

Regional Outreach Meetings: Results for Steuben County

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of the Steuben County regional outreach meeting, which was held on Monday, March 8th from 3:00 – 5:00 pm. Approximately 46 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 Steuben 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. **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.
3. **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.
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"> • 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

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.	17	Because diversification will keep us going if recession or change in industry. Tied heavily to automotive. Skill sets in county are not there. To get away and out of mfg base and more upon university, education service industry. Work in ag., food mfg. and other areas to diversify mfg base.
6. Establish a business-friendly tax and regulatory climate. Streamline approvals for economic development projects.	9	In order to make county more attractive to business
11. Grow existing manufacturing base and attract new manufacturing and distribution companies to the region.	7	Sense of loyalty to manufacturing base
3. Concentrate on developing targeted industry clusters (e.g. food, defense, etc.)	6	n/a

Additional “must haves” suggested by participants

- Where available, make appropriate use of major modes.
- Develop a strong training/vocational program to build sustain manufacturing entry level position.

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"> • Connect Education with business; what can education do to better align with business needs • Create culture that values education • Get parents to understand that it is their responsibility to be supportive of education/lifelong learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many assets in region-wide education; must have jobs • Trine- Typical 1st generation student, majority from tri-state region • Lowest school taxes rate in Indiana • Close-knit community

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many low-skill jobs in Steuben; if had higher education and skill attainment, county would attract better jobs • Training/education for entrepreneurs • Find niche to build on; become known in region/Midwest • Increase interest in pursuing continuing education • Attract major medical specialty to region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch-22 on state standards k-12 • 4- county voiced • Freedom academy
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Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
7. Ensure a strong employment base and attractive jobs for future workers.	10	Turn Rias (?) on to something in real world; need to know what we are preparing students for
10. Build community-wide appreciation for education, and a commitment of lifelong education and training.	10	If it happened, would take care of all others
2. Invigorate students to excel in STEM – science, technology, engineering, math. Support engineering and technical talent to encourage growth in high tech businesses.	6	Need to develop/ strengthen stem curriculum
6. Instill a good work ethic in members of the workforce.	4	n/a
1. Invest in Pre-K through 16 education and benchmark progress using internationally recognized standards.	4	n/a

Additional “must haves”

- Connectivity
- Reverse trend of lower skill/pa y jobs
- Appreciation for vocational training, more seats at 4 city for students
- Must address literacy problem in workforce/region
- Entrepreneurial Training Program? How to start business?
- Skill training w/ ABE will be essential to mitigating unemployment
- Implement 7 habits for teens

4. RESULTS: QUALITY OF LIFE

Activity 2: Small Group Discussion

<p>Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better known for what we are • dollars • increase economic impact for Visitor's Center • gain national coverage for quality of life and Visitor's Center 	<p>Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive natural resources; Pokagon • Interstates- I80/90, I69 • Dedicated group of people; Chamber of Commerce, Govt, Business association. Active tourism bureau • Cutting edge of green revolution
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better institutions for kids (HS, universities) • reduce brain drain with better quality of life • need to have something to bring kids back • need occupational training schools • Medical community will grow with Allen Co. hospitals growing north • Competitive with business (medical) • More people working from home, a large business can be located throughout the state • Innovation center- place for people to develop their ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home of University; Good k-12 • Healthcare opportunity because of hospital • Downtown business and community • Commercial attractions- winery, hiking trails, buffalo farm • YMCA • over 100 natural lakes • good child care • large inventory of wetlands in the state • lots of herons and other wildlife
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Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

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Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
11. Provide amenities that attract young professionals – including housing, entertainment, recreation, and transportation.	10	n/a
3. Protect and improve the region’s natural areas, including parks, open spaces, and rivers.	9	n/a
4. Develop a regional identity that highlights quality of life assets – including favorable tax rates, affordable housing, and strong education system.	8	Need to maintain/ order quality of place to help attract people and bring money to the region
5. Enhance the region’s arts and cultural resources – ensure affordability and diversity in scope.	3	n/a

Additional “must haves”

- Marketing plan
- Strong community support and a plan
- Ensuring "basic needs" are met is essential in creating a welcoming atmosphere -> access to vital health and human resources and education
- A new Director, to lead us

5. RESULTS: INFRASTRUCTURE

Activity 2: Small Group Discussion

<p>Q1. What will your county gain through the regional implementation of this pillar?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure investments will prepare us for future growth. But need to know what direction we want to go in. (i.e. may not want heavy industry with the lakes). Know our vision. • Broadband and fiber optics are critical. • IMAN - Community foundation developing fiber optics. 	<p>Q2. What are the assets in your county that can help ensure the success of this pillar?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lakes • 2 Interstates • Rail, air • 2 colleges • Wonderful school system • Build Indiana Funds
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- Master Plan for the county: stress lakes, farming, and industry - strike a balance.
 - First do no harm - make sure you're not harming the environment.
 - County roads need improvement.
 - Bike paths - contribute to quality of life.
 - Grow high tech jobs and keep the college graduates.
 - Get different local governments together - move forward with the same vision.
 - Make sure county plan (and zoning) follows the regional plan.
 - Avoid in-fighting! Need buy-in from all groups. What do we do with the Build Indiana Fund?
 - Need county-wide planning and zoning.
 - Good leadership can guide the way to collaboration (i.e. county government).
 - Broadband service a must.
 - Need engineers to stay and make start-up companies locally.
 - Steuben County needs a capital improvement plan.
 - An industrial park we could market
 - Would like to see the region driven by whole region, not one county
 - We would be more efficient in the full package of infrastructure
 - We would be more competitive, could use our advantages better
 - More attractive
 - Railroad is a viable asset
 - More jobs here will benefit entire region
 - We'll have a better life: better wages, more tax base, better jobs, better govt. services
 - Diverse industries from better internet/broadband
 - Helps Steuben leverage other benefits like quality of life. Once you meet infrastructure requirement you can be more competitive
 - We have to invest in infrastructure- we have to pay for
 - Become the beta, pilot, get recognition for the region. Wouldn't it be nice if we were the next Chattanooga?
 - Government/ legislature tells businesses that they have to sign first and then they get to know the incentives we should be up front about incentives, honest about infrastructure
 - We have to be mutually beneficial/ investing
 - Infrastructure laid could make NE IN the next benchmark
- Regional Marketing Partnership
 - \$30 Million cash in the county - money is not our problem.
 - What if we created an inter-modal transportation hub? Facilitate air distribution.
 - Location- N, S, E, W- all are great
 - Transportation: toll road, I-69
 - Lakes- paint a great picture
 - Beginnings of broadband
 - Electric companies have been upgrading systems
 - Sewers- for all the grief it has been beneficial
 - Entities need to work together
 - Angola downtown renovation with repaving, state/county/city all had to work together. There were many hurdles to cross but it is going to be efficient. Sidewalk upgrades are coming
 - Everyone wants to do good for their 'home'
 - True opportunities for folks to work together
 - Within the county there is Angola that acts as the driver and it needs to spread to Orland, Ashley, and the other towns
 - Major moves money- but no one wants to spend it
 - Local officials- Mayor Hickman has made stuff happen downtown
 - County-wide partnership to build/ maintain infrastructure
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Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
11. Expand broadband width and availability.	29	Attract people who want to work from home. New communication medium - if we're not linked up, we're lost. People in west part of county don't have internet.
8. Increase the number of “shovel-ready” development sites.	19	If we want jobs, need more sites to be shovel-ready. This is what state and site selectors want; we don't have any yet but are working on it; utilize empty buildings and have something available. Vacant buildings are configured the way they need to be for today's use.
2. Enhance regional planning efforts to ensure connections between land use, transportation, and infrastructure investments.	18	Regionally, we have even more to offer. A rising tide raises all boats. It's a strategic planning issue. *Note: We're defining the "region" as Steuben County, not the 10-county region. If you don't have planning to tie things together, you don't have anything.
10. Work regionally to identify and finance regional infrastructure priorities.	15	Need to plan and invest regionally. This activity is about the whole region and leverage the money that is available. Steuben has different needs than other regional counties.
4. Enhance freight opportunities through improvements to air and rail facilities.	5	n/a

Additional “must haves”

- Education and training for non-college bound students and re-training of displaced, unemployed to match skills for new jobs.
- Inter-modal (Freight) transportation hub
- Underground- can you run power and fiber in same easement? Grid power distribution enhanced.
- Clean up blight in the area/improve appearance
- Bike trails, parks, arts and entertainment venues
- Better access to I-69 (North-South) another interstate between Angola and Ashley?
- Local government partnership, Regional financing
- Cooperative planning, buildings, small town + large
- Better all around roads in county
- Increase corporate use of the airport by enhancing the facilities

- Internet access to all parts of the County.
- Northeast Indiana could easily become the "most wired" area in the nation which would make us the platform that all others would strive towards. Someday soon, we'll be the "Chattanooga" of broadband! Wouldn't it be outrageous if we were to be the topic of the next major economic development conference?
- Strategic development plan for Steuben County
- Recreational infrastructure - trails, athletic facilities, etc.
- All roads in County need improving
- While we have empty buildings these may not prove the need of particular business interest. So we need "Shovel Ready" sites of various sizes or options.
- Pave road through out County
- No Septic Field - sanitary sewers + treatment plant wherever possible

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"> • Lower unemployment • More jobs • Better jobs • Better understanding of community vision • More start up firms • More corporate headquarters, better jobs, increasing per capita income • More tax income, better infrastructure • Startups, sustained growth, increase demand for talent, higher skilled/education institutions • Entrepreneurs need to connect to the IPFW 'TAP' program to connect academics to business • Connect entrepreneurs to a respected university 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QOL- Attract higher educated people • Trine University • County EDC • Chamber • SBDC • Interstates- I80/90, I69 • Business friendly environment • Need virtual incubator for entrepreneurship • Community is conservative (risk averse)

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Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
6. Develop a variety of support services to assist entrepreneurs, including business-related research, invention and innovation evaluation, product and service development, and marketing.	9	Entrepreneurs need process support to get product from idea stage to markets
1. Enhance access to venture capital – both debt and equity. Better connect entrepreneurs to potential investors.	8	Can't stand without capital
9. Help entrepreneurs market their products and services outside of the region and globally.	7	Have to get the process started

3. Create an innovation center that can and will provide entrepreneurial assistance to all counties in Northeast Indiana.	4	Need entrepreneurial support head in Steuben County
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Additional “must haves”

- Improvement of the IEDC's TAP program.
- Central to have access to funding...but entrepreneurs must first be able to communicate and define their needs through planning and appropriate education/mentoring/support so that their need can be funded appropriately.
- NIIC S.C. Operation (physically located in Angola)
- Support for the necessary areas (finance, marketing, manufacturing, pricing of product, research and development) at a reasonable cost or at no cost for a period of time.
- Make university assistance and expertise more available and more timely.
- Ivy Tech / IPFW satellite in Angola.
- Active entrepreneurial education program (including SBDC office) physically located and staffed in Steuben County.

7. EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

At the Steuben County regional outreach meeting, 43 participants submitted exit questionnaires. All of the respondents were white, and 74 percent were male. Eighty-four percent of respondents were over 45 years of age, and 70 percent had a college degree or higher. While most participants indicated that they live and work in Steuben County, other represented counties included Allen, LaGrange, and Noble.

Participants were highly satisfied with the meeting format. Every respondent indicated that they were comfortable working in their small group, 98 percent reported that their ideas were recorded appropriately, and 95 percent judged the length of the meeting to be “about right.”

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