

Regional Outreach Meetings: Results for Wabash County

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of the Wabash County regional outreach meeting, which was held on Tuesday, March 9th from 3:00– 5pm. Approximately 27 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 Whitley 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. **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.
4. **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.
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"> • 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. |

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. Concentrate on developing targeted industry clusters (e.g. food, defense, etc.) | 13 | We need to play off of competitive advantages in agricultural/food production. Things are in place, we can build on them. |
| 1. Develop a brand for Northeast Indiana. Market the region nationally and internationally. | 8 | We're not able to do it alone. Plus, we're going to have to reach out beyond this region to bring in new business. What do we find that we do regionally. |
| 13. Retain support for agriculture, even as the region becomes more urbanized. | 3 | n/a |

Additional “must haves” suggested by participants

- Make Wabash the world capital of...
- Consolidation of school system
- Consolidate county schools to offer more class choices to attract young families.
- Have some focus on our competitive advantage in agriculture and develop food-related industries.
- Consolidate school systems in county
- Utilize POET and Dreyfus to attract supporting businesses.
- 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.
- Agri-production - processing products grown here: grain, meat, and fruit.
- Consider focusing on attracting services and products (manufacturing) that profit from gaining population - pharmaceuticals, etc.
- Attract industries and businesses that hire young educated people - Sweetwater.

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"> • Produce students ready to step into the job market. • Get people to adapt to having a job, care about what they're doing, show up on time and ready to go. How do you teach work ethic? Organizational skills? • Collaboration among business and higher education will be improved. (can develop seminars about real-world workplace experiences) • "School-to-Work" programs - internship opportunities for high school students. • Get talented people to come back to the region. • More economically-equitable community. (not just upper and lower class) • More people contributing to the community. • Funding available from the state for education. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ivy Tech retraining programs helping people keep jobs - good collaboration with business and industries, could expand role and introduce training opportunities for high school students. • Can-do attitude. If you dream it, it will happen. • People are open to new ideas. • Recent infrastructure improvements. • 21st Century Scholars program - economically disadvantaged students get a free ride. • Tremendous number of scholarships available. • Schools are dedicated to turning out good students. Keep raising the bar. • 2 universities. • Learnmore center - focus on adult education, literacy, GED programs. |

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Top Initiatives

| Initiative | Weighted Score | Reason(s) Selected |
|---|----------------|---|
| 6. Instill a good work ethic in members of the workforce. | 9 | Hot button issue for businesses here. Make up for what hasn't happened in the homes. Same for students and workers - both need good work ethic. Workers with good ethic are more loyal, passionate, and dependable. |
| 10. Build community-wide appreciation for education, and a commitment of lifelong education and training. | 9 | Jobs of the future don't necessarily exist now. Need kids to be excited about learning, interested in education. Includes schools, businesses, students, churches all valuing education. If the community supports education, half our problems would be over. Parents would be more involved, engaged with learning. If parents do their job, schools can do their job better too! |
| 4. Enhance collaboration among schools, higher education institutions, and businesses. Develop more internship and on the job training opportunities. | 6 | n/a |

Additional "must haves"

- County-wide STEM initiate - pre-engineering course. High-tech initiative.
- To create the 21st Century Talent needed to move the region forward, we need funding for programs in schools teaching the skills and habits wanted by business owners and HR personnel doing the hiring. How can we teach computer and software skills that are needed when schools have to go with free software that students will never use the rest of their lives?
- Flexibility in student programs. Not all students need the same 40 credits - let them focus on specialty areas.
- Continue to pursue our version of Kalamazoo Promise.
- Cap and share - capture "what works" in one areas of the 10-county region and ensure there is opportunity to share.
- Work as county to provide opportunities we can't do individually.
- Creation of mentor programs matching business leaders with students.
- Money for support of public education is also needed.
- Local industries and business banding together to provide technology for schools to help turn out the product and future employee they want.

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"> • Gain income stream with improved quality of life - replace lost income. • Critical to population stability and homeownership. • Attracts higher educated professionals. • Create a "new story" as a place you want to be - changes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell the story of those (many) who have returned. • Low cost of living - housing. • Walkability. • Unique feature of pristine water source. • Short commute. |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>story from within, hopeful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change perceptions of outsiders (executives) regarding drug issues, jobs available. • Student recruitment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similarities to Key Quality of Life in metropolitan areas without the extra costs and commute. • Easy access to large metropolitan areas (Chicago) and money available to do so because of low cost of living. • More time available to enjoy life. • Strong sense of community - "village of support" to raise a family. • Cultural assets of big city - college, 4-star hotel, large venue. • Vibrant downtown core. • Natural resources around. • Schools/education critical to quality of life. • Community festivals to build on. |
|--|--|

Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

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Top Initiatives

| Initiative | Weighted Score | Reason(s) Selected |
|--|----------------|--|
| 9. Encourage redevelopment and infill instead of sprawling development patterns. | 9 | Reduce sprawl to increase downtown vibrancy (use what you have). Need to make county attractive and marketable - sprawl needs to be reduced. |
| 4. Develop a regional identity that highlights quality of life assets – including favorable tax rates, affordable housing, and strong education system. | 5 | Critical to differentiate. Need to clarify our vision/story to attract people here. |
| 2. Support active lifestyles in the region – increase walkability and bikability; enhance access to healthy foods; improve access to outdoor spaces and recreational activities. | 4 | |

Additional “must haves”

- I would love to have a really strong tourism message, with plenty of money for advertising, someone very savvy to "work" the tourism angle, attract visitors.
- Regional public transportation (especially to healthcare systems). Trains.
- Educate citizens on what quality of life is.
- Plenty of money for programming and coordination with the schools, like Honeywell Educational Outreach Programs. Education, highly educated people.
- Sharing resources in the region.
- Market what quality of life does exist.
- Farm teams (amateur) from surrounding communities to support Tin Caps, Komets, 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"> • Industrial development • High speed county-wide internet connection. • Improved corporate/industrial development • Better connection to education. • Better/faster distribution of goods and services. • Railroad hub - capitalize on east-west, north-south rail hub. • Improved government system, better coordinated, more efficient - between city/county/state. • Low utility rates - competitive. • Increased capacity for water/sewer service. • Low tax rates. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong/excess capacity, low electricity rates. • Strong water aquifer. • Strong highway system - limited access state highways. • Sense of urgency to act. • Willingness to collaborate - communities working together better than ever. • Certified industrial park development. • Proactive land acquisition • North-south, east-west rail intersection. • Central location. |

Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

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Top Initiatives

| Initiative | Weighted Score | Reason(s) Selected |
|--|----------------|--|
| 10. Work regionally to identify and finance regional infrastructure priorities. | 11 | Broad areas of interest/impact - many projects lack funding |
| 11. Expand broadband width and availability. | 6 | n/a |
| 9. Invest in renewable energy and green infrastructure. | 5 | Need different/greener energy services - to keep costs down. |
| 7. Develop better, faster, safer transportation options (such as high speed rail) to major hubs like Chicago, Indianapolis, and Detroit. | 3 | n/a |

Additional “must haves”

- Create "world-class" regional trails system serving entire region and connecting key venues/assets.
- Expanding our airport - creating a facility to land and house and maintain corporate jets.
- Educated workforce/top-notch educational system.
- 4-lane north-south highway.
- Develop regional strategies (3 to 10 years) for trails, rail, public transit, roads, parks and recreation.
- Create an underpass or overpass in City of Wabash so traffic is not disrupted by train traffic.
- Financial assistance - state and federal.
- Have a taxi service.

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"> Reinvent culture to create a job, not get a job. Support services to help company grow successful and help with sustainability. Venture capital for a strong community - there are 2 financial institutions headquartered here. Support growth of the entrepreneur - equity growth. Strong regional innovation center -research and marketing to help with educational needs. Educational support of the entrepreneur. Don't start a business because they are business people, just like the idea. Training and resources to compliment skills of the entrepreneur. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial institutions (community). Manchester College Ivy Tech Post-secondary education - Huntington and Indiana Wesleyan Have entrepreneurs already in the county - peer networks. Economic developer and the board Making progress on cooperation of city/county government Community aspect: Manchester College and Honeywell Center - recreational opportunities. |

Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

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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 on-going support. After they get started the need help to maintain business - sustain them. |
| 1. Enhance access to venture capital – both debt and equity. Better connect entrepreneurs to potential investors. | 8 | Without capital you don't have anything. Better connect entrepreneurs with the money. |
| 3. Create an innovation center that can and will provide entrepreneurial assistance to all counties in Northeast Indiana. | 3 | n/a |

Additional “must haves”

- Develop social entrepreneurship - innovative ways to address the social and family economic issues in the region.
- Peer-to-peer groups, mentoring programs
- Regional health co-op.
- #3 - cannot be NIC which is Fort Wayne only. It must serve all counties without raiding.
- Regional health co-op - pooled health insurance; free entrepreneurs and small business owners from health insurance worries. Insurance, shared clinic (self-funded clinic)
- Regional health cooperative, regional buying co-op.
- #3 - create a non-competitive innovation center that doesn't steal companies from the county.
- Regional health cooperative.
- Kalamazoo Promise - similar system.

- Similar to Quest Foundation in Allen County, loan college students tuition. Forgive half of debt if they work in the region for 5 years and forgive half of remaining debt if they work in the region 5 more years. Thus, they pay a quarter of tuition if they work in the region for 10 years.
- Regional purchasing cooperative.

7. EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

At the Wabash County regional outreach meeting, 27 participants submitted exit questionnaires. One hundred percent of the respondents were white, and 74 percent were male. Seventy-four percent of respondents were over 45 years of age, and 89 percent had a college degree or higher. Nearly all participants indicated that they live and work in Wabash County.

Participants were highly satisfied with the meeting format. All respondents indicated that they were comfortable working in their small group, felt that their ideas were recorded appropriately, and said 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 Wabash County Excel file.