

region **3**a

NORTHEAST INDIANA  
**COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

2025 - 2029





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
Mission, Vision, Regional Overview	4
CEDS Committee	5
<b>Summary Background – Regional Profile</b>	<b>6</b>
Population	6
Population – Age	7
Education	8
Education – Certificates	9
Childcare	10
Housing	11
Per Capita Income	12
Median Household Income	13
<b>Employment</b>	<b>14</b>
Industry Sectors	15
Employment – Unemployment	16
Transportation	17
Travel	18
Broadband	19
<b>SWOT Analysis</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Action Plan – Regional Goals, Objectives, and Performance Measures</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>36</b>
Appendix 1 – Resiliency	37
Appendix 2 – Economic Development Resources	39
Appendix 3 – CEDS DATA	42
<b>Sources</b>	<b>43</b>



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy will serve as the economic and community development roadmap for the region over the next five years. It is meant to be a fluid document to be evaluated annually to review progress and outcomes. This brings awareness of our ever-changing region to the forefront of this process.

The priorities listed within this document play on strengths where assets are grown and weaknesses where new ideas can be developed. Together, they create challenges and opportunities for the leaders in the region to be forward thinking, intuitive, and interact regionally.

This document provides guidance to continue to build the region. It outlines where efforts should be placed, who must be involved, and how we will accomplish the established goals. Through strategic partnerships, the region secures its economic future and competitive edge.

This comprehensive economic development strategy was developed by the Region 3-A Regional Planning Commission with assistance from the Northeastern Indiana Regional Coordinating Council and with the guidance, feedback, and support of the Regional CEDS Committee. Strategy and monitoring is possible with a recurring federal grant from the Economic Development Administration that is administered by Region 3-A Development and Regional Planning Commission.

This strategy was developed in late 2024 and early 2025, approved by the Region 3-A Board of Directors in April 2025, and submitted to the Economic Development Administration for approval on April 18, 2025. Per regulation, this strategy will be updated every five years by Region 3-A Development and Regional Planning Commission and the Regional CEDS Committee. During the life of the Strategy, the Commission and Committee will periodically review the Strategy to assess progress and outcomes.

This CEDS was prepared according to the guidelines of 13 CFR Chapter III, Part 303, Section 303.7. The CEDS helps to ensure the communities within the region remain eligible for funding through the EDA. The EDA of the US Department of Commerce invests in public works, economic adjustment assistance, technical assistance, and short-term planning.



## MISSION

To improve quality of life of the region through community and economic development initiatives celebrating the rural environment and leading innovative industries.

## VISION

Region 3-A, as a commission, seeks to expand the role that it plays in regional affairs by facilitating improved, long-term collaboration, coordination, and cooperation amongst counties and municipalities in the region. We recognize the importance of regionalism in more effectively and efficiently strengthening economies and communities and strive to lead in acting within this framework.

## REGION OVERVIEW

Located in northeast Indiana, Region 3-A Regional Planning Commission and the Northeast Indiana Coordinating Council serve as multicounty, multipurpose agencies that assist county and municipal governments in 10 counties. Region 3-A serves Huntington, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, and Whitley Counties while NIRCC serves Adams, Allen, DeKalb, and Wells Counties. Primary services include economic development, community development, transportation services, and planning. Region 3-A is organized under Indiana Code 36-7-7 and is a designated Economic Development District with the Economic Development Administration.

The areas served by Region 3-A and NIRCC have faced similar challenges and economic hurdles that have seen an aging population and decrease in population over time. The region has also seen an increasing skills gap and low per capita income in relation to the nation. Through collaboration, strategies can be identified to combat the issues with economic and community development. Opportunities can be evaluated and strengths pursued. In order to bring success to the region, threats and barriers need to be identified and strategies developed.

Partnerships between Region 3-A and NIRCC with other regional councils through the Indiana Association of Regional Councils, helps to provide resources and technical assistance to mobilize efforts to promote northeast Indiana.





## CEDS COMMITTEE

The CEDS Committee was developed with the goal of having all 10 counties represented, and to have a diverse mix of both the public and private sectors represented. Efforts were also made to include individuals from higher education, public utilities, and economic development professionals.

NAME	AGENCY	REPRESENTING	TYPE
COLTON BICKEL	ADAMS COUNTY EDC	ADAMS COUNTY	PRIVATE
DAN RICKORD	MAYOR, CITY OF DECATUR	ADAMS COUNTY	PUBLIC
ELISSA MCGAULEY	ALLEN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING SERVICES	ALLEN COUNTY	PUBLIC
PAUL LAGEMANN	ALLEN COUNTY COUNCIL	ALLEN COUNTY	PUBLIC
ANTON KING	DEKALB COUNTY EDC	DEKALB COUNTY	PRIVATE
MIKE WATSON	DEKALB COUNTY COMMISSIONERS	DEKALB COUNTY	PUBLIC
MARK WICKERSHAM	HUNTINGTON COUNTY UNITED EDC	HUNTINGTON COUNTY	PRIVATE
TOM WALL	HUNTINGTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS	HUNTINGTON COUNTY	PUBLIC
SHERRI JOHNSTON	LAGRANGE COUNTY EDC	LAGRANGE COUNTY	PRIVATE
TERRY MARTIN	LAGRANGE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS	LAGRANGE COUNTY	PUBLIC
GARY TIMMERMAN	NOBLE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS	NOBLE COUNTY	PUBLIC
MELANIE KELLOGG	BE NOBLE	NOBLE COUNTY	PRIVATE
ISAAC LEE	STEBEN COUNTY EDC	STEBEN COUNTY	PRIVATE
ANDY LAUGHLIN	STEBEN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS	STEBEN COUNTY	PUBLIC
TENILLE ZARTMAN	GROW WABASH COUNTY	WABASH COUNTY	PRIVATE
BRIAN HAUPERT	WABASH COUNTY COMMISSIONERS	WABASH COUNTY	PUBLIC
ERIN PRIBLE	WELLS COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE	WELLS COUNTY	PRIVATE
TODD MAHNENSMITH	WELLS COUNTY COUNCIL	WELLS COUNTY	PUBLIC
JOHN WHICKER	MAYOR, CITY OF BLUFFTON	WELLS COUNTY	PUBLIC
DALE BUUCK	WHITLEY COUNTY EDC	WHITLEY COUNTY	PRIVATE
RYAN DANIEL	MAYOR, CITY OF COLUMBIA CITY	WHITLEY COUNTY	PUBLIC
PONE VONGPHACHANH	CITY OF NEW HAVEN	ALLEN COUNTY	PUBLIC
ELLEN CUTTER	GREATER FORT WAYNE	ALLEN COUNTY	PRIVATE
RACHEL BLACKMAN	PURDUE COMMUNITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE	REGIONAL	HIGHER EDUCATION
RYAN TWISS	NORTHEAST INDIANA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP	REGIONAL	PRIVATE
JUSTIN BRUGGER	FORT WAYNE CITY UTILITIES	ALLEN COUNTY	PUBLIC
JACOB IHRIE	NORTHEAST INDIANA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP	REGIONAL	PRIVATE
KENT CASTLEMAN	FORT WAYNE TRAILS	ALLEN COUNTY	PRIVATE
STEPHANE FRIJIA	NORTHEAST INDIANA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP	REGIONAL	PRIVATE
GENE DONAGHY	REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY	REGIONAL	PUBLIC
BILL KONYHA	REGIONAL CHAMBER OF NORTHEAST INDIANA	REGIONAL	PRIVATE
LINDA WALCZAK	NORTHEAST DIRECTOR, INDIANA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION	REGIONAL	PRIVATE
EDMOND O'NEAL	PRESIDENT, WORK ONE	REGIONAL	PRIVATE
JASON KAISER	TECHNICAL SERVICES DIRECTOR, INDOT	REGIONAL	PUBLIC
JENNA ANDERSON	THRIVE BY 5 – CHILDCARE	REGIONAL	PRIVATE
JOHN STAFFORD		CHAIRMAN	PRIVATE

# SUMMARY BACKGROUND – REGIONAL PROFILE

## POPULATION

The region's counties—Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells, and Whitley—have a current total population of 729,033 people, according to 2023 U.S. Census Data. In terms of population, Allen County is the largest county in the region with a population of 394,545 which represents 54% of the region's population. This is due to the largest city in the region, Fort Wayne, being located in Allen County. Fort Wayne's population reached 269,994 in 2023, which is approximately 68% of Allen County's population and 37% of the population in the region. Allen County is followed in population size by Noble, DeKalb, LaGrange, Huntington, Adams, Steuben, Whitley, Wabash and Wells County in descending order.

The Indiana Business Research Center (IBRC) at the Indiana University School of Business conducted population projections for the State of Indiana. Their estimates show the population of the region growing to 769,626 by the year 2050. This is an increase of 40,593 people, or 5.57%, compared to 2023. The population for the region is expected to increase by 2050, but the data for each county shows a range of expected outcomes. There are five counties that are expected to see an increase in population. The five counties are Adams, Allen, DeKalb, LaGrange, and Wells. The largest increase will be in Allen County with a 10.49% increase. The remaining five counties – Huntington, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, and Whitley – are all expected to see a decrease in population. The largest anticipated decrease will be in Wabash County with a 17.66% decrease in population. Officials in these counties do not agree with this projection as the current data would suggest otherwise. Industrial growth and new housing starts in these counties would suggest the study is not accurate and not indicative of a future population decline.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023, Indiana Business Research Center – Indiana University Kelly School of Business 2024

COUNTY	POPULATION – 2023	POPULATION – 2050	POPULATION CHANGE	PERCENT CHANGE
ADAMS	36,288	38,137	1,849	4.85%
ALLEN	394,545	440,805	46,260	10.49%
DEKALB	44,198	46,245	2,047	4.43%
HUNTINGTON	36,781	33,581	-3,200	-9.53%
LAGRANGE	40,907	43,626	2,719	6.23%
NOBLE	47,430	44,529	-2,901	-6.51%
STEBEN	34,917	32,361	-2,556	-7.90%
WABASH	30,670	26,066	-4,604	-17.66%
WELLS	28,555	29,991	1,436	4.79%
WHITLEY	34,742	34,285	-457	-1.33%
<b>REGION</b>	<b>729,033</b>	<b>769,626</b>	<b>40,593</b>	<b>5.57%</b>

## POPULATION – AGE

As a region, our population is slightly younger than the state and the nation. The individual county data does provide areas of concern for two of our counties. The percentage of the population that is over the age of 65 is 17.3% nationally, and 16.9% within Indiana. The two counties that have a significantly higher percentage of residents over the age of 65 are Wabash County at 21.2% and Steuben County at 20.8%. These two counties are both projected to see their population decrease by 2050. An aging population such as this will need a service provision aimed toward this demographic. Also, efforts will be needed to attract and retain younger working people.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023

COUNTY	0-4 YEARS OLD	5-19	20-24	25-44	45-64	65+	PERCENT 65+
ADAMS	3,181	8,901	2,264	7,822	8,060	5,572	15.6%
ALLEN	26,380	81,001	26,854	105,555	89,891	61,588	15.7%
DEKALB	2,870	8,553	2,545	10,773	11,387	7,184	16.6%
HUNTINGTON	2,071	6,856	2,397	8,918	9,910	6,547	17.8%
LAGRANGE	3,605	10,534	2,686	8,983	8,946	5,611	13.9%
NOBLE	3,055	9,628	2,853	11,338	12,781	7,776	16.4%
STEBEN	1,720	6,444	2,907	7,139	9,343	7,254	20.8%
WABASH	1,585	5,836	1,990	6,868	8,177	6,576	21.2%
WELLS	1,747	5,804	1,619	6,642	7,230	5,125	18.2%
WHITLEY	2,030	6,586	1,868	8,134	9,396	6,245	18.2%
<b>REGION</b>	<b>48,244</b>	<b>150,143</b>	<b>47,982</b>	<b>182,172</b>	<b>175,201</b>	<b>119,478</b>	<b>16.5%</b>
INDIANA	399,031	1,359,732	489,814	1,753,096	1,673,938	1,157,426	16.9%
NATION	18,358,199	62,776,186	22,446,040	89,280,908	82,603,914	57,822,315	17.3%





## EDUCATION

Educational attainment is essential to the regional economy and the workforce. Data for the region was reviewed as it relates to the number of people over the age of 25 and the level of education obtained. The data shows that the region is ahead of the state in both high school graduates and associates degrees. Regionally, 38.9% of residents over the age of 25 have a high school diploma as their highest level of education attainment. The entire state has 32.1% of residents with this level of attainment. The data also indicates that 9.5% of residents have an Associate’s degree compared to 9.3% of all Indiana residents. The region is behind the state when it comes to Bachelor’s degrees and graduate degrees. The percentage of residents with a Bachelor’s degree is 14.1% compared to 19.0% for all of Indiana. Graduate degrees or more have been obtained by 6.6% of residents compared to 10.6% of all Indiana residents. The data for LaGrange County shows that 31.8% of residents in the County have less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education. All other counties have less than 10% of their residents with this classification. The reason for this in LaGrange County is their significant Amish population. Their custom is to finish with formal education at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 and American Community Survey, 5-year estimates 2019-2023

COUNTY	LESS THAN 9 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	GRADES 9-12, NO DIPLOMA	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE	SOME COLLEGE, NO DEGREE	ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	GRADUATE DEGREE OR MORE
ADAMS	9.5%	3.8	44.0	16.9	10.0	10.9	4.5
ALLEN	4.2	5.7	27.8	21.0	10.1	20.5	10.8
DEKALB	2.2	6.4	43.5	19.4	9.5	13.4	5.5
HUNTINGTON	1.6	5.8	42.7	18.1	9.9	16.6	7.4
LAGRANGE	31.8	7.6	30.1	13.3	5.9	7.0	4.2
NOBLE	9.0	7.8	39.6	17.7	8.2	12.3	5.4
STEU BEN	1.9	5.4	39.2	20.5	8.6	15.9	8.5
WABASH	2.4	6.2	41.8	18.8	9.1	13.6	8.1
WELLS	1.5	5.2	42.7	20.0	11.5	13.6	5.5
WHITLEY	2.6	5.5	37.2	20.0	11.8	16.7	6.0
<b>REGION</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>38.9</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>6.6</b>
INDIANA	3.6%	6.2%	32.1%	19.2%	9.3%	19.0%	10.6%





## EDUCATION – CERTIFICATIONS

Data on the number of residents in the region pursuing education beyond high school outside of a traditional college setting is difficult to pinpoint with accuracy. The exact number of residents obtaining certifications remains uncertain. While we can examine the number of people receiving certificates or degrees from institutions of higher education with a presence in the region, this data has limitations. It does not account for whether these individuals remain in the region to live or work. Although we aim to see more residents earn certifications and contribute to the local workforce, it is important to recognize that the available data is incomplete and should be interpreted with caution.

One of our priority areas is health sciences. The table below presents total completions across all fields, including health sciences. Given our emphasis on this sector, a separate column highlights the number of completions specifically in health sciences for additional clarity.

TYPE	ALL FIELDS	HEALTH SCIENCES
DEGREES/CERTIFICATES TOTAL	9,800	2,148
CERTIFICATES TOTAL	3,184	1,048
CERTIFICATES BELOW THE BACCALAUREATE LEVEL	3,049	1,047
CERTIFICATES OF LESS THAN 1 YEAR	1,875	819
CERTIFICATES OF AT LEAST 1 BUT LESS THAN 2 YRS	1,159	228
CERTIFICATES OF AT LEAST 2 BUT LESS THAN 4 YRS	15	0
CERTIFICATES ABOVE THE BACCALAUREATE TOTAL	135	1
POSTBACCALAUREATE CERTIFICATE	129	1
POST-MASTER'S CERTIFICATE	6	0
DEGREES TOTAL	6,616	1,100
UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES	4,285	822
ASSOCIATE'S DEGREES	1,138	372
BACHELOR'S DEGREES	3,147	450
GRADUATE DEGREES	2,331	278
MASTER'S DEGREES	2,158	126
DOCTOR'S DEGREES	173	152



## CHILDCARE

The region is facing a severe lack of affordable, quality childcare options. The data below shows the total number of children aged 0-5 in each county, as well as the total number of school age children ages 6-17, per county. The data also includes the number of children in those age groups who may need care, as well as the total number of licensed programs, and the licensed childcare seats within those programs. The licensed program numbers include licensed childcare centers, unlicensed registered ministries, licensed family childcare homes, head start programs, half-day or full-day preschools, and legally licensed exempt programs in schools.

All economic development strategies for the region must include a provision for childcare to be successful.

Source: Brighter Futures Data Center, February 2025

COUNTY	TOTAL CHILDREN 5 AND UNDER	CHILDREN AGE 5 AND UNDER WHO MAY NEED CARE	TOTAL SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN	TOTAL SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN WHO MAY NEED CARE	NUMBER OF LI-CENSED PROGRAMS	NUMBER OF LICENS-ES CHILDCARE SEATS
ADAMS	3,653	1,599	7,635	778	11	934
ALLEN	31,667	20,744	66,516	10,810	291	9,526
DEKALB	3,131	2,296	7,381	1,320	21	934
HUNTINGTON	2,270	1,585	4,515	728	14	611
LAGRANGE	4,184	1,085	8,884	586	6	194
NOBLE	3,782	2,431	7,816	1,290	12	618
STEBEN	2,244	1,486	4,783	784	12	694
WABASH	1,834	1,328	4,351	746	16	708
WELLS	2,038	1,371	4,349	728	9	555
WHITLEY	2,434	1,845	5,172	914	17	768
<b>REGION</b>	<b>57,237</b>	<b>35,770</b>	<b>121,402</b>	<b>18,684</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>15,542</b>





## HOUSING

The region has high rates of home ownership in compared to the state and nation. Regionally, housing units that are owner-occupied is 70.2%. The state has 63.5% and the nation has 57.8% of households that are owner-occupied. Based on the high rates of owner-occupied households the number of renter-occupied households is lower than the state and national figures. There are 19.2% of households in the region that are renter-occupied compared to 27.0% for Indiana and 31.4% for the nation. There is one characteristic in the region's housing stock that skews the data and that is lake homes. Lake homes are typically second homes that are used primarily on the weekends during the summer months. Lake homes are located primarily in three counties. The data shows that homes used for seasonal or recreational use account for 27.3% of the housing in Steuben County, 15.0% in LaGrange County, and 12.1% in Noble County.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 and American Community Survey, 5-year estimates 2019-2023

COUNTY	TOTAL HOUSING UNITS	OWNER-OCCUPIED	RENTER-OCCUPIED	VACANT	VACANT FOR SEASONAL OR RECREATIONAL USE
ADAMS	13,386	76.8%	16.6%	0.1%	6.5%
ALLEN	168,078	64.8	28.5	0.0	6.7
DEKALB	18,547	76.2	17.3	0.0	6.5
HUNTINGTON	16,399	70.6	22.8	0.0	6.6
LAGRANGE	15,291	70.5	14.5	0.0	15.0
NOBLE	20,418	67.3	20.6	0.0	12.1
STEBEN	19,327	58.1	14.6	0.0	27.3
WABASH	14,099	70.5	18.3	0.0	11.3
WELLS	12,155	72.1	21.2	0.0	6.7
WHITLEY	15,116	75.5	17.4	0.1	7.0
<b>REGION</b>	<b>312,816</b>	<b>67.4</b>	<b>23.7</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>8.9</b>
INDIANA	3,002,605	63.5	27.0	0.0	9.5
NATION	145,344,636	57.8	31.4	0.0	10.8



## PER CAPITA INCOME

Per capita income lags behind both the state and nation. As a whole per capita income for the region is 92.7% of the state, and 79.9% of the nation. There will need to be a focus on implementing strategies that will lead to per capita income increasing across the region. The number of households in poverty across the region is lower than the percentages for the state and nation.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis 2023 and U.S. Census Bureau 2023

COUNTY	PER CAPITA INCOME	PERCENT OF INDIANA	PERCENT OF NATION	HOUSEHOLDS IN POVERTY
ADAMS	\$26,489	74.5%	64.2%	11.5%
ALLEN	35,839	100.7	86.9	11.5
DEKALB	33,164	93.2	80.4	9.2
HUNTINGTON	32,046	90.1	77.7	12.8
LAGRANGE	31,404	88.3	76.1	7.8
NOBLE	31,953	89.8	77.4	9.8
STEU BEN	36,648	103.0	88.8	9.8
WABASH	32,763	92.1	79.4	11.5
WELLS	33,020	92.8	80.0	9.1
WHITLEY	36,515	102.6	88.5	9.0
<b>REGION</b>	<b>32,984</b>	<b>92.7</b>	<b>79.9</b>	<b>10.2</b>
INDIANA	35,578			12.6
NATION	41,261			11.5





## MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Median household income lags behind both the state and nation for most of the region. As a whole median household income for the region is 89.0% of the state, and 84.9% of the nation. Strategies will be needed to improve median household income in the region. One item of note is that LaGrange County is above both the state and nation on median household income. It is believed this is due to the sizable Amish population in the county. The higher median household income is likely due to the customs that the Amish have that the rest of the population does not have.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023

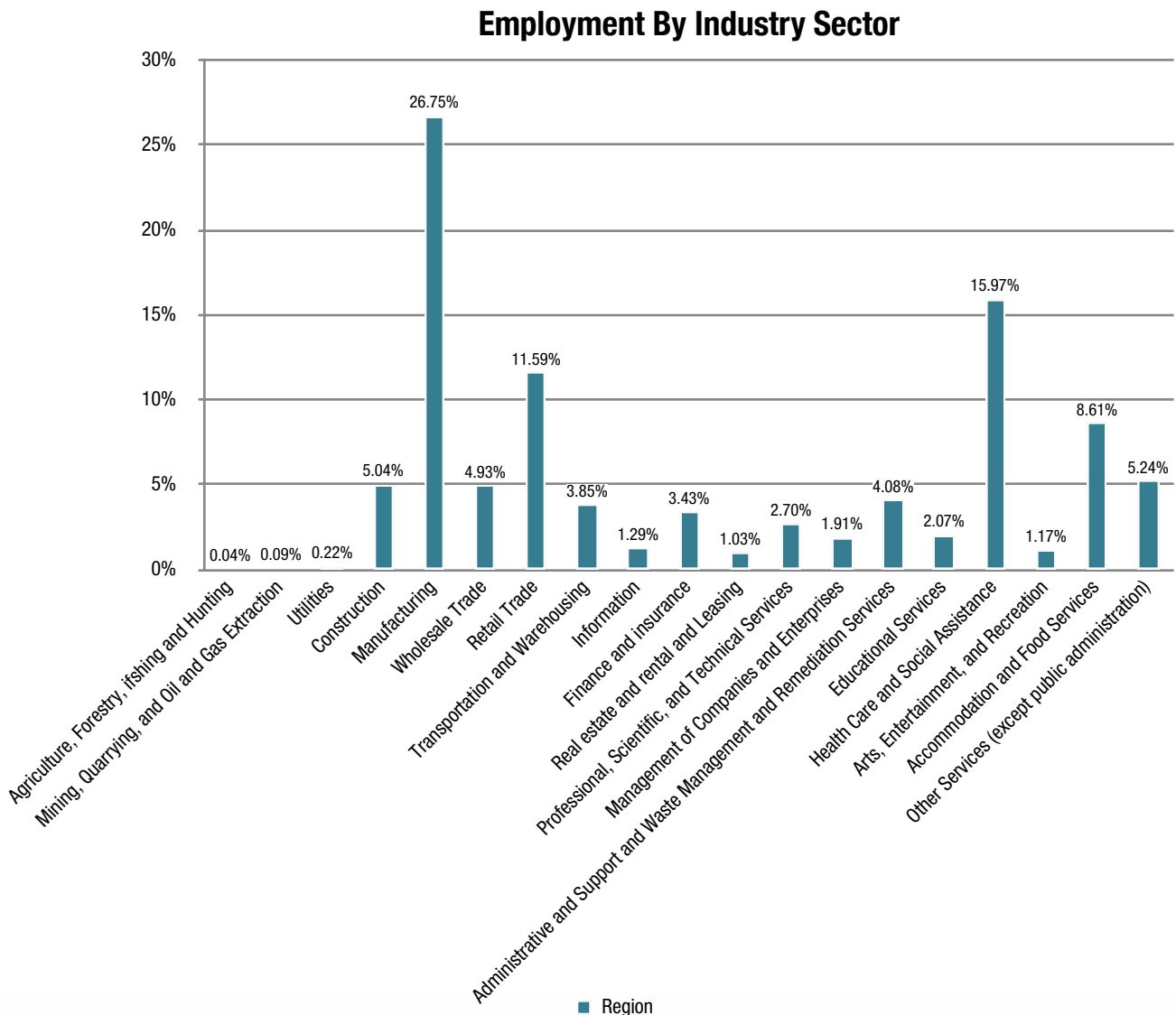
COUNTY	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	PERCENT OF INDIANA	PERCENT OF NATION
ADAMS	\$61,731	80.3%	76.6%
ALLEN	66,222	86.1	82.2
DEKALB	68,110	88.6	84.5
HUNTINGTON	59,894	77.9	74.3
LAGRANGE	81,658	106.2	101.3
NOBLE	70,286	91.4	87.2
STEUBEN	68,837	89.5	85.4
WABASH	66,194	86.1	82.1
WELLS	68,074	88.5	84.4
WHITLEY	73,636	95.7	91.3
<b>REGION</b>	<b>68,464</b>	<b>89.0</b>	<b>84.9</b>
INDIANA	76,910		
NATION	80,610		



# EMPLOYMENT

Employment across all industries within the region indicates that the largest employing industry is manufacturing which accounts for 26.75% of all employment. The employment concentration in this sector, combined with a strong current economy, has contributed to high levels of employment across the region. Regional stakeholders have emphasized the need to align workforce training with current regional job opportunities, particularly in the manufacturing sectors that are struggling to attract workers. The next highest sectors with the highest levels of employment are Health Care and Social Services, Retail Trade, and Accommodation and Food services.

Source: Indiana Department of Workforce Development 2023

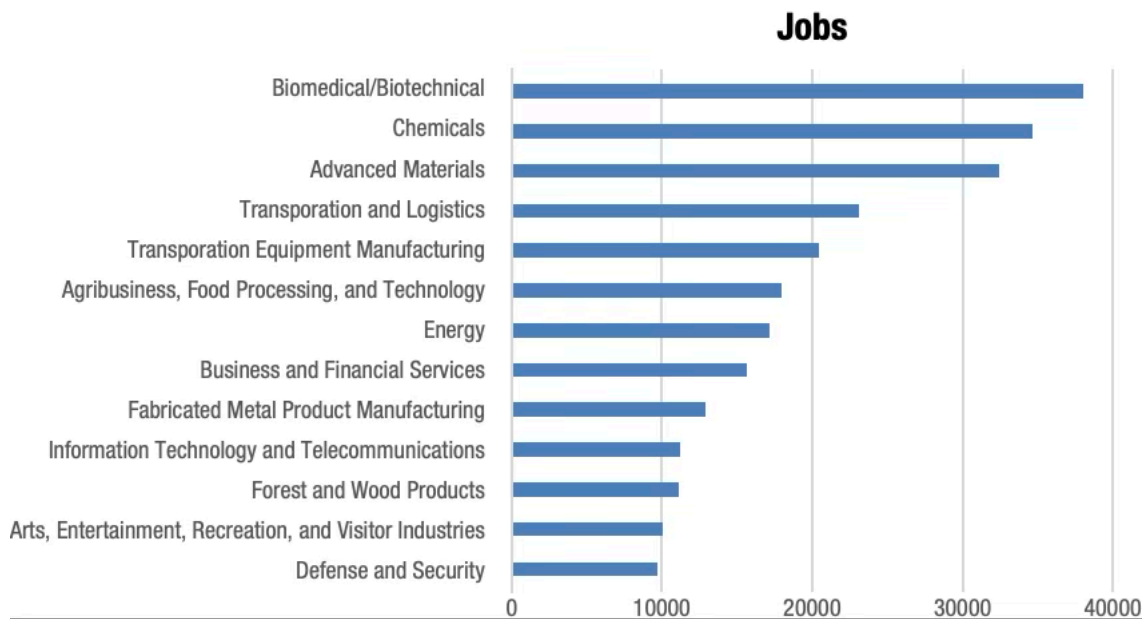




## INDUSTRY SECTORS

Industry sectors are defined as concentrations of companies and industries that are interconnected by markets, suppliers, and trade in a geographic area. The region has several well-established industry clusters that are linked via employment, location, business expertise and other marketplace factors. The largest cluster in the region is Biomedical/Biotechnical. The manufacturing sector is represented with many of the industry clusters highlighting the concentration that we have in that sector.

Source: Purdue Center for Regional Development, 2022



## EMPLOYMENT – UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment across the region remains low at the end of 2024. The strength of the economy has contributed to the low unemployment rate. The region does have concentrations in manufacturing. That industry is very sensitive to downturns in the economy. When the next economic downturn takes place, it is expected that unemployment across the region will rise. This shows the importance of focusing on resilience when developing an economic development strategy.

Source: Indiana Department of Workforce Development 2024

COUNTY	UNEMPLOYMENT %
ADAMS	3.9
ALLEN	4.1
DEKALB	4.0
HUNTINGTON	4.0
LAGRANGE	3.5
NOBLE	4.5
STEBEN	3.6
WABASH	4.3
WELLS	3.6
WHITLEY	3.7
REGION	3.9

### Top 10 Employers in the Region

Parkview Health Systems	Lincoln Financial
Lutheran Health Network	LSC Communications
General Motors	BAE Systems
Steel Dynamics	BF Goodrich
Sweetwater Sound	Thor Industries

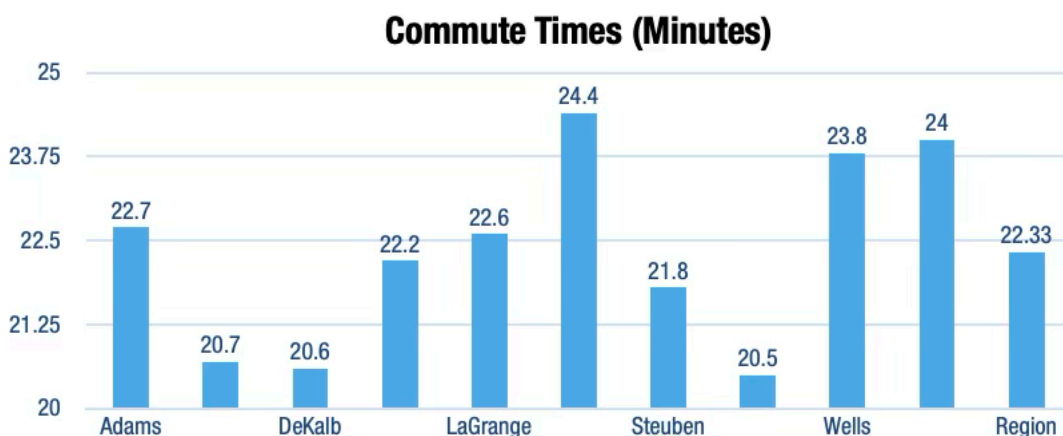


## TRANSPORTATION

Transportation planning in the ten-county region is done by Region III-A and the Northeastern Indiana Regional Coordinating Council (NIRCC). Region III-A works in Huntington, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, and Whitley counties. NIRCC works in Adams, Allen, DeKalb, and Wells counties. Indiana has 14 interstate highways pass through it, two of these intersect in the region. Additionally, the region has seven U.S. highways, and 20 state roads. Fort Wayne is a regional freight hub with access to several large Midwestern cities. This includes semi-truck and railroad traffic. The region is home to an intermodal facility and also has ready port access. The region is home to the Fort Wayne International Airport, which provides both passenger and freight services. The region is also home to six general aviation airports, which are primarily used by private pilots. The region has one municipal transportation system serving the urbanized area within Allen County and eight rural public transportation systems. There has been continued emphasis on the development, connectivity, and completion of trails and pedestrian facilities throughout the region. All counties have trails open, as well as trails under development or planned.

One area of emphasis from regional stakeholders is Highway U.S. 30. This highway runs east and west across the entire state from the border with Ohio and the border with Illinois. It includes two of the counties in the region, Allen and Whitley. Discussions with regional stakeholders shows that U.S. 30 is not realizing its full potential when it comes to economic development, and that there are safety concerns that need to be addressed. Due to number of stoplights and local roads with access to the highway, combined with a mix of truck traffic and passenger traffic, the accident rate is deemed too high. The number of stoplights and local roads with access also increase commute times for workers and slow down the delivery of freight. U.S 30 is the main thoroughfare in Whitley County. Due to the attributes of U.S. 30 it contributes significantly to Whitley County having one of the longest average commute times in the region at nearly 24 minutes.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2019-2023





## TRAVEL

The region is still very dependent on automobile traffic for residents to get to and from work. As a region over 90% of residents drive to and from work. Public transportation is utilized very little across the region. This is true even in Fort Wayne, the largest city in the region which has bus service. There is a small percentage of residents that ride a motorcycle, ride a bike, or walk to work. LaGrange County has the highest percentage in this category. This is due to their sizable Amish population that either walks or rides a bike to work. Driving is not an option for them due to their customs, so they utilize other means. The work at home category has shown an increase over the last five years and is expected increase further. Source: U.S Census Bureau 2022

### Travel to Work 2022 (Percentages)

COUNTY	DRIVE TO WORK	PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION	MOTORCYCLE, BIKE, WALK	WORK AT HOME
ADAMS	90.8	0.8	2.8	5.6
ALLEN	86.4	0.7	3.1	9.9
DEKALB	93.4	0.1	2.6	3.8
HUNTINGTON	90.8	0.0	3.1	6.2
LAGRANGE	78.2	0.8	14.7	6.3
NOBLE	91.5	0.3	3.6	4.7
STEUBEN	91.9	0.3	4.2	3.6
WABASH	91.0	0.4	4.0	4.7
WELLS	92.5	0.5	2.3	4.8
WHITLEY	90.1	0.2	2.3	7.5
REGION	89.7	0.3	4.3	5.7



## BROADBAND

Internet speeds across the region vary greatly. A review of the speeds in the chart below shows that download speeds are adequate for basic internet functions such as email, social media, and limited streaming. However, the download speeds available cause limitations for businesses as they look increase their digital footprint. The same is true for upload speeds. While the average residential user will be able to do everything they would like to do, many businesses are not able to operate at full capacity to upload speed limitations.

The region does experience variability in broadband speeds. While urban areas largely have sufficient speeds the same cannot be said of rural areas. There are pockets within rural areas of the region that have minimal internet speeds. These areas typically have one internet service provider with speeds that are similar to dial up speeds. Broadband investment is needed in these areas to ensure that they do not get left behind on economic opportunities.

The Purdue Center for Regional Development developed a system to measure limitations for communities when it comes to broadband expansion. The Digital Divide Score is composed of several variables to show the limitations that exist in an area. The factors that comprise a digital divide score include percentage of homes without a computing device, percentage of homes with no internet access, average download speeds, average upload speeds, percentage of population ages 65 and over, percentage of population age 25 and over with less than a high school education, individual poverty rate, and a digital inequality or internet income ratio measure. Digital Divide scores range in value from 0 to 100 where 100 indicates the highest digital divide. The higher the score the greater the limitations exist in preventing access to sufficient broadband speeds for a community. The region has scores that are relatively low, but there are still barriers that limit the region from achieving its full potential.

Indiana has received its allocation from the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. Internet service providers (ISP's) across the region are informed on the program and making strides to access these dollars to expand broadband offerings across the region. It is expected that BEAD dollars will improve speeds across the region allowing residents and businesses to have the broadband capacity that they need.

Source: Purdue Center for Regional Development 2024

COUNTY	AVERAGE DOWNLOAD SPEED (MBPS)	AVERAGE UPLOAD SPEED (MBPS)	DIGITAL DIVIDE SCORE	% OF HOMES WITH NO INTERNET ACCESS
ADAMS	136.8	22.1	24.8	20.9
ALLEN	225.8	119.9	11.24	7.0
DEKALB	155.5	52.6	16.68	11.7
HUNTINGTON	159.0	103.3	14.77	11.3
LAGRANGE	153.5	96.2	36.14	32.8
NOBLE	140.6	21.8	19.11	13.1
STEBEN	196.8	93.4	14.86	12.1
WABASH	160.0	106.4	15.24	9.6
WELLS	132.4	44.1	15.39	13.4
WHITLEY	125.6	45.8	14.56	9.7



# SWOT ANALYSIS

## STRENGTHS

- Access to natural resources, such as lakes, rivers, reservoirs, parks, nature preserves, etc.
- Access to an array of post-secondary institutions for education.
- Regional economic development collaboration between the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership, Regional Chamber, Northeast Indiana Works, NE Regional Office of the IEDC, Region III-A, NIRCC, Strategic Development Commission, LEDO Council, and the Regional Development Authority.
- Availability of transportation infrastructure, including two interstates, many US highways and state roadways, east/west railways, and airports.
- Quality of life, specifically the availability of arts, entertainment, trails, etc. -- examples of this includes the Pulse Opera House in Warren, the Honeywell Center in Wabash, the Embassy Theatre in Fort Wayne, Promenade Park in Fort Wayne, and the Sculpture Walk in Decatur.
- Industrial development, such as the creation of new industrial parks.
- The Innovation Center and the associated business incubator.
- Strong industrial base with a particular strength in the manufacturing sector.
- Strong core workforce talent for manufacturers.
- Amish trades orientation benefit to employers.
- Availability of two state parks and the hunting/sportsman opportunities available on state-owned properties.
- Strong schools, kindergarten thru grade 12, including 5 regional New Tech High Schools.
- Turnstone, which provides a full range of rehabilitative, educational, wellness, athletic and recreational programs and facilities to persons with physical disabilities and their families.
- Sports facilities, including Parkview Field, the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum, universities, and various youth sports facilities including two proposed facilities in Fort Wayne and New Haven.
- Jurisdictional permitting agencies working together to streamline the permitting processes.
- Location within 3-4 hour drive of multiple urban areas such as Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Columbus, Toledo, Cincinnati, Dayton, Indianapolis and Louisville is great for commerce.
- Low cost of doing business.
- Many of the communities across the region have invested in downtown revitalization.





## WEAKNESSES

- The population is less educated than other areas.
- Lack of passenger rail and public transit.
- Severe housing shortage across the region – quantity and type.
- Available land for development is limited – annexation challenges.
- Mismatch between jobs demanded and labor force.
- Lack of new shell buildings – many buildings available are older and less desirable to companies.
- Lack of “white collar” jobs/not a good job mix.
- Minority business ownership is not strong compared to other Midwestern areas.
- Venture capital could be higher.
- Patents are not as strong as they used to be.
- Old housing stock.
- Lack of a comprehensive entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- INDOT reluctance to fast-pace projects, too much bureaucracy and layers for projects to happen at the speed they could. Also, while INDOT supports maintenance there are limited funds for new roadways.
- Career counseling in schools doesn’t steer students towards in-demand jobs and the educational path to getting them.
- Severe shortage of quality childcare.
- Per capita income for the region is behind the national per capita income.
- The region lacks a natural attraction – ocean, mountains, etc.



## OPPORTUNITIES

- Affordable housing in the region generally – own and rent.
- Perception as family friendly.
- Expansion of trail system.
- Indiana location, including business and tax-friendly environment.
- Medical industry has invested heavily in the region.
- Low cost of living.
- Build research & development capacity through greater partnerships between industry and higher education.
- The major reservoirs, lakes and streams for fishing and hunting.
- Agricultural expertise and increased investment within the industry.
- Foreign trade zone.
- Multi-company consortium training programs (multiple companies that need the same things would help drive demand and lower the cost).
- Access to vocational schools.
- Guidance/career counselors in educational settings.
- Air guard base transition and modernization.
- Upgrade of US 30 to a limited-access highway.
- Fort Wayne airport expansion could open new markets for passenger flights.
- Network of accessibility and disability advocacy organizations which could be leveraged for a greater regional identity.
- Continued investment in quality of place initiatives.



## THREATS

- Underfunded and deteriorating public utilities, particularly sewer districts.
- Impending closure of AEP Rockport coal plant leaving options that cannot meet current demand.
- Lack of higher paying “white collar” jobs.
- Increase in locally-owned companies selling to owners outside the region limits reinvestment in the region – business, industry, and philanthropic.
- Brain drain - population of 19-25 continues to decrease.
- Region’s educational attainment has not budged for a decade.
- Lack of skills and education necessary to remain globally competitive.
- Lack of consistent, reliable broadband access.
- Health of the population contributes to greater healthcare costs.
- Automation or AI may eliminate low-skill jobs.
- Central location to other metropolitan areas and markets may limit investment that takes place within the region.
- Increase in vacant office space.
- Lack of energy capacity in certain areas of the region limiting growth potential.
- Aging population.
- Declining population in some counties in the region.
- Surrounding states are offering more support for early childhood development and care.





# REGIONAL ACTION PLAN

## REGIONAL GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

This section contains goals, strategies, performance measures, and partners for the 2025 CEDS update. The objectives and strategies associated with each goal are a result from the regional background information, the SWOT exercise, and the CEDS committee input and review. Performance measures are also included to measure goals, strategies, and their implementation. Region 3-A will track measures, many of which are output metrics, to determine the progress of implementation.

### GOAL #1: SUPPORT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION

Supporting workforce development in a region is crucial for fostering economic growth, attracting businesses, and ensuring a skilled labor force that meets industry demands. It enhances job opportunities, improves wages, and strengthens community resilience by preparing workers for evolving market needs. Investing in workforce development ultimately drives innovation, competitiveness, and long-term regional prosperity.

#### **Objective 1.A:**

Increase the number of adults with an associates degree, bachelor's degree, or certification within six years of graduating high school.

#### **Strategies:**

**Expand Dual Enrollment Programs:** Offer high school students the opportunity to earn college credits, reducing the time and cost of obtaining a degree or certification.

**Enhance Career and College Readiness Programs:** Implement guidance counseling and workshops to help students identify post-secondary paths aligned with their interests and local labor market needs.

**Provide Financial Assistance:** Increase access to scholarships, grants, and affordable tuition programs to reduce financial barriers to higher education.

**Partner with Community Colleges and Employers:** Develop pathways that integrate certifications or associate degrees with clear transfer options to four-year institutions or direct workforce opportunities.

**Strengthen Mentorship and Support Services:** Establish mentorship programs and academic support systems to improve student retention and success rates in post-secondary education.

#### **Measures:**

Have at least 60% of residents obtain a degree or certification within six years of graduating high school.

Have at least 60% of college graduates from regional universities stay in the region to obtain full-time employment.

#### **Partners:**

Regional institutions of higher education, Northeast Indiana Works, labor unions, Don Wood Foundation, Questa Foundation.



**Objective 1.B:**

Increase regional median income.

**Strategies:**

**Attract High-Wage Industries:** Target economic development efforts toward industries offering high-paying jobs, such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and technology.

**Upskill the Workforce:** Invest in education and training programs to equip workers with skills aligned to high-demand, high-paying jobs, including certifications, apprenticeships, and advanced degrees.

**Encourage Innovation and R&D:** Partner with universities and private sectors to foster innovation and create high-value jobs in emerging sectors.

**Strengthen Regional Collaboration:** Coordinate across local governments, educational institutions, and economic development organizations to ensure a unified approach to job creation and wage growth.

**Address Barriers to Workforce Participation:** Provide early care and education, transportation, and housing opportunities to enable more individuals to enter and remain in the workforce, increasing overall income levels.

**Measure:**

Increase the median income so that there is an increase in per capita income. This will be reviewed and measured on an annual basis.

**Partners:**

Regional institutions of higher education, LEDO's, childcare providers, Regional economic development organizations, Northeast Indiana Early Childhood Coalition



**Objective 1.C:**

Foster a regional partnership among higher education institutions, industry leaders, and community stakeholders to strengthen health sciences education and workforce development. This initiative will focus on joint program development, industry-aligned training, and expanded student access to meet evolving regional healthcare workforce needs

**Strategies:**

Develop a collaborative initiative among multiple higher education institutions to enhance health sciences education and workforce development in alignment with regional industry needs.

Joint program development: Create shared health sciences curricula designed to address regional industry needs, leveraging the expertise of each institution. Establish agreements to ensure ease of credit transfer among participating institutions.

Industry Partnerships: Engage local healthcare providers in program design to ensure alignment with workforce needs. Secure commitments for internships and job placement for program graduates.

Regional Funding and Grants: Pursue state, federal, and private grants focused on workforce development in health sciences.

Community Outreach and Recruitment: Develop joint marketing and outreach campaigns to attract potential students from across the region. Offer scholarships and financial aid to increase access and participation.

**Measure:**

Review on an annual basis the number of participating higher education institutions and industry partners, the development and implementation of health sciences training programs, and the number of students enrolled and successfully completing the programs.

**Partners:**

Northeast Indiana Colleges and Universities Network, Healthcare providers, EDA, Foundations





**Objective 1.D:**

Encourage the development of a variety of housing options to meet the need of the current and future labor force.

**Strategies:**

**Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborate with developers to build affordable and workforce housing. Partner with employers to create employer-assisted housing programs, providing housing options near workplaces.

**Leverage Funding Mechanisms:** Use federal, state, and local housing funds to support the construction of affordable units, including grants and tax credits.

**Infrastructure Investments:** Ensure areas targeted for housing development are equipped with necessary infrastructure, such as transportation, utilities, and broadband, to make them attractive for new housing projects.

**Target Specific Housing Needs:** Encourage the development of diverse housing types, including rental apartments, starter homes, and senior housing.

**Collaboration:** Coordinate housing strategies across municipalities to ensure there are adequate housing options and resources throughout the region.

**Measure:**

Increase in the number of housing units in the region by 10% in five years.

**Partners:**

Builders and Developers, LEDO's, Regional Economic Development Organizations



**Objective 1.E:**

Provide early childcare and education for workers to increase the labor force.

**Strategies:**

**Promote Employer-Supported Childcare:** Encourage businesses to provide on-site childcare facilities or partner with local providers to offer discounted rates for employees.

**Increase Childcare Provider Capacity:** Support the expansion of existing childcare centers and the creation of new facilities.

**Enhance Affordability:** Leverage funding opportunities to subsidize childcare costs for low- and moderate-income families. Establish childcare assistance programs through public-private partnerships or community organizations.

**Infrastructure Investments:** Dedicate resources to upgrading or building childcare facilities in strategic locations near workplaces or transportation hubs. Include childcare infrastructure in broader community development projects to ensure integration with housing and workforce initiatives.

**Workforce Development for Childcare Providers:** Offer training programs, certifications, and career advancement opportunities for childcare workers to ensure quality care and reduce turnover. Provide wage supplements or incentives to attract and retain skilled childcare professionals.

**Measure:**

Review wait lists and program enrollment on an annual basis to ensure the trend is moving in the right direction.

**Partners:**

Employers, Municipalities, LEDO's, Foundations, Funding Agencies, Northeast Indiana Early Childhood Coalition and County Coalition leaders.



## GOAL 2: STRENGTHEN INFRASTRUCTURE ACROSS THE REGION

Strengthening infrastructure across the region is essential for supporting economic growth, improving connectivity, and enhancing quality of life. Reliable roadways, broadband, utilities, and public facilities attract businesses, create jobs, and ensure communities remain competitive and resilient. Investing in infrastructure fosters long-term sustainability for the region.

### **Objective 2.A:**

Obtain grant funding for projects that improve utility infrastructure

### **Strategies:**

**Conduct Thorough Needs Assessments:** Identify critical utility infrastructure gaps and prioritize projects that address urgent community needs, such as water, wastewater, broadband, or energy upgrades. Use data, such as condition assessments, capacity studies, and demographic analyses, to demonstrate the need for funding. Develop maps of utility infrastructure across the region that shows location and capacity.

**Leverage Federal and State Assistance:** Apply for federal programs like USDA Rural Development, EPA, INDOT, or OCRA.

**Engage in Regional Collaboration:** Present projects as part of a regional plan to address shared utility challenges, increasing the potential impact and appeal to funders.

**Partner with Region 3-A and NIRCC:** These organizations have extensive experience in securing infrastructure grants to develop compelling applications and manage technical requirements.

### **Measure:**

Increase in the number of funded projects.

### **Partners:**

Federal and State funding agencies, private foundations, Region 3-A, NIRCC





**Objective 2.B:**

Have adequate broadband available to all residents and businesses across the region.

**Strategies:**

**Expand Infrastructure Investment:** Collaborate with private internet service providers (ISPs) to co-invest in infrastructure, particularly in underserved or rural areas where market incentives may be low. Apply for grants such as those available through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and the Indiana Broadband Office.

**Map and Assess Broadband Gaps:** Use data to identify areas with inadequate or no broadband coverage. Publicly accessible maps can help target investments and pinpoint underserved communities. Determine community-specific broadband needs, considering factors such as population density, geography, and income levels to prioritize projects.

**Streamline Permitting and Regulations:** Simplify local regulations and permitting processes for broadband infrastructure development to reduce barriers for ISPs.

**Promote the Use of Emerging Technologies:** In rural areas where traditional broadband infrastructure is difficult or costly to deploy, promote the use of fixed-based wireless or satellite broadband solutions.

Provide tax phase-in opportunities to internet service providers that invest in the expansion of broadband infrastructure.

**Measure:**

100% of residents and businesses in the region have access to 1 gig speeds (download and upload) within five years.

**Partners:**

Internet service providers, federal and state funding agencies, Municipalities, Regional Economic Development Organizations



**Objective 2.C:**

Work with transportation programs to increase access and efficiency of roadways across the region.

**Strategies:**

**Continue to Prioritize Regional Transportation Planning:** Continue to develop comprehensive, long-term plans that align transportation projects across multiple municipalities to ensure efficient use of resources and consistent infrastructure improvements. Ensure that regional plans are in sync with state and federal transportation policies and funding opportunities, maximizing access to resources.

**Enhance Public Transit Systems:** Invest in expanding bus and shuttle services to underserved areas to increase access to transportation for workers, particularly in low-income or rural communities. Ensure that public transit routes are well-integrated with major roadways and key destinations like employment centers, schools, and healthcare facilities. Enhance the frequency and reliability of public transit services to make them more attractive to residents, especially during peak hours.

**Promote Multi-Modal Transportation:** Build or improve bike lanes, sidewalks, and trails to provide safe and efficient alternatives to car travel. This is especially important in the areas of the region that have Amish communities.

**Invest in Roadway Maintenance and Expansion:** Regularly invest in maintaining and upgrading existing roadways to reduce congestion, prevent accidents, and improve travel times. Focus on expanding high-demand roads, such as adding lanes, improving interchanges, or implementing new designs, to accommodate growing traffic volumes. Convert US 30 into a freeway type highway.

**Secure Funding and Resources:** Leverage federal and state funding programs to support transportation improvements.

**Measure:**

Increase in roadway capacity.

Decrease in accidents.

Increase in use of public transit by 10% in five years.

**Partners:**

Federal Highway, INDOT, Public transit agencies, Region 3-A, NIRCC



**Objective 2.D:**

Identify parcels for development into shovel-ready sites.

**Strategies:**

**Conduct a Comprehensive Land Use and Zoning Analysis:** Analyze current zoning regulations to identify underutilized or misaligned parcels that could be better suited for industrial, commercial, or residential development. Amend zoning codes and allow for more flexible land use. Perform studies to determine the highest and best use for underdeveloped or vacant parcels, based on market demand, access to transportation, and utility availability.

**Identify Properties with Infrastructure Potential:** Identify parcels with existing or nearby access to key utilities (water, sewer, electricity, natural gas, broadband) to reduce the need for significant infrastructure investment. Look for parcels near major highways or planned infrastructure projects that could support business development or residential growth. Perform environmental assessments to identify parcels that are not subject to flood risks, protected areas, or other environmental restrictions.

**Leverage Data and Technology:** Employ Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to create detailed maps of vacant or underutilized land, analyze infrastructure availability, and assess proximity to key amenities and transportation networks.

**Analyze Market Demand and Future Growth Trends:** Use market analysis to determine which types of developments (e.g., industrial parks, residential developments, mixed-use) are most in demand and target parcels accordingly. Identify areas with projected population or employment growth, as these areas are likely to have greater demand for housing, commercial spaces, or services in the near future.

**Utilize annexation when necessary.** Strategically located parcels should be annexed into municipal boundaries, ensuring access to essential infrastructure (water, sewer, roads) along with aligning zoning regulations. This process will facilitate streamlined permitting, enhance site marketability, and attract investment by reducing development barriers.

**Prepare Land for Shovel-Ready Status:** Conduct environmental impact assessments, geotechnical studies, and soil tests to ensure parcels are suitable for development. Work with all relevant agencies to secure all necessary zoning, building, and environmental permits. Ensure key utilities and access roads are either already in place or ready to be developed quickly, so the site can be marketed as “shovel-ready” for developers based on state standards.

**Measures:**

Increases in the number of sites that have a shovel-ready designation.

**Partners:**

Municipalities, LEDO's, Regional Economic Development Agencies, OCRA





## GOAL 3: SUPPORT BUSINESS, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Supporting business, business development, and entrepreneurship in a region drives economic growth, creates jobs, and fosters innovation. A strong business ecosystem attracts investment, enhances local competitiveness, and builds a resilient economy. Encouraging entrepreneurship fuels new ideas and industries, contributing to long-term economic growth and stability in the region.

### **Objective 3.A:**

Grow existing manufacturing base and attract new manufacturing companies and emerging technology industries to the region.

### **Strategies:**

**Leverage Infrastructure and Location Advantages:** Continue to ensure easy access to highways, railroads, and airports to facilitate efficient shipping and distribution. Further develop or expand transportation hubs and distribution centers to support supply chain operations. Provide reliable and affordable access to critical utilities, including energy, water, and broadband. Create or expand industrial parks specifically designed for manufacturing companies, offering ready-to-develop land with the necessary infrastructure in place.

**Continue Our Competitive Business Environment:** Provide tax abatements or tax-increment financing (TIF) to reduce the financial burden on manufacturers. Partner with local educational institutions and workforce development organizations to offer training programs tailored to the manufacturing sector, ensuring that the region has a skilled workforce.

**Promote Economic Diversification and Resilience:** Invest in technology and infrastructure that support advanced manufacturing sectors like robotics, 3D printing, and AI-driven production processes. Build or expand existing industry clusters where complementary businesses (e.g., suppliers, service providers, logistics) are concentrated in the region, creating synergies that support both new and existing manufacturers.

Have LEDO's continue to administer business retention and expansion programs, visiting local employers, and providing technical assistance.

### **Measures:**

Increase in number of new manufacturing businesses in the region.

Increase in the number of jobs at existing manufacturing companies in the region.

### **Partners:**

LEDO's, Municipalities, Indiana Economic Development Corporation



**Objective 3.B:**

Develop a variety of support services to assist entrepreneurs, including business-related research, invention and innovation evaluation, product and service development, and marketing.

**Strategies:**

**Support the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center:** They are an incubator that provides entrepreneurs with affordable office space, mentoring, resources, and access to networks of investors, customers, and peers. They offer a range of services such as business planning, accounting, legal advice, and access to office equipment. They also bring together entrepreneurs, researchers, and technology experts to facilitate collaboration and support innovation.

**Provide Access to Research and Market Data:** Help entrepreneurs access market research and industry reports that provide insights into trends, consumer preferences, and competitive landscapes. Facilitate collaborations between entrepreneurs and local universities or economic development organizations.

**Create Access to Funding and Investment:** Identify opportunities for venture capital partnerships to help entrepreneurs secure funding for product development, marketing, and operational costs.

**Facilitate Networking and Peer Learning:** Organize events where entrepreneurs can interact with other startups, potential investors, and industry experts.

**Build Strategic Partnerships:** Develop relationships with established companies that can offer resources such as mentorship, technology, access to distribution networks, and potential joint ventures.

**Measures:**

Increase in the number of new businesses and startups in the region.

**Partners:**

Universities, Economic development organizations, LEDO's, Chambers of Commerce



## GOAL 4: EXPAND QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE REGION

Continued emphasis on quality of life in the region is essential for attracting and retaining residents, businesses, and a skilled workforce. Investments in housing, healthcare, education, recreation, and cultural amenities create vibrant, thriving communities. A high quality of life enhances economic resilience and fosters long-term regional success.

### Objectives:

- Create vibrant downtowns in all of the region's cities and towns.
- Further develop the trail network across the region.
- Provide amenities that attract young professionals – housing, entertainment, and recreation.
- Promote and expand tourism opportunities to complement business sectors and enhance quality of life.
- Continue to promote the region as a family-friendly environment.
- Rehabilitation of historic districts.
- Improve access and affordability of healthcare.

### Measures:

- Increase in the number of façade programs established or expanded.
- Increase in the number of downtown housing units.
- Increase in the miles of trails.
- All trails linked across the region.
- Continue to increase recreation opportunities within the region.
- Increase in the number of tourists that come to northeast Indiana.
- Increase investment in public art or other cultural amenities.
- Develop programs and facilities that focus on mental health care, addiction treatment, and wellness initiatives.
- Increase investment in projects in small towns and cities, focusing on parks, public spaces, and downtown districts to boost community pride.

### Partners:

Main Street groups, Tourism Bureaus, Developers, Healthcare organizations, Non-profits





# APPENDICES



## APPENDIX 1 – RESILIENCY

The CEDS committee conducted a SWOT exercise which resulted in the communication of threats and vulnerabilities of the region. By engaging in this process, goals and strategies were developed to address resiliency to these vulnerabilities. The concerns and threats identified during the SWOT are below as they relate to the goals of the CEDS.

### GOAL 1: SUPPORT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION

The region will need to supplement and maintain its workforce, particularly the 25-44 age group. If this doesn't happen there could be a contraction in businesses due to a shortage in either numbers or talent in the workforce. An additional threat and weakness related to the workforce is the lack of available housing choices. The future workforce will need a variety of available housing and affordable housing. Younger talent needs affordable homes or a choice of rental housing in the region. The region will also need to prioritize the expansion of childcare options if we are going to adequately address the shortage in workforce.

### GOAL 2: STRENGTHEN INFRASTRUCTURE ACROSS THE REGION

The biggest issue with infrastructure is funding. Resources exist to assist in funding for the expansion and maintenance of infrastructure. However, there isn't enough funding to meet all goals and objectives related to infrastructure. To increase resiliency this disparity will have to be addressed, but available funding is again an issue. The Region will need to work with all partners to address the funding gap.

### GOAL 3: SUPPORT BUSINESS, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A concern is the lack of financial access for non-collateral rich startups. Stakeholders identified the need for access to capital that is not readily available. Entrepreneurship will diversify the economy, but a lack of funding and resources is a weakness currently in the region.

### GOAL 4: EXPAND QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE REGION

The region's quality of life and economic development are linked. A threat to growth and development is the lack of housing options. We will need more housing and a variety of housing to meet attraction efforts. Efforts need to continue and be increased to ensure our downtowns are thriving and that we have the amenities that will attract young workers.



## PRE-DISASTER PREPARATION AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Hazard mitigation planning forms the foundation for a community's long-term strategy to reduce disaster losses and break the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage in the next disaster. State, county, and tribal governments are required to develop a hazard mitigation plan as a condition of receiving certain types of hazard mitigation disaster assistance, emergency and non-emergency.

**Hazard Mitigation planning** begins with organizing resources. A gathering of support and removing barriers to the planning process is needed. An effective planning process also requires aligning technical resources to establish a knowledge base for the plan.

Next, **identifying and assessing risk occurs**. The types of vulnerabilities are natural, man-made and technological. A plan will create a profile of the area, and in working with resources gaps and deficiencies will be identified and areas of vulnerabilities will be specified. A probability of risk occurrence will also be assessed for these areas.

**The mitigation plan includes strategies and priorities for response actions.** An assessment of the capabilities to execute these actions is completed. Additionally, a cost – benefit review of the proposed mitigation is done to support the priorities of responses in the event of a disaster.

### Natural Disaster Resources

Federal Emergency Management Agency

A Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approved hazard mitigation plan is a condition for receiving certain types of non-emergency disaster assistance, including funding for mitigation projects. Specific information for additional resources for disasters is below.

### Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program

The Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant (PDM) program is a nationally competitive program that makes funding available to local, state, and Indian Tribal governments to implement hazard mitigation activities. Funding may be awarded for the development or update of an all hazards mitigation plan or for a hazard mitigation project. Local governments and Indian Tribal governments applying for PDM funds for local mitigation projects must have an approved local mitigation plan. Information about the PDM program is here: <https://www.fema.gov/pre-disaster-mitigation-grant-program>

### Hazard Mitigation Grant Program

The Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) provides funds to states, tribes, and local communities after a disaster declaration to protect public or private property through various mitigation measures. Hazard mitigation includes long-term efforts to reduce the impact of future events. Further information can be found at: <https://www.fema.gov/hazard-mitigation-grant-program>





## APPENDIX 2 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

### Economic Development Corporations

The region has economic development corporations that serve in a coordinating and service provision role within their geographic areas. These entities assist with business attraction and retention and other customized services based on local needs.

The region has the following corporations:

Adams County Economic Development Corporation  
313 West Jefferson Street, Suite 120  
Decatur, IN 46733  
[www.adamscountyedc.com](http://www.adamscountyedc.com)

Greater Fort Wayne, Inc.  
200 East Main Street, Suite 800  
Fort Wayne, IN 46802  
[www.greaterfortwayneinc.com](http://www.greaterfortwayneinc.com)

DeKalb County Economic Development Partnership  
112 South Jackson Street  
Auburn, IN 46706  
[www.dekalbedp.org](http://www.dekalbedp.org)

Huntington County United  
Economic Development  
8 West Market Street  
Huntington, IN 46750  
[www.hcued.com](http://www.hcued.com)

LaGrange County Economic Development Corporation  
513 West Central Avenue  
LaGrange, IN 46761  
[www.lagrangecountyedc.com](http://www.lagrangecountyedc.com)

Be Noble  
401 East Diamond St, Suite 308  
Albion, IN 46701  
[www.noblecountyedc.com](http://www.noblecountyedc.com)

Steuben County Economic Development Corporation  
907 South Wayne Street, Suite 100  
Angola, IN 46703  
[www.stubenedc.com](http://www.stubenedc.com)

Grow Wabash County  
214 South Wabash Street  
Wabash, IN 46992  
[www.growwabashcounty.com](http://www.growwabashcounty.com)

Wells County Economic Development Corporation  
128 East Market Street  
Bluffton, IN 46714  
[www.wellsedc.com](http://www.wellsedc.com)

Whitley County Economic  
Development Corporation  
220 West Van Buren Street,  
Suite 102  
Columbia City, IN 46725  
[www.whitleyedc.com](http://www.whitleyedc.com)



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

### **Region:**

#### **Region 3-A Development and Regional Planning Commission**

Formed as a regional unit of government, through Indiana Stature, Regional 3-A has been in existence since 1974, supporting the community and economic development needs of Huntington, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, and Whitley Counties. For additional information please go to [www.region3a.org](http://www.region3a.org)

#### **Northeast Indiana Regional Coordinating Council**

The Northeastern Indiana Regional Coordinating Council (NIRCC) is a voluntary organization of local governments that collaborate on regional issues including transportation, transit, community development, environment and other matters that impact the region. NIRCC operates in Adams, Allen, DeKalb, and Wells counties. [www.nircc.com](http://www.nircc.com)

#### **Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership**

The top priority for the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership is increasing business investment. They support business, build the community, and market the region to the world. This is accomplished through collaboration which is the key in promoting a globally competitive economy in northeast Indiana. Their footprint is 11 counties. They cover the 10 counties covered by this CEDS, and Kosciusko County. [www.neindiana.com](http://www.neindiana.com)

#### **The Northeast Indiana Regional Development Authority**

The Northeast Indiana RDA was formed to attract and invest funds into catalytic regional projects aimed at talent attraction and retention and improved quality of life. Since its establishment in 2016, the RDA has attracted and invested \$92 million into various projects across the entire 11-county region, which has resulted in more than three quarters of a billion dollars of total investment in the region. [www.neindiana.com/why-nei/economic-development/regional-development-authority](http://www.neindiana.com/why-nei/economic-development/regional-development-authority)

#### **The Strategic Development Commission**

The Northeast Indiana Strategic Development Commission (NEISDC) was created by the Indiana Legislature in 2021 to provide strategic framework for how Northeast Indiana will raise wages, grow the population, and increase the number of residents with college degrees or credentials. [www.neisdc.com](http://www.neisdc.com)

#### **Northeast Indiana Works**

The region's economy demands a workforce with a wide range of skills. Northeast Indiana Works strives to meet that need with innovative programs and customized services designed to align workforce skills with employer demands across the region. Working with employers, other community partners, and job seekers, they are committed to the development and expansion of talent pipelines that will keep northeast Indiana companies and workers competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century marketplace. [www.neinworks.org](http://www.neinworks.org)

#### **Northeast Indiana Innovation Center**

The NIIC was created to solve a problem. In the late 1990s, aspiring innovators and entrepreneurs had nowhere to go in Northeast Indiana to incubate their businesses. Many worked from their kitchen tables at home or local coffee shops, trying to make a go of it. Visionary leaders imagined a place where innovation and economic development intersect for a COMMUNITY. To address this problem, the NIIC was formed as a nonprofit entrepreneurial community. Their community of innovators and entrepreneurs in the past 20+ years have launched hundreds of new products and patents, created thousands of jobs for our neighbors, infused hundreds of millions in grants and capital into our economy. [www.niic.net](http://www.niic.net)



**State:****Indiana Economic Development Corporation**

The Indiana Economic Development Corporation is committed to attracting and supporting new business investment, creating new jobs for Hoosiers, and furthering Indiana's legacy as one of the top states in the nation for business. They have numerous resources to assist in this effort. For more information on the resources available please go to [www.iedc.in.gov](http://www.iedc.in.gov)

**Indiana Department of Transportation**

INDOT is the state agency responsible for roadway construction and maintenance throughout the state of Indiana. There are programs available to municipalities that allow them to get grant funding within their jurisdictional boundaries. [www.in.gov/indot](http://www.in.gov/indot)

**Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs**

The Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs works with Indiana communities to build relevant and economically thriving places where people want to live, work, and grow. The Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs works with local, state, and national partners to provide resources and technical assistance to aid communities in shaping and achieving their vision for community and economic development. Grants are available for public facilities projects, utility projects, and broadband expansion amongst others. To learn more about their programs please go to [www.in.gov/ocra](http://www.in.gov/ocra)

**Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority**

IHCDA believes that growing Indiana's economy starts at home. Everyone can agree that all Hoosiers should have the opportunity to live in safe, affordable, good-quality housing in economically stable communities. IHCDA's work is done in partnership with developers, lenders, investors, and nonprofit organizations that use their financing to serve low- and moderate-income Hoosiers. IHCDA leverages government and private funds to invest in financially sound, well-designed projects that will benefit communities for many years to come. [www.in.gov/ihcda](http://www.in.gov/ihcda)

**Federal:****U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration**

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) provides financial assistance to help distressed communities overcome financial barriers that inhibit the growth of their local economies. EDA provides assistance for **public works projects**, planning, research and technical assistance, and education. Region 3-A Regional Planning Commission is a designated Economic Development District by the EDA and, as such, it is required to conduct economic development planning and project identification.

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

The Brownfields program provides funding for the **assessment and clean-up of brownfield sites**. The program leverages local funds and property owner involvement for the redevelopment process.

<https://www.epa.gov/brownfields>

**USDA**

The Rural Business Development Grant is a program for smaller communities to provide technical assistance, capital for a revolving loan fund, rural incubators, and other uses to foster emerging businesses in rural areas. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/fact-sheet/RD-FactSheet-RBS-RBDG.pdf>

The USDA also provides business and industry loan guarantees for business expansion, modernization, and other eligible activities for businesses located in communities less than 50,000 in size. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-industry-loan-guarantees>

The USDA Water and Waste Disposal Program provides **funding for infrastructure in smaller communities**. This program provides loans and possible grants for drinking water systems. It also offers funding for sanitary sewage disposal, solid waste disposal, and storm water drainage to households and businesses. Eligible communities are those 10,000 in size or smaller.





## APPENDIX 3 – CEDS DATA

### Creation and Adoption of this Plan

The 2025 CEDS update was developed with the use of a CEDS committee. This committee was comprised of stakeholders from across all 10 counties in the region. Stakeholders represented the public sector, the private sector, utilities, and higher education. Meetings were conducted with this group, and feedback was obtained regarding a strategy for our region. Members of the committee also completed surveys on key components that went into comprising this document.

Information used to create this document is available upon request to Region 3-A Regional Planning Commission. Requests for information related to this document may be made at 260-347-4714.



## SOURCES

This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy uses demographic data obtained from a wide variety of sources, but primarily the US Census.

A substantial amount of data has been compiled and analyzed from various primary and secondary sources as part of this CEDS document:

- 2020, 2023 Census Data & American Community Survey 2019-2023\*
- United States Census Bureau 2023
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development 2024
- Purdue Center for Regional Development
- Indiana Business Research Center – Indiana University Kelly School of Business 2024

*\*Data from American Community Survey (ACS) is based on survey data and estimates and is less accurate than Decennial U.S. Census data.*



