



Vision

East Central Indiana aspires to be a welcoming region in which new and existing residents are invited to be their authentic selves and create a life that matters. Backed by community resources, residents are empowered to forge their own path to success. There are three elements that serve as the backbone for East Central Indiana's vision: a mosaic of communities, innovative eds and meds institutions, and amenities that enable residents to thrive. These three elements encapsulate the region's strengths, while also providing a focus for the future.

A Mosaic of Communities

The region is made up of diverse communities ranging in size and character, from rural communities like Redkey to metros like Muncie. To leverage the unique perspectives, assets, and opportunities our region has to offer, East Central Indiana is committed to collaboration across sectors and scales. Our towns, cities, and counties understand that we are stronger together, and can learn from one another. When opportunities to work together arise, our region steps up.

Innovative Eds and Meds

The region is home to several higher education institutions and hospitals which provide transformative educational opportunities and critical health services to rural and underserved communities. To support the needs of these anchor institutions to fill high-wage positions, East Central Indiana is committed to talent development and talent attraction.

Amenities That Enable Residents to Thrive

The region leverages existing assets in outdoor recreation, arts and culture, and family-owned small businesses to enhance quality of life for residents. Residents are further supported by a commitment to increase educational attainment, expand access to childcare, and revitalize historic downtowns. By expanding access to valuable amenities, East Central Indiana enables residents to thrive.

By capitalizing on each of these distinct elements, East Central Indiana stands out as a desirable place to live and work, a place that both attracts and retains talent. When pursued, this vision should manifest in population growth and regional prosperity.

Stronger Together

Since the formation of the East Central Indiana Development Council in 1984, the region has combined the strengths and talents of eight counties, 60+ cities and towns, and over 375,000 residents, to implement change. Counties include Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, and Wayne, each of which offers unique attractions and opportunities. East Central Indiana's new regional development plan represents an effort to leverage county assets, build consensus on regional strategies, and promote vibrancy and resiliency. By preparing and implementing this regional development plan and subsequent READI application, East Central Indiana acknowledges that the region is stronger together.



Regional Assets

East Central Indiana is rich with assets that have the potential to propel the region forward.

Transportation	The region has convenient access to major cities in Indiana and Ohio via I-69, I-70, US-27, US-35, and US-36. There are approximately 3,155 commuters from Ohio to the region. If captured, this workforce would support population growth goals for the region and the state.
Education	East Central Indiana has one of the state's most concentrated clusters of higher education institutions producing graduates that stay in Indiana. Colleges and universities in the region include Ball State University, Taylor University, Earlham College, Indiana Wesleyan University, Indiana University East, Indiana University School of Medicine – Muncie, Purdue Polytechnic Institute – Richmond, Ivy Tech (Marion, Muncie, Richmond), and Bethany Theological Seminary.
Healthcare	The region is home to outstanding hospitals and medical programs, including IU Health, Reid Health, Marion Health, Henry Community Health, Ascension St. Vincent, Centerstone, Meridian Health Services, Open Door Health Services, Neighborhood Health Centers, and Veterans Affairs Clinics. The region is also developing a reputation as a center of excellence in medical education.
Agriculture	East Central Indiana sells \$1.13 billion in agricultural products each year. The region's strong agricultural foundation opens the door for emerging opportunities in value-added agriculture and agritourism.
Manufacturing	The region has a rich manufacturing legacy, and manufacturing employs 18.6% of residents across the region. Major employers include General Motors, Draper, 3M, Ardagh Group, MPT Magna Powertrain, Progress Rail (Caterpillar), Mursix, Astral Industries, Berry Global, Stant, INTAT, Workhorse, and FCC Indiana.
Outdoor Recreation	East Central Indiana is emerging as one of the state's top destinations for canoeing, fishing, wildlife viewing, and outdoor recreation. Amenities include Summit Lake State Park, the Cardinal Greenway, Prairie Creek Reservoir, the White River, and the Whitewater River.

Benchmark Community

Greater Iowa City, a 7-county region encompassing and surrounding Iowa City, IA was selected as the peer community for East Central Indiana. An underrated region, Greater Iowa City is a growing center for creativity and industry. The top industry is educational services, health care and social assistance, which employs 28.5% of the civilian labor force. Iowa City is home to the University of Iowa (UI), while neighboring counties feature several private universities and community colleges. Greater Iowa City's eds and meds focus, balanced by a diversity of other industries, serves as a positive example for East Central Indiana to aspire towards.

Regional Investment Strategy

To support the State of Indiana in its efforts to accelerate economic growth and help forge a path to regional prosperity, East Central Indiana has identified four overarching priorities. Each priority is accompanied by a goal and a complementary set of strategies. These strategies are closely tied to projects and initiatives designed to enhance quality of life, place, and opportunity, enabling the eight-county region to retain and attract talent.



Qualify Of Life

Stabilize the region's population and encourage growth through investments that directly benefit the health and well-being of residents, promote tourism, and support vibrant downtowns.

Regional Strategies:

- Market existing regional attractions and encourage the development of new arts and culture, recreation, retail, and culinary destinations.
- Revitalize historic downtowns through façade, structure, and streetscape improvements, as well as the introduction of new businesses, including nightlife.
- Advocate for the preservation of existing rural health services.
- Enhance pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to encourage healthy lifestyles and provide alternative transportation options.
- Enhance existing parks and trails and consider opportunities to develop new outdoor recreation amenities.
- Expand access to mental health resources in the region.
- Expand access to drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in the region.

IEDC Goal Alignment: Quality of Life

KPIs: Population Growth, Private Investment

Housing and Infrastructure

Stimulate the development of quality housing in the region to create thriving neighborhoods that appeal to both current and future residents.

Regional Strategies:

- Develop quality workforce housing across the region.
- Develop attractive rental options that appeal to young professionals.
- Invest in infrastructure improvements to spur housing development.
- Mitigate blight and encourage context-appropriate infill development.
- Encourage property maintenance and responsible homeownership in existing neighborhoods to instill community pride.

IEDC Goal Alignment: Quality of Place

KPIs: Housing Units Developed, Population Growth, Private Investment

Education and Opportunity

Enhance the upward mobility of residents and promote regional prosperity by developing talent, supporting innovation, and attracting well-paying jobs to the region.

Regional Strategies:

- Increase awareness of existing educational resources and skills training opportunities as pathways to well-paying jobs in East Central Indiana.
- Connect recent college graduates to satisfying career opportunities in the region.
- Create dedicated spaces to encourage innovation and collaboration, such as co-working spaces, makerspaces, and community kitchens.
- Encourage the creation of new businesses through financing and technical support.
- Invest in quality of life and quality of place improvements to attract jobs and talent.

IEDC Goal Alignment: Quality of Opportunity

KPIs: Educational Attainment, Per Capita Income Growth, Growth In Employment Opportunities, Innovation Activities



Regional Outcomes

- **Stabilize the Population:** To counteract population decline, East Central Indiana will increase the annual regional growth rate to 0% or higher by 2031. Assuming population decline occurs at approximately 0.4% annually, as demonstrated from 2010 to 2020, this requires attracting or retaining 1,500 people across the region each year. By 2031, the region will be poised for growth.
- **Increase Educational Attainment:** Boost educational attainment in the region by enabling an additional 1,300 people to obtain a bachelor's degree or higher each year. This will result in 25% of residents holding such a degree by 2031.
- **Promote Housing Development:** Build at least 7,200 housing units across the region by 2031, including 3,000 housing units with READI support.
- **Support Livelihoods:** Boost the regional per capita personal income by \$22,043 by 2031, which would represent a 47% increase over the course of the decade.
- **Foster Innovation:** Encourage the filing of 100 additional business applications each year across the region, which would represent a 45% increase in new business applications by 2031.

Regional Collaboration

Through a six-month engagement process, over 3,300 participants were encouraged to share their perspective, ideas, and opinions about the future of the eight-county region. Intentional steps were taken to engage students, residents, employers, and community leaders from each county to build regional consensus and promote partnership. Engagement opportunities, which ranged from surveys to stakeholder meetings, allowed the project team to identify regional priorities and challenges. Shaped by abundant feedback, these priorities and challenges evolved to become the vision, goals, and strategies for East Central Indiana.

The READI 2.0 initiative represents the most comprehensive, far-reaching engagement effort to date in East Central Indiana. The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership (ECIRP) found it particularly important to intentionally engage stakeholders from all eight counties, ensuring that all voices are heard, and creating truly regional consensus on East Central Indiana's goals and strategies. The region has learned from READI 1.0 that there are no shortcuts to regionalism. Past engagement efforts are no substitute for active attempts to engage the community. With a region of this size, active engagement posed a significant challenge. Nonetheless, the region rose to the challenge, enthusiastically sharing and participating in engagement opportunities hosted by the project team.

Regional Outcomes

- **Steering Committee (16 members)**
 - The Steering Committee consisted of representatives from each county's local economic development organization accompanied by a plus one. The Steering Committee met every 1-2 months throughout the planning process to review engagement results and draft materials.
- **County Workshops (217 participants)**
 - A county workshop was held in each of the region's eight counties to engage elected officials, anchor institutions, major employers, and other community leaders. Participants were asked to envision the future of their county and identify barriers preventing them from achieving their vision and aspirations.
- **Regional Workshops (212 participants)**
 - The project team hosted two regional workshops at the Ball State Alumni Center in Muncie, IN. The first workshop focused on building consensus around regional priorities. The second workshop focused on reviewing and refining the regional vision, goals, and strategies.

- **Stakeholder Meetings (115 participants)**
 - The project team facilitated 12 stakeholder meetings on a range of topics, from housing to hospitals and community health. Stakeholder meetings were intimate and focused, allowing the project team to gather information on specific challenges facing the region.
- **Public Input Survey (1,058 responses)**
 - The public input survey was distributed to community members to get a balanced perspective on the region from those that live and work in East Central Indiana. Results of the survey highlighted regional strengths and weaknesses and identified missing components in the region.
- **Youth Survey (1,720 responses)**
 - The youth survey was distributed to high schools and colleges, and provided important insight on the personal plans, experiences, and desires of young adults in the region.
- **Project Ranking Process (96 community leaders invited to participate)**
 - Elected officials, and representatives from economic development organizations, community foundations, and anchor institutions, were invited to participate in the ranking process. The goal was to identify priority projects from the 165+ projects submitted.



Part II: READI 1.0 Evaluation

Provide an honest assessment of the region's participation in the first phase of the READI initiative:

In READI 1.0, East Central Indiana leveraged Forge Your Path, a talent attraction initiative designed to establish the region as a destination and a place where people live, work, and play. The Forge Your Path branding was used as the springboard for regional planning efforts, which focused on talent enhancement, attraction, development, and growth. The plan was developed based on feedback from community stakeholders gathered over the course of several years, with some engagement efforts pre-dating the READI 1.0 initiative. In 2015, roundtables, regional summits, and stakeholder interviews were held in several East Central Indiana counties to identify assets, opportunities, and issues. Engagement continued through 2021 with additional meet ups, roundtables, and interviews with stakeholders. The plan was also informed by previous strategic plans, which utilized diverse approaches to community engagement, including surveys, focus groups, interviews, workshops, and public hearings. As part of the READI 1.0 planning process, over 150 proposed projects were submitted from across the region. The East Central Indiana READI Governing Body, consisting of two representatives from each participating county, reviewed each project. The governing body developed and utilized a Regional Project Scorecard to identify how and to what extent proposals met the region's primary goals, and additional scoring criteria. Scoring criteria included project readiness, funding and support, maintenance and sustainability, equity and access, and regional partnerships. Following the review, scoring, and deliberation process, the Governing Body grouped projects into common themes aligned with the region's strategic goals and objectives. The group then classified all project proposals into two primary categories: Catalyst Projects and Supporting Projects and Programs. The plan identifies 14 catalyst projects and 139 supporting regional and local initiatives. East Central Indiana received a funding award of \$15 million in READI 1.0. Combined with matching funds, the region leveraged \$135,815,080 across 19 regionally impactful projects. Projects represent diverse investments in the region's prosperity and seek to forward the state's READI goals of enhanced quality of life, place, and opportunity. Projects include housing developments, infrastructure improvements (water, wastewater, broadband), childcare programs and centers, indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, rural broadband development, performance centers, and mixed-use urban density developments. To date, the entire award has been obligated, ahead of the required deadline. A total of \$2 million has been disbursed, and another \$413k is in the works. It is worth noting that the region's top three projects account for over 55% of the entire award amount. The Muncie YMCA (\$2.65 million) is well under way, and the Gas City Music Center (\$2.75 million) is ready for disbursement at any time. The Richmond Rising (\$2.95 million) project has now received all city/council approvals to move forward. (There was a mayoral leadership transition in Richmond, however the new mayor is very supportive of this important, transformative project.) The region has had full disbursements completed on the Salamonina Schoolhouse, Vision Corner, Town of Yorktown, and Wilbur Wright Trail Phase III. 2024 is poised to be a busy year for READI 1.0 disbursements in East Central Indiana.



Identify lessons learned and any issues that, if addressed, would increase opportunities for successful implementation of the region's READI 2.0 application.

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSENSUS BUILDING:Stakeholder engagement was a glaring issue in READI 1.0. Although the previous plan was developed in partnership with local government, economic development organizations, and anchor institutions across the region, it relied on consensus building that was done prior to READI. Consequently, members of the public, industry representatives, and elected officials felt excluded. Since engagement was lacking, community buy-in was never truly established. In READI 2.0, there was a concerted effort to implement a new consensus building process. This process involved casting a wide net for engagement. The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership engaged local government representatives, higher education institutions, top employers, economic development organizations, community foundations, non-profit organizations, and community members from all eight counties. Community engagement activities were designed to gather feedback and promote conversation amongst different target audiences of all ages. Goals and strategies were shaped and reshaped through an iterative process until widespread consensus was reached.

COMMUNICATION:Regional communication was poor throughout the READI 1.0 planning process. Without regular updates and outreach, community members and local leaders were left in the dark. To help stakeholders stay on top of the READI 2.0 process, East Central Indiana engaged in active and regular communication. ECIRP sent out email updates as milestones were reached, touched base with elected officials, and updated the Forge Your Path website to include timely information. Steering Committee members helped disperse information by reporting at county-level meetings.

REGIONAL PLAN AND STRATEGIES:The READI 1.0 plan was unfocused. East Central Indiana's strategy was spread out over five key themes, explained in over 320 pages. Consequently, the plan can be intimidating and difficult to utilize. Due to time constraints, the region chose to lean into the 21st Century Talent Region designation without creating true regional development strategies. As such, the plan has not held up and is not a document that the region rallies behind. The revised plan benefits from being more deliberate. Each strategy was defined, vetted, and approved by stakeholders with the region's long-term success in mind. Strategies are designed to tackle a range of local and regional issues, and advance state goals, while remaining distinct and intentional. While the plan is tied to READI 2.0 and intentionally aligns with IEDC's Key Performance Indicators, it will outlive any single funding opportunity. Already, the plan is allowing the region to align around priorities and strategically pursue other funding beyond the IEDC. Local philanthropy is using the data, needs assessments, and project identification from the plan to make local funding decisions and align resources.

LEADERSHIP AND APPROACH:After receiving initial feedback from READI 1.0, ECIRP staff and influential community leaders went on field trips to learn from regional development organizations who had been more successful. Through formal interviews, ECIRP gained insight into their approach and roadmap to success. This roadmap gave ECIRP a new focus and strategy, centered on collaboration, to be more successful in the second round of the READI program, and set the region up for long-term success.

Describe the current capacity of the regional organization as well as strengths, weaknesses, and whether potential changes or support are needed to enhance the organization's long-term viability and sustainability.

The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership, a 501(c)3 non-profit, has been a pivotal force in driving economic growth and development in the region since its establishment in 2005. The mission of the organization is to foster economic growth as the lead economic development marketing and business attraction organization in East Central Indiana. Initially focused solely on regional marketing to attract businesses and site consultants, the



organization has evolved over nearly two decades to become a comprehensive hub for regional economic and community development initiatives. One of the organization's key strengths lies in its ability to spearhead and coordinate regional strategic initiatives. These efforts have supported critical projects that have enhanced East Central Indiana's infrastructure and quality of life, such as READI 1.0. In the first round of the READI program, ECIRP helped manage and monitor \$15 million worth of state investment across a range of projects, from early learning centers to a performing arts venue. A major strength of the organization is its connection to local economic development organizations and the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC). With an annual budget of nearly \$500,000, the ECIRP has a healthy pool of supporters who see the value in supporting its work on behalf of the region. Part of the ECIRP's new strategic plan launched in 2023 is to grow its resources to enable more comprehensive regional services and more effective execution of its mission. The partnership's primary weakness is its limited capacity. The ECIRP only has two full-time staff members, a President and CEO, and a Vice President of Strategy and Operations. Trevor Friedeberg was hired as President and CEO in 2022 bringing over 15 years of economic development experience and has been a champion of the East Central region. With a new perspective and understanding of the importance of state partnerships to catalyze regional economic growth (previously worked for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation) he is well positioned to continue building bridges, driving meaningful, sustainable growth to the East Central region. Caitlin Hancock provides a wealth of institutional knowledge to the team with over 9 years of experience at the ECIRP. Her understanding of the regional players, makeup, and shared challenges enable her to be a critical asset to the region. While relying on regional partners to support the ECIRP's work has been instrumental in the organization's success, to assist with long-term viability and sustainability, ECIRP would benefit from additional funding and staffing. These resources would not only allow the organization to expand its reach and impact but also enhance its ability to respond to emerging economic challenges and opportunities in the region.



Part III: Review

Keeping in mind the analysis from the previous section, regions should provide the identified data points in this section and describe how these metrics have shifted over the years. The purpose of this section is to use the economic and demographic changes occurring in the region to allow regions to conduct projections of these metrics to determine how they will contribute to the overall success of the READI 2.0 program.

Key performance indicators	Indiana	Region
Total population (U.S. Census Bureau)	6,751,340	375,510 (2021)
Total employment (U.S. Census Bureau)	3,020,345	136,384 (2022)
Per capita income (Bureau of Economic Analysis)	\$ 51,645.95	\$ 46,899.70
Total population with bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau)	1,253,299	49,608 (2021)
Total housing units (U.S. Census Bureau)	2,911,562	170,437 (2021)
Total rental housing units (U.S. Census Bureau)	680,964	45,262 (2021)
Total owner-occupied units (U.S. Census Bureau)	1,097,622	104,870 (2021)
Number of new business start-ups (Small Business Development Center)	150,067	7,342 (2021)

Please describe the current landscape of childcare within your region. Information could include current challenges to childcare, the number of facilities and/or seats and quality of childcare in your area. Visit the READI website for supplemental information that may be available.

East Central Indiana residents lack sufficient access to affordable, high-quality childcare. On the public input survey, 45.3% of respondents rated access to childcare as 'poor' or 'very poor' for the region. In stakeholder meetings, major employers in the region echoed this sentiment. Data from Brighter Futures Indiana (2023) confirms that childcare is a regional problem. Licensed facilities in East Central Indiana have the capacity to support fewer than half (49.3%) of children under the age of six who may need care. This discrepancy is most prevalent in Blackford County where only 17.7% of children can be served. Capacity issues are closely tied to staffing. The region must develop a pipeline of childcare workers by supporting the attainment of degrees and certificates in early childhood education. To attract individuals to local programs and positions, and to retain childcare workers in the region, higher wages are needed. Childcare is vitally important to a robust, inclusive workforce. Without it, parents, especially women, may have to stay home, sacrificing income and career opportunities. Parents should have the choice, and the support, to send their child to a qualified center. Early childhood education also plays a key role in future academic success. Students that obtain sufficient care and instruction at an early age are more prepared for kindergarten, elementary school, and beyond. Tackling



the childcare issue in ECI will require higher wages for early childhood educators, greater local childcare capacity, and additional childcare centers to serve the region. Strategies are detailed in the attached plan.

Please describe the current innovation ecosystem within your region. Think about current challenges or barriers to innovation activities, the number of new business start-ups and current resources to increase innovative activities in your area (patents, research and development funding, etc).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Business Applications by County, from 2010 to 2020, East Central Indiana saw an increase in new business applications of 37.8%, compared to 53.4% for the State of Indiana. Although new business growth occurred at a slower pace than the State, the region continues to spur innovation. In 2022, 2,908 new business applications were filed. Most applications came from Delaware (30.5%), Grant (18.8%), Wayne (16.4%), and Henry (14%) Counties. Furthermore, in 2021, approximately 7,342 new business establishments were reported in the region, based on data from the Indiana Small Business Development Center (ISBDC). The innovation ecosystem in East Central Indiana faces challenges associated with funding, access to a skilled workforce, and ongoing national and international economic threats. To overcome these challenges, resources are available across the region to support innovation and entrepreneurship. In Muncie, Innovation Connector helps new entrepreneurs with unique business ideas by supporting and accelerating the creation of successful technology-based and emerging companies. MadJax Makerforce, also in Muncie, is a makerspace designed to encourage creativity and collaboration. MadJax features the CO:LAB coworking space, the Design Lab (which offers special equipment, from 3D printers to vinyl cutters), office space, and retail space. Revolving loan funds, façade grants, and staff assistance from dedicated local economic development organizations are also available throughout the eight-county region to support new ideas and business ventures. The attached plan identifies opportunities to grow this ecosystem in outlying rural areas through ventures like Vision Corner and other projects.

List your top 10 employers. List your civic institutions including higher education and philanthropic organizations. Please specify companies or organizations, not industries.

The top 10 employers in East Central Indiana are IU Health, Ball State University, Reid Health, Marion Health, Indiana Wesleyan University, Walmart Distribution Center, GM, Belden Wire and Cable, Henry Community Health, and SugarCreek Packing Company. Civic organizations in the community include Ball State University, Indiana Wesleyan University, Taylor University, Earlham College, Indiana University East, Ivy Tech Community College, Purdue Polytechnic, Bethany Theological Seminary, The Community Foundation of Muncie & Delaware County, Ball Brothers Foundation, George and Frances Ball Foundation, Blackford County Community Foundation, Fayette Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Grant County, Indiana, Inc., Henry County Community Foundation, The Portland Foundation, Community Foundation of Randolph County, The Wayne County Foundation, Stamm Koechlein Family Foundation, Quigg Family Foundation, and United Way (Richmond, Muncie). As this list demonstrates, East Central Indiana's regional identity is strongly shaped by "eds and meds" as key anchor institutions. These institutions are the heart and soul of our region's biggest cities and small towns. They add value far beyond creating jobs as they foster the entrepreneurial spirit, bring world-class amenities to Indiana, and prepare the next generation's workforce.



List the counties or areas that are considered rural and rural-mix. List the counties or areas that are considered disadvantaged communities. Visit the READI website for supplemental information that may be available.

Every county in East Central Indiana is either rural or rural-mixed, disadvantaged, or both. **RURAL COMMUNITIES:** Five out of eight counties in East Central Indiana are considered rural or rural-mixed, including Blackford, Henry, Jay, Randolph, and Wayne. **DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES:** According to maps provided by the IEDC, seven out of eight counties are considered disadvantaged, including Grant, Jay, Randolph, Wayne, Fayette, Henry, and Delaware. Blackford County is absent from the list of disadvantaged communities; however, the county continues to experience distress and should also be considered disadvantaged. From 2000 to 2020, the population declined by 13.8%. Shrinkage contributes to declining tax revenue and deters private investment, making it difficult to maintain adequate services. The county health ranks 82 out of 92 counties in Indiana, making it one of the least healthy counties in the state. Residents experience more poor physical and mental health days, and are more likely to have a low birthweight, exhibit adult obesity, or die prematurely compared to other Hoosiers. Furthermore, Blackford County lags behind in education and opportunity. As of 2021, only 14.2% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher. Blackford County has the lowest per capita income in the region at \$44,325, compared to \$46,900 for East Central Indiana and \$51,646 for the state. Finally, approximately 4.6% of residents are unemployed and 18.2% of residents live in poverty. For these reasons, we make the case Blackford should be considered disadvantaged.

Based on the datapoints above, describe how the region's metrics have shifted since 2021. What are your anticipated projections of change given your READI 1.0 projects?

To demonstrate progress, East Central Indiana has identified anticipated outcomes from READI 1.0 projects. In READI 1.0, East Central Indiana received \$15 million to help fund 19 projects. These projects represent over \$135 million in public-private leveraged investment. Once completed, these projects will alleviate housing shortages, expand broadband access, spur economic development, increase educational attainment, and improve quality of life. Thanks to READI, more than 150 apartments will be constructed in Wayne County. In Delaware and Henry County, over 100 acres of undeveloped land will have transportation and utility access, priming these areas for development. Families in Jay County will benefit from 125 additional childcare seats. Residents and visitors will enjoy performances in the 1,800-seat Gas City Music Center in Grant County and exercising on 2.6 miles of multi-use trail in Henry County. In Delaware County, the redevelopment of downtown Yorktown is expected to generate nearly 200 jobs and spur \$150 million in economic activity over the next 10 years. In Blackford County, READI 1.0 supported broadband improvements that lead to a comprehensive needs assessment. As a result, there are several companies looking to invest throughout the county to increase access, a great win that is hard to immediately quantify, but truly spurred by the first round of READI. These investments, coupled with READI 2.0 projects and a region ready to roll up its sleeves and tackle the hard work needed to effect positive change, will empower East Central Indiana to forge ahead.



Identify a regional community outside of the state of Indiana that is similar to your region to use as a benchmark. Provide the selected metrics in the table below. When selecting a peer community, please consider the following key components for comparison (not all datapoints need to be an exact match): Population size (\pm 5000), Median income (\pm \$5000), Industries, Similar assets, General demographics, Geography

Peer Community: Iowa City, Iowa

Key performance indicators	Region	Peer Community
Total population	375,510 (2021)	484,349 (2021)
Total employment	136,384 (2022)	243,600 (2022)
Per capita income	\$ 46,899.70	\$ 55,502.32
Total population with bachelor's degree or higher	49,608 (2021)	118,001 (2021)
Total housing units	170,437 (2021)	210,605 (2021)
Total rental housing units	45,262 (2021)	57,206 (2021)
Total owner-occupied housing units	104,870 (2021)	138,076 (2021)

Based on the identified benchmark community, describe any specific best practices, defining strategies, or measurable goals the community is doing that inspires action for your region.

Benchmarking is an important tool for assessing and comparing regional performance to achieve continuous improvement. The previous plan outlined three benchmark regions against which to measure progress, including Southwest Kentucky (Bowling Green), North Central Illinois (Dekalb), and North Central Virginia (Harrisonburg). These regions were chosen based on their aspirational achievements and social, economic, and geographic similarities to our eight-county area. After review, East Central decided to take a more refined, methodical approach to determine a peer region. Therefore, as part of the READI 2.0 planning process, the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership selected a new benchmark region following a refined methodology. From a list of 927 metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, four communities were identified. In 1969, each of these communities reported a similar population to the Muncie metro area. However, by 2022, all four communities demonstrated significant population growth, outpacing East Central Indiana. Iowa City, Iowa was ultimately chosen from these four contenders, and the ECIRP met virtually with representatives from Greater Iowa City, Inc. to discuss their growth strategies, best practices, and overall successes. Greater Iowa City, a 7-county region encompassing and surrounding Iowa City, IA, was selected as the peer community for East Central Indiana. An underrated region, Greater Iowa City is a growing center for creativity and industry. In 2021, the top industry is educational services, health care and social assistance, which employs 28.5% of the civilian labor force, compared to 27.5% in East Central Indiana. Greater Iowa City is home to the University of Iowa (UI) as well as smaller colleges and universities, including Cornell College, Coe College, Mount Mercy University, and Kirkwood Community College. Greater Iowa City is also home to several hospitals and medical centers, including the UI Hospitals & Clinics, the UI Stead Family Children's Hospital, and a VA Medical Center. The



University of Iowa as well as its medical institutions are strong drivers of population growth and stability in Greater Iowa City. The undergraduate student body is larger than that of Ball State University (14,416) compared to the University of Iowa's undergraduate student body (22,130). Greater Iowa City's eds and meds focus, balanced by a diversity of other industries, including manufacturing, retail trade, and arts/entertainment, serves as a positive and aspirational example for East Central Indiana. With an established and growing arts scene, national pull for entertainment acts and Broadway shows, and trails offering cycling and recreational activities, Greater Iowa City represents an attainable, sustainable analogy to how East Central Indiana can focus its strategies for long-term growth. Boasting a strong and targeted talent attraction website/brand, furnished with a "recruit me" call to action button, Greater Iowa City has been focused and intentional on its talent attraction and remote worker recruitment efforts. Similar to East Central's Forge Your Path talent attraction brand, Greater Iowa City highlights Quality of Place as its strongest selling point for attracting individuals. Overall, Greater Iowa City is an excellent peer community, providing East Central Indiana with a comparable region from which to draw inspiration.

Please describe the region's current barriers to growth (e.g., housing challenges, childcare availability, or infrastructure). Think about housing, infrastructure, childcare, and/or other feasibility studies your region has recently completed or conversations and meetings with your regional stakeholders. Examples can be attached as part of the appendix.

Community leaders were asked to identify local and regional challenges in stakeholder meetings, workshops, and surveys. Their insight was paired with regional data to identify barriers to growth, which include quality-of-life, housing, childcare, education, and employment. Quality-of-life is a top concern. When discussing quality-of-life, community members emphasized the following themes: health, social services, amenities, and attractions. Community health is an ongoing challenge in East Central Indiana. According to the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps (CHR&R) program from the University of Wisconsin, the average county in the region has a health ranking of 82 out of 92 (with 92 being the lowest performing county in Indiana). Community members shared the need to preserve and expand healthcare amenities which address both physical and mental health. With IU Health Blackford discontinuing inpatient and emergency care services, it is critical to protect these amenities in rural communities. To promote vibrancy, community members called for investments in recreation, including maintenance and development of park and trail facilities, and better access to restaurants, retail, and entertainment. Community members want to revitalize historic downtowns and attract new residents and visitors to the region. East Central Indiana faces significant housing challenges, including aging housing stock and blight. According to the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 75% of housing units in the region were built before 1980, compared to 56% for Indiana. Fewer than 10% of homes in the region were built after 1999. Economic downturns, from post-industrial decline to the 2008 recession, have left many neighborhoods scarred by blight and abandonment. As of 2021, approximately 12% of housing units in the region are vacant, compared to 10% for Indiana. New housing stock has failed to keep pace with demand, nor has it provided sufficient options to appeal to young professionals. Consequently, employers struggle to recruit staff who cannot find suitable homes, and young professionals start their careers elsewhere. East Central Indiana lacks sufficient access to childcare. On the public input survey, 45% of respondents rated access to childcare as 'poor' or 'very poor.' Data from Brighter Futures Indiana, collected in 2023, confirms that childcare is a regional problem. Licensed facilities in East Central Indiana have the capacity to support fewer than half (49%) of children in the region who may need care. Finally, the region stands out for its concentration of colleges and universities, including Ball State, Taylor,



Earlham, Indiana Wesleyan, Indiana University East, Purdue Polytechnic Richmond, and three Ivy Tech campuses. Despite having great educational resources, in 2021, only 19.8% of adults in East Central Indiana had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 27.8% for Indiana. East Central Indiana is uniquely positioned to develop a talented workforce and connect that workforce to satisfying jobs. Investing in quality-of-life, promoting higher education programs, developing a robust college to career pipeline, and expanding employment opportunities, including entrepreneurship and small business ventures, are strategies that will bring positive change. Additionally, it is imperative to invest in housing to retain college graduates, faculty, and staff, preventing talent from leaving the region.

Given the regional data and needs assessment, highlight the region's three to five priority needs.

PRIORITY 1: QUALITY OF LIFECommunity members indicated a need to invest in quality-of-life amenities to benefit the well-being and health of current and future residents across the region.Strategic investments in this area address the following:

- *Bikeable and walkable communities
- *Outdoor recreation amenities, including parks and trails
- *Restaurants, retail, and entertainment
- *Healthcare, including mental health and access to rural health services
- *Social services aimed at addressing homelessness and rehabilitation for alcoholism and drug addiction
- *Food security
- *Youth activities and engagement

PRIORITY 2: HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURECommunity members indicated that current housing stock is insufficient to meet the needs of existing residents, and to attract new residents to East Central Indiana. Anchor institutions, including universities and hospitals in the region, struggle to recruit employees when they can't find adequate housing. There is a need for attractive, quality housing in the region, not just affordable housing.Strategic investments in this area address the following:

- *Quality housing
- *Workforce housing
- *Diverse housing options, including housing options that appeal to young professionals
- *Infill development in historic downtowns
- *Senior housing
- *Blight reduction and remediation
- *Home maintenance and repair
- *Homeownership education
- *Infrastructure costs as a barrier to development

PRIORITY 3: CHILDCARE AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIESCommunity members expressed concern about the lack of affordable, high-quality childcare in the region. Residents shared that there are childcare deserts in the region (i.e., communities where there are little to no available childcare services). Access to childcare affects the workforce and the regional economy, driving a need for unique solutions.Strategic investments in this area address the following:

- *Access to childcare, including distance to childcare centers and capacity
- *Staffing childcare centers, including adequate pay for educators
- *Affordability of childcare for families and employers
- *Quality of childcare, including ability to prepare children for life-long learning

PRIORITY 4: EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITYEast Central Indiana is home to many higher education institutions offering a variety of degree programs. Community members believe that more could be done to leverage these resources and connect residents to quality jobs. There is a need to enhance upward mobility by strengthening connections to higher education and skills training opportunities, attracting well-paying jobs, and supporting entrepreneurs and innovators in the region. Strategic investments in this area address the following:

- *Connecting high school students to future careers
- *Workforce development, including educational attainment and skills training
- *Innovation and entrepreneurship, including co-working spaces, makerspaces, and business incubation



Part IV: Regional Growth Strategies and Action Plan

Please list three to five goals to meet your region's priorities. Also, identify 3-5 strategies to help achieve each identified goal.

Goals	Strategy
<p>QUALITY OF LIFE: Stabilize the region's population and encourage growth through investments that directly benefit the health and well-being of residents, promote tourism, and support vibrant downtowns.</p>	<p>QUALITY OF LIFE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Market existing regional attractions and encourage the development of new arts and culture, recreation, retail, and culinary destinations. *Revitalize historic downtowns through façade, structure, and streetscape improvements, as well as the introduction of new businesses, including nightlife. *Advocate for the preservation of existing rural health services. *Enhance pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to encourage healthy lifestyles and provide alternative transportation options. *Enhance existing parks and trails and consider opportunities to develop new outdoor recreation amenities. *Expand access to mental health resources in the region. *Expand access to drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in the region.
<p>HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE: Stimulate the development of quality housing in the region to create thriving neighborhoods that appeal to both current and future residents.</p>	<p>HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Develop quality workforce housing across the region. *Develop attractive rental options that appeal to young professionals. *Invest in infrastructure improvements to spur housing development. *Mitigate blight and encourage context-appropriate infill development. *Encourage property maintenance and responsible homeownership in existing neighborhoods to instill community pride.



<p>CHILDCARE AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES: Position the region as a great place to raise a family, and attract employers seeking a robust workforce, by investing in quality, affordable childcare.</p>	<p>CHILDCARE AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Increase wages to attract more skilled professionals to early childhood education. *Increase childcare capacity by encouraging local employers, schools, and churches to offer childcare services. *Develop new, stand-alone childcare centers offering quality, affordable services. *Develop a pipeline of childcare workers by supporting the attainment of degrees and certificates in early childhood education.
<p>EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY: Enhance the upward mobility of residents and promote regional prosperity by developing talent, supporting innovation, and attracting well-paying jobs to the region.</p>	<p>EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Increase awareness of existing educational resources and skills training opportunities as pathways to well-paying jobs in East Central Indiana. *Connect recent college graduates to satisfying career opportunities in the region. *Create dedicated spaces to encourage innovation and collaboration, such as co-working spaces, makerspaces, and community kitchens. *Encourage the creation of new businesses through financing and technical support. *Invest in quality-of-life and quality-of-place improvements to attract jobs and talent.



Section B: Funding Request: This section should be utilized to estimate and set target goals for READI 2.0. Regions should include funding from other programs that the region or organizations are seeking, such as EPA funding, College and Community Collaboration Grant, Next Level Trails, other federal funding, or any other philanthropic initiatives. READI 1.0 data from projects funded can be used as a baseline to estimate totals below. If projects have been identified for READI 2.0, those can also be utilized to fill in this section.

Overall planned investment required to implement the strategies successfully	\$ 850,000,000.00
Requested READI 2.0 funds	\$ 75,000,000.00
Anticipated matching funding sources	\$ 775,000,000.00
Private funding	\$ 550,000,000.00
Philanthropic	\$ 100,000,000.00
Local Funding	\$ 75,000,000.00
Other State funding	\$ 25,000,000.00
Federal funding	\$ 25,000,000.00
Percentage of anticipated READI funding towards rural and rural-mix communities	46%
Percentage of anticipated READI funding towards disadvantaged communities	100%



For each goal/strategy, identify the action plan for proposed implementation. This includes description of specific opportunities/projects and/or examples of the types of investments the region is considering in achieving its goals. Include suggested milestones and timelines for each strategy. (300 words maximum per goal area)

Action plans

QUALITY OF LIFE:

East Central Indiana will achieve population stability and growth through quality of life investments. Investments will benefit the health and well-being of current and future residents and increase tourism to the region. East Central Indiana will promote community health by expanding access to services and encouraging active lifestyles. Related opportunities include developing an ambulatory center at Reid Health Connersville, constructing a YMCA in Gas City, and expanding the White River Greenway in Muncie. East Central Indiana aspires to be known for its vibrant downtowns and health and recreational opportunities. Opportunities include small business development along Main Street in Richmond and expanding trails and health assets.

EXAMPLE PROJECTS:

- BSU Revitalizing the Village – Muncie, IN (Delaware County)
 - Ball State has developed and begun to execute a plan to revitalize The Village, a commercial district adjacent to the University and IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital. After decades of disinvestment, this four-year plan will reposition The Village as a regional amenity through new entertainment options, places to live and work, and connecting the University campus to Downtown Muncie.
- Reid Health Connersville – Connersville, IN (Fayette County)
 - Reid Health's comprehensive initiative begins with the construction of a new ambulatory center and concludes with community-driven gifts of property to the City of Connersville and the Fayette School Corporation. The project addresses healthcare needs of the community and will contribute to well-being and quality of life by mid-2027 through the development of public spaces and enhanced infrastructure.
- YMCA at Turner Park – Gas City, IN (Grant County)
 - This public-private partnership brings a first-class wellness and community center to the popular Turner Park. The new YMCA would provide additional space for licensed childcare and early learning programs. The \$32 million project is anticipated to start in August of 2024 and open in July."



HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE:

East Central Indiana will stimulate the development of quality housing to support thriving neighborhoods appealing to current and future residents. Strategies include infrastructure investments to spur new development, developing a diverse portfolio of housing types, encouraging infill development, and mitigating blight. Nearly 2,500 housing units are proposed for the region including owner-occupied and rental units, single-family homes, townhomes, duplexes, and apartment complexes, as well affordable and market-rate options. In addition to the examples below, Jay County also has a potential project of 300 new housing units.

EXAMPLE PROJECTS:

- Smith Hill Residential Development – Richmond, IN (Wayne County)
 - Through a collaborative effort between Reid Hospital, the City of Richmond, and 11th Street Development, Smith Hill will offer 198 apartments and 178 single-family homes in an amenitized, walkable community. This vibrant, mixed-residential neighborhood will meet housing needs of the region while attracting new residents to Indiana from Ohio due to commuting patterns and strategic location. The project is scheduled for completion in 2030.
- New Castle Residential Housing Developments – New Castle, IN (Henry County)
 - This public-private partnership involves priming two parcels for housing development to spur residential growth in the City of New Castle. The project includes the construction of road, sewer, drainage, and water infrastructure along with mass grading of the overall development. The private development partnership will bring the municipality, land developers, and homebuilders together for success. The project will yield 135 to 160 homes and be completed by Fall 2026.
- Hartford City Housing Project – Hartford City, IN (Blackford County)
 - Designed to meet the needs of various demographics within a framework that prioritizes environmental sustainability and economic vitality, the Hartford City Housing Project will transform 130 acres of city-owned land into a vibrant, inclusive community that will serve as a model for regional development by 2026.

CHILDCARE AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES:

East Central Indiana will position the region as a great place to raise a family, and attract employers seeking a robust workforce, by investing in quality, affordable childcare. Strategies include expanding childcare capacity and developing a pipeline of childcare workers by supporting the attainment of degrees and certificates in early childhood education. In the initial call for projects, over 16 projects included a childcare component that would add stand-alone facilities or upgrade existing facilities.

EXAMPLE PROJECTS:

- Jay County Early Learning Center – Portland & Dunkirk, IN (Jay County)
 - The Portland Foundation is proposing to build off a READI 1.0 project with the construction of a new wing on the Jay County Early Learning Center to house a Head Start program in Portland. The Foundation also plans to construct a second facility in the Town of Dunkirk by the end of 2025 that would add additional childcare seats and serve families in western Jay County, Blackford County, and Delaware County as both an early learning center and a Head Start.
- Brave Little Learners – Union City, IN (Randolph County)



- Randolph Eastern Schools recognize the need for preschools and daycare in the region. Over 30% of their employees need daycare for their young children. To address the growing younger population and to keep staff during a statewide teacher shortage, Randolph Eastern Schools is proposing a four-room preschool and daycare. This investment will help increase the number of childcare seats by the end of 2024 and increase school readiness in the region.

EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY:

East Central Indiana is uniquely positioned to develop a talented workforce and to retain that workforce by connecting them to valuable, well-paying jobs. The region stands apart due to its concentration of universities and colleges, and the region is eager to expand partnership with these institutions to create pathways to well-paying jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities. In addition to capitalizing on higher ed and technical training opportunities, the region looks to further support new, dedicated spaces of collaboration and innovation to encourage the creation of new businesses.

EXAMPLE PROJECTS:

- Vision Corner – Union City, IN (Randolph County)
 - As a collaborative effort in downtown Union City, Vision Corner is a learning center focusing on job creation and skills development for high school students, adults aiming for career advancement, and companies looking for skilled employees or to improve their workforce. Vision Corner's popularity is driving more partnerships in the healthcare industry to meet the evolving career demands in the 21st Century. The two-story addition to add classroom capacity has an anticipated completion date of December of 2024.
- ECI Regional Technology and Incubator Hub Expansion – Muncie, IN (Delaware County)
 - Serving as an entrepreneurial and technology innovation hub for the East Central Indiana Region, this expansion will support a technology development center for emerging technology businesses and entrepreneurial space for startup businesses with the potential to attract technology startup businesses from other states. The expansion is set to be completed by the end of 2025.

A 4:1 match will be required for READI 2.0 investment. Based on this requirement, what is your expected commitment from public and private partners including anchor institutions? What are their expected roles in helping to implement the plan?

East Central Indiana is at a turning point where there is an opportunity to leverage historic investments in the region. Three of ECI's educational institutions (Ball State University, Earlham College, Taylor University) received a total of \$90 million through the Lilly Endowment in 2023. All three institutions have potential READI projects that can maximize the community impact of these grants if supported. The support from the Lilly Endowment underscores the potential for regional impact, as it was intended to foster collaboration between communities and colleges. These grants will serve as a catalyst for projects that enhance housing, education, innovation, the arts, and overall quality of life in the region. They will also bolster the ability of regional healthcare and educational institutions to attract and retain talent, a key element of ECI's regional development plan aimed at elevating our innovative educational and medical institutions. These initiatives align seamlessly with both regional and state goals of the READI 2.0 program. The opportunities of these initiatives and READI 2.0 represent a generational opportunity that has the potential to transform ECI's,



ushering in a new era of sustainability and prosperity. These institutions have been and remain actively engaged and supportive of the region's new strategies and vision, as evidenced by the attached letters of support. In addition, intentional steps were taken to engage public and private partners in the READI 2.0 planning process to build regional consensus on East Central Indiana's goals and strategies. This led to strong financial commitments from public, private, and philanthropic partners totaling approximately \$775,000,000. Recognizing the challenge faced by many underserved communities in providing matching funds for projects, the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership proposes two loan programs with READI support to overcome this barrier.

EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL LAND BANK: Establishing the East Central Regional Land Bank represents a collaboration with Intend Indiana, an organization dedicated to empowering land banks. This partnership will spearhead the acquisition and stewardship of abandoned and blighted properties across the region, enabling communities to gain control over parcels and breathe life into neglected areas. With support, a revolving loan fund (RLF) for affordable housing development on landbank lots could be established. This could support landbanking activities and build capacity with non-profits seeking to eliminate blight and revitalize neighborhoods. This strategic approach ensures that rural and disadvantaged communities receive essential services and resources to fuel their redevelopment and prosperity. By focusing on underserved areas, communities are empowered with the tools necessary to embark on transformative revitalization journeys.

RURAL/DISADVANTAGED DEVELOPMENT FUND: The creation of the Rural/Disadvantaged Development Fund will bring new and innovative support for community development. This loan program will be tailored to meet the needs of rural and disadvantaged areas, offering favorable terms that alleviate financial burdens and streamline project financing. By offering an alternative to traditional bonding, opportunities for growth and progress are unlocked. The fund will prioritize communities facing challenges to meet local matching requirements. Providing access to capital can bridge funding gaps and leverage READI investments.

Describe the process the region will utilize for intake, prioritization, and evaluation of projects.

To evaluate the potential project pipeline in the region, ECIRP initiated a project identification process as part of its preparation for this application. Ahead of our first regional meeting, information was disseminated regarding the metrics that would be assessed, based on feedback from prior regional engagement efforts. These metrics included strategic alignment with IEDC and regional goals, available match commitments, and potential economic impact. Stakeholders were then provided with guidelines outlining the information required when the project collection portal became operational. The portal was launched during our second regional meeting on October 25, 2023 and remained open until November 17, 2023. Stakeholders from across East Central Indiana were invited to submit information and supporting materials for potential projects through this portal, resulting in over 165 projects submitted across the eight-county region. Unlike the READI 1.0 call for projects, the East Central READI 2.0 call for projects was more deliberate and targeted. Instead of a broad, open call, the region sought projects that clearly aligned with its developed vision, goals, and strategies, as well as with IEDC's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). East Central Indiana then implemented a three-phase process to prioritize projects. This project ranking process allowed the region to organize the submissions into a tiered project list based on impact and feasibility. In the first phase, approximately five elected officials from each county were selected to participate, along with Steering Committee members. Steering Committee members for the READI 2.0 planning process included representatives from each county's local economic development organization as well as another community leader within the county. County leaders were invited to score each project from their respective county using a custom scoring



framework. Projects scored higher if they aligned with East Central Indiana's regional goals and IEDC's Key Performance Indicators, exhibited significant match, advanced existing community plans, and had the potential to be highly impactful. Highly impactful projects could catalyze significant change and promote growth in the county, region, and/or broader economy. Following these evaluations, the project team hosted a virtual follow-up meeting for each county. During the meeting, the project team reviewed the results of the ranking exercise to confirm consensus on the county's top ten projects. In the second phase, county leaders and additional stakeholders, including institutional leaders, community foundations, and major employers, were asked to score another pool of projects. This pool included the top five projects from each county, in addition to any multi-county projects that were submitted. From this round of scoring, the project team was able to identify the top 20 projects for the region that best contributed to the identified regional goals and the IEDC's Key Performance Indicators. The final phase involved meeting with the Steering Committee to review the cumulative results of the ranking process. Based on Steering Committee feedback, a three-tier project pipeline was then created. Tier 1 projects included projects ranked among the top 20 in the second phase of the ranking process. Tier 2 projects included projects ranked among the top 5 for each county in the first phase, if they did not advance to Tier 1. Finally, Tier 3 projects included all other projects that were submitted through the portal. It is important to note that no final funding decisions have been made for any projects. The region anticipates partnering with the IEDC to identify and select final projects for READI 2.0 consideration. Additionally, projects may have evolved or become more developed since the initial call for projects was released in October. This evolution could lead to additional projects seeking READI 2.0 support once a regional allocation has been finalized. After funding is determined by the IEDC, the region looks forward to extending conversations with the IEDC READI team to discuss projects in further detail. At that time, additional information will be collected, including updated timelines and budgets. If another call for projects is needed to capture emerging projects, the process is envisioned to follow a similar methodology as outlined above and will remain intentional and inclusive to gather broad perspective and input from the entire region.

If applicable, explain how the proposed or potential investments described above leverage additional investments within immediate proximity of another investment. You may consider a plan to make additional investments within the surrounding area to enhance the viability and economic benefit (e.g., accelerating population growth) of the project's implementation.

The region is prepared to leverage additional investments to maximize the impact of READI 2.0 projects. Collectively, Ball State University, Taylor University, and Earlham College received \$90 million from Lilly Endowment to fund projects through the College and Community Collaboration Initiative (CCCI). In Muncie, CCCI will support Ball State's plans to revitalize the Village, a commercial district adjacent to campus. This project will enhance connectivity and vibrancy in neighborhoods surrounding downtown Muncie and activate adjacent projects, including the McKinley-Whitely Live Learn Neighborhood project (READI 1.0) and the proposed White River Greenway project. In Upland, Taylor University is investing in their "Main Street Mile" to connect downtown Upland to the University through pedestrian enhancements and infrastructure. This investment can activate the proposed Upland Master Planned Residential Community project. In downtown Richmond, CCCI is funding capital projects and small business support to enhance entrepreneurship and fill vacant storefronts. Earlham's plan builds off the Richmond Rising investment that will complete 150 market-rate apartments in the heart of downtown (READI 1.0). To maintain momentum, the Richmond Main Street project has been identified as a READI 2.0 project that could further revitalization through a grant program that



supports additional private investment. Lilly Endowment's Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (GIFT) VIII program provides an opportunity to leverage investments to catalyze change in the region. In the coming months, the region looks forward to working with IEDC, community foundations, and local leaders to identify additional projects that align with strategies, create synergy, and maximize funding.

Broad stakeholder input in the planning and execution of READI 2.0 projects will be critical for a successful regional development strategy. Describe how the region proactively engaged a diverse group of individuals, organizations, and interest groups during the planning process and how you solicited input when developing the plan. Describe any challenges and how the region came together.

The READI 2.0 regional plan was developed with the input and support of community members across East Central Indiana. Through a six-month engagement process, over 3,300 participants were encouraged to share their perspective, ideas, and opinions about the future of the eight-county region. Intentional steps were taken to engage students, residents, employers, and community leaders from each county to build regional consensus and promote partnership. Engagement opportunities, which ranged from surveys to stakeholder meetings, allowed the project team to identify regional priorities and challenges. Shaped by abundant feedback, these priorities and challenges evolved to become the vision, goals, and strategies for East Central Indiana. The READI 2.0 initiative represents the most comprehensive, far-reaching engagement effort to date in East Central Indiana. The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership found it particularly important to intentionally engage stakeholders from all eight counties, ensuring that all voices are heard, and creating truly regional consensus on East Central Indiana's goals and strategies. The region has learned from READI 1.0 that there are no shortcuts to regionalism. Past engagement efforts are no substitute for active attempts to engage the community. With a region of this size, active engagement posed a significant challenge. Nonetheless, the region rose to the challenge, enthusiastically sharing and participating in engagement opportunities hosted by the project team. Engagement efforts began with the formation of a Steering Committee. This committee consisted of representatives from each county's local economic development organization accompanied by another community leader to ensure equal representation across the region. The Steering Committee met every 1-2 months throughout the planning process to review engagement results and draft materials. Steering Committee members provided insight into the region, helped connect the project team to stakeholders, and promoted engagement opportunities to maximize reach. In addition to regular Steering Committee meetings, the project team facilitated a county workshop in each of the region's eight counties to engage elected officials, anchor institutions, major employers, and other community leaders. Participants were asked to envision the future of their county and identify barriers preventing them from achieving their vision and aspirations. Across the region, there were 217 participants in the county workshops. County workshop participants were invited to attend regional workshops. These workshops focused on building consensus around regional priorities, and each workshop brought together over 100 participants to share their unique perspective. The project team also facilitated 12 stakeholder meetings on a range of topics, from recreation to entrepreneurs and downtown development. Stakeholder meetings were intimate and focused, allowing the project team to gather information on specific challenges facing the region. Finally, the project team engaged the public, including youth in the region, through online surveys. The general public input survey garnered 1,058 responses, and the youth survey received 1,720 responses. The public input surveys highlighted regional strengths and weaknesses and identified critical missing components in the region. The youth survey was distributed to high schools and colleges, and provided important insight on the personal plans, experiences, and desires of young adults in the region.



How do you plan to maintain stakeholder engagement?

Building on the momentum from the READI 2.0 planning process, the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership is committed to maintaining stakeholder engagement. This will be accomplished through a multi-prong approach centered around meetings and active communication. **MEETINGS WITH STAKEHOLDERS:** ECIRP will host annual meetings for elected officials to provide training and discuss best practices in economic development. This will ensure that elected officials contribute to and understand regional priorities, even as transitions occur, and new faces lead the region's communities. To engage other stakeholders, an annual luncheon will be held. This will keep community leaders and anchor institutions up to date on regional progress. The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership will also attend regular county meetings to offer a regional perspective and support for county-level initiatives. Additional regional-level meetings may be held in order to keep momentum and continue to foster regionalism by providing networking opportunities, opportunities to interact, and review and refine our regional development plan as needed. **ACTIVE COMMUNICATION:** ECIRP will continue to issue newsletters and press releases to share progress of READI projects. Online resources, including the Forge Your Path website and social media, will be updated regularly to communicate regional progress. These resources will be used to inform community members, and to solicit feedback. Finally, ECIRP will pursue a comprehensive communications strategy, utilizing radio, TV, op eds, and more, to keep the public engaged with regional economic development efforts, and showcase the impact being made by READI and partnership with the IEDC.

How will the organization sustain itself?

The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership has been self-sustaining since its inception in 2005. The organization, a 501(c)3, is a privately funded non-profit with a mix of support that ranges from philanthropic grant support, utility partner support, educational institutions, and private sector investors and has an annual budget of nearly \$500,000. The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership launched a new strategic plan in July 2023. One of the core strategies of this plan is to continue building investor support to grow the organization's capabilities to further develop the impact on and sustain momentum in the East Central region. Coupled with the other elements of the newly launched strategic plan, ECIRP will become a more impactful and positive change agent for the region.

If applicable, use this space to describe the plan to maintain, or activate the asset(s) the IEDC is investing in if more information is needed.

After funding is determined by the IEDC and projects are selected for implementation, the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership will continue to provide oversight and support of the grant process and act as an intermediary between projects and the IEDC. However, subrecipients will be responsible for the delivery of individual projects and must have the financial capacity and plan in place to maintain the assets for the long-term. The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership is eager to collaborate with the IEDC on the establishment of the proposed East Central Indiana Regional Land Bank and East Central Indiana Rural/Disadvantaged Development Fund. These initiatives will provide additional support region-wide, enhancing the goals and strategies outlined in this application and in the attached 2024 Regional Development Plan.



Part V: Outcomes, KPIs and Metrics

Define the region’s expected outcomes if the plan is successfully implemented. Consider the economic development potential of this plan and how this plan demonstrates both regional and local impact.

Through strategic investments in quality of life, place, and opportunity, the region will counteract population decline, increasing the annual regional growth rate to 0% or higher by 2031. Assuming population decline occurs at approximately 0.4% annually, as demonstrated from 2010 to 2020, this requires attracting or retaining 1,500 people across the region each year. By 2031, the region will be poised for growth. New housing stock is needed to promote population growth. Approximately 3,000 housing units have been proposed as part of the regional plan, which could be constructed in the next few years with READI support. Building off this momentum, the region aspires to develop 7,200 housing units by 2030, or 720 units per year. Housing will be varied and include affordable and market-rate options, as well as rental and homeownership opportunities. The region will boost educational attainment by enabling an additional 1,300 residents to obtain a bachelor’s degree (or higher) each year. This will result in 25% of residents holding such a degree by 2031. Finally, the region aims to improve livelihoods. Expanding the availability of well-paying, satisfying jobs, and matching skilled workers to these positions will boost per capita income and wages per employee by 47% (real-dollar value) by 2031. Quality jobs, combined with an affordable cost of living, will draw residents to the region, supporting towns and cities throughout East Central Indiana. A stable population will provide local communities with the tax revenue needed to maintain and enhance community assets.

Please complete the table below with 5-year and 10-year projections with Indiana’s economic development priorities.

Key performance indicators	Current	5-year projection	10-year projection
Total Population	375,510	375,510	375,510
Total Employment	136,384	136,384	136,384
Per capita income	\$ 46,899.70	\$ 57,921.13	\$ 68,942.56
Educational attainment	49,608	56,108	62,608
Total new housing units	170,437	174,037	177,637
New rental housing units	45,262	46,342	47,422
New owner-occupied housing units	104,870	107,390	109,910
Percentage of affordable housing units	74%	74%	74%



Please describe your 5-year and 10-year projections for childcare within your region. Factors you may want to consider: Increase the number of childcare facilities and/or the number of seats in specific counties or regional total with the overall goal of decreasing childcare deserts in the state, Increase quality of childcare.

East Central Indiana lacks sufficient access to affordable, high-quality childcare. To overcome this barrier, the region has outlined several strategies. These strategies build on READI 1.0 investments, including the creation of the TRAC program, which is designed to identify gaps and limitations in care, train providers, and advocate for the needs of the industry. The TRAC program will be a critical resource as East Central Indiana seeks to (1) increase wages for early childhood educators, (2) encourage employers, schools, and churches to offer services, and (3) develop new, stand-alone childcare centers. According to Brighter Futures Indiana, licensed facilities in the region can only support 49% of children in need of care, compared to 55% for Indiana. By 2026, the region aims to be on par with the state, adding 900 seats. By 2031, the region aspires to serve 60% of children in need, which will require an additional 800 seats.

Please describe your 5-year and 10-year projections for innovation activities within your region. Factors you may want to consider: Increase specific number or percentage of new business start-ups within specific counties or increase regional total, Increase number of patent filings or SBIR/STTR activity, Increase in research and development spending of university or other partners

East Central Indiana is committed to spurring innovation and entrepreneurship in the region. Given support, entrepreneurs can transform dreams into real business ventures, creating quality job opportunities that benefit new and existing residents. The region is investing in spaces dedicated to innovation, including co-working spaces, makerspaces, and community kitchens, and offering financial and technical support to entrepreneurs. Several of ECI's entrepreneurial assets are interested in expanding the scope of their operations with READI 2.0 support, including the Muncie Innovation Connector, John Jay Center for Learning, and Vision Corner. Through these efforts, ECI will encourage growth in new business applications filed at a rate of 2.6% annually. This rate is based on the 2021 to 2022 growth rate as reported in the U.S. Census Bureau's Business Applications by County tables. In 2021, 2,835 new business applications were filed. By 2031, ECI will report 3,665 new business applications across the eight-county region.

Include additional metrics that are specific to the region if applicable.

While not a traditional metric, there has recently been an uptick in entrepreneurial pitch competitions in the region, such as Launch Jay (Jay County), Innovation Connector's Big Idea Pitch Competition (Delaware County), and Open for Business (Randolph County), to name a few. In addition, Vision Corner, a READI 1.0 funded project, will be launching a new Student Pitch Competition this spring, further illustrating the growing interest in developing East Central Indiana's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Therefore, another metric to consider would be the growing number of competitions on an annual basis, and if such events can be encouraged and executed across all counties in the region to spur innovation and entrepreneurship.



General Information

Legal Name as registered with Indiana Secretary of State (Region Name)	East Central Indiana Regional Partnership
Business Structure	501(c)(3)
List counties within your region	Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph, Wayne
Website	www.forgeeci.com and www.ecirp.org

Primary Contact Information

Primary Contact Name	Trevor Friedeberg
Title	President and CEO
Address of Company Contact	PO Box 1912
City	Muncie
State	IN
Phone	765-254-1420
Email	tfriedeberg@ecirp.org