

Regional Outreach Meetings: Results for DeKalb County

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of the DeKalb County regional outreach meeting, which was held on Wednesday, March 10th from 9:00 – 11:00am. Approximately 30 people attended the meeting. The complete data set that contributed to this report has been saved in an Excel spreadsheet, which will be submitted electronically to the Northeast Indiana Fund. This report is divided into 7 parts:

1. Pillar Ranking Results
2. Results: Competitive Business Climate
3. Results: 21st Century Talent
4. Results: Quality of Life
5. Results: Infrastructure
6. Results: Entrepreneurship
7. Exit Questionnaire Results

1. PILLAR RANKING RESULTS

Participants in DeKalb County expressed the following order of priority for the vision pillars:

1. **21st Century Talent** – Among other issues, this pillar focuses on: workforce skills for a knowledge-based economy; an excellent education system (pre-K through higher ed); workforce retraining opportunities; a strong regional work ethic; and collaboration among businesses, schools, and higher education institutions.
2. **Competitive Business Climate** – Among other issues, this pillar focuses on: globally competitive industry clusters; a diversified economy with a strong manufacturing base; a business-friendly tax and regulatory climate; and a strong regional brand that can be marketed globally.
3. **Infrastructure** – Among other issues, this pillar focuses on: regional planning that connects land use, transportation and infrastructure investments; affordable energy; enhanced freight; effective public transit; increased “shovel-ready” development sites; and expanded broadband service.
4. **Quality of Life** – Among other issues, this pillar focuses on: vibrant downtowns; strengthening the unique character of communities in the region; stewardship of natural resources; enhanced arts and cultural resources; higher development standards; and amenities that attract young professionals.
5. **Entrepreneurship** – Among other issues, this pillar focuses on: access to venture capital; a strong regional innovation center; formalized entrepreneurial training opportunities; and support services such as research, invention evaluation, product development, and marketing.

2. RESULTS: COMPETITIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

Activity 2: Small Group Discussion

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 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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)

Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

This section lists the top 3-5 initiatives for this pillar, and provides a combined weighted score for each initiative based on the participants' voting sheets (3 points for being ranked first, 2 points for being ranked second, 1 point for being ranked third). It also lists any additional "must haves" that were identified by the participants.

Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
1. Develop a brand for Northeast Indiana. Market the region nationally and internationally.	15	If we don't tell the world who we are, who will? We have to decide who we want to be, then tell them.
14. Document and market the region's low real estate cost, low cost of labor, good work ethic, and quality of life.	7	Tell them good things - our advantage.
7. Encourage more public/private cooperation.	4	n/a
11. Grow existing manufacturing base and attract new manufacturing and distribution companies to the region.	4	Grow industry base.
3. Concentrate on developing targeted industry clusters (e.g. food, defense, etc.)	4	n/a

Additional "must haves" suggested by participants

- We must know the parameters we have to live with. (tax rates stable, federal/state/local health insurance costs, unemployment taxes, employee education.
- A positive can-do policy in the community. A pride policy.

- Strong entrepreneurial and small business environment.
- Market the total area instead of local. Restructure the political units - townships, counties, city etc. - to better facilitate the distribution of the tax base.
- 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
- Develop a risk-taking group to encourage, educated, evaluate, and take financial risk to promote new small entrepreneurial businesses.
- Attract more diverse businesses with the advantages we have in our region.
- Need a concise, consistent message as to what Northeast Indiana is about.

3. RESULTS: 21ST CENTURY TALENT

Activity 2: Small Group Discussion

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"> • Better appreciation of education system/appreciate education, culture change. • Life-long learning, continuous learning. • Support other pillars - skill level increases, perception improves, competitive climate, entrepreneurial training. • Better claim to their future, more control over destination. • Can draw people into region if have good education. • Infrastructure is important. • Reduce unemployment rate - retraining. • Increase per capita income. • Higher skill for tomorrow. • Critical thinking skills. • Do career pathway in schools. • Define the vision • Have business person tell kids how important skills are - not just a teacher (school-business collaboration) • Entrepreneurial spirit in the schools. • Funding could come from business - "what is in it for me?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-county vocational • Freedom Academy • Chamber • Business leaders already involved • Foundation • Learning Links • Work ethic program • DeKalb EDC • School systems collaborate very well • K-12 and private schools - lots of choices • Music program at DeKalb • Lakewood Park • Library • Alternative school • Have great resources - just need to focus; very fragmented. • Work One • Numerous higher education

Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

This section lists the top 3-5 initiatives for this pillar, and provides a combined weighted score for each initiative based on the participants’ voting sheets (3 points for being ranked first, 2 points for being ranked second, 1 point for being ranked third). It also lists any additional “must haves” that were identified by the participants.

Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
4. Enhance collaboration among schools, higher education institutions, and businesses. Develop more internship and on the job training opportunities.	14	Realistic goal we can do: interaction will drive the others; need base for workers to attract industry
10. Build community-wide appreciation for education, and a commitment of lifelong education and training.	12	Need to change mind-sets before change can happen.
12. Link workforce development to target industry clusters (e.g. food, defense, etc.)	4	Important and quick way to get where we need to go.
5. Identify requisite skill sets and focus on these – for example, finance, accounting, technology, etc.	3	Before you can move forward need to understand where we are going. Train for tomorrow.

Additional “must haves”

- Business- education partnership - bring awareness and relativity to learning. Also, open the eyes to possibilities for entrepreneurship
- Training for entrepreneurs
- Make a commitment to funding/cutting programs that aren't effective
- In order to have industry come, we must have qualified employees to do the work
- Need sites in county, higher education presence.
- Collaborate with businesses to expand 4 County vocational to more students.
- A shared vision related to #10
- Implement 7 habits of highly effective tens in the school curriculum = ethics building
- Business/education leadership level
- Good work ethic
- "Career path ways in all schools within our region
- Voucher system for education - money follows the students to whatever types of education they want to seek."
- Need pre-K nothing will change without changing the culture.

4. RESULTS: QUALITY OF LIFE

Activity 2: Small Group Discussion

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"> • We need more cultural opportunities • Elderly - senior housing - close to a college seems to draw them - entertainment lectures. • Tourism - need multiple sites, not just museums (antique shops) • Downtown - more work needs to be done • Younger families - parks, bike trail, friendly park for dogs, picnic - to draw them here. • Connection of bike trails - regional implementation important • Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis - you have to go through 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I-69 • Easy to get around city • County roads (some need paved like CR-4) • Small, quaint • Antique, farmers market - big plus • Library, hospital, YMCA

-
- here to get there - we should capitalize on this! Find ways to make people WANT to stop here.
- Dinner theater - one weekend a year 600-700 people attend functions and museums. Not well-attended - why?
 - Amenities: DeKalb is a nice small town atmosphere - close proximity to Ft. Wayne. Some like/prefer.
 - Suggestion: classes free to seniors in small town.
 - Grants - non-profit
 - Better advertising - emails, word of mouth, program at museum.
-

Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

This section lists the top 3-5 initiatives for this pillar, and provides a combined weighted score for each initiative based on the participants’ voting sheets (3 points for being ranked first, 2 points for being ranked second, 1 point for being ranked third). It also lists any additional “must haves” that were identified by the participants.

Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
4. Develop a regional identity that highlights quality of life assets – including favorable tax rates, affordable housing, and strong education system.	8	Developing a regional identity - make us a destination; cultural highlights; promoting what we have in Auburn. Business base important for support of parks, bike trails, etc.
2. Support active lifestyles in the region – increase walkability and bikability; enhance access to healthy foods; improve access to outdoor spaces and recreational activities.	6	Intrigue - what is going to draw us here?
8. Celebrate the unique assets and characteristics of various communities throughout the region.	5	Celebrate the unique aspects - businesses and industries.
3. Protect and improve the region’s natural areas, including parks, open spaces, and rivers.	3	Natural resources are a great value; what are key elements to each county habitat. How do we connect and compliment each other?

Additional “must haves”

- Promote the "Courthouse Square" downtown Auburn. Help with grants for coordinating storefronts, benches, trees, etc.
- Promote the entire region in all communities. Each community market each other community's activities.
- Enhanced natural spaces and cultural opportunities = people walking/biking = increased overall health of our population. All liked and all relatively cheap and easy.
- More music/art activities in the parks and cafés. Free to the public - attracts to downtown stores/restaurants.
- Redefine "production" to include "non-material" and consumption to include "beauty," "ideas," and "experiences."

5. RESULTS: INFRASTRUCTURE

Activity 2: Small Group Discussion

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"> • Transportation • Facility - water/sewer - need to expand, where does it come from: cooperative effort, put 4 or 5 pieces together to make it work. • Roadblocks are a problem for county. • Competition within state? I-69 is key factor in attraction. Companies look from land that fits their needs. Identify sites easy to get to. Improve roads close to land available. • Water/sewer maintenance. Financing: residents may not be able to pay utility cost within region, more expensive. Do you look for state for assistance? • Power availability to company very key. NIPACO - high in Waterloo - effects. How to distribute - ours is outdated - how to make more efficient. We depend on coal. Regionally - we can advance more. • Utilities - regionalized? Thinking outside the box! More open connection. • Wind power - approximately 30 years away. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I-69 • Railroads. • Highway - INDOT • Airport

Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

This section lists the top 3-5 initiatives for this pillar, and provides a combined weighted score for each initiative based on the participants’ voting sheets (3 points for being ranked first, 2 points for being ranked second, 1 point for being ranked third). It also lists any additional “must haves” that were identified by the participants.

Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
1. Increase access to affordable energy.	8	How costly - affordable energy. Fluctuation - make more affordable.
8. Increase the number of “shovel-ready” development sites.	8	Industries - like the land shovel-ready. Shovel ready - ground infrastructure ready.
10. Work regionally to identify and finance regional infrastructure priorities.	5	Development infrastructure.
2. Enhance regional planning efforts to ensure connections between land use, transportation, and infrastructure investments.	4	n/a

Additional “must haves”

- Build an exit and entrance from I-69 to downtown Fort Wayne
- Increase access to affordable energy - maybe not just access to the energy but efficiency in acquiring and delivering this energy.
- A strategy to improve the efficiency of local utility infrastructures (water, sewer, energy) to make them more competitive.

- Local government reform/restructuring

6. RESULTS: ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Activity 2: Small Group Discussion

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"> • Need new business to create jobs. • Increased pay structure, retention of talent. • Entrepreneurship can support other pillars - improve quality of life. • Access to capital • Word of mouth recognition - like the research triangle, or Seattle in the 90s. It's a marketing tool. • Develop a pipeline between school systems here and innovation center in Allen County • Get students involved in internships, entrepreneurial activities at an early age • Entrepreneurs may not go to college - what other training programs or opportunities can be provided? • Learning Link between business community and education community • Strong marketing campaign to attract entrepreneurs. Once people show interest, need a one-step concierge. • Funding for entrepreneurs - needs to be easily understood. • Continued foundation support. Can all foundations chip a certain percentage for economic development? (Chattanooga example) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundations can provide funding to support local programs, and regional innovation center. • Our rich history (auto, museum, rail). Tradition of hard work, etc. • Arts and culture, entertainment is great for a small community. • Attracting tourists through auto show. • Garrett museum of art- draws visitors from broader region. • Potential high-speed rail? • Parks, schools, family-friendly environment, small-town feel. • Hospital - \$26 Million in economic impact last year. Low cost service. Hospital as a business partner, business attractor. • Freedom Academy is working on a certificate program. • Learning Link - pre-K, K-12, life-long education programs. Show students the variety of opportunities available, for a variety of educational levels. • Pickle factory - draws a lot of tourism • Access to regional university, college system. Trine U. - discounted credits for high school students. • Could we utilize the resources of the innovation center here in DeKalb (satellite opportunity)

Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

This section lists the top 3-5 initiatives for this pillar, and provides a combined weighted score for each initiative based on the participants’ voting sheets (3 points for being ranked first, 2 points for being ranked second, 1 point for being ranked third). It also lists any additional “must haves” that were identified by the participants.

Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
3. Create an innovation center that can and will provide entrepreneurial assistance to all counties in Northeast Indiana.	11	To let people know what's here. All encompassing, assistance with money, education, etc. Have to start somewhere!
1. Enhance access to venture capital – both debt and equity. Better connect entrepreneurs to potential investors.	6	Money talks. Everything else will fall in line.
6. Develop a variety of support services to assist entrepreneurs, including business-related research, invention and innovation evaluation, product and service development, and marketing.	5	n/a
8. Recruit back to this region college graduates and young professionals who were originally raised here.	3	Already have ties here - need incentive to return.

2. Encourage existing businesses to take entrepreneurial risks by growing their firms, or investing in new business areas.	3	n/a
--	---	-----

Additional “must haves”

- Communities to work collaboratively together. Promote county-wide activity to benefit all.
- Link innovation regionally from resources to local counties - outreach innovation centers funded by local foundations
- Expand educational efforts focused on entrepreneurship at the elementary level - foster it early on.
- Promote assets of "small" town.
- Develop a thematic approach to market our area to business, education providers and families.
- Capitalize on what we have in place to build
- Parlay all local foundations to expend 10% of their annual typical giving to innovation centers with focus on entrepreneurial programming.
- Create a new theme of promotion utilizing area assets but focusing on a new direction.
- Work to attract the entrepreneur segments of high-tech by developing a "community" based around entrepreneur -businesses.

7. EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

At the DeKalb County regional outreach meeting, 30 participants submitted exit questionnaires. All of the respondents were white, and 53 percent were male. Seventy-three percent of respondents were over 45 years of age, and 70 percent had a college degree or higher. Most participants indicated that they live and work in DeKalb County, while a few came from Noble or Allen Counties.

Participants were highly satisfied with the meeting format. Every respondent indicated that they were comfortable working in their small group, 96 percent felt their ideas were recorded appropriately, and 96 percent reported that the length of the meeting was “about right.”

The complete exit questionnaire data, including all write-in responses, will be submitted electronically with the DeKalb County Excel file.