

Regional Outreach Meetings: Results for Noble County

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of the Noble County regional outreach meeting, which was held on Friday, March 12th from 1:00 – 3:00pm. 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 Noble 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. **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.
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"> 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. 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) 	<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 together: generally supportive community/culture for business; growing collaboration across county; low-union participation. Infrastructure is in place: rail, proximity to I-69. Quality of life and overall standard of living. Pro-business community.

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
12. Develop a diversified economy that expands beyond the traditional manufacturing base.	10	Diversified market provides more stability and protection in down times; helps to attract different industries and diverse workforce and leads to diversity of thought.
6. Establish a business-friendly tax and regulatory climate. Streamline approvals for economic development projects.	4	If it is easy for companies to relocate here, easier to recruit.
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

- Agricultural specialties - organic farming.
- Strong educational facilities and/or programs for all levels; enhance what we have.
- Help our present businesses grow.
- Not just a targeted industry cluster but whole economy and quality of life supporting.
- More flexibility (through legislative initiatives) to use public money on private projects that have long-term potential community benefits.

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"> Strong educational system attracts businesses. Have pre-K through adult - more complete education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 school systems - very strong. 4-county vocational cooperative - diverse opportunities.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More educated workforce. • Higher-paying jobs. • Known for a particular type of industry and specialization. • Good education system will attract people to area. • School system work together so students have more of an advantage. • Need regional training facility - more and diversified. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries. • Freedom Academy. • LEAP. • Campus Connection • Special-Ed Co-op • Access to work one. • Local Ft. Wayne universities come to this county. • Manufacturing training facility. • State training funds. • Schools and libraries are working together even more. • Collaboration is starting to form. • Thrive. |
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Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

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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	Theme of collaboration among all entities; more people collaborate get more things done.
10. Build community-wide appreciation for education, and a commitment of lifelong education and training.	7	Desire to want to do better: encourage people to get jobs and do better; learn a new skill.
3. Focus on teacher quality and accountability – train teachers in new instruction methods; remove consistently underperforming teachers.	4	Need good teachers so that children can learn; better quality of teachers.

Additional “must haves”

- Have the 3 high schools develop magnet school programs which specialize in career ladders.
- Provide more opportunity for high schoolers and adults to expand their education more affordably and easily - offer training opportunities for jobs that are in high demand in the region.
- Sharing resources - minimize duplication; one outstanding physics teacher, streamed into several classrooms.
- Ensure that education is valued and available for ALL skill levels and job requirements (current and future).
- Ensure personal communication and relationship buildings skills do not die with the "texting" generation.
- Continue to offer long-distance learning availability for upper-level students at the middle school and high school levels.
- Broaden the vocational programs and have easier access to them (females)
- Providing more high-tech infrastructure to provide more and more diverse educational opportunities to those in our community.
- Focus on preparing students/workers to have a more global focus/understanding of their world.

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"> • Creative class - young professionals/empty nesters may choose to locate in Noble County. • Educational base may grow; entrepreneurial base may grow; economic base may grow. • Attractive community for living - bedroom community. • Create pool of creative people - need to create opportunities for staying here. • Gain regional identity - create new opportunity. • Develop/build upon assets we already have to connect with young talent/retirees. • Better regional planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lakes/recreations. • Health resources. • Proximity to major cities. • Giving/caring community. • Historic value • Natural resources • Land for development • Faith-based • Diversity of culture

Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

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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.	13	This will help attract growth.
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	Attract health-conscious people - develop parks will bring other growth, will attract aging population at use them.
11. Provide amenities that attract young professionals – including housing, entertainment, recreation, and transportation.	5	n/a

Additional “must haves”

- Develop the region’s natural areas into reserve parks that people from all over the state and outside would like to come and visit with trails, amenities, recreational fields, etc.
- High-speed rail system linking vital communities.
- Start a college in Noble County.
- Plan for "are our communities elder-friendly" - are we prepared for the huge increase of retirees in the next two decades?
- Cooperation amongst churches and between churches and other agencies to accomplish goals: church entrepreneurship projects.
- Construct a regional network of trails that connects the region for hiking and fishing.
- Focus on senior living; great place to retire.
- Plan in this county in a way that this area develops into a model township.

- Obtain a professional sports franchise.
- More activities for singles and non-residents.
- Need a specific identity for Noble County besides Meth #1.
- Create a Quality of Place Office that coordinates, advocates, supports, and is a clearinghouse of tech support.
- Focus on families; great place to raise kids.
- Develop an outdoor sports cluster-RVs, boats, fishing, etc.
- Downtown development - walkable.
- Accent the positives - plan for growth.
- Create a regional Visitors Bureau with county satellite offices.
- Slogan: "Come, grow." Play off our "fertile" land, available land, open spaces, education, infrastructure, entrepreneurship, etc.

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"> • More competitive globally with entrepreneurs who can choose to live in a rural area because they have access to broadband. • Share a rural airport with another county. • A possibility for companies who previously could not get to rural areas. • Rail lines, globally competitive. • With mass transit: people travel into and out of county. If we had mass transit it would really help with increased energy costs; high speed rail. • More broadband, transportation could make us more of a bedroom community than we want to be, yet the potential gain is bigger than the loss. • Allow people to live/work here if they don't want to live in the city. • Allow employee to work from home • Pretty good energy infrastructure. • We could "woo" companies with the great water supply. • More competitive business climate. • 2-mile runway at Kendallville, or even a mile runway for corporate jets. • Looking farther down the road, knocking down boundaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the best aquifers in the country. We don't have a problem with water. • Rail systems. • Roadways. • Utilities - located here. • Partnerships with other counties. • REMC crosses county lines. • Rural cooperatives are large and spread out. • Capitalize on the assets of the other counties (airport, etc.) • Healthcare system, a regional healthcare system. • Broadband. • Combination of healthcare and broadband and what can be done with that.

Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

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Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
2. Enhance regional planning efforts to ensure connections between land use, transportation, and infrastructure investments.	13	If we are looking at a regional area, we need to sit down and plan as a team so we have a partnership, relationship with others. If we are going to compete with metro areas, we need to gather resources. A win from drawing a big employer will be good for the whole region, as well as financial cooperation.
11. Expand broadband width and availability.	11	As a tool as what we are trying to do, we need it. It is something you have to have, and our county as a rural area doesn't have it. There are places without broadband access; we can't move large files fast enough. We're sending large files by disk. People will move to the next town because there isn't broadband.
10. Work regionally to identify and finance regional infrastructure priorities.	7	n/a
8. Increase the number of "shovel-ready" development sites.	3	n/a

Additional "must haves"

- Need to look at strategically placing nuclear power plants that will provide power in regional areas vs that of the monster plants. Small might be easier to manage.
- 1-mile runway at Kendallville Airport.
- Develop or concentrate on regional policies that protect the water resources, but allow the area for capitalize on their asset.
- Local, but tied together regionally a fuel cell type proprietary electric power system and grid.
- Noble County has great aquifers. We need to capitalize on them as well as protect them.
- Tax incentive for legislature to promote tax incentive for development of broadband for everyone.

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"> • Noble County can gain a higher annual wage with "E" growth. • Gain an international or national competitiveness base. • Create jobs. • Diversify our county. • Are we looking at marketing our knowledge base of "E" or are we looking to bring jobs in? • Defense contractors - we have many small companies in Noble County however we don't really have the marketing that represents it (that we are able to do defense work). • We want everyone to know what "our identity" is. Our 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where we are, our location within the U.S. as a whole. • We are in a tremendous opportunity/position. We are within 250 miles from major cities: Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis. • Export to other areas of the world. • Access to a huge amount of suppliers. Coordinate the link to suppliers, the resources that are available. • Use success to create success. Industries can offer their resources to help support the "E". • If you need help in Noble County, all you have to do is raise your hand and people are waiting in line to give assistance/help. It is the spirit of this county to embrace

ability to market existing business.	"E".
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An IDENTITY! • Higher wage due to new business growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The history and existing talent supports "E". • The EDC is a tremendous asset.

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Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
9. Help entrepreneurs market their products and services outside of the region and globally.	7	Supports new and existing industry.
7. Ensure entrepreneurial support efforts complement the region’s target industry clusters (e.g food, defense, etc.).	4	Build critical mass - support other efforts.
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	n/a
4. Establish a leadership network to foster entrepreneurial coaching and collaboration.	3	Get the right people in the room - informal networks are best/inexpensive.

Additional “must haves”

- State and local government must be supportive of E.B. with taxes and investment.
- Engineering technical assistance center to give us support as we grow.
- Tie brands to targeted industry sector.
- High-speed internet everywhere - countywide WIFI.
- Rapid rail from Fort Wayne to Indianapolis...possibly other cities.
- Improved communication system.
- "Cross County Utilization" - make sure everyone knows what everyone else does so you can purchase products and services locally.
- Invest in hard assets outside of Allen County - hub & spoke.
- Strong, consistent tax incentives to encourage business expansion and start up; consistent from community to community.
- Identify what IS working and build off of that.
- Marketing firm for small business support.
- Geographic distribution of expertise using existing resources/organizations.
- Government must be realistic in terms of industry growth. We must find a way to bring attention to the employers (new and old) in this region.

7. EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

At the Noble County regional outreach meeting, 29 participants submitted exit questionnaires. Ninety percent of the respondents were white, and 69 percent were male. Seventy-one percent of respondents were over 45 years of age, and 90 percent had a college degree or higher. Nearly all participants indicated that they work in Noble County.

Participants were highly satisfied with the meeting format. Every respondent indicated that they were comfortable working in their small group, that their ideas were recorded appropriately, and 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 Noble County Excel file.