



REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGY: INDIANA FIRST REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Revised March 2024



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Indiana First Regional Development Plan would not have been possible without the many residents, business owners, and other stakeholders who generously devoted their time and ideas in the hopes of building a stronger and more vibrant community. We would also like to thank each committee member for their service and commitment to the Indiana First Region.

Indiana First Committee

Alvin Evans: Projects Coordinator, Perry County Port Authority

Ashley Willis: Executive Director, Pike County Economic Development Corporation

Chris Pfaff: CEO, Knox County Indiana Economic Development

Darrell Voelker: Executive Director, Harrison County Economic Development Corporation

Erin Emerson: President + CEO, Perry County Development Corporation

Heath Klein: Broker, Klein Real Estate

Holli Castetter: Councilor, Harrison County Council

Jefferson Lindsey: Chairman, Lincolnland Economic Development Corporation

John Mandabach: Business Development Executive, Bowman Family Holdings

Jon Craig: Business Development Manager, Midwestern Engineers and Pike County Council

Kathy Reinke: Executive Director, Spencer County Regional Chamber of Commerce

Katie King: Director, Ivy Tech Tell City Career + Technology Center

Melissa Arnold: Executive Director, Spencer County Visitors Bureau

Michael Sizemore: Director of Corporate Sales, ProMedia Group

Richard Chattin: President, Knox County Council and Real Estate Broker



Regional Organizations



Participating Counties

Perry County

Pike County

Knox County

Harrison County

Spencer County

Project Team

Rundell Ernstberger Associates



CWC Latitudes LLC



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Chapter One: Introducing Indiana First

Chapter Two: READI 1.0 Evaluation

Chapter Three: Review of Regional Data

Chapter Four: Regional Growth Strategies and Action Plan

Chapter Five: Outcomes, KPIs, And Metrics

Appendix: Focus Group Meeting Notes



Executive Summary



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Regional Interconnections

Regional Assets and Unique Qualities

Benchmark Communities

Regional Collaboration

Vision

Alignment with State's Economic Development Goals

Introduction

Harrison, Knox, Perry, Pike, and Spencer Counties in southwestern Indiana form the Indiana First Region. The Region created a regional development plan to compete for \$50 million from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation's Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI 1.0) in 2021. READI enhances Indiana communities' quality of life, place, and opportunity. The initiative gave the Indiana First Region \$15 million, which it leveraged to create roughly \$155 million in investment to build sixteen projects in five counties.

Regional Interconnections

The Indiana First Region identifies itself as the southern gateway and crossroads to the State of Indiana, referred to affectionately by its residents as the "Rural Piece of Paradise" between the metros of Bloomington, Evansville, and Louisville. The Region is rural, connected to one another by interstates and state roads. Due to the Region's rural character, the workforce travels between the participating counties for employment. Because four of the five counties border adjacent states, the Region attracts a workforce from Illinois, Kentucky, and Ohio. Beyond physical similarities and commonalities, the Region has worked together since 1987 through regional formations, including the Southwest Indiana Development Council (SWIDC) and Indiana Region 15 Planning Commission. Through these organizations, the Region has collaborated on planning, marketing, and physical improvement initiatives that have led to significant regional improvement in economic development, housing, and childcare access that extends beyond the READI initiative. The history and similarities the five counties of the Indiana First Region share are the reasons they formed a subset of their larger regional organizations to pursue READI. By doing so, they can have the greatest impact on their local communities.

Regional Assets & Unique Qualities

As the namesake alludes, the Indiana First Region has a deep and rich heritage. The Region is home to Indiana's first two state capitals, Vincennes and Corydon. Other notable destinations include the nation's first theme park, Holiday World & Splashin' Safari, which attracts more than one million visitors annually; Abraham Lincoln's boyhood home, the Hoosier National Forest; and the George Rogers Clark National Historic Park.

Local industry is a major contributor to the state and global economy. The Region is the number-one producer of produce in Indiana, number-two in the nation, and Indiana First is one of the largest iron-producing areas of the country supporting global industries. Three of the Region's five counties border Kentucky, one borders Illinois, and together, local employers draw significant out-of-state daytime workforce to Indiana daily. Combining the Region's assets of location, recreation, tourism, community charm, industry, and affordable living, Indiana First has begun to attract new residents from out-of-state and will build on those assets to gain additional population.

Benchmark Communities

The Indiana First Region chose the Central Western Slope Region in Colorado as its benchmark region. The Central Western Slope Region contains six counties and is comparable to the Indiana First Region in terms of its rural nature, population, community character, and connections through major state roads and highways. Like the Indiana First Region, the Central Western Slope has a strong tourism industry and an economy transitioning away from coal mining.

The Region has developed innovative strategies for transitioning the workforce from a coal economy through investment in accelerator programs, co-working spaces, and partnerships with educational institutions. Moreover, the Region addressed affordable housing through the support of pre-fabricated housing and skilled trades to support construction, as well as the construction of critical infrastructure to support development viability needs. These strategies directly relate to the Indiana First Region and help to inform the overall strategy.

Regional Collaboration

Over the past year, the Indiana First Region has significantly bolstered stakeholder outreach and engagement efforts. The experience gained from READI 1.0 highlighted the importance of a cohesive regional communication strategy to involve diverse stakeholders. Consequently, the Indiana First team has cultivated an inclusive environment, emphasizing collaboration and forming partnerships to leverage regional networks and resources.

A central committee—comprising representatives from SWIDC, Indiana 15 Regional Planning Commission, local economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, tourism bureaus, higher education institutions, local elected officials, and private business owners—spearheads implementing READI 1.0 projects and forming READI 2.0's growth strategy. This core leadership has conducted numerous local working group sessions to review project updates, assess potential advancements, integrate community feedback, and maintain transparent communication.

Focus groups, held across all five counties over a week, engaged nearly 80 distinct stakeholders, while an additional 36 meetings were held with local community organizations. These focus groups were pivotal in shaping and prioritizing the updated regional plan.

Moving forward, the Indiana First team remains committed to ongoing collaboration with the IEDC and regional stakeholders to carefully select, implement, and evaluate initiatives to foster strategic growth within the rural region.

Vision

Based on the experiences from READI 1.0 and the data received as a part of the READI 2.0 update, the regional committee developed a vision statement to guide the Indiana First Region through the next ten years:

Indiana First is a region of **tremendous assets**. Recreation abounds from our **rolling hills, meandering streams, navigable rivers, and forested lands** to our **theme parks and affordable and active communities** that provide a high quality of life and diverse housing for current and future residents. Our **well-connected infrastructure and robust private investment support diverse industries and innovative institutions** that ensure **sustainable living, next-generation careers, and an entrepreneurial spirit** that raises awareness of the State and attracts a multi-generational population to **live, work, and play in our region**.

From that vision, pillars were identified to highlight regional priorities, establish realistic and quantifiable goals, and develop actionable strategies to help the Region continue to economically grow and prosper. Indiana First's

five priority pillars include Development Viability, Business Development, Talent Attraction, Housing, and Quality of Life and Place. The goals and strategies for each pillar are as follows:

1. Development Viability

Goal: Remove barriers to, and encourage, private and public development through incentives to promote growth within the Indiana First Region. Strategies:

- Fund updates to, and establish, regional policies that promote strategic growth.
- Invest in critical infrastructure to support housing and business development that helps mitigate costs for private developers to make development more viable.
- Increase the availability of shovel-ready sites through strategic site acquisition and preparation.
- Develop pre-engineered building plans and construct speculative buildings for target industries.

2. Business Development

Goal: Support a regional economic development strategy that diversifies the economy, fosters innovation, entrepreneurship, and business attraction, and focuses on retention and expansion. Strategies:

- Identify and capitalize on diverse industry sectors and clusters that can be positioned to drive job growth in the future.
- Establish grant and loan funding, as well as robust incentive packages that promote existing business expansion and attract new businesses.
- Connect innovation networks that support and develop local entrepreneurs, attract investment from outside the Region, and promote business creation.

3. Talent Attraction

Goal: Future-proof the workforce, create opportunities for upskilling, strengthen connections with the Region's employers, and attract new workforce to meet desired and target industry needs. Strategies:

- Build upon, strengthen, and encourage new partnerships between secondary education, higher education, and local businesses and industries to expand skilled trade certifications

and higher education degree attainment.

- Support the existing coal mining workforce in transitioning to next-generation careers.
- Build upon existing, and establish new, incentives that encourage resident migration from other states.
- Focus on quality of life and place initiatives that attract a diversified workforce.

4. Housing

Goal: Address the lack of, and outdated, housing stock and provide housing options and incentives that encourage migration to the Region.

Strategies:

- Fund blight remediation and elimination.
- Create a regional land bank to create more opportunities for housing development.
- Utilize information from past housing studies and the success of recent housing construction to increase private development interest within the Region.
- Support the construction of a variety of housing types through financial assistance and the construction of necessary infrastructure.
- Strengthen and develop housing incentives to maintain the existing population and encourage migration to the Region from outside the State.

5. Quality of Life & Place

Goal: Provide amenities and services that support population growth and diversification within the Region.

Strategies:

- Fund public and private gathering spaces, recreational opportunities, and amenities that promote entertainment, leisure, and year-round tourism throughout the Region.
- Support businesses and institutions that enhance local culture and fill local quality of life and place needs.
- Enhance promotion and marketing of existing

amenities within the Region.

The Region identified five metrics to track the impact of investment in the pillars. They include population, housing units, private investment in disadvantaged communities, per capita income, and access to childcare. Projected outcomes upon successful plan implementation include:

- Population Growth: Reverse population growth, 1% population growth in the next five years, and an additional 2% growth in the next ten years. Regain the population the Region lost in the last ten years.
- Housing Units: Build an additional 532 new units in the next ten years, in addition to the 478 units projected in READI 1.0 that are currently under construction.
- Private Investment in Disadvantaged Communities: 8:1 return on investment of READI funds with 96.91% of funding earmarked for disadvantaged communities.
- Per Capita Income: 2% annual growth, increasing the 2020 average of \$51,956 to \$62,100 in ten years.
- Childcare: Increase childcare access by more than 100 seats in the next five years.

Alignment with State's Economic Development Goals

Based on the strategy, projects, and IEDC investments, the Indiana First Region is committing to 1,270+ additional residents, 650+ new jobs, 200+ new students, and over 95 new businesses in the next five years. The table below shows Indiana First's KPI benchmarks for five and ten years. The Indiana First Region has made significant progress since READI 1.0, leveraging its \$15 million grant tenfold to create almost \$155 million in total investment. The Region is more collaborative, effective, and focused than ever in its 40+ year

Key Performance Indicator	Current	5-Year Projection	10-Year Projection
Total Population	127,080	129,450	132,015
Total Employment	62,604	63,154	64,254
Per Capita Income	\$51,956	\$56,240	\$62,100
Educational Attainment	18.5%	20.5%	23%
Total New Housing Units	56,459	57,037	57,920
New Rental Housing Units	11,804	12,091	12,741
New Owner-Occupied Housing Units	38,357	38,823	38,925
Percentage of Affordable Housing Units	80%	80%	80%

history and is ready to create the best place in Indiana to live, work, and play. By leveraging general fund, TIF districts, abatement, remaining ARP funds, and local sources (Perry County Port Authority, IFA Residential Infrastructure Fund, etc.), the Region is READY to use the total \$75 million and commit to an 8:1 minimum return on investment. With these strategies in place, the Region aims to emerge as a leader in rural development and serve as a benchmark region for Indiana and the nation.

Chapter One: Introducing Indiana First

**Who is the Region and Why Are We
Together?**

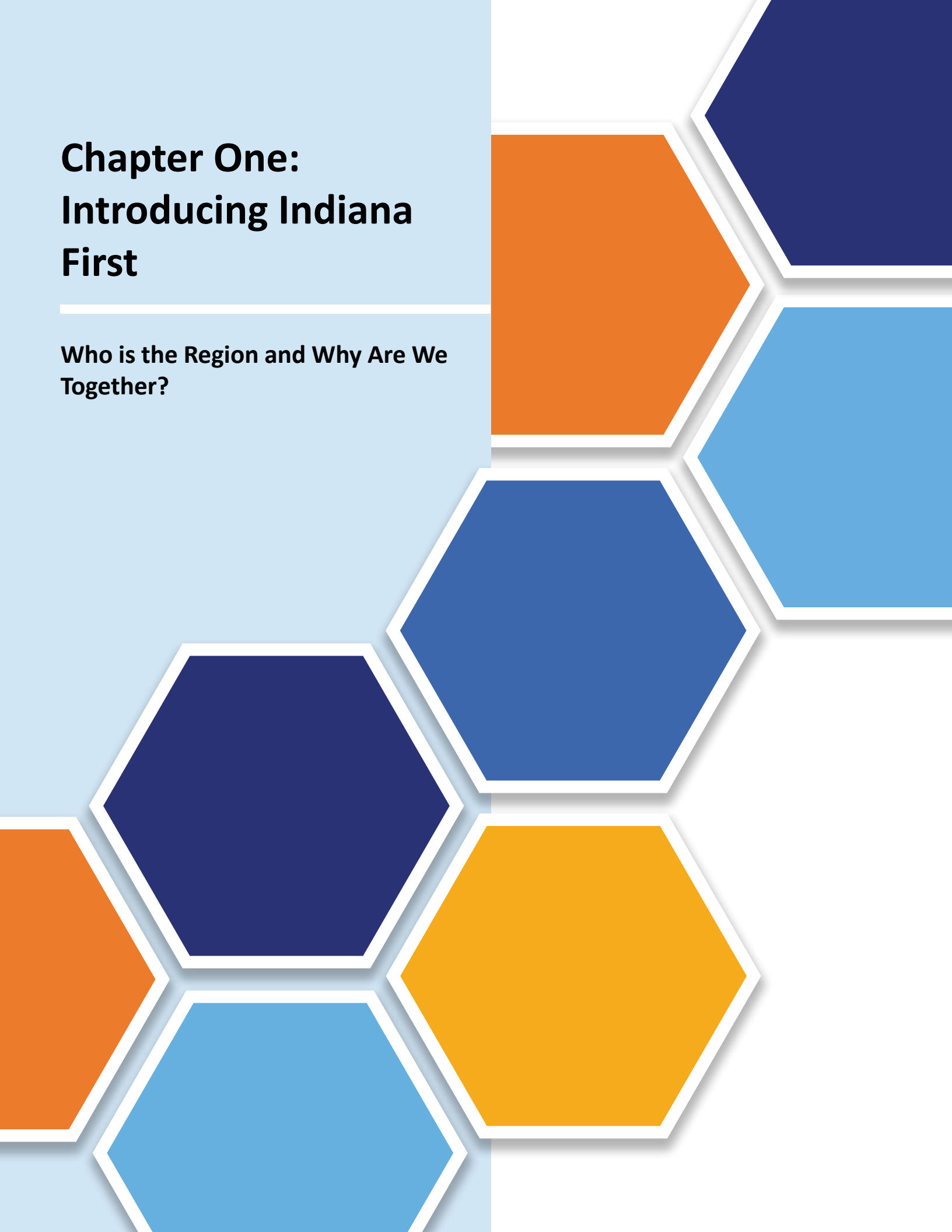


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Who & Why We Are

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING INDIANA FIRST

Introduction



The Indiana First Region is a subset of counties working collaboratively together since 1987 under the umbrella of the Southwest Indiana Development Council (SWIDC).

The Indiana First Region is a collaboration of **Harrison, Knox, Perry, Pike, and Spencer Counties** located in southwestern Indiana. During the Spring and Summer of 2021, the Region prepared a regional development plan to compete for up to \$50 million through the State of Indiana's Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI 1.0) administered through the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC). The READI program focused on improving quality of life, quality of place, and quality of opportunity within Indiana communities. Through the initiative, the Indiana First Region was awarded \$15 million, which was used to leverage nearly \$155 million in total investment to complete sixteen projects throughout the five participating counties.

In the summer of 2023, the IEDC announced the allocation of an additional \$500 million by the State of Indiana to be administered through a second round of READI, READI 2.0, with regions able to compete for up to \$75 million.

READI 2.0 continues a focus on quality of life, quality of place, and quality of opportunity and establishes key performance indicators, or KPIs, centered around:

- Population growth
- Per-capita income growth
- Increase in employment opportunities
- Educational attainment
- Number and affordability of housing units developed
- Increase in childcare capacity
- Increase in innovation activities
- Increase in private investment

To compete for the READI 2.0 funds, regions were required to update their 2021 strategies to craft a revised Regional Economic and Acceleration and Development Strategy and submit a standardized application. The following document outlines the updated regional strategy submitted to the IEDC in February 2024.

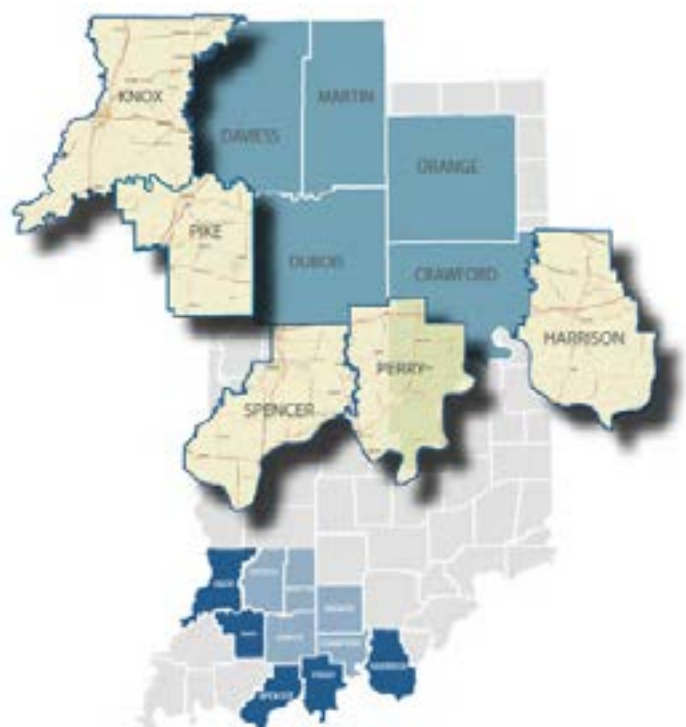
Who & Why We Are

As noted, the Indiana First Region is a collaboration of five rural, southwest Indiana counties (Harrison, Knox, Perry, Pike, & Spencer) that serves as the southern gateway and crossroads to the State of Indiana, referred to affectionately by its residents as the "Rural Piece of Paradise" between the metros of Bloomington, Evansville, and Louisville.

The participating counties have been working together for more than 40 years under the guidance of a larger ten-county regional partnership, the Southwest Indiana Development Council (SWIDC), to leverage their shared values and vision to grow the Region's communities by attracting new talent and retaining existing residents.

During READI 1.0, the Indiana First Region formed as a subset of the larger ten-county region after considering other regional alignments. The resultant formation created a region lacking full contiguity, which is unique to the State's regional formations. Viewed by some as a disadvantage during the first round of READI, the Region has moved beyond this perception to focus on their shared similarities and a common vision to improve their communities. This effective collaboration has demonstrated the Region's potential, resulted in a 10:1 return on the State's READI 1.0 investment, and created a region that serves as a rural role model for childcare, rural population growth, and developing talent pipelines for next-generation careers.

As the namesake alludes, the Indiana First Region has a



deep heritage and much to celebrate. The Region is home to the first two capitals, Vincennes and Corydon, the nation's first theme park, **Holiday World & Splashin' Safari**, originally known as Santa Claus Land, which attracts more than one million visitors to Indiana annually, **Abraham Lincoln's boyhood home**, and the **George Rogers Clark National Historic Park**.

The Region provides access to more of the **Hoosier National Forest** than any other region within the State. Tourism is further supported by the world's largest "in situ" Celtic Cross, the **Old Ben Aqua Park**, and the renowned **Azalea Path**, among others. Local industry is a major contributor to the State and global economy. The Region is the number-one producer of produce within the State and number-two in the nation. Indiana First is one of the country's largest iron-producing areas, supporting the automotive industry globally. Three of the Region's five counties border Kentucky, one borders Illinois, and together, the local industry draws a significant out-of-state workforce to Indiana daily. The Region has begun to capture some of these individuals as permanent residents and intends to capture more.

Holiday World & Splashin' Safari



Old Ben Aqua Park



Abraham Lincoln's Boyhood Home



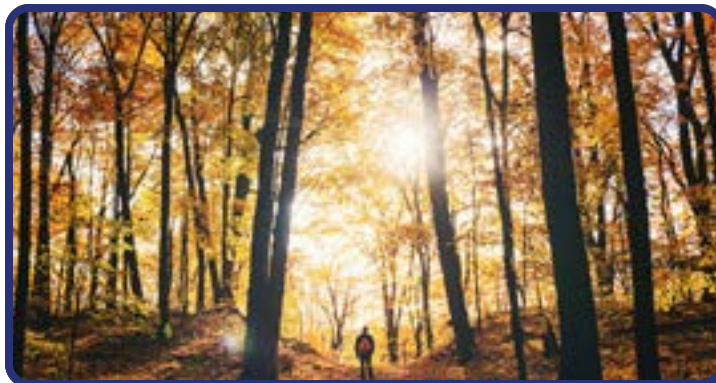
George Rogers Clark National Park



Azalea Path



Hoosier National Forest



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING INDIANA FIRST

Beyond its geographic proximity, the Region is united by shared strengths and challenges that center around seven categories: population, education, quality of life, childcare, housing, tourism, and industry.



Population

Communities such as Tell City are experiencing population growth. There has been a 3.4% increase in residents since 2010 and a reversal of the age pyramid. According to the 2010 Census, people over the age of 65 were the largest demographic of the Tell City population. In 2020, the largest demographic was children under five. Despite this encouraging trend, the Region as a whole continues to lose population to more urbanized areas.



Education

The Region is a role model for creating partnerships between local employers and higher education institutions, such as Ivy Tech and Vincennes University, that produce advanced certifications and Associate degrees; however, the Region struggles to produce more advanced degrees and attract white-collar jobs.



Quality of Life

The Region's rural character and community charm, coupled with a low cost of living, creates a quality of life that attracts many, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, the Region struggles to provide urban amenities, such as parks, restaurants, programmed events, and healthcare options that larger communities and metropolitan areas can afford.



Childcare

The Indiana First Region has been an innovator in childcare and has helped lobby the State for additional funding in rural communities across Indiana. However, local access is still inadequate.



Housing

Residential construction within the Region is at its highest level in decades, but a great need remains in terms of number and type.



Tourism

Unique to the Region are the numerous tourism offerings, which range from amusement parks, national forests, and historic sites to local historic destinations, supporting the State economy and local businesses. Unfortunately, most of these offerings are seasonal, and the Region needs to expand tourism to transition from a seasonal tourism industry to a year-round tourism destination.



Industry

Indiana First leads the State in energy production, agriculture, and wood and steel manufacturing. However, the Region's largest industry, coal mining, is declining, and the Region must transition to emerging opportunities.

In summary, the Region's physical and socioeconomic similarities transcend its lack of contiguous borders to establish an effective partnership bound by a shared vision and goals.

Lincoln Amphitheatre



Chapter Two: READI

1.0 Evaluation

**Assessment of the Region's
Participation in the First Phase of
READI**

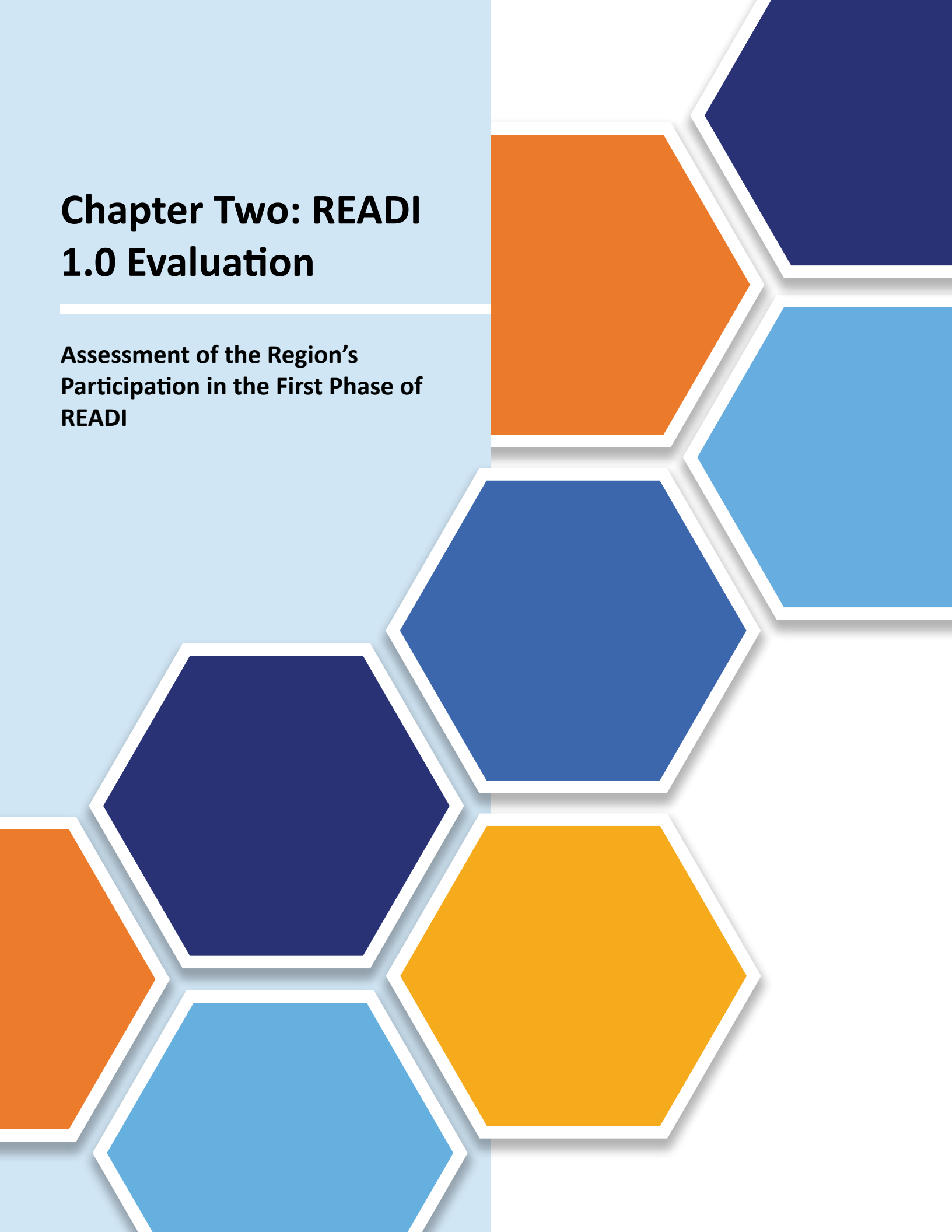


TABLE OF CONTENTS

READI 1.0 Evaluation

Identifying & Prioritizing Projects for Investment

Summary of the Region's READI 1.0 Investment

Lessons Learned

Organization Capacity

READI 1.0 Evaluation

READI 1.0 has been a catalyst for the Indiana First Region in many ways. The effort required to complete the regional development strategy has strengthened the relationship among the participating counties through more frequent meetings and enhanced communication, resulting in increased trust among leadership and ownership of regional successes. The Region has also become more effective at supporting each other in times of need. For example, when a participating county has lost critical staff, or is understaffed, other counties have stepped in to offer advice and provide assistance where needed.

Additionally, completion of the regional development strategy allowed the participating counties and communities to identify and focus attention on common strengths and challenges that ultimately led to a unified vision and strategy for addressing them. The infusion of State funding and resources enabled the Region to act on its strategies quickly in an unprecedented way that has garnered the public's attention. The public investment has increased private interest by making projects financially viable, highlighting the Region's opportunities, and demonstrating that a rural region, such as Indiana First, can attract new development, business, and residents.

Identifying & Prioritizing Projects for Investment

The Indiana First regional development strategy completed for READI 1.0 engaged stakeholders in multiple ways. At the onset of the project, a core project committee was assembled of representatives from each participating county. These representatives included members of the Southwest Indiana Development Council, Indiana Region 15, local economic development representatives, chamber of commerce representatives, members of local tourism bureaus, and more. This core committee met multiple times monthly to provide insight and offer direction on the regional development strategy. The core group also helped identify key anchor institutions, representatives, and local stakeholders who were engaged in a series of focus group meetings and throughout the planning process.

The input received from the core committee and focus group meetings led to a strategy centered around seven core areas. These core areas, or plan themes, included;

- Housing
- Innovation

- Downtown Revitalization
- Quality of Life
- Talent Attraction
- Education
- Economic Development
- Tourism

Upon development of the plan themes, a call for projects was advertised throughout the Region by local economic development organizations, community leaders, and social media.

Once submitted, a core team evaluated the projects to determine their alignment with the plan themes, their potential impact on the entire region, and the level of financial commitment to date. Submitters were required to provide a detailed breakdown of the funding structure, including the amount of local, private, state/federal, and other funding, as well as the specific request from READI.

Additionally, submissions were required to forecast their anticipated impact on the Region, identify their design, planning, and/or construction readiness status, and outline an anticipated timeline for project implementation.

Based on the evaluation of these criteria, the core committee short-listed, prioritized, and elevated projects for funding consideration and discussion with the IEDC. Upon regional award notification by the IEDC, the Indiana First Region met with state officials to review the project's short-list. As expected, some projects were not ultimately eligible for funding or in a position to meet the aggressive timeline required by the READI process.

Summary of the Region's READI 1.0 Investment

With the \$15 million award received from READI 1.0 funding, the Indiana First Region has obligated all funds to facilitate sixteen projects, including two quality of life, eight quality of place, and six quality of opportunity projects. The \$15 million READI award has created \$154.5 million in total investment, a 10:1 return on the State's award to the Region. Nine of the sixteen projects have supported housing through infrastructure extension to create **478 new dwelling units**, including 187 multi-family units. Units completed to date are occupied, and there is a waiting list for additional units. Furthermore, the investment in housing has attracted residents from outside of the Region and the State, who were previously commuting to the Region for work daily.

READI funds have been allocated towards education initiatives with Ivy Tech, Vincennes University, and Good Samaritan Hospital to remodel classroom spaces, invest in advanced robotics training technology, and expose students to cutting-edge simulation technology within the healthcare industry. These investments are projected to **impact more than 300 students** and generate more than 200 advanced certifications and associate degrees, adding to the local workforce and filling local employer needs. Advancements at the Tell City Ivy Tech location have the ability to double current enrollment.

Six employment projects have been supported through READI 1.0, which are projected to create more than **360 new jobs** and unlock **\$50 million in investment**. Projects include an infrastructure expansion within the Lanesville Business Park that attracted a new Amazon Distribution Center and created more than 300 new jobs. READI funding was also used to complete a Previously Mined Property Case Study for the Southwest Indiana Megasite. The case study confirmed the ability to redevelop 8,000 acres of previously mined property, including 1,500 acres of prime developable ground near interstate and rail access. The study identified target industries and infrastructure investment to support near-term redevelopment and capitalize on the opportunity of the property and the larger region. Additionally, the money allowed the extension of critical infrastructure to

a 340-acre, OCRA-certified site where private investors are creating a shell building, a necessary resource for attracting developers to the previously unavailable region.

Lessons Learned

The Indiana First Region has learned many lessons through READI 1.0 and its 40-year history of working together. First and foremost, approaching economic development from a regional perspective allows the participating counties to pool local resources and accomplish goals that would otherwise be unattainable. This includes not only monetary resources but also staffing and talent. Examples include the regional marketing strategy that Indiana First has developed to attract new residents and businesses. As individual counties, adequate resources are needed to fund and manage the initiative. However, as a collaboration, cost-sharing and staffing management becomes possible. That said, as a rural region, staffing remains difficult, even at a regional level, and the ability to add staff dedicated to special projects' management would further improve efficiency and effectiveness. Currently, county and regional leaders assume multiple roles, which dilutes their ability to focus on a narrow set of initiatives.

Secondly, as individual counties, many participants have developed best practices and innovative solutions for encouraging community development. As a region, these individual best practices can be shared and leveraged to create opportunities for the entire region and beyond. Examples of this within the Indiana First Region can be found in childcare access and population growth. Childcare access is a challenge that extends beyond the Indiana First Region. Still, through creative partnerships with local schools and providers and lobbying the State to increase childcare funding for rural communities, Perry County has increased childcare access, allowing some parents to return to the workforce. This has also attracted new residents to the county who needed more quality access in their previous communities.

Similarly, Perry County has been incentivizing migration to its region through incentives including moving stipends, free or reduced-cost housing, access to local attractions, and more. These incentives, coupled with improvements in housing and quality of life, have begun to reverse Tell City's population decline. These strategies are two examples initiated by individual counties that are being reviewed and scaled for adoption at the regional level.

Our Impact with READI 1.0



CHAPTER 2: READI 1.0 EVALUATION

These strategies speak directly to the importance of quality of life investments in attracting residents and talent to communities, especially rural regions such as Indiana First. It is often hard to quantify the benefits of quality of life amenities. Still, the examples noted above related to housing, childcare, and access to attractions, speak directly to improvements in quality of life that are helping to attract people to live, work, and play within the Indiana First Region. A continued focus on amenities such as parks, trails, downtowns, healthcare, and more will continue to increase the Region's attractiveness to prospective residents, talent, and tourists. That said, local funding is limited when significant investment must be allocated towards infrastructure to support the amenities, which is why programs such as READI are critical to the Region's success. As successes build and the tax base increases, continued public investment will become easier to attain, making the Indiana First Region more self-sufficient in the long term.

The benefits of regional collaboration have encouraged the Indiana First Region to look beyond its region and participating counties to the innovative ideas and strategies occurring in other parts of the State and nation as well. Through research, the Region has identified new community development ideas and affirm, or sometimes reconsider, existing and proposed strategies. An example of this relates to communities transitioning away from the coal industry. By reviewing other regions across the nation dealing with the same issue, the Indiana First Region identified strategies for attracting new business and encouraging other industry growth through accelerator programs, co-working spaces, shared equipment, and the creation of small business centers and loans. Additional research, site visits, and developing professional networks beyond the Indiana First Region should be encouraged to generate inspiration and idea sharing.

Many of the lessons learned stem directly from increased collaboration, which has improved communication and coordination and tightened focus on common strategies for regional development. This has created a more synchronized effort, which has allowed the Indiana First Region to produce more results and be more effective than it was in the past. Continuing the increased collaboration will be critical to ensuring future success.

Organizational Capacity

Working together is not new for Indiana First. The five counties have worked together for over forty years as part of the Southwest Indiana Development

Council (SWIDC). SWIDC was created as a gateway to economic development in Southwest Indiana. SWIDC comprises ten counties with miles of land available for development. Their location puts them within reach of 75% of the nation's population and benefits from the ease of interconnecting transportation options. The I-69 Corridor extension and the existing I-64 corridor have the SWIDC region ready for transformation. With two interstates, rail lines, airports, two navigable rivers, and an international port, businesses' products and supplies can get where they need to go quickly.

SWIDC is a trusted regional organization by elected and appointed officials, who have supported it for the last 40 years. There has been numerous partnerships with anchor institutions and other regional organizations over this 40-year period. The organization has an appointed board with elected leadership that guides the strategic, financial, and regional economic development initiatives of southwest Indiana.

The Indiana First Region assembled after considering other regional alignments. The Indiana First Region was organized as a subset of SWIDC since the organizational framework already existed. SWIDC served as the financial entity for the READI 1.0 money and will continue in that role for READI 2.0.

As part of SWIDC, many local economic development officials do not have staff, so they manage multiple economic development projects for their organizations. This means they also manage these projects while accomplishing their full-time job. So, they have relied on contracts with other professional staff and organizations to assist with implementation.

Indiana First partnered with the Indiana 15 Regional Planning Commission (IN15RPC) to serve as the project manager and grant administrator for the implementation of READI projects. Three of the counties in Indiana First have membership in the IN15RPC, and SWIDC has partnered with them before on other projects. IN15RPC has a staff of more than seven certified grant administrators and provides specialized staffing in revolving loan fund application, mapping, municipal codification, infrastructure development, and community and economic development planning. Currently, they fill the staffing gaps for SWIDC.

Given the ever-expanding role of SWIDC, the organization is assessing whether it should bring on full-time staff. The Region will continue to evolve to take advantage of all its opportunities.

SWIDC has been a development council since January 12, 1987, and it is funded through fees paid for by each of the participating counties. SWIDC continues to evaluate the advantages of becoming a Regional Development Authority. The Indiana First Region, on its own, cannot become a Regional Development Authority (RDA) because the counties are not contiguous.

The Indiana First Region will continue to operate as a subset of SWIDC. The five counties involved in the Indiana First Region pay increased dues to SWIDC to help support the administrative and functional costs of the Indiana First Region. The organization has the capacity and ability to continue with this relationship indefinitely.

The Indiana First Region is committed to continuing its strong engagement of its elected officials, community leaders, school systems, health care providers, community foundations, economic development corporations, utilities, technology centers, business incubators, large landholders, business owners and managers, major industries, home builders, and tourist attractions among others who helped update Indiana First's economic development plan for READI 2.0. These organizations are financially committed and supportive of the Region's strategy.

Chapter Three: Review of Regional Data

Why Data Matters

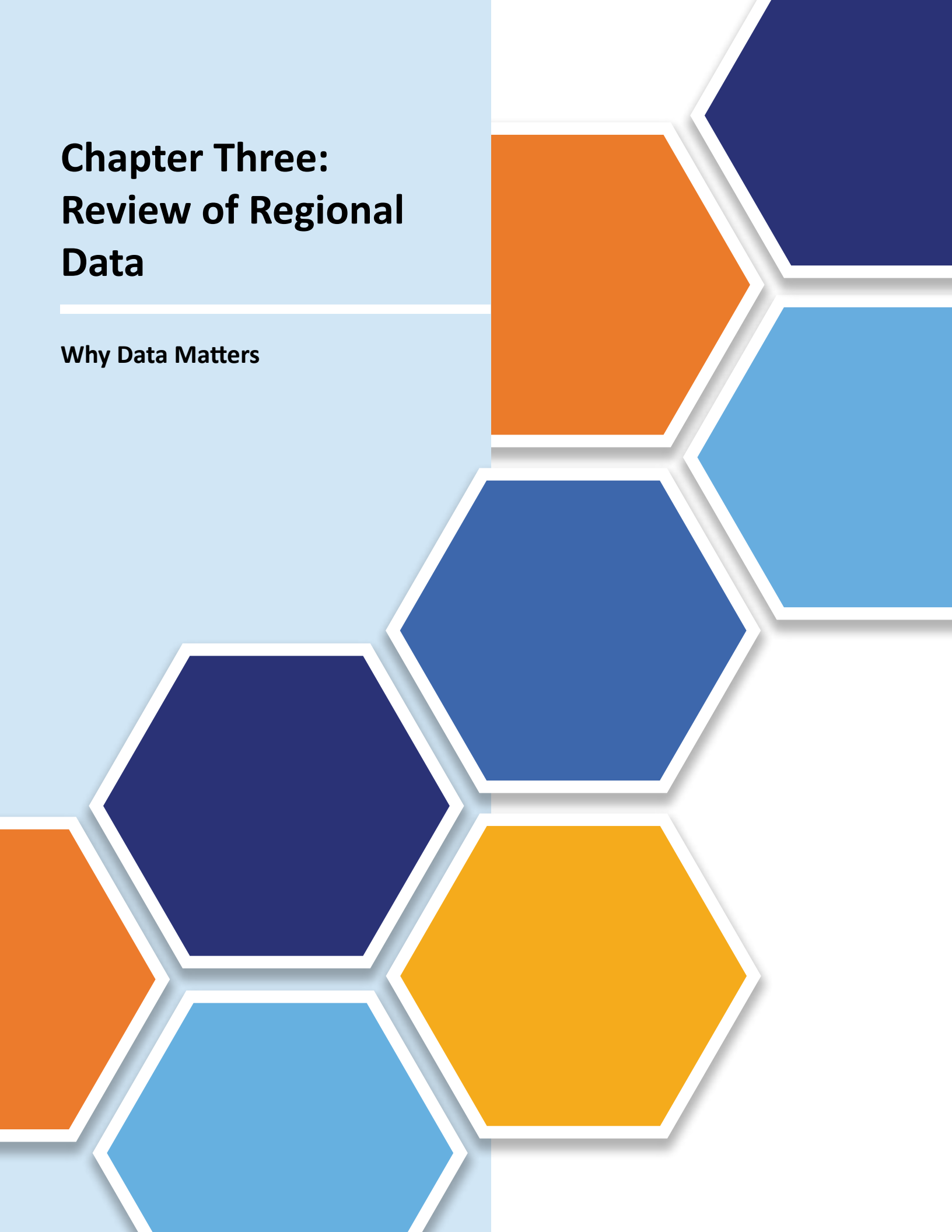


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why Data Matters

Key Performance Indicators

The State of Childcare

Innovation

Economic Overview

Inflow-Outflow Analysis

Real Estate Development Context

Benchmark Comparison

Regionals Needs Assessment

Development Strategies

Stakeholder Engagement

Why Data Matters

Data collection and analysis is a significant step in identifying the Indiana First Region’s socioeconomic and development trends. These trends give the Region insight into its strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and barriers that local leaders should address to protect and pursue long-term improvements to public health, safety, and general welfare.

Several metrics are used to assess the Region, including housing, childcare, education, economic development, population characteristics, and more. As a baseline for measuring regional performance, the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) has identified eight (8) “key performance indicators” (KPIs):

- Total population,
- Total employment,
- Per capita income,
- Population with a bachelor’s degree,
- Total housing units,
- Total rental housing units,
- Total owner-occupied housing units, and
- The number of new business start-ups.

These KPIs are required to be provided as part of the Indiana First Region’s application for READI 2.0 funding.

Key Performance Indicators



Total Population

Regional Population: 127,080

As of 2022, the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) estimates that Indiana First has a total population of 127,080 people – a decrease of 3,859 since the 2010 Decennial Census. Hence, the Region has lost about 2.9% of its population compared with the State, which grew by 4.7%.

While the Region has faced an overall population decline, there have been notable exceptions, such as Tell City, which has experienced a population increase of 3.4% since 2010. Remarkably, Tell City has also seen a reversal in its age

pyramid, with the under age 5 demographic becoming the largest. This shift underscores the evolving demographics within specific communities in the Region. Moreover, emigration from the Region has primarily seen residents relocating to metropolitan areas, particularly Indianapolis, Evansville, Bloomington, and Louisville, Kentucky. Despite pockets of population growth, the overarching challenge for Indiana First remains stabilizing regional population decline.



Total Employment

Regional Employment: 62,604

Total employment includes the number of residents in the labor force and employed. This metric does not include commuters coming into the Indiana First Region, nor does it include residents who are in the labor force but are unemployed. Individuals may have multiple jobs in the Region, though most only have one. According to ACS 5-year estimates, 62,604 residents in the Region are employed, down from 65,120 employed residents in 2010. Aligned with a regional decline in the total population, residents are likely moving closer to metropolitan areas for higher-paying jobs and a greater variety of amenities and services.

Population growth and employment are highly interconnected. The US Census Bureau has identified a job as one of the top three reasons why people move.



Per Capita Income

Regional Per Capita Income: \$51,956

Per capita income (PCI) describes the average income earned by an area’s population. Unlike total employment, this metric only captures income-earning residents in the Region, including outside commuters, but excludes residents working outside the Region. It is calculated by dividing the total income earned by the total population. Data for the year 2022 for total population comes from the US Census Bureau, while total income data originates from the US Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). As of 2022, Indiana First has a PCI of \$51,956, with the total income earned amounting to \$6.6 billion. The county with the highest PCI in the Region is Harrison County (\$54,430), the



Population with a Bachelor's Degree

Pop. with Bachelor's Degree: 16,409 (18.5%)

closest county to a major metropolitan area (Louisville, KY), while Perry County has the lowest PCI of \$44,243.

Estimates from the ACS for 2022 show that 18.5% of Indiana First residents aged 25 years and over have a bachelor's degree or higher educational attainment (e.g., a master's degree). Comparatively, estimates for the State are at 28.2%. While the Region does fall behind the State in terms of college-educated residents, it's important to note the significant contributions of vocational skills within Indiana First. Many residents, such as electricians and tradespeople, possess valuable vocational skills, which traditional educational attainment metrics may not capture. In fact, 27,713 residents in Indiana First have pursued vocational education or have attained some college education without a degree, accounting for 31.3% of residents aged 25 years

Many residents have vocational skills, such as being an electrician, instead of traditional college degrees.

and over, compared to 28.7% across the State.

Interestingly, recent data highlights a notable trend in earnings within the Region. There has been a strong increase

ACS definition for Associate's degree: "people whose highest degree is an associate's degree, which generally requires 2 years of college level work and is either in an occupational program that prepares them for a specific occupation, or an academic program primarily in the arts and sciences."

Source: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation.html>

in earnings for workers without advanced degrees, such as those with vocational training or associate's degrees. This underscores the significance of vocational trades and their valuable contribution to the Region's economy. The Region's emphasis on vocational trades addresses the



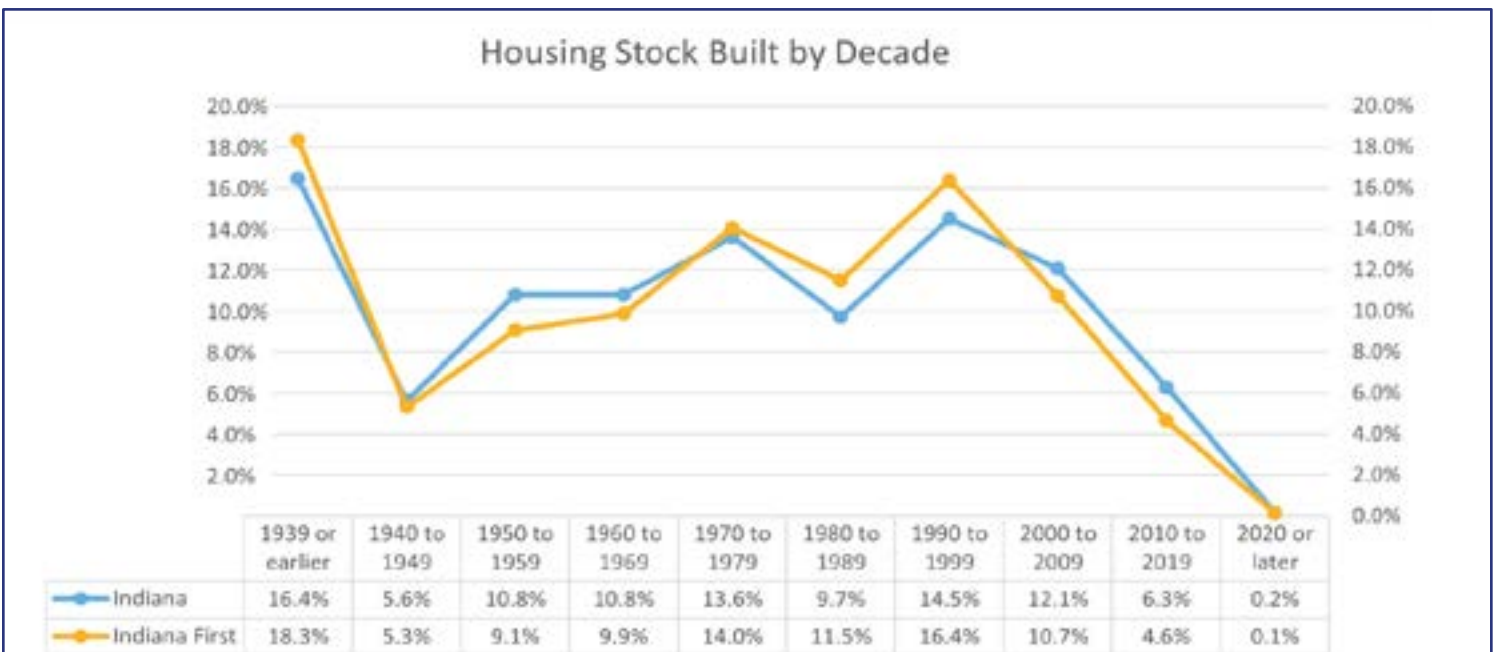
Total Housing Units (USCB)

Regional Housing Units: 56,459

immediate labor market needs and supports economic growth and resilience.

As of 2022, there are 56,459 housing units in the Region, both occupied and vacant, according to the ACS. This figure represents a negligible change from the 56,466 units reported in 2010. Notably, the Indiana First Region has experienced its slowest three decades of housing construction since the 1960s, as shown in Figure 1: Housing Stock Built by Decade. However, with READI 1.0, 478 dwelling units were developed in the Region, including

Figure 1: Housing Stock Built by Decade





Total Owned Housing Units

Regional Owner Occupied Units: 38,357

187 multi-family units. While these additions represent a positive step forward, there is still a pressing need to ramp up housing construction to meet the growing demand and address housing shortages in the Region.

As a result of more renter-occupied units since 2010, the Region's homeownership rate has decreased from 78.9% to 76.5% in 2022, according to data from the ACS. In total, there are 38,357 owner-occupied units, down from 39,660 units in 2010. Despite a decrease in owner-occupied units, the Region still surpasses the statewide homeownership rate of 70.1%, which was also true in 2010 (71.5%). Greater

The Indiana First Region has experienced its slowest three decades of housing construction since the 1960s.



Total Rental Housing Units

Regional Rental Units: 11,804

housing affordability and a generally low cost of living in the Region compared to other areas in the State and bordering counties in Illinois and Kentucky are to thank for this.

Renter-occupied housing units comprise 23.5% of the Region's occupied housing stock, compared with 29.9% across Indiana. In total, there are 11,804 renter-occupied units, typically found within the larger towns and cities of



New Business Start-Ups

New Regional Start-Ups: 162

the Region, such as Vincennes, Tell City, or Santa Claus. This metric is up by 2.4 percentage points from 2010 for the Region (10,595 renter-occupied units), almost two times quicker than the statewide increase of 1.4%.

The number of business start-ups is just one of many ways to measure innovation. Still, it is an important indicator of how willing and/or viable it is for people to start a business in the Region. According to the US Census Bureau's Business Dynamics Statistics (BDS), 162 new businesses sprouted up across the Indiana First Region in 2021. This number equates to a ratio of one new business for every

785 people, compared to 566 people at the State-level, which means there are relatively fewer start-ups in the Region than in the State. In 2010, this ratio was one new business for every 885 people in the Region, meaning the Region has become more innovative in the past ten years.

The State of Childcare

Childcare plays a role in many significant aspects of public health, welfare, and the economy. Limited childcare facilities, capacities, and capabilities affect children's education and health and impact their parents. For example, a parent's ability to further their own education for a job promotion or work during typical job hours can greatly limit a family's options and chances to pursue a better financial future. This assessment of childcare in the Indiana First Region will be primarily based on the following:

1. Physical access to facilities,
2. The capacity of facilities, and
3. A comprehensive report on childcare in southwestern Indiana counties completed in 2023.

These metrics help local leaders identify gaps in coverage, financing, level and quality of childcare services, and other challenges to providing improved care and a greater variety of options for families.

Facility Location and Access

Most children under five years of age live in or near the major cities of the Indiana First Region. This can be seen in Figure 3, where the dark blue areas represent the largest concentrations of children in the Region using census tract data from the 2021 ACS. Most of the urban areas in the Region have better access to childcare than rural areas. There are several stretches of inadequate childcare access (more than a 20-minute drive) southwest of Petersburg in Pike County and a majority of Perry County, where Tell City is located in Figure 2. A major focus for regional leaders regarding facility locations should be Tell City and southwest of Corydon in Harrison County, where many children under five years old, and therefore many families too, are living more than 20 minutes away by car from a childcare facility.

Figure 2: Childcare Facilities 20-Minute Drivetime Map

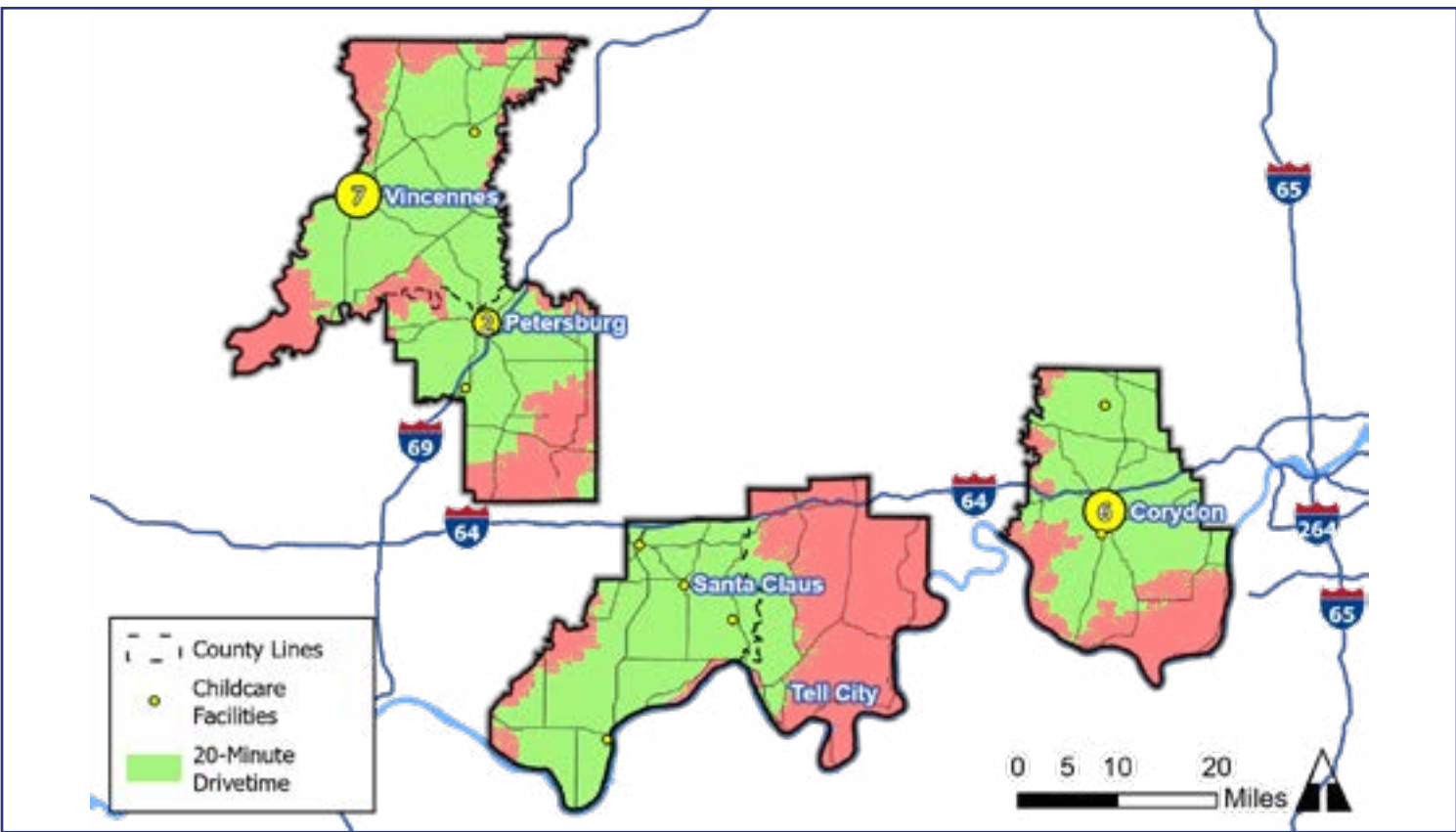
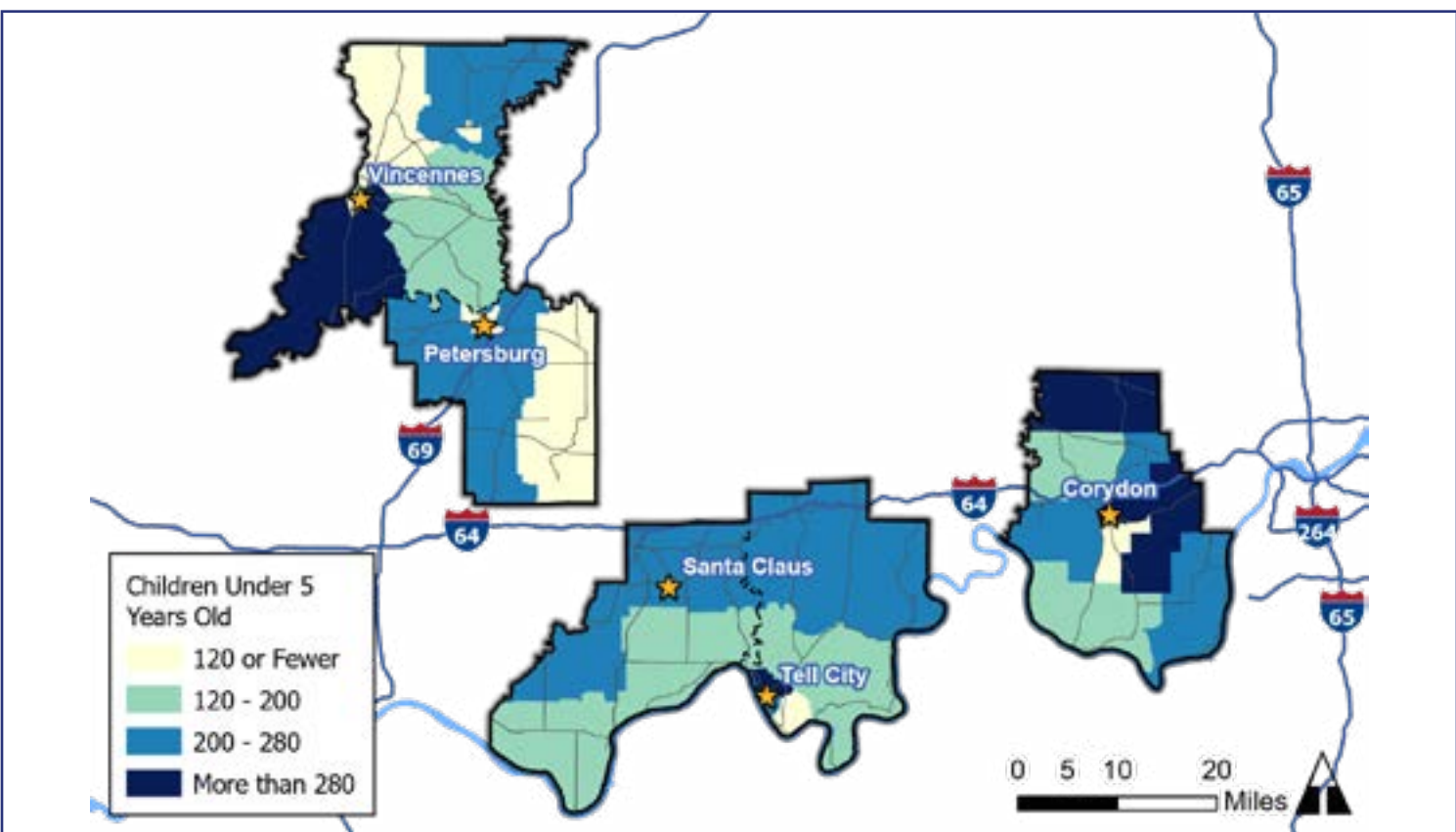


Figure 3: Child Population by Census Tract (2021 ACS 5-YR)



CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF REGIONAL DATA

Figure 4: Care Capacity of the Indiana First Region

Area	Children Under 5	Childcare Facilities	Children per Facility
Harrison County	2,134	15	142
Knox County	1,888	22	86
Perry County	1,069	3	356
Pike County	672	5	134
Spencer County	1,037	8	130
Indiana First Region	6,800	56	121
<i>Data Source</i>	<i>2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates</i>	<i>Southern Indiana Gateway Childcare Analysis</i>	<i>Calculated by dividing "Children Under 5" by "Childcare Facilities"</i>

Care Capacity

The capacity of childcare facilities greatly affects their availability to working parents, and possibly prices too, as more demand for a small supply of childcare services pushes prices upwards. According to a report commissioned by Southern Indiana Gateway in 2023, "Southern Indiana Gateway Child Care Analysis," and additional data collection using the same data sources as the report, there are a total of 87 childcare facilities in the Region. Knox County has the most facilities (22), with about 86 children under five years old in every facility. Data for the other four counties can be seen in the table above. Pike County has relatively more capacity than the rest of the Region, while Harrison and Perry Counties have the lowest relative capacities. These data points support previous findings in the "Facility Location and Access" section, which point towards Perry County (Tell City) as requiring the most investment in childcare facilities to ensure regional prosperity.

Regional Childcare Study

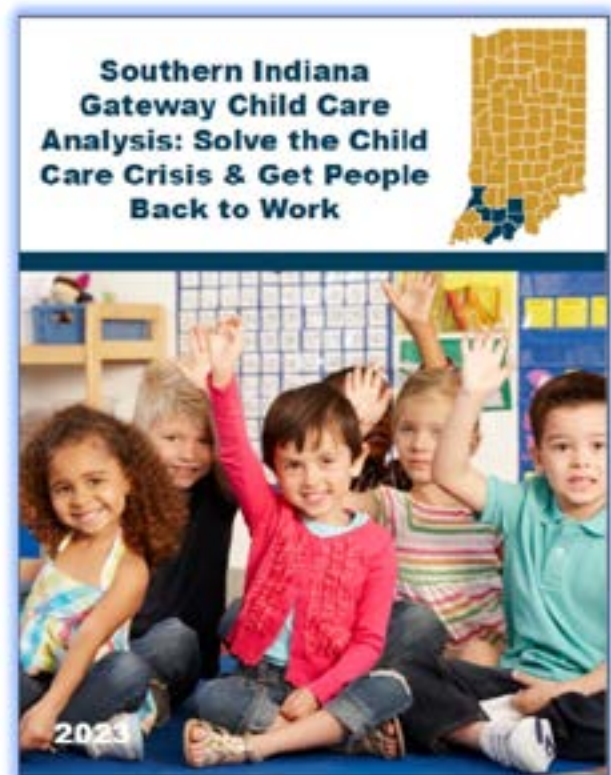
In 2023, leaders of Southern Indiana Gateway counties (SIG) commissioned a report, "Southern Indiana Gateway Child Care Analysis: Solve the Child Care Crisis & Get People Back to Work," on the state of childcare in southwestern parts of Indiana. While this report does not include Harrison County, its findings still align with the current conditions in the county. The report focused on how a lack of access and/or availability of childcare services impacts economic development, the workforce, and recommendations to improve service in the area.

Working families in SIG counties continue to struggle with balancing their job(s) and taking care of their children. The main challenges in attaining childcare for these families include inaccessible locations and unaffordable services.

One startling statistic is that "Indiana loses \$1.1 billion yearly due to the lack of childcare and childcare-related absenteeism and turnover" of working parents. Due to a lack of childcare, SIG counties are affected by:

- Parents having difficulty finding quality childcare,
- Businesses struggling to remain open due to workforce shortages,
- Local economies losing millions due to the inability to support working families and their children adequately.

Although there have been several improvements to



childcare services in the Region, further improvements are undermined by competition for qualified staff, a lack of childcare-related benefits at the jobs of working parents, and underfunded childcare facilities and services. The report recommends several solutions to address these challenges:

- 1. Re-engage the workforce with family-first workforce practices
- 2. Explore shared services and other business supports for childcare programs
- 3. Expand childcare access to support more young children.

All in all, a lack of childcare affects not only working parents but also individual employers by reducing the availability and reliability of the workforce in the Region. Regional investments in childcare have significant long-term benefits to the regional economy, including child health, reduced parental stress, a more reliable workforce, and improved educational opportunities for children. For regional prosperity, local governments, businesses, and childcare providers should work together to create more opportunities, funding, and availability of childcare services to boost economic growth and ultimately create a more resilient economy.

Innovation

This section discusses innovative activities within the Indiana First Region. The Innovation section encapsulates the dynamic initiatives, institutions, and industries pivotal to driving economic growth, fostering creativity, and attracting and retaining talent in the Indiana First Region. These metrics underline the critical role of innovation in propelling the Region’s competitive edge and ensuring sustained prosperity.

Several innovation centers in the Indiana First Region

play a pivotal role in fostering entrepreneurial growth and workforce development. The Pantheon Theatre in Vincennes, Knox County, provides crucial co-working space, resources, and workshops tailored to entrepreneurs. Similarly, the Elmer Buchta Technology Center offers valuable support for workforce development, start-up businesses, and co-working spaces. Moreover, institutions like Vincennes University, with its main campus in Vincennes and a satellite campus in Jasper, significantly contribute to innovation and bolster the Region’s workforce.

Several innovation centers in the Indiana First Region play a pivotal role in fostering entrepreneurial growth and workforce development. The Pantheon Theatre in Vincennes, Knox County, provides crucial co-working space, resources, and workshops tailored to entrepreneurs. Similarly, the Elmer Buchta Technology Center offers valuable support for workforce development, start-up businesses, and co-working spaces. Moreover, institutions like Vincennes University, with its main campus in Vincennes and a satellite campus in Jasper, significantly contribute to innovation and bolster the Region’s workforce.

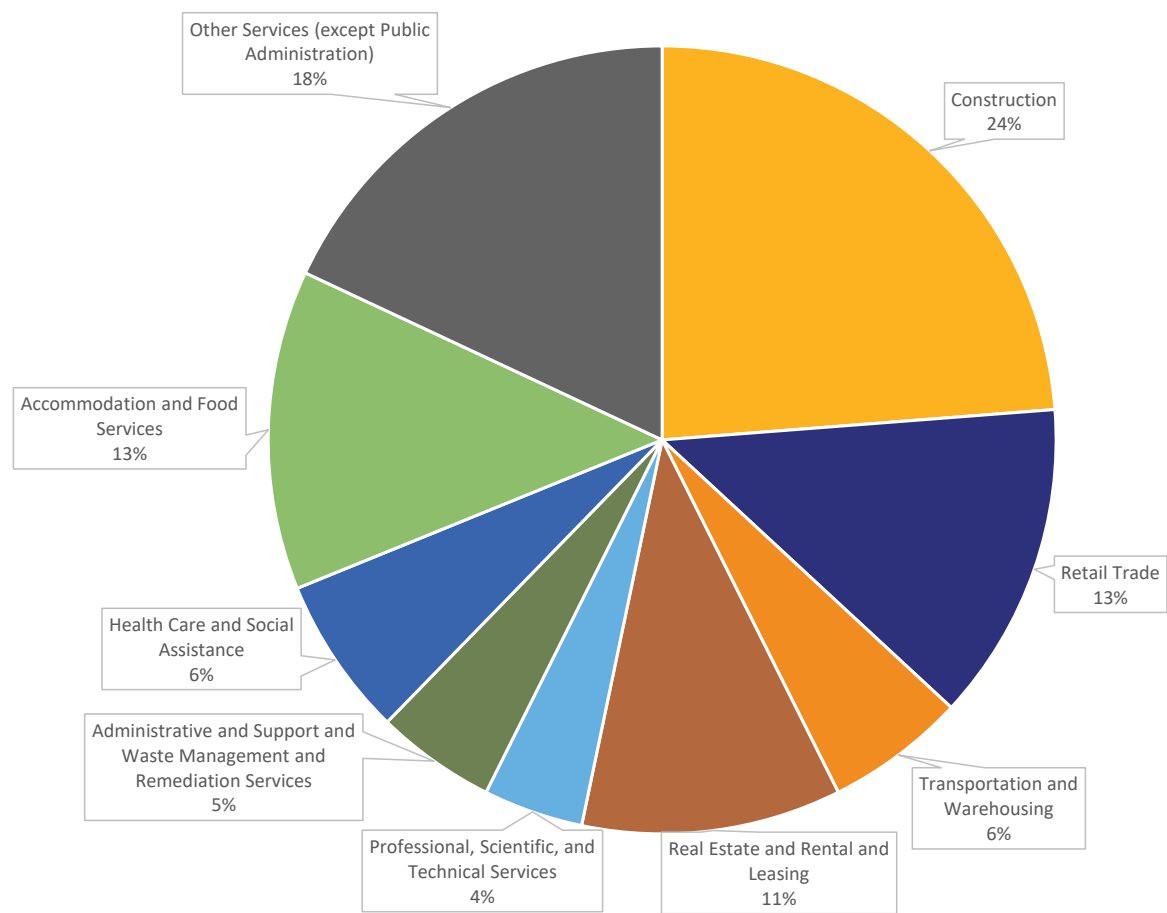
An analysis of completion rates from the Indiana Commission for Higher Education’s Indiana College Completion Report highlights the pivotal role of educational institutions in driving innovation. Vincennes University exhibits notably higher two-year completion rates compared to both Ivy Tech campuses and statewide averages. This suggests a strong commitment to educational attainment and skill development, which are crucial factors in cultivating an innovative workforce. The university’s emphasis on practical, applied learning through initiatives like the Indiana Center for Applied Technology and the College of Technology further solidifies its role as a cornerstone of innovation in the Region. By nurturing a highly skilled and educated workforce, these institutions lay the foundation for sustained innovation and economic growth in the Indiana First Region.

Figure 5: College Completion Rate Table

Completion Rate Overview: Two-Year Campuses On-Time Completion							
Students starting in:	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	5-Year Change
All Ivy Tech Campuses	9.7%	10.8%	13.5%	14.2%	15.9%	17.0%	+7.3
Vincennes University	23.9%	28.5%	26.4%	33.0%	32.1%	39.7%	+15.7
Two-Year Statewide	12.7%	13.9%	15.7%	17.3%	18.6%	21.3%	+8.7
Four-Year Campuses							
Purdue University Polytechnic	37.0%	36.4%	43.8%	43.9%	34.6%	38.0%	+0.9
Four-Year Statewide	45.4%	48.4%	48.4%	50.1%	50.8%	50.8%	+5.5

Source: Indiana Commission for Higher Education - Indiana College Completion Report (2023)

Figure 6: Establishment Births by Industry



Business Start-Ups by Industry

The breakdown of new business start-ups by industry in the Indiana First Region reveals a diversifying economy. This diversification is crucial, especially considering the Region’s historical overreliance on resource-extraction industries like coal mining. Construction, retail trade, accommodation and food services, and real estate and rental and leasing emerge as significant contributors, reflecting the Region’s focus on infrastructure development, consumer services, and hospitality. Moreover, the presence of a significant number of new businesses in transportation and warehousing underscores the Region’s strategic location and logistics infrastructure, offering opportunities for economic expansion and connectivity. However, challenges persist in sectors such as healthcare and social assistance, where further investment is necessary for growth and addressing regional health disparities.

Additionally, initiatives supporting entrepreneurship and industry diversification are crucial for fostering resilience against economic shocks and enhancing long-term prosperity. Collaboration between public and private stakeholders, along with targeted investment in key sectors, can help realize the Region’s potential as a hub for innovation and sustainable development while addressing wage competitiveness and improving the quality of employment opportunities for inclusive growth.

Economic Overview

Occupational Mix

Occupational data shows the role that residents have in their job(s). Typically, occupations are separated in terms of knowledge, skillsets, and abilities required to perform tasks at their job. The Indiana First Region is relatively like the State in terms of its occupational mix; however, it stands out in many of the more industrial-based jobs and vocational trades. According to ACS estimates from 2022, the Indiana First Region has notably more people whose occupation deals with production, installation, maintenance, and repair; construction and extraction; building and grounds cleaning and maintenance; transportation; and material moving. Conversely, the Region has fewer people whose occupations typically require a 4-year college degree, such as healthcare practitioners and technical; computer, engineering, and science; and management, business, and finance.

Workforce Education

Data on jobs by worker educational attainment provides insight into the educational composition of the workforce and its implications for the Region's economic environment. Analysis of the 2021 and 2010 data offers key insights into the evolution of educational attainment levels within the workforce over the past decade.

The higher percentage of jobs held by workers with a high school diploma or equivalent, as well as those with some college education or an associate degree, in the Indiana First Region compared to the State of Indiana reflects the Region's higher concentration of industries and sectors that prioritize practical skills and vocational training, such as mining, construction, and manufacturing. Additionally, the higher rates of workers with some college education may indicate the emphasis on post-secondary education and training programs within the Region that cater to the specific needs of the local employers and industries.

The notable lower rates of workers with a bachelor's degree or higher in the Indiana First Region compared to the State highlights potential disparities in access to higher education and opportunities for advanced skill development. Fostering pathways for educational advancement and career growth is crucial for enhancing the Region's competitiveness, attracting high-skilled talent, and diversifying its economic base.

Figure 7: Employment by Occupation

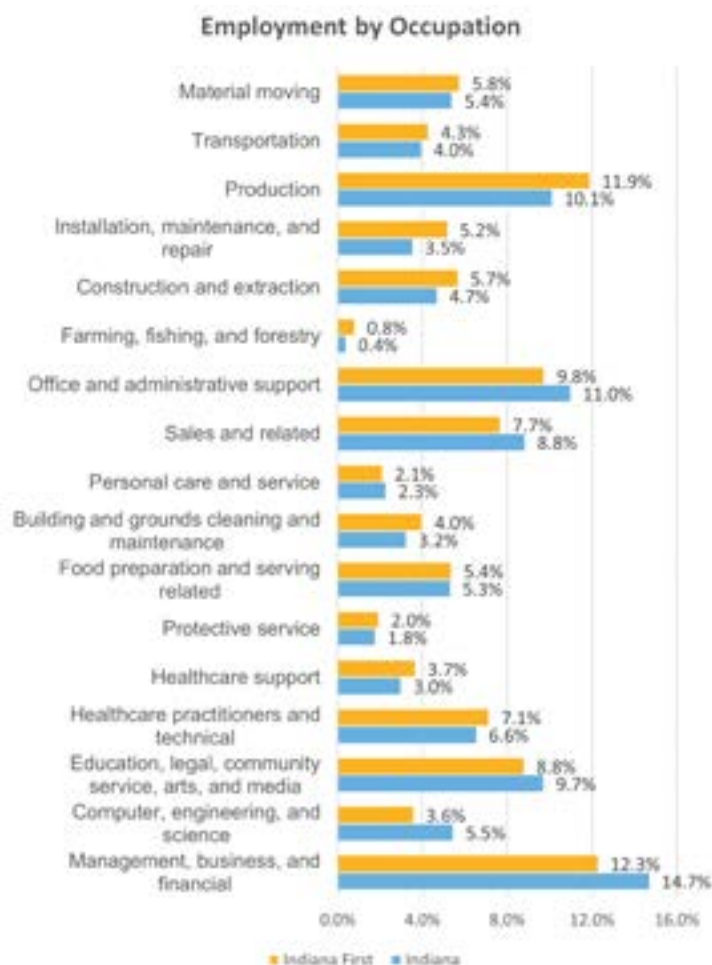
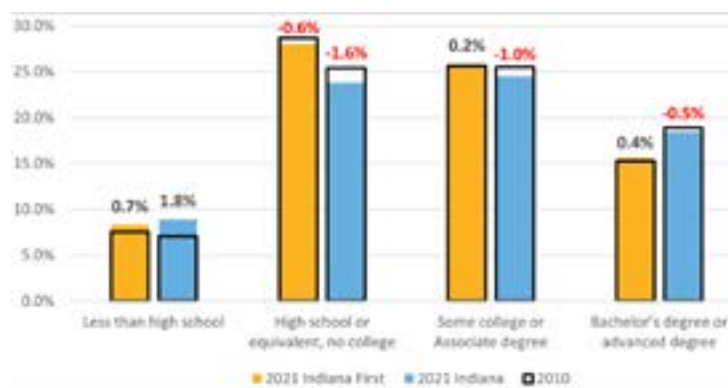


Figure 8: Workforce by Educational Attainment Pop 25+ (Labels show change between 2010 and 2021)



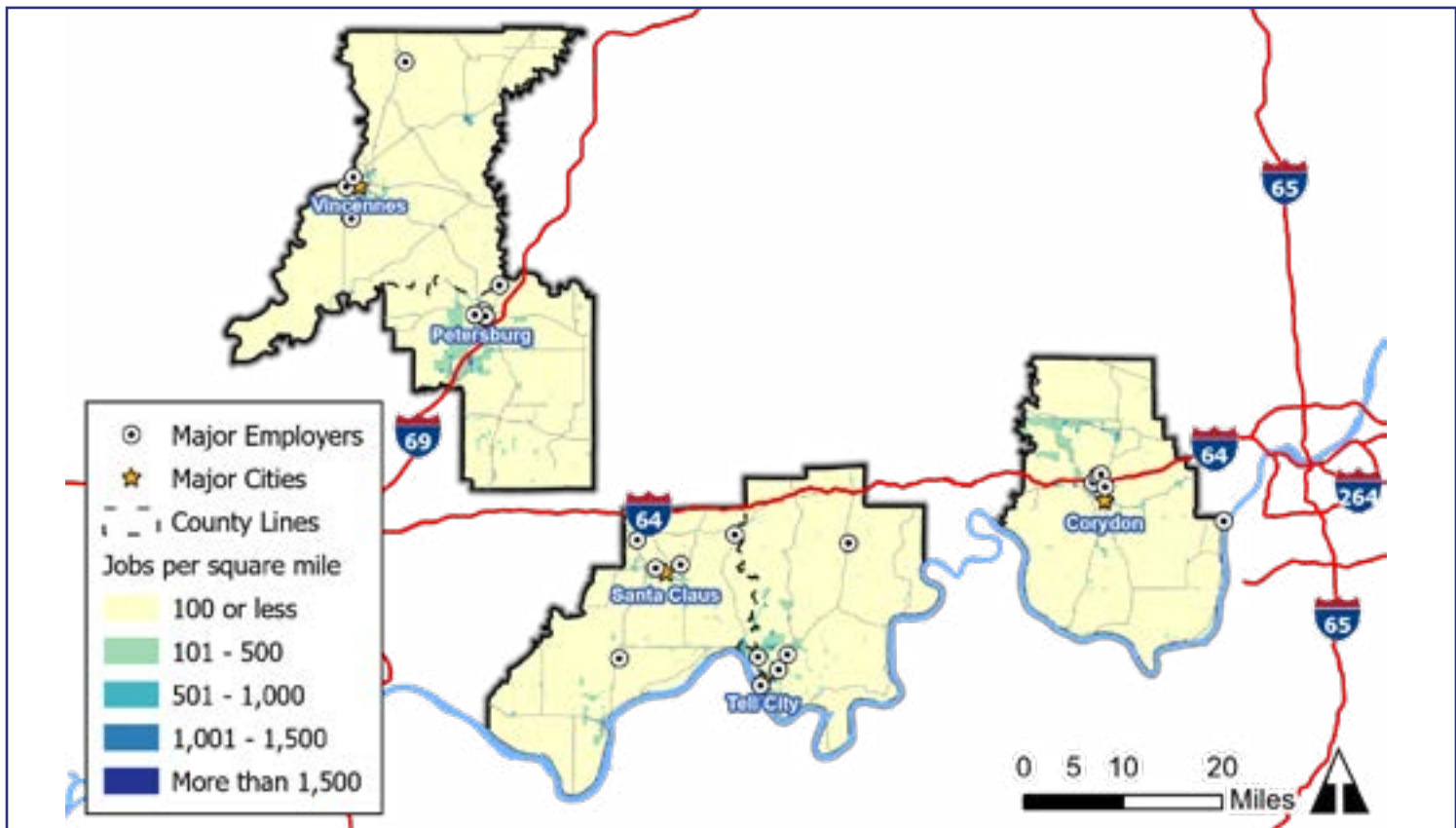
Major Employers and Job Density

Major employers – that is, the five companies with the largest number of employees in each county – are typically located near areas with high job and/or density or population. This is mainly because they require a larger, readily accessible workforce and utilities, such as municipal water/sewer, that are usually located in population centers, such as Vincennes, Corydon, or Tell City. Most major employers fall under two industries, as shown in the table on the following page: manufacturing (8 total) and healthcare/social assistance (7 total). In addition to employing Indiana residents, these employers also bring in many cross-state workers who may patronize local shops and businesses during a lunch break or after working hours.

Job density, or the concentration of jobs within a particular area, plays a significant role in shaping the Region's economic landscape. Higher job density tends to experience greater economic activity, attracting more businesses, residents, and investments and driving economic growth and prosperity. In the Indiana First Region, areas with higher job density are experienced around interstates, major roads, and major cities. These areas offer greater accessibility, which is essential for attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, supporting workforce mobility, and promoting economic mobility for residents.

The concentration of job density also reflects the rural nature of the Indiana First Region. While job density may be high around high access points, vast rural areas have low job density. This spatial distribution of jobs highlights the Region's rural character and underscores the unique economic challenges and opportunities faced by rural communities, such as limited job opportunities, lack of economic diversification, or limited access to infrastructure and services. By leveraging the strengths of areas with higher job densities and addressing the needs of rural communities with lower job densities, the Region can promote inclusive economic growth, enhance regional competitiveness, and improve the quality of life for residents.

Figure 9: Major Employers and Job Density



Company	Industry	County
Good Samaritan Hospital	Health care and social assistance	Knox
Vincennes University	Educational services	Knox
Sunrise Coal	Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	Knox
Futaba Indiana of America	Manufacturing	Knox
Farbest Foods	Manufacturing	Knox
Ceasars Southern Indiana	Arts, entertainment, and recreation	Harrison
Harrison County Hospital	Health care and social assistance	Harrison
Blue River Services	Health care and social assistance	Harrison
Lucas Oil Products	Manufacturing and distribution	Harrison
ICON/Martinrea	Manufacturing	Harrison
Waupaca Foundry	Manufacturing	Perry
ATTC Manufacturing	Manufacturing	Perry
Perry County Memorial Hospital	Health care and social assistance	Perry
Green Industrial Services	Manufacturing	Perry
Branchville Correctional Facility	Public administration	Perry
AES Petersburg	Power generation	Pike
Pike County Area Rehabilitation Center	Health care and social assistance	Pike
Pike County School Corporation	Educational services	Pike
Amber Manor Care Center	Health care and social assistance	Pike
Brickyard Living Center	Health care and social assistance	Pike

Inflow-Outflow Analysis

Analyzing inflow-outflow job counts provides valuable insights into the Region's economic development dynamics. With 15,126 individuals employed in the selection area but residing outside it, there's a notable inflow of workers commuting into the Indiana First Region. However, the data also reveals a significant outflow, with 29,649 residents living within the Indiana First Region but working outside it.

This outward migration of workers highlights the potential loss of local talent and economic activity and emphasizes the need for job creation and retention initiatives within the Region to support its economic base. Additionally, the 14,649 individuals living and employed within the Region underscore the importance of fostering local employment opportunities to strengthen workforce stability and promote community prosperity. By strategically addressing these inflow and outflow patterns through targeted workforce development and economic diversification efforts, the Indiana First Region can enhance its economic landscape, encourage sustainable economic growth, and position itself as a vibrant and competitive economic hub.

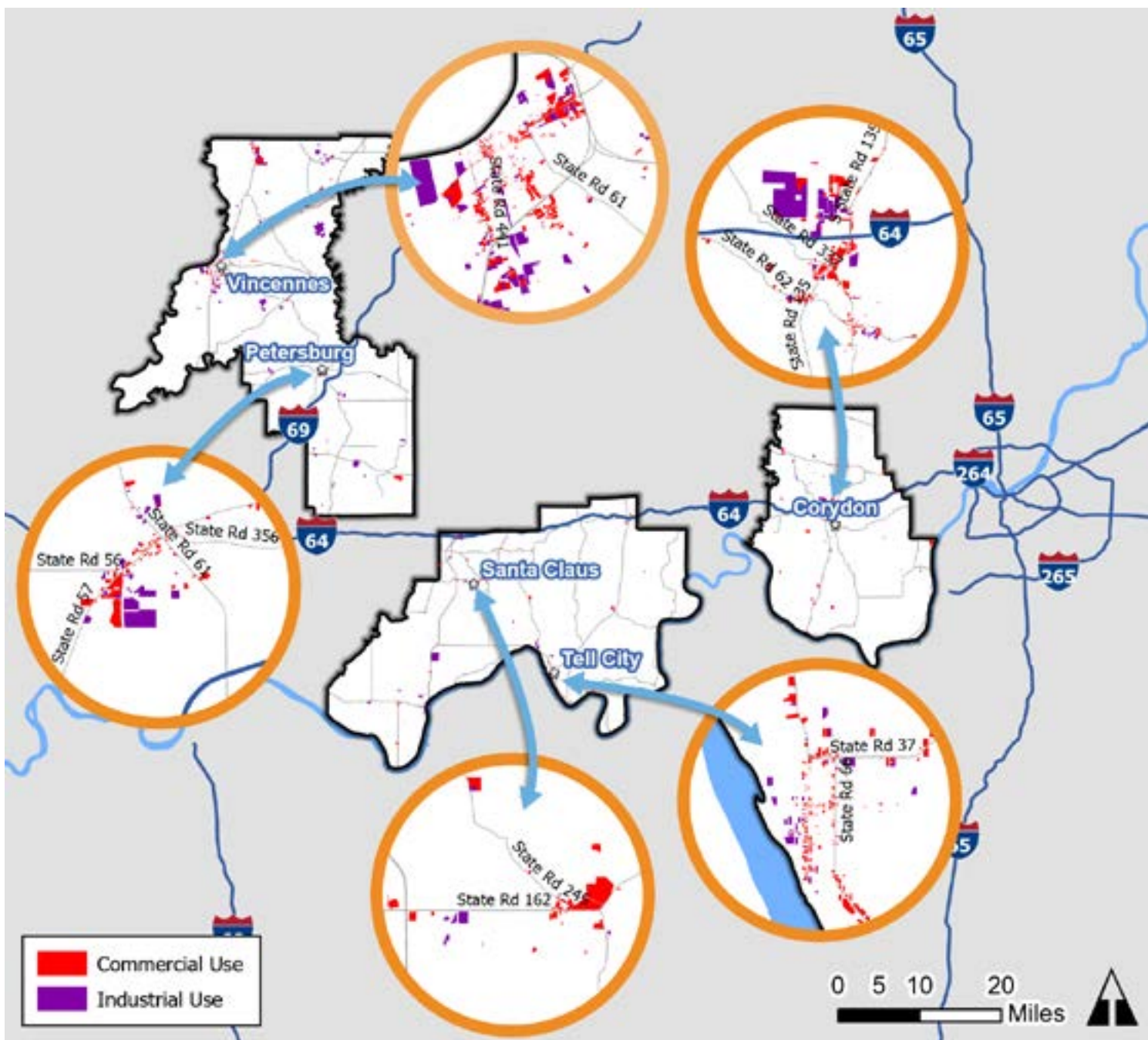
Commercial and Industrial Corridors

Several commercial and industrial corridors provide a significant number of employment opportunities within the Indiana First Region. Many of these corridors are along state roads, which are maintained and regulated by the Indiana Department of Transportation rather than the local municipalities. Corydon (Harrison County) is a prime example of what development at an interstate highway interchange can promise the Region, if/when utilities are extended to these sites. Additionally, many of these corridors consist of important social and cultural sites, such as historic buildings, entertainment venues, and tourist attractions. Santa Claus (Spencer County) has one such attraction, Holiday World, an amusement park that brings in over a million visitors annually to the Region.

Figure 10: Inflow Outflow Private Primary Jobs



Figure 11: Industrial and Commercial Corridors



SBDC Scorecard

The Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) across the Indiana First Region collectively demonstrate a commitment to creating a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, attracting more job opportunities, and ensuring sustainable economic development. The data from Perry, Harrison, Pike, Spencer, and Knox Counties provides insights into the overall performance of SBDCs in supporting small business growth and development across the Region.

New Business and Job Creation

From January 1st to December 31st, sixteen new businesses started across the Region, reflecting a positive trend in entrepreneurial activity. However, job creation numbers vary, with a total of 34 new jobs created. While the number of new businesses that have started is promising, efforts are needed to stimulate job growth further and ensure these start-ups translate into employment opportunities for the local workforce.

Retention and Support of Existing Jobs

Job retention is crucial for maintaining workforce stability and sustaining economic growth. The total number of jobs retained across the Region is 307, indicating efforts by SBDCs to support existing businesses and preserve employment opportunities within the community.

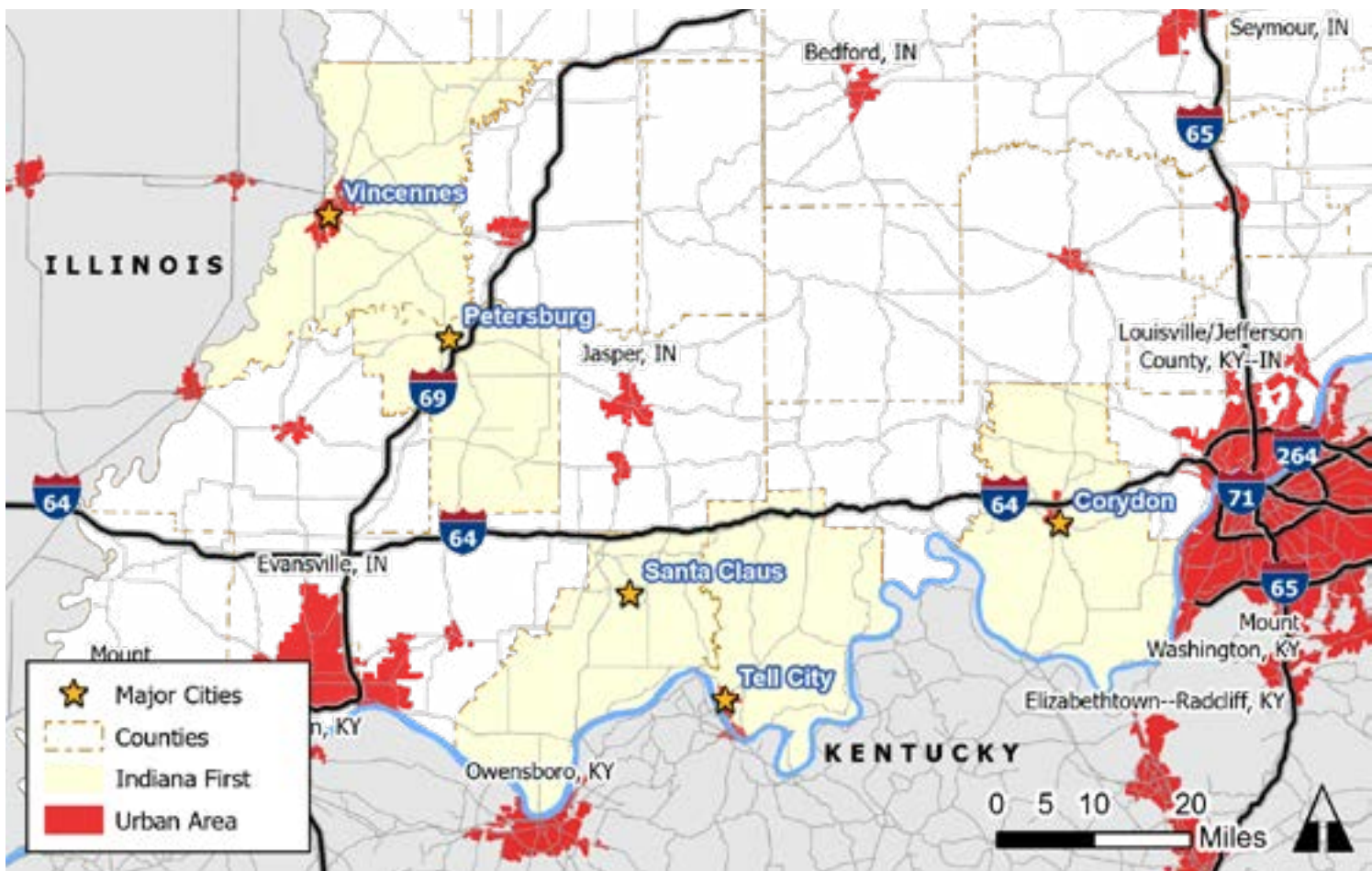
Access to Capital and Equity Infusions

Access to capital is essential for small businesses to thrive and expand. The total loan amount secured across the Region is \$861,700, with an additional \$408,998 in equity capital infusion. While these figures demonstrate some level of financial support for businesses, opportunities may exist to further enhance access to capital, particularly in underserved areas within the Region.

Counseling and Training Services

Counseling and training services offered by SBDCs are critical resources for business owners, providing guidance, support, and skill development opportunities. A total of 188 clients were counseled across the Region, including 141 new clients served. The SBDCs delivered 944 counselor hours, averaging 3.7 hours per client counseled. Moreover, the SBDCs held 41 training events, serving 838 attendees, and provided 200 clients with substantive counseling and training. These services are vital in empowering entrepreneurs and equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in today's competitive business environment.

Figure 12: Industrial and Commercial Corridors



Real Estate Development Context

Urban-Rural Context

The Indiana First Region is primarily rural, with most population centers located on the state border along the Ohio River to the south and the Wabash River to the west. Vincennes (Knox County), Tell City (Perry County), and Corydon (Harrison County) are the three largest urbanized areas in the Region. Out of these three cities, Corydon is the only one near an interstate highway. Historically, the Indiana First Region relied on major waterways for transportation before the advent of the automobile. The Region is also near several major metropolitan centers, including Evansville, IN; Owensboro, KY; and Louisville, KY. There is at least one major city in each of the Region's five counties, as shown in Figure 12, which comprises most of each county's population, labor force, amenities, utilities, and job opportunities.

CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF REGIONAL DATA

Land Use

Most land in the Region is used for agricultural purposes. Any other use is generally located near the Region's major cities. A large patch of land south of Petersburg (Pike County) is being prepared for the Southwest Indiana Megasite. This planned industrial complex will take advantage of access to national transportation and power networks, such as the national power grid, interstate highway system, and national rail system. Additionally, north of Tell City, a large amount of land is within the Hoosier National Forest, a 204,000-acre national park that provides the Region with bountiful recreational and educational opportunities about nature. While the forest is an opportunity for the Region, these publicly-owned lands also reduce the amount of developable land and property tax revenue.

Transportation

Two interstate highways (I-69 and I-64) connect the Region and nearby metropolitan areas. However, many of the Region's major cities are far from these interstates and instead are connected to the rest of the nation by rail or by water.

Railroads connect to many of the smaller towns around the Region and are critical corridors for moving goods nationally. Additionally, the Region acts as the southwest gateway to Indiana from neighboring states. State crossings over the Ohio and Wabash Rivers, as well as a port in Rockport, are mostly located near urban centers in or around the Region.

Floodplains

Floodplains and flood management are an integral part of the Region's future development and economic viability, as they reduce the risk of flooding when managed properly and can provide recreational opportunities for the Region, such as riverside trails. Indiana First borders two major waterways: the Ohio River in the south and the Wabash River in the west. These waterways have contributed significantly to the Region's history and culture, as well as providing a steady source of water for drinking and agriculture. Knox (Vincennes) and Spencer (Santa Claus) Counties are most affected by floodplains, as shown in Figure 15.

Figure 13: Existing Land Use

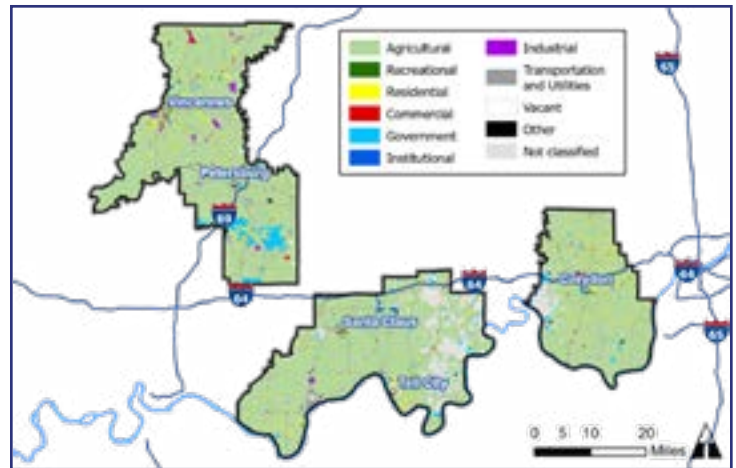


Figure 14: Transportation Network



Figure 15: 100-Year Floodplain Map



Topography

The Region is generally hillier than the rest of Indiana. Perry County (Tell City) has the most variations in terrain, providing a multitude of outdoor recreation and protecting many environmental assets within the Hoosier National Forest. Knox County (Vincennes), Pike County (Petersburg), and Spencer County (Santa Claus) are the flattest areas in the Region, which also make them more prone to flooding from nearby rivers and creeks. New developments will be the least restricted by the terrain in most existing towns and cities in the Region, as they are built on mostly flat terrain away from flood-prone areas.

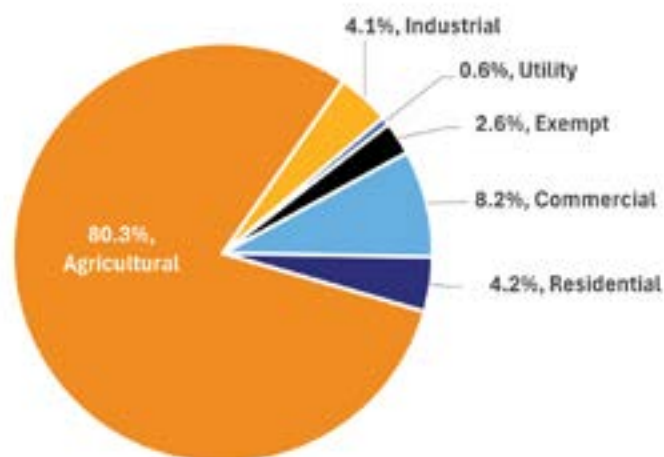
Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts

TIF districts present a significant opportunity to bring reinvestment and new development into the Region. Already, the Indiana First Region increased its TIF revenues by 941% between 2020 and 2021, with the most significant increase in Vincennes, Knox County. These increases show that private interest and reinvestment are interested in coming to the Region's urbanized areas. Additionally, nearly 80% of land within TIF districts is agricultural on the edges of these urbanized areas, which totals about 11,700 acres across the Region that can be developed. Further investments in TIF districts, such as public infrastructure improvements, will help the Region improve its economic outlook, attract talent, and encourage the development of existing and future businesses

Figure 16: 10-Foot Contours



Figure 17: Land Use Within TIF Districts



Benchmark Comparison



The **Central Western Slope Region** in Colorado, also known as Region 10, is the chosen benchmark region for Indiana First. A benchmark community is a comparable region to help identify best practices, define strategies, and set goals. The Central Western Slope Region consists of six counties and had a population of 107,387 people in 2019. The Region is characterized by small towns along major state roads and highways that wind through Colorado's mountains. This region of Colorado has varying topography, from level plains for farmland to hills and mountains for outdoor recreation. Several communities include historic downtowns and creative corridors that house local artists and artisans. Region 10's largest industry is tourism, accounting for 23% of jobs. Their top industries also include regional services, agri-business, and government.

Figure 18: Regional Fact Sheet: Region 10

Central Western Slope Region, Colorado

Regional Fact Sheet

Region 10 is located in West Central Colorado and includes the counties of Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray & San Miguel.



POPULATION & ECONOMIC DEMOGRAPHICS



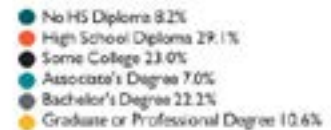
Total Population % (by Age)



LABOR & EDUCATION



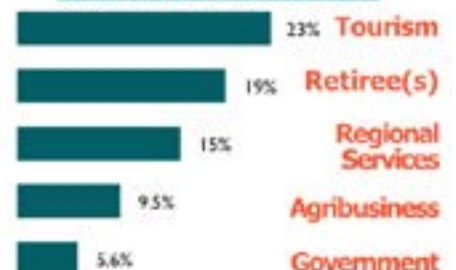
Educational Attainment of Persons 25+



INCOME & POVERTY



TOP 5 BASE INDUSTRIES



DATA SOURCES

1. www.census.gov/economic/factsheets (2019)
2. Bureau of Economic Analysis (2021) www.bea.gov/
3. Colorado State Demographer
4. Stats America 2019

Around half of the Central Western Slope Region's population is within the typical workforce ages of 19 to 65. The labor force in 2019 was 49,082 people, and 46,231 (or 94.1%) were employed. The average income per person is \$47,152. The largest percentage of educational attainment is high school diplomas at 29.1%, followed by bachelor's degrees at 22.2%. Graduate or professional degrees account for 10.6%. The Region has a total of 46,541 housing units; 31,744 housing units are owner-occupied, and 12,053 housing units are renter-occupied. Most vacant housing units are rental units.

In regional development plans, the Central Western Slope Region identified several challenges and developed corresponding solutions or strategies. Each county had individual, not comprehensive, approaches for economic development. In response, Region 10 created a comprehensive economic development strategic plan for a regional approach, creating a unified vision for all six counties. Their local economy depends on tourism and related industries. Region 10 provides support for diverse, sustainable tourism, building upon its existing assets, including national parks, outdoor recreation, history, culture, and agriculture (agri-tourism) through business loans, training, and providing resources for tax incentives.

Mining was once a major industry in the Central Western Slope Region. As mining operations declined, the Region needed to adapt to new industries. Region 10 developed support strategies for new business entrepreneurs through accelerator programs, co-working spaces, shared equipment, and establishing a small business center, which provides resources and funding through grants and loans. The Business Cultivator is an excellent example for the Indiana First Region's strategies for business development, including reusing non-residential buildings and attracting and supporting entrepreneurs. The project used grant funds to purchase a building for use as a small business incubator. The building includes a commercial kitchen to support businesses related to food production and agriculture. It also includes a co-working space, providing small businesses with professional office space, including high-speed internet and shared office equipment.

The Region created Opportunity Zones to encourage investment in rural and low-income urban communities. Development in these specified areas is supported through federal tax incentives. As industries shifted and economies fluctuated, the Region needed a way to retain and develop its skilled workforce. Hence, it partnered with educational institutions to re-skill/up-skill the workforce to transition to new and growing industries. The partnership also provided support for education in the trades and healthcare

industries.

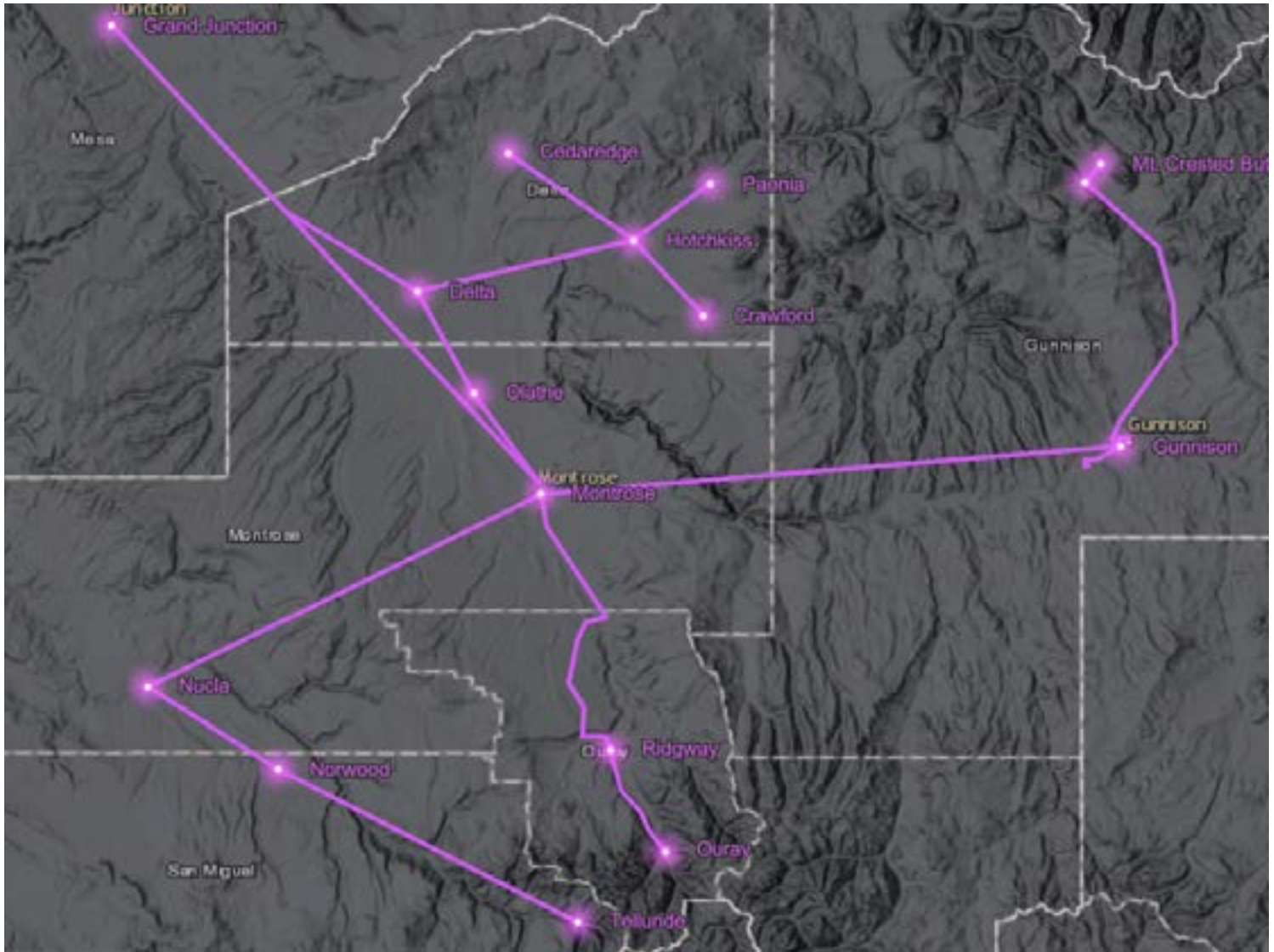
Housing options needed to be improved for median-income households, which are not eligible for housing assistance, such as vouchers, nor can they afford market-to-high-end housing through traditional financing. In response, Region 10 created the Mind the Gap report evaluating workforce housing. This report identifies capital resources and the use of special limited partnerships for financing. It also recommends the implementation of more affordable modular and prefabricated construction types and supporting trade skills education so the local workforce can meet the demand for housing.

Figure 19: *The Business Cultivator: Region 10*



CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF REGIONAL DATA

Figure 20: Region 10 broadband infrastructure



Several communities needed more infrastructure and utilities to support new development. The Regional Transportation Planning project partnered with businesses and used state and federal funds to expand public transportation. The Region 10 Broadband project used state and federal funds and contracted local companies to build the infrastructure for high-speed internet.

The Region 10 Broadband project is an example of how the Indiana First Region could improve its strategies for development viability. Region 10 also received public funding to install broadband infrastructure. They partnered with local contractors to install a Middle-Mile Network, which is the infrastructure that connects high-speed internet providers to the end user. This project allowed for successful implementation even in rural communities.

Some rural communities connected to broadband include Ridgeway, which has only 1,200 residents, and Lake City, which only has 800 residents. This initiative works well as a regional strategy for development viability by providing infrastructure to support development and talent attraction that supports residents' ability to work from home and e-learning.

Regionals Needs Assessment

Barriers to Growth and Development

It is important to note that these two terms, growth and development, should be viewed comprehensively and inclusively, meaning what is considered growth and development are different depending on the context of each part of the Region. For example, Knox County may benefit the most from reviving urban amenities in Vincennes, while Perry County could build on its advantageous proximity to the Hoosier National Forest with additional recreational facilities. However, as a region, there are several shared barriers to growth and development, including:

- A shrinking population due to emigration,
- A lack of infrastructure to support new development,
- A regional economy overdependent on a narrow set of industries, and
- A lack of suitable housing.

Population and Push-Pull Factors

People are influenced by many variables when they decide to move, which are called ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. ‘Push’ factors discourage people from moving to or staying in the Region, while ‘pull’ factors encourage people to move to or remain in the Region. A migration analysis – that is, the flow of people moving to and from the Region – was conducted for the Region, revealing that nearly 75% of people move to/from other counties in Indiana, especially the nearby metropolitan areas of Evansville, Indiana, and Louisville, Kentucky. According to the US Census Bureau, most people in the United States move for three reasons: (1) housing, (2) family, and/or (3) employment. Some general conclusions can be made about the Indiana First Region, keeping these three factors in mind:

- Push Factors
 - Lack of housing and/or neighborhood variety and quality
 - Lack of employment opportunities and higher-paying jobs
 - Lack of amenities and services, either in variety and/or quality.
- Pull Factors
 - Relatively lower housing costs and costs of living
 - More space to establish a family and/or own a relatively larger home than in urban areas.

For the entire analysis of migration patterns, also known as population flow, see the Appendices chapter.

Lack of Infrastructure

A lack of infrastructure was a recurring theme in focus group conversations and discussions with local officials across the Region. Many interchanges with the interstate highway system are an opportunity for the Region, but they remain undeveloped because of a lack of utilities. Housing, job opportunities, and population growth are inextricably linked to adequate infrastructure. However, many of the municipal water and sewer systems in the Region are aging and need refurbishment to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of providing services. Extensions to municipal water/sewer systems are also cost-prohibitive to many municipalities in the Region. Focus groups pointed to a lack of funding as the main cause for deficiencies in infrastructure, which may be due to declines in local property tax revenue as people are emigrating from the Region. It may also be a result of overdevelopment or unsustainable development patterns in previous decades, such as uncoordinated low-density residential development (i.e., urban sprawl). These development patterns put a strain on public services by forcing local governments to provide services to a larger area with relatively fewer people who pay taxes to fund the services. Additionally, many of the levees and floodwalls along the Ohio River and Wabash River need to be either refurbished or naturalized to better control flooding along the western and southern parts of the Region.

Uncompetitive & Overdependent Economy

The Indiana First Region has historically been home to major resource-extraction industries, such as coal mining. Despite providing many jobs, the Region has suffered what economists call a “resource curse,” wherein a region has an abundance of non-renewable resources and becomes dependent on them for economic development. Unless sufficient measures to diversify the economy are taken, regions with a resource curse often fail economically when the resource runs out, and accompanying industries move away, drastically reducing the government tax revenue and job availability. However, if an economy is home to a diverse range of industries, it is often more resilient to economic downturns and able to recover from these downturns quicker than other regions.

CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF REGIONAL DATA

The Indiana First Region is slowly moving away from its overdependence on non-renewable resource extraction. However, further work is needed to ensure its economy is more resilient and prepared for the next economic recession or depression. The chart below, also known as a shift-share analysis, provides an in-depth view of Indiana First's economic strengths and weaknesses of each industry and how it has evolved (i.e., became stronger or weaker) between 2010 and 2021.

Location quotients (LQs) are an important part of this analysis. LQs allow the comparison of the concentration of industries in the Indiana First Region relative to a larger, encompassing economy, which was chosen as the state region. Hence, the graphic shows the relative economic strengths and weaknesses (1) in its current form, (2) compared to a previous time, and (3) compared with the state economy. The horizontal (x) axis shows the current location quotient of each industry, while the vertical (y) axis shows the change in an industry's location quotient since 2010. The size of the bubbles indicates how many workers are currently employed by that industry – this analysis only includes residents of the Region, not commuters from outside the Region.

As shown in Figure 18, the industries are divided into four quadrants. An industry in the top right, green area, means it is stronger than it was in 2010 and is currently relatively stronger in the regional economy compared to the state economy. On the opposite spectrum of the economy, an industry in the bottom left, dark red area, has weakened since 2010 and is relatively weaker in the regional economy than the state economy. Notably, the "Mining" industry is so strong that it cannot be placed on the shift-share analysis without distorting the chart. The reason that the "Mining" industry has seemed to strengthen since 2010 is because mining across the state is declining, or moving away from mining, at a quicker rate than the Indiana First Region. The "Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation" industry falls into the same situation; however, it has become weaker than the state economy at the quickest rate compared to other industries in the Region.

Key Takeaways:

1. Manufacturing is somewhat weak but growing stronger.
2. Healthcare needs investment to rebound.
3. Educational, public admin, and construction sectors are star industries.

Figure 21: Shift-Share Analysis of Region Economy in Reference to State Economy

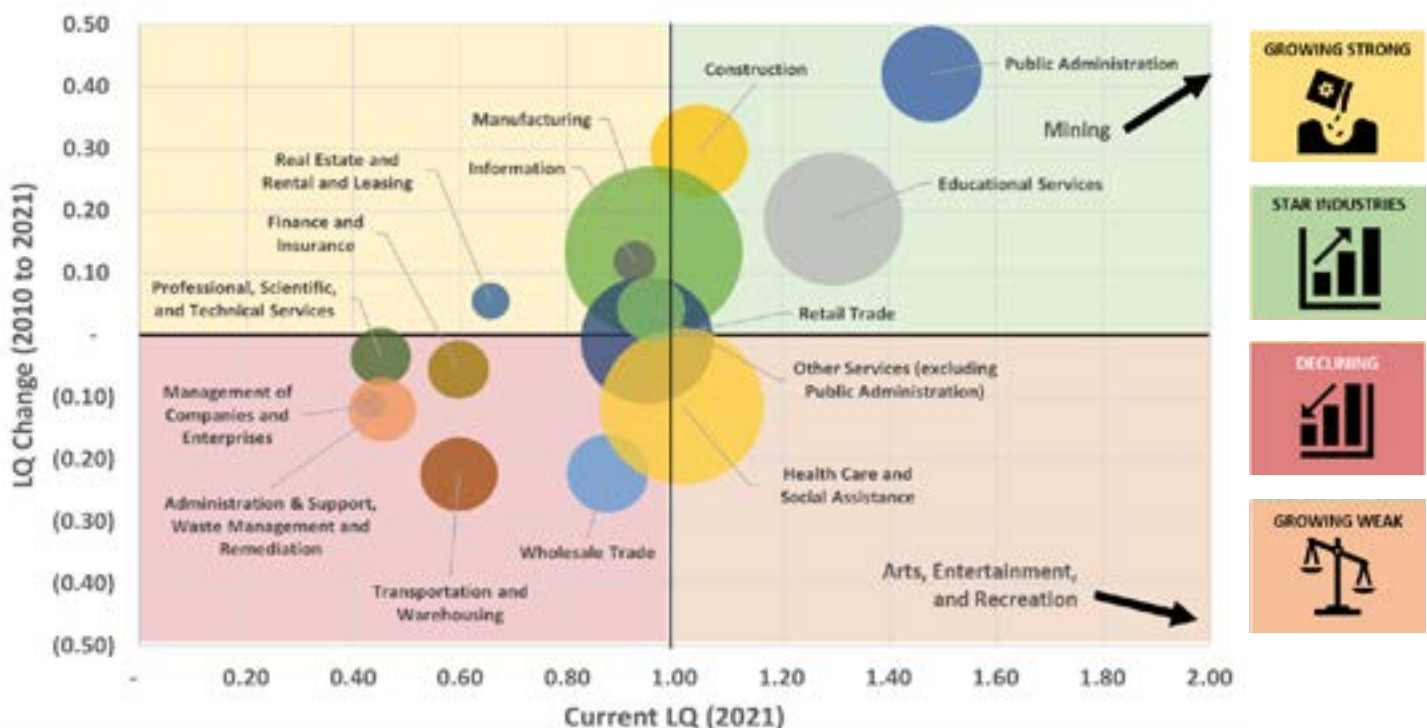
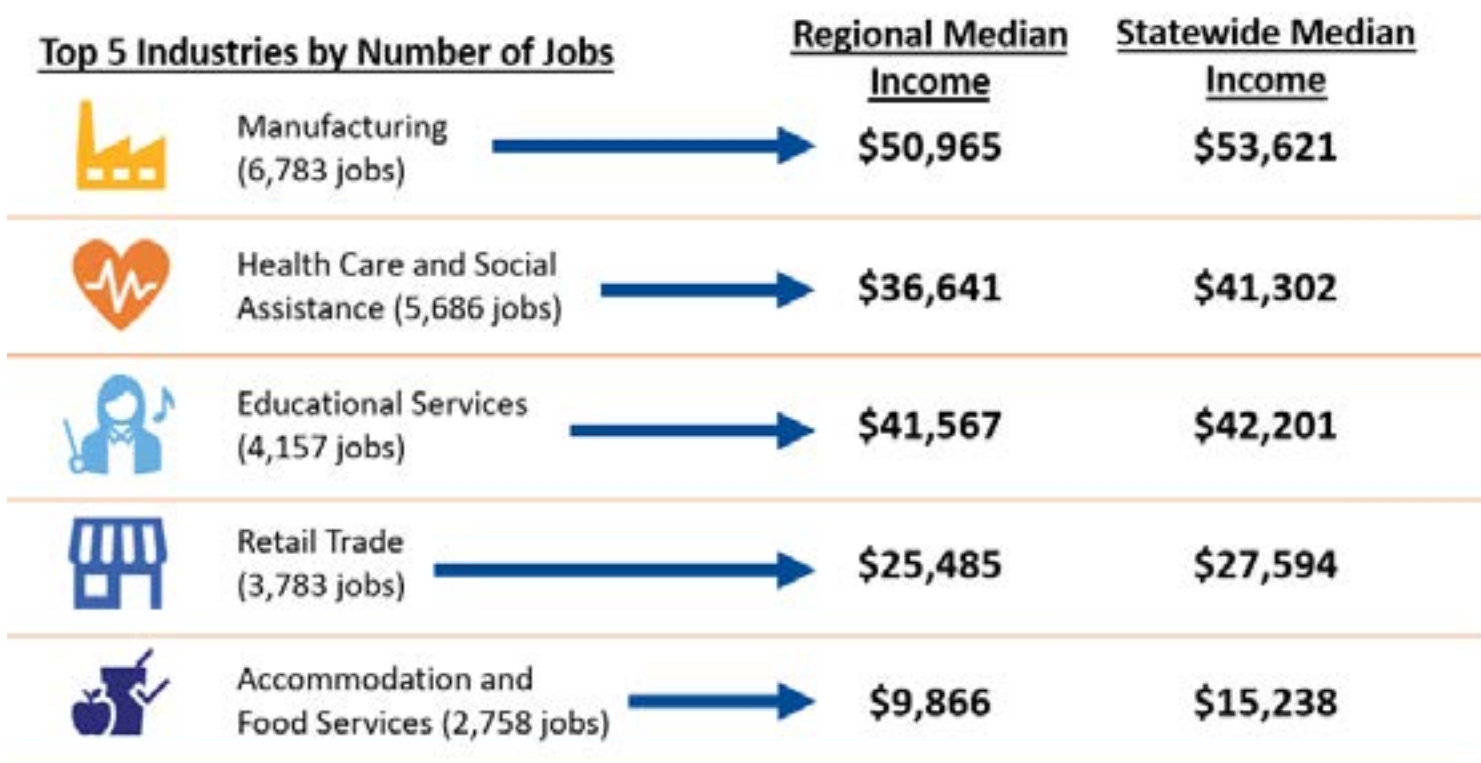


Figure 22: Top 5 Industry Median Earnings

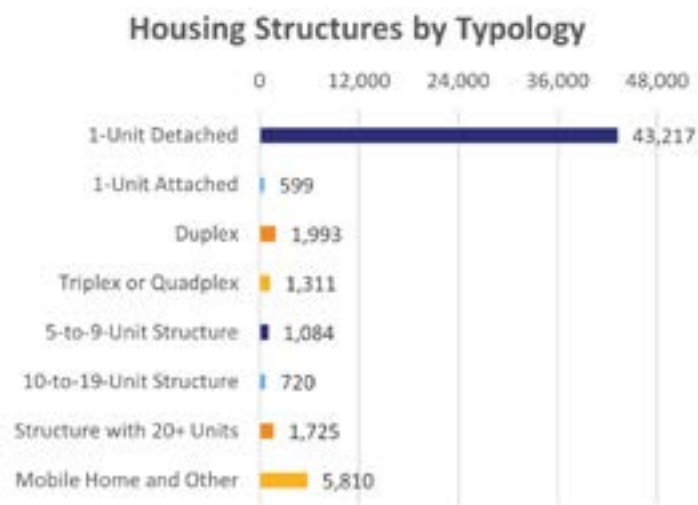


In addition to overdependency on a few industries, the Region also needs help to provide competitive wages to its workers compared to other areas in Indiana. For example, median earnings for the top five industries in the Region are all lower than what is typical across the State, according to the ACS. These figures are slightly nuanced, however, as the cost of living in the Region is also lower than across the State.

Housing Needs

The Region suffers from a lack of housing variety, though it should be noted that this is a widespread problem across the United States. The housing stock of the Region is heavily skewed toward the single-unit, detached housing typology, accounting for 76.5% of all housing units. The second largest typology is a mobile home or other mobile structure, such as an RV. Additionally, single-unit structures are often more expensive for prospective homeowners and have a lower return on investment, regarding property taxes for municipalities that provide infrastructure to support this typology. Local leaders may consider amending their zoning and subdivision ordinances to encourage and/or allow a broader variety of housing to be developed in the Region.

Figure 23: Housing Typologies (Units in Structure ACS 2022 5-YR)

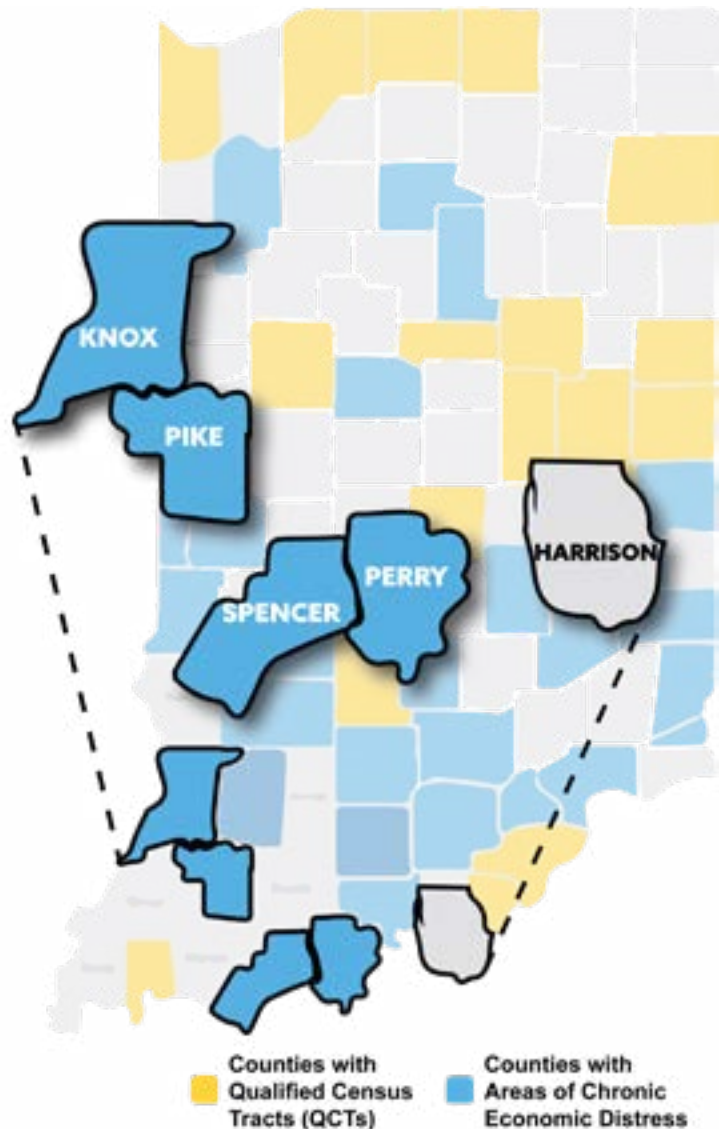


Development Strategies

Disadvantaged Communities

Disadvantaged communities are defined by the Indiana Housing Community Development Authority (IHCD), which comprises counties containing Qualified Census Tracts (QCTs) and/or areas of “Chronic Economic Distress.” QCTs are census tracts identified by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development in which at least 50% of households have an income less than 60% of the area median gross income (AMGI). This metric adjusts for high-cost and low-income areas since the cost of living varies by region across the United States. Areas of “Chronic Economic Distress” consist of communities in which negative economic conditions, such as high poverty rates, have persisted for a long time and are difficult to improve. These areas are designated by the State and approved by the federal government to target them for additional public/private investment. The IEDC recommends that regions allocate at least 25% of total investments into areas of chronic economic distress and qualified census tracts. Within Indiana First, four out of the five counties are identified as areas of chronic economic distress (i.e., “targeted” areas). This means most residents in the Region fall within a “targeted” area, which waives the requirement of being a first-time homebuyer for many of IHCD’s programs.

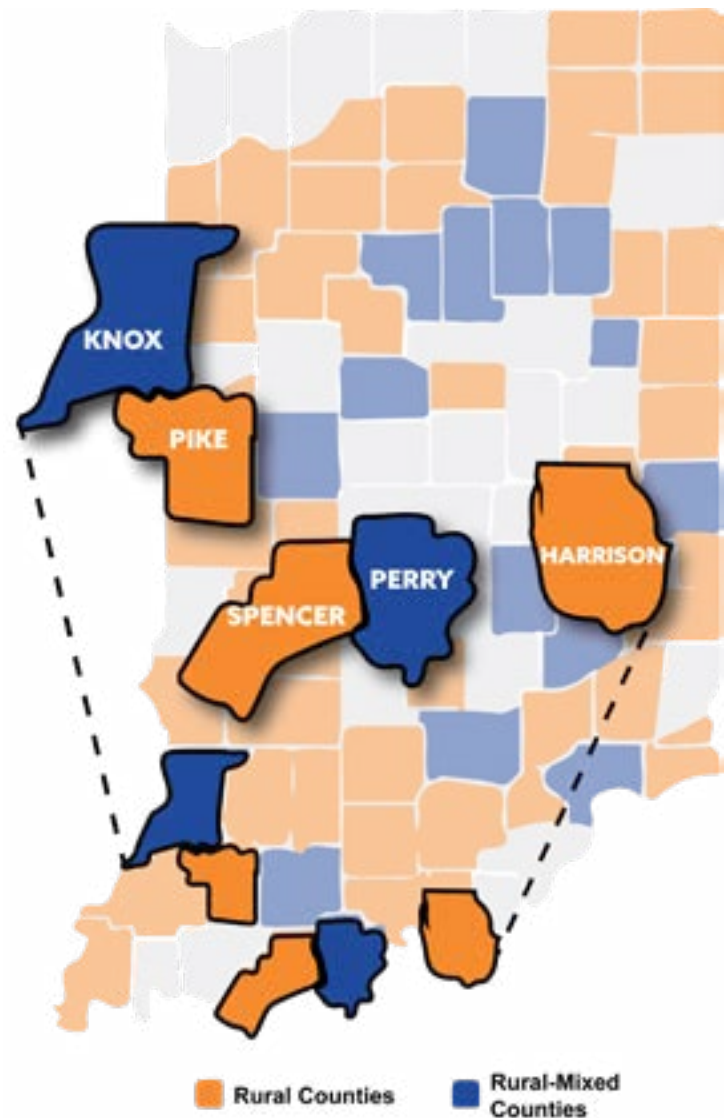
Figure 24: IEDC - Disadvantaged Communities Map



Rural Communities

A county is defined as rural or rural-mixed if the urban population is in the range of 42 to 58% of the county's total population, according to the IEDC, as well as designations by census tract from the US Census Bureau. The IEDC recommends that at least 25% of total investments go towards communities in rural/rural-mixed counties; however, since the Region is entirely rural, this metric is less necessary. The Region should, however, focus on how the urban centers within the Region and the surrounding agricultural and natural landscapes can mutually benefit each other. For example, urban centers often rely on rural areas to provide outdoor recreational opportunities and food products. In contrast, rural areas depend on urban centers to provide laborers, public services, and amenities like entertainment venues.

Figure 25: IEDC - Rural and Rural-Mixed Map



Stakeholder Engagement

As demonstrated during the completion of the first regional development plan, stakeholder engagement is a critical part of creating successful regional strategies and ensuring successful project completion. The Indiana First Region takes stakeholder engagement seriously and has implemented a more robust engagement strategy during the development of the updated regional development plan that will continue through project implementation. With few exceptions, the Region has maintained a consistent project committee from READI 1.0 comprised of members of the Southwest Indiana Development Council, Indiana Region 15, local economic development representatives, chamber of commerce representatives, members of local tourism bureaus, and more. This core committee has met multiple times a month since June of 2023 and almost weekly since the late Fall of 2023. They have guided all aspects of the strategy and have helped identify key stakeholders and anchor institutions throughout the Region. In addition to core committee meetings, the committee members have individually facilitated dozens of working group meetings and discussions in their local communities to vet and determine strategies, review progress, and maintain a direct line of communication with key stakeholders.

The committee has built upon relationships created during the development of the first regional development strategy and has sought out new relationships. Key partners and constituents have participated in progress meetings, focus group meetings, and core committee discussions. These partners represent private, non-profit, and public entities and include community leaders, municipal officials, school systems, health care providers, community foundations, economic development corporations, utility companies, technology centers, business incubators, large landholders, business owners and managers, major industries, home builders, local utilities, and tourist attractions among others.

One challenge of the READI 1.0 process was engaging constituents from across the Region due to the geographical separation of communities and the rural character. To address this in the updated regional development plan process, the committee chose to travel to its constituents. The committee facilitated a series of focus group meetings across five different days and in five different locations throughout the Region that were readily accessible to all constituents. Key stakeholders were sent direct invitations, and the meetings were advertised via print and social media. More than eighty stakeholders from numerous public, private, and philanthropic organizations attended

the meetings, where an overview of the planning process was provided, as well as goals related to the regional opportunity strategy. Participants were asked to brainstorm regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and changes in the Region since 2021. Stakeholders shared their goals individually and for the larger region, as well as forthcoming initiatives they were working on. Key strengths and opportunities included tourism, access to parks and natural areas, local schools, community charm, cost of living, educational institutions, manufacturing, agriculture, and access to rail, road, and water. Key challenges included seasonal tourism, loss of the coal industry, lack of infrastructure in critical areas like interstate interchanges, lack of youth amenities, childcare options, and housing opportunities, and lack of physical and mental health care. Participants in all focus group meetings noted an appreciation of the impact that READI 1.0 has had within the Region. They specifically cited improvements related to housing and childcare access and noted an excitement for the opportunity of READI 2.0.

As noted in the project intake portion of the report, the committee established an online project submission portal that was advertised throughout the Region through local municipalities and social media. The portal has resulted in more than eighty project submissions to date. Moving forward, the Region will continue to promote the regional development plan and READI 2.0 updates through social media, governmental websites, print, and the Indiana First website. Keeping regional constituents informed will be a regional priority that will result in large-scale public support and enhance the positive energy and growth that the Region is experiencing and excited about.

Harrison County Inclusive Playground



Chapter Four: Regional Growth Strategies and Action Plan

**Goals, Strategies, and Action Plan
for the Indiana First Region**

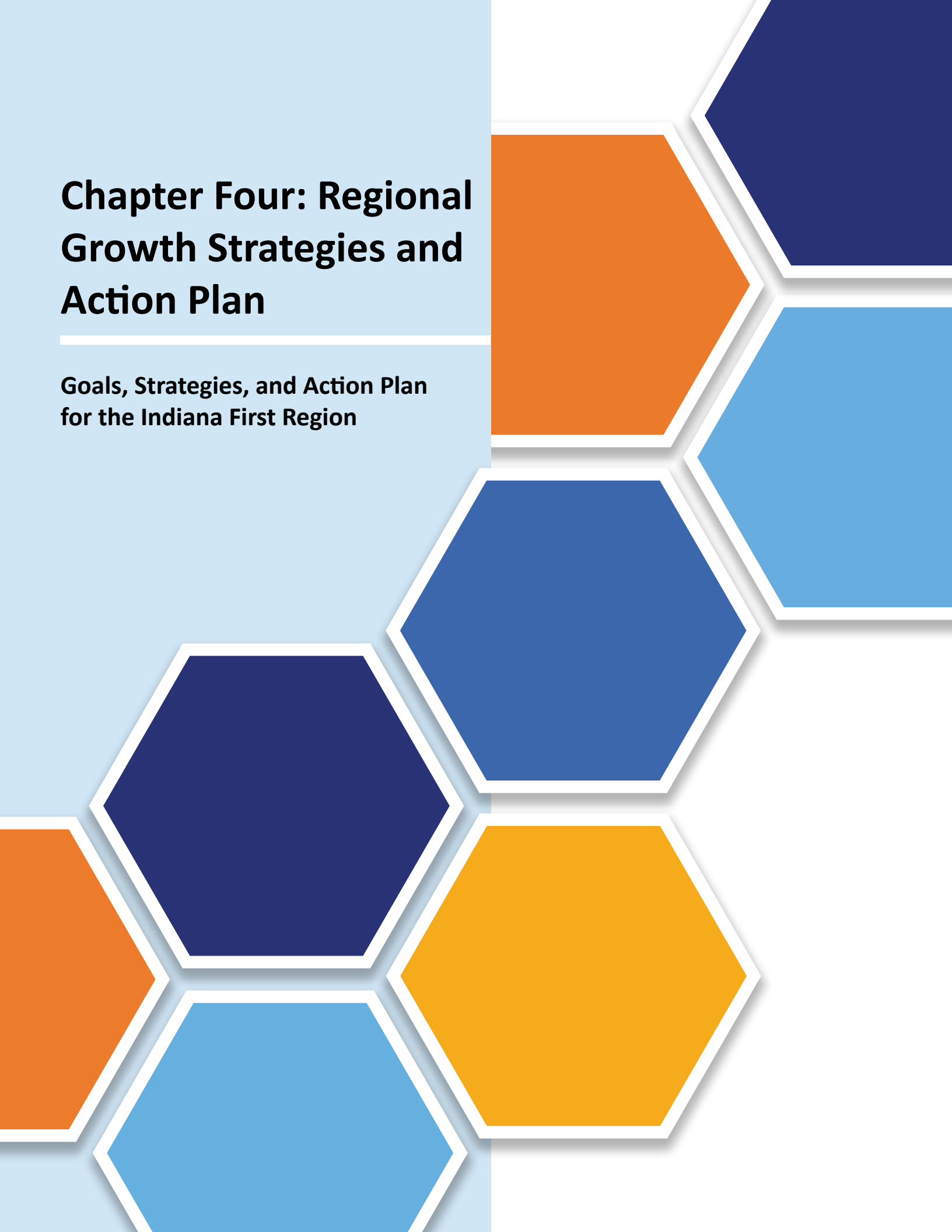


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Vision

Development Viability

Business Development

Talent Attraction

Housing

Quality of Life & Place

Project Intake Process

Vision

Based on the Indiana First Region's strengths and challenges from READI 1.0, the information received from stakeholders, regional data analysis, and an analysis of benchmark communities across the country, the regional committee developed a vision statement for where it would like to be in the next ten years. The vision for the Indiana First Region is stated below:

Our Future First: Building Tomorrow's Success Today

Indiana First is a region of **tremendous assets**. Recreation abounds from our **rolling hills, meandering streams, navigable rivers, and forested lands** to our **theme parks and affordable and active communities** that provide a high-quality of life and diverse housing for current and future residents. Our **well-connected infrastructure and robust private investment support diverse industries and innovative institutions** that ensure **sustainable living, next-generation careers**, and an **entrepreneurial spirit** that raises awareness of the State and attracts a multi-generational population to **live, work, and play in our region**.

This vision is an aspirational but realistic one. It has been established to identify and provide focus on regional priorities, establish realistic and quantifiable goals, and develop actionable strategies for achieving the goals and priorities.

Priorities provide a strategic framework for the Region and should touch on every aspect of growth and development. By organizing goals, strategies, and action steps around key priorities, the Indiana First Region can grow the population and improve the lives of existing residents. Indiana First Region's five priority areas include:

- Development Viability
- Talent Attraction
- Housing
- Quality of Place & Life
- Business Development

The following section outlines each priority, including their definition as they relate to the Indiana First Region, their key issues impacting local development and growth, a goal for addressing the priority, and action steps for achieving each goal. Also included are example projects and the anticipated impact of investing in each priority.

It should be noted that each of these priorities is integrally related to one another. Advancements in any one priority benefit the others, and conversely, challenges and weaknesses in one priority area negatively impact all others.

Development Viability

Definition

Development viability is the ability, or inability, to promote



near-term site development or redevelopment projects based on policy, financial, and/or physical constraints. Examples of development viability include access to critical infrastructure, such as roads, rail, and utilities; zoning, or a lack thereof; and site conditions, such as topography, forested lands, contamination, wetlands, and more.

Key Issues

As noted in the previous section, key issues related to development viability within the Indiana First Region include a need for more infrastructure to support new development. This relates to both residential and commercial development. Due to the rural nature of many Indiana First communities, existing water and sewer infrastructure can only support development with improvements, and the infrastructure cost often makes projects infeasible. Lack of roadway improvements causes physical difficulty in supporting the construction and access to development. Additionally, several communities lack zoning. Within the Indiana First Region, this can make it difficult to incentivize density, and development can occur without oversight, leading to undesirable construction.

Furthermore, as local industry shifts away from coal mining and coal-related energy production, a targeted strategy must be needed to attract new industry types to replace existing, declining industries. There is also a need for more modern structures to support new businesses and industries, and blighted properties and structures throughout the Region need investment or demolition. A significant number of the Region's existing, available structures are outdated and do not meet the needs of new businesses and next-generation industries. The cost of improving existing blighted structures and properties can be prohibitive and reduce the likelihood of new (re) development.



Goal

Remove barriers to, and encourage, private and public development through incentives to promote growth within the Indiana First Region.



Strategies

Several strategies will be employed to support development viability. These will include:

- Funding updates to, and establishing, regional policies that promote strategic growth.
- Investing in critical infrastructure to support housing and business development that helps mitigate costs for private developers.
- Increasing the availability of shovel-ready sites through strategic site acquisition and preparation.
- Developing pre-engineered building plans and constructing speculative buildings for target industries.



Action Plan

Near-Term (Six Months to One Year):

The Region will collaborate with local counties, communities, and private developers to identify strategic development areas for housing and commercial development, focused on sites near existing communities and key transportation corridors. This will include a review of comprehensive plans, strategic development plans, and other relevant planning documents that may outline target growth areas. Blighted and/or brownfield sites and structures within strategic growth areas will also be identified. Where opportunities exist, the Region will collaborate with owners on assessment and clean-up.

Barriers to development within existing codes and policies will be identified. As required, amendments will be drafted and adopted to promote long-term development within the Region. Where codes and policies do not exist, the Region will evaluate adoption with local government. Where appropriate, the Region will seek private consultants to assist in code and policy amendments, drafting, and/or adoption.

Mid-Term (One Year to Three Years):

Upon assessment of blighted and/or brownfield sites and structures, the Region will collaborate with property owners on clean-up strategies, structure updates, removal, and funding, or will purchase properties where feasible and beneficial. The Region will hold properties within a land bank where possible for future (re)development.

As sites are identified for near-term (re)development, the Region will invest in critical public infrastructure, including water, wastewater, fiber, other necessary utilities, and roadways to mitigate private development costs.

The Region will work with local governmental agencies and consultants to develop pre-engineered building plans that can be accessed at low or no cost, to help reduce planning review times and costs associated with development planning and engineering.

The Region will invest in building updates and/or speculative buildings on strategic development sites to attract targeted industries.

An inventory of sites ready for development will be created, and the Region will work with State and other agencies to develop certified, shovel-ready sites.

Existing codes and policies will be reviewed regularly, updated and/or created, and adopted to promote development.

Long-Term (More than Three Years):

Regional planning documents will be evaluated annually and updated to maintain relevancy. Codes and policies will be adopted to encourage development and promote growth.

The Region will maintain and evaluate site and building inventories. The Region will acquire additional property and extend infrastructure to support future development as needed.

Blighted and brownfield sites will be mitigated as necessary to promote long-term redevelopment.



Example Projects

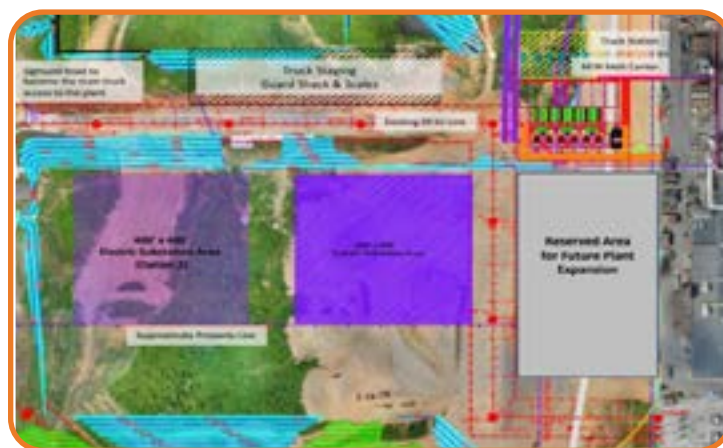
Understanding regional challenges related to development viability, several anchor institutions and key stakeholders have approached the Region with development viability projects. Examples include a local meat locker plant, First Capitol Meats, which would like to expand into a regional meat processing facility, which is a needed amenity within the Region. The manufacturer has already purchased

property within a local industrial park but is requesting assistance to fund infrastructure improvements, including roadway improvements and water and sewer extensions.

Similarly, a local iron manufacturer, Waupaca, is seeking assistance to upgrade the plant with new technology that will increase iron production by 25 tons per hour. The manufacturer is one of the largest iron-producing companies in the nation and supplies iron to the automobile industry globally. Supporting the manufacturer would support the expansion of other local industries specifically located in the Indiana First Region to support Waupaca.

At a residential level, multiple local housing developers and property owners have contacted the Region requesting assistance in roadway and infrastructure extension to make new housing development financially viable. This includes the improvement and extension of existing and new roadways, as well as the extension of primary utilities (water and sewer). With regional support for housing projects such as these, the Region can anticipate the development of dozens of new housing units.

Featured Project: Waupaca Expansion – Tell City



Anticipated Impact

As discussed later in this strategy, investment in development viability is anticipated to generate hundreds of millions of dollars in total investment, support population increase through new job opportunities and housing units, and increase per capita income. Furthermore, existing business expansion and new business creation will support investment in complementary industries. As the population increases as a result of job opportunities and available housing, new businesses will be created to support the demand of an increasing population.

Business Development



Definition

Business development includes efforts to generate and sustain regional wealth and advance local quality of life. It includes the attraction, retention, and expansion of business investment, entrepreneurship, employment opportunities, and the tax base, which promotes long-term growth and diversification of the regional economy.

Key Issues

Regional challenges related to business development center around the economy being tied to a select and narrow set of key industries. As alluded to in previous sections, this creates an over-reliance that causes the local economy to rise and fall with adjustments in the market of those industries. A prime example of this exists within the coal industry and non-renewable energy sector. The nation is shifting from coal-fired power plants and energy production to more renewable energy production. The coal mines within the Indiana First Region will cease operations over the next several years. This is causing the loss of thousands of jobs and a large reduction in the tax base received from coal operations. As noted within development viability, the Indiana First Region must target new and growing industry types to support the regional economy into the future. In order to do so, the Region will need to establish a current market analysis to target new industries strategically. This work has been started within the Previously Mined Case study that has been completed, but it needs to be expanded upon for the larger region.



Goal

Additionally, the Region will support an economic development strategy that diversifies the economy, prioritizes business retention and expansion, and fosters

innovation, entrepreneurship, business attraction.



Strategies

Development viability and business development strategies are very closely linked to one another, and the strategies employed for development viability are intended to complement those employed for business development. Strategies related to business development focus on:

- Identifying and capitalizing on diverse industry sectors and clusters that can be positioned to drive job growth in the future.
- Establishing grant and loan funding, as well as robust incentive packages that promote existing business expansion and new business development.
- Connecting innovation networks that support and develop local entrepreneurs, attract investment from outside of the Region, and promote business creation.



Action Plan

Near-Term (Six Months to One Year):

Building on the analysis of data already completed through the creation of the updated regional development strategy and the previously mined case study, the Region will identify opportunity industries. This review will determine the need for additional market analysis to refine the strategies for future industry targeting. As needed, the Region will consult with a professional firm to assist in additional strategy and market analysis for the Indiana First Region.

Based on analysis to date, the Region recognizes that education and construction are strong industries, and there is significant opportunity in manufacturing, specifically renewable energy and advanced battery manufacturing, warehouse, and storage. Building on the strategies identified within development viability, the Region will develop marketing materials to attract new development focused on regional strengths, incentive and funding opportunities, development-ready sites, and buildings/structures capable of supporting target industries.

The Region will explore and establish business attraction and retention funds and tools to help pay for, defray, or mitigate capital costs necessary to serve business development and expansion. Funds will be established with both loan and grant opportunities, and incentive packages may include tax abatements, among other tools. The

CHAPTER 4: REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLAN

Region will identify opportunities to market the Region to site selectors and research businesses within key industry sectors to target and contact. The Region will maintain strong communication with existing businesses and help identify funds and tools to encourage expansion.

The Region will increase collaboration among existing regional resources, including existing business incubators such as The Pantheon and Elmer Buchta Technology Center, institutions such as Ivy Tech and Vincennes University, and local employers and innovators to enhance knowledge and best-practice sharing and increase the support network for local entrepreneurs to promote existing talent within the Region. Enhanced collaboration will be encouraged through establishing regular, recurring meetings that promote communication and accountability. These resources will be marketed beyond the Region's boundaries to attract and develop entrepreneurs from neighboring states and beyond. Building off initiatives proposed in READI 1.0, the Region will analyze and support the development of strategic, new business development resources, including additional business incubators.

Mid-Term and Long-Term (More than One Year):

The Region will update market analysis research regularly to forecast industry trends and maintain a proactive, rather than reactive, business development strategy. Business development funding and incentive packages will be evaluated annually to determine their sustainability and effectiveness and if updates are necessary. Collaboration with regional resources will be ongoing indefinitely, and additional resources will be incorporated into regular meetings.



Example Projects

Multiple business development projects have been submitted to date. In Spencer County, the City of Rockport is interested in creating a business incubator facility to support local entrepreneurs. A strategic location within the Region, the incubator would service the southern portion of the Indiana First Region and place the majority of Indiana First Region's population within one hour of a business incubation facility. READI funds would be used to support the renovation of an existing building to serve as the physical space for the business incubation facility.

Several private businesses have also expressed interest in expansion and/or new development. Also located in Rockport, a local entrepreneur, John Obermeier, has been investing in blighted properties throughout the community

with a focus on supporting new businesses. Mr. Obermeier manages a very successful hardware store within the community and has recently revitalized a local service station into a popular café. Understanding the need for a local market to support food access and other merchants and business owners, Mr. Obermeier proposes a new open-air market and commerce center to support local businesses and farmers who may not require a full-time storefront or large commercial space. The project is seeking assistance for the removal of existing blighted properties and the construction of 5,000 square feet of new retail and event space.

Similarly, another regional entrepreneur has built a business, EVE, focused on recycling and reusing natural by-products into compost. Certified through IDEM, the facility has grown to handle grass clippings, leaves, sticks, trees, animal manure, soil, corn cobs, straw, and other farm waste. Positioned to expand, the business is seeking financial assistance to update an existing factory building and procure equipment to increase its production capabilities and service regional demand.

Featured Project: Obermeier Commerce Center



Anticipated Impact

Investing in business development directly impacts many of the Indiana First Region's and State of Indiana's key performance indicators. Through direct business development support, new businesses will be generated that will add jobs to the local economy. This will increase per capita income through increasing demand for the existing workforce and by supporting entrepreneurs who may develop new businesses that offer high-earning job opportunities. Increased access to business incubation facilities will encourage higher educational attainment to support new business development initiatives. As more job opportunities are created, additional workforce is needed, and per capita income increases, population will increase, which will drive demand for additional housing opportunities within the Region.

Talent Attraction



Definition

Talent attraction within the Indiana First Region is the process of identifying and attracting individuals with the necessary skills and abilities to support regional businesses, achieve economic growth, and support next-generation careers.

Key Issues

Key issues impacting talent attraction within the Indiana First Region include a need for more job diversity and a lack of high-wage job opportunities. As discussed in the regional data section of the report, industries within the regional economy are dominated by manufacturing, agricultural, mining, and tourism industries. The narrow set of industries limits job availability and income potential. Targeting a wider range of industries in the future will help increase job diversity and talent attraction. In order to attract desired target industries, the Region needs to support and provide a qualified workforce. Doing so will require enhanced collaboration with local institutions, including Ivy Tech, Vincennes University, and local employers to train existing and future workforce to prepare them for next-generation careers. It should be noted the Indiana First Region does this well, but understands the importance, and is continuously looking to improve its efforts. Attracting select industry types will require providing a workforce with higher levels of educational attainment than the Region may be able to provide currently. As the Region struggles with overall population decline, attracting a workforce with higher educational attainment will require importing population and increasing collaboration with higher education institutions beyond the Region.



Goal

Future-proof the workforce, create opportunities for upskilling, strengthen connections with the Region's employers, and attract new workforce to meet desired and target industry needs. Additionally, limited access to quality housing options is a barrier to talent attraction that must be addressed to attract young professionals and families to the Region, as discussed in the following section.



Strategies

Talent attraction for the Indiana First Region is directly impacted by all priority areas. Specific talent attraction strategies include:

- Building upon, strengthening, and encouraging new partnerships between secondary education, higher education, and local businesses and industries to expand skilled trade certifications and higher education degree attainment.
- Supporting the existing regional coal mining workforce to transition to next-generation careers.
- Building upon existing, and establishing new, incentives that encourage resident migration from other states.
- Focusing on quality of life and place initiatives that are attractive to a diversified workforce as discussed in the quality of life and place priority section.



Action Plan

Near-Term (Six Months to One Year):

The Region will enhance local talent attraction initiatives by establishing regular, regional collaboration meetings between institutions and local employers to identify existing industry needs and understand future industry trends. Based on the desired industry sectors discussed in the business development priority section, the Indiana First Region will collaborate with local institutions and employers to identify opportunities for providing training and certifications that support desired industry types, encouraging direct employer participation in local schools and higher education institutions. The Region will expand the network of higher education institutions and employers by targeting industries and employers outside of the Region who support the desired industry sectors that Indiana First would like to recruit locally in the near future.

The Region will identify opportunities within the job market to transition coal miners to alternative careers and support existing workforce needs. This will include targeted contact with potential talent and establishing reduced cost, or free, training and educational opportunities that result in new certifications and job placement with existing regional employers.

The Region will evaluate existing incentive packages utilized throughout communities to encourage population migration and expand those initiatives to Indiana First communities that are not currently offering incentives. This may include increased participation in the MakeMyMove initiative and using an online presence to advertise local incentives, including moving stipends/relocation grants, housing grants, business start-up grants, membership at regional community centers, passes to local attractions, discounts at local merchants and restaurants, and more.

Mid-Term and Long-Term (More than One Year):

Indiana First will analyze business needs, training, and certifications on an annual basis. The Region will collaborate with local institutions and employers to evolve training and certifications, encouraging the development of hands-on training applicable to the young workforce and those transitioning from the coal mining profession. This will include traditional education options, partnerships with local school systems, and mobile training opportunities and simulations. As relationships develop and networks expand with additional higher education institutions and businesses outside of the Region, Indiana First will increase regional marketing and offer incentives directed towards the workforce, students, and recent graduates within the desired industry sectors. This will include identifying top talent and targeted contact with candidates to provide job and internship offers, as well as incentive packages for relocation to the Indiana First Region.

For existing and future workforce interested in higher education opportunities not supported locally, the Indiana First Region will establish funds to support their educational attainment outside of the Region with an incentive to return to the Region upon degree attainment.



Example Projects

Innovative solutions are being proposed to address the Indiana First Region's talent attraction needs. A private example includes HBW Solutions, a regionally based engineering consultant who provides process engineering solutions for large corporations across the United States and internationally. Originally from Pike County, the owner relocated the business to Petersburg from outside of the Region with a desire to have a positive local impact. The company is experiencing significant growth and needs young engineers to meet project demands. With limited workforce options inside of the Indiana First Region, HBW Solutions is recruiting talent from beyond the Region for the short-term. Long-term, HBW Solutions is proposing a hands-on training module package that can be implemented within local schools and business incubators. The company has already established relationships with the Elmer Buchta Technology Center and Pike County Central High School and is seeking additional regional partnerships. HBW Solutions is requesting financial assistance to help construct the training modules for placement within the technology center and local schools. Once constructed, the company will work with local students to train and prepare them for future engineering careers with the hopes of recruiting new talent to HBW Solutions.

Within the public realm, Ivy Tech is proposing a similar solution to meet regional employer needs. Within a ten-county area that includes the Indiana First Region, Ivy Tech has conducted surveys to better understand local employer needs. Two-thirds of respondents noted a need for Industrial Maintenance and Internet Technology training. To address the need, Ivy Tech is proposing the development of a Mobile STEM Unit that can travel to key locations and employers throughout the Region to provide needed training. The project is requesting funding to assist in purchasing and constructing the mobile unit that will allow the use of state-of-the-art tools and instrumentation for workforce training.

Featured Project: MTP Engineering Training



Anticipated Impact

Employing the talent attraction strategies noted above will have a ripple effect within the Region that will help achieve the Indiana First Region's vision and address the State of Indiana's key performance indicators. Through a targeted approach for attracting talent and workforce, the Region will stabilize and increase its population. With a larger pool of qualified workforce, employment and job opportunities will increase. Higher skilled jobs and workforce will lead to an increase in per capita income. Additional population and higher incomes will support the need for new and diverse housing types.



Housing

Definition

Housing within the Indiana First Region refers to the type, availability, and quality of housing opportunities needed to support and attract population with a balanced and diverse demographic offering.

Key Issues

Regional issues related to housing are not unique to the Indiana First Region. Housing was a regional priority of the original development plan for READI 1.0 and remains a priority with the updated strategy. While significant improvements in housing availability have been made with the assistance of READI 1.0 funding, primary issues related to housing still include a need for more available housing stock. Most of the Region's homes are occupied, leaving little opportunity for housing purchase. When houses are available for purchase, they sell quickly and sometimes do not make it to the market before being sold.

Within the available stock, a large amount is outdated, having been constructed prior to 1990. The age, coupled with a lack of housing diversity and type, makes it difficult to attract young professionals and families who are looking for modern and affordable options. Convenient housing access to amenities such as retail, recreation, and dining, among others, is a challenge within the Region, and many of the Indiana First Region's downtowns are where these amenities are located. Unfortunately, they have limited housing availability, if any at all.



Goal

Address the lack of, and outdated, housing stock and provide housing options and incentives that encourage migration to the Region.

Strategies for addressing regional housing needs impact all



Strategies

priority areas and are directly related to strategies within development viability, talent attraction, and quality of life and place. Specific strategies for addressing housing within the Indiana First Region include:

- Funding blight remediation and elimination and creating land banks within existing communities.
- Utilizing information from past housing studies and the success of recent housing construction to increase private development interest within the Region.
- Supporting construction of a variety of housing types through financial assistance and construction of necessary infrastructure.
- Strengthening and developing housing incentives to maintain the existing population and encourage migration to the Region from outside of Indiana.



Action Plan

Near-Term (Six Months to One Year):

As described further below within the example projects section, the Region will establish a blight elimination, mitigation, and land bank program to address regional blight and prepare properties, structures, and sites for renovation or redevelopment. These properties will be used to create a landbank that will be marketed to potential developers.

The Region will establish funding sources to encourage mixed-use development within community downtowns and to support infrastructure construction and expansion in strategic growth areas. As discussed further below in example projects, Indiana First representatives will meet with downtown building and business owners to encourage the adaptive reuse of the upper stories of historic downtown buildings into housing, office, or retail space. A revolving loan fund will be established to fund the design and construction of their renovation, and the Region will develop a resource list of consulting firms, contractors, and developers who may be able to assist building owners with their projects.

Indiana First will enhance collaboration with development partners. This will include frequent conversations with existing partners and establishing relationships with new partners to increase regional development interest.

CHAPTER 4: REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLAN

Marketing material will be presented to the development community related to available property and property owners interested in housing development projects. A variety of housing types will be targeted, including, but not limited to, single-family homes, townhomes, duplexes and multiplexes, apartments, downtown lofts, and more.

The Region will evaluate existing housing incentive packages provided throughout the Region to determine what is working well and what is not. In coordination with the action plan noted within Talent Attraction, the Region will scale up incentives throughout the Region to promote regional migration to Indiana First communities in strategic growth areas. Incentives may include housing stipends, grants, low-interest loans, and moving grants. Incentives will be generally advertised, but targeted contact will be made by marketing incentives to the out-of-state workforce with priority skill sets, as well as to existing workforce regularly commuting to the Region for employment from outside of the State.

Mid-Term and Long-Term (More than One Year):

The Indiana First Region will evaluate housing projects regularly. As housing development projects are identified, the Region will allocate funds to assist developers in infrastructure development and expansion. This may include the construction of utilities, roads, and other public infrastructure.

As mixed-use projects become viable, the Region will provide grants and revolving loans to support infill and existing structure redevelopment. As loan funds are recovered and become available, the Region will actively market to additional developers, building, and property owners.

Incentive packages will be evaluated annually. The Region will collaborate with the development community to enhance incentives and ensure sustainability through increased private investment.

Region will financially support structure demolition and subsequent site preparation for redevelopment. The properties will be inventoried and marketed to developers for redevelopment and/or infill. The Region is requesting financial assistance in the acquisition and demolition of targeted properties, as well as in establishing funds to support property renovation.

The Indiana First Region will establish a revolving loan fund to encourage mixed-use development within downtowns. Many of the Region's downtown have historic structures where the upper stories are underutilized. This project seeks to create a loan fund to encourage the renovation of upper stories to support downtown housing and additional office and retail space. As funds are recovered, they will be used to fund additional downtown mixed-use projects. This project will require Indiana First Region and community representatives to actively engage downtown property owners to encourage building renovation and redevelopment. The Region is requesting funds to be used to establish the revolving loan fund.

Multiple private developers have also submitted projects for funding consideration. One example project includes a new multi-family project in Vincennes known as Bierhaus Flats. The developer is preparing to construct a new apartment complex that will include six buildings and 240 apartments within close proximity of downtown. Amenities within the development will also include trails and garage parking, leading to improved quality of life and place amenities. The developer is requesting financial assistance to support critical public infrastructure improvements.



Example Projects

The Indiana First Region is preparing to establish a blight elimination, mitigation, and land bank program. As alluded to above, this program will require collaboration with regional communities to evaluate existing blight within the Region and determine strategic areas for property acquisition. As properties are acquired, structures will be evaluated to determine their feasibility for renovation or the need for demolition. If demolition is required, the

Featured Project: Bierhaus Flats



Anticipated Impact

The strategies and action plan outlined above will significantly impact housing and generate thousands of new units over the next several years. This will increase access to housing, as well as diversity, providing hundreds of new affordable housing and rental housing units. An increase in housing opportunities will support population growth and talent attraction and allow the Region to recruit new individuals from neighboring states and beyond who are seeking the affordable living and quality of life that the Indiana First Region offers. An influx of population will increase the workforce supporting business development, leading to an increase in per capita income.

Quality of Life & Place



Definition

Quality of life and place refers to the amenities and services that support well-being, culture, and entertainment, making a location a desirable, competitive, and economically vibrant place to live, work, and play. These are often intangible things that are hard to quantify, but which are critically important to attracting and retaining the population, such as access to restaurants and food, nightlife, parks, recreation, entertainment, schools, childcare, physical and mental health care, and more.

Key Issues

The Indiana First Region is often challenged to provide the same level of amenities as more urban areas due to its rural nature. The impact of this is illustrated by migration patterns, which suggest outward migration to more urbanized areas, including Indianapolis and Louisville. Within the Region, existing childcare providers only have enough capacity to service 24% of the children under six years old. This prevents some parents from being able to enter the workforce who may need more convenient and affordable access due to limited availability. Due to past population trends, portions of the Region have also lost convenient access to birthing centers, leading some families to leave the State for healthcare.

The Region also tracks behind the State in broadband access, which impacts the ability of remote workers to work from home. Since the remote workforce often consists of high-wage earners with advanced degrees, this directly correlates to lower per capita income. Within the Region, the percentage of the population with food insecurity is slightly higher than the State average, suggesting that additional food options are needed. The Indiana First Region workforce also has a higher percentage of people with long commute times than the State average. This contributes to outward migration for people who choose

to move closer to work. Fortunately, this can also work in favor for the Region since many people commute to Indiana First for employment. Lastly, although the Indiana First Region is a major contributor to the State's tourism industry, attracting more than one million annual visitors, many of the Region's attractions are seasonal. This makes it difficult for businesses that support tourist attractions to remain viable in the off-season and it also creates difficulty in retaining seasonal and transient workforce.

Providing quality of life and place amenities will help retain the existing population and attract new residents from adjacent states. As explored in READI 1.0 and reinforced during recent focus group meetings and research, the Indiana First Region needs more access to entertainment, recreation, childcare, and healthcare opportunities to be competitive with more urbanized areas to retain existing, and attract new, talent and population to the Region.



Goal

Provide amenities and services that support population growth and diversification within the Region.



Strategies

Three primary strategies will be used to support regional quality of life and place. These include:

- Funding public and private gathering spaces, recreational opportunities, and amenities that promote entertainment, leisure, and year-round tourism throughout the Region.
- Supporting businesses and institutions that enhance local culture and fill local quality of life and place needs.
- Enhancing promotion and marketing of existing amenities within the Region.



Action Plan

Near-Term (Six Months to One Year):

The Region will collaborate with local counties, communities, and private developers to identify opportunities for new amenities and attractions, or upgrades to existing amenities and attractions, that support quality of life. Building on the work of the regional development strategy, this will include the solicitation of public input through community events and surveys and a review of existing comprehensive plans,

strategic development plans, parks and recreation plans, and other relevant planning documents, as well as a review of private investment initiatives and business plans.

Key project types will include public and private gathering spaces that support programmed events, activities, and entertainment; recreational trails that encourage community and regional connectivity; private investments that enhance regional tourism and promote the Region as a year-round destination tourism center; projects that support nightlife, culture, and dining within local communities and downtowns; and public and private initiatives that enhance childcare access, health care access, and support local education and schools.

Once vetted, the Region will financially support projects through grants and loans that assist in the construction of quality of life amenities and initiatives. Since quality of life and place amenities are proven to drive economic development, tools such as TIF districts will be evaluated and may be considered for establishment or expansion to support future investment in strategic growth areas.

The Region will establish a working group of local organizations, including, but not limited to, SWIDC, Indiana Region 15, tourism bureaus, visitors centers, chambers of commerce, and more, to research, develop, and enhance regional marketing strategies that build on existing efforts. Where possible, entities will pull resources to implement updated marketing strategies.

Mid-Term and Long-Term (More than One Year):

As needed, the Region will collaborate with local communities to update and/or develop key planning documents that take a holistic view of regional communities to evaluate existing conditions and determine local quality of life needs. As planning documents are updated, Indiana First will work with local public and private organizations described above to support the ongoing development of quality of life initiatives.

Marketing materials and strategies will be evaluated annually and updated to reflect new and upcoming amenities available within the Region.



Example Projects

Understanding the importance to regional development, the Indiana First Region has received overwhelming support for quality of life projects during the READI 2.0 process and the development of the updated regional development strategy. Submissions demonstrate regional cooperation and have come from local municipalities and counties, as well as private developers and business owners. Submitted projects span a number of quality of life targets and include parks, trails, community centers, markets, campgrounds, childcare facilities, and domestic abuse shelters, among others.

Specific examples include the Town of Petersburg, which intends to construct a downtown gathering space on a municipally-controlled ground where events such as local markets and festivals, concerts, and movies on the lawn can be programmed. A unique opportunity within the Region, the community plans to develop the space on two parcels formerly occupied by historic downtown buildings that were removed due to a previous lack of maintenance and a resultant lack of structural integrity. During the planning for demolition, the Town invested in the salvage and stabilization of the building facades, which still remain and allow the historic streetscape to be uninterrupted. The Town is seeking READI assistance to augment municipal funds and allow the construction of the park, which will become a major attraction for the community and support downtown business.

An additional example of public investment in quality of life is proposed in Perry County, where Perry Central Community School Corporation is seeking to expand local childcare services. In an effort to attract teachers to the school and understand the ongoing regional need for licensed services, the school has provided care for the children of students and staff for years. The services have been highly utilized, and the demand is greater than the school can handle within its current space. Realizing the importance high-quality childcare not only for staff but for its future students, the school corporation is looking to expand its program to the wider community by constructing a 100-seat center. The project is requesting READI support to help fund the construction of the facility.

The Old Ben Aqua Park is an example of a private investment quality of life project. Recently purchased from the Boy Scouts of America, the owner has a vision to create a destination water park, campground, and event center to draw visitors from throughout the State and beyond. The owner has

CHAPTER 4: REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLAN

successfully managed other regional campgrounds and has successfully operated the Old Ben Aqua Park as a water recreation attraction. The owner is requesting READI funds to assist in the extension of water infrastructure, which is needed to support six phase one cabins and twenty initial campsites, with plans to expand to twenty cabins and fifty campsites in Phase 2.

Featured Project: Future Petersburg Park Location



Featured Project: Perry Central Childcare



Anticipated Impact

As further discussed in the strategy, investment in quality of life is anticipated to generate approximately \$50 million in total investment. This investment is expected to foster population growth by enhancing recreational amenities and boosting tourism potential within the Region. By showcasing the Region to visitors through tourism initiatives, opportunities will arise to promote regional assets and attract further migration to the area. Additionally, investment in quality of life amenities and services bolsters local businesses and expands job opportunities. This will be achieved by enhancing and expanding visitation within the Region, its communities, and their respective business districts.

Project Intake Process

The following section outlines the process the Indiana First Region will utilize for intake, prioritization, and evaluation of regional projects. Following receipt of initial public input and drafting strategies, the Region developed an online project submission portal for use in receiving and vetting READI 2.0 projects. The portal became active in the Fall of 2023 and will remain active through the notice of the READI 2.0 award from the State. It was advertised to the general public through local municipalities, government agencies, anchor institutions, and social media platforms. The portal was created to standardize the project submission process, and a PDF of the portal is included in the appendix of this report. It introduces the Indiana First Region and the READI program, providing a brief description of key metrics and intent. Basic submission requirements include contact information for the project representative and information regarding the organization requesting funding. This includes the organizational type (e.g., public, private, other) and their location within the Region. The portal requests a project narrative focused on intent and goals and requires the submitters to select regional and state priority areas impacted by the project, including the IEDC's stated KPIs and regional focus areas.

The submission form requires the submitter to note the status of site control and any project steps that have been completed to date, including cost estimating, engineering reports, renderings, construction documentation, and more. The portal allows submissions to upload any supporting documentation for reference. Following the project information section, a budgeting section is provided. The overall budget for the project must be provided, as well as the funding gap request and current funding sources, including local, private, and non-profit. The form requires the submission to note additional funding sources that have been explored beyond READI funds, as well as a specific description of how any awarded funds would be used. A project timeline is required at the end of the portal prior to submission. The timeline includes anticipated start and completion dates for the project, as well as any phasing that may be required to complete the overall project.

Utilizing the format of the project portal, the Indiana First Region has developed a scoring sheet and ranking system for evaluating project submissions in an objective manner. The scoring sheet assigns a range of points to projects based on the following ranking criteria:

- Submission completeness
- Project site control
- Level of design/engineering
- Analysis of supplementary documentation
- Alignment with regional priorities
- Alignment with State KPIs
- Project funding
- Project narrative
- Anticipated construction start date
- Anticipated construction completion
- Anticipated regional impact

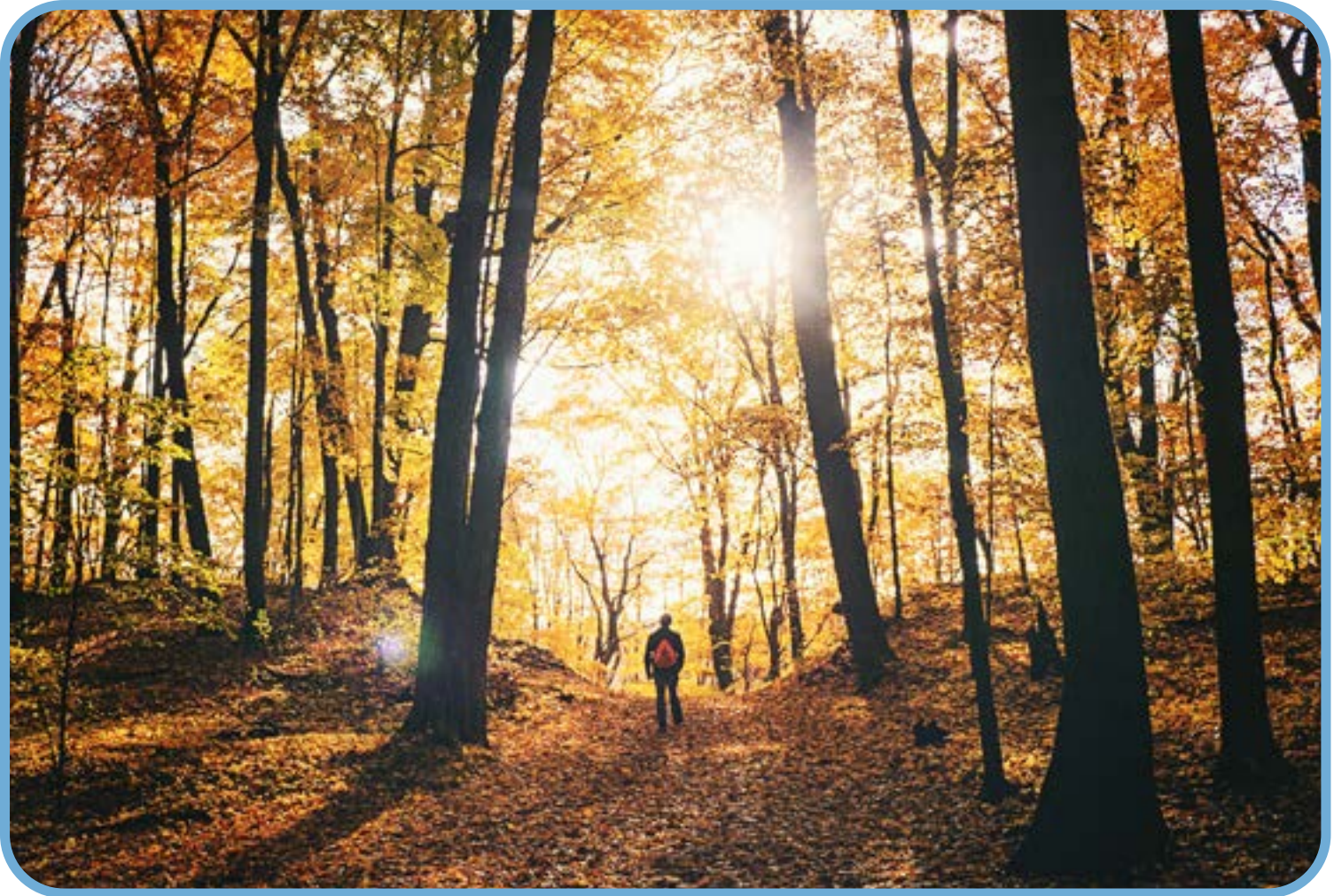
On a minimum, monthly basis, the submissions of the project portal are exported to an Excel spreadsheet allowing the information of all projects submitted to be compared directly to one another. The Indiana First Region has developed a sub-committee of reviewers who analyze submissions monthly and go through the project scoring process. As projects are evaluated, initial results are shared with the project representatives.

Upon notice of award from the IEDC and the State of Indiana, the Indiana First Region will be prepared to present a shortlist of recommended projects for funding consideration and evaluation. The Region understands that this will be a conversation with the IEDC, and that not all projects may meet the IEDC's criteria, and not all projects will receive ultimate funding. As conversations with the IEDC progress, the Region will notify project representatives of funding awards or denials.

As projects are awarded for funding, the regional subcommittee will meet with the project representatives and IEDC as required to work through project reporting, contracting, and funding requirements. During project construction, the subcommittee will acquire and report project information monthly to the IEDC through project completion. As projects are completed, the regional subcommittee will work directly with the project representatives and IEDC to close out the necessary paperwork and other project requirements. Upon completion, the Indiana First Region will provide the requested documentation to the IEDC and collaborate as needed to calculate the economic impact of regional initiatives and projects.



Hoosier National Forest



Chapter Five: Outcomes, KPIs, and Metrics



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Outcome

Investment Criteria

Conclusion

Introduction

The READI program was developed to focus on three primary initiatives: Quality of Life, Quality of Place, and Quality of Opportunity. These elements were chosen to drive overall population growth and employment in rural communities while creating places residents wanted to be. To align with the State's priorities, the Indiana First Region recast its vision for the future and developed more refined strategies for READI 2.0. While this plan serves as a mechanism for READI 2.0 future funding, this plan will be used beyond that. The Indiana First Region will use this plan as its foundation to harness its regional strengths and address its weaknesses, allowing it to continue growing and thriving as a region. While unforeseen circumstances brought them together to form this new region, they have all worked together as part of a larger region. Although they are not contiguous counties bound together by borders, they easily work together as a region because of their location as state border counties and similar issues and strengths.

Through this update, Indiana First defined five key strategies that will give them unique advantages and address their shortcomings. The State identifies three overarching buckets – Quality of Life, Quality of Place, and Quality of Opportunities. The Indiana First Region refined those “goals” into more refined strategies that were tailored to the Region. These include: Development Viability, Business Development, Talent Attraction, Housing, and Quality of Life and Place.

Each of these strategies has a defined goal. They include the following:

- **Development Viability:** Remove barriers to, and encourage, private and public development through incentives to promote growth within the Indiana First Region.
- **Business Development:** Support a regional economic development strategy that diversifies the economy, focuses on business retention and expansion, and fosters innovation, entrepreneurship, business attraction.
- **Talent Attraction:** Future-proof the workforce, create opportunities for upskilling, strengthen connections with the Region's employers, and attract new workforce to meet desired and target industry needs.
- **Housing:** Address the lack of, and outdated, housing stock and provide housing options and incentives that

encourage migration to the Region.

- **Quality of Place and Life:** Provide amenities and services that support population growth and diversification within the Region.

Related to each of these goals is a series of strategies that build upon strengths and address key issues within the Region. While there are action steps to accomplish many projects, policies, and programs under these strategies, the alignment with the State's initiatives is still the same – to grow the population in the Region, increase opportunities, and create quality places where people want to live and work.

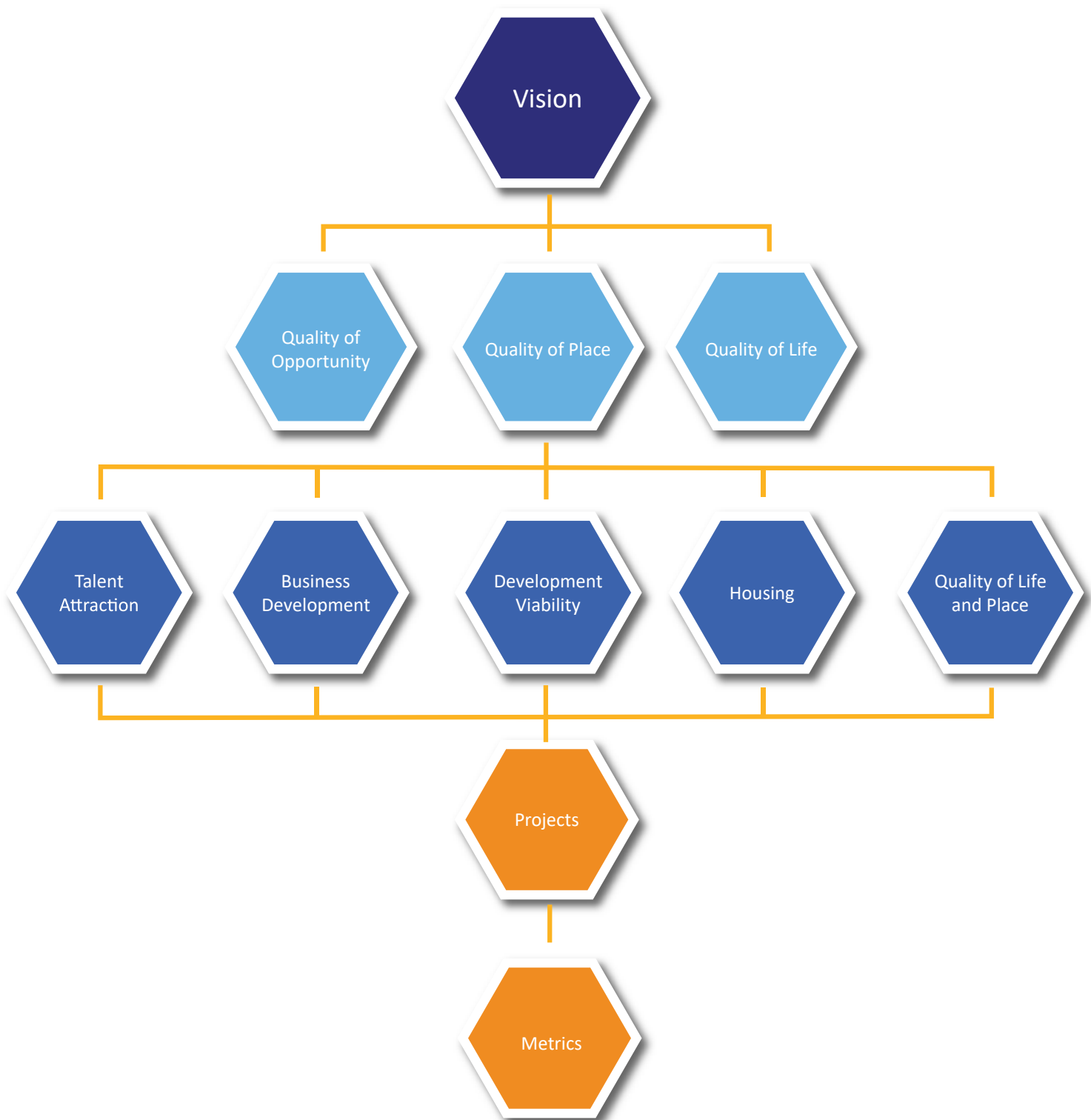
Outcome

As part of the update to their plan, the Region identified five different metrics to track, including population, housing units, private investment in disadvantaged communities, per capita income, and access to childcare. One area for improvement during READI 1.0 was the need for a regional dashboard to track key success metrics related to these metrics. While a tracking dashboard was created during the 21st Century Talent Region designation, one must select the Indiana First counties to understand their collective impact. Therefore, it has been difficult for the Region to track the complete impact of READI 1.0.

As the plan was updated for READI 2.0, the Region established baseline data to benchmark the implementation of their strategies. The development of a virtual dashboard tool to monitor key indicators would be useful for the Region. This would be an initiative outside of the READI 2.0 funding strategy. This could complement the Region's monthly meetings to monitor the impact to the Region as the strategy unfolds and projects are completed. It could also be something that Indiana First undertakes with the Indiana 15 Regional Planning Commission, which has been helping them implement READI 1.0 projects. Data to be monitored includes:

Population Growth

Population growth is the key indicator of how well the Region is doing. Overall, in the last ten years, the Indiana First Region has lost approximately 3% of its population. However, particular areas in the Region have grown by reversing population trends and changing the population pyramid. To reverse population growth, the Region must address development viability and increase the number of sites that can be developed in the Region for both housing and jobs. The Region also needs to increase



housing availability along with different housing choices and develop a targeted marketing campaign to attract new people from out-of-state to the Region. These strategies, combined with others in the plan, anticipate to reverse the population decline. Since the Region has seen a decline over the past ten years, typical projections could not be completed as they would show a decline based on historical trends. Instead, the population was calculated based on the positive net-in migration into the Region, which stood at 228 people domestically and 67 internationally in 2021.

Additionally, the number of new housing units constructed with an average persons per household rate of 2.32 would produce a population of approximately 1,100 people. The 5-year goal for the Region is to reverse population decline and grow the population by 1.0%, which would be approximately 1,270 people in addition to the 1,100 people from the new housing units. The 10-year goal would be to add another 2% of the population, approximately 2,565 people for a total of 132,015 people in 2034.

Total Employment

The Indiana First Region’s economy is slightly different from other regions, with healthcare, education, manufacturing, and entertainment/hospitality industries serving as major employers. The top ten employers in the Region include Good Samaritan Hospital (Knox), Vincennes University (Knox), Waupaca Foundry (Perry), Ceasars Southern Indiana (Harrison), Sunrise Coal (Knox), Futaba Indiana of

America (Knox), Cleveland Cliffs (Spencer), Harrison County Hospital (Harrison), Pike County School Corporation (Pike), ATTC Manufacturing (Perry). The Region has a labor force participation rate of about 60%, with unemployment hovering just above 4%. Total employment has declined from 2010 to 2020 by about 4% (approximately 2,500 jobs lost). The Region is an exporter of coal products; however, the Indiana First Region intimately knows that they will continue to lose coal-related jobs, and they must be replaced with other industries. Hence, the study conducted by Pike County regarding “Previously Mined Property Case Study” during READI 1.0. Like population growth, the goal is to stabilize job losses and begin recovery. Based upon known project expansions such as the Waupaca and EVE Green Waste Management Expansion, new business startups like Bliss Ice Cream, Culture and Innovation Center in Rockport, and recruitment of new businesses like solar manufacturing to Pike County, it is anticipated that will be an addition of 550 new jobs in the next five years, and the Region anticipates doubling that in ten years to 1,100 additional new jobs.

Per Capital Income

Per capita income serves as a fundamental measure for assessing a region’s economic well-being and development status, guiding policymakers in their efforts to promote sustainable growth and improve the standard of living for residents. A higher per capita income generally correlates

Figure 1: Key Perfomance Indicator Projections

Key Performance Indicator	Current	5-Year Projection	10-Year Projection
Total Population	127,080	129,450	132,015
Total Employment	62,604	63,154	64,254
Per Capita Income	\$51,956	\$56,240	\$62,100
Educational Attainment	18.5%	20.5%	23%
Total New Housing Units	56,459	57,037	57,920
New Rental Housing Units	11,804	12,091	12,741
New Owner-Occupied Hous- ing Units	38,357	38,823	38,925
Percentage of Affordable Housing Units	80%	80%	80%

with a higher standard of living, indicating that residents have more resources available to meet their needs and desires. A rising per capita income suggests that the economy is expanding, creating more job opportunities and increasing the overall prosperity of the population. It can contribute to improved quality of life indicators such as life expectancy, literacy rates, and access to clean water and sanitation. Regions with higher per capita incomes are generally more attractive to investors and businesses. They indicate a larger consumer market with greater purchasing power, which can stimulate investment, job creation, and economic growth.

Additionally, higher per capita income often leads to increased government tax revenue. This revenue can then be reinvested into public services and infrastructure, further contributing to regional development. Per Capita Income in 2010 was approximately \$44,0884, increasing by almost 17% in 2020 to \$51,9564. The Indiana First Region anticipates Per Capital Income growth to continue at 2% per year, with the 5-year project being \$56,240 and in ten years \$62,100.

Educational Attainment

Within the Indiana First Region, a skilled workforce is needed to meet job demands. Across the Region, certain employers are compelled to recruit labor and workers externally to fill vacant positions and address staffing shortages. Particularly within sectors such as skilled trades, advanced manufacturing, robotics, and STEM and STEAM-related careers, there needs to be more qualified professionals. The transition from the declining coal industry to a renewable energy economy further highlights the need for technicians and skilled workers capable of supporting, installing, and maintaining emerging technologies. Additionally, local healthcare establishments, including hospitals and extended care facilities, need more nursing staff.

Through the initiatives of READI 1.0, the Region invested in vocational training and advanced certifications, aiding young individuals' entry into the local workforce post-high school graduation. Anticipated outcomes following READI 1.0 include a projected increase in post-secondary educational enrollment to over 300 students and the attainment of more than 200 certifications. The subsequent implementation of READI 2.0 is expected to return similar positive effects, with an anticipated additional increase of over 390 students and attainment of over 200 certifications.

Between 2010 and 2020, the percentage of the population holding bachelor's degrees in the Region rose from 13.2%

to 18.5%. Based on the documented rise in post-secondary enrollment and data collected from the 21st Century Talent Regions, it is projected that the Indiana First Region will experience a 2% increase in bachelor's degree attainment within the next five years, followed by another 2% increase in the following decade.

Total New Housing Units

The Indiana First Region is home to numerous vibrant communities and neighborhoods that offer enriching places for residents and their families. Maintaining these thriving communities requires continuous investment in neighborhoods and housing infrastructure. Housing is a fundamental pillar of the Region, with the availability of safe, affordable, and high-quality housing being crucial to residential satisfaction and efforts to attract new residents and job opportunities.

Childcare

The Region currently needs help with childcare and having enough seats and quality childcare that offers employees the opportunity to take advantage of childcare so the employee can participate in the workforce. A major focus of the Region is to increase capacity for childcare. There are 87 childcare facilities in the Region; nearly three-quarters of these facilities are full time, while 25% are part-time facilities. What is more staggering is that licensed childcare providers can only serve 24% of the children under age 6, while 75% are served in an informal setting, whether by friends, family members, neighbors, or others. Based on childcare data, Harrison and Perry Counties have the lowest relative capacities for childcare. The Region anticipates creating one childcare facility in Spencer County that would care for up to 40 children, expansion of a YMCA in Perry County that would offer childcare as part of its program, and expanding the existing Perry County Child Care initiative from 53 to 100 seats, the expansion of the Saint Bernard Pre-School facility in Spencer County, and the expansion of the Perry Community Schools project which would increase capacity from 25 seats to 100 seats. In fact, the goal of the Region is to add one new facility to every county in ten years.

Innovation Activities

Sustaining long-term economic growth in the Indiana First Region comes from fostering the development of ideas and the creation of new businesses from existing regional assets. While traditional economic development

efforts focused on attracting new industries and service operations are still important, there is a growing need to develop and connect innovation assets and networks to promote economic growth from within. As the Indiana First regional industrial landscape has shifted away from manufacturing and extraction jobs, focusing economic development efforts on industries where intellectual capital drives expansion is increasingly important. This will help small businesses and entrepreneurs leverage and commercialize new technologies, ultimately leading to growth for the regional economy. In 2010, there were approximately 2,226 industries located within the Region. By 2020, the number of businesses had decreased to 2,097. The Region has seen growth in new startups. There were approximately 96 startups in 2019, followed by 95 startups in 2020, and 98 new startups in 2021. The Region anticipates that it will continue its average of approximately 95 new startups annually.

Increase Private Investment in Disadvantaged Communities

The Indiana Housing Community Development Authority identifies disadvantaged communities as those containing qualified census tracts and/or areas of “chronic economic distress.” Four of the five counties in the Indiana First Region are classified as counties with areas of Chronic Economic Distress. These include Knox, Pike, Spencer, and Perry.

Being designated as a Chronic Economic Distress community offers advantages such as eligibility for 48C energy/manufacturing tax credits, benefiting the majority of the Indiana First Region. This unique tax credit provides a competitive edge for business attraction, distinguishing the Region from other counties in Indiana. These funding opportunities play a crucial role in securing financing for projects under READI 2.0, building upon the successes achieved in READI 1.0. The Region experienced a significant impact through READI 1.0 initiatives, resulting in a total investment of \$154.5 million, showcasing a remarkable return on investment ratio of 10:1.

With strategic objectives outlined in the updated development plan, the Indiana First Region is positioned to maintain its attractiveness as an investment destination. Economic and fiscal projections anticipate a return on investment exceeding 8:1 for READI 2.0 initiatives. Additionally, the Region remains committed to directing a substantial portion of anticipated READI funding towards disadvantaged communities, with an estimated allocation of 96.93% dedicated to these areas within the Region.

Economic Impact

The total project investment is approximately \$656,665,600 derived from the 80+ projects. The funding breaks down as follows:

- READI 2.0 Funding: \$74.9 million
- Philanthropic Funding: \$30.7 million
- Private Funding: \$445.9 million
- Local Match: \$88 million
- Other State Funding: \$10.6 million
- Federal Funding: \$6.6 million
- Total Investment: \$656.7 million

The strategic allocation of \$74.9 million of READI funding coupled with \$88 million of total local match is a pivotal move to bolster regional development in the Indiana First Region. This significant investment showcases a sophisticated use of local financial mechanisms to draw in more substantial state funding, thereby amplifying the impact of these resources on regional projects. TIF funds are directed toward public projects that are expected to trigger private development, elevate property values, and boost property tax revenue. This investment not only secures substantial economic growth and job creation but also strengthens the Region’s competitive edge.

Utilizing TIF funds as a considerable part of the local match for READI projects underscores the Region’s commitment to sustainable economic development. It signals robust local support, enhancing the viability and appeal of projects to potential investors. This approach fosters public-private partnerships, drawing private-sector investments into the community, thus magnifying the program’s overall impact. By aligning these investments with strategic development priorities, the Region ensures that funding is channeled into projects with the most significant potential for regional economic acceleration and development.

In essence, this methodical allocation of TIF funds as a local match for the READI program is a testament to the Indiana First Region’s strategic planning and investment in its future growth and prosperity. It sets a precedent for leveraging local resources to achieve broader development objectives.

Additionally, the influx of 393 new students into Indiana, particularly the Indiana First Region, presents significant economic impacts through direct financial contributions and indirect economic stimulation. The \$5.6 million in new Economic Development Income Tax (EDIT) revenue annually represents a substantial infusion of funds into

local government coffers, facilitating improvements in public services, infrastructure, and possibly educational funding, directly benefiting both the new students and the existing population.

The additional \$5.99 million in new property taxes annually further enhances the financial resources available for local governments. This increase in property tax revenue can lead to improvements in public schools, parks, and community services, contributing to a higher quality of life for all residents and making the area more attractive for future investments.

Moreover, the \$58 million in new disposable income annually introduced into the local economy by adding more than 2,340 new residents has a multiplier effect, stimulating business growth, job creation, and increased spending in the local economy. This boost in disposable income can lead to higher demand for local goods and services, fostering an environment of economic vitality and stability.

Overall, the addition of 2,340 new residents and 393 new students and their associated financial contributions present a significant positive impact on the State of Indiana and the Indiana First Region, driving economic growth, enhancing public services, and improving the standard of living for both new and existing residents.

Investment Criteria

As noted in Part Four, Project Intake Process, the Indiana First Region has outlined the process for project selection that would be deployed across the Region through a process approved by the Indiana First Task Force. In collaboration with the IEDC, the Indiana First Task Force will allocate funding to projects demonstrating extensive impact and significant contributions toward achieving regional key performance indicators and established goals.

While acknowledging the potential benefits of numerous projects to the Region, it is deemed essential to employ additional criteria for further project evaluation, ensuring alignment with the State's economic development priorities:

- **Population Growth:** Project or program will directly or have a strong correlation to mitigating population loss or growing the population.
- **Economic Development Potential:** Given the importance of growing rural communities and the fact that this region is predominately in "chronic economic distress", the economic impact of each project

will be critical. The Task Force will review project outcomes and metrics of each project to determine the likelihood of success in moving the needle on the employment and innovation KPI metrics. Projects that have broad and long-term economic impact will be given preference.

- **Sustainability of the Project:** The project has a reasonable probability of being maintained or extended for a certain period beyond the use of the READI grant. For example, an infrastructure project must account for maintenance costs beyond what READI can provide.
- **Successful Implementation:** Those projects that have more of the key indicators such as site control, completed design/engineering, alignment with state and regional KPIs, and secured funding streams worked through will have a more favorable rating.
- **Project Impact:** The degree to which the project creates an impact, especially towards the identified state and regional KPIs.
- **Financial & Match Requirements:** Those projects that have secured or can show strong financial commitments beyond READI and meet the match will be given higher consideration.

Geographic Allocation of Projects: The dispersant of projects across the Region will be evaluated as the Region benefits not only regionally but locally as well, to accelerate population and employment growth.

Conclusion

The updated plan surpasses the READI initiative, presenting itself as a comprehensive growth strategy for the Region. Grounded in this strategic framework and the forthcoming projects, the Region is poised to sustain growth and prosperity. Through the investments made and sought from the IEDC, a commitment is made to welcome over 1,270 new residents, generate more than 650 jobs, accommodate over 200 additional students, and establish in excess of 95 new businesses within the next five years.

The Region has progressed significantly, building upon the success of READI 1.0. Notably, the initial allocation of \$15 million has been leveraged to yield a total investment exceeding \$150 million. Collaboration, effectiveness, and focus have reached unprecedented levels, marking a notable shift in the Region's 40+ year history. The Region stands prepared to collaborate further, aiming to solidify its status as the most desirable destination in the State of Indiana for living, working, and recreational activities.

CHAPTER 5: OUTCOMES, KPIS, AND METRICS

Through these strategic initiatives, the Region is positioned to emerge as a rural leader and a model community, not only within Indiana but also on a national scale. The anticipation is to continue fostering collaboration, with a genuine invitation extended to stakeholders to contribute their resources in facilitating the successful implementation of the strategy.

George Rogers Clark National Historical Park

