

**Introduction**

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

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

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

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

**Forum Structure**

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

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

**Northwest Region Participants**

Thirty-two regional leaders attended the *Indiana Vision 2025* Northwest Forum on June 5, 2012, in Merrillville, Indiana.

<b>Keira Amstutz</b> President & CEO Indiana Humanities Council	<b>Dr. Peggy Buffington</b> Superintendent School City of Hobart	<b>Dr. Deborah Howe</b> Superintendent Tri-Creek School Corp.	<b>Joseph Medellin</b> Director of Human Resources ArcelorMittal	<b>Michael Schrage</b> President & CEO Centier Bank
<b>Don Babcock</b> Director of Economic Development NIPSCO Economic Development	<b>Jack Cole</b> Director of Membership & External Relations Indiana Grantmakers Alliance	<b>James Jorgensen</b> Partner Hoepfner, Wagner & Evans	<b>Hon. Blair Milo</b> Mayor City of LaPorte	<b>Maggi Spartz</b> President Unity Foundation of LaPorte County
<b>Mike Baird</b> 4th District Representative Valparaiso City Council	<b>John Diedrich</b> Executive Vice President Peoples Bank	<b>Dr. Thomas Keon</b> Chancellor Purdue University Calumet	<b>Leigh Morris</b> Chairman Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority	<b>Hon. Joseph Stahura</b> Mayor City of Whiting
<b>Speros Batistatos</b> President & CEO South Shore Convention & Visitors Authority	<b>Dr. James Dworkin</b> Chancellor Purdue North Central	<b>Sharon Kish</b> President United Way of Porter County	<b>Eric Reaves</b> Assistant Director, Department of Economic Development City of Gary	<b>Harry Vande Velde, III</b> President & CEO Legacy Foundation of Lake County
<b>Cal Bellamy</b> Partner Krieg DeVault	<b>Lincoln Ellis</b> President & CEO Girls & Boys Club of Northwest Indiana	<b>Kristopher Krouse</b> Executive Director Shirley Heinze Land Trust	<b>Sue Reed</b> Executive Director Crossroads Chamber	<b>Beth Wrobel</b> CEO HealthLinc
<b>Lee Botts</b> Advocate Indiana Dunes Environmental Learning Center	<b>J. Forest Hayes</b> Director, Department of Commerce City of Gary	<b>Mark Maassel*</b> President Northwest Indiana Forum	<b>Dr. Dennis Rittenmeyer</b> Retired President Calumet College of St. Joseph	<b>Barbara Young</b> President Porter County Community Foundation
		<b>Lou Martinez</b> President Lake Area United Way	<b>Bob Schaefer</b> President Community Dynamics	

\* Denotes Regional Partner



## Northwest Region Challenges & Opportunities

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

### PRIMARY CHALLENGES

1. **Educational Excellence:** Northwest Forum participants emphasized the need for an improved educational structure that begins with early childhood development programs and extends to diverse higher education opportunities. Beyond “cradle to tassel” education, they expressed an imperative for lifelong learning that prepares people for productive, relevant careers and vocations.
2. **Transportation Infrastructure:** The Northwest region both supports and depends upon the economy of the greater Chicago area. Superior roadways traversing the region are essential for moving people, products and ideas. As well, the future of light rail, Lake Michigan port development and access to regional air travel will all play a significant role in economic development.
3. **Community/Political Leadership:** Attracting talented people to public and private service in the region is crucial to the region’s revitalization. Participants expressed the belief that the best and brightest have not always chosen to remain in the region. Initiatives to build and retain strong leaders are highly encouraged.
4. **Regional Identity:** More than any other region of Indiana, the Northwest is identified by distinctive geographical, industrial and cultural characteristics – some positive and others that are not. A passion exists among area leaders to effectively build and market Northwest Indiana as a dynamic brand where opportunities abound.
5. **Racial Diversity and Renewal:** The Northwest represents one of the most diverse areas in the state, where multiple races and cultures intersect. Economic growth will depend, in part, on these cultures continuing to create opportunities together and expand their understanding and cooperation with each other.
6. **Cohesive Planning:** Participants identified a number of good, forward-thinking initiatives that could benefit the region socially and economically. The challenge is coordinating and consolidating those strategic initiatives so they can produce a more dramatic impact. Currently, many initiatives exist on a county or city-wide basis rather than benefitting the area as a whole.
7. **Training/Job Creation:** A strong manufacturing base has survived the economic downturn. However, the 21st century economy will rely on a technically competent workforce. To that end, participants reiterated the need to create an atmosphere where talented people capture high-paying jobs.



**OVERARCHING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE**

1. **Location:** Northwest Indiana is a geographical sweet spot with close proximity to major metropolitan areas via both roadways and waterways. The location affords immeasurable opportunities for growth-minded people, businesses and organizations.
2. **Gary Airport:** The Gary/Chicago International Airport has exceptional potential and surprising capacity; however, the airport's resources are currently underutilized.
3. **Natural Resources:** The Northwest's resources related to recreation, entertainment and economic opportunity abound. Lake Michigan, the lakefront, state and national parks, and a number of other attractions are exceptional (if somewhat unknown) advantages the region possesses.
4. **Commuter/Freight Rail/Transportation:** The region's long history as a crucial center of manufacturing and logistics means that rail resources continue to play an important role in economic growth. There are strong opportunities and a strong motivation to expand rail's presence even further.
5. **Trend Toward Regional Cooperation:** Regional leaders have acknowledged in recent years that they are stronger working together than separately. Initiatives such as the NWI Regional Development Authority's One Region One Vision should be the model for collaboration in the future.

Northwest Forum participants selected seven goals from *IV 2025* and addressed how these goals could be specifically leveraged in their region. Additionally, the group formulated two goals that were not directly addressed in the report, but that they believe are essential to the region's future. Objectives, Strategies, Immediate Next Steps and Milestones were all considered and applied to the goals. Below is a synopsis of those prioritized goals by the driver under which they appear in *IV 2025*. An expanded explanation of the work done by participants on each goal begins on the next page, including the two goals that the forum participants proposed.

**DRIVER 1: Outstanding Talent**

Ensuring quality education from early childhood through higher education is of paramount concern. Increasing graduation rates is among the highest priorities in that continuum. Likewise, developing a workforce ready to embrace the technological demands of our 21st century global economy is key to the region's vitality. Business and education must work closely to establish baselines for academic and skills growth. WorkOne regional centers, ACT, colleges and universities, labor unions and school corporations are among the critical assets.

**DRIVER 2: Attractive Business Climate**

Government reform, both on a state and local level, would help the Northwest region realize greater efficiency in delivery of services and in fiscal management. But a public that is both informed and educated on how local government works seems a prerequisite if this reform is to be enacted and subsequently embraced. If counties are to move to a government model that consolidates services around a single county executive, communicating the benefits will involve a wide variety of assets including community groups, regional thought leaders, past and current legislators and the business community. The group urged that the Kernan Shepard report be revisited.

**DRIVER 3: Superior Infrastructure**

Clearly, the transportation infrastructure in the Northwest region of Indiana will always play a vital role in its economic success. Identifying local infrastructure funding in order to leverage state and federal funding, as well as promoting home rule legislation, were among the strategies recommended by forum participants. Support and advocacy from elected officials at all levels of government will be needed. Additionally, local and state organizations, including the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority and the Indiana Chamber, must help synthesize existing studies and reports regarding infrastructure into a cohesive and coordinated plan.

**DRIVER 4: Dynamic and Creative Culture**

Participants emphasized the need for the region to continue embracing the cultural diversity and inclusion that has represented some of its greatest challenges as well as its most promising initiatives. Additionally, the region will prosper by investing its energy and resources in a new generation of entrepreneurs, thus attracting and retaining talented individuals focused on providing jobs to the region's workforce. The diversity/inclusion initiative must draw from an equally diverse pool of assets including human rights commissions and race relations councils, tourism organizations, universities and colleges, businesses and not-for-profit organizations. Supporting entrepreneurs will require the interaction of school corporations, colleges and universities, multiple agencies focused on workforce and economic development, and government representatives.

## Key Driver #1: Outstanding Talent

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

Forum participants established objectives addressing graduation rates, parental and family involvement, and established clear benchmarks and continuous measurement around what it means to be “ready” for college and careers. Since the goal is aggressive and the issues are widespread, the assets needed to address the goal are equally sweeping. Collaboration between school corporations, universities and colleges, social service agencies, churches, teachers and businesses/employers will all be necessary to realize success. Participants recommend that a summit with representatives from these assets establish initiatives toward the goal by the summer of 2013. Pilot programs to promote family involvement and educate parents would need to find funding and launch by the end of 2013.



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

Participants addressing this goal identified a number of objectives necessary to attack this workforce development issue. Assessments that establish current skill levels of both incumbent workers and high school students are needed (many “WorkKeys” are already in place in school corporations in the region). In step with those baselines, comparisons must be drawn between the findings and current labor market trends. Developing relevant educational plans to develop necessary skills would follow. Business and education should work closely to implement these objectives. In many cases, the assets are already in place, even if their coordination and communication are not fully integrated.



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

At each regional forum, participants collectively addressed the goal regarding increasing the proportion of Indiana residents with high quality postsecondary credentials. Its importance and priority was reflected throughout survey responses in all regions. Tackling this goal together also served as an exercise that educated participants about the process they would use when expanding the remaining prioritized goals. Additions and comments made by Northwest Forum participants included the belief that finding effective methods for evaluating Indiana’s K-12 teachers were necessary. Additionally, participants believed that their role in achieving the stated goal was beyond merely an economic imperative; it was also a civic responsibility.

## Key Driver #2: Attractive Business Climate

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

Northwest Forum participants recommended streamlining the current structure of county governance, moving to a single executive that would provide or oversee the services currently administered by multiple elected officials. As did leaders in other regions of Indiana, they encouraged the state legislature revisit the Kernan Shepard report on local government reform. Forum participants believe the authors of any future legislation should be bipartisan.



### Key Driver #3: Superior Infrastructure

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

Transportation infrastructure critical to economic growth throughout Indiana received specific focus from the Northwest leaders. Participants recommended identifying multiple sources of local funding for infrastructure projects in order to leverage state and federal funding opportunities. Consolidating and synthesizing existing transportation studies for the region was also recommended so that a cohesive list of assets and initiatives could be developed.

### Key Driver #4: Dynamic and Creative Culture

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

A significant number of strategies and assets were identified by forum participants regarding this goal aimed at furthering entrepreneurship in Indiana. They recognized a need for changes in both policy and culture. Some immediate steps would include developing a Northwest Indiana incubator center for business start-ups, establishing metrics for tracking the success of new ventures, promoting the Small Business Development Center and championing the regional efforts of Elevate Ventures. Additionally, they encouraged early exposure to entrepreneurship for youth and aspiring entrepreneurs. Public schools, universities and the Center for Workforce Innovation are all key assets to leverage in these initiatives.



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

Northwest Indiana's history is one of both cultural and diversity challenges and advancement. The participants in the forum identified three primary objectives attached to the above goal: 1) celebrate diversity; 2) encourage civility; and 3) inspire creativity by removing traditional thought boundaries. A diverse grouping of assets would be critical to advancing these objectives. The need for collaboration between public and higher education, business, government and not-for-profit organizations was cited by participants. A number of successful local cultural events, activities and festivals create opportunities for cross-regional participation that would promote diversity and civility.

### Additional Driver: Tourism

**Goal Statement: Grow the Hoosier hospitality industry to be within the top two industries statewide (in any given year) and most visited state in the Midwest.**

Participants recommended an aggressive objective: Grow the hospitality gross revenue and jobs in the region by 50%. Increasing state tourism funding and incentivizing private investment in tourism were also recommended. Tools and methods for tracking increases in tourism, including methods for comparing state spending against other Midwestern states, are necessary. Overall, participants focused their strategies, asset mapping and milestones on significant increases in marketing and advertising Indiana's tourism.

### Additional Driver: RDA

**Goal Statement: Sustain and enhance funding for NWI RDA through 2025 and beyond.**

The current legislation for funding Indiana's Northwest Regional Development Authority runs through 2015. Northwest participants propose sustaining the current funding of \$27.5 million (\$10 million in state funds and \$17.5 million in local) beyond 2025. As well, they propose identifying and enhancing additional funding sources. Validating and measuring the success of the first 10 years of RDA is crucial to extending its existence and a game plan for building local support for funding is also recommended. Participants propose a regional RDA summit in early 2013 to address its future and adoption of the summit initiatives by the summer of 2013.