

Regional Outreach Meetings: Results for Whitley County

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of the Whitley County regional outreach meeting, which was held on Tuesday, March 9th from 9:00 – 11:00 am. Approximately 20 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. **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. **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.
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"> • Support for all the pillars • Lower taxes • Less of a bedroom community • Ability to increase jobs • Retention of current workforce • Encouragement for students to stay local • More corporate partners, more money, more tax base • Collaboration, help the communities, better quality of life, more grants, downtown improvements • Small town values, close to larger community • Opportunity for higher pay scale • More opportunity, competitive edge for new business locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whitley Co. EDC (Allen) knowledgeable- follow up • US 30 Corridor- land availability, shovel ready sites • Willingness of county to work with companies • Redevelopment Commission, and Plan Commission • Tax Structure- Abatement • WC Community Foundation • Plentiful water supply- rail • Expertise in University level • Work Ethic • Cheap to do business here? Strength or weakness?

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
10. Enhance economic development incentives. Encourage existing businesses to upgrade their programs and processes. Create tailored incentive packages for prospective businesses.	12	In today's environment you must have incentives to retain and attract or they will look elsewhere.
6. Establish a business-friendly tax and regulatory climate. Streamline approvals for economic development projects.	3	n/a
8. Develop strong leadership in the region – including government officials and the business community.	2	n/a

Additional “must haves” suggested by participants

- Develop Strategies to encourage landowners interested in selling to have shovel-ready locations through loan programs
- #11 is very important but too general- must develop a 'how to' plan for this
- Develop Strategies to encourage landowners interested in selling to have shovel-ready locations through loan programs
- Strong push by local business owners to look at new HS

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"> • Bring people into community- young people • New tech HS critical- innovation in educational strategies • Adult ed- helping people to start second career opportunities • Workforce retraining • Population as a whole becomes higher educated • Importance of technical training • A well educated community helps keep values, keep democracy alive • Well educated community is more likely to own homes, improve quality of life • High social return on investment • Importance of sharing resources- working together as a region • Industry working with education- need help in private industry • Schools are a big factor in relocation decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work based internship and co-op programs • Businesses are very open to working with kids, schools • Everyone is in this together- we've changed our way of thinking • Leadership at the county- very open door policy • Schools working together- superintendents collaborating, undertaking joint programs • Huntington U.- utilize business leaders, community leaders as adjunct faculty • Business incubation program • Excellent schools, dedicated staff

Activity 3: Strategizing the Vision

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Top Initiatives

Initiative	Weighted Score	Reason(s) Selected
1. Invest in Pre-K through 16 education and benchmark progress using internationally recognized standards.	9	Supports the other strategies
2. Invigorate students to excel in STEM – science, technology, engineering, math. Support engineering and technical talent to encourage growth in high tech businesses.	8	New jobs come from new technology- need this STEM base. New tech project lead the way- make kids' education more real world
10. Build community-wide appreciation for education, and a commitment of lifelong education and training.	3	Importance of education, community commitment to schools. Lifelong- we're never finished learning

Additional “must haves”

- Change State Requirements for schools and allow schools to innovate
- Provide project-based training for teachers
- Collaboration among the school corps to offer courses in i.e. CAD- gather students in all schools to make for full class
- Develop a correlation matrix which relates: educational focus to occupational cluster requirements to industry cluster focus for NEI

- Eliminate unfunded mandates for schools; fully fund or eliminate
- Encourage businesses to promote further education with paid his to attend/ education reimbursement
- Focus on development of knowledge clusters which support existing and emerging industry clusters
- Reinvent the HS. Provide intensive support to students for career development; Change k-12 curriculum to teach 21st century skills
- Teach 21st century skills

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"> • Attract families to live here, including doctors • We'll have kids who will come back after college • I'll feel good as a grandparent having my grandchildren raised/ educated here • Trails • Economic Development, tourism • Art and culture • Higher incomes- be able to afford more • Things to do • I feel a sense/ acceptance of mediocrity • Better behaved students, teachers, grandparents, parents • higher standards, respect • being proud of your area • renewed enthusiasm people who are in position to make change • It shouldn't be about money, needs to be about pride, process • Green space: county parks, city parks, pocket parks • Walkable, bikeable spaces, sidewalks • Grocery stores in walkable distance • Maintenance of trails- walk in winter, without trash • Green standards in terms of pollution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is good and progressive, but Churubusco doesn't have the tax base • Y- it needs to grow again • Community foundation • Strong health system- being connected to Parkview is really helpful • Good city park system • Healthiest in IN, we can build on this • Master gardening programs • We don't have traffic jams • Convenience- 10 min to get to everything • Small businesses • Community supported agriculture • Farmer's market • Affordable housing • Highest income in NE IN • Lakes- with sewer systems • Camp Whitley • Our churches interested in helping others • Senior Center • Movie Theaters • Safety, judicial 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
2. Support active lifestyles in the region – increase walkability and bikability; enhance access to healthy foods; improve access to outdoor spaces and recreational activities.	8	Walkability and access to outdoor spaces; access to healthy foods as a niche?

4. Develop a regional identity that highlights quality of life assets – including favorable tax rates, affordable housing, and strong education system.	6	We have low taxes and our schools are good, but all need to be up there
6. Ensure high quality health infrastructure throughout the region, including access to health insurance and primary care physicians.	4	n/a
8. Celebrate the unique assets and characteristics of various communities throughout the region.	3	Get excited about ourselves and develop pride, throw a party... Positive attitudes
11. Provide amenities that attract young professionals – including housing, entertainment, recreation, and transportation.	3	n/a

Additional “must haves”

- Do away with mediocrity; family values- change of culture to include 40 developmental assets
- Celebrate and enhance the areas Indian heritage as a destination place
- Create a paved network of bicycle trails which connect neighborhoods, schools, shopping, Ft Wayne network
- Attract an interesting mix of services and products
- Make pollution standards- we are a dirty state and burn coal for energy
- Raise the bar in our schools as far as behavior expectations, values, respect, consequences
- Create an industry of community supported agriculture beyond our boundaries
- Build a new HS adjacent to Indian Springs middle school; HS as community center
- Make all downtowns walkable, filled with shops, restaurants, clean and attractive
- Project to develop pride in our community, homes, backyards, families, etc.
- broadband promotion and requirement to establish sustainability example
- Expand broadband service to every home in the county
- Focus on health/ green initiatives. Address high rates of STD's, teen pregnancy, smoking, obesity

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"> • Shovel-ready sites, need to expand throughout county and make sure ready for businesses to move in • Transportation: US30 and access to I-69, several state roads • Need affordable energy • Broadband DSL available, need to improve high speed service-necessary to stay competitive • Map out existing infrastructure throughout region • Create jobs and get revenue back 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not fill out this sheet.

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.	9	Increase shovel-ready sites throughout county; more variety, location of sites
1. Increase access to affordable energy.	4	Need affordable energy to stay competitive
2. Enhance regional planning efforts to ensure connections between land use, transportation, and infrastructure investments.	3	Coordinating infrastructure, make sure the region fits together and land is being used for best fit.
10. Work regionally to identify and finance regional infrastructure priorities.	3	Airport, rail, bottleneck at I-69 and 14 hindering access; region as a whole to see what is needed

Additional “must haves”

- Establish regional high tech development center
- Get to know your strengths

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"> • Basis for building on all other areas • Job creation • New taxpayers • Graduate retention • Opportunity to stay- we have the best and brightest • Can build on neighboring county biomedical • Education opportunities • Workforce retention • Need to build trust with outsiders and engage • Establishing programs to support entrepreneurs • Virtual innovation center • Growing group of professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EDC infrastructure in place • Allen’s linking ability • Making resources more available/ accessible • Short commutes • Very supportive county governments • Consolidated business area to meet needs efficiently downtown • Consumer/ visitor friendly town center • Lakes nearby- QOL • Innovators from region- reconnecting • General infrastructure • Location/ position to Ft Wayne, Chicago, benefits to other counties

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
2. Encourage existing businesses to take entrepreneurial risks by growing their firms, or investing in new business areas.	3	People with experience can provide quick growth- they have financial resources and infrastructure in place

3. Create an innovation center that can and will provide entrepreneurial assistance to all counties in Northeast Indiana.	3	Often good ideas but often nervous and need an incubator to support, spread costs with shared overheads and allow inexpensive starting location
4. Establish a leadership network to foster entrepreneurial coaching and collaboration.	3	Group agreed this provision of coaches is critical to new businesses
6. Develop a variety of support services to assist entrepreneurs, including business-related research, invention and innovation evaluation, product and service development, and marketing.	3	Access to information is important to help entrepreneurs think through idea and connect with community resources and marketing assistance

Additional “must haves”

- A process or set of resources available to help realize ideas into a business plan
- ID entrepreneurs through schools and give them encouragement to follow their dreams. Teach risk/reward strategies
- To have a 'market maker'- a person/ group that connects the dots resources to needs
- A formalized entrepreneurial mentor program is fantastic idea
- Teach importance of ATTITUDE!!
- Enhance business assistance- through business center to access to grant funding for startup growth or access to venture capitalist group.

7. EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

At the Whitley County regional outreach meeting, 18 participants submitted exit questionnaires. One hundred percent of the respondents were white, and participants’ gender was evenly split at 50 percent male and 50 percent female. Seventy-eight percent of respondents were over 45 years of age, and 83 percent had a college degree or higher. Nearly all participants indicated that they live and work in Whitley 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 Whitley County Excel file.