



## Introduction

North Central Indiana is a region on the rise. Formally created more than a decade ago, the North Central Indiana Regional Planning Council's (NCIRPC) focus has been to create long-term sustainability, overcome regional population loss, continue to build the skills of the local workforce, attract new innovation investment, and diversify the regional economy. The region has seen significant investments in quality-of-life improvements that have led to the region outperforming projected population loss over the last 14 years with Howard County experiencing population growth for the first time since 2010. Since May of 2022, Stellantis and Samsung SDI have announced a record-setting \$6.3 billion investment in two StarPlus Energy electric vehicle (E.V.) battery plants in Kokomo. In addition, five suppliers will be locating throughout the region adding another \$500 million of investment. In total, nearly 3,600 new, high-paying jobs will be coming to the North Central region in the next five years making the region one of the country's fastest-growing advanced manufacturing reshoring hubs.

This success has not been by accident. It is a direct result of ongoing investment in regional strategies supported by decades of regional collaboration. Bound together by shared transportation networks, geographic proximity to major metro hubs in Indianapolis and Chicago, industry clusters in advanced manufacturing and agribusiness, common patterns of commerce, and a shared skilled workforce, NCIRPC brings regional stakeholders together from both urban and rural communities to overcome the challenges that are common to rural regions and capitalize on the opportunities unique to the North Central region.

With recent generational economic growth, the region will continue to invest resources in its strategies to best maximize the returns on recent momentum and build on that momentum to ensure that dynamic growth will be sustained into the future.

## Overall Regional Vision and Strategies

The North Central region has a long history of being an innovator in building things – from automobiles to farm implements. Moving forward, the region will build on its historical successes to achieve its vision:

**To become an international destination for innovation investment and a recognized leader in advanced manufacturing and technological innovation.**

This includes the production, research, and development of new technologies and their applications. To accomplish this, the region must attract and retain an innovation workforce, build connected and vibrant communities, expand regional housing and quality-of-life amenities, attract private investment in target industries, leverage key regional assets and partnerships, and deliver the projects and infrastructure to foster a true culture of innovation. This includes continued strategic investment in the following goals:



## Goal 1: 21st Century Workforce Development and Education

### Goal:

Grow and attract a skilled workforce by creating educational pathways for future generations and continuing to up-skill and re-skill the current workforce by supporting new and expanded educational opportunities for **1,000 additional students, increase degree/certificate attainment 17.5%, and grow wages 28% by 2030.**

### Strategies:

- Continue work with regional education partners to build a 21st Century workforce with re-skilling and up-skilling programs.
- Support the next generation of the regional workforce with career pathways programs.
- Ensure that regional training and degree programs are aligned with the needs of regional employers and target sectors.

### IEDC Goal Alignment:

- Increase Educational Attainment
- Growth in Employment Opportunities
- Per Capita Income Growth
- Innovation Activities



## Goal 2: Enhancing Quality of Life and Place

### Goal:

Enrich the region with diverse and unique quality-of-life amenities, activities, and service that help build connected and vibrant communities, and retain and attract a young, innovative, **increase the region's population 1.5% and add 1,480 Level 3/4 childcare seats by 2034.**

### Strategies:

- Increase access to quality childcare services.
- Invest in revitalization and blight abatement in downtowns and neighborhoods throughout the region.
- Support development patterns and projects that encourage mixed-use, walkable, and well-connected communities.
- Effectively leverage the region's natural resources, recreational assets and greenspaces.
- Increase investment in destination tourism assets, public art, cultural assets, and entertainment options that improve the region's quality of life.

### IEDC Goal Alignment:

- Population Growth
- Educational Attainment
- House Unit Developed
- Private Investment
- Childcare Capacity
- Rural Community Investment

## Goal 3: Diversifying and Expanding Housing Options

### Goal:

Build a new, diverse, and modern housing stock that accommodates multiple income levels and product types to retain existing residents and attract new workforce to the North Central region by **developing 2,649 units, and growing the population 1.5% by 2030.**

### Strategies:

- Ensure each county understands potential housing needs and barriers to attainment.
- Support single-family development at a variety of product types and price points.
- Support the development of multi-family residential products, including both rental and non-rental options.
- Promote infill and redevelopment of vacant and underutilized properties.

### IEDC Goal Alignment:

- Population Growth
- Housing Units Developed
- Private Investment
- Employment Growth
- Disadvantaged Community Investment
- Rural Community Investment



## Goal 4: Expanding Diverse Business and Job Growth

### Goal:

Enhance regional economic growth and sustainability by supporting incentives for new commercial and industrial development in the region's target clusters, increasing high-paying jobs 6%, increasing industry diversity 4%, issuing \$500,000 in small business loans, and growing new business starts 49% by 2030.

### Strategies:

- Continue to plan and leverage the region's existing transportation assets of I-65, U.S. 31, U.S. 24, and Grissom Aeroplex.
- Support entrepreneurship and small business development regionally.
- Support programs to expand and retain the region's existing business community.
- Promote regional economic diversification to support economic resiliency.

### IEDC Goal Alignment:

- Employment Growth
- Population Growth
- Per Capita Income Growth
- Private Investment
- Rural Community Investment
- Disadvantaged Community Investment
- Innovation Activities



## Goal 5: Expanding Broadband Access

### Goal:

Expand regional broadband capacity to all homes by 2034 by implementing local strategies that provide the region's communities and rural areas with download speeds of at least 25 Mbps and upload speeds of at least 3 Mbps so community members can flexibly live, learn, and work.

### Strategies:

- Continue to increase the region's broadband connectivity, ensuring that each resident has access to reliable internet with download speeds of at least 25 Mbps and upload speeds of at least 3 Mbps.

### IEDC Goal Alignment:

- Population Growth
- Growth in Employment Opportunities
- Disadvantaged Community Investment
- Rural Investment



## Expected Outcomes

Regional stakeholders are actively collaborating and developing new and unique initiatives, programs, and projects to continue to build the North Central region as a collection of welcoming, vibrant, and connected communities much greater than the sum of its individual parts. To maximize its potential, the region must harness the opportunities and assets of both its urban and rural areas. Over the next five years, the region is working to increase the following: total regional employment by 3,600 jobs with an average salary of \$66,700, regional population by 1.5%, high-paying jobs by 6%, total housing units by 2.6%, total rental units by 7.8%, total owner-occupied units by 1.3% and childcare seats by 23.7%.

Through ongoing regional planning, the region has created a pipeline of shovel-ready housing, quality of life/place, workforce development and quality of opportunity projects focused on delivering regional strategies. With READI 2.0's support as an accelerant, the region can deliver \$248 million in local investment and \$4.4 billion in private investment to drive State and regional metrics.

## Regional Assets and Unique Qualities

The North Central region is rich with assets to retain and grow the region's population and continue diverse economic growth. US-31, I-65, and US-24 provide excellent connectivity throughout the region, and the country, to anchor regional economies and labor sheds like Chicago, Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, South Bend, and Lafayette. With the longest runway in Indiana, Grissom ARB presents numerous unique economic development opportunities. For example, AZIsotopes and SpectronRx, nuclear medicine and radionuclide manufacturing companies specializing in developing and producing medical isotopes and research, have developed a just-in-time nuclear medicine hub utilizing the runway. Additionally, discussions are actively taking place around new aeronautics-related industry investments around Grissom.

The region possesses a strong economic advantage in the manufacturing cluster that has seen significant growth and has exports of over \$8 billion annually. StarPlus Energy's announced investments in Kokomo and Samsung SDI's investment in New Carlisle are expected to have profound impacts across the region and are already attracting new suppliers and jobs throughout the region.

The region's educational partners not only play a role in helping the region to reach its educational attainment goals, but they are also essential to driving economic development goals. The North Central region is fortunate to have three engaged and active higher education partners: Indiana University Kokomo, Ivy Tech, and Purdue Polytechnic Institute. They have been leaders in responding to the shifts in workforce training needs for a modern economy and have developed regional education programs custom-tailored to local employer needs. They are working actively with regional employers to develop spaces and curricula to serve the region's burgeoning E.V. cluster.

## Benchmark Communities

NCIRPC has worked with Indiana University to benchmark peer communities since its inception (the latest update is attached). Of the 12 benchmark communities within the report, the area around Chattanooga, Tennessee was selected as the focus for this application.

It was selected for several reasons including geographic similarities, industry mix, regional assets, and demographics. The main reason for selection, however, was the region's significant growth in population and per capita income over the last several decades (two of North Central's primary leading

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indicators of overall regional success). The North Central region has targeted its strategies on many of the lessons learned from its peer communities, such as: methods to secure foreign direct investment in advanced manufacturing, investing in quality-of-life and quality-of-place amenities, creative use of local public resources, embracing mixed-use development, and leveraging educational partners to build creative workforce training programs. Details of the peer community analysis are included in the application.

## Regional Goals Alignment with the State's Economic Goals

The strategies outlined in this application are short and long-term strategies designed to meet the immediate needs and seize upon the unique opportunities with the region to deliver sustained success and positively advance the region's metrics. While the strategies have been updated and fine-tuned to respond to the ever-evolving landscape, they are consistent with the same strategies that the region has been pursuing since 2012. As noted previously, these strategies are directly aligned with the state's KPIs of Population Growth, Per Capita Income Growth, Growth in Employment Opportunities, Educational Attainment, Developing Housing Units, Expanding Childcare, Expanding Innovation, Expanding Private Investment, and Rural/Disadvantaged Investment.

## Regional Collaboration

Regional collaboration that delivers regional strategies is at the heart of the region's success. The region has executed a series of strategies that have been developed through years of regional planning efforts including multiple CEDS documents, a 21st Century Talent Region Plan, and the North Central Indiana Regional Development Plan (RDP) completed during READI 1.0.

The RDP brought together nearly 800 regional stakeholders through a series of six county workshops, regional workshops, community and youth surveys, and individual stakeholder conversations. Stakeholders included industry leaders, small business owners, school corporations, higher education institutions, youth within the region, not-for-profits, elected officials, the general public, and local economic development leaders. During the process, stakeholders defined their vision, goals and the opportunities and barriers related to achieving long-term success in the region. The result was a broad regional consensus around not only the desired vision of the region but also a clear roadmap of strategies and metrics to deliver desired outcomes. The region completed the same engagement process in developing this READI 2.0 application and added special focus group discussions about childcare and innovation.

Recent record-setting private investment is made possible by implementing bold strategies and partnerships between local governments, the State of Indiana, non-profits, the private sector, higher education institutions, local school corporations, and NCIRPC. While the North Central region is certainly proud of its most recent successes, these successes are just leading indicators of a much larger economic evolution that is accelerating across the region.



## Part II: READI 1.0 Evaluation

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

**READI 1.0 Stakeholder Engagement** In 2021, the region formed a Steering Committee composed of representatives from each city and county in the region, industry leaders, LEDOs, education institutions, and non-profits. They decided that rather than simply submit a READI application, they would use the opportunity to formalize a Regional Development Plan (RDP). The RDP would build on previous regional planning work including two prior Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plans and a 21st Century Talent Region plan. They would expand that work with unprecedented regional stakeholder engagement to build consensus around the vision, goals, and strategies to deliver growing the regional workforce and supporting long-term economic success for the region. The Steering Committee understood that stakeholder engagement was the key to broad regional consensus, ownership of the plan by regional partners, and ultimately, the successful implementation of the plan. A diverse collection of more than 800 stakeholders were engaged, including industry leaders, small business owners, school corporations, higher education institutions, youth, non-profits, elected officials, the public, and local economic development leaders. The Steering Committee facilitated a series of engagement events, including county workshops in the region's six counties to understand local and regional issues, a public survey, a youth survey, a workforce development summit, and two region-wide workshops to finalize the region's vision, goals, and strategies.

**READI 1.0 Project Identification and Prioritization** Once the RDP process was nearly complete, the Steering Committee began to gather information regarding projects that would specifically address the RDP's strategies and metrics. Ultimately, over 160 potential projects were identified by regional stakeholders. The Steering Committee then began a structured, systematic evaluation process to prioritize the project/program list based on their alignment with regional/State goals and strategies, the commitments for local and private match dollars to support project delivery, and the shovel-readiness of the projects/programs. They were also prioritized based on their regional impact on key performance indicators, including: improving population growth, educational attainment, personal earnings, assessed value growth, average age of population, and business/job growth. After multiple rounds of prioritization/negotiation to identify the most regionally impactful investments, the Steering Committee recommended the RDP and the final prioritized project list to the NCIRPC READI Oversight Committee for their final approval. This committee of private sector partners was specifically established to help oversee and support the implementation of any projects utilizing READI 1.0 funding. Multi-layered stakeholder accountability, a strategy at the very heart of the formation of the NCIRPC, was the best approach to ensure not just the success of READI 1.0, but the success of the implementation of the RDP itself.

**READI 1.0 Investment to Date** Ultimately, the 21 projects/programs funded with the \$30 million awarded to the region are delivering \$332 million of local investment and \$2.8 billion in private capital investment (nearly 25% of the total public and private investment for READI 1.0). To date, the region has 100% of its funds obligated, nearly 75% under construction, and anticipates 100% of its projects will be under construction by the end of 2024.

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



Importance of Proactive Project Preparedness READI 1.0 reinforced that proactively developing a robust pipeline of shovel-ready and shovel-worthy projects built around delivering the region's strategies is critical. This allows the region to strategically pursue multiple funding sources and remain nimble and flexible enough to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities when they arise. Stakeholders must take proactive steps to prepare for the possibility of quick project delivery such as performing prior due diligence, securing property control, developing realistic budgets, and building the public/private partnerships that are essential to delivering many types of projects. Additionally, project partners must plan in advance to have financial skin in the game. This includes such steps as integrating projects that will deliver regional strategies into annual budgets and capital improvement planning. A cohesive and comprehensive regional strategy allows the region to be responsive and resilient to unforeseen economic growth opportunities and challenges. Strategy Development Framework The region leveraged the success of READI 1.0's project prioritization framework to prepare for READI 2.0. The RDP had already built regional consensus around vision, barriers, opportunities, SMART goals, strategies, and metrics. This engagement process was key to the region's READI 1.0 success. The North Central region has a long history of positive collaboration, but the expedited timeline of READI 1.0 created the opportunity to test that collaboration in a crucible. It helped establish the rules of engagement for decision-making that has reinforced trust among the region's partners and has made the region even stronger. This trust has served the region well during preparation for READI 2.0 and will continue to do so in the future. Building a Resilient Economy Over its history, the region has watched its local economy ebb and flow, sometimes dramatically. As the region welcomes a new wave of tremendous private investment, its communities are focused on how best to leverage that private investment not just for success today, but how to ensure long-term resiliency and success in the future. Weathering economic ups and downs can be mitigated by diversifying the economy, creating an agile and responsive education and workforce development system, and supporting organizations that promote resiliency. The region is using today's investment to diversify the economy, focusing not just on advanced manufacturing, but also new, emerging clusters. The region is focused on bolstering workforce development and education to support not just the manufacturing of new technologies, but also to build the required skills to research and develop the next generation of technology. In addition to the role NCIRPC plays as facilitator and disseminator of information (key to responsive resiliency), the region is assuming an expanded and proactive role by leading regional marketing efforts and managing proposed regional small business development and rural development revolving loan funds. While it is absolutely necessary to fully support the private investment taking place today, the region realizes that in order to build a resilient economy, it must leverage the investments being made today to ensure long-term sustainability for generations to come.

**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 North Central region, through NCIRPC, has over a decade of organizational experience providing and successfully delivering regional planning and grant administration services for state and federal funding programs for the region. Including READI 1.0, NCIRPC has secured more than \$52 million in grant funding and has completed more than 155 projects across its six-county region. Since its inception, NCIRPC has been led by Executive Director, Steven Ray. Mr. Ray has 18 years of experience in community development and grant administration. He is a state-certified Grant Administrator and is responsible for maintaining working relationships with elected officials, economic development organizations, and key community leaders



throughout the region. During READI 1.0, NCIRPC's Board identified that for the organization to realize its full potential, additional capacity was necessary to support regional initiatives. Mr. Ray's staff is now composed of three additional individuals with a combined 40 years of experience in community development and grant administration, including two state-certified grant administrators. NCIRPC's staff expands the operational capacity of communities throughout the region, including 34 cities, counties and rural communities, to provide support in areas such as contract review, labor standards, grant writing/administration, compliance, reporting, environmental review, data analysis, and procurement. The organization is financially supported by its member counties and receives additional income through grants and fees for service contracts. This model has served the organization well since its inception. Funding partners have invested in growing staff and supporting initiatives like READI with funding beyond their normal annual support. This financial commitment from regional partners provides long-term sustainability for the organization. Additionally, the region has created a private sector oversight committee to review investments made as part of the READI process to help ensure project delivery and continued alignment with regional strategies. During the development of READI 1.0's RDP, NCIRPC realized that, while they have provided critical regional support for over a decade, the organization must play a larger role in facilitating ongoing regional collaboration. The organization is now expanding services to assist in regional initiatives like coordinating a regional marketing/branding effort, overseeing the regional early learning and childcare working group, leading regional cultural appreciation training, conducting regional transportation planning, helping manage a proposed revolving loan fund targeting direct investment in the region's rural communities, and managing a proposed regional loan fund to help support ongoing small business development efforts that are occurring throughout the region. Many of these services activate NCIRPC's potential to increase regional impact and provide sustainability to the region. Particularly, the region's revolving loan funds will play a key role in providing long-term sustainability of READI 2.0 funds while ensuring READI 2.0 dollars have an impact for decades. NCIRPC understands that, like all organizations, it must evolve to meet the changing needs of its constituency. Board members, investor partners, and staff are all aligned to continue investing in staff and resources to ensure NCIRPC continues to fulfill its role in helping facilitate the ongoing regional transformation and its overall economic success.

## 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	226,519.00
Total employment (U.S. Census Bureau)	3,020,345	67,540.00
Per capita income (Bureau of Economic Analysis)	\$ 51,645.95	\$ 46,626.00
Total population with bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau)	1,253,299	28,069.00
Total housing units (U.S. Census Bureau)	2,911,562	100,739.00
Total rental housing units (U.S. Census Bureau)	680,964	23,174.00
Total owner-occupied units (U.S. Census Bureau)	1,097,622	66,168.00
Number of new business start-ups (Small Business Development Center)	150,067	1,823.00

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.

Providing early childhood education and childcare is a complex and nuanced problem. Overwhelming consensus exists among regional stakeholders that a lack of childcare is hindering economic development and growth. The 2024 North Central Employer Needs Survey indicates 73% of employers believe a lack of available and affordable childcare affects employee retention. Childcare providers identified balancing paying staff a living wage while providing care at an affordable cost is a challenge (regional childcare worker median wage = \$11.61/hour). The need for additional facility space, worker attrition, the lack of a talent pipeline, and costly state and federal policies are other challenges.

Brighter Futures Indiana indicates that 16,986 children may need care in the region, but capacity exists to serve only 5,053 children. Thus, 70% of the region's children are without clear options for care. Only 60% of current regional seats are considered "high quality" using the Indiana Paths to Quality scale and 1,565 seats are not registered in Indiana's Pathways to Quality Database.

The childcare gap will only increase with the addition of 3,600 new jobs in the region over the next five years. The region has identified three childcare projects that can utilize READI 2.0 to provide additional childcare space, in locations where talent pipelines already exist, to add 280 childcare seats immediately to serve as models for 1200 additional seats by 2034. The region has also developed a working group of schools, childcare providers, and public sector members who are actively working to identify solutions to expand childcare alternatives.

**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).**

The North Central region has a proven track-record of building things that support global technology transitions. Recent onshoring investments of \$6.3 billion by StarPlus Energy in two new E.V. battery facilities are currently underway. These new facilities and their related suppliers will create over 3,600 high-paying jobs. AZIsotopes, SpectronRx, and others are leveraging Grissom Aeroplex (the State's longest runway) to establish a hub for nuclear medicine, R&D, and aeronautic innovation.

The Inventrek Certified Technology Park in Kokomo supports business start-ups with an affordable incubator space and support services. IUK supports entrepreneurship by providing free or discounted consulting services to new business start-ups at Innovation Hall. Ivy Tech has invested in Industry 4.0/E.V. training facilities to up-skill, re-skill, and create pipelines of innovation workforce, supporting ongoing regional private investment. To overcome the access to capital barrier for start-ups, the region plans to utilize READI 2.0 to develop a regional business loan fund to support new start-ups.

The regional innovation culture stretches beyond just its target industry clusters. StatsAmerica's Innovation Intelligence Index (III) measures relative innovation by county. The region's counties collectively average a top-line III score of 116, or 16% above average. The region's counties also score particularly well in key sub-indices that play a vital role in driving the State's innovation metrics. On average, the region's counties collectively score 29% above average in Employment and Productivity, 56% above average in Industry Diversity, 25% above average in the Change in Average Patents, and 90% above average in Patent Diversity.

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

#### Top Employers

- Stellantis, Transmissions-automobile-manufacturers, Kokomo, 7,000 jobs
- Frito-Lay Inc, Food Production, Frankfort, 3,000 jobs
- U.S. AirforceGovernment, Grissom ARB, 2,600 jobs
- Tyson Fresh Meats, Meat-retail, Logansport, 2,200 jobs
- Community Howard Regional Health, Hospitals, Kokomo, 1,064 jobs
- NHK, Automotive Component Mfg, Frankfort, 908 jobs
- Logansport State Hospital, Hospitals, Logansport, 800 jobs
- Haynes International, Foundries-steel, Kokomo, 800 jobs
- Meijer, Grocers-retail, Kokomo, 700 jobs



- Ascension St. Vincent Kokomo, Hospitals, Kokomo 645 jobs

#### Community Foundations

- Tipton Community Foundation
- Community Foundation of Howard County
- Clinton County Community Foundation
- Miami County Community Foundation
- Cass County Community Foundation
- Fulton County Community Foundation

#### Chambers of Commerce

- Clinton County Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Kokomo Economic Development Alliance/Howard County Chamber of Commerce
- Logansport/Cass County Chamber of Commerce
- Miami County Chamber of Commerce
- Fulton County Chamber of Commerce
- Tipton County Chamber of Commerce

#### Main Street Organizations

1. Rochester Downtown Partnership
2. Logan's Landing (Logansport) - nationally accredited
3. Rediscover Downtown Peru - Indiana accredited
4. Greater Kokomo Downtown Council
5. Greentown Main Street Association
6. Frankfort Main Street - nationally accredited
7. Kirklin Main Street
8. Tipton Main Street Association

#### Educational Institutions

- Ivy Tech
- Indiana University Kokomo
- Purdue University

**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.**

Rural Counties: Fulton County, Tipton County

Rural-Mix Counties: Cass County, Clinton County, Miami County

Counties with Areas of Chronic Economic Distress: Clinton County, Fulton County, Miami County

\*Counties with Qualified Census Tracts: Cass County, Clinton County, Howard County, Miami County

The region has a blended composition of urban and rural communities, anchored by the urban hub of Kokomo. While not categorized as a rural county, the portion of Howard County outside of Kokomo closely



resembles the rest of the region's Rural and Rural-Mix counties and, thus, faces similar challenges. The Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool indicates that significant portions of every county in the region meet the thresholds of socioeconomic and environmental burden and are considered "disadvantaged."

To unlock the maximum potential of the region, it must activate the untapped potential of its rural areas. The ongoing \$6.3 billion private investment in the region has created new development opportunities throughout the region, including rural areas and disadvantaged communities both inside and outside of Howard County. With this in mind, 50% of the money received in READI 1.0 was targeted to State-classified rural areas and approximately 70% of READI 2.0 prioritized projects are focused on investing in state-classified rural areas. Every READI 2.0 dollar invested in the region will advance the State's KPIs of rural or disadvantaged community investment.

\*This does not match the IEDC's maps for READI 2.0, however, it is consistent with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's online mapping tool.

**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?**

The North Central region has been tracking a standard set of metrics since 2015. Since 2015, gross assessed value has increased 24.3%, average earnings per worker have increased 23.0%, population has remained stagnant, associate degree attainment has increased by 2.3%, and bachelor's degree attainment has increased by 2.5%. As part of READI 1.0, the region added five-year metrics to measure receipt of associate's degrees and technical certificates (increase by 6,000), median income (increase 6%), and share of the population in prime working age (increase 1%). In 2023, as a part of the region's 2024 CEDS update, the region added a new metric to measure the growth of the region's Chmura Industry Diversity Index. By 2030, the region hopes to grow this number by 4%. While it is too soon to understand the full impact of the region's READI 1.0 projects, the projects are anticipated to develop 230 multi-family and 197 single-family units and grow the region's population by an estimated 1,068 people, which alone would account for an estimated 0.5% growth in population (assuming 2.5 people/unit). There will be an estimated 1,850 new jobs created throughout the region because of READI 1.0. The 1,400 StarPlus jobs attributed to READI 1.0 will pay on average \$32.07 per hour, or \$66,705 a year. That is \$10,000 more than the region's current median household income. The region's READI 1.0 education initiatives will contribute to degree and certification attainment for 1,672 students between 2021 and 2024.



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:** Chattanooga-Cleveland-Dalton, Tennessee

Key performance indicators	Region	Peer Community
Total population	226,519.00	975,226.00
Total employment	103,352 (0.46 per capita)	445,193 (0.46 per capita)
Per capita income	27,427 (0.12 per capita)	162,443 (0.17 per capita)
Total population with bachelor's degree or higher	\$ 46,626.00	\$ 49,993.79
Total housing units	100,618 (.044 per capita)	420,979 (0.43 per capita)
Total rental housing units	25,737 (0.11 per capita)	124,873 (0.13 per capita)
Total owner-occupied housing units	65,096 (0.29 per capita)	258,231 (0.26 per capita)

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.

In 2011 Indiana University Kokomo and Indiana University Business Research Center completed a benchmarking study of IU Kokomo's service area and 12 peer communities. Since 2014, NCIRPC has updated and utilized this study to monitor the region's progress as compared to those peer communities. Because of several key factors, the Chattanooga-Cleveland-Dalton CSA (CCDCSA) was selected as the peer region to feature in this application.

North Central and CCDCSA both have strong manufacturing bases. Fourteen percent of the CCDCSA's employees and 27% of North Central's employees work in manufacturing. The CCDCSA is a two-hour drive from Atlanta and a two-hour-thirty-minute drive from Nashville. This parallels North Central's proximity to Indianapolis and Chicago. The CCDCSA area has seen large-scale investment from the South Korean company Qcells, a solar panel manufacturer. This closely relates to StarPlus's ongoing and planned investment in the North Central region. CCDCSA performs particularly well in two leading KPIs. The CCDCSA has seen a 19% growth in population between 2000 and 2020, whereas the North Central region has seen a 4% decline (although North Central is outperforming projections). The CCDCSA experienced an 80% growth in per capita income between 2000 and 2020, outpacing North Central's 71% growth.



A series of interviews were completed with key stakeholder entities in the CCDCSA to understand their challenges and what strategies have been used to overcome those challenges. They noted that they struggle with the same issues as North Central, such as limited early childhood education and childcare, housing needs, and the need to expand their talent base. Like the North Central region, members of CCDCSA are engaged in regular regional collaboration, visioning, planning, and strategy development. Their planning processes bring together a similar mix of elected officials, private sector stakeholders, and non-profits. The CCDCSA's vision is focused on quality of life, workforce development, economic development, connectivity, and collaboration and they note this ongoing collaboration is a key to the region's success.

CCDCSA leaders highlighted the importance of building a strong Korean community in the North Central region to retain new workers. Members of the CCDCSA noted the critical need to invest in quality-of-life and quality-of-place amenities. Some CCDCSA communities require a portion of all TIF revenue from any new economic development project to be re-invested into quality of place, and they have heavily invested in leveraging their natural assets to create quality-of-life amenities. They recommended that the North Central region continue its focus on building connected communities with trails, parks, and entertainment amenities (building on the region's existing 50-mile Clover Leaf Trail). The CCDCSA has also embraced mixed-use, walkable development in their downtown cores. Overall, the communities of the CCDCSA agreed that they have found the most success by combining job growth with strategic investments in quality of place to attract and retain people to both live and work in the region. The best practices learned from interviews with the CCDCSA have been integrated into the region's READI 2.0 strategies.

**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.**

#### Barriers to 21st Century Workforce Development and Education

Attracting and connecting innovative talent to careers is fundamental to increasing population and economic prosperity. K-12 and higher education stakeholders are working with employers to develop next-generation programs and facilities to support lifelong learning and close the 7% bachelor's degree attainment gap between the region and the state of Indiana. According to DWD, the region has 25,640 underemployed workers earning less than \$15/hr. Further investment is needed to support students transitioning from high school to post-secondary education or the workforce – through degree attainment, skilled trades training, or other certifications. The region's workforce must be re-skilled or up-skilled to meet the workforce needs of the region's growing innovation-focused advanced manufacturing sectors.

#### Barriers to Enhancing Quality of Life and Place

Thriving communities require a spectrum of quality-of-life amenities encompassing childcare, mixed-use development, parks, trails, restaurants, arts, entertainment, and cultural offerings. Funding and sustaining these kinds of amenities is challenging in rural areas, but progress has been made. Kokomo has led the way in quality-of-life investments, and, as a result, has reversed its population decline. However, more work must be done, especially in childcare, to drive positive population growth throughout the region. According to Brighter Futures Indiana, the region only has the capacity to meet about 30% of its potential 17,000-seat childcare

need.

#### Barriers to Diversifying and Expanding Housing Options

A lack of available housing in the region is a barrier to population growth and talent attraction. Recent housing studies show market support for over 4000 new housing units. The challenge is even more pressing as the 3,600 jobs from StarPlus Energy and its suppliers come online increasing demand. Current regional housing stock is old (median year built is 1963) and not the product type desired by current buyers. Escalating materials costs and public infrastructure limitations impede rural residential development. To expand its overall housing stock, the region must facilitate public-private partnerships to fill funding gaps to deliver new homes, apartments, and downtown residential infill neighborhood revitalization projects.

#### Barriers to Expanding Diverse Business and Job Growth

Prior to the StarPlus investment, the number of total businesses and jobs in the region was slowly declining over the last decade. Two primary barriers to attracting more jobs to the region are the cost of activating industrial sites with infrastructure and access to capital. To take full advantage of the regional economic development momentum, strategic investment must provide sites for development opportunities and support small business growth by expanding access to capital for entrepreneurs.

#### Barriers to Expanding Broadband Access

NCIRPC identified two challenges in its 2019 Broadband Study: 15.8% of the region's residents have no access to 25/3 providers and 36.5% had access to only one provider. As work and education becomes more digital, the region must engage public agencies and private providers to expand infrastructure to reach unserved rural areas to increase competition at affordable costs. Significant steps have been taken to address these challenges and additional resources are actively being sought outside of READI 2.0.

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

Potential strategic investments have been identified for each area of need below. With or without READI 2.0, the region will continue pursuing these opportunities. Because of the magnitude of recent regional job growth, however, there is an urgency to address the region's needs by seizing emergent market opportunities. With READI 2.0, IEDC can help maximize and accelerate the potential return on these opportunities. Time is of the essence to realize the full growth potential created by 3,600 new high-paying jobs and \$6.3 billion of investment in the North Central region.

#### 21st Century Workforce Development and Education

A 21st Century Talent region, NCIRPC has developed a comprehensive approach to talent development by promoting life-long training and support. The region must increase investment in expanded pathways for workforce development to grow regional talent at all levels. The region's workforce is aging, and must focus efforts on retaining high school and college graduates. Indiana University Kokomo retains 83% of its graduates in the State of Indiana and 49% in the region. The region must continue to grow the culture to keep them here and attract other college graduates to the region.

#### Enhancing Quality of Life and Place

Innovation thrives in places that facilitate collaboration and creativity. The region needs more place-based



investments targeted toward retaining and attracting the talent needed to fuel the next generation of economic growth. The region supports investments in arts, culture, parks, trails, small business development, and downtown redevelopment to cultivate community connection and catalyze the kinds of creative collisions necessary to spark innovation.

#### Diversifying and Expanding Housing Options

The regional need for complementary and diverse housing stock has been identified as the number one impediment to regional population growth. The region's housing strategy involves public/private partnerships to reduce the risk of development and prioritizing infill and redevelopment whenever possible. All counties have completed housing studies to quantify the demand for housing by product type, price point, and estimated annual absorption. Studies indicate demand totaling more than 4,000 units across the region. Targeted residential development parcels (including infill and redevelopment) and partnerships with landowners and developers have been identified in each community.

#### Expanding Diverse Business and Job Growth

The North Central region must continue to create public-private partnerships to strategically invest in growing and diversifying the regional economy at all levels. The region must continue to make key investments in infrastructure to support large-scale economic growth. At the same time, regional partners must invest in entrepreneurship to create diverse and resilient economies. This two-pronged approach not only ensures economic resilience through economic cycles, but it creates a more equitable regional economy where everyone has access to opportunity.

#### Expanding Broadband Access

The region must expand adequate broadband infrastructure to attract and retain population and jobs. Low population density in rural areas makes building the necessary infrastructure for broadband expensive, making it less attractive for private companies to invest in such areas. The region is already seeking alternative funding including \$27M from Next Level Connections.

## 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><b>21st Century Workforce Development and Education</b>  <b>Grow and attract a skilled workforce by creating educational pathways for future generations and continuing to up-skill and re-skill the current workforce by supporting new and expanded educational opportunities for 1,000 additional students, increase degree/certificate attainment 17.5%, and grow wages 28% by 2030.</b></p>	<p>21st Century Workforce Development and Education Continue work with regional education partners to build a 21st Century workforce with re-skilling and up-skilling programs. -Work with Ivy Tech, Indiana University Kokomo (IUK), Purdue, and the region's employers to develop affordable and accessible up-skilling and re-skilling programs for current employees, including building on IUK's existing micro-credentialing program. -Continue to develop training facilities and programs that are custom-designed to the needs of the innovation investment desired within the region. Support the next generation of the regional workforce with career pathways programs. -Expand existing partnerships between Ivy Tech, IUK, and the region's school corporations to further develop pathway programs in middle school and high school for in-demand careers, such as teachers, skilled trades, advanced manufacturing, childcare, nursing, computer science, business management, and exercise science. -Expand resources for independent career counselors within local schools to help young people better prepare for both pathways to college and pathways directly into the regional workforce. Ensure that regional training and degree programs are aligned with the needs of regional employers and target sectors. -Continue to regularly engage the region's private sector and educational leaders to ensure communication between all pertinent regional stakeholders is taking place. -At the state level, create a North Central region-specific Workforce Development Board to better serve the specific needs and opportunities of the region.</p>

**Enhancing Quality of Life and Place Enrich the region with diverse and unique quality of life amenities, activities, and services that help build connected and vibrant communities, and retain and attract a young, innovative workforce, increase the region's population 1.5% and add 1,480 Level 3/4 childcare seats by 2034.**

Enhancing Quality of Life and Place Increase access to quality childcare services. -Engage a regional childcare taskforce that meets regularly to drive forward childcare initiatives. -Fund a childcare study within the region to understand gaps in care, develop strategies to pursue to fill the gaps, and fund delivery of the strategies. -Support initiatives that aid in paying childcare workers a living wage. -Work with major employers to create on-site childcare facilities that serve employees and the broader community. Invest in revitalization and blight abatement in downtowns and neighborhoods throughout the region. -Deliver place-based investments that strengthen downtown areas (urban/rural), create signature public gathering/event spaces, remove blighted structures, and activate underutilized properties and vacant in-fill sites. Support development patterns and projects that encourage mixed-use, walkable, and well-connected communities. -Encourage developers to integrate a mix of uses and densities into development projects to create more sustainable communities. -Expand safe and reliable public transportation options/service for all citizens to better connect people to where they live, work, learn, and play. Effectively leverage the region's natural resources, recreational assets and greenspaces. -Deliver projects that improve, expand, engage, or connect amenities around the region's existing natural resources amenities. -Expand outdoor recreation options like parks, sports fields, and both passive and active greenspaces. -Expand local and regional trails to connect community and regional assets, fill the gaps in the current regional trail network, and to connect the region to other region's trail networks. Increase investment in destination tourism assets, public art, cultural assets, and entertainment options that improve the region's quality of life. -Support investments made in arts, music, and other aspects of the creative economy. -Increase funding for projects that support cultural inclusion and diversity. -Fund projects and initiatives in the region that strengthen the region's cultural capital make the region a more welcoming place.

**Diversifying and Expanding Housing Options Build a new, diverse, and modern housing stock that accommodates multiple income levels and product types to retain existing residents and attract new workforce to the North Central region by developing 2,649 units, and growing the population of the region 1.5%, by 2030.**

Diversifying and Expanding Housing Options Ensure each county understands potential housing needs and barriers to attainment.

- Encourage each county to continue to update their housing studies and develop a housing strategy.
- Understand the demand for housing product type and price point in each community.
- Identify potential development sites and perform site due diligence to identify potential red flags inhibiting development of the sites
- Develop cost estimates to understand the cost of activating each site with utilities.
- Build relationships with local and regional developers to connect them to potential development sites.

Support single-family development at a variety of product types and price points.

- Invest in projects that provide the infrastructure needed to activate diverse single-family residential developments.
- Where appropriate, promote mixed-density and mixed-product developments to create more complete neighborhoods and support changing market demands.

Support the development of multi-family residential products, including both rental and non-rental options.

- Invest in projects that provide the infrastructure needed to activate a mix of density and price points of multi-family residential development.
- Invest in projects that convert upper-floor downtown space into housing.

Promote infill and redevelopment of vacant and underutilized properties.

- Create an inventory of potential infill and neighborhood redevelopment sites.
- Proactively secure control of key properties to help facilitate their potential for development.
- Support projects and programs that help reduce the cost to developers for infill and redevelopment projects that will lead to more housing supply. This may include local financial incentives as well as updates to local development regulations.
- Seek state and federal funds to help develop creative financing tools to support these types of projects.
- Leverage the region’s \$500,000 EPA Brownfield Assessment to develop site inventory and enhance redevelopment activities.

**Expanding Diverse Business and Job Growth Enhance regional economic growth and sustainability by supporting incentives for new commercial and industrial development in the region's target clusters, increasing high-paying jobs 6%, increasing industry diversity 4%, issuing \$500,000 in small business loans, and growing new business starts 49% by 2030.**

Expanding Diverse Business and Job Growth Attract new private investment in target sectors and existing clusters. -Develop targeted campaigns promoting the region's strengths in E.V. technology, advanced manufacturing, aeronautics, agriculture, and nuclear technology clusters to attract investment. -Continue supporting business-friendly policies and incentives that attract new businesses and suppliers to the region. -Continue working with communities to implement key infrastructure investments to create shovel-ready employment sites that can support business development and attraction. Continue to plan and leverage the region's existing transportation assets of I-65, U.S. 31, U.S. 24, and Grissom Aeroplex. -Support marketing the advantages and unique opportunities for businesses locating along I-65, U.S. 24, U.S. 31, and at Grissom Aeroplex. -Continue investing in regular improvements that enhance regional connectivity to places of employment and residential development to best maximize the overall return on investment. -Encourage local agencies to develop a strategic plan for the development of the interstate and highway corridors that promote a mix of compatible land uses and adequate local access. Support entrepreneurship and small business development regionally. -Support the development of innovation hubs that provide affordable office space, shared resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities. -Connect regional business owners to funding and programs to enhance business planning, marketing, financial management, and access to capital. Support programs to expand and retain the region's existing business community. -Support local economic development organizations in conducting regular business retention and expansion surveys and visits that identify the needs, challenges, and opportunities of existing businesses. -Connect businesses to business assistance programs and other resources. Promote regional economic diversification to support economic resiliency. -Support funding, grants, and incentives to industries outside of the region's existing clusters and target industries to diversify the region's economy. -Continue supporting programming through educational institutions that educates and up-skills the region's workforce within new and emerging fields.



**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	\$4,723,550,000.00
Requested READI 2.0 funds	\$75,000,000.00
Anticipated matching funding sources	\$4,648,550,000.00
Private funding	\$4,400,000,000.00
Philanthropic	\$1,000,000.00
Local Funding	\$245,000,000.00
Other State funding	\$750,000.00
Federal funding	\$1,800,000.00
Percentage of anticipated READI funding towards rural and rural-mix communities	
Percentage of anticipated READI funding towards disadvantaged communities	





**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**

**21st Century Workforce Development and Education** The region must continue to work with educational and private sector leaders to create programming that up-skills and re-skills the current workforce for key, future-focused industries such as E.V. technology, Industry 4.0, agriculture technology, nuclear medicine, and information technology. To supply jobs in high-demand/high-wage industries, career pathway programs must begin much earlier than post-secondary education and include targeted lifelong learning from middle school through college or ongoing certificate training. The region's goal is to increase the number of regional associate and bachelor's degrees by 17.5% by 2030. To do this, investments will be made in projects including the following: **Ivy Tech E.V. Battery Training Lab** This facility will expand Ivy Tech's capacity to up-skill and re-skill an additional 150-200 students per year, provide 100 academic credentials each year, and complete nearly 1,000 workforce training programs for EV target cluster private sector partners by 2026. Ivy Tech plans to purchase a building previously occupied by Fed-Ex (located in the middle of its campus), and outfit it with first-of-its-kind E.V. training equipment. **Grissom Nuclear Medicine R&D Lab** This facility is a partnership with AZIsotopes, SpectronRX, Notre Dame, Purdue, and Ivy Tech that will provide a space to research new applications of nuclear medicine technology. The lab will use cyclotron technology, currently used in isotope manufacturing, to improve current processes and develop new life-saving technology. This investment, which leverages the investments made to the Grissom Tarmac project in READI 1.0, will increase R&D funding in the region, and ultimately increase patent filings as well. The region anticipates that the total investment of \$27.5 million will increase jobs in nuclear medicine in the region 100% and attract three new nuclear medicine employers by 2030.

**Enhancing Quality of Life and Place** To attract and retain workforce, the region must strategically invest in a tapestry of diverse amenity projects including childcare, arts and entertainment, revitalizing downtowns, active recreation, and retail establishments. Much work has been done in this area in the last 15 years, including as part of READI 1.0, but additional investment is needed. A few examples the projects proposed for READI 2.0 funding are listed below: **Childcare Projects** The region's goal is to increase the number of Pathways to Quality (PTQ) level 3 and 4 childcare seats by 1,480 by 2034. To do this, the region has identified three shovel ready capital projects to expand childcare in the region. Little Zebbie's in Fulton County, the YMCA in Miami County, and the Delco Park Mixed-Use project in Howard County will collectively add 280 childcare seats at PTQ level 3 or higher. These projects will be completed in 2025. **The International Hospitality Hub** This project creates a space to provide information, services and education for new immigrants to the region, including the region's growing population of South Korean, Haitian, and Burmese community members. The Hub anticipates serving more than 1,000 community members annually by 2030. **Banderas Point Event Facility** This is a 64-acre mixed-use equestrian event center with retail development and a hotel. Seeking to become a statewide draw for events, this 5000-seat facility will host a variety of events including equestrian activities from rodeos to charrería (the national sport of Mexico). The facility is projected to draw over 400,000 people annually by 2030. **Regional Rural Development Revolving Loan Fund** This loan fund would provide \$7.5 million in sustainable funding to improve the region's rural communities. The fund is expected initially finance 20

projects including downtown revitalization, infrastructure improvements, and blight abatement by 2030.

**Diversifying and Expanding Housing Options** A lack of new, modern housing product has artificially depressed population growth within the region for decades. Employers within the region note that this lack of new housing options is an impediment to workforce attraction and retention. Because of recent investments in target industries such as E.V. technology and nuclear medicine, there will be at least 3,600 jobs coming to the region in the next five years. To support these employees, as well as future job creation, the region must begin to improve its housing options immediately. Having a diverse array of modern single-family homes and multi-family residential developments, including both rental and owner-occupied units, is a key step in capturing those workers to live in the region. The region has a diverse and complementary portfolio of residential development opportunities across the region. As with most rural residential development projects, however, there is a financing gap to deliver infrastructure and lots at appropriate market prices. The portfolio of projects will add up to 3649 new units, including a mix of single-family, multi-family and mixed-use products throughout the region. Most of these projects could begin immediately with READI 2.0 support, and the goal is to increase the population by 1.5% by 2030. The region's portfolio of housing projects includes three greenfield single-family developments, six multi-family projects supporting in-fill/blight elimination/revitalization areas, multi-use development with housing and onsite childcare, and a second-story downtown revitalization project. Proposed projects are projected to include 88% affordable units based a cap of 30% regional median household income going toward projected housing costs and rents.

**Expanding Diverse Business and Job Growth** The North Central region is focused on investing in attracting jobs and investment from five target sectors: advanced manufacturing, E.V. battery technology, aeronautics, agri-business/ag-tech, and nuclear technology. The region also knows the importance of supporting small business growth and entrepreneurs to ensure success and resiliency of the regional economy. By 2030, it's the region's goal is to increase median income by 20%, average earnings per worker by 24%, regional gross assessed value by 30%, the number of business establishments by 4%, the region's Chmura Industry Diversity Index number by 4%, and per capita income by 28%. Some projects designed to help support meeting these metrics include: **Kokomo Industrial Park Phase 2** This project will include infrastructure to support StarPlus's second EV battery plant facility in Kokomo. This facility represents \$3.2 billion in investment and another 1,400 high paying jobs for the region. It also includes five new suppliers with commitments throughout the region. When complete, these facilities will bring more than 500 high-paying jobs to the region. **The Cass County Agribusiness Park** This project is an upgrade to the existing agribusiness park to support the expansion of two key anchor employers in Cass County, increasing their existing capacity by 100%. The water utility infrastructure improvements will also generate \$1.5 million in annual savings for existing businesses. **Fulton County Industrial Park** This proposed development is at the planned interchange along US 31 in Fulton County. This project will include infrastructure to support nearly 400 acre phased industrial park. **Small Business Revolving Development Fund** This fund would invest \$500,000 in regional small businesses with the intent of increasing new business start-ups 49% by 2030. These funds would provide the critical start-up or expansion capital to small businesses and provide long-term sustainability to READI 2.0 dollars.

Expanding Broadband Access Access to quality broadband services has become a necessity. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed a clear need for increased broadband connectivity throughout areas around the country. The North Central region was no exception. Working and learning from home were no longer luxuries but necessities, and remote or hybrid work will remain an essential part of the of the economy for the foreseeable future. Since READI 1.0, some communities across the region have begun implementing their broadband strategies. The Howard County fiber loop is now complete, Cass County has begun its READI 1.0 broadband expansions project, Fulton County now has fiber to nearly 100% of its homes and businesses, and Miami County and Tipton County are actively engaged in broadband strategy planning processes. Despite this success, a report from the Purdue Center for Regional Development notes that 15.8% of the region's residents do not have access to a provider that offers 25/3 service. The region intends to have broadband plans completed in all six counties by the end of 2025 and have a clear pathway to provide at least 25 Mbps download speed and upload speeds of at least 3 Mbps to 100% of residents by 2034. NCIRPC will support communities in establishing broadband taskforces to develop strategic plans and pursue alternative funding resources relative to educational opportunities, healthcare services and enhancing agricultural productivity. NCIRPC will identify funding opportunities and technical assistance programs to support the construction of broadband infrastructure and to increase the adoption rate.

**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?**

The NCIRPC has strong, established partnerships with public and private sector regional stakeholders and other regional anchors like educational institutions. These partnerships have led to the decade-long success of the formal region, including the region's response to, and implementation of, READI 1.0. These partners are playing pivotal roles as part of READI 1.0 from regional planning to project investment and implementation. In total, regional public entities supported the \$30 million READI investment with \$332 million in local investment: an 1:11 match. Private sector partners matched the READI investment with over \$2.8 billion in private investment: a 1:93 match. While a 1:4 match was required, the region delivered an overall portfolio of projects and programs that provided a 1:104 return on the READI investment.

Regional success in delivering its vision and strategies is not accidental and would not be possible without regional stakeholder ownership of the Regional Development Plan and the financial commitment, partnership, and collaboration amongst a broad group of regional stakeholders, including public, private, and non-profit partners. Just like READI 1.0, these stakeholders have gathered again to serve as the steering committee to prepare the region's application for READI 2.0. The region has doubled down on its commitment to implement the Regional Development Plan, will build upon its READI 1.0 success, and will take the next step in addressing regional goals, overcoming regional barriers, and implementing regional strategies to deliver key regional metrics.

As part of its preparation of this application, the regional steering committee reaffirmed the Regional Development Plan's vision, goals, strategies, and metrics. It also decided that it was important to go the next step and identify a prioritized list of diverse, shovel ready, potential projects to support implementation of this strategy. Like READI 1.0, the region engaged in a preliminary prioritization process and identified a curated list of regionally impactful projects, specifically targeted to deliver regional strategies, totaling nearly \$100 million in potential READI investment. The region understands it is only eligible for up to \$75 million in READI allocation, and that it is IEDC's intention to work with the region after the READI 2.0 regional funding



allocations are complete to help regions finalize project selections.

With this in mind, the region's READI 2.0 ask is \$75 million. That said, the current proposed prioritized project list already has commitments from local and private regional partners to bring a local public match of \$248 million (1:2.6), and \$4.4 billion in private capital investment match (1:46) to support the projects. This financial commitment underscores the confidence that the public and private sectors have in the North Central region and its future.

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

As noted in the previous section, the region has already gathered and preliminarily prioritized a proposed project list for READI 2.0. The region followed a very similar process to that used in READI 1.0 to successfully prioritize \$50 million in projects and then successfully adjust the prioritized list when \$30 million was awarded.

As part of the READI 1.0 process, the region engaged nearly 800 regional stakeholders through county workshops, regional workshops, community and youth surveys, and focus groups to build consensus around the long-term vision for the region. Stakeholders were asked to identify opportunities for, and barriers to, population and economic growth in the region and to develop strategies to help drive regional success. Once the strategies and related key performance indicators were identified, the engagement shifted to a process of identifying programs and projects that would best activate strategies and deliver the desired regional outcomes. Stakeholders from around the region gathered in regional workshops to build a regional projects/program list. Once a comprehensive list was gathered from a broad group of regional stakeholders, a structured prioritization process, including multiple rounds of honest, frank, and open conversations and negotiations, produced a prioritized list of projects and programs totaling a \$50 million READI ask. These prioritized projects and programs, as well as those that did not rank in the top \$50 million, were included in the Regional Development Plan. The success of this prioritization process was made possible because of the historical trust that had been created in the region. This trust is born out of a decade of prior collaboration between regional partners as well as the shared consensus that was built during the engagement phase of the Regional Development Plan. When the region was awarded \$30 million, the Steering Committee reconvened to revise the project list to a \$30 million READI ask. While not easy, the initial prioritization process allowed the Committee to establish a framework to reach consensus on the final project list in an orderly fashion.

Because of the work that was already completed in READI 1.0, the READI 2.0 process was able to begin with a series of stakeholder workshops in each of the region's counties to review and validate that the vision, goals, strategies, and key performance indicators of the 2021 Regional Development Plan were still appropriate for the region. Once regional validation was confirmed by stakeholders, the project identification process for READI 2.0 began by asking regional stakeholders, "If the region is fortunate enough to receive READI 2.0 funding, how best could the region invest it to maximize the positive impact on the Regional Development Plan's strategies and key performance indicators and do so as quickly as possible?" The speed-to-market component for READI 2.0 is essential for the North Central region if it is to maximize the population growth and economic growth potential of the generational investment being made by StarPlus Energy within the region over the next five years. Even though IEDC has made it clear that the READI 2.0 application is focused more on strategy than projects, this early project identification was also important to help the region know the investment capacity of local and private partners for READI 2.0 given the tremendous commitments it is



currently delivering for READI 1.0.

The Steering Committee, the same group that oversaw the READI 1.0 process, gathered the list of projects from the Regional Development Plan that had not yet been initiated, as well as a collection of new projects identified during the county stakeholder workshops, and consolidated a single READI 2.0 overall project list that included nearly 100 projects. Next, a process was undertaken to collect pertinent information about the projects. This included information such as project owner, project budget, site control, previous work to date (such as engineering reports), and a project narrative. This information helped the region determine the shovel-readiness of each project and the interest/ability of public and private sector partners to support the projects financially. The Steering Committee then scored and prioritized the projects based on established criteria. These criteria included the degree to which the project:

- Assists in achieving the region's goals and strategies and key performance indicators.
- Removes a barrier to attaining one of the region's priorities related to talent attraction/retention and economic growth.
- Clearly aligns with the READI program priorities and State of Indiana economic development goals and KPI's.
- The impact that the project will have on improving rural and disadvantaged areas.
- Would have a true regional impact and not just local impact.
- Has an appropriate commitment level of both local and private sector investment support to meet or exceed READI match requirements.

Once scoring was complete, the Steering Committee established a prioritized regional capital project list including both shovel-ready projects and longer-term projects that represent the most regionally impactful known projects. Developing a prioritized list gives the region flexibility to make informed decisions and adapt to an evolving landscape, as some projects may find alternative funding sources or new funding opportunities arise. Like READI 1.0, this process is one that built regional consensus and further fostered a spirit of regionalism. This list of regionally prioritized projects that are aligned with both regional and State objectives is still preliminary because of the READI 2.0 formal project selection schedule. Having the pre-prioritized list positions the region to have productive conversations with IEDC about final project selection immediately after the funding decision has been announced. For projects not selected as a part of READI 2.0, the region will continue to pursue funding with other local, state, federal and philanthropic funding opportunities.

The region appreciates READI 2.0's willingness to consider revolving loan programs to help better service targeted focus areas. The North Central region has a strong interest in both a revolving loan program focused on supporting rural community improvement projects and a regional revolving loan fund to support start-up business ventures, entrepreneurs and small business growth. A full list of preliminary prioritized projects is included as an attachment for reference.

**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.**

Many of the projects in the attached preliminary prioritized project list are designed to leverage adjacent and

previous investments, including: - The StarPlus Energy Infrastructure project will extend infrastructure built in READI 1.0 to support the construction of StarPlus' second facility providing 1,400 new jobs by 2030. - The Miami County YMCA childcare project, supported by the Peru Riverfront READI 1.0 road improvements, is providing 90 childcare seats by 2030. Additionally, the region received a combined \$1,197,217 of Employer-Sponsored Child Care Grants that will be leveraged with the region's childcare investments. - The E.V. Battery Lab at Ivy Tech benefits from the Industry 4.0 Lab investment in READI 1.0 adding the capacity to serve 200 additional Ivy Tech students and 1,000 private sector employees annually by 2030. - IU Kokomo's International Hospitality Hub project will be in IU Kokomo's Innovation Hall, a READI 1.0 project, and will serve 1,000 people annually by 2030. - The Nuclear Medicine R&D Lab project will leverage READI 1.0 and previous private investment at Grissom Aeroplex to double regional jobs in nuclear medicine and attract three new nuclear medicine employers by 2030. - The Cass County Agribusiness Park project builds on the \$1.5 million in EDA funding won by Cass County in 2023, allowing to two businesses to expand and the potential to attract more new businesses by 2030. - Nearly all READI 2.0 proposed residential housing projects will benefit from recent nearby infrastructure improvements, including \$7,750,000 of READI 1.0 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 North Central region was founded in 2014 but has been functioning and collaborating as a region for decades. The region knows that true regional collaboration is only possible with continued and purposeful engagement with a broad group of regional stakeholders. In READI 1.0, the region underwent an extensive stakeholder engagement process to build regional consensus around the Regional Development Plan. Through dozens of meetings, focus groups, targeted surveys, and one-on-one engagement, the region was able to engage nearly 800 regional stakeholders to understand the barriers to growth that existed within the region, build true consensus around regional priorities and strategies, and select projects that are having unprecedented regional impact today.

Because the region went through such extensive engagement and developed a comprehensive regional development plan in READI 1.0, the region could have simply conducted steering committee meetings and filled out the application for READI 2.0. However, having seen the success that regional engagement brought about in READI 1.0, the region understood how critical it was to have a robust regional engagement process again for READI 2.0.

The planning and engagement process was again designed specifically to engage a broad range of stakeholders including industry leaders, small business owners, school corporations, higher education institutions, youth within the region, not-for-profits, elected officials, the public, and local economic development leaders. For this process, the region went back out into each of its six counties to hold workshops. The workshops included a review and verification of the previously established regional vision, priorities, strategies, and key performance indicators. Because the region has experienced unprecedented international innovation investment, it was important that, for READI 2.0, these opportunities and changes were captured in the region's application and accounted for when refining the strategies.





In addition to engaging with stakeholders in six county meetings, the region held one-on-one interviews with top employers including Stellantis, StarPlus, AZIsotopes, SpectronRx, and Waelz Sustainable Products. Representatives were asked questions about barriers to their success and growth. The region also hosted two focus groups: one focused on childcare and one with the region's LEDOs and educational partners to discuss traditional economic development projects, innovation strategies, entrepreneurship, and long-term transformational regional projects.

In READI 1.0, stakeholders from one community were concerned about putting in the effort to pursue READI funds for the fear that they would not materialize. At the same time, this community was experiencing challenges surrounding changes in leadership. As a result, the community did not have a READI 1.0 project ready to implement when the funding decisions were announced. One of the benefits of having functioned as a region for years is having regional partners who are committed to one another's success. The region rallied around the community, hosted an additional public engagement forum, and worked with local leaders to develop a successful READI 1.0 project that both addressed local needs and positively affected the region's metrics.

#### **How do you plan to maintain stakeholder engagement?**

The North Central Indiana Regional Planning Council (NCIRPC) has been leading planning and public engagement processes, and serving as a technical resource for regional communities, since its inception in 2014. NCIRPC has led the completion of the three CEDS processes, the development of the 21st Century Talent Region Plan, the READI 1.0 Regional Development Plan, READI 1.0's implementation and grant management, and the READI 2.0 Application development. All of these processes have engaged key regional stakeholders, institutional partners, and major regional employers.

The original regional plan developed for READI 1.0 is a living document that will be updated with stakeholder engagement on a regular basis. NCIRPC holds quarterly board meetings and monthly executive committee meetings with representation of each member county. The region also engages in comprehensive CEDS planning process every five years and will continue doing so moving forward. Additionally, NCIRPC plays a key role in convening regional stakeholders on a variety of topics like development of a regional long-term childcare strategy and regional transportation planning. NCIRPC Board membership includes elected officials, LEDOs, higher education partners and community development professionals. The READI 1.0 process initiated the development of the Oversight Committee, a private sector board that approves all READI-related expenditures. This committee will continue serving during READI 2.0, ensuring the continued engagement of the private sector. As a result, there is a constant and ongoing dialogue between local communities, regional stakeholders, and the region.

#### **How will the organization sustain itself?**

NCIRPC is led by an executive director and has three additional full-time staff members. NCIRPC is funded and sustained by annual per capita financial commitments from each of its six regional counties and receives fees for technical services. NCIRPC has the capacity to continue carrying out its duties as a regional planning entity, convener of regional partners, disseminator of information, technical resource, grant management expert, and leader in continued stakeholder engagement.



Excluding the \$30 million READI 1.0 award, NCIRPC has earned more than \$22 million in grants for the region since 2014, a 1:16 return on investment for regional partners. NCIRPC understands that it must evolve as the region evolves. The organization is looking to take a more active role in coordinating regional branding and marketing efforts and is seeking READI 2.0 funds to facilitate two potential regional revolving loan funds. The Rural Development Fund will provide an ongoing funding source for rural communities to implement community development projects. The Business Revolving Loan Fund will provide small businesses and entrepreneurs access to low-interest gap financing. These funds provide long-term sustainability of READI 2.0 funds. Adding more value and sustainability, NCIRPC is expanding its technical assistance, providing regional transportation planning services, in collaboration with the Kokomo MPO. Additionally, NCIRPC is working with the Indiana Economic Development Association and Indiana Association of Regional Councils to conduct a talent attraction/childcare needs assessment.

**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.**

NCIRPC has the policies and procedures in place to ensure the successful implementation of the READI funded projects. The region's organizational structure and READI Oversight Committee are well-equipped to hold project owners accountable through regular project updates and monthly meetings.

Local units of government, economic development organizations, non-profits, workforce, university and K-12 partners, and project owners all have a role to play to ensure the successful activation of projects. Project owners will enter into a sub-recipient that clearly defines their roles and responsibilities including public & private match requirements, procurement and reporting, implementation timeline, and measurable outcomes. These administration and reporting requirements will run through NCIRPC, to the sub-recipient, and ultimately to the contractors for implementation.

Regrading maintaining and activating the assets, workforce and education projects will be further supported through public/private partnerships; housing developments will be supported through developer agreements to ensure deliverables; infrastructure improvements will be maintained through user rates; and new industry development will have job growth and private investment goals tied to incentive packages. NCIRPC has 10 years of project administration experience with more than 150 successful implemented projects. The implementation of READI 2.0 is simply a continuation of the NCIRPC's core function.





# 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.

The ultimate goal of the NCIRPC’s Regional Development Plan is to solidify the North Central Indiana region as a recognized national leader in innovation-based advanced manufacturing and research and development, a preferred destination for workforce growth from around the country and the world, and to secure long-term regional sustainability through continued economic growth.

To achieve this goal, the region has developed a strategic Regional Development Plan specifically designed to deliver achievable action steps and measurable outcomes. The strategy includes both regional projects and complimentary local projects that, when combined, will positively drive overall regional metrics. The projects that have been preliminarily identified for this application from the plan include \$248 million of committed local public investment and an estimated \$4.4 billion in private capital investment. The result of timely implementation of these projects will result in a 1.5% growth in population between 2020 and 2030 and, by 2030, more than 3,600 new high wage jobs, 3,649 new housing units, a growth in per capita income of 28%, and potentially 1,200 new high quality childcare seats. These projects include 70% of READI 2.0 funds invested in rural areas and 40% invested in disadvantaged communities. The region is committed to advancing all of these projects over time, but with an appropriate amount of READI 2.0 investment, the region will be able to advance the majority of the project portfolio in the next few years.

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	226,519	229,900	232,200
Total Employment	67,540	71,500	73,700
Per capita income	\$ 46,626.00	\$ 59,681.00	\$ 71,617.00
Educational attainment	2806900.0%	3298100.0%	3710400.0%
Total new housing units	100,739	2,649	4,098
New rental housing units	23,174	1,800	2,500
New owner-occupied housing units	66,168	849	1,598
Percentage of affordable housing units	88	85	82



**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.**

The region is actively working with its public, private, and education sector partners to develop strategies to increase regional childcare and develop a broader strategy to increase access to quality childcare in the region. The region has multiple planned shovel-ready projects that will begin to increase quality childcare capacity and was recently awarded \$1,197,217 in Employer-Sponsored Child Care Grants to support regional childcare. To increase the region's 5,053-child capacity, the region will complete a regional childcare study, physically expand two existing childcare facilities and add one new facility with READI 2.0, and develop a pipeline of childcare workers with schools and higher education institutions. The region plans to create at least 280 new PTQ level 3 or 4 seats by 2025 and add an additional 1,200 PTQ level 3 or 4 seats by 2034.

**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**

The region's strategy is custom-tailored to champion innovation by supporting innovative workforce education programs (Ivy Tech's E.V. Battery Lab), support research and development in the region (Nuclear Medicine R&D Lab - 49% increase in business starts), and support small businesses and entrepreneurs (\$500,000 invested via the Business Revolving Loan Fund). The North Central region must focus on investing in infrastructure to continue to attract innovation-based advanced manufacturing jobs (at least 3,600 jobs planned in the next five years) and cultivating an entrepreneurial culture with assets like the Inventrek Certified Technology Park and the proposed Business Revolving Loan Fund. These targeted investments will prepare the region's workforce for the economy of today and tomorrow, create a hub for academic research to develop the technology to serve the economy of the future, and build a strong foundation of small business entrepreneurs to diversify and make the region's economy more resilient.

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

Additional key performance metrics that the region is tracking include: Bachelor's and Associate Degrees Current: 21.24% Five-year projection: 38.27% (+17%) Median Household Income Current: \$61,922 Five-year projection: \$74,306 (+20%) Average Earnings Per Worker Current: \$50,766 Five-year projection: \$62,950 (+24%) Regional Gross Assessed Value Current: \$ 18,418,116,018 Five-year projection: \$26,706,268,226.10 (+45%) Share of Prime Working Age Current: 36.22% Five-year projection: 43.22% (+7%) Number of Business Establishments Current: 4,345 Five-year projection: 4,519 (+4%) Chmura Industry Diversity Index Current: 109.06 Five-year projection: 113.42 (+4%) Per Capita Income Current: \$46,626 Five-year projection: \$59,681 (+28%) Number of Pathways to Quality (PTQ) Level 3 and 4 Childcare Seats Current: 3,079 Five-year projection: 3,359 (+9%) Ten-year projection: 4,559 (+48%) Job Growth in Targeted Industry Sectors Five-year projection: +3,600 jobs Number of Rental Units Current: 23,174 Five-year projection: 24,974 (+8%) Number of Owner-Occupied Units Current: 66,168 Five-year projection: 67,071 (+1.4%)



## General Information

<b>Legal Name as registered with Indiana Secretary of State (Region Name)</b>	North Central Indiana Planning Council, Inc. (North Central)
<b>Business Structure</b>	501 c3
<b>List counties within your region</b>	Cass, Clinton, Fulton, Howard, Miami, Tipton
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.ncirpc.com/">https://www.ncirpc.com/</a>

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