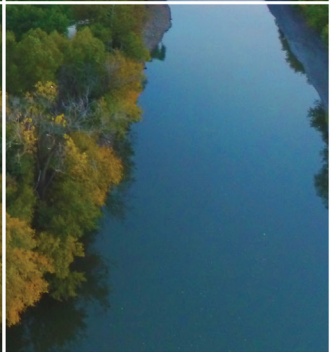
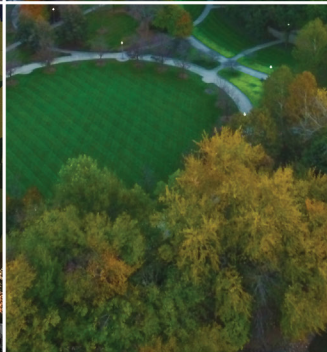
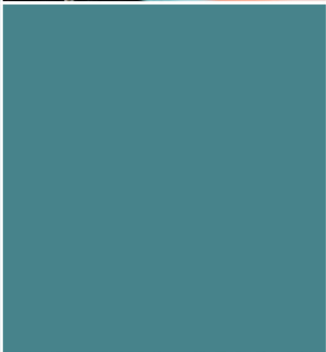
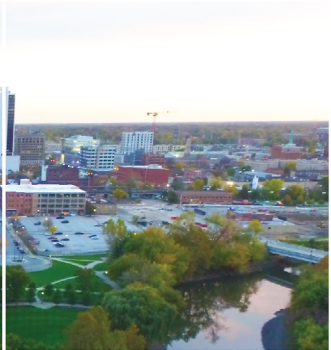
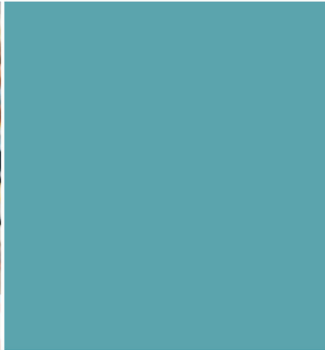


NORTHEAST INDIANA FIVE-YEAR PLAN

NORTHEAST INDIANA STRATEGIC
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

September 2022



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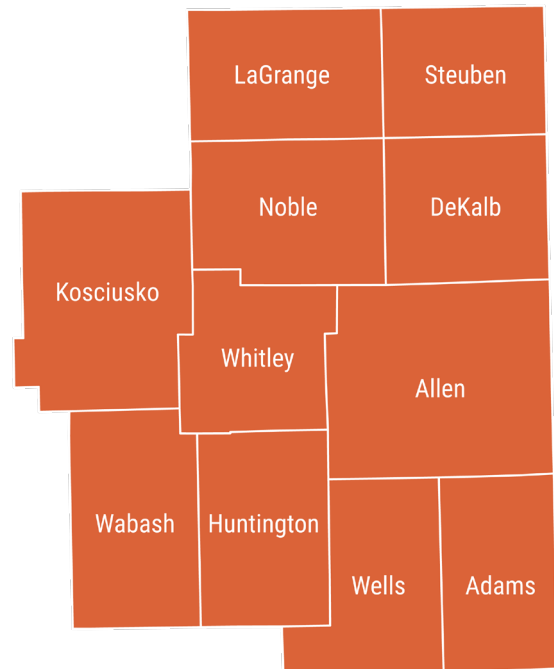
1. Introduction

The Fort Wayne metro area was recently named the fastest-growing metro area in the Great Lakes region¹. That accolade was earned through years of focused efforts and dedication by leaders in Fort Wayne-Allen County, and leadership across Northeast Indiana has been working to emulate that success. While the area’s uptick in growth over the last decade should be celebrated, the positive headlines mask larger challenges facing Northeast Indiana. These challenges include substantially lower income levels than the nation (and compared to the region’s own history), limited population growth outside of Allen County, and postsecondary education and credential attainment levels in Northeast Indiana that remain far lower than the US as a whole. Although residents of the region enjoy a lower cost of living relative to many Americans in larger metro areas, that cost (e.g., housing) will continue to rise, calling for aggressive action.

The region includes 11 counties,² each with its own distinctive culture, history, and economic development assets. Each county also faces different growth dynamics. Counties like Allen County (the region’s major urban center) and LaGrange County (home to a large Amish population) are firmly on the path of rapid economic growth. These areas have experienced robust business investment and job creation, as well as strong population growth, driven by a recent uptick in net domestic migration in Allen County and by natural increase in LaGrange County. Other counties—such as Huntington County and Wabash County—have yet to turn around a decades-long decline in their population base. Most of the region’s counties are neither declining nor generating enough positive momentum to spur sustained long-term growth. Yet despite such challenges, these 11 counties have both the potential and a path to achieve faster population growth, higher income levels, and improved educational attainment and workforce readiness levels.

Northeast Indiana has a long history of working together as a region. The Northeast Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA) has competed for and been awarded \$92 million from the State of Indiana through two programs to invest in projects that attract and retain skilled talent in the region: The Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI)³ and the Regional Cities Initiative (RCI).⁴ Northeast Indiana has already proven its ability to generate strong returns for the community and the state for these types of investments. RCI allowed the region to fund 28 projects, leading to an induced investment of more than \$1 billion

Figure 1. Northeast Indiana 11-County Region



¹ "Fort Wayne growth rate paces Great Lakes region." Greater Fort Wayne Inc. May 5, 2021. <https://www.greaterfortwayneinc.com/allen-county-posts-another-year-of-positive-domestic-migration/>

² Northeast Indiana, as defined for purposes of this planning process, includes the following 11 counties: Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells, and Whitley.

³ READI was launched by Governor Holcomb in May 2021. It dedicated \$500 million in state appropriations (originating from the federal level via the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 or ARPA) to invest in projects and new assets to spur economic growth. Northeast Indiana’s *Growing With Vision* proposal was awarded \$50 million, the maximum amount allocated under the program.

⁴ In 2015, the state of Indiana launched the Regional Cities Initiative, which sought to make the state a magnet for talent attraction by funding transformative quality-of-place projects. Northeast Indiana won \$42 million through this state initiative, which led to the formation of the Regional Development Authority (RDA) to oversee implementation of the funds.

in Northeast Indiana and supporting a \$6.5 billion increase in personal per capita income. Assuming the same performance, READI is anticipated to result in even higher levels of direct and induced investment.⁵

The highly collaborative approach of economic development organizations across Northeast Indiana is an important factor in the region’s success. The Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership (the Partnership) promotes the region for global business investment. The Regional Chamber of Northeast Indiana (the Chamber) advocates for a strong business climate through its legislative initiatives. The Local Economic Development Organization (LEDO) Council comprises the lead economic development officials from each county to address shared economic and community development interests. The Mayors and Commissioners Caucus brings together government leaders to advance economic development policies at the state level with a unified voice. Each of these regional bodies (and others) are well-prepared to serve the entire Northeast Indiana region.

In recent years, Northeast Indiana has undertaken several strategic planning initiatives aimed at guiding the region’s future growth. These plans and studies include the 11-county [Growing with Vision: A Regional Development Plan](#) prepared for the RDA as part of the state-led READI initiative in 2021 and [Northeast Indiana’s Rolling Strategic Plan \(2023-2025\)](#) developed for the Partnership. Individual counties have also undergone strategic planning efforts focused on economic development, including the 10-year [Allen County Together](#) economic development action plan created for Greater Fort Wayne Inc. and Fort Wayne-Alen County. Additionally, many of the region’s counties have recently created or updated long-range comprehensive plans that serve as roadmaps for future land use and infrastructure investments, such as the [All in Allen: Moving Forward Together](#) comprehensive plan designed to guide the community’s growth and development over the next 20 years and the [Imagine One 85](#) comprehensive plan for Wabash County with the stated purpose of reversing 40 years of population decline.

Despite the extensive planning work carried out for Northeast Indiana and many individual counties and communities, the region has not had a fully resourced strategic and tactical plan designed to increase per capita income levels relative to the US average, drive population growth in the region, and enhance postsecondary education and credential attainment among residents.

The Response

To provide a strategic framework for how Northeast Indiana will raise wages, grow the population, and increase the number of residents with college degrees or credentials, the Indiana Legislature (the Legislature) in 2021 created the Northeast Indiana Strategic Development Commission (NEISDC).⁶ The Commission is mandated by the Legislature to prepare a five-year strategic plan (with the initial plan spanning 2023–2028) that aligns regional and state resources to accomplish these objectives.

The Commission will not replace or duplicate any existing regional organizations. It will serve as the conduit for at least \$15 million in state funding to be deployed in the region annually. In addition to the funding allocated by the Indiana legislature, public money will serve as an opportunity to acquire matching dollars from private industry. The Commission will act as an advocate for the funding and policies that support the recommendations in the five-year strategic plan. Existing regional organizations—from the Partnership and the RDA to the Chamber and the LEDO Council—will act as the primary entities responsible for leading and facilitating the implementation of their respective portions of the strategic plan.

The development area targeted by the NEISDC consists of the 11 Northeast Indiana counties. The Commission is comprised of 11 members, with the majority appointed at the state level, three by the Governor and four by the Legislature. Of the four remaining members, two are appointed by the Mayors and Commissioners Caucus (with

⁵ Return on investment for RCI and READI initiatives provided by the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership.

⁶ House Enrolled Act No. 1238, First Regular Session of the 122nd General Assembly (2021).

the selections consisting of one mayor and one commissioner), and two are automatically appointed due to their role as the top executives of local partner organizations (specifically the leaders of the Regional Chamber of Northeast Indiana and the Regional Partnership). The latter ex-officio members are non-voting members and are not subject to term limits. The nine appointed voting members will serve two- and four-year terms. The NEISDC has no staff. Current NEISDC members and their affiliation are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Northeast Indiana Strategic Development Commission (NEISDC) members

MEMBER	AFFILIATION	VOTING STATUS
Ron Turpin, Chairman	CFO, Ambassador Enterprises	Voting
Travis Holdman	Indiana State Senator, District 19	Voting
Michael Vanover	CEO, Clean Fuels National	Voting
Andrew Briggs	Director, Farmers & Merchants Bancorp.	Voting
Richard Strick	Mayor, City of Huntington	Voting
Sharon Tucker	Fort Wayne City Councilwoman, 6th District	Voting
Keith Thornton	City of Fort Wayne, Community Development Manager	Voting
Steven McMichael	Mayor, City of New Haven	Voting
Cary Groninger	Kosciusko County Commissioner	Voting
Bill Konyha	President & CEO, Regional Chamber of Northeast Indiana	Nonvoting
Stéphane Frijia	President & CEO, Regional Partnership	Nonvoting

Source(s): HEA 1238, TIP Strategies, Inc., research.

Legislative Mandates

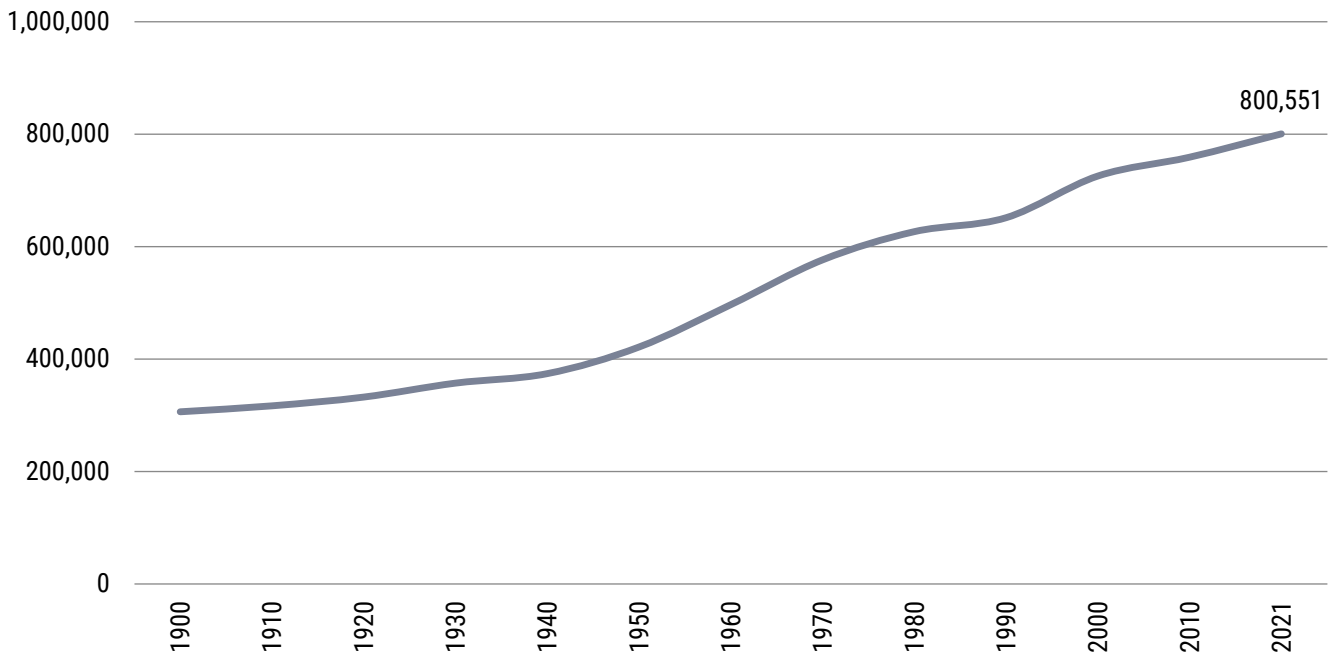
The legislation that created the NEISDC also spelled out specific mandates (House Enrolled Act No. 1238, Chapter 39, Section 4). The purpose of this planning process was to put Northeast Indiana on track to increase population, educational and credential attainment, and per capita personal income. Setting realistic targets for these mandates was an essential component of the creation of this regional strategy. This section presents data on the status of each mandate, along with 5-year targets assuming both a moderate (status quo) and an accelerated approach to the recommendations.⁷

⁷ The region is home to a significant Amish population (second only to Pennsylvania in the US), with the highest concentration in LaGrange and Adams Counties. This demographic has an impact on all three mandates. The Amish typically have larger than average families, which drives up population. With regards to educational attainment, the Amish generally leave the formal education system after 8th grade, reducing the region’s overall metric. Their income levels are often on par with—or higher than—the general population. However, there is wide variation in cultural attitudes among the distinct Amish communities (governed by different bishops), with some allowing for more participation in public life. Incorporating the Amish into the goals outlined in this plan will require careful and respectful engagement from regional leadership.

Mandate 1: Increase the population in the development area.

The population of Northeast Indiana has been rising at a relatively steady but modest pace for decades, and the Commission has been tasked with making significant progress on this front. With the region’s population standing at just over 800,000 (as of 2021), there are two foreseeable paths that growth could take over the next five years. A continuation of the trend seen over the last decade, a 2.5 percent increase (representing a compound annual growth rate, CAGR, of 0.49 percent), would put the figure at roughly 820,000 in 2026. This rate is slightly faster than Indiana experienced over the same period (CAGR of 0.46 percent). However, if aggressive measures are taken, an acceleration of growth to 5 percent (CAGR of 0.99 percent) would land the region at a population of over 840,000 in 2026.

Figure 3. Northeast Indiana Population Estimates



Source(s): Indiana University, Kelley School of Business, Indiana Business Research Center (IBRC), [STATS Indiana](#).

Note(s): Northeast Indiana includes the following 11 counties: Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells, Whitley.

Population Targets

NOW	IN 5 YEARS	
800,551	820,484 +2.5%	840,914 +5.0%
2021	Moderate	Accelerated

Mandate 2: Increase postsecondary education and credential attainment among residents in the development area.

A healthy economy is dependent on having a sufficient share of residents with the education and skills necessary to support employers’ labor requirements. In this regard, Northeast Indiana has unfortunately lagged behind both the state and the country as a whole. As of 2020, an estimated 42 percent of the region’s residents aged 25 to 64 held a labor market-valued degree or credential. The state of Indiana sits at roughly 44 percent and the US at 48 percent. Over the next five years, a conservative target of matching the state’s figure would be attainable but sub-optimal. With considerably more sustained effort, the region could meet the nation’s level in five years.

Figure 4. Northeast Indiana Educational Attainment with Comparison to State and US, 2020

	Northeast Indiana	Indiana	United States
Population estimate, age 25 to 64	428,925	3,764,750	185,157,984
Less than high school	10.7%	9.0%	9.7%
High school or equivalent	28.8%	28.0%	23.4%
Some college, no degree	19.1%	18.6%	18.9%
Associate degree	10.1%	9.0%	8.5%
Bachelor's degree	16.3%	17.5%	19.9%
Graduate or professional degree	6.5%	8.6%	11.7%
Certificates	4.2%	4.2%	4.4%
Industry certifications	5.1%	5.1%	3.5%
Labor market-valued degree or credential	42.2%	44.4%	48.1%

Source(s): American Community Survey (ACS), [Table B15001](#), 5-year estimates; Lumina Foundation, [A Stronger Nation Progress Report](#).
 Note(s): **ACS data:** Data are released in 1-year and 5-year estimates. Ideally, only estimates from the same series should be compared (i.e., compare 1-year estimates to 1-year estimates and 5-year estimates to 5-year estimates of a non-overlapping period). Due to data collection challenges during the onset of the COVID pandemic, ACS only released a 5-year estimate for 2020 (there are no 1-year estimates for 2020). This analysis uses 5-year estimates from non-overlapping periods. To update this metric on an annual basis, 1-year estimates may be used but may also be inconsistent with 2020 data. ACS data on educational attainment do not include a category for certificates or certifications.
Lumina data: Data on certificates and certifications are not available at the county level. The percentages for the Northeast Indiana region (red bold text) use the state percentages. Lumina data on certificates and certifications are not available for 2020. To better compare with the ACS 5-year sample, the average annual number of certifications and certifications over the nearest matching period is used (2016-2019 for the 2020 5-year ACS). **Population data:** Totals in red text are the sum of population totals from the ACS data and counts of certificates and industry certifications from Lumina. This value overestimates the total population age 25 to 64 since people with certificates and/or industry certifications are already counted in the ACS data but are spread across multiple categories. Because of this estimation, percentages for the Northeast Indiana region add to more than 100%. Northeast Indiana includes the following 11 counties: Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells, Whitley.

Education Targets

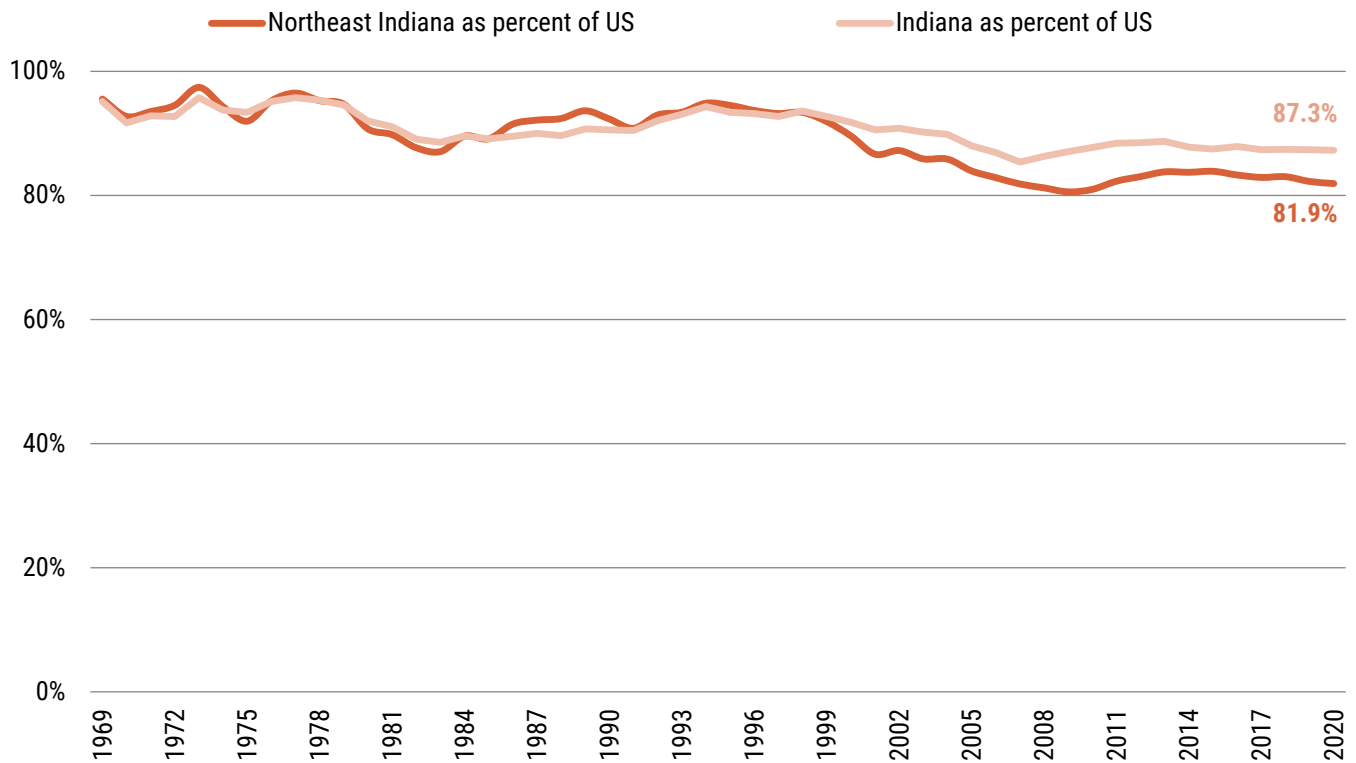
Estimated share (%) of Northeast Indiana residents aged 25-64 with a labor market-valued degree or credential

NOW	IN 5 YEARS	
42.2%	44.4%	48.1%
2020	Moderate	Accelerated

Mandate 3: Increase the per capita personal income relative to the national average.

One of the simplest and clearest measures of overall economic strength is the income of residents. In 2020 (the most recent data available), Northeast Indiana’s per capita income was under 82 percent of the nation’s figure. Since the Indiana legislature has established a target relative to the national per capita personal income (PCPI), the actual dollar amount will vary over the next five years. If the region can reverse its recent decline in PCPI, a 2 percentage-point gain on the nation would be a moderate improvement; however, doubling that gain to 4 percentage points would bring the region’s per capita income to nearly 86 percent of that of the US, an ambitious but achievable mark.

Figure 5. Per Capita Personal Income: Northeast Indiana and Indiana as Percentages of US



Source(s): [US Bureau of Economic Analysis](#).

Note(s): Northeast Indiana includes the following 11 counties: Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells, Whitley.

Income Targets

Northeast Indiana PCPI as a percentage of US

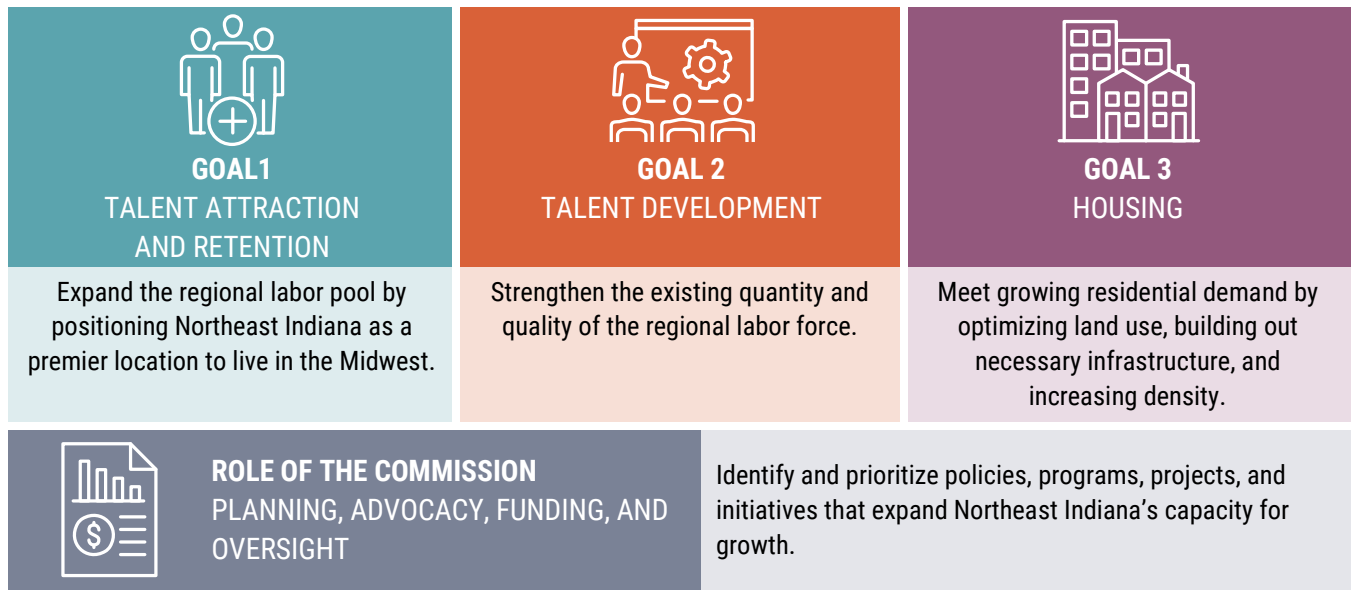
NOW	IN 5 YEARS	
81.9%	83.9%	85.9%
2020	Moderate	Accelerated

Approach

The Commission engaged TIP Strategies (TIP) to examine the economic context of Northeast Indiana and deliver a five-year strategic plan for the region, to be submitted to the state legislature in September 2022. TIP conducted three phases of the engagement: Discovery, Opportunity, and Implementation.

The framework shown in Figure 6 represents the culmination of the planning process, which involved targeted stakeholder engagement (detailed in Appendix B) and a review of relevant indicators, including the legislative mandates detailed in Figures 3, 4, and 5. In addition, TIP researched potential regional collaboration models, summarized in Appendix B. This quantitative and qualitative research informed the three goals that collectively drive the strategies and actions outlined in the plan.

Figure 6. NEISDC Plan Framework



Next Steps

Although the Commission was formed in September 2021, its real work begins at the delivery of this plan to the Indiana legislature. Equipped with the framework above and the specific strategies and actions that follow, the Commission will seek \$15 million in annual funding to implement the projects, programs, and initiatives. This process will require ongoing, active collaboration between the Commission (as the overseeing body) and regional and local economic development organizations (as the executing bodies). A clear delineation of these differing responsibilities throughout the next five years will be paramount to the plan’s success and future planning efforts, as laid out in the formative legislation.

In its new role as the conduit between the state and Northeast Indiana, the Commission will need to advocate for and defend that annual funding stream, providing the region’s stakeholders with a reliable mechanism for pursuing the three legislatively mandated targets described previously. This will not be an easy task, but the region and its leadership are well-positioned to translate this strategic plan into a brighter, more prosperous economic future for Northeast Indiana.

2. Action Plan

Northeast Indiana is home to a growing and diverse population base and increasingly diversified economy, thanks in large part to recent planning efforts by existing regional economic development organizations. With the legislative creation of the NEISDC, the region is well-positioned to capitalize on this momentum. The following Action Plan seeks to provide targeted recommendations that will optimize the impact of the Commission on the Northeast Indiana economy. The three overarching goals of Talent Attraction and Retention, Talent Development, and Housing represent the most pressing strategic priorities for the region to pursue over the next five years, facilitated by the fiscal resources distributed by the state legislature.

Goal 1. Talent Attraction and Retention

Expand the regional labor pool by positioning Northeast Indiana as a premier location to live in the Midwest.

Northeast Indiana is rightfully proud of its increased desirability as a place to live and work. However, that internal perception must be translated into improved external perception, both within and outside the state. This effort will involve greater focus from regional leadership on incentives, branding, and amenities, which will be spurred by the new and steady source of funding. The attraction and retention of talent depends on the professional and cultural assets provided by communities, and the region needs to ensure that workers considering relocation take a serious look at Northeast Indiana.

- 1.1. **Incentives.** Establish a funding pool to create materials, guides, benefits, and incentive programs to induce relocations of professional workers, including remote and hybrid workers, to the region.
 - 1.1.1. Increase access to and use of coworking environments and supportive networks as talent pools that can be used to enhance regional recruitment efforts.
 - 1.1.2. Expand the reach and affordability of gigabit-speed broadband service to underserved areas of the region.
 - 1.1.3. Establish new and expand the availability and use of existing financial incentives to encourage relocation to Northeast Indiana from outside the state.
 - 1.1.4. Create and maintain a “welcome guide” to include a list of local restaurants, bars, entertainment venues, gyms, and other local businesses aimed at improving awareness and promotion of housing, lifestyle amenities, and professional assets and opportunities to potential residents.
- 1.2. **Marketing.** Dedicate funding to launch new regional and collaborative marketing campaigns for the region, targeted at young professionals.
 - 1.2.1. Establish a regional data repository to gain greater understanding of consumer patterns of specific population segments, including young professionals, to be distributed and used for marketing campaigns that support a regional narrative.
 - 1.2.2. Identify and capture pain points and success stories for all marketing campaigns.
 - 1.2.3. Create incentives programs and “ambassador” initiatives, designed to enhance the region’s image and appeal in social media for young professionals.

- 1.2.4. Increase the share of attracted talent from peer communities outside the state of Indiana through targeted marketing efforts.
- 1.3. **Regional talent concierge.** Allocate funding to enhance organizational capacity to focus on regional and local talent attraction initiatives.
 - 1.3.1. Increase regional and local economic development organizational capacity to establish and deliver talent concierge services, modeled after other successful regional talent concierge programs.
 - 1.3.2. Expand organizational capacity required to launch and sustain a dedicated regional talent attraction effort in Northeast Indiana.
- 1.4. **Amenities.** Fund the cultivation and expansion of amenities in town centers, especially family-friendly options.
 - 1.4.1. Support the cities and counties to better encapsulate their unique identities, cultures, value propositions, and required amenities to attract and retain talent.
 - 1.4.2. Support the LEDOs of each county in evaluating and implementing ambitious but attainable amenities projects to pursue.
- 1.5. **Business succession planning.** Provide additional support to business owners, particularly “mom and pops,” that are experiencing productivity lags and leadership transitions, and work with them to create greater economic opportunities for diverse populations.
 - 1.5.1. Support small business retention and growth by improving access to education programs to enhance productivity and improve business and succession planning practices.
 - 1.5.2. Build capacity among managerial and entrepreneurial talent across the region to provide greater economic opportunities to historically underserved populations.
 - 1.5.3. Identify and cultivate existing and future management and executive-level talent to be groomed to support small businesses undergoing leadership transitions.
 - 1.5.4. Pursue initiatives to help retain the region’s industrial base—especially small and mid-size manufacturers—through the use of employee ownership succession plans.

Goal 2. Talent Development

Strengthen the existing quantity and quality of the regional labor force.

The global labor landscape is rapidly evolving. Competition for desirable jobs has been fierce and will only increase. Northeast Indiana is home to a dominant industry: manufacturing. While this plan by no means advocates for a sharp departure from this legacy-driven manufacturing presence and its related assets, the regional labor force will require twenty-first-century solutions to meet the demands of new and existing employers. The talent pipeline throughout the educational system will need retooling with an eye toward in-demand occupations and skills. Workers in the middle of their careers will need new avenues for developing their skillsets to match trends like automation and other technology-driven advancements. By cultivating a more prepared and adaptive labor pool, the region will be able to rise to the challenge of a changing economic environment.

- 2.1. Industry and higher education alignment.** Optimize alignment of educational/training program curricula with industry needs.
- 2.1.1.** Advance forward-thinking goals and priorities of the Northeast Indiana Colleges and Universities network, convened by the Partnership, by expanding dedicated institutional capacity and access to resources.
 - 2.1.2.** Establish and maintain regional survey data to identify the highest-need occupations and skillsets.
 - 2.1.3.** Enhance resources available to expand credentialing paths to include Industry 4.0⁸ careers in manufacturing and other highly skilled jobs in critical and advanced industries, thereby increasing access to these fields by regional talent.
- 2.2. K-12 engagement.** Enhance collaboration between industry and K-12 school systems.
- 2.2.1.** Enhance current efforts and increase dialogue between representatives of school districts and other stakeholders by expanding dedicated institutional capacity and access to resources.
 - 2.2.2.** Create a program for middle and high schoolers to tour and “shadow” local employers to explore career opportunities hands-on.
 - 2.2.3.** Ensure that career fairs and related events include representation from a variety of industries, including those that do not require post-secondary education.
 - 2.2.4.** Work with high school guidance counseling offices to establish consensus on the opportunities provided by alternative credentialing paths.
 - 2.2.5.** Encourage the private sector to collaborate with schools to maintain and expand career centers and innovation in education.
 - 2.2.6.** Host competitions that feature students’ presentations to industry audiences.
- 2.3. High-need occupations.** Encourage the flow of labor into the highest-need occupations (such as registered nurses, robotics/automation technicians, and software developers) with new initiatives and incentives.
- 2.3.1.** Offer partial tuition reimbursements and loan forgiveness for workers in the identified occupations.
 - 2.3.2.** Create employer incentives to support apprenticeship programs in high-need technology occupations.
 - 2.3.3.** Generate broad regional understanding of the immediate and growing need for certain occupations by supporting and enhancing local and regional career awareness and promotion initiatives that focus on recruiting workers into relevant educational opportunities.
 - 2.3.4.** Encourage international recruitment of students and workers for identified high-need occupations.
- 2.4. Up-skilling.** Improve up-skilling/re-skilling initiatives.
- 2.4.1.** Scale up programs and incentives focused on up-skilling/re-skilling mid-career workers.

⁸ Industry 4.0 (or the fourth Industrial Revolution) is a term popularized by the World Economic Forum that refers to the rapidly increasing efficiency and productivity driven by technological advancements like automation and the Internet of Things. It has a particularly significant impact on the manufacturing sector and the global supply chain.

- 2.4.2. Advance programs and incentives to up-skill/re-skill and integrate military veterans who have recently completed their service.
- 2.4.3. Enhance dialogue with Amish communities in the region to explore potential career paths via culturally respectful bespoke work-based credentialing programs.
- 2.4.4. Increase access to webinars and other information sessions for existing workers interested in learning more about potential career opportunities associated with improved skillsets.
- 2.4.5. Help students and job seekers begin new career paths, sharpen skills relevant to their existing careers, and explore potential careers through apprenticeships or work-based learning opportunities.
- 2.4.6. Promote and enhance the Indiana Manpower Placement and Comprehensive Training ([IMPACT](#)) Program to extend training services to underserved communities and individuals.

Goal 3. Housing

Meet growing residential demand by optimizing land use, building out necessary infrastructure, and increasing density.

Housing has become a pressing national concern. After the cataclysmic disruption of the Great Recession, the housing market eventually bounced back only to reach unsustainable affordability levels that have burdened a growing share of households with high housing costs. The costs of construction labor and materials, combined with rising inflation, has made it difficult for potential first-time homebuyers to find residences within their price range. In Northeast Indiana, these pressures are a significant barrier to the desired population growth target established by the legislature and tasked to the Strategic Development Commission. As outlined in the Mandates section of this plan, an ambitious target would be a 40,000 increase in population over the next five years. The region would need somewhere in the range of 15,000 to 20,000 new housing units (about 3,000 to 4,000 new housing units each year) to accommodate such a level of population growth. To achieve this goal, the region must make a concerted effort to increase residential development with a particular eye toward density in city and town centers. Innovative financing provisions and improved relationships between developers and communities will put the region on a clearer and more achievable path to reaching desired growth.

- 3.1. **Infrastructure.** Expand innovative financing models to close residential site development and infrastructure (electric, natural gas, water, wastewater) gaps and incentivize new housing construction.
 - 3.1.1. Work with state agencies and utility providers to translate identified geographic gaps into achievable targets with funding and business modeling support.
 - 3.1.2. Incorporate the above gaps into a comprehensive residential infrastructure review.
 - 3.1.3. Advocate for greater use of existing financing tools (such as tax increment financing) for new housing development, including mixed-use development projects.
 - 3.1.4. Support the creation of new public-private partnerships tools, such as a regional revolving loan fund, to close site development funding gaps.
- 3.2. **Financing.** Use innovative financing mechanisms to assist first-time homebuyers and to stimulate residential development.

3.2.1. Provide one-time grants for closing costs and down payment assistance aimed specifically at transplants from outside the region, such as the *Grant for Grads* program in Grant County, Indiana.

3.2.2. Provide tax abatements for renovations/improvements to existing structures.

3.3. Pro-growth policies. Maintain transparency during planning and zoning discussions and foster a pro-growth culture across the region, particularly in rural areas, to help counteract NIMBYism.

3.3.1. Host regular townhalls focused on housing for residents to voice their concerns.

3.3.2. Formulate united regional messaging about the importance of population growth to economic sustainability.

3.3.3. Review current land use, zoning, and permitting policy and advocate for increased emphasis on density.

3.3.4. Utilize infill housing solutions to increase the amount of housing units near major employment centers and commercial/industrial districts, especially at middle-income/workforce price points.

3.3.5. Host Northeast Indiana housing development fam tours (familiarization tours) for real estate developers and investors.

- Conduct these one- or two-day events with small groups of 10 to 15 real estate professionals.
- Invite housing developers based in Indianapolis, Chicago, and other major markets in the Midwestern US.
- Use the events as an opportunity to expand networking for smaller, local developers and investors based in Northeast Indiana.

3.4. Employer engagement. Engage major local employers in cultivating solutions to housing issues.

3.4.1. Convene business leaders with developers to facilitate agreements in which expanding companies reserve blocks of new housing units to mitigate the developers' risk.

3.4.2. Recruit regional employers to invest and otherwise participate in creative financing models that reduce the risk of investment by developers and homebuyers.

3.4.3. Utilize employers' network of new hires to distribute information on available housing.

3.4.4. Encourage employers to consider relocation bonuses to subsidize housing costs.

3. Role of the Commission

Goals 1, 2, and 3 describe how Northeast Indiana can raise wages, grow the population, and increase the number of residents with college degrees or credentials. This section addresses the role of the NEISDC in identifying and prioritizing policies, programs, projects, and initiatives that expand Northeast Indiana’s capacity for growth. It outlines four areas of focus for augmenting the resources and organizational capacity required to achieve regional growth targets.

1. **Planning and communications.** Convene the Commission regularly to measure progress on the strategic plan.
 - a. Engage in regular internal and external communications about the work of the Commission and its partners.
 - b. Educate Commission members, regional partners, and state partners about best practice examples of regional planning and economic development efforts (see case studies in Appendix B), including peer exchange visits to learn about successful regional collaboration efforts outside Indiana.
 - c. Re-assess all outcomes and further needs on an annual basis.
2. **Advocacy.** Collaborate with regional and state partners to advocate for pro-development and pro-growth policies and investments in Northeast Indiana.
 - a. Work with the Regional Chamber, the Mayors and Commissioners Caucus, and other regional allies to encourage local and state government leaders to maintain and expand existing pro-development policies such as incentives and infrastructure investment funding.
 - b. Encourage local and state governments to continually review and refine policies to ensure they provide a favorable regional and statewide environment for business investment, job growth, and talent retention and attraction.
 - c. Embolden business and community leaders to advocate for a greater share of state-level R&D funding to be directed to Purdue Fort Wayne University and other Northeast Indiana higher education institutions and to challenge the status quo that concentrates a disproportionate share of these R&D investments in Purdue University’s West Lafayette campus and Indiana University’s Bloomington campus.
3. **Funding.** Secure a minimum of \$15 million each year from the state to support implementation of the regional plan.
 - a. Maintain, grow, and target this funding for specific high-impact initiatives.
 - b. Pool funding with other local, state, federal, philanthropic, and private funding sources to amplify the impact of dedicated funds for regional priorities.
4. **Oversight.** Act as the body responsible for holding accountable the organizations that receive and deploy the funding disbursed by the state legislature.
 - a. Conduct regular reviews of implementation efforts, discuss progress at each meeting (see item 1a), and establish next steps.
 - b. Keep the legislature and the general public informed of measurable outcomes produced by the funded regional organizations.

Appendix A. Regional Collaboration Options

As part of the planning process, the consulting team reviewed examples from across the US to understand how other regions are coordinating and aligning resources and efforts to achieve shared economic development priorities. This research uncovered **four options for regional collaboration**, including specific examples to illustrate each approach to regionalism.

1. **Grant-making body investing in economic revitalization and transformational projects.** This option most closely resembles the vision for the Northeast Indiana Strategic Development Commission and the Northeast Indiana Regional Development Authority.

Examples:

- **Gulf Coast Restoration Fund.** Created to disburse \$750 million in restoration funds awarded to six coastal Mississippi counties from the 2018 BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlement representing 75 percent of the total apportioned to the state.
- **Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission.** Formed in 1999 to revitalize 40 tobacco-dependent localities in south and southwest Virginia, the organization has invested more than \$1.5 billion in tobacco settlement funds.
- **Delta Regional Authority.** Federal agency covering 252 counties/parishes in eight states with \$30+ million budgeted annually for economic development. (See case study, page 15.)

2. **Policy, planning, and infrastructure council.** This option exists in most regions across the US to coordinate transportation planning (including federal funding) and multi-county infrastructure projects. The most ambitious examples of regional policy, planning, and infrastructure councils include tax-base sharing, regional infrastructure districts covering water and wastewater, and area-wide land use regulations.

Examples:

- **Metropolitan Council.** Minneapolis-St. Paul area planning, transportation, and infrastructure agency covering a seven-county region. (See case study, page 16.)
- **New Jersey Meadowlands Commission.** Planning and zoning agency for a 14-town area that merged with New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority in 2015.

3. **Industry cluster initiative made up of private sector, higher education, and other anchor institutions.** This option is typically led by private sector and higher education partners based on the presence of an industry cluster with numerous business, workforce, research, innovation, and other assets that collectively serve as a magnet for talent and expertise.

Examples:

- **KC Animal Health Corridor.** Private nonprofit institution focused on promoting animal health industry, workforce, and innovation from Manhattan, Kansas, to Columbia, Missouri. (See case study, page 17.)
- **Southeast Alaska Cluster Initiative (Cluster Working Groups).** Launched in 2011 by the Juneau Economic Development Council to bring the private sector together with federal, state, and local agencies; university faculty; trade association representatives; economic development organizations; community leaders; and other stakeholders to serve as a catalyst for public-private partnerships in seven identified industry clusters.

4. **Business attraction alliance.** This option is similar to the LEDO Council and is a good sign of existing positive regionalism within a multi-county area. It is focused on outward business attraction on the national and global stage and is dependent on local economic development organizations working together to promote the broader region to external business decision makers.

Examples:

- **Northern Virginia Economic Development Alliance.** Collaboration of 10 county and city EDOs in Northern Virginia aligned for business attraction. (See case study, page 17.)
- **Southern Louisiana (SoLA) Super Region.** Partnership between the Baton Rouge Area Chamber, Greater New Orleans, Inc., and the South Louisiana Economic Council to work with regional business interests and government bodies to pursue projects and policies that benefit the entire SoLA Super Region, an area representing roughly two-thirds of Louisiana’s population and employment base.

Delta Regional Authority (DRA)

WEBSITE	https://dra.gov/
LOCATION	Clarksdale, Mississippi (headquarters)
PROGRAM AFFILIATION	<p><u>General Services Administration (GSA):</u> GSA is the federal office that helps manage and report on the federally appropriated dollars that the DRA receives and assists with federal requirements compliance.</p> <p><u>USDA's Rural Development (RDA) Program:</u> RDA helps the DRA with the Rural Community Advancement Program through state and local offices.</p> <p><u>Local Development Districts (LDDs):</u> Per statute, LDDs are the local embedded project developers and managers. LDDs dispense technical and application support for funding, assist with identifying development projects, and coordinate with state and federal agencies. There is also an LDD Advisory Board which ensures federal compliance with certification requirements regardless of funding source.</p>
BACKGROUND	<p>Established by Congress in 2000, the DRA seeks to improve the quality of work and life in the Lower Mississippi River Delta region through economic development. The region encompasses eight states (Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee) and 252 counties and parishes, comprising the most distressed region in the United States. The DRA’s strategic priorities are workforce development (Delta Workforce Program), healthcare (Delta Doctors, Delta Region Community Health Systems Development Program), leadership development (Delta Leadership Institute and Network), partnerships (Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities and White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council), and small business/entrepreneurship (Delta Small Business Academy).</p> <p>The Authority is a federal-state partnership and is led by a Board which is headed by a Federal Co-Chair appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate (as is the Alternate Federal Co-Chair) and a State Co-Chair appointed by the eight Governors. The remaining members consist of the Governor from each of the eight states, not including Designees and Alternates, and all board members share the fiduciary responsibility of the Authority. The Board’s responsibilities include establishing and approving investments for economic development, assessing the condition of the region, facilitating cooperation among region members, developing model legislation, supporting and training LDDs, and encouraging private investment and collaboration with state economic development programs. Board decisions require affirmation from the Federal member and a majority of participating Governors.</p> <p>The DRA receives federal funding that is then distributed to state and local governments primarily through the States’ Economic Development Assistance Program (SEDAP) which provides direct investment into DRA communities. State administrative funds are held by local banks in the DRA region and are accounted for by the Director of Finance and Administration. Investments must address the four funding priorities set by Congress: Basic Public Infrastructure, Transportation Infrastructure, Business Development/Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development. Additional federal stipulations dictate that at least 75 percent of DRA funds must be invested in economically distressed counties and parishes and at least 50 percent of any funds must be used for transportation and basic public infrastructure improvements. Other funding tools are the Community Infrastructure Fund, which supplements gaps in SEDAP funding, and the EDA’s Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance program.</p>

KEY TAKEAWAY(S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful regional economic development relies on effective coordination of government at every level. Creating specialized districts such as LDDs ensures success of local development efforts through community-centered leadership and coordination. • Sharing financial responsibilities among Board members holds everyone equally accountable for the success and failure of projects, independent of location, which unites disparate localities into a single region.
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Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc., research.

Metropolitan Council

WEBSITE	https://metrocouncil.org/
LOCATION	St. Paul, Minnesota
PROGRAM AFFILIATION	Not applicable
BACKGROUND	<p>The Metropolitan Council (Met) is the regional government agency and metropolitan planning organization serving the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-Saint Paul) seven-county metropolitan area. It was created in 1967 by Minnesota Legislature in response to regional wastewater contamination and an aging privately-owned bus system. Overtime, the Met’s powers expanded through department mergers and legislation. Currently, there are 17 members, 16 representatives from a geographic district in the area and one chair who serves at large. Members are appointed by the Governor and reappointed with each new administration, and the state Senate may confirm or reject each appointment.</p> <p>The Met provides the region with essential services and infrastructure that support the shared regional needs for economic success. Specifically, the Met manages and plans for public transportation, water and sewage treatment, regional and urban planning, affordable housing, and park systems. To manage these programs, the Met has five standing committees, three work groups, 13 advisory committees, multiple project and short-term committees, and three operating divisions with central administrative units within the Regional Administration (RA). The RA has six divisions and houses the Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity. The RA determines strategic priorities and manages the budget and the distribution of finances throughout the region.</p> <p>Funding comes from multiple sources including fees for wastewater treatment and transit services, state and federal funds, and a seven-county property tax. Implemented in 1975, the Minnesota Fiscal Disparities Program (the Program) gives the Met authority to collect and redistribute the property tax revenue back to localities with lower-than-average market value of property per capita. The Program was the first region in the country to implement tax-base sharing. Each year, the Met develops the operating and capital budgets, a work program, and a capital improvement program which are reviewed by the state’s Legislative Commission on Metropolitan Government.</p> <p>In 2021, the Council approved the distribution of \$214 million of federal funding for 56 transportation projects, opened the region’s first highway bus rapid transit line, awarded more than \$27 million in grants to support local revitalization and affordable housing projects, and developed a Climate Action Plan to be published in 2023.</p>
KEY TAKEAWAY(S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Met began with an infrastructure focus and steadily added competencies over decades which afforded the organization time to truly understand regional needs and seamlessly integrate change. • Housing economic and community development together allows funds to be used synergistically and reduces spending on redundant services.

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc., research.

The Kansas City Animal Health Corridor

WEBSITE	http://kcanimalhealth.thinkkc.com/
LOCATION	The Greater Kansas City Region (from Manhattan, KS to Columbia, MO)
PROGRAM AFFILIATION	Kansas City Area Development Council (KCADC): KCADC is a private, nonprofit institution established in 1999 that serves as the economic development organization for the two-state, 18-county Greater Kansas City region. KCADC launched the KC Animal Health Corridor in 2006. The organization is managed by a Board of Directors and maintains five advisory councils, including the KC Animal Health Corridor Advisory Board which governs the Corridor’s strategic priorities.
BACKGROUND	<p>Building on the region’s long agricultural heritage, the Kansas City Animal Health Corridor (KC Animal Health Corridor) is an initiative housed within KCADC with the goal of promoting the Greater Kansas City region as the premier location, nationally and globally, for companies in the animal health industry. The Corridor is guided by four strategic priorities: industry engagement, policy advocacy, workforce development, and technological innovation.</p> <p>KC Animal Health Corridor has successfully united the region’s major animal health stakeholders and functions as the industry’s single marketing and advocacy organization, focusing on increasing national awareness of the region’s animal science assets and opportunities. Further, the initiative seeks to improve communication and increase collaborative opportunities by connecting the region’s animal science stakeholders.</p> <p>The organization also leverages opportunities created by the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF), the Department of Homeland Security’s research facility, and develops strategies to attract and retain a relevant and skilled workforce. More than 300 animal health companies reside in the Corridor, comprising the largest concentration in the world. Together, they represent 56 percent of total worldwide animal health, diagnostics, and pet food sales. In 2019, the USDA opened two new major offices in the region, bringing hundreds of employees to the area from Washington, DC.</p>
KEY TAKEAWAY(S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional economic development organizations can ensure collective success by minimizing local competition through unified marketing and workforce development efforts. • Federally funded research positions are an effective tool for attracting a skilled workforce.

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc., research.

Northern Virginia Economic Development Alliance

WEBSITE	https://novaeda.org/
LOCATION	Northern Virginia (Regional)
PROGRAM AFFILIATION	Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP): As the state economic development authority, VEDP coordinates economic development activities at the local, regional, and state level to grow and diversify Virginia’s economy. VEDP is governed by a 17-member Board of Directors that sets strategic priorities and crafts marketing plans for Virginia.
BACKGROUND	Northern Virginia Economic Development Alliance (NOVA) was formed in response to Amazon’s 2017 HQ2 request for proposal (RFP) encouraging regional organizations to apply. Originally comprised of four Northern Virginia jurisdictions and led by the VEDP, NOVA won the bid in 2018. The following year, VEDP urged jurisdictions to form regional coalitions to access additional lead generation opportunities otherwise unavailable to localities. Regionalism also minimized competition between localities and strengthened the collective recruiting power against other major tech industry competitors such as Silicon Valley. In 2019, ten jurisdictions formally established NOVA through a memorandum of understanding (MOU). Though NOVA’s main purpose is to assist individual

	<p>economic development organizations with regional marketing activities, the MOU does not limit members from promoting activities within their respective jurisdiction. Further, members have no obligations, financial or otherwise, beyond collaboration. NOVA’s second priority is to engage with VEDP as a formalized Regional Economic Development Organization (REDO). To that end, NOVA put out an RFP to formally establish itself as a REDO in Fall 2021. NOVA’s leadership consists of one representative, or designee, from each member locality, and this person must hold either the Executive Director, President and CEO, or equivalent title.</p> <p>Construction of Amazon’s HQ2 campus is set to be completed by 2023 and more than 3,500 employees have been hired, with 2,500 corporate roles open, as of Fall 2021. After the second campus is completed, at least 25,000 hires will work between the two locations which is expected to create more than 22,000 permanent, direct, and indirect jobs statewide. Since nearly half of the employment is expected to be in tech positions, VEDP has partnered with regional academic institutions in the NOVA territory to develop a talent pipeline through the Virginia Tech Talent Investment Program. It is estimated that the \$1.1 billion program will create a surplus of 32,000 graduates over current levels.</p>
<p>KEY TAKEAWAY(S)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional development quells infighting among neighboring jurisdictions and strengthens the competitive standing of an area as whole, which is especially important when more suburban and rural areas bid against larger established markets. • Individual localities benefit from regional wins through indirect jobs, shared resources, and the larger regional reputation.

Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc., research.

Appendix B. Engagement and Outreach

During the Discovery phase of this engagement, TIP conducted virtual roundtables with a wide array of regional and local stakeholders. Sessions were held in 10 of the 11 Northeast Indiana counties, with roundtable attendees identified and invited by each county’s LEDO. For each virtual group, TIP utilized an online live-polling tool, Mentimeter, to gather and record responses that informed the development of the plan. The following is a list of stakeholder groups engaged.

County Roundtables

- Adams County
- Allen County
- DeKalb County
- Huntington County
- Kosciusko County
- LaGrange County
- Steuben County
- Wabash County
- Wells County
- Whitley County

Regional Organization Roundtables

- Young Leaders of Northeast Indiana *(In lieu of a live meeting, the Mentimeter questions were distributed to the group and their responses recorded.)*
- Regional Chamber of Northeast Indiana Board
- Regional Chamber Coalition of Northeast Indiana
- Regional Development Authority (RDA) Board
- LEDO Council
- Northeast Indiana Colleges and Universities (NEICU)
- Mayors and Commissioners Caucus

At the beginning of each roundtable, TIP asked participating stakeholders to answer the same question via Mentimeter: “In one word, how would you describe your vision for Northeast Indiana five years from now?” All individual responses were compiled into a single word cloud, displayed as Figure 7.

Figure 7. Vision for Northeast Indiana in Five Years



Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc., analysis of Mentimeter responses across stakeholder roundtables.