

## North Central Indiana WIRED Network



Two traditional labor markets located in North Central Indiana (NCI) have joined forces to focus on creating a competitive advantage for a larger region facing interrelated challenges and opportunities. The proposed NCI WIRED Network will span fourteen rural counties covering 5,577 square miles. The region is slow-growing; has low educational attainment levels; is aging rapidly; and is losing its younger citizens to other parts of the country. Long a bastion for good jobs, particularly in manufacturing, the communities of NCI are in an economic war due to the decline in traditional employment opportunities in large industries and their suppliers. The NCI WIRED Network will catalyze regional stakeholders and resources to accelerate structural changes needed for an economic renaissance in North Central Indiana. Extraordinary, aligned, and sustained actions are required to increase the region's competitiveness.

Purdue University has been selected to serve as the Project Administrator. Strategies carried out by the NCI Transformation Network will be organized around three major regional change efforts: the NCI Entrepreneurial Collaborative, the NCI "Next Paradise" Cluster Initiative, and Maturity Matters Older Worker Initiative. A fourth civic leadership component is woven into the project. Each strategy has identified goals, strategies, and expected outcomes.

The NCI Entrepreneurial Collaborative will 1) make entrepreneurship a vibrant, mainstream part of the region's economic and educational culture; 2) further develop regional cooperation across multiple jurisdictions in North Central Indiana; 3) nurture early-stage ventures from start-up through survival and success, creating direct and indirect employment; and 4) establish networks for peer support and learning for entrepreneurs and for community leaders and policy makers who support them.

Goals of the NCI "Next Practice" Cluster Initiative include: 1) increased innovation, sales and job growth among NCI firms in the advanced manufacturing, advanced materials, and agri-business/food processing/technology clusters; and 2) aligned regional workforce, economic development, and education systems to support growth in these clusters.

Finally, the Maturity Matters Older Worker Initiative will: 1) increase post-secondary education attainment rates among the region's mature residents, but especially low-skilled, mature incumbent workers in declining industries who must keep working during their retirement years, and 2) prepare businesses in the region for the demographic reality of the aging population and the mature workforce.



These boldly integrated workforce development, economic development, and education initiatives chart the course for transforming the North Central Indiana regional economy. Strategic partnership members committed to this challenge and opportunity are Purdue University, Workforce Development Strategies, Inc., North Central Indiana and Tecumseh Area Workforce Investment Boards, Lafayette-West Lafayette Economic Development Corporation, Greater Lafayette Venture Club, Lafayette School Corporation, Ivy Tech Community College, Indiana University Kokomo, Kokomo/Howard County Development Corporation, and several units of local government.



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