

# Northwest Indiana Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



A collaborative plan to enhance regional prosperity and community quality of life in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties.







|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Acknowledgements                            | <b>3</b>  |
| About The Region                            | <b>5</b>  |
| The Economic Framework in the United States | <b>9</b>  |
| Planning Context and CEDS Structure         | <b>10</b> |
| Economic Performance Indicators             | <b>13</b> |
| Qualitative Input and Public Engagement     | <b>21</b> |
| Goals                                       | <b>25</b> |
| Evaluation Framework                        | <b>36</b> |

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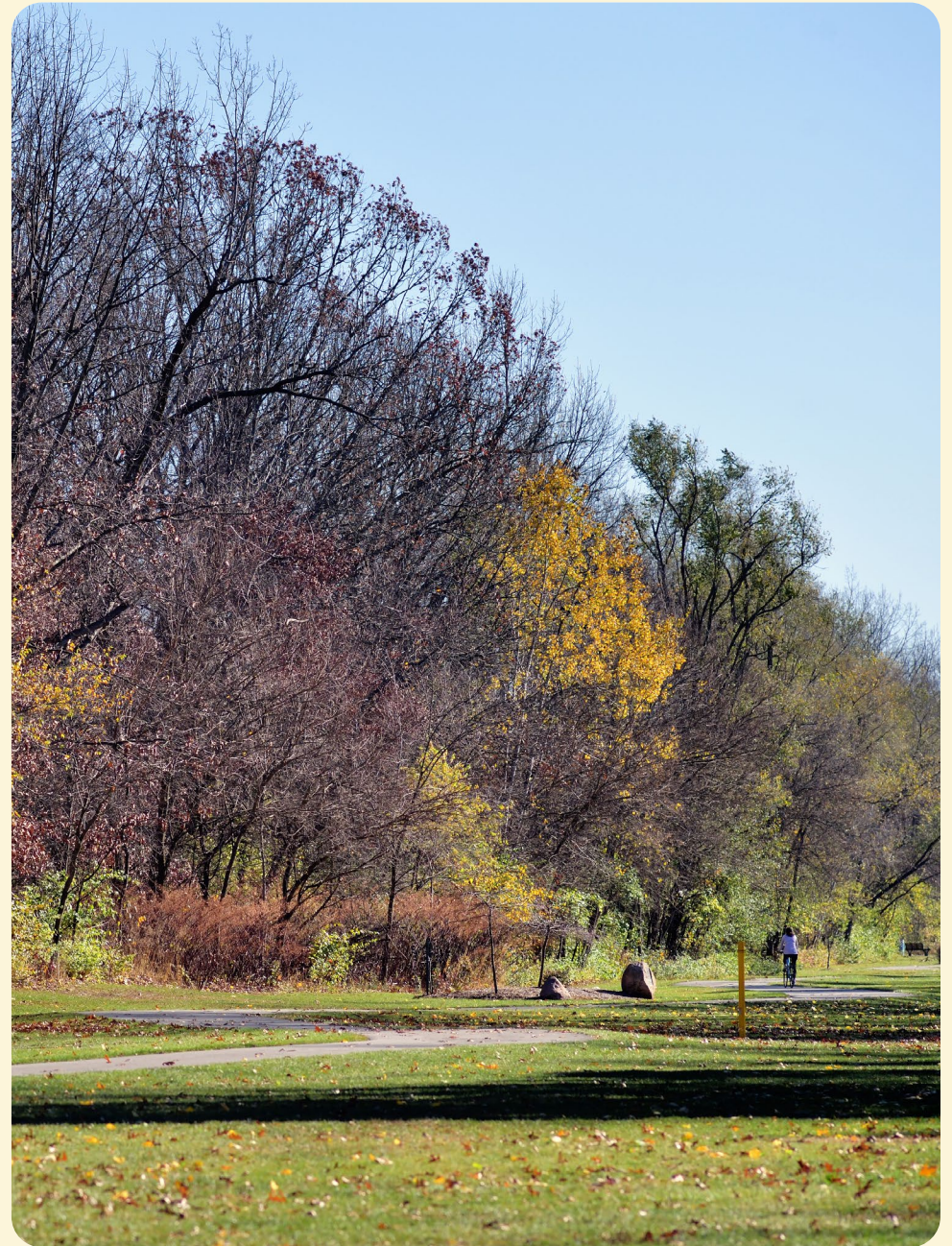
# About The Region



Overview

Economy

Cultural and Social Life





## Overview

Northwest Indiana is known as “The Region” based on its proximity to the city of Chicago and economic prominence. It is the section of the Chicago metropolitan area that spreads past the Illinois border into three Indiana counties and along the southern shore of Lake Michigan. Northwest Indiana, notably, is culturally heterogeneous which creates a very environmentally diverse and unique place that is far different from any other location in Indiana. Northwest Indiana has played a crucial role in both industrial development and knowledge exchange between Indiana and Illinois.

At the time of this printing, U.S. Steel has been in the national news and faces an uncertain future. This plan recognizes the medium level existential threat to the region’s largest industry cluster, Primary Metals Manufacturing, which adds to the urgency to move forward in a new direction. This happens as we align the Economic Development District (EDD) with existing well-funded technology initiatives in both Indiana and Illinois. In addition, several initiatives in neighboring Illinois and within five miles of Northwest Indiana are kicking off such as the Chicago Quantum Exchange, the Midwest Hydrogen Hub, and the Bloch Tech Hub. Further, Indiana is supercharging its pharmaceutical research and development (R&D) and manufacturing capabilities statewide with the Heartland

BioWorks grant, Indiana’s Semiconductor Corridor, and BioWorks hubs. All of these emphasize the future of industry for the Greater Chicago metropolitan region: advanced computing technologies and R&D, the future of energy along with significant investment in technology and the semiconductor corridor. How can Northwest Indiana take advantage of these investments and fuel its own growth using its unique industrial strengths? That is part of what the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) brings together: a blueprint for the economic future of Northwest Indiana over the next five years.

Northwest Indiana has a unique geographic location and is bordered by Illinois, the rest of Indiana, Lake Michigan, and the state of Michigan. It has numerous major assets.

- Northwest Indiana offers access to waterfronts, parks, and recreational areas like the Indiana Dunes National Park and the Indiana Dunes State Park. These natural attractions are key features of Northwest Indiana, drawing tourists and nature lovers.
- Counties: Northwest Indiana is comprised of Lake County, Porter County, and La Porte County.

### Lake County:

Home to cities like Gary, Hammond, East Chicago, and the county seat of Crown Point. Lake County is the most industrialized area of Northwest Indiana. It is Indiana’s second most populated county. It includes parts of Indiana Dunes National Park.

### Porter County:

Includes the city of Portage and the county seat of Valparaiso. Porter County is known for its natural beauty, including all of the Indiana Dunes State Park with parts of the Indiana Dunes National Park.

### La Porte County:

Known for its smaller cities and rural areas, including Michigan City and the county seat of La Porte. La Porte County features parts of the Indiana Dunes National Park. The area also hosts events like the Great Lakes Grand Prix and the Lakefront Art Festival. It offers numerous recreational opportunities with its multiple freshwater lakes.





## Economy

- **Industrial Hub:** As an economic hub, Northwest Indiana has historically been an industrial powerhouse, particularly due to steel manufacturing and heavy industry. Historically, U.S. Steel, Cleveland-Cliffs and other factories in cities like Gary, East Chicago, and Hammond have been central to Northwest Indiana's economy. Northwest Indiana is currently among the strongest Primary Metals Manufacturing industrial clusters both in the U.S. and globally.
- **Transportation:** The area has strong transportation infrastructure, including major highways (I-65, I-80, I-90, I-94), the South Shore rail line, and three class A rail lines (Union Pacific, BNSF, and Norfolk Southern) facilitating trade and commerce. Proximity to the port of Indiana-Burns Harbor enhances Northwest Indiana's access to international shipping for steel, agriculture, and manufacturing.
- **Transitioning Economy:** In recent decades, the area has seen efforts to diversify its economy beyond traditional steel manufacturing and is looking at opportunities in Energy and Advanced Computing; particularly as they segue with Pharmaceuticals, Machinery Manufacturing, and Primary Metals Manufacturing. Energy and Advanced Computing will be influential to the region's economic competitiveness in all of its high performing industrial clusters.
- **Unparalleled Educational Opportunities:** The region features a robust university, college, community college, and trade school system.

## Cultural and Social Life

**Diversity:** Northwest Indiana is home to a diverse population, including significant numbers of African American, Latino, and Eastern European communities. This diversity has shaped the region's cultural life, including food, music, and festivals.

**Education:** The region is home to several universities and colleges, including Purdue University Northwest, Indiana University Northwest, Valparaiso University, Calumet College of St. Joseph, and Ivy Tech Community College. All of these contribute to the education and research environment.

**Historic Significance:** The region, part of the Calumet Heritage Area, is pursuing designation as a National Heritage Area to enhance its economic and placemaking impacts. It boasts a rich industrial history with notable sites such as the U.S. Steel Gary Works and the Indiana Dunes. Some significant historical sites include:

This plan provides a roadmap to guide regional economic development efforts to build a future-forward robust and resilient economy. It offers Northwest Indiana the opportunity to leverage its strengths, to expand upon effective programs, bolster partnerships, and to address its weaknesses through a long-term and coordinated effort. Sustainable partnerships and policy alignment are the key. If growth and regional connectivity are embraced, Northwest Indiana can improve its competitive advantage at the national and international levels.

### Indiana Dunes National Park

While primarily a natural area, the Dunes are rich in history as well. The park preserves a wealth of cultural and natural history, including Native American heritage, early European settlers, and the growth of the conservation movement. The historic Bailly Homestead and Chellberg Farm are part of the park and showcase early pioneer life in Northwest Indiana.

### Gary Bathing House Aquatorium

This Gary location in the historic Miller neighborhood houses a Museum of Flight.

### Washington Park

Established in the 1800s, this park is home to the Michigan City Lighthouse, one of the oldest on the Great Lakes. Its history ties to the city's early maritime and tourism industries.

### Tolleston Indian Mounds

These mounds are remnants of prehistoric Native American burial sites and are significant as part of the region's ancient history before European settlers arrived.

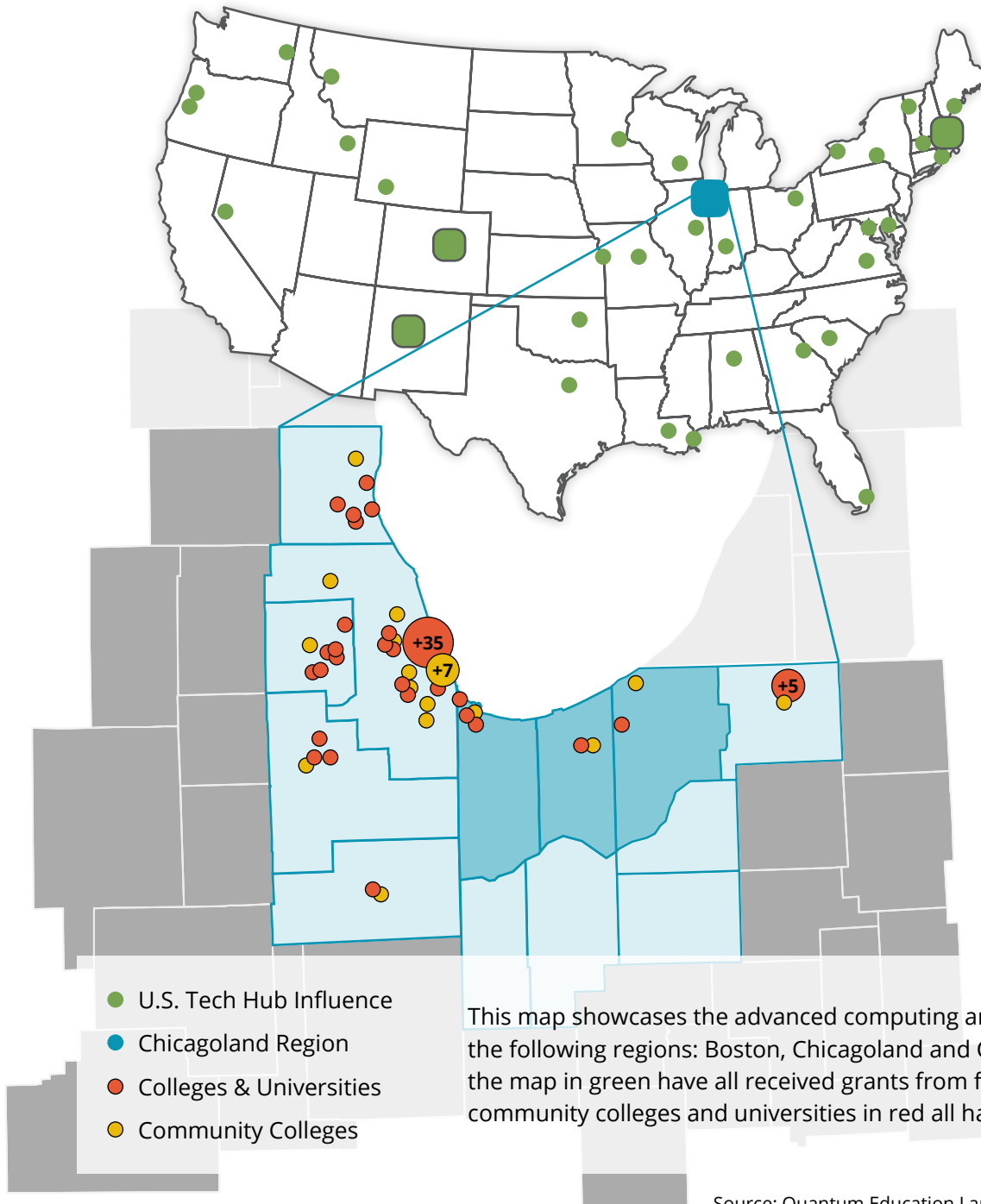
### Friendship Botanic Gardens

Originally a private estate, this site is a beautiful historic garden, with roots going back to the 1920s. It also includes remnants of the region's agricultural and horticultural history.

### Lake County Courthouse

Built in 1878, the Lake County Courthouse is a prominent historic building in Crown Point. It's known for its beautiful Romanesque Revival architecture and its role in important historical events, including the Cobe Cup Race, the precursor to the Indianapolis 500.





### Colleges/Universities with Advanced Computing Related Courses

(# of courses offered; 10 or more; IN-IL Region)

|    |   |    |
|----|---|----|
| 11 | Bradley University                                | IL |
| 11 | Northeastern Illinois University                  | IL |
| 11 | Southern Illinois University-Carbondale           | IL |
| 13 | Illinois State University                         | IL |
| 13 | Loyola University Chicago                         | IL |
| 13 | University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign           | IL |
| 14 | Illinois Institute of Technology                  | IL |
| 19 | DePaul University                                 | IL |
| 20 | Lewis University                                  | IL |
| 25 | Northern Illinois University                      | IL |
| 27 | University of Illinois Chicago                    | IL |
| 33 | Northwestern University                           | IL |
| 66 | University of Chicago                             | IL |
| 10 | Purdue University Fort Wayne                      | IN |
| 10 | Indiana University Northwest                      | IN |
| 10 | Valparaiso University                             | IN |
| 12 | Purdue University Northwest                       | IN |
| 13 | Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology               | IN |
| 16 | Ball State University                             | IN |
| 16 | Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis | IN |
| 18 | University of Notre Dame                          | IN |
| 36 | Indiana University-Bloomington                    | IN |
| 39 | Purdue University-Main Campus                     | IN |



# Planning Context and CEDS Structure



Planning Context

Vision

Guiding Principles and CEDS Structure



## Planning Context

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) partnered with the Purdue Center for Regional Development (PCRD) to update their comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) under the guidelines of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). The project launched in October 2024 with an informational and engagement phase. This included data collection and analysis and stakeholder engagement sessions to identify the region's economic development challenges and assets. Insight from this work, in addition to regular input from the Economy and Place working group, forms the foundation of this plan.

This CEDS update serves as a guide for economic development efforts across Lake, Porter and La Porte counties. This plan focuses on the region's efforts to be more strategic and collaborative in responding to new economic development opportunities and addressing regional challenges. Though a CEDS concentrates on strategies to be implemented over the

next five years, the impacts of the Northwest Indiana region embracing its interconnectedness and working collaboratively to implement these strategies will have a much longer-lasting impact. This CEDS meets the requirements set forth by the EDA to continue to retain Economic Development District (EDD) status. The overall guiding principles, goals and industry cluster focus also emerged from the Economy and Place Committee with three goal areas: economic diversification and innovation, workforce resiliency, and quality of place. These goals, along with the strategies and action items, leverage other regional planning efforts for greater coordination, collaboration, and impact. This CEDS should be viewed as a living document that invites revisions and refinements as economic conditions in the Northwest Indiana region change. The Economy and Place Committee should meet and discuss goal implementation progress and performance metrics to adapt as needed.



## Vision



As the cornerstone for a comprehensive economic development strategy, a strong vision statement provides the basis for the plan to capitalize on opportunities and address vulnerabilities. The vision statement describes where the region hopes to be, with the strategies and actions in the plan moving Northwest Indiana toward this vision. **NIRPC's CEDS is committed to partnerships that prioritize fair, unified, vibrant, and resilient growth.**

## Guiding Principles and CEDS Structure

NIRPC's Economy and Place working group identified several industrial clusters to nurture along with current and future initiatives: Primary Metals Manufacturing, Chemicals/Glass and Ceramics (pharmaceuticals), Machinery Manufacturing, and Advanced Computing and Quantum. In addition, they approved guiding principles, (described in further detail below) which are the connections uniting all the goals, strategies, and action items throughout the CEDS. The importance of connective and Emerging clusters appears as a guiding principle and as part of the economic resilience framework. These principles are:

- **Partnerships and Regional Alignment.** Align regional efforts to advance economic opportunity for all and build partnerships across the Northwest Indiana region.
- **Distributed Growth.** Seek to understand, address, and dismantle the root causes of opportunity disparity along with the historic and existing barriers to participation in the regional economy.
- **Economic Stabilization and Growth.** Target efforts that prepare the region to avoid, withstand, and recover from economic shocks and natural disasters.

Guided by these three principles, the plan structure divides strategies and action items under three goal areas: **Economic Diversification and Innovation, Workforce Resiliency, and Quality of Place.** These three goal areas, strategic action items, and an evaluation framework are outlined within the CEDS.





# Economic Performance Indicators



Economic Performance Indicators

Economic Leakages and Opportunities

Job Growth and Cost of Living

Why the Focus on Industry Clusters

Industry Cluster Competitiveness and Specializations



## Economic Performance Indicators

The region consists of three counties in Indiana, which include Lake, La Porte, and Porter counties. Located in the northwest corner of the state, this region serves as Indiana's gateway to the Chicago Metro Area. This region is an economic engine in the state. In 2023, the NIRPC region had a gross regional product (GRP) of \$52.9 billion. This means that the region created almost \$53 billion worth of goods and services in one year. At the same time, the Chicago Metro Area and the state of Indiana created \$861

and \$476 billion worth of goods and services, respectively. Despite the large differences in the GRP estimates, the region emerges competitive when the economic productivity measures are compared to the Chicago Metro Area and Indiana. For the economic productivity measure of GRP per job in 2023, Northwest Indiana had \$132,508 per job, which exceeded the state of Indiana's value of \$112,787 per job and was on par with the Chicago Metro Area's value of \$138,583 per job.

|   | <b>NIRPC Region</b> (all jobs) (Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), non-QCEW, self-employed, and proprietors) | <b>Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN Metro Area</b> (QCEW, non-QCEW, self-employed, and proprietors) | <b>Indiana</b> (QCEW, non-QCEW, self-employed, and proprietors) |
|---|--|--|---|
| Jobs, 2018  | 377,807  | 5,932,474  | 3,962,379   |
| Jobs, 2023  | 399,365  | 6,211,128  | 4,218,876   |
| Job change, 2018-2023                             | 21,558   | 278,654  | 256,497   |
| % Job change, 2018-2023                           | 6%   | 5%   | 6%  |
| Average total earnings per job, 2023              | \$60,723   | \$79,536   | \$63,481  |
| Cost of Living (COL)                              | 93.8   | 103.0  | 95.6  |
| COL Adjusted Average total earnings per job, 2023 | \$64,737   | \$77,220   | \$66,403  |
| Establishments, 2023                              | 18,175   | 253,386  | 189,164   |
| Sales, 2023                                       | \$123.5 billion  | \$1559.5 billion   | \$973.1 billion   |
| Gross Regional Product (GRP), 2023                | \$52.9 billion   | \$860.8 billion  | \$475.8 billion   |
| GRP per job, 2023                                 | \$132,508  | \$138,583  | \$112,787   |
| Exports per job, 2023                             | \$200,046  | \$100,814  | \$129,817   |
| Total purchases, 2023                             | \$57.2 billion   | \$623.1 billion  | \$422.1 billion   |
| <i>Within region</i>                              | 39.7%  | 69.8%  | 51%   |
| <i>Imported from outside of state/region</i>      | 60.3%  | 30.2%  | 49%   |

Source: Lightcast- 2024.4 (QCEW + non-QCEW + Self-employed + Proprietorships)



## Economic Leakages and Opportunities

Regional businesses and industries purchased \$57.2 billion worth of goods and services as inputs in 2023. Nearly 60% of those inputs or supply chain demands were obtained from outside of the NIRPC region. Hence, economic leakages or imports were approximately \$34.3 billion in 2023. Such a large magnitude of economic leakages provides opportunities for the import substitution strategies for industry clusters in the region. The fulfillment of regional demand by business and industries within the region can create multiplier or positive ripple effects within the regional economy adding to jobs and earnings.



## Job Growth and Cost of Living

The region had more than 399,300 jobs in 2023, which was 6% more than the total jobs in 2018. In comparison, the jobs in Chicago Metro Area and Indiana grew by 5% and 6%, respectively, from 2018 to 2023. Note that the NIRPC region has the lowest cost of living (COL) index of 93.8 compared to Chicago Metro Area's and Indiana's COL indices of 103 and 95.6, respectively. A COL value of 100 indicates that the cost of living is similar to average of the U.S. The NIRPC region has a comparative advantage in terms of the COL, hence, despite lower average earnings per job than the Chicago Metro Area and the state of Indiana, the gaps are reduced for the COL adjusted earnings per job. The lower cost of living can be translated into the lower cost of doing business in the region. In another economic performance indicator related to the exports, the NIRPC region exceeded Chicago Metro Area and Indiana in terms of the exports per job in 2023 by large margins.







## Why the Focus on Industry Clusters?

Strong concentrations of related industries in a specific area are referred to as industry clusters. These clusters encompass companies, suppliers, service providers, as well as educational, research, and specialized training institutions that collaborate and support one another. When industry clusters thrive in a particular region, they contribute significantly to the local economy by generating jobs that sustain families and foster innovation. Moreover, they enhance the region's competitiveness for employment opportunities and attract private investments.

A robust industry cluster is characterized by a high level of employment specialization within the region. This specialization is particularly crucial for businesses considering establishing or expanding their operations in that area. There are two primary types of clusters that shape a regional economy: **Traded Clusters (industry)** and **Local Clusters**.

Both contribute to the regional economy in different ways. Local Clusters consist of areas that contribute to regional economic wellbeing and include:

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

This CEDS focuses on traded clusters because there is a focus on economic growth and competitiveness. Traded clusters are responsible for providing products and services that cater to markets beyond the region. They are instrumental in attracting financial investments from outside, which is essential for economic growth. The revenue generated by traded cluster companies constitutes new wealth being introduced to the area, as opposed to merely circulating existing wealth within the local market.



Firms within traded clusters often face competition from national or international companies. Unless their location is influenced by access to specific natural resources, these firms have the flexibility to choose where they set up operations.

Traded clusters are regions where specific industries are heavily concentrated, usually because the local market provides distinct competitive advantages. These advantages can include a readily available pool of highly skilled talent, robust infrastructure tailored to the needs of the industry, and a favorable business environment that encourages success. In contrast, local clusters consist of industries that mainly serve the surrounding market and are less influenced by external competitive factors. The majority of jobs in a region come from these local clusters, which operate without significant competition from outside their geographic area. Examples of local clusters include healthcare services such as dental practices and optometrists. Although most job growth is attributed to local clusters, it's essential to consider the role of traded clusters as well. While local clusters contribute significantly to employment, traded clusters have a tendency to foster higher levels of innovation and provide better wage opportunities. Furthermore, local clusters often

support the function of traded clusters, demonstrating that both types are vital for the economic health and vibrancy of a region. Why is innovation driven by clusters crucial for the economy? Innovation serves as a key driver of growth. For businesses, developing new products, services, and production techniques can lead to increased growth, which in turn creates more jobs. This growth often prompts further investment in research and development, fueling even more innovation and leading to a continuous cycle of new offerings and production advancements. Ideally, this process perpetuates itself, consistently advancing the economy.

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



## Industry Cluster Competitiveness and Specializations

Industry cluster analysis was used to assess the regional competitiveness of the NIRPC region. The industry cluster analysis revealed that there were four highly competitive or Star industry clusters in the region. These clusters included Chemicals and Chemical-based Products, Glass and Ceramics, Mining, and Machinery Manufacturing. The four industry clusters not only increased their specializations from 2018 to 2023, but remained competitive in 2023 with the location quotient (LQ) values higher than 1.0. The LQ measures the concentration of jobs in the industry cluster in a region with respect to the nation. If the value of LQ is more than 1, the industry cluster is specialized in the region, and hence there is capacity for exports or selling the goods and services outside of the region. In addition to the four clusters in Star quadrant, there were five different industry clusters which emerged as Mature or strong but declining clusters in the NIRPC region for the period of 2018 to 2023. These clusters included Primary Metals Manufacturing, Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing, Advanced Materials, Biomedical/Biotechnical (life sciences), and Transportation and Logistics. Mature clusters mean that industry clusters remained specialized (LQ greater than 1) in 2023, but during the period of 2018 to 2023, the LQ declined or the growth in specialization is negative. These industry clusters require policy and program support so that their growth in specialization is boosted. The LQ of Primary Metals

Manufacturing was 23 in the year 2023, which means that the jobs in primary metals or steel production is 23 times more concentrated than the U.S. average. This cluster provided 15,800 jobs in the NIRPC region.

In the shift-share analysis of the Chemicals cluster, Pharmaceuticals Preparation Manufacturing reported the highest competitive advantage of +258 during 2018-2023 period. Although Pharmaceuticals Preparation Manufacturing had only few hundred jobs in 2023, it shows a high jobs multiplier value for NIRPC and the sector has been active in hiring talent from the region. The region is competitive in Glass and Ceramics, which is embedded within the Chemicals cluster. Shift-share analysis can parse out the jobs growth in a sector into the national, industry and region-specific shares, and hence shows if a region can counter the declining trends at the national and industry specific levels. A positive and high value of shift-share analysis for an industry sector in a region could be due to skilled labor force, availability of raw materials and suppliers, logistics advantages, etc.

Despite having a strong presence in a variety of manufacturing activities, industry cluster analysis revealed that Machinery Manufacturing clusters was a competitive or a Star cluster in the NIRPC region from 2018-2023. Several industry sectors providing a high number of jobs within

### **What are Industry Clusters?**

Local and regional concentrations of competitive businesses and industries that:

- Buy and sell from each other
- Use similar or complementary technologies
- Share a labor pool
- Share supply chains
- Share, leverage, and promote innovation
- Include supporting services and specialized infrastructure
- Include high and low-value added employment
- Have career pathways available in the talent ecosystem
- Produce for exports outside the region
- Drive regional economic growth and wealth creation



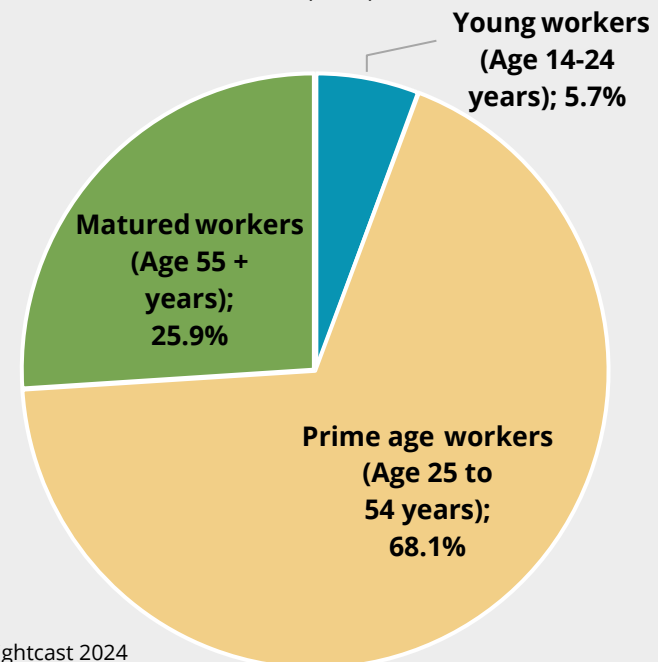
the Machinery Manufacturing cluster reported high positive values of competitive shift or regional performance during the 2018-2023 period. In addition, these sectors showed really high jobs multiplier values and very active jobs postings in the region.

The cluster drill-down reports were prepared for the Chemicals and Chemical-based Products, Glass and Ceramics, Primary Metals Manufacturing, and Machinery Manufacturing clusters. The industry cluster drill-down focused on the shift-share analysis or identifying competitive industry sectors driving the specific industry cluster; leakage analysis or the dollar values of products, goods and services imported within the industry cluster; top occupations working in the industry cluster businesses and industries; and the demographic characteristics of the workforce engaged in the industry cluster. In addition, select data metrics were developed for jobs postings or labor demand specific to the industry cluster.

Several chemical-related manufacturing industries are competitive within the Chemicals and Chemical-based Products industry cluster in the NIRPC region. These include unlaminated plastics film and sheet, clay building material and refractories manufacturing, pharmaceutical preparation, gypsum product manufacturing, etc. The Chemicals and Chemical-based Products industry cluster in the NIRPC region had a total demand of \$157 million in plastics material and resin manufacturing in 2023. Out of \$157 million demand, \$128 million or nearly 82% was being imported from outside of the region. Similarly, 75% of nearly \$70 million of demand was being imported in all other basic organic chemical manufacturing in the NIRPC region. The staffing patterns revealed that the largest number of workers were engaged in low to middle skill jobs requiring a high school diploma or a post-secondary nondegree award. One in four workers in the labor force engaged in the Chemicals and Chemical-based Products manufacturing cluster in the NIRPC region is 55 years of age or older. Only 6% of workers were of 24 years or younger. The remainder were in the prime working age of 25 to 54 years old. These data show challenges

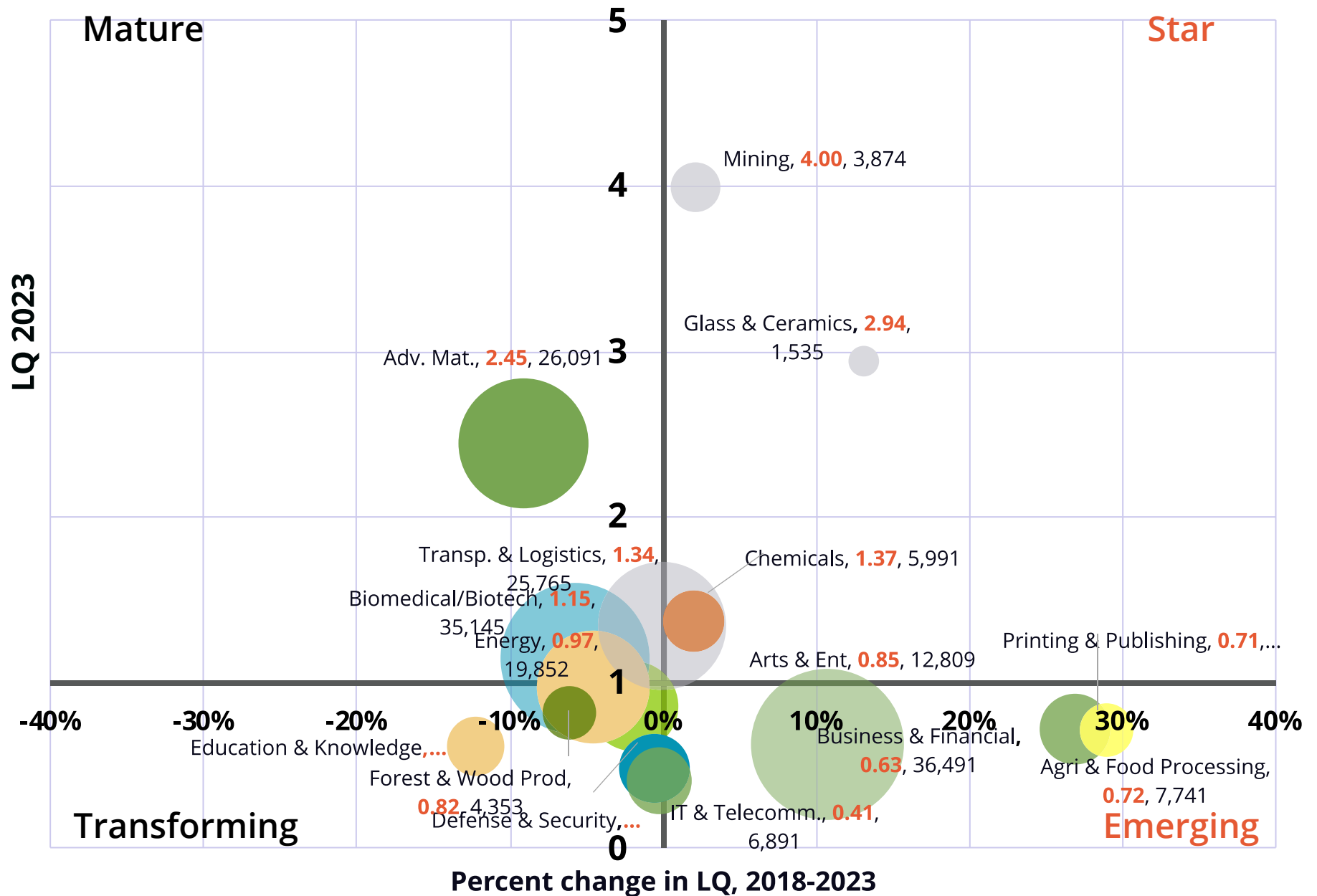
as there are not enough young age workers in the talent pipeline. The jobs postings revealed a consistent increase in the labor demand after COVID-19 shocks during the first quarter of 2020. In terms of jobs postings, industrial gas manufacturing shows potential with the largest demand for workers. Similarly, in terms of the competitive shift, economic leakages and multipliers, plastics material and resin manufacturing, all other basic organic chemical manufacturing, and pharmaceutical preparation manufacturing show the potential for the largest returns on investments. The detailed drill-down reports are included in Appendix E.

### Northwest Indiana Chemicals Cluster Workforce Demographics (2023)



Source: Lightcast 2024

This quadrant graphic depicts the PCRD's industry cluster analysis for the NIRPC EDD using 2023 data.



Note: Label includes cluster name, LQ in 2023, and Employment in 2023.

Source: Economic Modeling Specialists International (EMSI) – 2024.1 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, Self-Employed, and Extended Proprietors



# Qualitative Input and Public Engagement



Purpose and Session Development

SWOT Analysis

Initial Discussion Categories

Key Summary



## Purpose and Session Development

Public engagement is a very crucial piece of the CEDS drafting process.

The purpose of the public engagement sessions\* was to provide multiple stakeholders in the region an opportunity to discuss the current regional economic status and share valuable insights and feedback in the process of building a regional economic development plan.

During the initial phase of the CEDS update project meeting in October 2024, NIRPC and the Purdue Center for Regional Development (PCRD) agreed to host a total of four 2-hour public engagement sessions which included three in-person sessions (one in each county - Lake, Porter, La Porte) and one alternative virtual session, all taking place during the months of November and December in 2024.

### The session offerings were as follows:

- Wednesday, November 13, 2024, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m., Hammond Development Corporation (HUB), 5233 Hohman Avenue, Hammond, Indiana
- Tuesday, November 19, 2024, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m., La Porte County Library's Exchange Building Classroom, 807 Indiana Avenue, La Porte, Indiana
- Friday, December 6, 2024, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m., Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission Lake Michigan Room, 6100 Southport Road, Portage, Indiana
- Monday, December 9, 2024, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. via Zoom Virtual Session

**270**

Stakeholders  
Reached



**4**

Engagement  
Sessions



**42**

Session  
Participants



**33**

Organizations  
Represented



\*The public engagement sessions featured discussions about multiple topics and reflect the views of the attendees. These have not been altered and are being reported as stated.



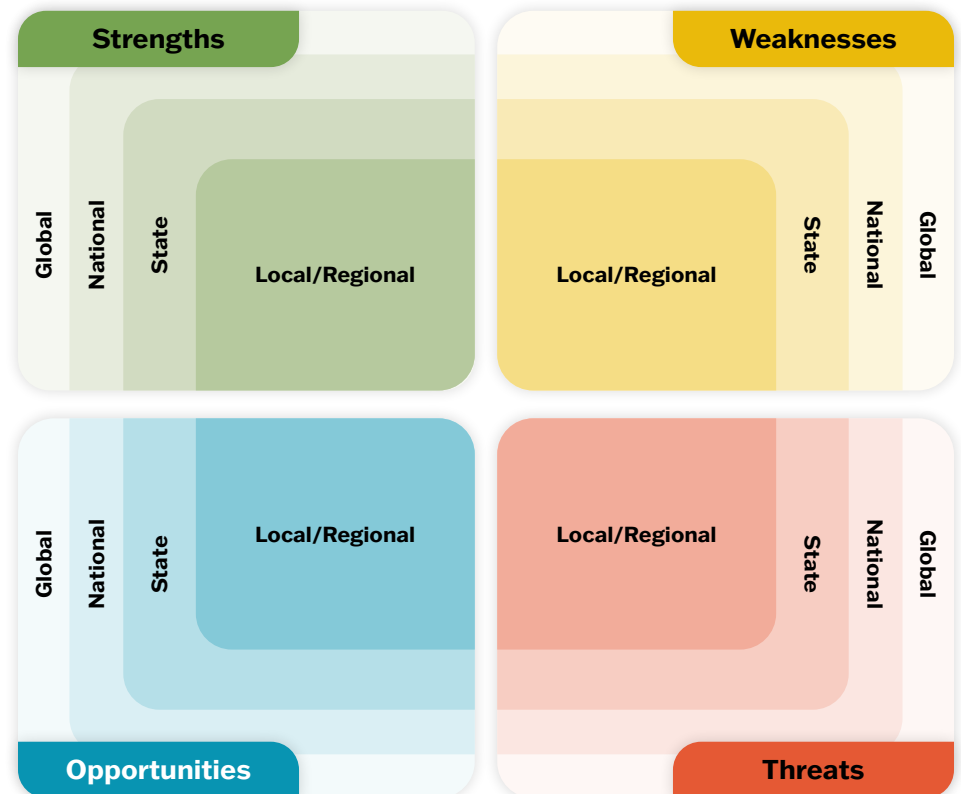


## SWOT Analysis

A CEDS requires a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, which is a commonly used method. During both in-person and online public engagement sessions, the facilitator led participant discussions based on a SWOT analysis format. Participants from the various backgrounds and organizational affiliations engage in collaboratively identifying a region's competitive strengths and weaknesses in the four geographies of the economy. Additionally, participants identify opportunities and potential threats based on a region's competitive advantages and various external circumstances.

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

The results of the NIRPC SWOT analysis and a list of the public engagement session participating organizations can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.



## Initial Discussion Categories

During each session, the facilitator reviewed the general focus areas including infrastructure, transportation, housing, education, workforce, natural resources, industry, local businesses, etc. The participants were engaged in SWOT analysis activities which would serve as the crucial elements for building a vision for the next five years.

During the SWOT activities for the first three in-person public engagement sessions, the attendees used sticky notes to jot down their ideas. The ideas for each SWOT category were discussed as a small group and then narrowed down to the top four to five priority items of each small group.

During the SWOT activities for the virtual public engagement session, the attendees were using a shared Google document to list their ideas and then casting votes using an annotation function to narrow down the top priority items for each SWOT category.

The following categories were given to the participants for brainstorming and engaging in-depth discussion:

- Transportation
- Healthcare
- Recreational Opportunities
- Housing
- Education
- Local Business
- Natural Resources
- Tourism
- Energy
- Infrastructure
- Industry Clusters
- Government & Regulations
- Cost of Living
- Arts & Culture
- Finance
- Childcare
- Environmental Quality
- Workforce

## Key Summary

Public engagement sessions collected valuable feedback on Northwest Indiana's current economic, cultural, intellectual, and physical assets as well as future recommendations which could be broken down into three key areas of concern that need to be addressed in the CEDS.

### Three Key Areas of Concern

**Economic  
Diversification and  
Innovation**

**Talent and  
Workforce  
Resiliency**

**Quality of  
Place**





# Goals



## Summary

Goal One: Economic Diversification and Innovation

Goal Two: Workforce Resiliency

Goal Three: Quality of Place



## Summary

This plan is designed to guide economic development efforts across the NIRPC region over the next five years. The three goals in this CEDS—Economic Diversification and Innovation, Workforce Resiliency, and Quality of Place—are structured to complement and build on one another to create a holistic approach to economic development. Altogether, this plan meets the EDA’s requirements to maintain the three-county region as an EDD. The plan is also designed to allow regional leaders to act swiftly as economic conditions change. This adaptability will require local organizations to maintain cross-sector partnerships and to act in a coordinated manner. Whether building a more competitive local talent pool, supporting industry clusters, or leveraging funding opportunities, regional collaboration and coordination will be essential to the successful implementation of the CEDS.

This section outlines the purpose and organization of the Goals, Objectives and Action Items. Goals are the broad, overarching aspirations of the CEDS. They define the desired future state of the region’s economy for the next five years in both qualitative and inspirational terms. They answer both the “what” and the “why.”

Objectives are the actionable priorities within each goal. They align with the overall vision and provide a roadmap to the action items. Action items are the “who,” “what,” and “when” – along with the specific tasks to achieve the overall goals.

### Goal One

#### Economic Diversification and Innovation

*Create a robust network of forward-thinking initiatives around legacy and Emerging industry clusters to fuel innovative growth.*

### Goal Two

#### Workforce Resiliency

*Develop, attract, and retain a skilled workforce by building on the collaboration among Northwest Indiana’s education and training organizations, workforce development programs, and private sector employees.*

### Goal Three

#### Quality of Place

*Collaborate with and support other regional organizations to improve the affordability/availability of housing for all income levels; brownfield cleanup and redevelopment; and awareness of Transit Development Districts (TDD).*





## Economic Diversification and Innovation

*Regional specialization of industries through diversification and collaboration.*

Industrial diversification, technology innovation, and creating supporting entrepreneurship are essential components to growing a vibrant regional economy. The three-county Northwest Indiana region has tremendous potential to leverage its assets, along with those in close geographic proximity (interstate) to drive industrial specialization through the adoption of new technologies to support both legacy and Emerging clusters. This is a region seeking a bold and transformative change which realizes the potential of Advanced Computing and Quantum technologies spillovers from adjacent regions. Technology adoption and innovation has the capacity to change the growth of clusters and the region is primed to take advantage of these computing technologies. This approach also aligns with strategic U.S. national security interests which are growing in prominence such as Advanced Computing and Quantum, Semiconductors, Critical Materials, Hydrogen and Biofuels.

This goal lays the economic foundations to support opportunity with forward-thinking initiatives around industry clusters to fuel innovative growth. This will depend on developing collaborative networks within industry groups to drive essential components of Northwest Indiana's economy. The existing Northwest Indiana economy hosts a number of growing, stable, and legacy clusters. In addition, the region is well-positioned geographically to **Advanced Computing and Quantum** technology development in the Chicago area which would act as a catalyst for what is possible in Northwest Indiana. This region has a unique opportunity to forge growth by harnessing new technology development in the broader Chicagoland region, including the quantum communications corridor, and merge those possibilities with its high-performing and

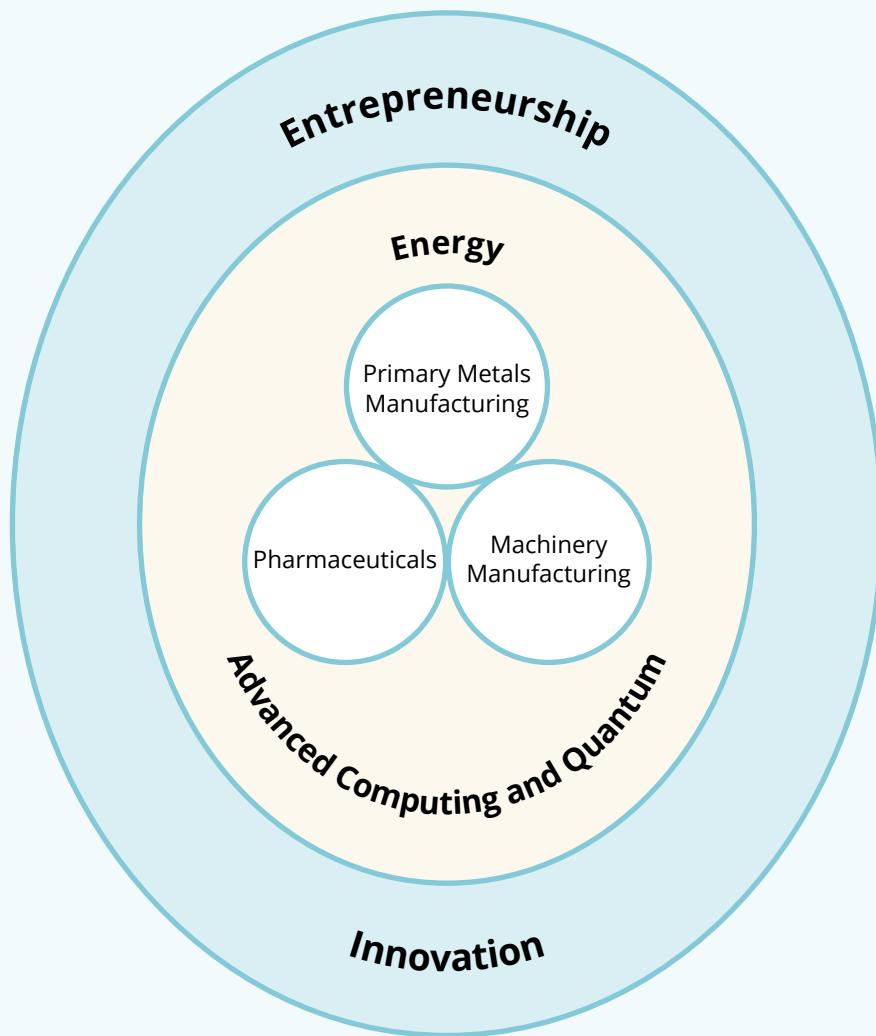
Emerging industrial clusters. This would mean that Advanced Computing and Quantum's potential for innovative growth should be explored within the **Primary Metals Manufacturing, Chemicals/Glass and Ceramics (pharmaceuticals), and Machinery Manufacturing** clusters.

The region is home to a strong set of legacy, Emerging, and strong clusters whose specialties can be leveraged in support of productivity growth and cross-sector synergies. This will also require some new technology adoption from advanced computing and quantum to potentially harness the possibilities. **Industrial cluster collaboration, along with cross-sector technology adoption, could provide key industrial advantages within the broader Chicagoland region.**

Ecosystems for entrepreneurship and innovation, from a regional perspective, are a positive-sum environment which requires regional coordination. Ecosystems, in this perspective, showcase assets, resources, and the social connections in which economic agents (such as entrepreneurs, firms, nonprofit organizations, research collaborations) may thrive. Introductory regional engagement with industrial clusters, in addition, to the exploration of cross-sectoral entrepreneurship opportunities, need to be supported to build trust.

NIRPC will focus on the development of three industrial cluster ecosystems and how they segue with Advanced Computing and Quantum technology. The following outlines an effective strategy to engage and sustain them with a combined focus on **policy, action, institutions, and governance.**

## NIRPC Economic Diversification Model



This graphic also represents the broader network of resources, capabilities, and partnerships that contribute to the value proposition for economic growth and workforce resiliency.

## Goal One Objectives

### #1 Ecosystem formation and foundation

- NIRPC will begin to identify which companies, regional nonprofits, and other partner organizations should form their first industrial cluster ecosystem project. This would include representatives from: businesses, academia, governmental entities, and relevant industry associations. Businesses in the cluster could be identified using jobs posting data.
- Research and contact businesses which may participate in an industrial ecosystem project and form sub-working groups.
- Support development of, and provide resources, such as data, or industry experts for the Advanced Computing and Quantum industry cluster. It should be noted that support will vary from simply hosting and convening meetings to doing cluster specific research. These resources will vary based on feedback from companies and partners.
- Build a slide deck of information to present to potential industry cluster project partners about the high tech assets and the potential benefits of an industry cluster group.



## #2 Ecosystem cluster strategy, collaboration, and innovation

- Evaluate potential projects (such as supply chain leakages or projected job growth) with each industrial cluster ecosystem group to develop a strategy to address them within the region.
- Identify what funding mechanisms and partners may support Emerging and traditional industry clusters.
- Explore the possibility of holding a summit with other collaborative partners for all identified clusters and have speakers from the Chicago Quantum Exchange, Indiana BioWorks, and the Indiana Semiconductor Hub leaders. Have cross-sector workshops to identify needs, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Identify areas where the positive spillover effects may be leveraged within the region. This will encourage more industrial growth within the region.
  - › Encourage joint projects and initiatives among cluster members and have them develop fund seeking strategies.
  - › Seek funding opportunities for research and development activities with regional and state level universities to broaden the training and research capabilities for Advanced Computing and Quantum.
- Survey what expertise, technology, and market information each cluster group would most benefit from and make connections to those who can provide for free or at a reduced cost.
- Identify and work closely with partner leaders within each cluster group who may serve as a unified voice for the industrial cluster in advocating for regional policies which support its growth.
- Continue to help the industry cluster ecosystem group identify high-tech industrial collaborations in advanced computing and energy.

## #3 Entrepreneurship and innovation

The NIRPC EDD will support The Society of Innovators at Purdue Northwest and NWI BizzHub's regional efforts to build and maintain a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem across Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties.

- Participate in regional entrepreneurship meetings in conjunction with the Indiana Small Business Development Center (ISBDC).
- Continue supporting eligible small businesses through the NIRPC EDD's revolving loan fund.
- The NIRPC EDD will support the efforts of the Northwest Indiana Forum's Ignite goals to build support systems necessary for talented and ambitious entrepreneurs.





## Goal Two

## Workforce Resiliency

As the region seeks to diversify and specialize the regional economy to meet high-growth areas, the Emerging high-technology areas and industrial clusters will require a highly trained workforce to meet the region's needs. Within the economic development realm, the conversation has shifted from solely using an industry-based analysis to also incorporate a focus on occupations and skills, emphasizing the importance of connecting education, workforce training, and economic development to meet regional needs and enhance career pathways. NIRPC has a unique opportunity to work with and support a variety of regional partners including nonprofit

organizations, industries, and entrepreneurs to develop a regional workforce pipeline and plan. By building on the economic specialization ecosystem approach, these relationships will help industries to not only identify, address and act on the skills gaps in a way that could change the trajectory of people's lives in the region. The industrial clusters are high-growth, broad, and Emerging areas in Northwest Indiana. As such, the workforce pipeline will take some time to develop and adjust to the growing industrial needs.

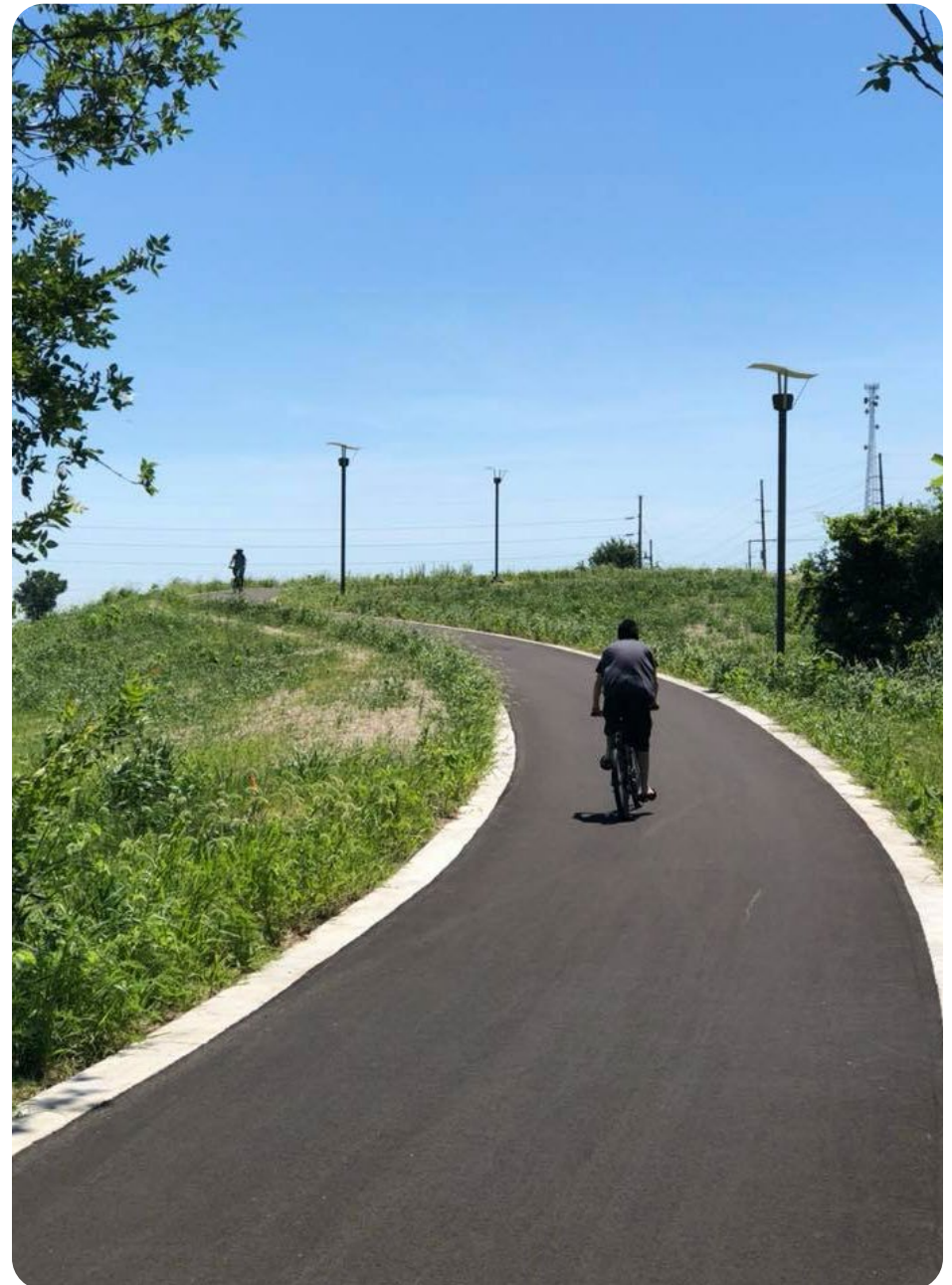




## ■ Goal Two Objectives

### #1 Establish a workforce-oriented public-private partnership for Emerging industries

- Form a collaborative by joining forces and utilizing the expertise of existing partners including Center of Workforce Innovations (CWI), the Society of Innovators, One Region, and the NWI Forum to help drive the development of an industry-led talent attraction pipeline for **Emerging industries** (energy, pharmaceuticals, advanced computing/quantum, cybersecurity, and data centers).
- Discuss using the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Foundation's **Talent Pipeline Management (TPM)** tool. Introduce the TPM tool, or some other workforce development pipeline too, for Emerging industries to all of the aforementioned partners.
- Organize a meeting to bring all closely aligned organizations together and discuss this approach to meeting the regional workforce needs. Assess whether TPM is the right tool and approach to the community of partners interested in working on the talent pipeline and recruitment issue. Leverage the NWI Forum's Talent Pillar Committee to capture a cross section of partners working in this space together with a seven-county strategic plan.
  - › Organize firms to address any skills gaps for critical jobs needed across their company's Emerging industries grounded in advanced computing. Starting from the technology side and then adding to the industrial cluster ecosystem groups may be the best approach; however, this can be explored by collaborators.
  - › Explore the implementation of appropriate next steps identified by a partnership as part of the workforce pipeline strategy developed by the industry and institutional collaborative.

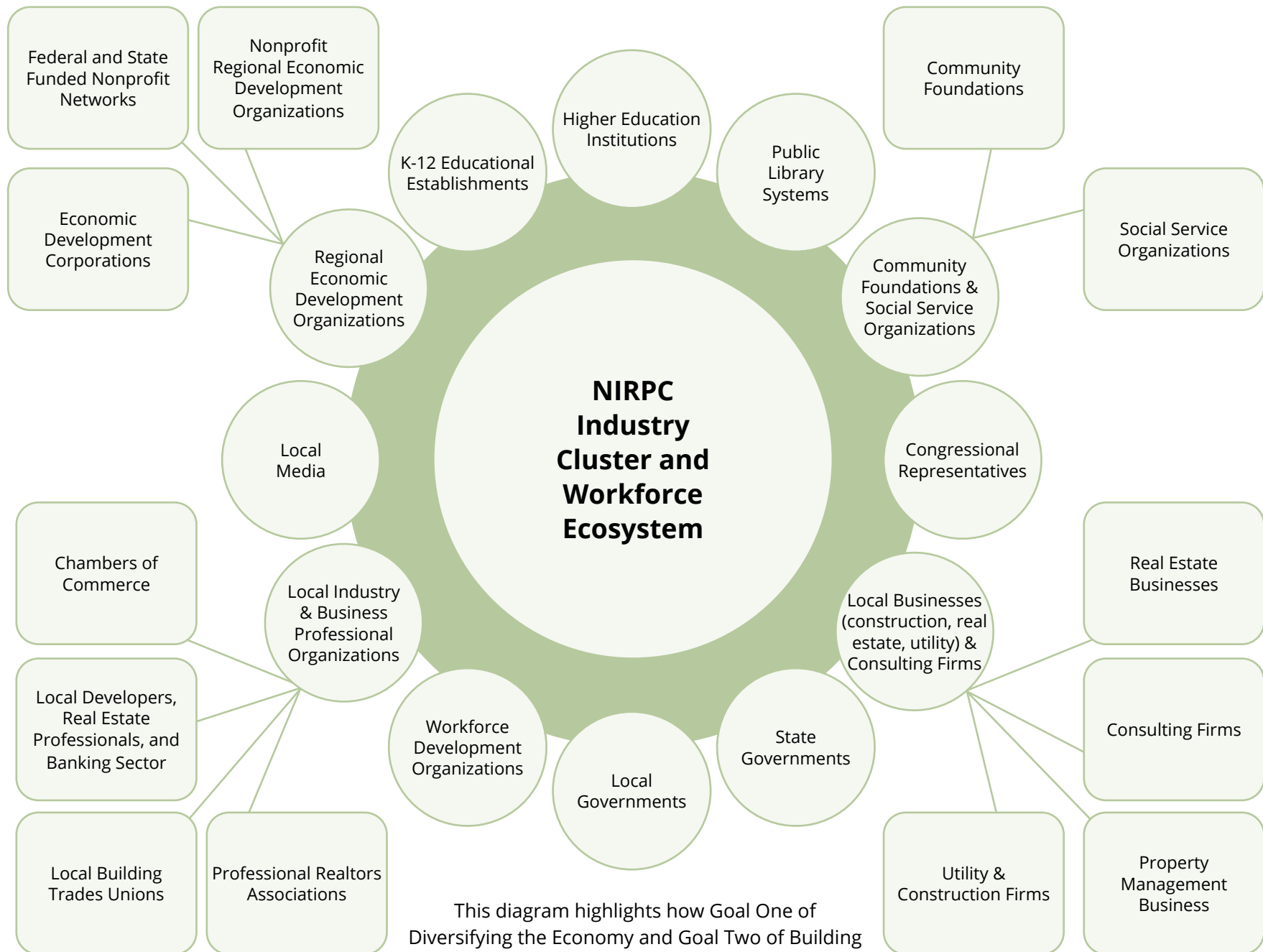


## #2 NIRPC will support CWI's efforts to increase labor force participation, close the skill gap, and build talent pipeline capacity for existing, in-demand, and emerging quality jobs in Healthcare and Social Assistance, Manufacturing, HEART (Hospitality, Entertainment, Arts, Retail and Tourism), Construction, Transportation & Warehousing, Agriculture and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services.

- NIRPC will support CWI's job and career exposure and readiness coaching with wrap around support and basic computer skill training as feasible.
- NIRPC will support CWI's efforts with Adult Career and Technical Education in a region-wide network of opportunity hubs located within distressed urban and rural communities dependent on capacity.
- NIRPC will support CWI's efforts with work-based learning experiences, on the job training, apprenticeships, and employer supported skills training programs dependent on capacity.
- NIRPC will support the coordination of cross-sector, employer-led, industry consortia such as education (READY NWI), advanced manufacturing (FAME), healthcare, and technology to co-create recruitment, training and placement strategies with employers, educators, and community based organizations as feasible.







This diagram highlights how Goal One of Diversifying the Economy and Goal Two of Building Workforce Resiliency rely on multiple partners and assets to come together to implement.



## Goal Three

### Quality of Place

A region's quality of life is profoundly shaped by the synergy between diverse housing options, accessible transit, and in some locations, the responsible redevelopment of brownfield sites. NIRPC completed *NWI 2050+* in 2023 which includes a Land Use and Housing chapter that helps communities understand regional needs and challenges. As the region continues to grow, NIRPC should seek to increase the awareness of transit-oriented developments and districts, support wide range of housing

options for all communities, and provide resources on the reclamation of brownfield sites. Redevelopment of brownfield sites transforms neglected areas into valuable community assets by mitigating environmental hazards and promoting sustainable growth. By prioritizing these interconnected elements, regions can cultivate healthier, more equitable, and resilient communities, enhancing the overall well-being of their residents.

## Goal Three Objectives

### #1 Build awareness of the Land Use and Housing chapter of *NWI 2050+*

- NIRPC should meet with county and municipal governments to discuss the region's projected housing needs across communities.
  - › Share the Land Use and Housing chapter of *NWI 2050+* and provide data on housing affordability options and future land use needs with regional planning staff and elected officials.
  - › Foster more missing middle housing, encourage municipalities to establish new land-use categories that permit higher densities while permitting smaller building sizes in walkable areas.
  - › Share the analysis, findings, and recommendations outlined in the the Land Use and Housing chapter of *NWI 2050+* with municipal planning staff.







## #2 Continue to work on the mitigation and remediation of brownfield sites

- The NIRPC EDD will continue to explore ways to bolster brownfield finances with the Regional Development Authority's (RDA) revolving loan fund.
- Explore the development of an updated website with regional brownfield information to be a resource to local governments on the mitigation process. Website may include high priority sites, redevelopment strategies, and capital ideas necessary for implementation.

## #3 Land use, housing, and transit connection

- Continue to plan for needed infrastructure to support coordinated multi-modal transportation options including walking, bicycling, and transit in locations with historic downtowns and older retail corridors.
- Identify key arterial roadways, including state highways and other arterials that can be reimaged to enhance the livability of Northwest Indiana communities.
- NIRPC will support other local and regional organizations by offering technical data expertise such as Census data.



## Evaluation Framework



Cross-sector Partnerships

Stakeholder Engagement Focus

Planned Work and Progress

Outcomes and Impacts

Industrial Cluster and Workforce Ecosystem Metrics



## Evaluation Framework



The evaluation framework is designed to assess planned work and progress as well as longer-term outcomes and impacts. This CEDS will evaluate the impact of NIRPC's work toward building an effective regional ecosystem which fosters economic stability and growth. This is predicated on cross-sector partnerships, stakeholder engagement, governance, and securing grants in the process.

## Cross-sector Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement Focus

An effective ecosystem will recruit and sustain an interdependent innovation ecosystem that draws in expertise, involvement, and synergy across a wide range of partners, stakeholder groups, and communities. Partners and stakeholders may include institutions of higher education (IHEs), for-profit industry including small businesses, capital investors, entrepreneurs, local and state governments, national and regional laboratories, labor and workforce development organizations, nonprofits, the creative industry, and community-based organizations. The ecosystem should leverage its partnership network to unify regional interests. This

can be achieved through stakeholder engagement, both regional and community-wide, to set mini-goals for industrial specialization, workforce development, and quality of place efforts. The expectation is that the core partnerships will emerge to support wider regional interests and community needs in impactful ways. The evaluation centers on how NIRPC progresses to foster a regional collaborative framework to strategically align public sector investments from federal, state, and local sources as well as private, nonprofit, and philanthropic partners.



## Planned Work and Progress

Several activities are proposed in this document. Progress and action on each of these can be summarized and reported annually by each dimension as part of the evaluation and monitoring framework. Documented progress may include regional efforts as well as localized community activities that align with the CEDS priorities.

## Outcomes and Impacts

Indicators to evaluate longer-term results from CEDS related activities are documented and include a baseline measure with a five-year goal.

## Industrial Cluster and Workforce Ecosystem Metrics

These evaluation metrics are organized by three overarching NIRPC CEDS goals and will help with tracking goal implementation and progress. Each evaluation metric can be tracked monthly, quarterly, biannually, and/or annually based on each measurement characteristic. CEDS are designed for a five year implementation period and some of the metrics will not be able to be tracked at the beginning of the CEDS implementation period.

The evaluation components for goals one and two are meant to guide the deep levels of engagement that these goals require to be successful. They collect real time engagement data and reflect the work required to implement these goals. Engagement metrics provide real-time data on the effectiveness of economic development programs, allowing for timely adjustments and improvements. Instead of relying on assumptions, data

allows for informed decisions about resource allocation, program design, and targeted interventions. By tracking engagement, policymakers can pinpoint areas where participation is low, or where specific groups are not being reached. This information enables targeted interventions and adjustments.

It is meaningful to create a comprehensive evaluation metrics structure to track implementation progress and diligent monitoring for a long-term perspective and improvement in future planning. In addition, individual metrics under each goal category can be modified as NIRPC and partnering organizations are collaborating CEDS strategies and action items. The tracking template for the NIRPC EDD Coordinator can be found in Appendix D.





## Goal One Metrics: Economic Diversification and Innovation

- Number of identified potential industrial clusters and entrepreneurial partners
- Number of participating industrial cluster members in the ecosystem project
- Number of regional organizations contacted about the CEDS industrial diversification and entrepreneurship efforts
- Number of new organizations participating in the industrial cluster ecosystem project because of the CEDS related outreach
- Number of industrial cluster engagement attendees at meetings of the ecosystem project
- Number of meetings held with any industrial cluster business partners
- Number of NIRPC sponsored or partner meetings pertaining to either industry clusters or entrepreneurship
- Number of other Midwestern organizations (outside of Northwest Indiana) engaged in regional meetings or discussions hosted by NIRPC
- Number of entrepreneurs assisted which include directing to resources, providing information, or holding events with partner organizations

### Key Indicators

- *Monitor the regional performance on an annual basis of Primary Metals Manufacturing (knowing that it is in decline); Machinery Manufacturing; Glass & Ceramics (Pharmaceutical Production) on PCRD's Indiana Association of Regional Councils (IARC) data dashboard.*



## Goal Two Metrics: Workforce Resiliency

- Number of identified potential workforce development collaborations at the regional level
- Number of regional organizations contacted about the CEDS workforce development collaboration efforts
- Number of new organizations participating in the workforce development collaboration efforts because of outreach
- Evaluate various talent pipeline tools, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's TPM tool, to determine the best approach
- Number of NIRPC sponsored or partner meetings pertaining to workforce development

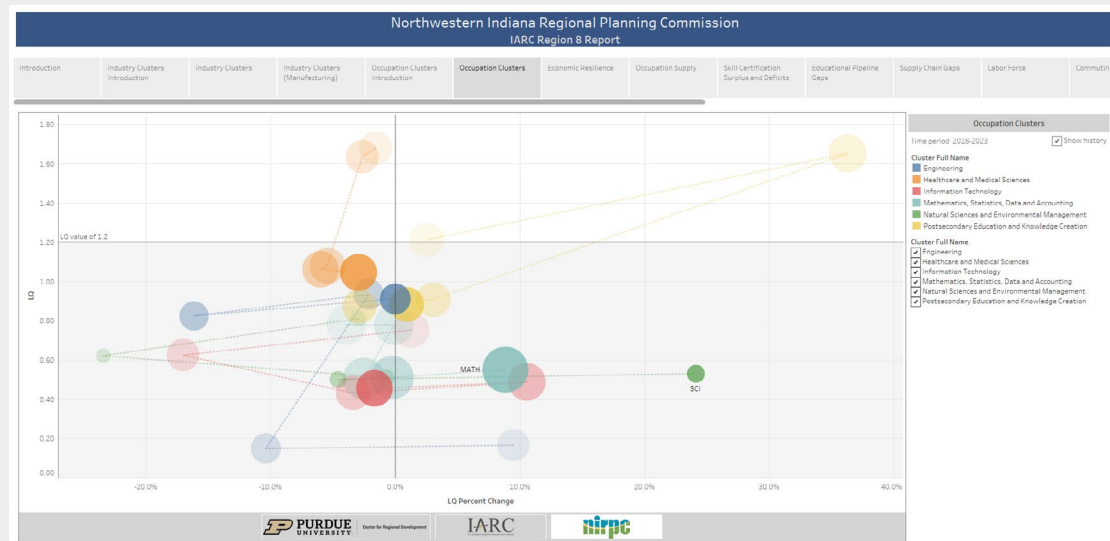
### Key Indicators

- *Monitor the regional performance on an annual basis of Labor Force Participation. Also monitor Occupation Cluster data for STEM jobs (found on PCRD's IARC Region 8 report updated annually).*

### Example of IARC Data Dashboard metrics information

See it at:

[https://tableau.it.purdue.edu/t/public/views/IARC\\_Report\\_Region08/IARCDashboard](https://tableau.it.purdue.edu/t/public/views/IARC_Report_Region08/IARCDashboard)





### Goal Three Metrics: Quality of Place

- Number of identified potential housing collaborations at the regional level
- Number of times NIRPC provided technical assistance to local units of governments, LEDOs, and private partners on brownfield assessments annually
- Number of NIRPC sponsored or partner meetings pertaining to either housing or brownfields
- Number of properties assisted in the NIRPC region through the Indiana Brownfields Program. The Indiana Finance Authority works with buyers to get status letters for brownfields and this represents the number of properties assisted: [IFA: Indiana Brownfields: Program Sites](https://www.in.gov/ifa/brownfields/program-sites) (<https://www.in.gov/ifa/brownfields/program-sites>)

#### Key Indicators

- *Indiana Finance Authority's number of properties assisted by county.*
- *Housing supply indicator by county annually:* <https://data.indianarealtors.com>.
- *Health of the housing market: Housing affordability and market indicators issued quarterly (track by median home value for all three counties). See:* <https://www.nar.realtor/research-and-statistics/housing-statistics/county-median-home-prices-and-monthly-mortgage-payment>.
- *Housing vacancy and housing tenure by county (annual American Community Survey updates):* [https://tableau.it.purdue.edu/t/public/views/CDS\\_QualityofLife/QualityofLife](https://tableau.it.purdue.edu/t/public/views/CDS_QualityofLife/QualityofLife).

### CEDS Regional Alignment and Governance Metrics

- Number of grant application submitted with partner organizations
- Number of grant meetings held with collaborative partners
- Number of grants secured by NIRPC, including as a sub-grantee
- Dollar amount of grants secured by NIRPC toward projects which align with the CEDS regionwide
- Number of studies initiated relating to any of the CEDS goals in the region
- Number of completed studies related to any of the CEDS goals

**Find the NIRPC CEDS and Appendices at:**

<https://www.in.gov/nirpc/economy-and-place/nirpc-economic-development-district/>





Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy by



Center for Regional Development