

# Regional Outreach Meetings: Results for LaGrange County

## INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of the LaGrange County regional outreach meeting, which was held on Friday, March 12th from 9:00 – 11:00 am. Approximately 41 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: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Talent
4. Results: Quality of Life
5. Results: Infrastructure
6. Results: Entrepreneurship
7. Exit Questionnaire Results

## 1. PILLAR RANKING RESULTS

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

1. **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.
2. **21<sup>st</sup> 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.
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. **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.
5. **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.

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

### 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.	9	Market properly business will want to come here and stay. Want to be there: attract industries for work skills we have.
3. Concentrate on developing targeted industry clusters (e.g. food, defense, etc.)	4	Can't have everything - need to concentrate resources.
11. Grow existing manufacturing base and attract new manufacturing and distribution companies to the region.	4	Growth of existing manufacturing.
14. Document and market the region’s low real estate cost, low cost of labor, good work ethic, and quality of life.	4	n/a

#### Additional “must haves” suggested by participants

- 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.

- 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.
- Brand the region in a way that makes people and industry want to locate here, not because of financial incentives.
- Focus on the best assets of the area, mainly available semi-skilled workforce.
- Improve the relationship between governments (state and local)
- Develop marketing co-ops to market NE Indiana products and services globally.
- Define national and global industry segments that could benefit from this workforce.
- Lower utility rates
- Market to attract the types of industry that fits the profile of the assets that are available.
- Sewer and water in all populated areas.

### 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"> <li>• A culture change - value and appreciation for education.</li> <li>• Base of talent available to accomplish rest of pillars available.</li> <li>• Foundation to keep young talent here in LaGrange.</li> <li>• Very difficult for us to have employees who have education go outside of community. When business was good, we were always short of labor.</li> <li>• In recession, still companies who can't fill positions due to unqualified workers.</li> <li>• No pipeline after high school to get through college, get placed. Need to follow-up after graduation.</li> <li>• Value for education is important. Not sure enough people believe "enough is enough." We have disconnect - not everyone needs to go through college - they need proper training. Value of education needs to be promoted and connected with local businesses.</li> <li>• To prepare young children for future - prepare them for what that is. No good connection between what jobs there are and what training there needs to be. Work ethic is driven by depressive-type conditions.</li> <li>• Metro areas will continue to attract kids if the perception remains that it is where the jobs are.</li> <li>• We need to get to life-long learning initiative. Need incentives for that.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amish, honest, hard-working people, diverse community.</li> <li>• People who are eager to learn and have tremendous work ethic.</li> <li>• New Lakeland tech school.</li> <li>• School collaboration with businesses to ensure proper training is given.</li> <li>• Wind turbine industries.</li> <li>• Engineering industries.</li> <li>• Four-county vocational training/Purdue education/Freedom Academy Community Foundation.</li> </ul>

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**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.	9	n/a
10. Build community-wide appreciation for education, and a commitment of lifelong education and training.	9	It begins with community-wide appreciation for education.
7. Ensure a strong employment base and attractive jobs for future workers.	7	No good to educate if you can't keep them in the area.
12. Link workforce development to target industry clusters (e.g. food, defense, etc.)	6	Easier to understand destination for community (jobs). Target clusters and figure out education needed. Importance in workforce development. Our county currently does not value life-long learning.
2. Invigorate students to excel in STEM – science, technology, engineering, math. Support engineering and technical talent to encourage growth in high tech businesses.	6	As we push kids through school, we are not encouraging them to excel.

**Additional “must haves”**

- Put an end to politically-driven federal control of education and take that initiative to regional efforts that will allow a productive relationship between education and global market forces and local assets.
- The diversity of the Amish and English communities, the life skills of family, pride, education.
- Entrepreneurial training programs
- One of the constant wishes we hear from teens is the lack of internships or hands-on work and career opportunities. This would help improve the relevance of education to youth who sometimes see school as having more inside the classroom.
- "Sell" our region to the people who will be shaping our future. Constantly ask ourselves the question "why would our kids choose to live here and work here after they have been educated? Actively work to make our region appealing to new talent entering the workforce.
- More coordination on connecting all county K-12 educational systems to the business community and work together with other 4-year tech training within Northeast Indiana.
- Local business and higher education should sponsor scholarships for skilled students who are willing to give 3-5 years back to a community-based business.
- Career pathways in all schools.
- Incentives need to be given to have local talent live here (home purchase credit) with Major Moves money.

**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"> <li>• Attract young professionals back to lifestyle; moving back from afar at some point in time.</li> <li>• Recruitment - quality of life helps recruitment effort of business and talent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very rural county - no cities.</li> <li>• Lakes are key asset not currently used as much as it could be.</li> <li>• Shipshewana big asset could continue to be beautified.</li> </ul>

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- More tourism/visitors to continue appreciating quality of life, increased tax base.
  - Useful tool to retain existing businesses.
  - Amish business community and furniture business can continue to be built upon as key economic development tool; critical to honor and not exploit.
  - Strong work ethic.
  - Tollway exit as gateway to county - what message do we want to send?
  - Fabulous park system.
  - Fish and wildlife areas and rivers - unique because NOT developed.
  - Great drives.
  - Family-focused community.
  - Access to local growers/agriculture, wonderful Farmer's Markets.
  - Pride of community.
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**Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision**

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***Top Initiatives***

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Weighted Score</b>	<b>Reason(s) Selected</b>
4. Develop a regional identity that highlights quality of life assets – including favorable tax rates, affordable housing, and strong education system.	21	Need a stronger education system and message to prospective employers. Need to tell a new story to support all others. A clearer regional identity of "good morals/good values" supports all efforts. Everyone who comes here, first arrives as a tourist and need a clearer story. Need to share what a great place to live - longer term.
2. Support active lifestyles in the region – increase walkability and bikability; enhance access to healthy foods; improve access to outdoor spaces and recreational activities.	9	Closely connected to #4, key to getting youth to stay here. Getting people outside makes healthier community, additional way to attract healthier business.
3. Protect and improve the region’s natural areas, including parks, open spaces, and rivers.	9	Easy to lose natural resources and need to protect what attracts people to the area. Important to people to know natural resources are protected.
11. Provide amenities that attract young professionals – including housing, entertainment, recreation, and transportation.	7	Young professional and families are "lifeblood" of community; activities are key, as are eating.
8. Celebrate the unique assets and characteristics of various communities throughout the region.	4	n/a

***Additional “must haves”***

- Getting young people to move back to the area after obtaining a higher education is very important.

- We must work together as a county - ability to pull all communities together to work toward common goals. To ensure sustainability and stability as a county first, then as a region. Ensure local and county government are involved in this process and support the goals.
- If we had walking trails and more bike trails that could really improve our quality of place.
- Need to elevate tourism to a level of importance for LaGrange County. We need the resources to improve all phases of tourism as an economic engine.
- I think we need to be able to present our county as a safe and clean area. This is for the benefit of visitors and that of people considering moving to the area. There are concerns regarding meth.
- Diversity of housing - not everyone wants to live in a single/double wide. Focus on single, two-family housing. The type of structure brings like results. Different types of recreation, arts, gyms, eating establishments.
- Institute signage off Toll Road introducing LaGrange County.
- We need to better broadcast our work ethic - we have a strong work ethic.
- To improve our rivers/lakes with sewers/protection and cleaning of rivers. Promote activities in them and our park systems.
- Visual impact first - development later. Good first impressions - the "wow" factor. "Sell what we have, then develop what we dream."
- Decide what we are and promote it to the midwest as only a short drive away.
- Protect our rural heritage which includes our lakes and rivers. Support the Amish in our county.
- I feel we need to get people outside more with families is great. We have the environment plus it promotes family connection and fitness and tackles adolescent obesity.
- Aging population, neighborhoods for families, create better environment.
- Use vacant buildings around county as incubators for new and small business.
- We need a county government that is willing to think outside the box - to broaden the manufacturing base.
- Promote our rural areas/safety and peaceful atmosphere.
- Visual impression as people enter our county.
- Provide the proper infrastructure to enhance the quality of life.
- Have the EDC Committees around the county meet and work together: Howe, Mongo, LaGrange, Walcottville, Shipshewana.

## 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"> <li>• More attractive to outsiders to move into area.</li> <li>• Add and invest in what we already have here - improve from residents</li> <li>• Infrastructure in place, improves business climate.</li> <li>• Infrastructure can improve tourism traffic (wireless especially).</li> <li>• Cheat gas and electricity supports and is vital to a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toll Road - both for transportation and infrastructure (fiber)</li> <li>• Wind power availability.</li> <li>• Lakes.</li> <li>• REMC - affordable.</li> <li>• Industrial park at Toll Road</li> </ul>

<p>competitive business climate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiber/telecom/redundant service is good to making a competitive business climate.</li> <li>• Roads connect us to the world - vital to our growth.</li> <li>• Fiber optic project on Indiana Toll Road is important - need it to extend down to us.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity of our sewage systems.</li> <li>• Shovel-ready sites.</li> <li>• Crossroads community.</li> <li>• Tourism hub.</li> <li>• Recreation - Shipshewana, Mongo area.</li> <li>• LCEDC (LaGrange County Economic Development Corporation)</li> <li>• New tech high school, Westview Bronze Medal award - US News &amp; World Report.</li> <li>• Good road system</li> <li>• Available buildings.</li> <li>• New facilities (library, hospital, medical facilities)</li> <li>• Good ground water supplies.</li> <li>• Home of a wonderful tourism community.</li> </ul>
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***Top Initiatives***

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Weighted Score</b>	<b>Reason(s) Selected</b>
8. Increase the number of “shovel-ready” development sites.	19	It is what businesses are looking for. Companies want sites ready to go, risk-averse. Land has to be ready or they will not come (competition). Reduces costs, creates flexibility.
11. Expand broadband width and availability.	10	Contributes to being shovel-ready, critical to attractive new business opportunities. Families want it/demand it (quality of life).
1. Increase access to affordable energy.	7	n/a
9. Invest in renewable energy and green infrastructure.	5	It is a large national issue and we need it to attract business to the area.
10. Work regionally to identify and finance regional infrastructure priorities.	5	n/a

***Additional “must haves”***

- I Develop wind power to supplement electricity.
- We have to get cheap energy.
- Good roads.
- Invest in renewable energy and green infrastructure. This is very important to attract talent and business from outside of the region. Ride the wave - this is a national policy.
- Improved county roads - to access small business.
- Establish north/south and east/west fiber-optic backbone with goal of high-speed broadband throughout county, wired and wireless. Owned by local non-profit corporation.

- A larger network of "extra heavy duty" highway designations.
- We have to help each county get industry to come.
- Develop cheap and plentiful water as a strategy to attract businesses and for population growth.
- Have land ready - for new industry.

## 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"> <li>• Jobs; livable wage jobs.</li> <li>• Increased number of wage earners: right now people are willing to work for a lower wage, which has driven down everything. Products are not marketed. Product standards have lowered.</li> <li>• Increased incomes will drive prices up.</li> <li>• More dollars circulating in the economy.</li> <li>• Increased marketing of companies, including face-to-face.</li> <li>• Population to increase.</li> <li>• More businesses.</li> <li>• Different kinds of businesses: example-healthcare.</li> <li>• Vision</li> <li>• Tax-income of businesses, so more money staying in LaGrange County. We need entrepreneurs to create businesses, not necessarily jobs.</li> <li>• Local businesses for those with jobs to spend their money here - the money will stay here.</li> <li>• Energy, more efficiencies.</li> <li>• Increased shopping selections here.</li> <li>• Suitable locations for local businesses to be here or national companies to franchise here.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locally-produced food is going to be huge and we have it here.</li> <li>• We can market greenhouses/agriculture.</li> <li>• People</li> <li>• Unique entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Population willing to work and do what has to be done.</li> <li>• Largest fish/game area/industry in region, which is hunting reservation vs. parks (people can't camp, based on classification of natural resources)</li> <li>• Natural resources: hunting, fishing, rivers.</li> <li>• "Off-roading": ATVs and horses. People can come here to do this - they will also need food/recreation.</li> <li>• 64 lakes in county. Could be recreational area.</li> <li>• Lots of entrepreneurs - they can band together. There are networking lunches, coordination they don't even know they are there, they can use each other.</li> <li>• Topeka: after factories left there was creativity.</li> <li>• Young leaders group that was started by Chamber.</li> </ul>

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#### Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
2. Encourage existing businesses to take entrepreneurial risks by growing their firms, or investing in new business areas.	10	Have to go forward with what you have and then branch out from there. Example: Parkview is taking a gamble by expanding regional hospital (\$900 Million); small entrepreneurs can do the same thing, on a smaller scale.

4. Establish a leadership network to foster entrepreneurial coaching and collaboration.	6	Develop young entrepreneurs - need established business leaders to grow the county. Financing.
9. Help entrepreneurs market their products and services outside of the region and globally.	5	n/a
10. Promote the value of entrepreneurial activity throughout the region, highlighting past and present entrepreneurial efforts, and celebrating the future potential of this region.	4	We need to promote the county and what is produced here.
1. Enhance access to venture capital – both debt and equity. Better connect entrepreneurs to potential investors.	4	There are good ideas that could take root and grow, but support/investment is needed. Need a "clearinghouse" to connect entrepreneurs and investors.

### ***Additional “must haves”***

- Present a more global awareness of world competition.
- County government working with businesses that want to come to this county, incentives.
- Government regulation - we have too much!
- We need county officials to think outside of box - not about me.
- Must have local government that is business-friendly.
- Coordination of business, government, education; take away "has been that way" attitude.
- WiFi local-region.
- Promote county.
- Need State of Indiana to change attitude on use of state land.
- Need to network entrepreneurs.
- Workshop for local entrepreneurs - business incubators.
- Market outside of area; market goods and services, market the area.
- Better government-business-private sector interaction. More long-term thinking.
- Bring healthcare production/facility here.
- Become healthcare center, supplier of equipment and services, including all of region and even international.

## **7. EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS**

At the LaGrange regional outreach meeting, 34 participants submitted exit questionnaires. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents were white, and 74 percent were male. Seventy-six percent of respondents were over 45 years of age, and 56 percent had a college degree or higher. Most participants indicated that they live and work in LaGrange County.

Participants were highly satisfied with the meeting format. Every respondent indicated that they were comfortable working in their small group, and that their ideas were recorded appropriately. Eighty-one percent noted that the length of the meeting was “about right,” while the remainder thought it was “too short.”

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