

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.

Southwest Region Participants

Thirty-two regional leaders attended the *Indiana Vision 2025* Southwest Forum on June 18, 2012, in Evansville, Indiana.

Keira Amstutz President & CEO Indiana Humanities Council	Andy Goebel Executive Director Evansville Regional Business Committee, Inc.	Matt Meadors President & CEO Chamber of Commerce of Southwest Indiana	Hon. Terry Seitz Mayor City of Jasper	Alfonso Vidal Board President Hospitality & Outreach for Latin Americans (H.O.L.A.)
Kevin Bain Executive Director & CEO Welborn Baptist Foundation	Ed Hafer * President Evansville Regional Business Committee, Inc.	Hank Menke OFS Brands	Lisa Slade President AlphaGraphics	Linda White President & CEO Deaconess Health System
Dr. Stephen Becker Associate Dean Indiana University School of Medicine - Evansville	Jim Heck Executive Director Grow Southwest Indiana Workforce	Lynn Miller-Pease Executive Director Leadership Evansville	Dr. David Smith Superintendent of Schools Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation	Eric Williams Sheriff Vanderburgh County
Dr. Mark Bernhard Associate Provost for Outreach & Engagement University of Southern Indiana	Philip Hooper Executive Director Department of Metropolitan Development	Sally Rideout-Lambert Director, Communications - Government Affairs Alcoa Warrick Operations	Derrick Stewart Executive Director YMCA of Southwestern Indiana	Hon. Lloyd Winnecke Mayor City of Evansville
Alan Braun Chairman Emeritus Industrial Contractors	Dr. Sharon Kazee Citizen	Steve Schaefer Chief of Staff City of Evansville	Stephanie Terry Executive Director Koch Family Children's Museum of Evansville	
Ron Christian Exec. VP, Chief Legal & External Affairs Officer Vectren Corp.	Shelley Kirk Marketing Director Fifth Third Bank	Brad Schneider President Henderson-Henderson County Chamber of Commerce	Matt Theby Sales Representative Architectural Sales	
Rosemary Dorsa Director, GIFT Program Indiana Grantmakers Alliance	Robert Koch CEO & Chairman Koch Enterprises, Inc.	Mark Schroeder Chairman & CEO German American	Jill Tullar Executive Director Community Foundation Alliance	* Denotes Regional Partner



Southwest Region Challenges & Opportunities

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

PRIMARY CHALLENGES

1. **Transportation Infrastructure:** Transportation infrastructure is both a challenge as well as an opportunity in Southwest Indiana. (Participants similarly recognized a number of issues as both a challenge and an opportunity.) Developing and completing superior pathways for moving people, products and ideas will greatly influence future economic growth.
2. **Workforce Development:** There is a strong, urgent need for a talented, technically competent and innovative workforce in the region. Many of the large traditional manufacturers have moved out of the area in the last decade and those jobs are highly unlikely to return. New opportunities will require a workforce with a dramatically different set of skills and part of the strategy to attracting those high-tech positions is to have a workforce ready to tackle them.
3. **Educational Excellence:** From early childhood through higher education, preparation for productive, 21st century-relevant careers and vocations is a critical goal for Southwest Indiana. Education was another area recognized as both a challenge and opportunity. While the public schools are regarded as better than some in other parts of the state, Indiana as a whole continues to lag behind in educating and graduating students ready to attract and capture high tech jobs.
4. **Quality of Life:** Again an area of both challenge and opportunity, increasing some aspects of the region's quality of life must be addressed in order to attract and retain talented individuals. Southwest Indiana needs to continue to enhance certain aspects of its economic, cultural and recreational environment so it can capitalize on its existing benefits such as cost of living and geographical location.
5. **Change Management:** Whether transitioning from a traditional manufacturing mindset or entrenched governmental structures, Southwest Indiana is facing the inevitable question: How do we open ourselves to new ideas? Parts of Southwest Indiana are tackling issues that, as expected, are being met with resistance, particularly in regard to consolidating government. Their success may well serve as a model to other regions of the state.
6. **Collaborative Effort:** Despite strong economic initiatives by a number of organizations, the Southwest region must search for ways to consolidate strategic initiatives for more dramatic impact. New standards of communication and collaboration, new systems for strategic planning and new methods for tracking results are all needed.



OVERARCHING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE

1. **Logistics & Transportation:** As the I-69 extension nears reality and connects with the region’s well-established Ohio River access, Southwest Indiana is well-positioned to take advantage of its proximity to major cities and their commerce. The long-standing roadblock for the Southwest – you can’t get there from here – is about to see a dramatic shift in perception.
2. **Economic Base:** Southwest Indiana benefits from a diverse business foundation that includes energy, health care, life sciences, logistics, manufacturing and an entrepreneurial mindset. When coupled with the logistics and transportation advantages listed above, the region finds itself especially well-suited for economic growth.
3. **Workforce:** Though there are challenges regarding its readiness for advanced technology, the Southwest region’s workforce displays a traditionally strong work ethic, an ability to innovate and a readiness for new opportunities. Specific pockets of the region have a particularly strong reputation for producing reliable, determined employees and this strategic advantage must be leveraged.
4. **Education Resources:** Southwest Indiana benefits from a particularly strong foundation of educational opportunity at all levels. Good K-12 schools, multiple colleges (both public and private), vocational training, a medical school, graduate programs, and outstanding relationships between business and education position the region for academic excellence.
5. **Quality of Life:** A low cost of living, growing amenities, an improving downtown Evansville (which represents the region’s “hub” of activity) and a strong work ethic should help the Southwest region gain and retain talented people as the economy recovers.

Southwest 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.

<p>DRIVER 1: Outstanding Talent</p> <p>The forum participants in Southwest Indiana were cautiously optimistic about the region’s prospects for tackling issues regarding outstanding talent. They believe the school systems, while needing to address gaps in student achievement, are better prepared to do so than the schools in most regions of the state. Specific focus should be given to increasing the proportion of high school graduates ready for college or career training and increasing the proficiency of students in math, science and reading. Already, there is solid communication and growing collaboration between school corporations, higher education and business.</p>	<p>DRIVER 2: Attractive Business Climate</p> <p>As evident in other regions of the state, Southwest Indiana leaders believe reforming local government is a priority. Not only will reform significantly impact economic growth, it will result in greater fiscal responsibility and efficient use of tax dollars. Containing health care costs was also a focus for forum participants. They recommended a greater emphasis on a wellness model for health care that incentivizes individuals to be healthy. They also recommended further tort reform as a way of controlling insurance costs.</p>
<p>DRIVER 3: Superior Infrastructure</p> <p>The completion of the I-69 extension is expected by the end of 2012. The economic momentum the project will provide for the region is greatly anticipated. As other infrastructure projects arise – those currently on the books or otherwise – new fiscal systems to support them will be critical to continuing this growth. A regional master plan overseen by a regional governing body was recommended by forum participants. Diversifying Indiana’s energy mix was also top of mind for an area where the coal industry is especially important to economic vitality.</p>	<p>DRIVER 4: Dynamic and Creative Culture</p> <p>Forum participants encourage developing systems of support for entrepreneurs and aggressively promoting business start-ups. Among the stated objectives was to increase the amount of technology that is transferred from the government, existing corporations and/or universities. The assets involved in promoting entrepreneurial support would be numerous, including local economic development organizations, businesses, local and state government, area chambers, school corporations, higher education and health care resources. Additionally, a continued emphasis on promoting a culture that further values diversity and civility is paramount to attracting and retaining talented individuals to the region.</p>

Key Driver #1: Outstanding Talent

Goal Statement: Increase the proficiency of Indiana students in math, science and reading to “Top 5” status internationally.

Forum participants recommended special emphasis on achieving high quality early childhood development in the Southwest region so that children enter school ready to learn (especially in regard to literacy, since reading skill greatly affects performance in math and science). They also recommended refinement of the Indiana Department of Education’s I-Read program as a way to increase reading levels and results. Additionally, STEM-related programs, such as Project Lead the Way, should be made readily available to all students at elementary, middle school and high school levels.

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

An important first step to achieving the above-stated goal is to raise the overall graduation rate in the region – currently estimated at around 75% – to 95%. Southwest Forum participants said that such a significant increase will require dramatic overhaul of the education system. This should include expanding early childhood development, creating opportunity for diverse “paths” to a high school degree and developing “carrot” programs that incentivize kids (and parents) to remain in school. Additionally, public/private partnerships that support and drive change are highly encouraged.

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. Southwest Forum participants again emphasized the need for funding early childhood education, noting that the cost of not investing in it will eventually come back on the state and region in other ways when the children need support as adults. There are a number of areas that should be addressed, including the affordability of higher education, the need for more highly trained counselors and mentors, and an expansion of available relevant credentials.



Key Driver #2: Attractive Business Climate

Goal Statement: Enact comprehensive government reform at the state and local levels to increase efficiency and effectiveness in delivery of services.

Creative, productive and civil dialogue is needed regarding reform of state and local government. Both sides of the political aisle have supporters and opponents for this reform, so more communication and evaluation is needed. Evansville and Vanderburgh County are already involved in such discussions and their work may serve as a model for other communities and regions who seek to control the costs resulting from duplicate local services. Success in this often heated area of reform will require some non-traditional allies, including state legislators, not-for-profit organizations, church and faith-based groups, neighborhood associations and the business community.

Goal Statement: Contain health care costs through patient-directed access and outcomes-based incentives.

A wellness model that incentivizes individuals to be healthy was recommended by Southwest Forum participants as a method for containing health care costs. Since chronic conditions account for a high percentage of health care costs, programs directed at reducing chronic illnesses and promoting healthy lifestyles could significantly reduce costs. Developing and accepting health protocols that emphasize quality of care over utilization of care should also help control health care expenses. Participants also encouraged state government to embrace further tort reform that would result in lower insurance rates.

Key Driver #3: Superior Infrastructure

Goal Statement: Diversify Indiana’s energy mix with an emphasis on clean coal, nuclear power and renewables.

Forum participants called for responsible use of Indiana’s abundant coal, oil and natural gas reserves, much of which rest in the Southwest part of the state. Additionally, they recommended the region develop renewable energy sources through short-term incentives (vs. subsidies) and through market-based innovation. They also gave their support to developing nuclear



energy sources, again through short-term incentives and market-based innovation. From legislators – both state and federal – they suggested that businesses and advocates for this energy policy must demand regulatory balance between environmental concerns, fossil fuel use and economic impact.

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

Connecting Southwest Indiana to the central part of the state through the I-69 extension has long been a goal of the region’s business leaders. Now that significant progress is being made, the future of that extension and other infrastructure projects may well hinge on implementing new fiscal systems to support them long-term. Changes in tax structures necessitate that the state

and region look at alternative ways to fund and support infrastructure projects. Forum participants recommended that among the first steps to developing and implementing new fiscal systems is creating a governing body to mold an infrastructure master plan and set regional priorities. They also recommended fully studying the best practices for generating income for projects, including user fees and privatization.

Key Driver #4: Dynamic & Creative Culture

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

The Southwest region of the state has lost a significant amount of its traditional manufacturing base in the last decade. Forum participants believe much of the future economic growth will necessarily come from entrepreneurial start-ups. To increase the number of start-up companies, they recommended strategies that will increase the number of start-up opportunities and increase the amount of technology that is transferred from government, existing corporations and/or universities. They encouraged the engagement of business leaders and entrepreneurs in investment/mentor relationships. Also recommended was increasing the number of education options relating to entrepreneurship. Building awareness of corporate partners such as Mead Johnson and government partners such as the Crane Naval Surface Warfare Center will help entrepreneurs identify needs and opportunities for product development.

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

Participants developed a number of objectives and strategies aimed at furthering a culture that values diversity and civility in the region. Their recommendations included: bringing diverse groups together in dialogue to develop a strategy for attracting and retaining talent, encouraging joint ownership of that process and its outcomes, and creating an overall environment where diverse groups want to stay and new businesses want to relocate. Addressing this quality of life issue will require the talent and energy of a broad spectrum of assets, including education, business and not-for-profit agencies. There are already strong relationships among these groups that can be leveraged to further advance this initiative.

