

Vision 2020

A Vision for Northeast Indiana

Topical Group Activities



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Competitive Business Climate Topical Group

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Strategizing the Pillar: Competitive Business Climate

REGIONAL PRIORITIES

At each regional outreach meeting, one table of participants received a form with a list of “must have” policies or initiatives related to Competitive Business Climate. The list was developed using two main sources: 1) an extensive review of the region’s existing economic development studies; and 2) a series of stakeholder interviews with representatives of various interest groups and geographies.

Participants worked individually to read through the list of must haves, select the top three initiatives, and then rank those three initiatives in order of priority. Following the meetings, these forms were analyzed and the initiatives were given a weighted score (receiving 3 points for being ranked first, 2 points for being ranked second, 1 point for being ranked third).

Using an aggregate compilation of the input from all ten meetings, the initiatives for Competitive Business Climate are listed in order of priority in the table below. The initiative ID number refers back to the original forms used at the outreach meetings. The table also indicates if an initiative was ranked as #1 for a particular county or counties.

Regional Initiatives for a Competitive Business Climate

ID	Initiative	Weighted Score	Top Priority for:
10	Enhance economic development incentives. Encourage existing businesses to upgrade their programs and processes. Create tailored incentive packages for prospective businesses.	48	Adams, Whitley
6	Establish a business-friendly tax and regulatory climate. Streamline approvals for economic development projects.	45	Allen
1	Develop a brand for Northeast Indiana. Market the region nationally and internationally.	44	DeKalb, LaGrange
12	Develop a diversified economy that expands beyond the traditional manufacturing base.	39	Noble, Steuben
8	Develop strong leadership in the region – including government officials and the business community.	38	
11	Grow existing manufacturing base and attract new manufacturing and distribution companies to the region.	35	Huntington
3	Concentrate on developing targeted industry clusters (e.g. food, defense, etc.)	33	Wabash
14	Document and market the region’s low real estate cost, low cost of labor, good work ethic, and quality of life.	31	Wells
2	Invest additional financial resources into economic development activities.	14	
13	Retain support for agriculture, even as the region becomes more urbanized.	11	
7	Encourage more public/private cooperation.	9	
9	Catalogue all of the assets in the region (an “asset-mapping” project.) Disseminate to LEDOs and various industries.	4	

ID	Initiative	Weighted Score	Top Priority for:
4	Understand the economic impact of healthcare and integrate health organizations into economic development activities.	3	
5	Understand and enhance the economic development impact of non-profits. Expand partnerships among non-profits, and between non-profits and the business community.	3	

ADDITIONAL “MUST HAVES”

Participants were also encouraged to write-in additional initiatives that they would like to see added to the “must have” list. The following strategic priorities were suggested by participants at meetings throughout the region. Strategies are organized under several broad themes: Branding/Marketing, Educational/Training Programs, Industry Clusters, Infrastructure Investment, and Leadership/Collaboration. Certain broad themes are further divided into sub themes.

Many of these themes relate to one of the original “must-have” initiatives on the ranking form. Where appropriate, the relevant initiatives are indicated in parenthesis.

Branding/Marketing

- Look at international companies.
- Make Wabash the world capital of...
- Brand the region in a way that makes people and industry want to locate here, not because of financial incentives.
- Develop marketing co-ops to market NE Indiana products and services globally.
- Need a concise, consistent message as to what Northeast Indiana is about.
- Attract more diverse businesses with the advantages we have in our region.
- Focus on the best assets of the area, mainly available semi-skilled workforce.
- Branding to include the marketing points of low cost, etc.
- When you market anything you must be able to back-up what you are saying. If you promote yourself as "... " then you must deliver on that promise
- Market to attract the types of industry that fits the profile of the assets that are available.

Educational/Training Programs

- Develop a strong training/vocational program to build sustain manufacturing entry level position.
- Strong educational facilities and/or programs for all levels; enhance what we have.
- Government, educational entities, and equipment manufacturers partnering to supply low-cost training for businesses.
- For LaGrange County, attract a college or university to build a campus here. Better educated workforce means better paying jobs, better quality of life.
- Develop specific strategies with education, entrepreneurship, and economic development to launch and/or attract technology-based business with high-growth potential (software, research, testing, etc.)

- Improve technical based curriculum in K-16 education system in area (Example: Research Triangle in North Carolina)
- Encourage stronger education system linked to business development - i.e. current business base K-PhD
- Education
- Additional doctoral programs and laboratories to be used by creative people.

Industry Clusters (initiative 3 and 13)

- Define national and global industry segments that could benefit from this workforce.
- Consider focusing on attracting services and products (manufacturing) that profit from aging population - pharmaceuticals, etc.
- Have some focus on our competitive advantage in agriculture and develop food-related industries.
- Agri-production - processing products grown here: grain, meat, and fruit.
- Agricultural specialties - organic farming.

Infrastructure Investment

- Passenger rail service for city to hub city. Control fuel cost- migrate away from automotive
- Create a corridor of business along US-24 as was seen along US-30.
- Where available, make appropriate use of Major Moves.
- Sewer and water in all populated areas.
- Leverage Huntington Airport to secure businesses that would locate by the airport. Foreign trade zone possibility similar model to what Indianapolis has done.
- Infrastructure development.

Leadership/Collaboration

- State wide level- need government reform
- Market the total area instead of local. Restructure the political units - townships, counties, city etc. - to better facilitate the distribution of the tax base.
- Remove duplication of services between city and county
- A positive can-do policy in the community. A pride policy.
- Consolidation of school system
- Consolidate county schools to offer more class choices to attract young families.
- Consolidate school systems in county
- Improve the relationship between governments (state and local)
- Create more leadership development programs like leadership Fort Wayne for our public servants.
- More flexibility (through legislative initiatives) to use public money on private projects that have long-term potential community benefits.
- City government must work well with businesses and industries.

- Encourage private sector to take over public sector functions (more public/private partnerships) for more competition. But have a clearly defined end and clearly defined use of the gains that the political entity realizes from this partnership.

Other ideas

Business-friendly tax and regulatory environment (initiative 6)

- Lower utility rates
- We must know the parameters we have to live with. (tax rates stable, federal/state/local health insurance costs, unemployment taxes, employee education)
- The state legislators need to change laws that hinder small business. Hold the state administration and IEDC accountable.

Entrepreneurial Support

- Provide Major Moves investment into one of our vacant buildings so that it can become a business incubator for entrepreneurial manufacturing opportunities in select - but diversified - businesses.
- Strong entrepreneurial and small business environment.
- Develop a risk-taking group to encourage, educate, evaluate, and take financial risk to promote new small entrepreneurial businesses.

Other

- Not just a targeted industry cluster but whole economy and quality of life supporting.
- Help our present businesses grow.
- Utilize POET and Dreyfus to attract supporting businesses.
- Attract industries and businesses that hire young educated people - Sweetwater.
- Expand on business plan competition to focus on economic development in the county.
- Incentives should include positive and negatives - like the free market (accountability for businesses)
- Develop Strategies to encourage landowners interested in selling to have shovel-ready locations through loan programs
- #11 is very important but too general- must develop a 'how to' plan for this

County Perspectives on a Competitive Business Climate

INTRODUCTION

During the regional outreach meetings, participants engaged in a discussion on two questions: Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?; and Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?

This document captures the discussion on Competitive Business Climate for each of the ten counties. Results are listed below in alphabetical order by county.

1. ADAMS COUNTY: COMPETITIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?	Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IPFW has a 4-year medical schools, has a lot to do with Fort Wayne hospitals, bio-tech companies in Warsaw. • Can Decatur benefit from Fort Wayne's medical gain? • Are there downsides to clusters? Like the RV industry - when it went south, everything did. • When one part falls down, another steps up. • There can be a downfall for a small area with an industry cluster. • You can specialize. I don't think cluster is the answer, you need to diversify. • Balance income with cost of life. What is the value? What does that buy you? • Business-friendly tax, marketing the brand will help. • Location-wise, tax breaks will pull business in, it helps to have low cost of living. It's tax-friendly and we will get more jobs, manufacturing. • We don't want it just in Fort Wayne, we want it to spill-over. • Regional - anything that helps the region, will benefit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong work ethic. • Industrial parts places to grow. • Fort Wayne airport, I-75, I-69, Toll Road. You are an hour from major transportation. • We have created a low tax base. Businesses will rise and fall by tax rates. • Businesses too some hit as property. • Great location. For products going out as well as raw materials going in. There are great reasons to stay. • Competitive employment base. • Logistically it is a great place. Proximity to Fort Wayne and Indianapolis, Dayton • Banks - financial institutions. It is traditional banking. We have not seen the defaults and foreclosures. A lot of the banks did not make the bad loans as in other places. • Plenty of employees available for work. • Infrastructure in place can help. • Good governmental structure - mayors, county councils.

2. ALLEN COUNTY: COMPETITIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?	Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reputation of being one of the best places in the US to do business. Some smaller, surrounding counties are much more welcoming to business (learn from surrounding counties) • Grow business, encourage local entrepreneurship. Make this easier. Need infrastructure in place to make that happen. • Bring together industry clusters - what do we have in common? Regulatory needs? Workforce needs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 rivers - great resource • Welcoming community, good cost of living - people want to stay. Easy to put roots down. • Great universities - center of higher education, IPFW, Trine • Great work ethic • Entrepreneurship - core culture - history of new companies starting here. Willingness to develop new business.

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- Concentrated efforts - legislative actions, etc.
 - Diversification - not dependent on manufacturing.
 - Education - Ft. Wayne school system needs to be upgraded.
 - Create atmosphere where young people with inventive minds can flourish. Innovation centers in every quadrant of the county. Encourage inventions, business plans, eventually manufacture here. Need to be motivated by education system.
 - Currently have only 1 PhD program - need to expand this, give kids an opportunity to do post-doctoral work and attract research dollars.
 - PhD programs can also help tech industries facilitate ongoing opportunities and learning for employees. Industry collaborative can help with funding.
 - Building a defense cluster - helping auto industries retool NEI Defense Industry Cluster Association has now been incorporated as a non-profit.
 - Software systems engineers to support the cluster.
 - Retraining for mechanical engineers.
 - Government procurement expo upcoming.
 - Hundreds of mechanical engineers could be retrained in a new area to help existing businesses (software, electrical engineering)
 - Logistics - land availability, geographic location - access to large population. Rail access.
 - Healthcare exploding regionally.
 - Easy to get around Fort Wayne - park at the door, very accessible.
 - Big city greatness in a front porch community.
 - A lot of companies want a big city feel
 - Extraordinary low cost of living
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3. DEKALB COUNTY: COMPETITIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?

- Increased employment (though we have more jobs than is perceived)
- Lower taxes, the more businesses that are brought in.
- Pillars have to be on a foundation, and we're still not there (to having a foundation). State/local government doesn't know "the rules." Federal taxes, social security, unemployment, healthcare.
- A more even playing field
- The pillars have to be the foundation
- Lobbying as a region - speaking with one voice, instead of a fragmented voice.
- More diverse industries so that if one fails, the rest can still keep going and the whole county isn't awash.
- Small businesses will bring jobs, many small businesses will be the primary source of job creation.
- Service industries to support those in manufacturing industry.
- Learning from each other about marketing.

Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?

- Electric rate
 - Tax rates
 - Transportation: rail, highway.
 - Location to Detroit, Chicago, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Columbus. Less than 5 hours away from 60% of the US population
 - Competitive wages
 - Educated workforce that can work at lower wages
 - Low cost of living
 - Marketed as retirement community because of low cost of living
 - Labor force that understands a full day's work for full day's wage
 - Work ethic
 - Midwest values
 - Workforce development
 - Utilities in place to bring business, growth
 - Abundant water supply
 - Drinkable water supply
 - Auburn essential services (fiber optic technology link)
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4. HUNTINGTON COUNTY: COMPETITIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?	Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More businesses coming into county - expand jobs. • Replace manufacturing base we lost - need to diversify. • Attract small business and large employers. • Technology-oriented business: software development, research and laboratory; sell our regional assets. • Creative nightlife in downtown Huntington. • Establish a regional organization designed to promote foreign trade...think globally. • Expand the airport - foreign trade zone. • Attract heavier industry. (driven out by environmental regulation, utility rates, but still more favorable than other parts of the country) • Improved regional cooperation, like Indianapolis aerospace consortium. We could look at software development, heavy industry. How can we all benefit, rather than compete? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro-business, pro-manufacturing • Reservoir • River • Airport • Space - land for industrial parks - shovel-ready. • Well-tied to road/rail/air infrastructure • Educational resources - ITT aerospace, Purdue, TAP program: grad students available to work for your business, consulting • HCUED - leveraging existing and prospective businesses. • Partnerships • Financial resources - CEDIT money, tax abatement funds.

5. LAGRANGE COUNTY: COMPETITIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?	Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs create wealth for individuals and county. • Increase tax base. • Create business diversity • Need infrastructure improvements to attract business. • Semi-skilled workforce. • Need to attract business that fits skill set. • Need to focus on certain businesses; not just go after everything. • Need business partnerships to help share resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrally located. • Good work ethic. • Low tax base. • Good infrastructure. • Need to improve government, more friendly, it is improving. • Need lower utility cost and support. • Available labor pool. • Non-union. • Improve school system - need higher education system. • Need to improve quality of place to help improve business climate. • Money from major moves project. • Lots of available buildings. • Good transportation system. • Semi-skill workforce. • Good quality of life.

6. NOBLE COUNTY: COMPETITIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?	Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased jobs = individual income increase, increased tax base. • Access to more industries expanded by working as a region (i.e. more continuity, more consistency) • More marketing resources as a region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Base and history of manufacturing in areas: 56% manufacturing, workforce available. • Good workforce development/training has base and is expanding: academy, 4-county co-op. • Business-friendly government with willingness to work

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversification of industry - i.e. not just gives more stability and opportunity for other businesses to connect. • Retention of young professionals if business opportunities (direct and indirect benefits) | <p>together: generally supportive community/culture for business; growing collaboration across county; low-union participation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure is in place: rail, proximity to I-69. • Quality of life and overall standard of living. • Pro-business community. |
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7. STEUBEN COUNTY: COMPETITIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?	Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More Jobs • Business retention • Tax revenue • Earned/ newly created revenue • Retaining graduates in the area • Diversification • Create a more attractive community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School system and university • Libraries • Low taxes • Pro business attitude • Existing workforce • Highway transportation system

8. WABASH COUNTY: COMPETITIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?	Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New businesses • New jobs • Momentum to breed more success • Bring businesses that can feed off of each other • Growth in service industry • Technology that will be good for the next 30 years • Keep people here and improve educational system • More businesses • Businesses that can drive capital, and then bring in more businesses to make money off of that - venture capital • By-products from Dreyfus biodiesel plants, food-based products, long-term products. • Vendors that follow customers • Import/export incentives to make Indiana stand out, create a niche. • Are we really part of the Northeast region? • Create an identity based on the Northeast Indiana region. • Food production, high-tech are two areas we can compete in . • Look to a bigger picture - we're always competing with the county next door) • The successes of others could be ours as well (work somewhere else but they live in Wabash) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-lane highway for transportation and distribution. • College • Business-friendly state (Indiana) • Hard-working workforce, low-cost. • Agriculture - utilization of by-products. • 2 reservoirs • Electricity grid - excess capacity? • Cultural amenities - Honeywell, Manchester College. • Water - access for manufacturing center. • Pockets of organic farming. • Import/export knowledge. • We're here because of a cheap building (though they are older). • Land is not expensive. • City gives incentives. • Industrial parks. • Emphasis on economic development. • \$1.2 Million expansion for private airport. • \$35 Million investment in hospital. • Young, educated people who would like to stay but can't find a job. • Rail (north-south, east-west lines) • Competitive wages. • Cost of living • Transportation center - cost, distribution.

9. WELLS COUNTY: COMPETITIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?	Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain new businesses- higher tax base • Regional Identity • Higher Profile for County • More diversification of business • Gain a lot from regional identity, even though we lack direct access to major highways • Greater efficiency with regional effort- County does not have resources to promote area as well as with regional brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to cooperate • Combined effort of Chamber of Commerce and Econ. Development • Solid competitive industry cluster • Diversified manufacturing base • Lowest tax rate- city, county • Low unemployment rate- in region • Business friendly climate

10. WHITLEY COUNTY: COMPETITIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?	Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for all the pillars • Lower taxes • Less of a bedroom community • Ability to increase jobs • Retention of current workforce • Encouragement for students to stay local • More corporate partners, more money, more tax base • Collaboration, help the communities, better quality of life, more grants, downtown improvements • Small town values, close to larger community • Opportunity for higher pay scale • More opportunity, competitive edge for new business locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whitley Co. EDC (Allen) knowledgeable- follow up • US 30 Corridor- land availability, shovel ready sites • Willingness of county to work with companies • Redevelopment Commission, and Plan Commission • Tax Structure- Abatement • WC Community Foundation • Plentiful water supply- rail • Expertise in University level • Work Ethic • Cheap to do business here? Strength or weakness?