



East Central Indiana Regional Partnership (ECIRP)

Strategic Plan

ECONOMY TREND OVERVIEW

390,283 

Population (2021)

Population decreased by 5,311 over the last 5 years and is projected to decrease by 3,219 over the next 5 years.

152,196 

Total Regional Employment

Jobs decreased by 8,173 over the last 5 years but are projected to grow by 3,209 over the next 5 years.

\$53,100 

Avg. Earnings Per Job (2021)

Regional average earnings per job are \$24.7K below the national average earnings of \$77.8K per job.

TAKEAWAYS

- As of 2021, the region's population has declined by 1.3% over the past 5 years. The population is expected to decrease by 0.8% between 2021 and 2026.
- From 2016 to 2021, jobs declined by 5.1% in East Central Indiana from 160,369 to 152,196. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 1.9% by 7.0%. As the number of jobs declined, the labor force participation rate decreased from 58.1% to 56.3%.
- Regarding educational attainment, 11.9% of residents possess a Bachelor's Degree (8.6% below the national average) and 9.3% hold an Associate's Degree (0.6% above the national average).
- The top three industries (2-digit NAICS) by employment are Health Care, Manufacturing and Retail.

Source: Lightcast (formerly EMSI); JobsEQ® The region includes the counties of: Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, Rush, and Wayne.

INTRODUCTION

It is important to establish a foundation that will guide the development of overall strategy for the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership. The following Baseline Themes are supported by both qualitative and quantitative information and articulate the guideposts and values for regional economic development strategic action. The strategies and actions detailed in this plan will be carried out over the next 2-3 years with work beginning immediately upon adoption of the plan. Additional details on tasks and timelines are provided as an addendum to the action plan.

BASELINE THEMES

Based on previous and current research, past planning efforts, and focus group feedback we have identified strategic themes to guide the planning process. The baseline themes include the following:

- A growing and diversified industry base that will increase population and wage and income levels is the key priority to maintain a healthy regional economy.
- A region-wide focus on communication and trust with the goal of creating action-oriented teamwork and collaboration amongst LEDOs and local elected officials is necessary to maintain a strong and successful partnership.
- The East Central Indiana region must establish/reinforce a clear identity, both with internal and external audiences, that strives to grow population, income levels and career opportunities.
- The East Central Indiana region must continue to actively advance efforts to enhance the quality of place initiatives described in the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan. These efforts will address the continuing challenges businesses are facing to retain, develop, and recruit new workers.
- The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership (ECIRP) should focus on providing sources of assistance that help build LEDO capacity to create and maintain dynamic local efforts by retaining, growing, and recruiting business activity in their areas.
- ECIRP must be well-funded to support consistent, reliable services throughout the region. The organization should create a sustainable funding approach that builds and diversifies current funding sources and incorporates additional private sector investors with assistance from LEDOs and/or board members.
- ECIRP must fortify the organization's structure and maintain clear and efficient lines of communication between all key partners and investors and also communicate a commitment to sustain a plan of action.

MISSION

The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership is dedicated to fostering economic growth in the East Central Indiana nine-county region as the lead economic development marketing and business attraction organization. Through collaboration with local economic development organizations and the state's lead agency – the Indiana Economic Development Corporation – ECIRP will work to attract new investment, support existing industries, and enhance the quality of life, place, and opportunity for all residents.

ECIRP STRATEGIC VISION

Our vision for East Central Indiana is to create a thriving and vibrant region where all residents have the opportunity to succeed. We believe that by working together and leveraging our collective strengths and resources, we can build a region that is known for its strong economy, excellent quality of life, and welcoming and inclusive culture. Through collaboration and innovation, we will build a foundation with the goal to increase our population, employment, and income growth.

OUTCOMES

Effective plans are focused on results. Therefore, the question was asked: What outcomes should be the focus of future economic development in East Central Indiana? The outcomes listed below are derived from available research and discussions held with regional leaders and stakeholders. Key strategic issues were identified, discussed, and prioritized. The ECIRP Strategic Action Plan will be based on strategies and actions that need to be taken to achieve these outcomes.

- In coordination with LEDOs, ECIRP will significantly increase communication and education efforts with local elected officials in the region. The organization will strive to build a knowledge base related to economic development trends and best practices. The goal is to grow trust throughout the region.
- ECIRP will diversify and grow its funding and support base to include a broader group of public and private investors/partners. Additional partners will stabilize the ability of the organization to implement a reliable long-term action plan.
- ECIRP will establish and market a clear brand identity to support key business development messages to be utilized both internally (within the region) and externally (national and international target markets/audiences). ECIRP will create a mechanism for LEDOs to utilize the branding for cooperative marketing efforts.
- ECIRP will implement a strategic lead generation effort that focuses on targeting business segments that complement regional location attributes, increase overall regional wage levels, and diversify the business and industry base.

- Based on feedback, and the working knowledge of each LEDO in East Central Indiana, ECIRP will identify at least 2-3 new areas of assistance that the organization can provide, such as business prospect research and BR&E strategy. Areas of assistance will focus on initiatives that help start, retain, or recruit businesses to the region.
- ECIRP will prioritize the local challenges related to enhancing quality of place and opportunity as a primary barrier to meeting the workforce needs of regional businesses. The organization will continue to focus on priority projects identified in the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan and work with local groups to advance these projects towards funding. ECIRP will improve and strengthen the Forge Your Path collaborative effort to attract talent to the ECI region.

ACTION PLAN

STRATEGIES and TACTICS

Outcome 1

In coordination with LEDOs, ECIRP will significantly increase communication and education efforts with local elected officials in the region. The organization will strive to build a knowledge base related to economic development trends and best practices. The goal is to grow trust throughout the region.

- **Strategy 1 - ECIRP will gather feedback from LEDOs on priority topics of interest to local elected officials and will design an annual outreach schedule. The organization will coordinate with LEDOs to create an East Central Indiana League of Cities and Counties.**
- **Strategic Action 1.1 -** Hold a planning session with the LEDOs to design an annual schedule of communication, outreach and education for the League of Cities and Counties. ECIRP will work with the LEDOs to determine membership/contact lists, modes of communication, logistics for education sessions and most importantly, primary topics for the group. Draft an annual proposed program of communication/outreach for the League.
- **Strategic Action 1.2 -** Develop a comprehensive contact database for all city/county elected officials in East Central Indiana.

- **Strategic Action 1.3** – Distribute an announcement to elected officials that ECIRP is forming the ECI League of Cities and Counties. Announce the date and details of the first session (featuring best practices) to elected officials.

Outcome 2

ECIRP will diversify and grow its funding and support base to include a broader group of public and private investors/partners. Additional partners will stabilize the ability of the organization to implement a reliable long-term action plan.

- **Strategy 2 – Design, organize, and implement a goal-oriented investor recruitment campaign based on current and projected funding needs and coordinate with LEDOs on outreach to investors.**
- **Strategic Action 2.1** – Form an Investor Recruitment Task Force with representation from the region comprised of individuals who can contribute knowledge related to potential future investment. The task force will advise ECIRP on final campaign objectives, including proposed funding levels, top potential investor candidates and key ECIRP messages to be conveyed to potential investors. The Task Force will advise ECIRP on whether an expert economic development fundraising firm should be engaged to assist the regional effort.
- **Strategic Action 2.2** – Develop a Top 10 list of new potential investors. Create an ECIRP value prospectus presentation based on proposed actions in the strategic plan and that clearly differentiates ECIRP as the lead marketing and business attraction organization in the region. Meet with each of the 10 potential investors to request their commitment. Based on feedback from investors, make identified adjustments to the campaign objectives and to the action plan. Create a media launch to promote the ECIRP value campaign and communicate highlights of the proposed plan of action.
- **Strategic Action 2.3** – Compile a comprehensive list of potential new investors and develop a contact and follow-up plan for the group. Utilize a version of the ECIRP value presentation as part of the initial introduction and contact.

Outcome 3

ECIRP will establish and market a clear brand identity to support key business development messages to be utilized both internally (within the region) and externally (national and international target markets/audiences). ECIRP will create a mechanism for LEDOs to utilize the branding for cooperative marketing efforts.

- **Strategy 3- Develop a regional branding initiative that leverages Forge Your Path.**
- **Strategic Action 3.1** - Organize a feedback session with LEDOs and board leadership to review and discuss various options to leverage Forge Your Path branding.
- **Strategic Action 3.2** - Based on feedback gathered from ECIRP leaders, develop a brand development and marketing plan. The plan should focus on both internal (within region) marketing and targeted external marketing. The planning process should include exploration of the feasibility of merging the Forge Your Path website to create a 1-stop website.
- **Strategic Action 3.3** - Additionally, review the target industry analysis and industry segments identified (See Outcome 4) for integration into plans and tactics.
- **Strategic Action 3.4** - Develop a cooperative brand marketing package with various options for LEDOs and other organizations, including private sector companies, to extend messaging. Continue to make adjustments that are based on discussion and feedback from LEDOs and board leadership.

Outcome 4

ECIRP will implement a strategic lead generation effort that focuses on targeting business segments that complement regional location attributes, increase overall regional wage levels, and diversify the business and industry base.

- **Strategy 4 - ECIRP will conduct an analysis to identify business segments that would add significant economic impacts to the region and utilize that analysis as a guide to implement an aggressive lead generation for regional partners.**
- **Strategic Action 4.1** - ECIRP will review and finalize the regional target industry analysis and prioritize segments for the initial focus of the lead generation effort. ECIRP will also review segments identified by IEDC for inclusion with ECI targets. The process will include identifying 6-digit NAICS codes for immediate attention. ECIRP will design a lead generation action plan which will include list generation (company size/characteristics), geographic focus and contact protocols.
- **Strategic Action 4.2** - Based on the action plan, follow up on list acquisition, campaign marketing support services and other action items to start a lead generation campaign.

- **Strategic Action 4.3** – Work with LEDOs to develop lead handling protocols.

Outcome 5

Based on feedback, and the working knowledge of each LEDO in East Central Indiana, ECIRP will identify at least 2-3 new areas of assistance that the organization can provide, such as business prospect research and BR&E strategy. Areas of assistance will focus on initiatives that help start, retain, or recruit businesses to the region.

- **Strategy 5 - Utilize the LEDOs to communicate, promote and periodically review/improve local capacity building assistance programs.**
- **Strategic Action 5.1** – Regularly review, evaluate, and make improvements to local capacity building efforts to stay current with shifting priorities and needs. Make changes, improvements or deletions as needed.
- **Strategic Action 5.2** – Develop, publish, and promote an annual report on ECI local capacity building efforts. In the report, not only highlight assistance being provided by ECIRP, but also the new programs being undertaken. Publish the report and distribute to LEDOs, investors, and local elected officials and also promote via social media and online.
- **Strategic Action 5.3** – Identify new resources and programs to assist LEDOs in their efforts.

Outcome 6

ECIRP will prioritize the local challenges related to enhancing quality of place and opportunity as a primary barrier to meeting the workforce needs of regional businesses. The organization will continue to focus on priority projects identified in the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan and work with local groups to advance these projects towards funding. ECIRP will improve and strengthen the Forge Your Path collaborative effort to attract talent to the ECI region.

- **Strategy 6 - ECIRP will continue to regularly consult with local partners to identify projects throughout the region that address quality of place barriers. Projects could include broadband improvements, early childhood education, housing and commercial development, quality of place (parks/trails, arts, and downtowns) and talent attraction initiatives. ECIRP will provide coordinating assistance to identify, package and secure funding for top priorities.**

- **Strategic Action 6.1** - Continue to work through the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan to develop priority identified projects, finalize project information, and submit for funding approval.

- **Strategic Action 6.2** - ECIRP will leverage the Forge Your Path lifestyle marketing initiative to support the talent attraction focus of the East Central Talent Collaborative. In turn, ECIRP will recognize the work of the Talent Collaborative and FYP quality of place initiatives in the ongoing messaging communicated through the Forge Your Path campaign.

- **Strategic Action 6.3** - Recognizing the exploding trend towards remote work, ECIRP will research, review, and design a remote worker attraction strategy for the ECI region. Review successful programs such as Make My Move to consider infrastructure, facility (co-working spaces), incentive, and networking support in designing a strategy.

STRATEGY GRID

MISSION

The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership is dedicated to fostering economic growth in the East Central Indiana nine-county region as the lead economic development marketing and prospect organization. Through collaboration with local economic development organizations and the state’s lead agency – the Indiana Economic Development Corporation – ECIRP will work to attract new investment, support existing industries, and enhance the quality of life, place, and opportunity for all residents.

League of Cities & Counties (Growing Trust)	Outreach	Contact Database	Events
Strategy 1	Action 1.1	Action 1.2	Action 1.3
Investors	Investor Task Force	Identify Top Ten New Investors	Pursue New Opportunities
Strategy 2	Action 2.1	Action 2.2	Action 2.3
Branding Initiative	Create Marketing	Target Industry Analysis	Co-op Brand Marketing Package
Strategy 3	Action 3.1	Action 3.2	Action 3.3
Lead Generation	Target Business Segments	Lead Generation Campaign	Develop Lead Handling Protocols
Strategy 4	Action 4.1	Action 4.2	Action 4.3
Local Capacity Building	Continuous Evaluation of Local Capacity Building	Local Capacity Building Annual Report	Ongoing Review of New Resources for Local Partners
Strategy 5	Action 5.1	Action 5.2	Action 5.3
Workforce-Quality of Place	Regional Development Plan	Assist Talent Collaborative	Remote Worker Strategy
Strategy 6	Action 6.1	Action 6.2	Action 6.3

TASK LIST

KEY TACTICS

Outcome 1. League of Cities & Counties

Strategic Action 1.1 - Outreach League

- Organize ECI Development Council Meeting to design schedule for outreach
- Set schedule of League Meetings
- Identify topics for meetings
- Develop Education Series
- Draft Annual Program of Communication/Outreach

Strategic Action 1.2 - League Contacts

- Develop and maintain comprehensive contact database of all city/county elected officials

Strategic Action 1.3 - Announce League

- Press releases/media contacts
- Disperse through various media outlets and social media
- Pick date for first session
- Hold first League Session

Outcome 2. Diversify and grow funding

Strategic Action 2.1 – Form Taskforce

- Form Investor Recruitment Task Force

Strategic Action 2.2 - Top 10 Investors/Launch

- Develop Top Ten New Investor List
- Meet personally with the investors to get a commitment
- Adjust campaign plan based on investor feedback
- Plan media launch

Strategic Action 2.3 - Full campaign

- Develop comprehensive list of additional investors
- Meet with local partners to discuss the list
- Develop contact and follow-up plan

Outcome 3. Clear Brand Identity

Strategic Action 3.1 - Branding session

- Organize feedback session

KEY TACTICS

Strategic Action 3.2 – Plan and execution

- Develop a brand development, marketing, and promotion plan
- Begin discussions to merge websites

Strategic Action 3.3 – Targets

- Complete a Targeted Industry Analysis

Strategic Action 3.4 – Co-op marketing

- Develop a Brand Marketing Package for LEDOS and private businesses to utilize
- Continually adjust the brand through ongoing discussions

Outcome 4. Lead Generation Effort

Strategic Action 4.1 – Lead generation plan

- Finalize the regional Target Industry Analysis
- Gather targets from IEDC
- Identify 6- digit NAICS segments

Strategic Action 4.2 – Lead generation action

- List Acquisition
- Secure marketing support services
- Start contacting prospective businesses

Strategic Action 4.3 – Protocols

- Work with LEDOS to develop lead handling protocols

Outcome 5. Building Local Capacity

Strategic Action 5.1 – Capacity Building through LEDOs

- Review, evaluate and improve local capacity building looking at current trends

Strategic Action 5.2 – Publish Report

- Develop and publish an annual report
- Highlight assistance provided by ECIRP
- Share best practices in region

Strategic Action 5.3 – Identify New Programs

- Identify new resources
- Meet with state leaders
- Attend conferences to stay informed of best practices

Outcome 6. Prioritize the Forge Your Path Regional Development Plan

KEY TACTICS

Strategic Action 6.1 - Advance Projects

- Prioritize actions in the Regional Development Plan
- Identify how to get complete projects in the Regional Development Plan

Strategic Action 6.2 - Talent Attraction

- Work with East Central Talent Collaborative
- Communicate successes in Talent Collaborative and Regional Development Plan

Strategic Action 6.3 - Remote Workers

- Research best practices
- Design strategy