

# STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RURAL INDIANA

**Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs  
2026-2028**



# Vision

The Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs works with Indiana communities to build relevant and economically thriving places where people want to live, work and grow.



# A LETTER FROM THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Dear Hoosiers,

It is an honor to introduce the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs' 2026-2028 Strategic Plan. Rural Indiana is not just part of our story it is the foundation of who we are as Hoosiers.

Over the past year, OCRA, working under the Lt. Governor's office and in partnership with Director Glynn, has taken a thoughtful and deliberate approach to listening. By engaging directly with leaders in all 92 counties, the insights in this plan reflect real experiences and on-the-ground perspectives. What we heard was honest and encouraging.

Communities shared needs for upgrading essential infrastructure, increasing available housing, confronting economic uncertainty, and breathing new life into Main Streets. These issues aren't new, but they are pressing. At the same time, rural Indiana's strengths in resilience, deep commitment to community, and rich cultural heritage give us confidence in the future.

This strategic plan balances immediate needs with long-term goals. It emphasizes stronger infrastructure, new housing approaches, leadership development, and stronger partnerships at every level. Just as importantly, it recognizes that lasting progress depends on local decision-making and community-driven solutions.

As Lieutenant Governor, I remain committed to ensuring OCRA is a responsive, effective partner. We will continue working to clear obstacles, create opportunities, and support local leaders as they shape the future of their communities. I firmly believe that local control leads to better outcomes.

Rural Indiana does not need to reinvent itself to succeed. It simply needs the right tools, investments, and support to grow into its best version.

The path forward is grounded in collaboration, innovation, and renewed focus. Together, we will strengthen our communities, support families, and ensure that every corner of Indiana remains a place where people are proud to live, work, and grow.

Sincerely,



Micah Beckwith

Lieutenant Governor of Indiana

# A LETTER FROM OCRA'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

When I started as executive director of OCRA in 2025, I wanted to learn more about our Hoosier communities, including what makes them unique, their strengths and their challenges. To accomplish this, I visited all 92 counties where I met with local officials and community leaders to ask questions and to listen. Through these conversations, a few common themes and challenges became clear.

The biggest challenge facing a large portion of our rural communities is water infrastructure issues. This problem, if not confronted head on, will become a bigger obstacle in the coming years.

The second biggest problem in our rural communities is vacant and dilapidated commercial buildings. In many cases, these buildings are purchased by absentee landlords that may hang on to properties with no intention of making improvements. These blighted buildings can have a negative impact on Main Street districts and communities as a whole.

The third biggest issue I heard during the listening tour is housing. I spoke with various communities that need housing built, however several could not get builders to travel to their areas without significant cost mark ups. Other communities have housing close to the downtown corridor, but they are in need of improvement.

The strategic plan we have released this year will reflect ways we intend to assist communities in confronting these complex issues in the areas that OCRA can provide. In addition to funding mechanisms when we can provide them, we will bring together interested parties to come up with solutions to present to key decision makers in our state. We will seek to make a bigger impact on these key issues for the benefit of our rural communities around the state.

We will also have a bigger focus on the growth of our Main Street program as well as bringing current Main Street members to higher levels of designation. Programs like Indiana Main Street, PreservINg Main Street, Stellar Pathways and the Rural Empowerment and Development program will continue to make positive impacts on communities.

We look forward to a great 2026 and 2027. We are here to serve you and be a resource at the state level. Let's work together to continue to improve our rural communities across Indiana!

Sincerely,



Fred Glynn  
OCRA Executive Director

# WHAT WE HEARD FROM COMMUNITIES

## TOP NEEDS

- ▶ Water and wastewater infrastructure
- ▶ Housing availability and diversity
- ▶ Fiscal stress and revenue uncertainty
- ▶ Growth management and identity preservation
- ▶ Access to funding and match support

# FROM

## TOP STRENGTHS

- ▶ Strong community identity and volunteerism
- ▶ Parks, trails and natural assets
- ▶ Manufacturing and industrial anchors
- ▶ Strategic regional location
- ▶ Historic downtowns and cultural heritage

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2026-2028

## 1 – STRENGTHEN RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Expand water and wastewater investments
- Relaunch Site Certified (2026)
- Modernize and relaunch Community Development Block Grant training (2027)
- Host Council of State Community Development Agencies' Community Development Block Grant Bootcamp (2026)

## 2 – ADVANCE RURAL HOUSING SOLUTIONS

- Support diverse housing types through Community Development Block Grants, Stellar Pathways and Indiana Main Street programs
- Align housing with infrastructure investments
- Use statewide grant mapping to identify gaps and opportunities

## 3 – ELEVATE INDIANA MAIN STREET

- Implement the Indiana Main Street Strategic Plan
- Deliver the 2026-2027 Main Street America contract
- Launch Main Street Statehouse Day
- Provide statewide workshops, webinars and accreditation visits

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2026-2028

## 4 – EXPAND OCRA’S PRESENCE & PARTNERSHIPS

- Host five regional conferences across the state (2026)
- Increase attendance at local council and Main Street meetings
- Strengthen partnerships with state agencies and nonprofits
- Promote community accomplishments through social media and monthly spotlight videos

## 5 – SUPPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & QUALITY OF LIFE

- Launch Stellar Pathways (2026) and announce designees (2027)
- Support downtown revitalization and blight clearance
- Promote parks, trails, placemaking and cultural assets
- Assist communities in attracting businesses and amenities

## 6 – BUILD LOCAL CAPACITY

- Provide staff professional development
- Offer responsive training tailored to community needs
- Support communities with high turnover
- Expand technical assistance for planning, zoning and Main Street development

# KEY OUTCOME

A stronger, better connected and more resilient rural Indiana — built through advocacy, partnerships and presence.

# KEY INITIATIVES

- ▶▶ Launch Stellar Pathways (2026)
- ▶▶ Announce Stellar designees (2027)
- ▶▶ Deliver Main Street America contract (2026-2027)
- ▶▶ Relaunch Community Development Block Grant training series (2027)
- ▶▶ Host COSCDA CDBG Bootcamp (2026)
- ▶▶ Host five regional conferences (2026)
- ▶▶ Map all OCRA grants from 2014-present
- ▶▶ Expand statewide storytelling and community celebrations