

# Regional Outreach Meetings: Results for Wells County

## INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of the Wells County regional outreach meeting, which was held on Monday, March 8<sup>th</sup> from 11:00am – 1:00 pm. Approximately 23 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 Whitley County expressed the following order of priority for the vision pillars:

1. **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.
2. **21<sup>st</sup> Century Talent (tie for 2<sup>nd</sup>)** – 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. **Quality of Life (tie for 2<sup>nd</sup>)** – 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. **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.
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"> <li>Gain new businesses- higher tax base</li> <li>Regional Identity</li> <li>Higher Profile for County</li> <li>More diversification of business</li> <li>Gain a lot from regional identity, even though we lack direct access to major highways</li> <li>Greater efficiency with regional effort- County does not have resources to promote area as well as with regional brand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Willingness to cooperate</li> <li>Combined effort of Chamber of Commerce and Econ. Development</li> <li>Solid competitive industry cluster</li> <li>Diversified manufacturing base</li> <li>Lowest tax rate- city, county</li> <li>Low unemployment rate- in region</li> <li>Business friendly climate</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
14. Document and market the region’s low real estate cost, low cost of labor, good work ethic, and quality of life.	7	Any company will manufacture cost into what they do- primary factor (cost)
6. Establish a business-friendly tax and regulatory climate. Streamline approvals for economic development projects.	6	Make sure we have the right attitude before we can move forward
8. Develop strong leadership in the region – including government officials and the business community.	4	Leadership drives everything- poor leaders will drive away, strong leaders will help get the incentives and infrastructure needed
10. Enhance economic development incentives. Encourage existing businesses to upgrade their programs and processes. Create tailored incentive packages for prospective businesses.	3	State and local incentives important to get company to locate here; tailor made incentives would spur onto other businesses to locate here

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

- State wide level- need government reform

## 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>It would make community more marketable, people would want to move here if there are good schools</li> <li>We're trying to improve school- econ development partnership</li> <li>Convince people to bring more training, more college classes</li> <li>If you can offer the best technology in the schools and library</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infrastructure of schools- actual buildings</li> <li>drastically increase the technology available to teachers/ students</li> <li>Budget issues aren't hitting us as much as they are elsewhere because it is a county library, Tax \$ is consolidated</li> <li>Quality library- not hit as much as other libraries financially</li> </ul>

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- Need more vocational
  - Already have a significant vocational program- was recently honored
  - School system is partnering with higher ed for classes
  - Indiana workforce development, has opportunities
  - Need awareness of workforce development
  - Tax benefit for companies who let kids intern- pay them to keep them around
  - A lot of NFPs don't have money to pay interns
  - Keep employees who have been educated here, grow our own talent
  - Work on lowering average age; need the young people out of college
  - Businesses will have to be able to pay higher wages to students out of school
- Our core is financially sound
  - Easy access to IPFW, Ivy Tech, Huntington University
  - Infrastructure: online
  - Continuing ed
  - intend to have shovel ready sites in industrial parks
  - Advanced placement and dual credit classes, vocational
  - Need adult literacy program
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**Top Initiatives**

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
7. Ensure a strong employment base and attractive jobs for future workers.	8	Need jobs to bring educated workforce to community
4. Enhance collaboration among schools, higher education institutions, and businesses. Develop more internship and on the job training opportunities.	7	Taking interns gives kids work experience and exposure; schools and students need to be prepared and proactive; both students and businesses benefit from internship program
2. Invigorate students to excel in STEM – science, technology, engineering, math. Support engineering and technical talent to encourage growth in high tech businesses.	6	Technical talent- we're behind the rest of the world
11. Retain skilled workers and recruit talent from outside the region.	3	n/a

**Additional "must haves"**

- n/a

**4. RESULTS: QUALITY OF LIFE**

**Activity 2: Small Group Discussion**

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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>• NE IN regional trail system- interconnectivity of QOL</li> <li>• NE IN regional water control/ quality</li> <li>• NE IN Alternative energy initiative</li> <li>• Wells YMCA, Interconnectivity of wellness</li> <li>• Local parks/ state park enhancement</li> <li>• Community support of the arts/ commerce center/ 4-h</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership/ vision contributions/ examples</li> <li>• Partnerships with other regional communities</li> <li>• Philanthropic/ Charity organizations</li> <li>• Best buy schools</li> <li>• Interconnectivity of church efforts</li> </ul>

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building	• Safety/ low crime rate
• 5-10 year review of Master Plan by local govt units	• A strong sense of community spirit

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**Top Initiatives**

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
2. Support active lifestyles in the region – increase walkability and bikability; enhance access to healthy foods; improve access to outdoor spaces and recreational activities.	7	It is the one item that can be achieved via collaboration regionally
11. Provide amenities that attract young professionals – including housing, entertainment, recreation, and transportation.	6	It provides an opportunity to integrate various components to enhance sustainability, environment, and community
6. Ensure high quality health infrastructure throughout the region, including access to health insurance and primary care physicians.	5	It provides an opportunity to enhance overall community health and community sustainability
4. Develop a regional identity that highlights quality of life assets – including favorable tax rates, affordable housing, and strong education system.	3	It enhances Wells Co. as a place of relocation and long-term citizenship/ residential location, which creates greater potential synergies. Should include affordable alternative energy options.

**Additional “must haves”**

- Alternative energy options

**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>• Could lose potential business if infrastructure is not in place</li> <li>• Quality of infrastructure is foundation for ED</li> <li>• Quality of roads- first impression impact- ease of coming in and out of community</li> <li>• Need for wind and renewable energy</li> <li>• Can install wind turbines- companies can choose to buy energy locally, cost will be more stable</li> <li>• "Bluffton uses 10% renewable energy"</li> <li>• Must have EVERY infrastructure component in place</li> <li>• Fiber optics- fundamental to communication driven economy</li> <li>• Sizing infrastructure for tomorrow- not today. Importance of planning to shovel ready sites</li> <li>• 4 lane connector to 69/469, businesses want to know how many minutes to interstate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiber optics in Bluffton</li> <li>• Wind farms, currently in testing phase</li> <li>• Having the Chamber and Mike Row- asset to our economic development</li> <li>• Ethanol plant- could attract biodiesel, like-minded businesses</li> <li>• Ted Ellis- mayor is a great leadership resource</li> <li>• Ossian- had a history of installing lower quality of utilities, now building to last and increasing capacity</li> <li>• State senator and state rep gives us voice at a state level</li> <li>• WOW- Wells on Wheels- transit for elderly</li> </ul>

**Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision**

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**Top Initiatives**

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
8. Increase the number of “shovel-ready” development sites.	8	Starting place for business to be interested in the community; Need to be ready for new companies
2. Enhance regional planning efforts to ensure connections between land use, transportation, and infrastructure investments.	5	All local governments should be on the same page before starting projects, increase development sites
11. Expand broadband width and availability.	5	n/a
5. Focus on developing an integrated, multi-modal transportation network that effectively links the region’s population centers.	4	Need to get inventory in and out. Focus on road access
1. Increase access to affordable energy.	3	Energy is such a big issue these days- really affects the economy

**Additional “must haves”**

- Four lane access to 69/469

**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>• County gain</li> <li>• Investment</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Job growth- best in region</li> <li>• Increase tax base</li> <li>• Growth beyond County, pull in regional resources</li> <li>• Community- quality of life, create regional pull</li> <li>• Appeal- identity for region</li> <li>• As businesses grow, need more support and other businesses</li> <li>• Synergy to all business establishment and growth</li> <li>• Agricultural community- ethanol plant, uses what we grow here</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong work ethic</li> <li>• Strong commitment to community and region</li> <li>• Strong agricultural base</li> <li>• Provide resources for startup businesses</li> <li>• People and business are very generous- business friendly and willing to give</li> <li>• Access to continuing education</li> <li>• Continue to grow and keep up with trends</li> </ul>

**Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision**

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***Top Initiatives***

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Weighted Score</b>	<b>Reason(s) Selected</b>
2. Encourage existing businesses to take entrepreneurial risks by growing their firms, or investing in new business areas.	9	Start with what already in place, has momentum; familiar with workforce relationships; build on existing talent.
1. Enhance access to venture capital – both debt and equity. Better connect entrepreneurs to potential investors.	5	Easier to obtain, money makes growth possible
6. Develop a variety of support services to assist entrepreneurs, including business-related research, invention and innovation evaluation, product and service development, and marketing.	4	Need to grow existing businesses and provide tools for growth

***Additional “must haves”***

- n/a

**7. EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS**

At the Wells County regional outreach meeting, 23 participants submitted exit questionnaires. One hundred percent of the respondents were white, and 70 percent were male. Seventy-four percent of respondents were over 45 years of age, and 78 percent had a college degree or higher. Nearly all participants indicated that they live and work in Wells 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 Wells County Excel file.