricultural technologies, makes the region an ideal place for agricultural innovation.

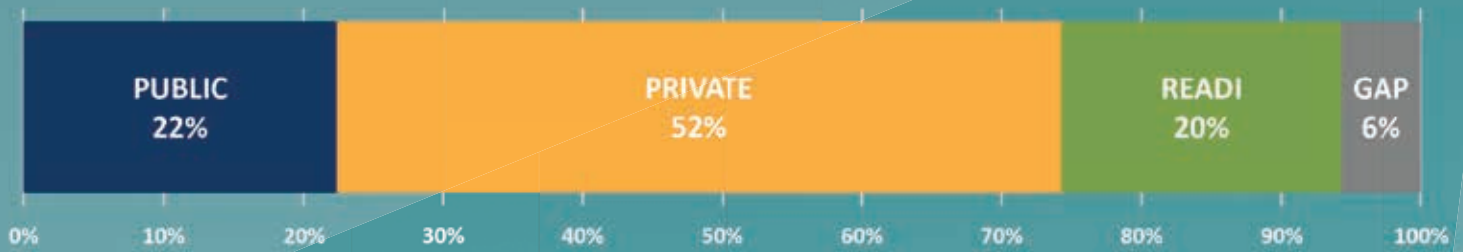
Agriculture is more than just planting crops and raising livestock; it takes an ecosystem and network of professionals working together to provide food, improve quality of life and cope with the challenges of sustainably managing our natural resources. The agricultural production system has evolved through scientific and industrial innovations. What about our extensive food processing industry here, particularly corn-milling and ethanol production? This dynamic nature allows the industry to meet increasing demands for physical, social, and economic access to nutritious foods.

While traditional family agricultural practices may continue to work for some, new practices have enabled farmers to become more productive and efficient, with less land and water needed to produce the food we need today. Agricultural innovation requires connecting farmers to the resources and information to become more resilient and adaptive to change. This knowledge allows them to bounce back more easily from the challenges associated with growth and environmental stressors.

Regional investment in agriculture aims to provide farmers equal access to the social, technological, and scientific advances in their trade. As the agricultural industry evolves, East Central Indiana has the unique opportunity to attract professionals who wish to innovate and maintain a commitment to community and environmental responsibility.



PROJECT COSTS



\$44,600,000



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners
Blackford County Economic Development Corporation

County and City Partners
Blackford County (City of Montpelier)

Supporting Partners
Hello Nature, Local Utility Providers, Private Developers, Private Businesses

Collaboration Partners
East Central Indiana Regional Partnership
East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Hello Nature's CEO Luca Bonini will manage site development and operations of the Hello Nature fertilizer plant.

Two initial anchor businesses are currently in place to begin operations and provide financial stability to the park within the first three years.

The remainder of the site is expected to attract three new sustainable agriculture operations once the infrastructure is in place.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Number of workers employed
- Extent to which employees' wages exceed the MIT living wage
- Percent of employees who faced employment barriers
- Visitors to the park to highlight technology
- Amount of follow-on investment in the park
- Amount of nitrogen and e-coli reduced into the Wabash River watershed
- Number of tires reduced from landfills or incineration plants



Sustainable Agriculture

Regional investment in agriculture aims to provide farmers equal access to the social, technological, and scientific advances in their trade.



The East Central Indiana region is an agricultural hub. According to the U.S. Agricultural Census, the region had 1,162,386 cultivated crop acres in 1997, which increased to 1,317,294 acres in 2017, a 13% increase. The region also has several confined feeding operations, where livestock is confined and raised in indoor pens. The current estimate of these operations is 208.

Similarly, the region's agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting workforce has increased over time. The agricultural workforce throughout the region has risen from 601 jobs in 2006 to 1,124 jobs in 2018, an 87% increase. Based on this data, the farm industry has been and will continue to be a mainstay of the regional economy.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Innovation through the development of sustainable products and technology.



Innovation Through the Development of Sustainable Products and Technology

Blackford County | Status: Near Term | Duration: 6 – 12 months

Advancements in the agricultural industry have led to innovations including sustainable agriculture, organic fertilizer production, and practices designed to reduce the amount of nitrogen and e-coli in our watersheds. Initiatives like AgriNovus, an agro-bioscience company, strive to make Indiana a growing, diversified economy that continues to offer career opportunities and connect agricultural professionals, innovators, and academics to new technology. The East Central Indiana region has the chance to become a leader in these specialized agricultural trends.

The **Montpelier Agricultural Sustainability Demonstration Park** will be an 80-acre sustainable agriculture facility in Blackford County. The facility will be the first domestic fertilizer production facility to divert poultry and other waste from the Wabash River watershed and the first facility to divert tires from landfills and incineration facilities and convert them into reusable carbon: a solvent, steel, and energy. The project will not only provide jobs to people facing employment barriers, such as limited educational attainment, incarceration, and substance abuse; it also offers an opportunity for innovative educational and technological advancement.

Hello Nature, a 50-year-old international leader in producing organic fertilizers, natural bio-stimulants, and beneficial microbials for use in agriculture, will be responsible for managing the site's overall development. The company is headquartered in the U.S. and has its initial production facility in Anderson. They are dedicated to fostering environmental conservation by reducing environmental pollution, stopping soil degradation, and preserving agroecosystems. The company envisions a complementary sustainable agricultural business at the Montpelier site.

Image provided by Hello Nature





Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE INITIATIVES			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
East Central Indiana Regenerative Farming Institute, with Hotel, Conference & Event Center for Agritourism and Sustainable Living (Exit 241 I69/ IN332)	Delaware	\$40,000,000	\$40,000,000

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.





Talent Growth

Together we will support innovation in our industries by investing in agriculture and the rural character of our Region.



Regional Context

The East Central Indiana region is primarily a rural area. With over 4,200 farms in the region, East Central Indiana is responsible for 10% of the state of Indiana's agricultural sales. Ivy Tech in Marion and several local high schools have agro-based curriculums.

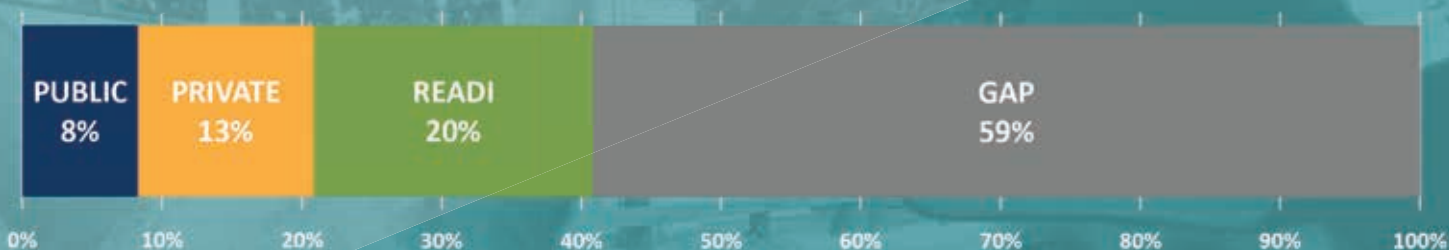
To continue to grow and celebrate our regional role in agriculture, East Central Indiana needs to utilize an innovative approach to engaging and educating citizens about agriculture and the importance of the agricultural industry. A key challenge in this industry is transiting operations to the next generation. It is becoming more difficult for farmers to "pass the torch" to a new operator as they retire. Addressing this challenge starts with children involved in 4-H, who could be future investors in the region's agricultural economy.

Today's 4-H participants tackle the nation's top issues, from global food security, climate change, and sustainable energy to childhood obesity and food safety. To improve our region's ability to compete in key scientific fields and take on the leading challenges of the 21st century, East Central Indiana's 4-H programs need to continue to offer a wide variety of programs and curriculum.

Without these necessary investments in community programs, advancements in the region's agriculture industry will lag behind others in terms of innovation. We believe that innovation and investment in our 4-H programs will give the region the community development win that we need to push forward towards other successes.



PROJECT COSTS



\$1,847,500



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Blackford County Economic Development Corporation

Jay County Development Corporation

Randolph County United

County and City Partners

Blackford County (City of Hartford City),
Jay County (City of Portland), Randolph
County (City of Winchester)

All incorporated Cities and Towns

Supporting Partners

Purdue University, philanthropic partners,
4-H Councils, 4-H Fair Boards

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership

East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

READI project funding is contingent upon developing 5-year capital facilities management plans for the affected 4-H organizations, including rough cost estimations for maintenance of existing facilities, additional needed capital improvement projects, and fundraising targets.

The regional 4-H programs and county fairgrounds have indicated plans to continue funding yearly donations to subsidize continuing maintenance costs.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

Number of events hosted at each facility

Participation rate in educational and character development programs

Participation rate in livestock events

Attendance of spectators



Growing our Role in Agriculture

4-H programs encourage children to learn and partake in agriculture and can provide a gateway into the agricultural industry.



Backed by a network of more than 6 million youth, 540,000 adult volunteers, 3,500 professionals, and more than 60 million alumni, 4-H delivers research-based programming around positive youth development. It prepares young people to be leaders in their community and worldwide through hands-on experiences alongside their peers and caring adults. America's 109 land-grant universities and the Cooperative Extension Service facilitate 4-H and reach every corner of our nation.

4-H programs encourage children to learn and partake in agriculture and provide a gateway into the agricultural industry. These organizations also help strengthen community development by collaborating with local leaders, residents, businesses, and organizations. The participation in 4-H is increasing, which requires updates to facilities and infrastructure at several county fairgrounds.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Innovation through community education and facilities.



Innovation Through Community Education and Facilities

Blackford County, Jay County, Randolph County | Status: Ready to Launch | Duration: immediately-2 years

Maintaining safe, clean, and efficient facilities is critical for continuing agricultural education through the 4-H program. The quality of facilities relates directly to the number and quality of events that 4-H campuses can attract. Livestock barns and show areas require repair, and updates are needed to electrical wiring and sound systems. Improvements to our 4-H facilities will provide quality places for the next generation of leaders in agriculture, enhance the learning environment, host more diverse events, and encourage more people to attend events. It is anticipated that business volume will increase by 50% following the completion of improvements.

The **Blackford County 4-H** and Open Fair makeover will include remodeling an existing barn into a showroom arena. Once completed, the arena will showcase new flooring, roof, and showroom equipment. The Jay County 4-H Council, in partnership with the other 4-H Clubs, is preparing for **Jay County 4-H Capital Campaign**. Like Blackford County, the Jay County 4-H Fairgrounds is in despite need of repair. This project will include replacing framing that has rotted and updating electrical wiring with the intention that phase 2 will focus on lighting and sound equipment updates to the exhibit hall. The **Randolph County 4-H Capital Improvement Project** will improve the Best Way Center and construct a new livestock show arena.

These updates to facilities will allow livestock participation and opportunities to increase and for increased spectator attendance. These improvements will also allow for an increase in the number of 4-H projects showcased. Investments in local 4-H programs in our region will increase regional development by providing region youth with the chance to explore and learn skills related to agriculture, develop meaningful relationships, and give a chance for mentorships and future career opportunities.

When complete, the improvements across the region will provide economic and agricultural investment opportunities outside of the traditional county fair season. New facilities such as barns and show rings can hold livestock events such as auctions or specialized livestock shows. These events can draw spectators, customers, specialists, and tourists, promoting agribusiness throughout the region. Facilities can also house new programs, including the 4-H Ag Innovators Experience, which challenges youth to apply critical thinking and STEM skills to address a real-world agriculture challenge. The program drives youth awareness of and interest in agriculture innovation and agriculture careers by tying in relevant concepts like aquaculture and environmental stewardship with a hands-on activity.





Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Floral Hall Restoration	Jay	\$350,000	\$10,000
Henry County Capstone	Henry	\$35,468,000	\$28,490,500
Henry County Expo Center	Henry	\$6,874,379	\$2,318,379
Infield Improvement	Jay	\$450,000	\$3,500

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.





Talent Growth

Together, we will improve our quality of opportunity by creating an environment for innovation and entrepreneurship.



Regional Context

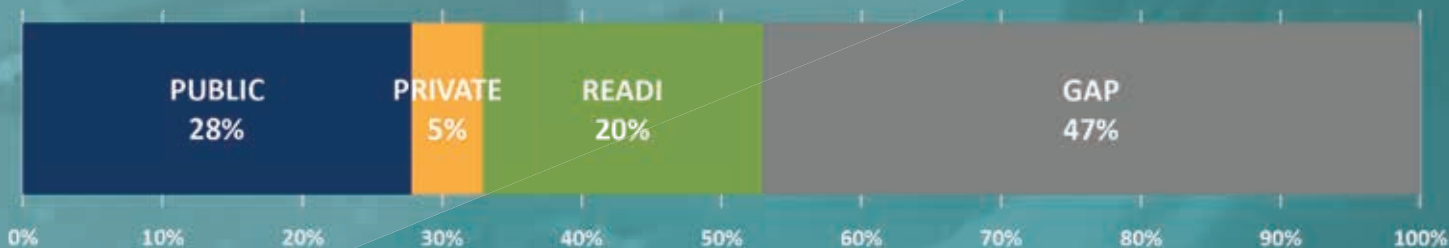
The “maker movement” is an umbrella term for a new generation of artisans, designers, and technicians, who are all part of the rise of a worldwide technology-enabled extension of do-it-yourself (DIY) culture. Makers are self-defined DIY inventors who participate in an active socio-technical community of sharing, who can entirely design, model, and fabricate what they want themselves, mainly through the utilization of the sharing economy. The maker movement is being touted as a catalyst for the next industrial revolution.

Makers embody many of the attitudes and characteristics of entrepreneurs, particularly their commitment to innovation. Through shared access to tools and digital fabrication technologies, makers can act as producers in the sharing economy and potentially increase entrepreneurship rates, grow advanced manufacturing, and spur economic development.

With the number of self-employed East Central Indiana residents rising, local communities have embraced the entrepreneurial attitude. They have established several incubators, co-working spaces, and maker spaces where innovators can find the resources, collaboration, and technology they need to take their ideas from concept to reality. Creating additional facilities and resources to our local landscape shows interested makers and entrepreneurs that our region welcomes and nurtures creative individuals. We strive to be at the forefront of the Maker Movement.



PROJECT COSTS



\$25,912,000



PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development Partners

Blackford County Economic Development Corporation

Muncie-Delaware County Economic Development Alliance

Fayette County Economic Development Group

Grant County Economic Growth Council

New Castle-Henry County Economic Development Corporation

Jay County Development Corporation

Randolph County United

Economic Development Corporation of Wayne County

County and City Partners

Blackford County, Delaware County, Fayette County, Grant County, Henry County, Jay County, Randolph County, Wayne County

All incorporated Cities and Towns

Supporting Partners

Purdue Polytechnic Institute, Ball State University, Indiana University East, and Ivy Tech Community College, The Kelly School of Business in the Indianapolis Public Schools.

Collaboration Partners

East Central Indiana Regional Partnership

East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative



MAINTENANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

For the proposed makerspace projects, once the equipment is in place, the build-outs are completed, and the programming is underway, the cost of participation and machine maintenance will be covered by the income generated from the equipment, leases, and membership revenue.

East Central Indiana and their partners intend for the facilities and programs to be financially self-sustaining.



SUCCESS INDICATORS

Number of Makers-in-Residence

Number of schools participating in the program(s)

Number of industry partners

Number of new business starts

Number of business expansions (measured in new jobs)

Number of new technology-focused jobs

Annual wage comparison

Number of visitors from outside of the region


Percentage of increased tax revenues

Estimated economic impact



Supporting Innovators and Makers

Called the “maker movement,” it has changed the way that people can access tools and equipment across the world.



Over the past ten years, a quiet revolution has been underway. The revolution is taking place in large and small communities, revitalized downtowns, trendsetting schools, and reimagined libraries. It is about building, creating, and making. Called the “maker movement,” it has changed how people can access tools and equipment worldwide. Communities have taken note of this unique way to spur economic development and retain/acquire talent. They invest in the future: makerspaces, fabrication laboratories (i.e., “fab labs”), and innovation centers. Where vacant buildings, public libraries, or old warehouses used to exist, makerspaces have brought new life to downtowns, suburbs, and rural areas alike. Supporting makers in East Central Indiana will allow residents to expand their creativity, earn an income doing what they love, and bolster the region’s overall resident happiness and economic success.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative and with support of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership we are committed to implementing, refining and scaling the following innovative ideas across the East Central Indiana region.

- Creating a maker mindset through elementary education.
- Bringing in Big Ideas
- Creating Communities through Maker Hubs
- Developing Entrepreneurial Skills in Youth
- Empowering Business Leaders of Color



Creating a Maker Mindset Through Elementary Education

Delaware County | Status: Capstone Project | Duration: 1 year

Inspiring youth and adults of all ages to adopt a “makers mindset” and embrace lifelong learning and making will help cultivate a positive future for everyone involved. East Central Indiana can continue building on its industrial heritage and craft the next generation of entrepreneurs, artisans, and industrialists by providing access to practical tools and collaborative workspaces.

In 2015, the Madjax transformed an empty warehouse in Downtown Muncie into a thriving hub for design, innovation, and community partnerships. Today, the Madjax houses six year-round STEAM-oriented programs catered to students in grades K–12, 1 program for adults with developmental disabilities, four college credit-granting programs, and five student internship opportunities, with more to come. The **Madjax Makerforce Expansion** project includes design and fabrication areas to support equipment and educational experiences related to molding plastics, advanced manufacturing, woodworking, and metalworking. Further development within the maker space will build excitement and trust and produce a higher retention rate for those currently conducting business and opportunities. Furthermore, this expansion will be valuable to the Makers-in-Residency: Teachers Initiative. This initiative invites teachers and makers/artisans in the region to come together at Madjax to expand their skills and co-create the future.



Image provided by Madjax Maker Force

Not only will this new investment attract new individuals to Madjax, it will enhance the work of those already in the building, like Beyond I Can who provides work and maker opportunities for adults with disabilities.

Dan Ridenour, Mayor, City of Muncie

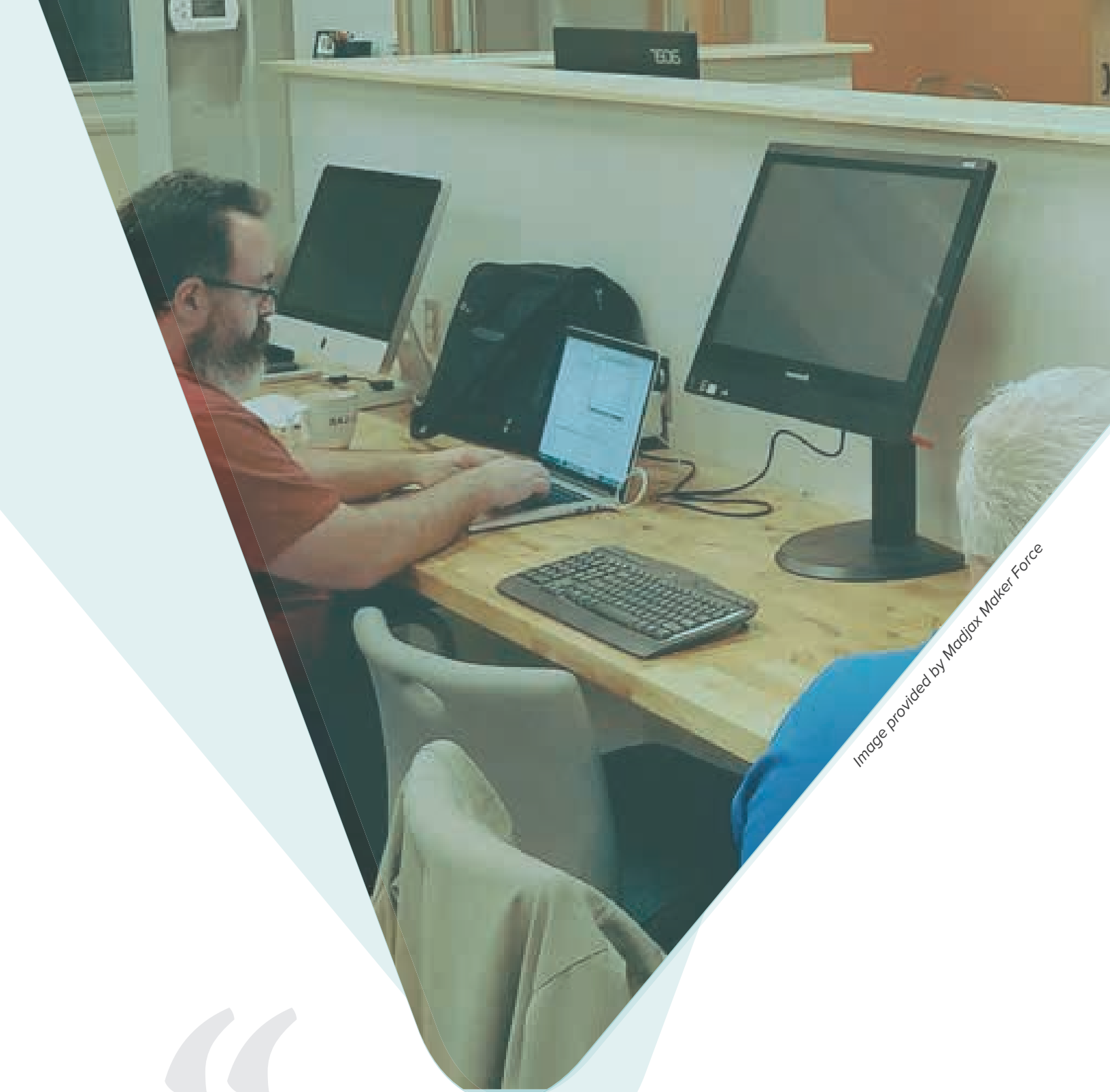


Image provided by Madox Maker Force

Our proposed hub will provide several educational opportunities for small business owners and employees, technology-driven students in K-12, as well as post secondary education for adults.

Muncie Innovation Connector's Board of Directors



Bringing in Big Ideas

Delaware County | Status: In Development | Duration: 3 or more years

Taking our regional entrepreneurship to the next level starts by bringing in the Big Ideas. Technology is rapidly transforming, and our region must continue adapting at the same rate to remain competitive. That holds true for providing the adequate infrastructure needed to support these advances and the skill set required to succeed within the technology-based industry.

Incubators can provide state-of-the-art facilities and resources such as a fiber-based internet, computer resources, and an active marketing and business center for a diverse group of people to utilize.

The **Emerging Growth Center & Regional Innovation Hub** project starts with a building expansion at Muncie's current Innovation Connector site. This expansion will create a regional hub for business growth resources, a regional attraction for e-sports, IoT development, and a youth and adult STEM Center. The expansion will also include an e-commerce fulfillment center for small-business entrepreneurs. The facility expansion will include additional business incubation offices to house the continued need for entrepreneurial spaces. Included with each of the three components will be educational elements to ensure a lasting value. For example, a creative partnership with Ball State University's renowned Sports Link program will introduce area high school students to sports media and production. This project is intended to directly affect the number of tech-ready employees available in east-central Indiana to fill current and future next-generation jobs.



Creating Communities through Maker Hubs

East Central Indiana Region | Status: In Development | Duration: 3 or more years

A makerspace is an environment where people with shared interests, especially in computing or technology, can work on projects while sharing ideas, equipment, and knowledge. These spaces will be a magnet for entrepreneurship, citizens of all ages and offer shared access to high-tech machinery and equipment. Maker Hubs provide many benefits to individuals, including access to a more extensive network of experts, exposure to new or different approaches, development of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and empowerment to become agents of change with their community.

The **East Central Indiana Maker Network** will support the makerspace within each county and Tinker Trailers® for ongoing outreach to schools and community organizations. These seven makerspaces – one in each county – will serve as hubs for creativity, new business startups, and mentorship alike. The Tinker Trailer is a mobile makerspace and STEM Lab. These spaces will be a magnet for entrepreneurship, citizens of all ages and offer shared access to high-tech machinery and equipment. This project will go through extensive community input and planning to meet the local community's needs. It will build on local momentum, including the makerspace in Downtown Muncie, MadJax, to expand the maker movement and create new makerspaces in identified areas. Each makerspace will be unique to the county it resides in and have a local maker manager to run the day-to-day operations and nurture ongoing partnerships to connect it to the rest of the county. Every makerspace will have a baseline of tools, equipment. Still, the specific goals of each space will depend on the outcomes of planning and input as the space evolves to ensure that it meets the needs of the citizens and companies that reside within that area.





The program has reached nearly 600 students and trained 25 teachers in the fundamentals of economics and entrepreneurship.

Statistic provided by Indiana University East



Developing Entrepreneurial Skills in Youth

East Central Indiana Region | Status: Capstone | Duration: 3 or more years

The 21st-century economy has evolved into an entity that behaves much differently from its predecessors. Success in the modern economy is about innovation and entrepreneurship. Attracting established industry in one town is no longer a reliable route to prosperity. Fostering talent in young people from preschool through life encourages them to think and create outside the formal academic or professional requirements. Creating environments that attract people who want to make and do things in new ways retains that talent to start the process over again in the next generation. Never before have academia, the private sector, and economic stakeholders been so reliant on one another to create economic opportunity¹.

Indiana University East recognizes the need to introduce high school students to the concept of entrepreneurship. Developing high school students as future entrepreneurs starts with teaching them the difference between becoming entrepreneurs instead of employees or creating a job rather than taking a job. The **Business Opportunities for Self-Starters (BOSS)** program, nationally recognized by UEDA, is prepared to expand throughout East Central Indiana.

Our approach is to provide students with the knowledge to help them develop the skills and abilities to become successful entrepreneurs. The 54-hour curriculum included in this plan achieves these objectives. It is designed so students will complete a business plan and submit it to a regional competition, either individually or as a team. The plan would cover five years with the goal of training over 500 high school students, training 25 high school teachers, and working with over 100 university graduates or final year students for the BOSS Experience to open a business or have it prepared to open. The students for the BOSS Experience would come from any of the regional state higher educational schools, including Purdue Polytechnic Institute, Ball State University, Indiana University East, and Ivy Tech Community College.

¹ <https://universityeda.org/>





Empowering Business Leaders of Color

Wayne County | Status: In Development | Duration: 3 or more years

Minority business owners face the same challenges as other entrepreneurs: developing a sound business plan, understanding the market and competition, and creating customers' products and services. However, for many minority business owners, there are additional complexities, challenges, and opportunities. Minority entrepreneurs face racism, difficulty securing funding, and a lack of social capital on which to draw.

The **REAL Momentum** the principles of venture capital and economic development principles to help entrepreneurs start and grow companies. In collaboration with community, state, and federal partners, REAL Momentum will generate dramatically improved and inclusive economic outcomes by supporting diverse entrepreneurs, optimizing entrepreneurial ecosystems, and accelerating innovation.

The proposed facilities will be located on East Main Street in Richmond with three primary objectives: providing access to the capital minorities need to start their businesses; providing technical assistance to help high-potential companies overcome barriers; and work on behalf of private, public, and philanthropic funders who want to assist entrepreneurs.



Proposed location- Former Knollenberg's Mall, Richmond, Indiana



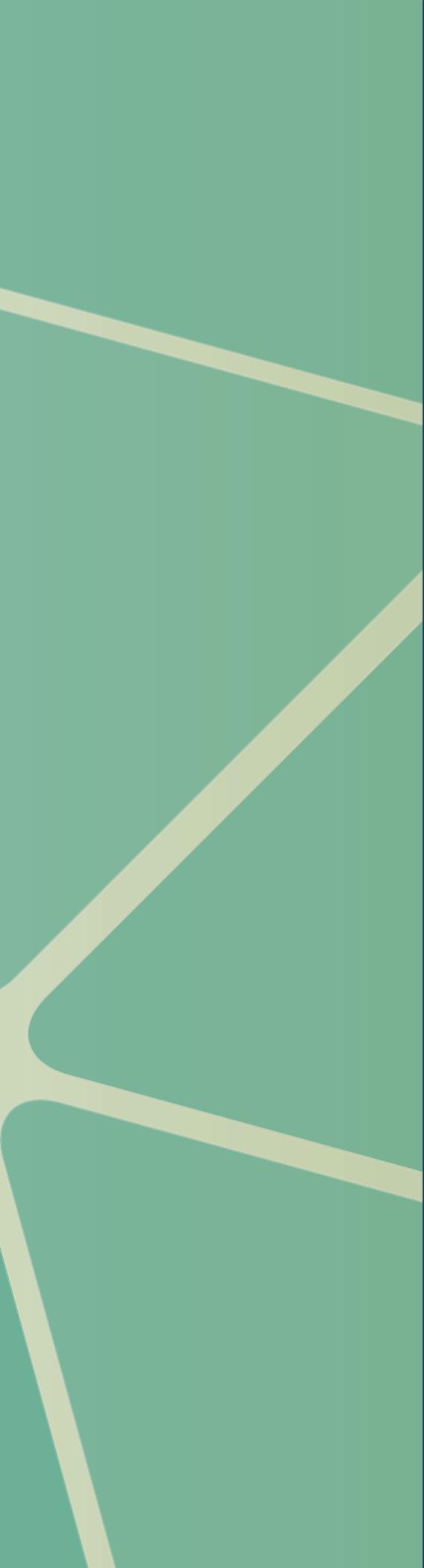
Mid- to Long- Term Supporting Initiatives

The following are initiatives and concepts that were submitted through the East Central Indiana Regional Call for Projects. While not highlighted as a catalyst project for funding through the READI process, these initiatives support the Region's vision and will provide for measurable outcomes that are in alignment with the region's goals and objectives. As these capital improvements and programmatic efforts continue, information and outcomes will be shared with the County Coalitions as a part of the ECI Talent Collaborative's work.

INNOVATION AND MAKER SPACE INITIATIVES			
Project Name	Project Location	Anticipated Costs	Committed Funds
Entrepreneur in Residence, 100 S. Main Street, New Castle	Henry	\$750,000	****
Henry County Creates: Business Builders, Henry County	Henry	\$20,000	\$12,000
Hub and Spoke Institute	Regional	\$12,420,306	****
Randolph County Business Development Revolving Loan Fund	Randolph	\$100,000	\$60,000
SMB and Not-for-Profit Digital Transformation	Regional	\$8,500,000	****
Wayne County Works	Wayne	****	****

**** Cost information has not been developed or committed for this effort at the time of plan publication.





SECTION NINE

Investment Criteria





Investment Criteria

We are prepared to take the challenging steps forward to allocate future resources in a fair and equitable way.



The *Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan* articulates a shared regional vision generated by the people who live and work in the region every day. The Plan is rooted in rich community engagement and a careful analysis of existing conditions, efforts, and influential trends. Our proposed regional strategies and supporting projects and programs outline a clear course of action to address and overcome our known challenges.

While our path is clear, we will continue our ongoing efforts to collaborate and improve our region. We are also prepared to take the challenging steps forward to allocate future funding resources fairly and equitably and refine our list of catalyst projects based on the region's needs.



Wayne County, Indiana



READI Governance and Oversight

The governing body is prepared to continue maintain transparency in decision making, provide opportunities to strengthen our regional participation and to provide equitable opportunities for enhancements across the eight county area.



The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership (ECIRP) will rely on the established ECIRP READI governing body, consisting of 17 individuals, 16 of which have voting rights. Representatives from each participating county and several anchor institutions review and provide recommendations for all regional projects and programs as a part of the READI funding allocation process.

The governing body is prepared to continue the processes developed and used to create the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan. They will maintain transparency in decision-making, provide opportunities to strengthen our regional participation, and provide equitable opportunities for enhancements across the eight-county area.



Project Funding Allocation

Following the designation as a READI region, the READI governing body will work with the IEDC to establish funding allocations at three specific levels:

ECI Talent Collaborative and Forge Your Path

As outlined in Section 8, we believe that our continued strength is developing and expanding our existing ECI Talent Collaborative network and our Forge Your Path platform. We will use the Talent Collaborative's collective impact model to explore new ideas, track regional metrics and report on our region's success. Through our Forge Your Path platform in conjunction with existing local programs, we will continue to market our region to retain current talent and attract new talent opportunities.

Regional Projects and Programs

Within East Central Indiana, we define "regional initiatives" as any effort that brings together multiple jurisdictions, organizations, or agencies to impact a broad area. We are committed to strengthening our regional partnerships and are prepared to set aside funding and technical resources towards developing and implementing regional efforts. To date, the region has raised \$240,000, with \$30,000 being committed by each participating county, for the specific purpose of regional plan creation, regional initiative implementation, and ongoing oversight and guidance.

We understand that these efforts are not always the easiest or quickest to implement through our previous efforts. While we know that the path forward on these regional initiatives will be challenging, we are committed to identifying and funding those projects and programs that will have the broadest, most long-term impact on our local communities, counties, and the entire region.

County Specific Initiatives

We believe that a vital piece of a regional approach is to ensure that all local parties and jurisdictions feel heard. While our primary focus will be on implementing regional projects and programs, we are committed to completing meaningful and impactful projects and programs within our local communities and counties.

Many of our local communities find that funding new projects and programs is difficult. Across the region, financial resources are limited, and an emphasis is often placed on maintenance and repairs, leaving enhancement projects stalled while funds are raised through donations or grant programs. By allocating funding to each county separately, our region will see localized improvements around our common goals and strategies for the future.



Project Selection and Evaluation

The READI Governing Body is prepared to undertake a final project selection and evaluation process following a READI designation by the IEDC. While 14 catalyst projects and 139 supporting regional and local initiatives are identified within this Plan, the Governing Body will facilitate an additional process to review and refine regional and local initiatives. That will ensure that local communities, counties, and community organizations have the opportunity to propose and/or refine solutions as a part of the regional development plan process.

After collecting any additional projects or programs, the Governing Body will review each submitted project using the READI Project Scorecard. The Project Scorecard is intended to be a tool for each member of the READI Governing Body and guides the individual review of proposed projects in a controlled way. While each governing body member will complete the scorecard separately, the criteria and supporting questions are the same, enabling the group to review things within the same frame of reference. When complete, the scorecard can be used to guide the group's discussion and deliberation process.

Starting with the topic of "Project Readiness," Governing Body members will consider each of the scoring criteria topics and questions and determine, based on the information provided, whether the project meets (low) or exceeds (high) the region's comprehensive needs. Scores for each topic should be entered onto the attached form or entered into the digital spreadsheet file sent to the READI Governing Body members. The scoring criteria include the following topics and objectives:

READI PROJECT SCORING CRITERIA

1. Project Readiness

- a. Has a feasibility study, or planning document been prepared in support of the project?
- b. If applicable, has design been completed for the project?
- c. If applicable, are permits secured, or is the process underway?


2. Project Funding and Support

- a. Is the project supported by local municipalities or the County?
- b. Does the project have a financial plan for implementation?
- c. Does the project leverage other investments such as city, town, county, or private resources?

3. Project Maintenance and Sustainability

- a. Does the project have an assigned responsible party for long-term maintenance and operations?
- b. Does the project have a funding stream for long-term maintenance and operations?
- c. Does the project have a maintenance plan to ensure it is sustainable?

4. Equity and Access

- a. Does the project benefit from a vast geography?
 - b. Does the project show value to all residents and visitors?
 - c. Does the project positively support or work to improve the quality of life for residents?
 - d. Does the project displace or negatively impact minority or at-risk populations?
- 




5. Regional Partnerships

- a. Does the project encourage collaboration among organizations, agencies, and local government?
- b. Does the project coordinate public services and investments for an increased public benefit?
- c. Does the project create new or reinforce existing cross-jurisdictional partnerships or public-private partnerships?

6. Talent Enhancement

- a. Does the project develop or promote diverse, affordable, and amenity-rich neighborhoods for the region?
- b. Does the project support our distinctive downtowns and promote investment in these areas?
- c. Does the project rehabilitate an underutilized or abandoned site and/or structure?
- d. Does the project update the critical infrastructure that is needed to retain and grow the regional population?
- e. Does the project expand universal access to reliable, high-speed internet (minimum speed of 25/3 MBps), especially to rural areas, minority residents, or low-income residents?

7. Talent Attraction

- a. Does the project work to attract and retain residents within the region?
 - b. Does the project promote preserving and celebrating the region's unique natural features and environmentally sensitive areas?
 - c. Does the project create and nurture great destinations for present and future residents and visitors?
 - d. Will the project provide a unique visitor experience, support and attract visitors, and/or increase tourism in the region?
 - e. Does the project provide entertainment, amenities, or services for visitors and current and/or future residents?
 - f. Does the project provide alternative ways for residents and visitors to access and connect to communities, increasing access for recreation activities?
 - g. Does the project enhance connections throughout the local communities, counties, and broader region by improving safety, function, and efficiencies for all modes of transportation, including vehicular, bicycle, pedestrian, rail, intermodal, freight, and aviation networks?
 - h. Will the project provide transportation infrastructure to connect critical industries that drive economic development to areas outside our region?
 - i. Does the project create a gateway to our region that welcomes visitors and reinforces our identity?
- 



8. Talent Development

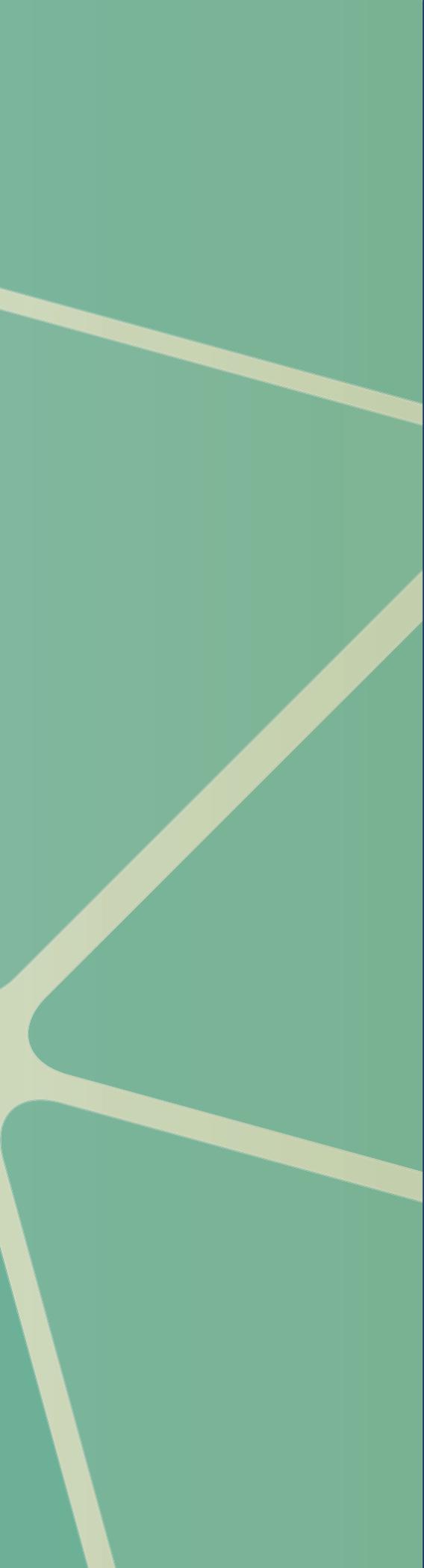
- a. Does the project align education and workforce development opportunities to strengthen job growth and ensure that the region's workforce adequately fulfills the employment opportunities available in the region?
- b. Does the project support or further our higher-education institutions, advance degree programs, or research capabilities in the region?
- c. Does the project increase the competitiveness of our schools through programs, resources, or increased student population?

9. Talent Growth

- a. Does the project support entrepreneurs in the region?
- b. Does the project support the creation of new industries in the region?
- c. Does the project support the viability of agricultural businesses in the region?
- d. Does the project pursue catalytic development that spurs investment in the region's quality jobs, housing, public spaces, and infrastructure?
- e. Does the project attract or retain high-skill jobs with wages that increase our region's livable wage standard (raise the average pay wage)?

Following the completion of the scorecard review, the proposed project will be discussed during a meeting of the READI Governing Body. Project readiness, relevancy, and impacts will be reviewed and discussed collectively. To be deemed regionally significant, the project must gain the support of the majority of the voting board. The "Project Scorecard" will be referenced throughout the discussion and will be used as a tool to guide the decision-making process.





SECTION TEN

Success Metrics



Western Wayne's

EVERYDAY HERO

Cambridge City Ch...



Success Metrics

We are prepared to measure our progress against each goal, as well as the individual goals outlined as a component of the proposed catalyst projects.



In partnership with Ball State University's Office of Community Engagement (the Talent Collaborative's Backbone Organization), the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership is prepared to work with our region's counties, cities, and towns, as well as the identified benchmark communities. We will establish a baseline of data around common datasets that match our proposed success metrics.

As a region, we have collectively identified three measurable goals for our region. We are prepared to measure our progress against each goal and the individual goals outlined as a component of the proposed catalyst projects to determine our region's success. All indicator data collected to measure the outcomes of these goals will be delineated in a way that allows for the identification of outcomes by race, age, and gender, as well as geographic participation.



1. GOAL: Boost population trends by 11% resulting in a net 0% population change by 2030.

Measurable Outcomes

- Total regional population and calculated population change.
- Measured components of population change including births, deaths, net loss to Armed Forces, and net civilian migration
- Commuting patterns
- Number of housing units per County
- Median housing price
- Health and wellness indicators including population pyramids, life expectancy, and obesity rates

2. GOAL: Mobilize our learning systems to increase the educational attainment of 9,000 Hoosiers by 2025.

Measurable Outcomes

- Youth poverty rates
- Youth uninsured rates
- Free/ reduced lunch rates
- ISTEP/ ILEARN pass rates
- High school graduation rates
- Post-secondary attainment rates
- Percent of population over the age of 25 who have achieved an associate's degree or higher


3. GOAL: Build upon equitable economic opportunities to increase median household income and earnings by 7.5% by 2025.

Measurable Outcomes

- Number of residents within the workforce
- Unemployment rate
- Average weekly wages
- Median household income

Data will be collected and documented by East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative staff on an annual basis. We will then sage the data through a regional data portal, similar to Central Indiana's SAVI platform maintained by the Polis Center. This data distribution will inform the entire East Central Indiana region during project and program implementation. It will assist in maintaining a level of transparency and neutrality to the regional planning and implementation effort.





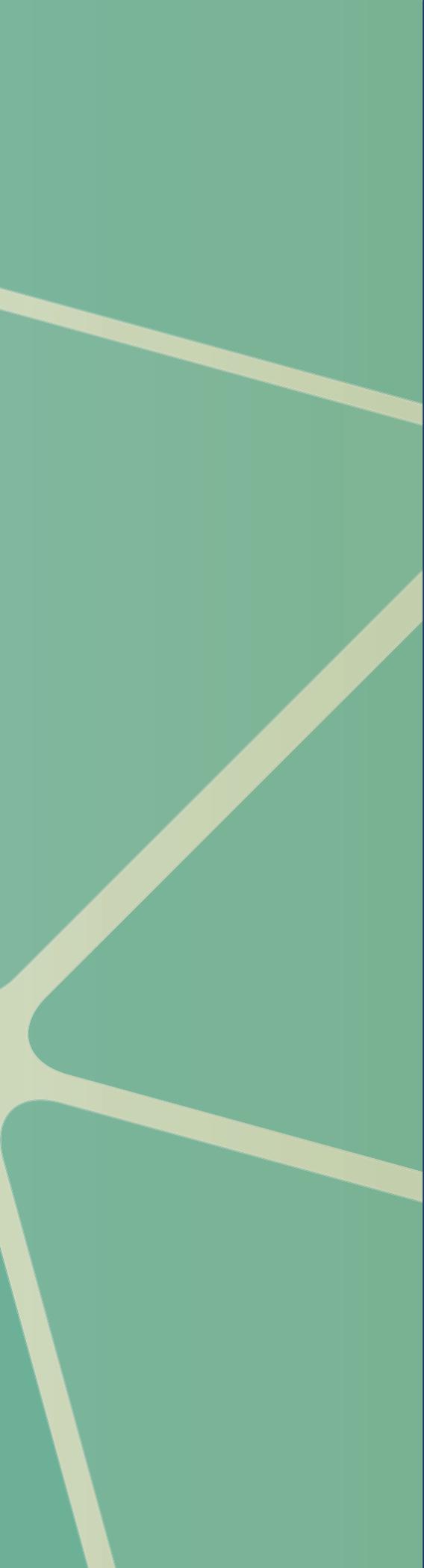
We will also track individual progress with each project and program included in this Regional Development Plan at least quarterly, if not monthly, to ensure milestone deadlines are met and proactively clear obstacles or issues. The READI Governing Body will work with the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership and the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative to identify the best way to integrate all organizational parties to ensure efficiency in reporting implementation efforts and gathered statistics.

The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership will reevaluate the *Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan* for success annually to ensure our efforts result in the outcomes our region has defined.

Regional Equity and Access

The ECI Talent Collaborative is committed to defining and prioritizing diversity, equity and including in all of our talent attraction, development, and connection efforts. The indicator data that is collected to measure the outcomes of these initiatives will be delineated to be able to identify outcomes by race, age, and gender as well as geographic participation (for the regional strategies). All events, research grants and pilot programs funded as a part of the Talent Collaborative will report their program data by those same characteristics so it will be possible to identify inequities in intake/ recruitment, program participation, and outcomes. If inequities are detected across any of the program components, the projects will engage in a redesign of the program in order to address the issue.





SECTION ELEVEN

Structural Changes





Structural Changes

East Central Indiana has been preparing for this type of regional effort for over thirty years.



East Central Indiana has been preparing for this type of regional effort for over thirty years. During that time, the region and its leaders have learned what works and what doesn't work. In response, the region has made adjustments and refinements to identify a balanced approach to regional participation and implementation.

The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership is prepared to facilitate the implementation of this plan in partnership with the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative. As a regional entity that markets the assets and resources of ten county areas, the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership has the organizational structure to convene interested stakeholders at a regional level. Given our current structure and organizational purpose, no structural changes are anticipated to facilitate the implementation of the Regional Development Plan.

While our structure is solid, we believe that the successful implementation of the *Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan* would be advanced by changes to specific organizational frameworks and operational dynamics.





Organizational Collaboration

As we move forward with implementing projects and programs, East Central Indiana and the Talent Collaborative will facilitate stakeholder engagement and participation through a collective impact organizational model. As a part of the cooperative impact model, the ECIRP READI Governing Body serves as the platform through which projects are evaluated and advanced for funding consideration by the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership.

Through the East Central Indiana Talent Collaborative's County and Cradle to Career Regional Development Coalitions, regional stakeholders will be empowered to think outside of the box regarding regional advancement within their specific area of focus. These Coalitions will not only work together to generate new projects and programs for ECIRP READI Governing Body review and regional implementation, but they will share information and feedback regarding in-progress or completed initiatives to improve and refine future regional strategies.

Organizational Oversight and Staffing

The region's counties have already committed \$240,000 (\$30,000 x8) toward Plan Creation and providing for adequate oversight and staffing when funded for implementation. The East Central Indiana Development Council (LEDO Group) should also consider increasing its annual support to the Partnership.

The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership, and supporting ECI Talent Collaborative will be staffed as a part of their day-to-day operations. However, there should be a consideration for increases in the staffing of each entity for the management of the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan implementation efforts. Understanding that the East Central Indiana region could be selected for IEDC funding, each proposed project and program must adhere to a strict schedule. They will require specialized knowledge and skill to complete the design of the effort and oversee the completion of the final initiative. That is a significant amount of work that could be a challenge for existing staff to absorb. Full consideration should be given to identifying the staffing needs for project implementation at the time of funding allocation.

