

**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 Tom Schuman, vice president of communications 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.

**Southeast Region Participants**

Thirty-three regional leaders attended the *Indiana Vision 2025* Southeast Forum on June 12, 2012, in Sellersburg, Indiana.

<b>Keira Amstutz</b> President & CEO Indiana Humanities Council	<b>Jay Conner</b> Investment Manager Capital Asset Management	<b>Matt Hall</b> Interim President & CEO One Southern Indiana	<b>Marissa Manlove</b> President & CEO Indiana Grantmakers Alliance	<b>David Vince</b> General Manager Clark County REMC
<b>Candice Barksdale</b> CEO Goodwill of Southern Indiana	<b>Dr. Uric Dufrene</b> Professor of Finance Indiana University Southeast	<b>Miguel Hampton</b> President F5 Enterprises, LLC	<b>Ken Rush</b> Vice President Sellersburg Stone Co.	<b>Melissa Weissinger</b> Development Officer Indiana University Southeast
<b>Marty Bell</b> COO Greater Clark County Schools	<b>Mark Eddy</b> Executive Director Leadership Southern Indiana	<b>Dr. Bruce Hibbard</b> Superintendent of Schools New Albany-Floyd Co. CSC	<b>Donald Slone</b> Owner Slone Automotive Enterprises	<b>Paul Wheatley</b> Director of Marketing & Finance River Ridge Development Authority
<b>Cile Blau</b> Senior Judge 7 Southern Indiana counties	<b>Chris Ertel</b> Vice President Indiana Bank & Trust	<b>Joan Hurley</b> President Our Lady of Providence Jr.-Sr. High School	<b>Kerry Stemler *</b> President & CEO KM Stemler Co., Inc.	<b>Doug York</b> President Rodefer Moss & Co., PLLC
<b>Steve Bush</b> Commissioner, District 3 Floyd County	<b>Jim Finan</b> Executive Director Rush County EDC	<b>Tom Jones</b> Insurance Agent The Hartfield Company	<b>Rep. Steve Stemler</b> State Representative Indiana House of Representatives	<b>Sister Barbara Ann Zeller</b> President & CEO Providence Self Sufficiency Ministries
<b>Pat Byrne</b> Partner McCauley Nicolas CPAs	<b>Tonya Fischer</b> VP, Investor & Government Relations One Southern Indiana	<b>Kent Lanum</b> President & CEO Paul Ogle Foundation	<b>Scott Stewart</b> Director Port of Indiana - Jeffersonville	
<b>Mark Casper</b> Agency Director St. Elizabeth Catholic Charities - New Albany	<b>Tom Galligan</b> Former Mayor City of Jeffersonville	<b>Brian Lenfert</b> Council Member Clark County	<b>Victor Unruh</b> Director/Shareholder Mac Construction & Excavating	

\* Denotes Regional Partner

## Southeast Region Challenges & Opportunities

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

### PRIMARY CHALLENGES

- 1. Infrastructure:** With bridges the overriding issue, transportation, roads and access to high speed Internet are all areas of great concern in Southeast Indiana. The temporary closure for repair of one of the major bridges between Indiana and the Greater Louisville area in 2011-2012 heightened the awareness for greater access across the Ohio River. A long-term, comprehensive intermodal transportation plan is critical to the area. Further development of ports along the Ohio River was also noted by forum participants.
- 2. Education & Workforce Development:** From early childhood education to higher education to workforce training, the need for reform and funding is heavily felt in this region. Increased and focused educational opportunities will ultimately lead to an increased tax base that will, in turn, support more opportunity. The need to build a more competent, skilled workforce will only grow. Participants emphasized the importance of funding for pre-kindergarten education and increased funding for full-day kindergarten as precursors to higher test scores, increased graduation rates and more workers ready for high tech jobs.
- 3. Economic Development:** Attracting good paying jobs and fostering an entrepreneurial environment are leading issues. As did other regions of Indiana, Southeast Region Forum participants recognized that jobs created by entrepreneurs will likely represent a significant portion of the higher wages long-term. The region's mix of business and industry is already more diversified than some parts of the state, but the local economy is struggling to recover from the national recession.
- 4. Efficient Local Government:** The duplication of services and a cumbersome structure slows economic growth and drains funds in the counties and municipalities in the Southeast. While the most touted solution would be dramatic overall reform of local government as proposed in the Kernan Shepard report, efficiency can still be realized through municipal-county collaboration, effective local and regional leadership, and more effective means of communicating between government and business.
- 5. Regulatory Business Environment:** The cost of doing business in Indiana, though better than our neighboring states, still has room for improvement. Participants encouraged streamlining ordinances and processes so that businesses can be quicker to build, quicker to produce and quicker to market with products and services.
- 6. Diversity & Inclusion:** Addressing the issues of ethnic populations and the underprivileged was top of mind among forum participants, perhaps more so than in any other region of Indiana. Successful initiatives in diversity and inclusion will produce widespread benefit, including better educational opportunities, better relations between ethnic populations and improved quality of life for all. Participants also expressed their concern over breakdown of the family structure. They believed strongly that an important part of building high standards for diversity and civility include emphasizing the need for strong family bonds.



**OVERARCHING OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE**

1. **Location:** Strong geographical advantages coupled with multi-modal transportation position the Southeast region of Indiana for growth. With a confluence of interstates, its proximity to major population areas and to major airports, and access to the Ohio River, Southeast Indiana can make a strong case to businesses and industries looking to locate in the region.
2. **Infrastructure:** Despite the current challenges (particularly regarding bridge access), the region’s diverse infrastructure of interstates, rail lines, airports and Ohio River ports place the region in an advantageous economic position in the future. Leadership in the region has reacted quickly and in one voice to address the immediate infrastructure needs. Strong communication and collaboration with government and business leaders in Kentucky and, specifically, Louisville has existed for a number of years and has helped the region move forward on some of its most critical projects.
3. **Cost of Living:** Southeast Indiana is an affordable environment for both businesses and citizens. Housing costs are traditionally lower than in other regions of the state. Low local taxes help businesses keep costs low, and products and services reasonably priced. Even as the economy recovers, the region’s cost of living should remain advantageous.
4. **Quality of Life:** Any number of factors positively affect the quality of life in Southeast Indiana. Diverse opportunities for recreation, close proximity to cultural events and activities, better weather than much of the Midwest, and blends of urban and rural areas all give the region a marketable quality of life. The relative low cost of living cited above is also a factor, helping the region attract and retain talented individuals.
5. **Labor Force:** Though skills development is a current challenge, the Southeast boasts a ready and willing workforce. Participants in the forum noted that the area’s population has a traditionally strong work ethic a trait they believe will help motivate workers to learn new skills and take on new tasks and responsibilities.

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

<p><b>DRIVER 1: Outstanding Talent</b></p> <p>Southeast Forum participants focused considerable attention upon goals related to growing the region’s talent base. Increasing proficiency in math science and reading, increasing the proportion of residents with high quality postsecondary credentials and increasing the number of workers with basic skills were all areas addressed by the group.</p>	<p><b>DRIVER 2: Attractive Business Climate</b></p> <p>Participants said that streamlining city and county government would have multiple benefits. Not only would the efficiency result in moving tax dollars away from administrative costs, greater fiscal responsibility will create economic growth opportunities. Forum leaders also posed the possibility of merging multiple city and county governments for even greater efficiency and cohesive planning.</p>
<p><b>DRIVER 3: Superior Infrastructure</b></p> <p>As much or more so than during any other forum, the participants in the Southeast emphasized the importance of superior infrastructure to the economic future of the region. Bridge access was top of mind, but building out an advanced telecommunication network is also critically important. The Southeast region has a symbiotic relationship with its Kentucky neighbors and good pathways.</p>	<p><b>DRIVER 4: Dynamic and Creative Culture</b></p> <p>Defining global and local business needs that could be met by entrepreneurs was among the recommendations by participants aimed toward developing a dynamic and creative culture. Technology transfer from higher education to the private sector was also emphasized and participants encouraged systems where shared technology resources are readily available to institutions. A culture where diversity and civility are encouraged was also a focus of discussion as an important landmark that would increase the quality of life and economic vitality of the region.</p>

## Key Driver #1: Outstanding Talent

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

Forum participants recommended three objectives aimed at the goal of increasing math, science and reading proficiency: 1) increase high school graduation rates with an emphasis in those specific areas; 2) achieve a high level of participation and success in international academic competitions; and 3) increase student knowledge of global affairs. Beyond the necessity for excellent schools and teachers, participants encouraged structured mentoring/tutoring programs that utilized both teachers and volunteers. Noting a correlation between achievement in science, math and reading to exposure to arts and music, forum leaders also stressed the need for emphasis and improvement in these disciplines. The Indiana Youth Institute, local nonprofits and businesses, school corporation leadership, college students (as potential tutors/mentors), schools of education and the Indiana Higher Education Commission are all important assets.



### **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 were 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. Southeast Forum participants addressed several components of this goal. They emphasized the important roles that parents, teachers, counselors and mentors would play in working collaboratively toward achieving this goal. High school counselors must also be educated on the options available to students and be trained in how to effectively direct students toward relevant credentials in higher education. Retaining international students, exploring a longer school year and the affordability of higher education were also areas of discussion.



### **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.**

Southeast Forum participants recommended the development of a workforce training program for unemployed and underemployed workers that coincides with the Southeast region’s business needs. The program would necessarily be comprehensive and the assets brought to bear on it would be extensive. Skills assessment and testing, career counseling, internships, apprenticeships and a complete overhaul of existing training programs were among the strategies presented. Ivy Tech, Workforce One, local and regional chambers of commerce, postsecondary schools and legislators would all play critical roles in the development of the programs.

## 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.**

Echoing the sentiments of forum participants in a number of regions, Southeast leaders called for meaningful reform of local government, eliminating multiple layers of bureaucracy, and even giving consideration to consolidating the governments of adjoining counties. They also recommended that the Kernan Shepard report be used as a template for possible compromise with those who still support the current local government structure. For effective change to occur, participants believed that a thorough evaluation of where redundancies exist is necessary and that clear benchmarks be established.

### Key Driver #3: Superior Infrastructure

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

New fiscal systems for funding and maintaining infrastructure projects in Southeast Indiana will be necessary for economic growth in the region. While ongoing bridge projects both new and expansions or upgrades are particularly critical to the area, there will be a number of future projects under which new fiscal systems might operate. These include sewer and water, telecommunications, waste management, roads and airports. A number of states and regions have approached these systems differently, so evaluating best practices and results is among the first steps. The participants emphasized an overwhelming need for communication and collaboration among state and local agencies and businesses in this effort so that project costs are controlled through a “dig once” strategy.

**Goal Statement: Aggressively build out the state’s advanced telecommunications networks.**

Enhanced telecommunications is an important indicator for quality of life and a capability that helps both attract and retain businesses and talented individuals. Forum participants recommended that telecommunication priorities be established through a cost/benefits analysis and that the strengths and weaknesses of geographic areas of Southeast Indiana are identified. Several assets will require involvement in this initiative, including utilities, government at all levels, universities, chambers of commerce, local economic development organizations and citizen stakeholders.



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

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

Promoting entrepreneurial opportunity received considerable focus and effort from forum participants. They recommended comprehensive support systems for start-ups, including assistance in business planning, finance, marketing and identifying venture capital resources. Existing incubators, state and local chambers, local Realtors, regional education facilities, venture associations and foundations will all play integral roles in this effort. Leadership Southern Indiana, the Ohio River Basin Caucus and CEO roundtables would assist in these efforts as well. The support system should also help define the local and global markets so that entrepreneurs can focus their energy on products and services most readily needed.



**Goal Statement: Increase the amount of technology transfer from higher education institutions and attain “Top 5” ranking per capita among all states.**

Regional forum participants recommended incubating technology development from higher education into the private sector. They encouraged universities to develop shared resources so as to increase the impact of both the research and the researchers. This effort will truly require the best efforts of both public and private entities. Collaboration between higher education, chambers, banks and venture capitalists, private companies, and local and state resources is essential to the success of this initiative. Participants also recommended thorough benchmarks for tracking the success of these start-ups so necessary program additions, changes and improvements can be made.

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

A culture that values diversity and civility can also help drive economic prosperity. Forum participants identified a number of strategies for building a more healthy regional culture, including developing self-sufficiency programs within housing developments; encouraging businesses and government to address initiatives around pay equity; encouraging universities with multicultural studies to mentor local business, education and government leadership; and developing multicultural community learning opportunities.