

## Introduction

Following the initial release of *Indiana Vision 2025 (IV 2025)*, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with other organizations and leaders, conducted five regional forums around the state of Indiana. The purpose of the forums was to:

- introduce *IV 2025* regionally;
- identify regional priorities among the report's stated goals within *IV 2025*; and
- gain perspective on issues and opportunities specific to different geographical areas of the state.

Together, the Indiana Chamber and the regional hosts invited thought leaders in both the for-profit and non-profit arenas to facilitated discussion and planning forums in Merrillville, Fort Wayne, Sellersburg, Evansville and Indianapolis. Prior to the forum, participants were invited to complete an online survey that asked them about regional issues, opportunities and trends, and asked them to prioritize each of the 33 *IV 2025* goals in four key drivers. The responses were then used to shape the specific content of each forum. To help them further prepare, each invited participant was provided with an executive summary overview of *IV 2025* and was asked to become familiar with the full report prior to attending the forum.

Besides the invited regional thought leaders, each half-day forum was also attended by several members of the Indiana Chamber executive leadership and policy teams who served as information resources to the participants. The forum discussion served as an invaluable opportunity for the Chamber regarding the regional priorities reflected in the report.

## Forum Structure

After a brief overview on the history and content of *IV 2025* presented by Kevin Brinegar, president and CEO of the Indiana Chamber, participants then reviewed and discussed the regional challenges and opportunities identified through their survey responses. The forums were facilitated by representatives from CHORUS®, Inc., an Indiana-based management consulting firm.

The regional leaders then turned their focus to the core content and focus of the forum – discussion of the drivers and goals within *IV 2025* that they believed were the specific priorities for their region. Working in teams, the participants expanded the content on nine of the goals to include **Objectives, Strategies, Regional Assets, Immediate Next Steps** and **Milestones**. Each team then presented its expanded goal to another team for “spirited critique” and revision, followed by a brief presentation to all forum participants. A summary of all nine of those expanded goals is included in the following report.

## Northeast Region Participants

Forty-two regional leaders attended the *Indiana Vision 2025* Northeast Forum on June 6, 2012, in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

**Keira Amstutz**  
President & CEO  
Indiana Humanities Council

**Marie Beason**  
Dir. Of Professional Dev.  
Indiana Grantmakers Alliance

**David Bennett**  
Executive Director  
Community Foundation of  
Greater Fort Wayne

**Bill Bradley**  
Executive Director  
Jay County Economic Dev.

**Andrew Briggs**  
President  
Bank of Geneva

**Don Cooper**  
VP/General Manager  
KPC Media Group, Inc.

**Gene Donaghy**  
VP of Energy Services  
Northeastern REMC

**Joe Dorko**  
CEO  
Lutheran Health Network

**G. Blair Dowden**  
President  
Huntington University

**John English**  
Manager of Corp. Relations  
Noble REMC

**David Floyd**  
CEO  
OrthoWorx

**Scott Glaze**  
Chairman & CEO  
Fort Wayne Metals Research  
Products Corp.

**Rich Haddad**  
President & CEO  
K21 Health Foundation

**Doug Inman**  
Executive Director  
The Portland Foundation

**Julie Inskeep**  
Publisher  
Journal Gazette

**Dent Johnson**  
Plant Manager  
BFGoodrich Tire Manufacturing

**Sandi Kemmish**  
Director  
Lincoln Financial Foundation

**David Koenig**  
Executive Director  
Steuben County EDC

**Mike Kubacki**  
Chairman  
Lake City Bank

**Ray Kusisto**  
CEO  
Ortho NorthEast (ONE)

**Mike Landram**  
President  
Fort Wayne Chamber of  
Commerce

**Suzie Light**  
Executive Director  
Kosciusko County Community  
Foundation

**Larry Macklin**  
Executive Director  
Adams County EDC

**Jim Marcuccilli**  
President & CEO  
STAR Financial Bank

**Dr. Cathy Maxwell**  
Vice Chancellor of Academic  
Affairs  
Ivy Tech - Northeast

**Bruce Menshy**  
Director of Operations  
Raytheon Company

**John Miller**  
Director of Retail Dev.  
Zurcher Tire, Inc.

**Tony Mitson**  
Dir. of Government Affairs  
Regional Chamber of  
Northeast Indiana

**Marilyn Moran-Townsend**  
CEO  
CVC Communications

**Tom Nordwick**  
President & CEO  
Adams Memorial Hospital

**Mike Packnett**  
President & CEO  
Parkview Health

**Tim Pape**  
Managing Partner  
Carson Boxberger, LLP

**Maclyn Parker**  
Attorney  
Olive B. Cole Foundation

**Jac Price**  
President & CEO  
Price's Laundry

**Kathleen Randolph**  
President & CEO  
Northeast Indiana Regional  
Workforce Investment Board

**John Sampson \***  
President  
Northeast Indiana Regional  
Partnership

**John Stafford**  
Executive Director  
Community Research Institute

**Darlene Stanley**  
President  
Johnson Junction

**Todd Stephenson**  
President & CEO  
United Way of Allen County

**Jeff Turner**  
VP, Admin. & General Counsel  
Metal Technologies

**Tom Wall**  
County Commissioner  
Huntington County

**Larry Weigand**  
President & CEO  
Weigand Construction

\* Denotes Regional Partner

## Northeast Region Challenges & Opportunities

Through survey results, personal interviews with regional leaders and forum discussions, the challenges and opportunities/assets characterizing the economic environment in Northeast Indiana were identified.

### PRIMARY CHALLENGES

1. **Educational Excellence:** Throughout the process – from surveys and interviews to forum discussions – Northeast participants continually emphasized the importance of education excellence, beginning with early childhood development and nurturing lifelong learners. Today’s students must graduate high school at a higher percentage and ready for high-tech jobs or prepared to move to vocational training or college.
2. **Workforce Development:** The traditional manufacturing base, so prevalent in Northeast Indiana for nearly a century, has eroded substantially and with it the region’s average salary. Attracting high-tech industry will depend in part on developing a competent and capable workforce for employers. Participants stressed that workforce development and educational excellence are two equally important areas that cannot be separated in order to ensure the region’s economic future.
3. **Transportation Infrastructure:** The Northeast region is vitally dependent on superior pathways to move people, products and ideas. Overall, participants believe the regional transportation infrastructure is sound, but creative funding sources for future needs should be addressed. They also expressed concern as to whether the Northeast is currently receiving its fair share of infrastructure funding.
4. **Quality of Life:** Attracting and retaining the best and brightest talent to Northeast Indiana will require continued focus on building a strong cultural and recreational environment. Additionally, participants expressed that the region will need to provide high wages and stable employment opportunities for the young people who grow up in the area.
5. **Community/Political Leadership:** In developing Vision 2020, the Northeast region has already displayed its ability to pull together the area’s leadership for collaborative work. However, encouraging talented, exceptional individuals to run for public office or volunteer their time to community leadership remains a challenge. Often, the same traditional leaders are called on time and again to serve. New ideas and new energy are needed from a new generation of leaders.
6. **Improved Air Service:** Air travel into and out of the northeastern part of Indiana is problematic. Though the Fort Wayne International airport has exceptional capacity, there are few outbound direct flights available to major cities. Travelers must choose between making multiple, expensive flight connections or driving to the major airports in Indianapolis, Chicago or Detroit.
7. **Collaborative Effort:** As much as any region of the state, the leaders of Northeast Indiana have been successful in working together to plan for its economic future. Yet, participants cited a number of initiatives – many of them strong, promising plans – that operate separately from each other. They encouraged more communication and collaboration to pull these regional initiatives together, thus increasing their collective impact.



## OVERARCHING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE

- 1. Vision 2020:** The Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership's Vision 2020 is a comprehensive economic plan aimed at bringing new vitality to the region. This collaborative effort leapfrogs the Northeast ahead of many of its competitors for economic development through a cohesive vision, mission and game-changing tactics.
- 2. Higher Education Resources:** Participants noted that the Northeast is exceptionally well-positioned for growth and innovation through its higher education resources. Multiple colleges (both public and private), a new pharmacy program, a four-year medical school and outstanding potential for technology-based research create the opportunity to build an academic center of excellence.
- 3. Fort Wayne International Airport:** Though currently air travel in and out of the region is difficult, Fort Wayne International has considerable untapped potential and capacity for increased air mobility. The airport facilities and infrastructure could easily support increased passenger and freight travel. Direct flights to major hubs such as Chicago and Washington, D.C. could dramatically affect the region's economic opportunities.
- 4. Transportation:** Beyond the opportunities for increased air travel, the region's ground transportation system is growing and improving. Its geographical relationship to other regional economic areas of influence positions the Northeast region to become a logistics "heavy hitter" in the future.
- 5. A Revitalized Downtown Fort Wayne:** Following the lead and proven success of other regional centers, downtown Fort Wayne is in the midst of a renewal. Renovated buildings and new construction are drawing restaurants, entertainment and recreation opportunities to the city's center. A vibrant downtown Fort Wayne results in overall increase in the quality of life for the Northeast region of Indiana.

Northeast Forum participants selected nine goals from *IV 2025* and addressed how these goals could be specifically leveraged in their region. Objectives, Strategies, Immediate Next Steps and Milestones were all considered and applied to the goals. Below is a synopsis of those prioritized goals by the driver under which they appear in *IV 2025*. An expanded explanation of the work done by participants on each goal begins on the next page.

### DRIVER 1: Outstanding Talent

Quality education and workforce development are inseparable elements in the formula for economic success. The region must increase the educational attainment and career preparedness of its population, from early childhood through higher education and vocational training. Increasing graduation rates is among its highest priorities. Postsecondary credentials in STEM-related fields should also be a focus. As the national economy recovers, the region cannot be left behind due to a workforce unprepared to meet the technical demands of that changing economy. Educational improvement will require the best efforts of school corporations, higher education, foundations, business leaders and regional organizations.

### DRIVER 2: Attractive Business Climate

Northeast Indiana would benefit from more uniformity in municipal ordinances and processes regulating business in the region to help increase economic opportunity. Echoed in other regions of the state, leaders in the Northeast also encouraged state legislators to revisit the Kernan Shephard report on streamlining local government. Local governments will necessarily need to work together to catalog the differences in their current ordinances and then adopt standards. This will require collaboration among a number of regional assets, including county and city government, local economic development organizations, state legislators and major employers.

### DRIVER 3: Superior Infrastructure

Future infrastructure projects - transportation related or otherwise - in the state and region will necessitate new systems for funding, including any number of revenue-generating methods and planning process improvements. Economic growth will also require the state to develop and implement a strategic water resource plan that ensures adequate fresh water for people and business. Much of the region's sewage and water infrastructure will require significant expansion and improvements in the coming decades. State, regional and municipal resources must cooperate to develop a cohesive strategy.

### DRIVER 4: Dynamic and Creative Culture

The Northeast region anticipates substantial future job growth generated by entrepreneurial enterprise; therefore, building a culture where entrepreneurs can thrive is an important component. State and regional initiatives will play a role, as well as tax credits, incubators, chambers of commerce, foundations, regional development organizations and venture capital firms. The region must also continue to nurture a culture that is inviting to a diverse population. Addressing quality of life issues will help create an environment that is welcoming to the diversity of talent, race, faith and choices the region can anticipate attracting.



## Key Driver #1: Outstanding Talent

### **Goal Statement: Increase to 90% the proportion of Indiana students who graduate from high school ready for college and/or career training.**

Raising the percentage of high school graduates in Indiana ready for college or career training will take exceptional collaboration. Employers, school administrators, higher education institutions, teachers and parents must all be engaged and invested in student achievement. Forum participants placed special emphasis on increasing parental involvement and student motivation. As well, they noted that assuring the effectiveness of teachers must be part of the equation. More educational options for students are necessary so that students who find

themselves in varying external situations can still find a clear path to an effective high school degree. Participants agreed that the 90% goal is aggressive, so achieving it will take equally aggressive and sweeping action by all parties tackling the problem.

### **Goal Statement: Develop, implement and fully fund a comprehensive plan for addressing the skills shortages of adult and incumbent workers who lack minimum basic skills.**

Northeast Indiana's average wage is roughly 75% of the national average. Increasing that average wage will require raising the skill level of adult and incumbent workers so they can thrive in the high-tech jobs of a new economy. Forum participants recommend finding dynamic assessment tools that will determine the skill needs of regional industries and businesses so that area schools and universities can focus their training and educational solutions. A collaborative agreement on basic skills training between industry and education will also be part of this initiative. The success of this collaborative effort will hinge, in part, on determining the "backbone organization" of the initiative and who will provide leadership going forward. A number of established assets already exist, including WorkOne Northeast, Ivy Tech, Indiana-Purdue Fort Wayne, Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership, school system leaders, and various foundation and industry partners.

### **Goal Statement: Increase to 60% the proportion of Indiana residents with high quality postsecondary credentials.**

At each regional forum, participants collectively addressed the goal regarding increasing the proportion of Indiana residents with high quality postsecondary credentials. Its importance and priority was reflected throughout survey responses in all regions. Tackling this goal together also served as an exercise that educated participants about the process they would use when expanding the remaining prioritized goals. Northeast Forum participants noted that this goal mirrors the "Big Goal" stated in Vision 2020, so it is already a priority for them. Currently, the region's proportion of residents with high quality postsecondary credentials stands at 35%, so aggressive measures will be needed to achieve the target number of 60%.

### **Goal Statement: Increase the proportion of Indiana residents with postsecondary credentials in STEM-related fields to "top 5" status.**

Forum participants believe that increasing the number of residents with STEM-related credentials will first require increasing the number of K-12 teachers qualified to teach STEM subjects. Additionally, interest in STEM subjects among students and families is traditionally low, so developing opportunities for students to engage in STEM activities early in the educational path will be vital. Close, consistent collaboration between regional school systems, universities, vocational schools and industries will be key to increasing student awareness, interest and success in STEM-related subjects.

## Key Driver #2: Attractive Business Climate

### **Goal Statement: Attain a "Top 5" ranking among all states for Indiana's business regulatory environment.**

Participants targeted uniformity across all municipalities regarding business-friendly ordinances and policy as one of the key objectives for this goal. Participants also considered reform that would reduce the number of government layers as instrumental in streamlining Indiana's regulatory environment. As did a number of leaders in other regions of the state, they encourage legislators to revisit the Kernan Shepard report on local government and adopt its recommendations. A number of influential assets can be brought to bear on this goal: business and foundation leaders, local economic development groups, chambers of commerce, regional opportunity councils, and city, county and state government.

## Key Driver #3: Superior Infrastructure

**Goal Statement: Develop and implement new fiscal systems to support the array of infrastructure projects critical to economic growth.**

Changes in tax structures necessitate that the state and region look at alternative ways to fund and support future infrastructure projects. In regard to transportation projects, Forum participants recommend consideration of a number of new fiscal systems, including moving from traditional gas tax structure to a direct consumer fee system, logistics tracking systems to capture lost revenues from out-of-state users, and low cost, user-paid multimodal transportation systems. Improved planning processes within the Indiana Department of Transportation were also recommended. Legislation on the state level is obviously necessary, but regional and local chamber transportation committees, planning organizations and initiatives such as Vision 2020 will be influential in advancing these strategies.

**Goal Statement: Develop and implement a strategic water resource plan that ensures adequate fresh water for citizens and businesses.**

Though Indiana and the Northeast region are traditionally regarded as having adequate to abundant water resources, future economic development in the region could stretch those resources and test the limits of water and sewer infrastructures. A comprehensive regional water and sewage plan that extends beyond (but includes) municipalities is recommended. Funding priorities and sources should be studied and developed and a water resource strategy promoted. Besides city water and sewage commissions, the Maumee River Basin Commission, lake-based sewer districts, multiple watershed areas and some higher education resources should all be considered as existing regional assets.

## Key Driver #4: Dynamic & Creative Culture

**Goal Statement: Develop entrepreneurship and aggressively promote business start-ups through education, networking, investment and financial support.**

As detailed earlier in this Northeast report, this region of the state anticipates future job growth will be generated through entrepreneurial enterprises. Forum participants do not expect the traditional manufacturing base to regain the momentum and influence it once enjoyed. Entrepreneurs starting or relocating high-tech research and manufacturing to the region is its best hope for job growth and is critical to the region's future. Both state and regional initiatives such as tax credits, incubators, chambers of commerce, foundations, regional development organizations and venture capital firms will all play important roles.

**Goal Statement: Promote a culture that further values diversity and civility, attracting and retaining talented individuals.**

Forum participants recommend increasing support for systems that enables a diverse culture. People look for "entry points" into the community, and they should discover multiple options where they can be involved. There are traditional organizations that can serve as important assets in promoting a healthy and diverse culture such as schools, universities and faith-based communities. Non-traditional avenues such as youth athletic leagues and social networking should also be considered. Participants recognize the need for diversity and civility as a significant quality of life issue and recognize that making Northeast Indiana a welcoming place will positively affect economic growth.

