

EAST CENTRAL INDIANA

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

A collaborative plan to enhance regional prosperity and community quality of life in Grant, Blackford, Jay, and Delaware counties.



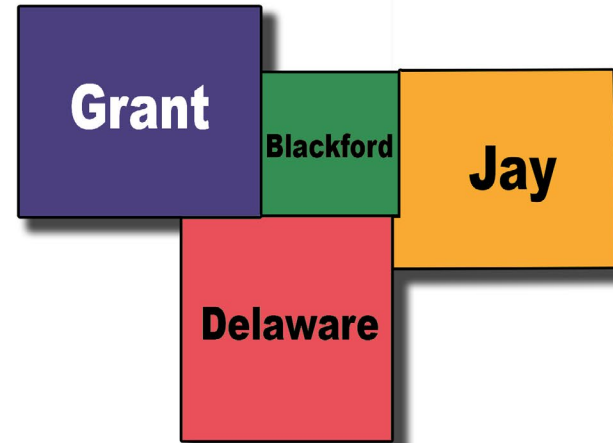
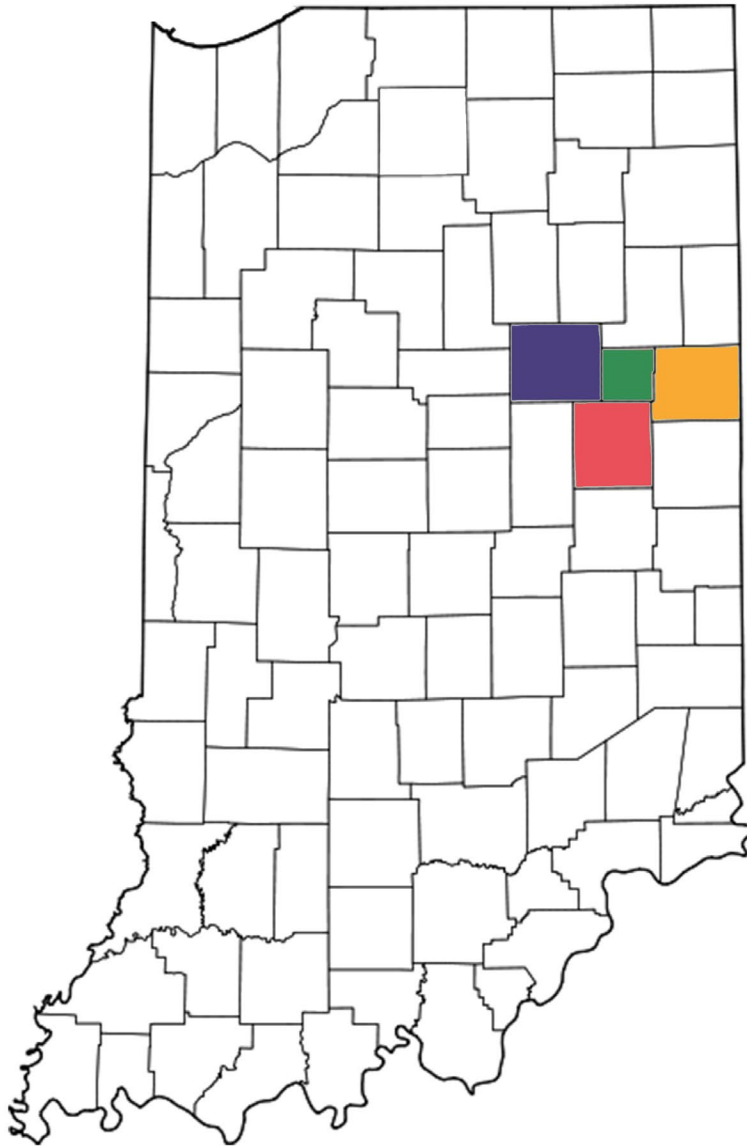


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Acknowledgments

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Jay County Visitor and Tourism Bureau

Grant County Convention and Visitors Bureau



ECIRPD Board of Directors

Blackford County	<i>Appointed By</i>
Vacant	County Commissioners
Vacant	County Commissioners
Vacant	County Commissioners
Vacant	Mayor of Hartford City
Vacant	Mayor of Montpelier
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About the Region

About the Region

The East Central Indiana Regional Planning District (ECIRPD) region is a state-designated, multi-county planning district in East Central Indiana (ECI). It is located in northeast central Indiana served by I-69 with Indianapolis to its southwest and Fort Wayne to the north. Its primary mission is to serve the economic development, planning, and grant development needs of local governments within its four-county service area: Blackford, Delaware, Grant, and Jay counties. These counties played a major role in the “Indiana Gas Boom” of the late 19th century. The discovery of natural gas attracted numerous industries and led to rapid population growth and development. This period also established a strong manufacturing base in the county. Today significant innovation funding is allotted into Indiana for the Heartland BioWorks - Tech Hub. It seeks to transform Central Indiana into a global leader in biotechnology and biomanufacturing, focusing on increasing the region’s capacity to develop and deploy life-saving medicines. This leverages Indiana’s existing research institutions, venture ecosystem, logistics, and current pharmaceutical/biotechnology manufacturing presence. This CEDS guides ECI Regional Planning District to both honor its past and move into the future investments and growth which are coming to East Central Indiana.

The ECIRPD region is characterized by a mix of more urbanized areas (like Delaware County with Muncie) and predominantly rural communities (Blackford, Grant, and Jay counties) with small towns. While facing challenges such as population decline in some areas, the ECIRPD actively works to promote economic development, improve infrastructure, and enhance the overall quality of life for its residents across these four Central Indiana counties.

ECIRPD Region Characteristics

Purpose

The ECIRPD aims to foster regional economic growth, improve quality of life, and facilitate community enhancements through various initiatives.

ECIRPD Services

Include:

- Planning and strategic thinking
- Grant research, writing, and administration
- Support for local economic development and community development efforts
- Projects related to transportation, environment (including brownfields), housing, greenways/trails/recreation, and infrastructure (sewer/water).
- Consulting, facilitation, and project development.
- Technical assistance and research.

Office Location

Muncie, Indiana at the Innovation Connector

Region Overview

East Central Indiana is known as a region with rich historical and cultural assets. ECIRPD is comprised of four counties including Blackford, Delaware, Grant, and Jay. Muncie in Delaware County is the largest city in the region.

The region is home to several universities and colleges, including Ball State University located in Muncie, Taylor University located in Upland, Wesleyan University located in

Marion, and Ivy Tech Community College campus located in Muncie.

These educational institutions provide a wide range of quality higher education as well as cultural and recreational programs to the communities in the region. The strong partnership between these higher institutions and the counties and communities contribute to local economic development.

Blackford County

Hartford City is the county seat and the county is also home to the city of Montpelier and the town of Shamrock Lakes. Hartford City was incorporated in 1867 and experienced significant growth during the gas boom. It boasts of sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including the Blackford County Courthouse and the Hartford City Courthouse Square Historic District.

Montpelier is another city in Blackford County, platted in 1837. It also saw considerable growth during the gas boom, and its Carnegie Library is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Godfroy Reserve (Montpelier, Blackford County), Indiana Historical Marker: Reserved by U.S. to Chief Francois Godfroy of the Miami Nation of Indians by treaty at St. Mary's, Ohio, 6 October 1818 and reserve lands sold 1827, 1836.

Delaware County

Muncie is the county seat and the county is also home to towns like Yorktown, Albany, Daleville, and Eaton. It's a county with a rich history, particularly shaped by the natural gas boom of the late 19th century and the presence of Ball State University.

Minnetrista Museum & Gardens (Muncie, Delaware County): Founded in 1988 on the legacy of the Ball family and company, a home to modern museum facilities and over 20 acres of cultivated greenspace including multiple horticultural and ornamental gardens. The public enjoys art exhibits, educational programs, community events, and natural trails along the White River in Muncie.

David Owsley Museum of Art, Ball State University (Muncie, Delaware County): Located on the Ball State University campus. The museum was established in 1936 and is the home to over 11,000 pieces of artwork including paintings, photographs, prints, and sculptures.

Grant County

Marion is the county seat and the county is also home to cities like Gas City and Jonesboro and towns like Upland and Fairmont. The county is located in north-central Indiana. It's a county with a significant industrial past, particularly influenced by the natural gas boom. The town of Fairmont is the hometown of Garfield creator, Jim Davis.

Garfield Trail: This trailhead is in Marion, which is in Grant County. Fourteen unique statues of the beloved American comic strip character Garfield are located throughout Grant County locations including Fairmont, Upland, Gas City, Jonesboro, Van Buren, Sweetser, and Swayzee.

James Dean Trail: Legendary movie star James Dean is a Fairmont, Indiana native. Dean made only three movies during this short life. The James Dean Landmarks Trail can be found in James Dean's hometown Fairmont. In addition to the trail, the county hosts the James Dean Gallery, the Fairmont Historical Museum, and the annual James Dean Festival.

Jay County

Portland is the county seat. Jay County is also home to towns like Penville, Redkey, and Dunkirk. The county is in East Central Indiana and is known for its unique blend of history, agriculture, and community events. The county played a role in the Underground Railroad, with the restored pioneer home of Jimmy and Rachel Silliven, key figures in the network, located outside of Balbec.

Loblolly Marsh Wetland Nature Preserve: This nature preserve is located 3 miles west of Bryant in Jay County on Hwy 18. It is Indiana's 250th dedicated nature preserve which covers 75 acres of marsh, forest, and prairie.

Dunkirk Glass Museum: Dunkirk was once called the Glass Capital of Indiana, known as a glass manufacturing hub with the discovery of natural gas in the 1880s. In its prime time, over 20 glass factories operated within Dunkirk. Dunkirk Glass Museum provides glass manufacturing history in Dunkirk as well as glass art and commercial products.



Source: Jay County Visitor and Tourism Bureau

County Profiles

	Blackford County	Delaware County	Grant County	Jay County	State (IN)
Population (2024)	11,816	112,951	66,458	20,164	6,924,275
Area (sq. miles)	165.08	392.10	414.09	383.91	
Median Household Income (2023)	\$51,799	\$55,704	\$53,872	\$61,030	\$69,458
County Seat	Hartford City	Muncie	Marion	Portland	
Established	1838	1827	1831	1835	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, STATS INDIANA DATA

Population by Age (2023)

	Blackford County	Delaware County	Grant County	Jay County	State (IN)
Preschool (0 to 4)	630	5,332	3,731	1,445	405,723
School Age (5 to 17)	2,023	15,033	10,527	3,701	1,181,531
College Age (18 to 24)	827	21,290	8,452	1,582	661,123
Young Adult (25 to 44)	2,684	25,373	14,447	4,533	1,771,624
Older Adult (45 to 64)	3,091	25,210	16,100	4,982	1,663,050
Older (65 plus)	2,638	20,083	12,943	3,789	1,179,148

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, STATS INDIANA DATA

Population Projection

	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050	% Change 2020 - 2050
Indiana	6,788,799	6,907,017	7,013,509	7,077,380	7,121,345	7,144,332	7,158,731	5.40%
Blackford County	12,111	11,771	11,403	10,993	10,560	10,086	9,618	20%
Delaware County	111,763	112,283	111,575	110,703	108,831	107,227	106,148	5.02%
Grant County	66,475	66,177	64,711	63,064	61,570	60,229	59,052	11.16%
Jay County	20,476	19,720	18,999	18,140	17,300	16,372	15,506	24.27%

Notes: Based on the 30-year population projection, the state of Indiana is expecting 5.4% growth. In contrast, all four counties in the region showed significant population decrease over the same period: an estimated 20% decrease for Blackford County, 5.02% decrease for Delaware County, 11.16% decrease for Grant County, and 24.27% decrease for Jay County.

Source: Stats Indiana, Indiana Business Research Center, July 2024

Educational Attainment (2023)

	Blackford County		Delaware County		Grant County		Jay County		State (IN)	
No High School	881	10.5%	6,356	9.1%	4,907	11.2%	1,763	13.1%	441,019	9.5%
High School	4,159	49.5%	23,978	34.2%	16,284	37.3%	6,308	47%	1,484,039	32.2%
Some College, No Degree	1,568	18.7%	14,699	20.9%	9,220	21.1%	2,549	19%	871,644	18.9%
Associate Degree	663	7.9%	7,136	10.2%	4,360	10%	1,102	8.2%	423,644	9.2%
Bachelor Degree or Higher	1,134	13.5%	18,036	25.7%	8,901	20.4%	1,703	12.7%	1,394,398	30.2%

Source: Indiana County Data Snapshots (PCRD) & StatsAmerica

Age Dependency Profiles (% , 2023)

Blackford County	Delaware County	Grant County	Jay County	State (IN)	U.S.
67	49	59	67	56	55

Notes: Age dependency is the ratio of dependent individuals (age 0-14 and 65+) to the working-age population (age 15-64). A higher age dependency ratio indicates a greater burden on the working population to support the dependent population. All counties except Delaware County showed a higher age dependency ratio than the state average.

Source: Rural Indiana Stats, PCRD <https://pcrd.purdue.edu/ruralindianastats/socio-economic/age-dependency-profiles.php>

Economic Distress Criteria

24-month Average Unemployment Rate (BLS) period ending April 2025

2023 Per Capita Personal Income (BEA PCPI)

2023 Per Capita Money Income (ACS 5-year PCMI)

2023 Per Capita Money Income (ACS 5-year PCMI) "Geography"	24 Month Unemployment	Threshold Calculation	BEA PCPI	Threshold Calculation	ACS 5-Year PCMI	Threshold Calculation	Economic Distress Designation
Region	4.26	0.33	\$45,825	69.9	\$29,363	67.8	
U.S.	3.93	0	\$69,810	100	\$43,289	100	
Blackford County	4.37	0.44	\$46,989	67.3	\$28,774	66.5	Distressed by Income
Delaware County	4.35	0.42	\$47,629	68.2	\$30,037	69.4	Distressed by Income
Grant County	4.34	0.41	\$49,748	71.3	\$29,023	67	Distressed by Income
Jay County	3.4	-0.53	\$53,566	76.7	\$27,105	62.6	Distressed by Income

Notes: Based on Economic Distress Criteria metrics analysis, all four counties in the region were identified as distressed by income.

Source: StatsAmerica, using U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (unemployment), U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (PCPI) and U.S. Census Bureau (ACS 5-year PCM) data

Labor Force Participation Rate & Unemployment Rate (2023)

	Blackford County	Delaware County	Grant County	Jay County	State (IN)	U.S.
Labor Force Participation Rate	54%	60%	59.3%	58.9%	62.6%	62.5%
Unemployment Rate	4.0%	3.8%	3.5%	3.1%	3.3%	3.6%

Notes: Labor Force participation rate measures the sum of people who are either employed or are actively looking for work divided by the working age population. It represents the relative amount of labor resources available to produce goods and services.

Source: Indiana County Data Snapshots, PCRD

Cost of Living and Affordability (2023)

	Blackford County	Delaware County	Grant County	Jay County
Cost of Living (COL) Index	94.5	90.8	93	94.3
Housing Costs (% of Income)	25.0%	22.0%	22.0%	20.0%
Transportation Costs (% of Income)	30.0%	36.0%	37.0%	31.0%

Cost of Living (COL) index is the estimated amount that represents the cost of the necessities required for an individual to live. COL index typically includes estimates for housing, food, energy, medical expenses, transportation, and other expenses. If the index in a particular area is greater than 100, it is more expensive to live there.

Housing Cost indicator includes mortgage and rental payments, insurance, utilities, and other miscellaneous fees. The indicator measures housing affordability. If the indicator is below 15%, the area is highly affordable. Whereas, if the indicator is above 30%, the area is unaffordable.

Transportation Cost indicator includes household spending on transportation-related goods and services, and the share should not exceed 15% of household expenses.

Notes: Cost of Living and Affordability index shows that COL index is moderate in all four counties of ECIRPD; however, Transportation Costs in all four counties are taking up higher percentages of income. The combined percentage of income for both housing costs and transportation costs is approximately 50% of the income, which means a significant burden.

Source: Indiana County Data Snapshots, PCRD

Regional Economic Review

Why the Focus on Industry Clusters?

Strong concentrations of jobs and establishments in related industries in a specific area are referred to as industry clusters. These clusters encompass companies, suppliers, service providers, as well as educational, research, and specialized training institutions that collaborate and support one another. When industry clusters thrive in a particular region, they contribute significantly to the local economy by generating jobs that sustain families and foster innovation. Moreover, they enhance the region's competitiveness for employment opportunities and attract private investments. A robust industry cluster is characterized by a high level of employment specialization within the region. This specialization is particularly crucial for businesses considering establishing or expanding their operations in that area. There are two primary types of clusters that shape a regional economy: Traded Clusters (industry) and Local Clusters. Both contribute to the regional economy in different ways. Local Clusters consist of areas that contribute to regional economic wellbeing, and primarily serve resident populations, which include:

- Healthcare: General hospitals, local clinics, and general medical professionals
- Food Services: Restaurants, cafes, and grocery stores
- Residential Construction: Home builders and contractors
- Personal Services: Hair salons, gyms, and other services



Source: Samantha Strahan, Ball State University



Source: Grant County Convention and Visitors Bureau

A new way of thinking about clusters recently came into being where there is a three pronged framework consisting of local, traded, and regional. The introduction of regional clusters is a new distinction and should be considered because they potentially provide more opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship than traded industries and higher quality opportunities than local industries.

This CEDS focuses on traded and regional clusters because they contribute to economic growth and competitiveness. Traded clusters are responsible for providing products and services that cater to markets beyond the region. They are instrumental in attracting financial investments from the outside, which is essential for economic growth. The revenue generated by traded cluster companies constitutes new wealth being introduced to the area, as opposed to merely circulating existing wealth within the local market. Economic Performance Indicators. Unless their location is influenced by access to specific natural resources, these firms have the flexibility to choose where they set up operations. Traded clusters are regions where specific industries are heavily concentrated, usually because the local market provides distinct competitive advantages. These advantages can include a readily available pool of highly skilled talent, robust infrastructure tailored to the needs of the industry, and a favorable business

environment that encourages success. In contrast, local clusters consist of industries that mainly serve the surrounding market and are less influenced by external competitive factors. Most jobs in a region come from these local clusters, which operate without significant competition from outside their geographic area. Examples of local clusters include healthcare services such as dental practices and optometrists. Although most job growth is attributed to local clusters, it's essential to consider the role of traded clusters as well. While local clusters contribute significantly to employment, traded clusters have a tendency to foster higher levels of innovation and provide better wage opportunities. Furthermore, local clusters often support the function of traded clusters, demonstrating that both types are vital for the economic health and vibrancy of a region. Why is innovation driven by clusters crucial for the economy? Innovation serves as a key driver of growth. For businesses, developing new products, services, and production techniques can lead to increased growth, which in turn creates more jobs. This growth often prompts further investment in research and development, fueling even more innovation and leading to a continuous cycle of new offerings and production advancements. Ideally, this process perpetuates itself, consistently advancing the economy.

Why should regions adopt an industry cluster strategy for economic development?

Collaborative efforts within industry clusters can significantly enhance economic growth. When stakeholders in a region's clusters work together, they can bolster the region's competitiveness and improve economic returns for specific industries. Collaboration within an ecosystem can lead to coordinated initiatives that drive policy development, secure funding for infrastructure, and promote specialized training for the workforce. Such efforts help regions maintain or develop their competitive advantages, making them more appealing for job creation and investment opportunities.

Economic Performance Indicators for ECIRPD

The jobs in ECIRPD remained relatively same between 2018 and 2023 with a loss of less than 1% or 476 jobs (-0.43%). The average total earnings per job in 2023 was \$52,643. However, the cost of living (COL) in ECIRPD is 93.2 making it relatively less costly than Indiana with COL 95.6 and Indianapolis with COL of 98.9. Hence, the effective average earnings for ECIRPD became \$56,484 in 2023 after adjusting for the COL. In 2023, ECIRPD had more than 4,200 business establishments in the regional economy.



Source: Ball State University

The ECIRPD regional economy generated around \$9.7 billion in gross regional product (GRP) and the economic productivity or GRP per job was \$88,809 in 2023. Similarly, exports per job for the region were \$115,715 in 2023. Total purchases made in 2023 were \$8.5 billion, where 69% were imported from outside of the state or region. This provides an opportunity for import substitution strategies and even 5% success in stopping leakage could result in saving \$400 million from leaving the region.

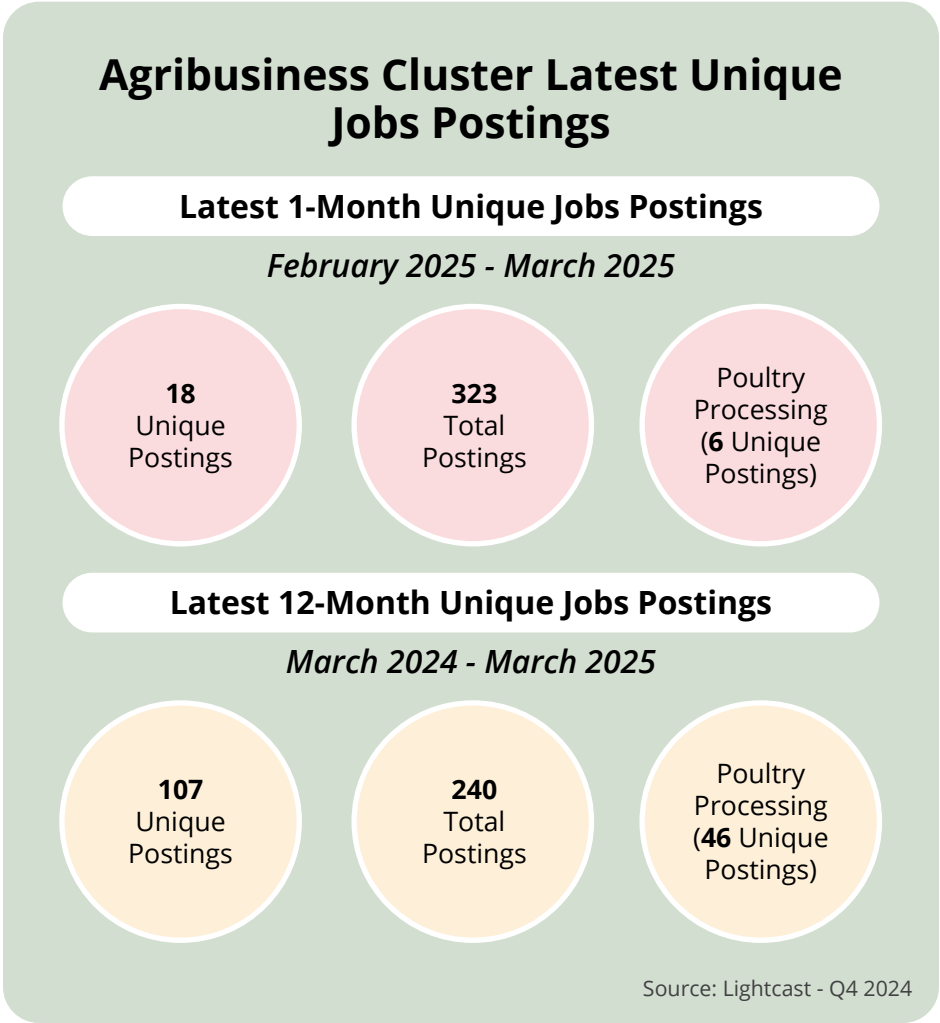
The industry cluster competitiveness analysis for ECIRPD for 2018-2023 revealed several industry clusters that were competitive and increasing their specializations. These included biomedical/biotechnical and healthcare, mining, chemicals, agribusiness and food processing, forest and wood products, and glass and ceramics clusters. All the six clusters were located in the STAR quadrant. There were three industry clusters located in the MATURE quadrant, which meant the clusters were competitive, but decreased their specializations during the study period. The clusters in the NATURE quadrant included education and knowledge, transportation and logistics, and advanced materials clusters. These clusters needed policy interventions and programming support to boost their specializations.

The manufacturing subclusters in the STAR quadrant included primary metal and electrical equipment and appliance clusters. The MATURE quadrant included transportation equipment, fabricated metal products, and machinery manufacturing clusters. The ECIRPD region has a robust manufacturing base as the majority of manufacturing subclusters are located in the competitive quadrants.

The Purdue Center for Regional Development (PCRD) conducted an industry cluster drill-down analysis for eight industry clusters. The cluster drill-down report contains detailed data about individual clusters, which include economic indicators such as GRP generated by the industry cluster and overall economic leakages happening at the cluster level. The drill-down reports focus on identifying driver industries within the cluster identified by using the shift-share analysis, industry-level supply chain leakages, occupational types engaged in the industry cluster, and age-group, gender, race and ethnicity breakup of the cluster workforce. A separate section in the drill-down report contains analysis of the post-COVID jobs postings data focusing on the skills and labor demand of industries and businesses that are present in the cluster.

The ECIRPD leadership has selected agribusiness, biomedical sciences, and fabricated metal clusters for inclusion in their Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document. The agribusiness, food processing and technology cluster is a competitive industry cluster for the ECIRPD region generating more than \$615 million of GRP in 2023. The cluster had a total inputs requirement of more than \$1 billion in 2023 with 74% of the demand met by suppliers located outside of the region. The industry sectors within the cluster with positive competitive shift-value included animal production, tortilla and flour manufacturing, bakeries, breweries, etc. This cluster can benefit from supply chain strategies where tens of millions of dollars' worth of goods are being imported into the region. Refer to the drill-down report in the Appendix. The agribusiness, food processing and technology cluster needs a talent pipeline and workforce development strategy because the mature workforce (age 55 years and older) makes up 40% of the workforce and the young workers (less than 25 years old) make up only 10% of the workforce. The jobs postings intensity in this cluster is 3:1 or for each vacancy the

employers are posting at least three times trying to fill the job position. It also indicates that employers are feeling scarcity of the labor force for these industries. The reasons could include lower wages in this cluster and the new generation not considering this as a trendy line of work. Poultry processing was the most active industry postings for jobs during two time periods from February to March 2025 in addition to March 2024 to March 2025. In this cluster, flour milling has the largest jobs multiplier value of 2.32 followed by farm supplies merchant wholesalers at 1.96.



Biomedical/biotechnical (life sciences) and healthcare cluster employed more than 10,000 workers in 2023 mainly in various kinds of medical and specialized care facilities in the region. This cluster generates GRP or economic value of more than \$800 million in a year and needs inputs of more than \$500 million in a year. Sixty percent of those inputs are supplied from outside of the region. The general medical and surgical hospitals and nursing care facilities had stronger regional performances with higher competitive shift values. Similarly, continuing care retirement and assisted living facilities also performed very well during the 2018 to 2023 period. Healthcare professionals such as registered nurses, pharmacy professionals and medical occupations make up the top tier workforce in this cluster. The workforce age distribution is much more balanced with mature workers (55 years and older) making up a quarter of the workforce and young workers (less than 25 years of age) making up 14% of the workforce. The top agencies posting jobs from January 2020 to March 2025 include different kinds of nursing, medical and surgical facilities. This cluster had a higher median advertised wage of \$22.8 per hour. The jobs postings have also been increasing consistently since January 2020. In the last one year between March 2024 and March 2025, nursing care facilities had the largest number of unique jobs postings of 442. This means 442 jobs positions were available in the region just in nursing care facilities. Post COVID, pharmaceutical preparation manufacturing, biological product manufacturing, etc. have been posting for job positions. The region should consider developing strategies to align with the Heartland BioWorks Technology Hub ongoing in Indianapolis. The synergy might help establish pharmaceutical related industries in the region.

Fabricated metal product manufacturing is a competitive cluster in the ECIRPD region; however, the economic metrics such as jobs, GRP and total purchases are modest. Fabricated structural metal manufacturing, machine shops, metal can,

iron and steel forging are high performing sectors with positive competitive shift values. The top occupations employed in this cluster have higher propensity for automation. Similarly, a gap exists between mature and young age workers indicating the need for a talent pipeline strategy. In recent months, metal can and precision turned product manufacturing have been actively hiring new talent. The analysis of primary metals cluster revealed that nonferrous metal die-casting facilities performed well during the 2018 to 2023 period with a higher competitive shift value of +141. This sector is small with 160 jobs, but was active posting for jobs in the recent month, and had a multiplier value of 1.65. Similarly, secondary smelting refining and alloying of nonferrous metal had a high multiplier value of 1.92. Refer to the Appendix for multiplier values of different industry sectors that are part of the industry clusters identified by decisionmakers in the region.



Qualitative Input and Public Engagement



Source: Jay County Visitor and Tourism Bureau

Purpose

Public Engagement is a crucial part of the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) drafting process. The purpose of public engagement is to involve the comprehensive stakeholders in the region, evaluate the current regional economic status, and further share insights and feedback on the future economic development plan for the region.

CEDS requires SWOT analysis, which is a commonly used method. The participants from the various backgrounds and current affiliations engage in collaboratively identifying the region's competitive strengths and weaknesses in the various categories of the regional economy and further contemplating opportunities and potential threats ahead based on the regional competitive advantages and external circumstances.

In principle, strengths and weaknesses are internal in nature representing competitive advantages and disadvantages, whereas opportunities and threats are external in nature representing potential positive chances or improvements as well as potential negative impacts or decline respectively.



Source: Grant County Convention and Visitors Bureau

SWOT Analysis

During Spring 2024, East Central Indiana Regional Planning District (ECIRPD) convened public information sessions and conducted Qualtrics survey applying SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis methods.

Participant County Representation

	Percentage	Number of Survey Participants
Blackford County	11%	20
Delaware County	39%	71
Grant County	31%	57
Jay County	19%	34
Total	100%	182

Participant Occupation Distribution

Occupation	Percentage	Number
Others	39%	70
Professional (accounting, sales, etc.)	12%	22
Elected Official	9%	16
Educational (post-secondary)	7%	12
Retail Business	6%	11
Healthcare	6%	11
Economic Development	6%	11
Education (K-12)	3%	6
Media	2%	4
Agriculture	2%	4
Student (high school)	2%	3
Student (technical, college, etc.)	2%	3
Transportation, Shipping, Logistics	1%	1
Manufacturing	1%	2
Law Enforcement	1%	2
Homemaker	1%	2



Source: Grant County Convention and Visitors Bureau

The following vulnerable population groups were identified as the top priorities for the CEDS draft process.

- Families: 56% (n=101)
- Low-income children: 49% (n=89)
- Working poor: 49% (n=88)
- People with chronic health conditions including mental health and substance abuse: 44% (n=79)
- Elderly and retiree population: 36% (n=65)
- Homeless: 22% (n=40)
- Minority & people of color: 16% (n=29)
- Uninsured (those without health insurance): 12% (n=21)
- Others: 9% (n=17)
- Migrant workers: 4% (n=7)
- No specific population: 4% (n=7)

Emergency Response Plan (ERP) - Which local organizations should be involved?

Note: ERP will outline a partnership between governmental institutions, charities, religious organizations, and local businesses.

- Local non-profit organizations: 73% (n=127)
- Local government including schools: 71% (n=122)
- Local religious organizations: 60% (n=104)
- Any charitable organizations: 54% (n=94)
- Other state in box below: 8% (n=13)



How would you like to see your community become more resilient?

- Develop an emergency action plan with social service providers to quickly respond to situations such as a tornado: 68% (n=96)
- Develop skilled construction workforce regionwide: 47% (n=67)
- Start a small business loan and emergency grant fund: 44% (n=63)
- Continue to prioritize broadband and digital inclusion efforts to increase connectivity: 39% (n=56)
- Create a committee representing the region to forward resiliency as a priority: 36% (n=51)
- Create a small business and resiliency roundtable: 32% (n=45)
- Start a regional social impact fund for people hard hit during a shock: 34% (n=48)

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) has required that regions should have a plan to be more resilient by incorporating policies and strategies pertaining to economic and disaster resilience. Choose up to 3 focus areas for the region's **Resilient Policies and Strategies**.

- Improve workforce education attainment and skills in the region: 73% (n=104)
- Increase the capacity of local organizations to help immediately in a crisis situation: 62% (n=88)
- Strengthen the financial capacity in the region to ensure local lending, advice and/or assistance can be sought during an economic downturn for small businesses, renters, and mortgage holders: 61% (n=87)
- Support women and families better in the regional workforce such as by increasing the number of preschools, capacity of daycares, and the provision of telehealth services: 57% (n=81)
- Improve on and prioritize a range of Infrastructure and Built Environment projects (i.e. Trails and walkability, Broadband, Road connectivity): 48% (n=69)



Source: Samantha Blankenship, Ball State University

Which opportunities ECIRPD should prioritize in CEDS draft (top ranked listed first)

- Increased availability of housing (all types)
- Childcare expansion
- Blight removal (residential, commercial, industrial)
- Increased access to healthcare and hospitals
- Address Substance Abuse issues (alcohol & other drugs) & Mental health treatment
- Workforce development
- Broadband expansion
- Land and building re-use
- Increased and/or improved communication (govn't, media, community)
- Green Infrastructure (solar, wind, etc.) - take advantage of

Emerging Threats in the region (top ranked listed first)

- Substance abuse (alcohol and other drugs)
- Lack of childcare
- Crime
- Declining population
- Broadband coverage gap
- Resistance to change
- Lack of communication resources
- Polarization
- Immigration
- Solar/Wind farms

SWOT Summary

Strengths

Manufacturing industry	Agriculture industry	
	Low cost of living	Workforce training (John Jay Center)
	Quality of life (parks, festivals, safety, fire department, faith communities, arts, urban & commercial centers)	Small business support and business investments
	Civic engagement and strong community participation	Nonprofit organizations and community foundations
	Proximity to I-69 (roads & infrastructure)	Public helath (drug prevention coalition)
		Higher education (Ball State University)

Weaknesses



Declining public education system		Healthcare shortage
Aging population	Blighted homes and buildings	Lack of broadband in rural areas
Poor childcare options	Public safety and health crisis	
Infrastructure and geographical environmental risk concerns	Availability and access to retail and grocery shopping	
Lack of resources and funding (public health, social services)	Lack of housing availability and middle income housing	Inefficient business/industry attraction strategy from the state
Low educational attainment	High poverty rate	
Lack of leadership and inter-county communication	Disconnect between urban and rural areas in each county and region	
Lack of skilled and technical knowledge ready workforce	Low pay scale jobs	

Global National State Local/Regional

Broadband access	Agricultural production		Airport expansion
	Rebranding local skills and knowledge	Youth program opportunities	
	Attract more employers to the region	Revitalization of empty buildings and sites	
Manufacturing jobs	Workforce development and training	Childcare centers	Rural farming community
	Fostering local businesses and recreational opportunities	Collaboration and communication among regions and stakeholders	
	Public transit and connectivity	Diversify housing supply	
Local participation	Healthcare and drug rehabilitation assistance	Low cost of living	Entrepreneurial opportunities in business and cultural activities
	Low unemployment	Private investment	
	Small business expansion	Stimulate existing artist community and industry parks	
		Retaining young workforce	Location between Indianapolis & Fort Wayne
		Healthcare quality and availability improvement	

Green energy and fuel

Local/Regional State National Global

Lack of good jobs		Lack of regional collaboration	Encroachment on farms	Illegal immigration	Green energy
Lack of investigative reporting				Slow economic growth	
Talent retention crisis		Lack of childcare		Public safety threats	
		Wealth inheritance	Food insecurity in schools	Mental health crisis	
Shortage in healthcare facilities		Lack of broadband	Political polarization		
Lack of government accountability and trust		Decling public funding and tax revenues			

Threats



Opportunities

Goals

Summary of Goals

As a dynamic organization, ECIRPD seeks solutions to a litany of regional economic development issues and challenges. To succeed, it is essential that they form partnerships with localities, state agencies, and other statewide Economic Development District associations and many other organizations to develop creative solutions and address funding issues. By strategically aligning their activities in different areas of economic development, ECIRPD and their state partners stand to gain from each other's strengths. This will be critical to the ability of ECIRPD to meet their goals.

A focus on developing Strategic, Regional Partnerships:

Collaborations between federal, state, local, and private sector entities, as well as non-profit organizations.



Source: Samantha Blankenship, Ball State University

Goal One

Industry Cluster Support

Goal Two

Strengthen and Develop Regional Workforce

Goal Three

Building Disaster Resiliency

Goal Four

Improve Housing and Childcare Options

Goal One: Industry Cluster Support



Strategy

- Increase awareness of the importance of the chosen industry clusters for regional competitiveness both in and out of the region.
- Develop partnerships with local nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and industry associations.
- Conduct outreach to businesses who are represented by the chosen industry clusters to find out what resources would most benefit them in the region.
- Encourage joint projects and initiatives among cluster members and have them develop funding seeking strategies.
- Seek funding opportunities for research and cluster strategies (such as an Agribusiness Strategy) to broaden the training and research capabilities for Agribusiness, Biomedical Sciences, and Fabricated Metal Manufacturing.
- Determine what expertise, technology, and market information each cluster group would most benefit from and make connections to those who can provide for free or at a reduced cost.
- Chart a path to developing an Agribusiness Strategy committee and Ag Strategy Development influenced by the Rural Economic Development Model (REDM). The REDM process focuses on understanding the region's core clusters, outputs, supply chain, current policies, infrastructure, and sites that serve the unique needs of the targeted industries.

Strategy

- Collaborate with local and regional workforce partners such as Ivy Tech, Ball State University, and workforce commissions.
- Prioritize strategies, in conjunction with partner organizations, which support the accumulation of human capital in the region, such as cooperation among firms, and interactions with education and research institutions.
- Seek partners who can implement the expansion and upskilling of human capital in the region such as cluster organizations, business associations, chambers of commerce, and other industry groups.
- Work with workforce partners to connect priority populations (such as young professionals) with supportive services that enable better access to education and employment opportunities.
- Coordinate training programs for identified industrial clusters with other agencies located within ECIRPD.
- Assist in the articulation of career pathways in key traded clusters outlined by the CEDS.
- Continue program to place interns within each county and within ECI to increase organizational capacity on an annual basis

Goal Two: Strengthen and Develop Regional Workforce



Goal Three: Building Disaster Resiliency



Strategy

- Conduct a region-wide Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment with other regional collaborative groups. This involves identifying potential threats (natural disasters, economic downturns, etc.) and assessing the likelihood and potential impact of each.
- Response Protocols should be in place which activates the plan, coordinating resources, and managing the response to a specific event.
- Develop a recovery strategy which focuses on restoring essential services, providing support to affected communities, and rebuilding infrastructure.
- Communication and coordination need to be outlined not just between police and fire, but also among nonprofits and other human-service organizations in the region. A crucial element is establishing clear communication channels and coordination mechanisms among different agencies and jurisdictions.
- Mutual Aid Agreements which establish aid protocols between regional nonprofits, business organizations, and government institutions should be explored which formalize the process for requesting and providing assistance from neighboring jurisdictions.

Strategy

ECIRPD is actively seeking to improve the availability of quality housing and childcare due to their critical roles in fostering economic vitality, retaining and attracting a workforce, and improving overall community well-being. ECI aims to stabilize its workforce, improve the labor force participation rate, attract new talent to support local industries, and ultimately create a more resilient and prosperous community for all.

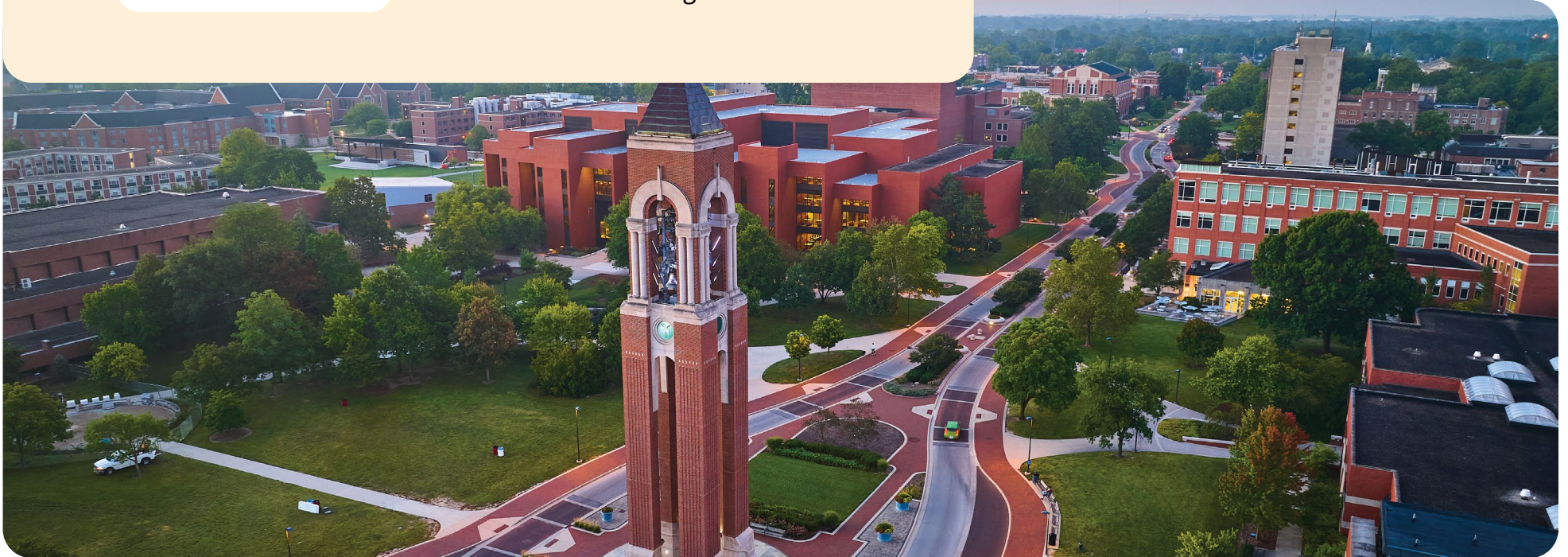
Housing

See Page 32

Childcare

See Page 33

Goal Four: Improve Housing and Childcare Options



Housing

Convene a regional collaboration to develop a Regional Housing Strategy

- Convene regional stakeholders to identify and engage key individuals and organizations involved in housing, including local governments, developers, non-profits, community organizations, and residents.
- Establish governance for collaboration among other organizations to determine how the partnership will operate, including communication channels, decision-making processes, and accountability measures.
- Data collection and analysis of data on existing housing conditions, demographics, economic trends, and regional housing needs. This includes looking at existing housing stock, affordability challenges, and areas with unmet housing needs.
- Identify regional priorities based on data analysis, identify the most pressing housing challenges and opportunities facing the region. This may involve prioritizing areas like affordable housing development, preventing and ending homelessness, or improving housing quality.
- Form a working group to focus on specific priority areas. This group can delve deeper into the issues, develop strategies, and propose action plans.
- Develop a shared vision and goals based on the regional priorities, develop a clear vision for the future of housing in the region, and establish specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.
- Develop a Regional Housing Plan which outlines the strategies, action steps, and timelines for achieving the identified goals. This plan should be collaborative and inclusive, involving input from all stakeholders.



Source: Ball State University



Source: Ball State University

Childcare

- Collaborate with other entities working within the housing and childcare/childhood spheres in the region.
- Support regional efforts to conduct an Early Childhood Regional Needs Assessment with both quantitative and qualitative data highlighting caregivers, early childcare professionals, and other community stakeholders collected through meetings, focus groups, interviews, community meetings, and surveys. Throughout the process, regional barriers were documented, and recommendations were developed based on identified needs of families throughout the region.
 - > This Regional Needs Assessment will look at gaps in care, delve into the childcare workforce pipeline, and any barriers which exist.
 - » Some key areas to look at are:
 1. The recruitment and retention of childcare professionals.
 2. The number of preschool classrooms and childcare centers.
 3. How families and caregivers connect with support systems and programs, including resources such as behavior counseling.
 4. Create awareness of preschool options in all communities.
 5. The wages and benefits of the workforce.
 6. The number of of licensed care centers.

Evaluation Framework

Evaluation of Goal One

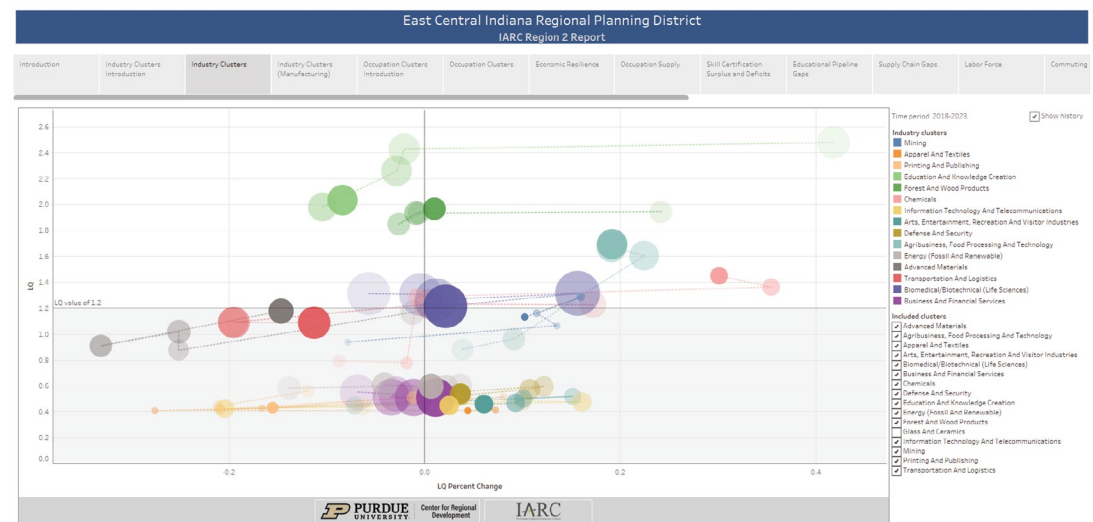
Industry Cluster Support

- » Number of identified potential industrial clusters collaborative partners
- » Number of participating industrial cluster members in each collaborative group
- » Number of regional organizations contacted about CEDS industrial cluster efforts
- » Number of new organizations participating in the industrial cluster collaboratives because of CEDS related outreach
- » Number of industrial cluster attendees at specific meetings related to the respective cluster collaborations
- » Number of meetings held with any industrial cluster partners
- » Number of ECIRPD sponsored meetings pertaining to connecting any of the cluster partners with Indiana Bioworks Tech Hub or READI project participants in the region

Key Indicators

Monitor the regional performance on an annual basis of Fabricated Metal Manufacturing; Biomedical (with special attention paid to Chemicals); and Agribusiness on Purdue Center for Regional Development's IARC Data dashboard.

See it at:
<http://iarcdatadashboard.com>



Evaluation of Goal Two

Strengthen and Develop Regional Workforce

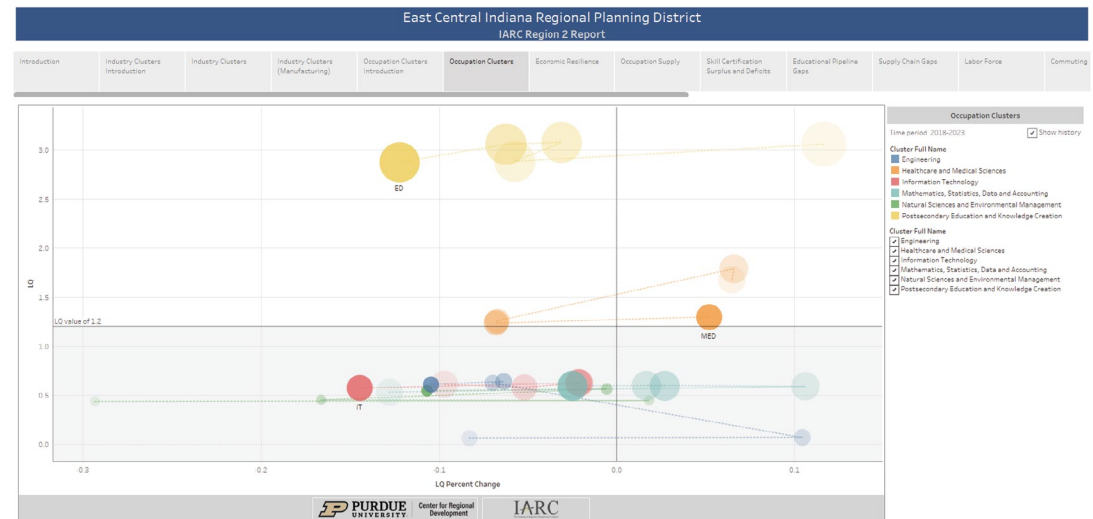
- » Number of identified potential workforce development partner collaborations at the regional level
- » Develop strategy to attract and recruit new talent for growing industry clusters identified in this CEDS which includes the development of a talent pipeline with collaborative partners
- » Number of new organizations who now participate the workforce development collaboration efforts because of outreach
- » Number of 18–29-year-olds who are in education, apprenticeships, or training in the region for critical shortage occupations and those within the identified industrial clusters

Key Indicators

Monitor the regional performance on an annual basis of the Labor Force Participation rate. Also monitor Occupation Cluster data for STEM jobs (found on PCRD's IARC Region 2 report updated annually). Website updates every December.

See it at:

<http://iarcdatadashboard.com>



Evaluation of Goal Three

Building Disaster Resiliency

- » Number of times ECIRPD provided technical assistance to local organizations related to Disaster Resiliency in the region
- » Number of organizations working with ECIRPD to collaborate on Disaster Planning efforts
- » Number of meetings held with local institutions and neighboring jurisdictions pertaining to mutual aid and assistance in the event of a disaster
- » Number of mutual aid agreements secured with local institutions and neighboring jurisdictions pertaining to mutual aid and assistance in the event of a disaster



Evaluation of Goal Four

Improve Housing and Childcare Options

- » Number of times ECIRPD provided technical assistance to local organizations related to housing in the region
- » Number of times ECIRPD provided technical assistance to local organizations related to childcare in the region
- » Number of times ECIRPD participated in discussions and collaborations with partner organizations related to housing
- » Number of times ECIRPD participated in discussions and collaborations with partner organizations related to childcare

Key Indicators

- » Number of new housing starts
- » Number of construction permits issued by County
- » Number of day care licenses issued by County



Source: Ball State University



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy by

