

Thriving Communities Thriving State

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE



SUMMARY OF REGIONAL FORUMS – MID-SIZED

Staff from the Public Policy Institute conducted a series of five regional forums around the state in 2015 to gather feedback from local leaders and residents about the past, present, and future of their respective communities. As part of these events, attendees participated in roundtable discussions around five questions about their community (self-selected as either urban, mid-sized, or rural/small town). What follows is a summary of the recurring themes, common concerns, and general insights from those discussing their mid-sized communities.

2015 Forum Locations:

Gary: February 5
Evansville: February 10
Indianapolis: February 17
Columbus: February 26
Ft. Wayne: March 2

What are the best things about your community/region?

- Education
 - K-12 and post-secondary
 - Access to higher education institutions
- Safety
 - Feel safe in their communities
- Sense of community
 - Caring people willing to collaborate
 - Expectation of excellence
 - Increasing diversity
 - Collaboration
 - Pride in their communities
- Economic development
 - Diversity in business sectors in the region
 - Job opportunities and availability
 - New jobs with good wages
 - Some businesses well invested in the community
 - Distribution center growth
- Aesthetics/amenities
 - Livability and walkability
 - Less congestion
 - Cleanliness
 - Arts and culture
 - Bike paths and trails
 - Parks and recreation
 - Restaurants and retail
 - Communities doing quality of place (QOP) surveys and making QOP plans

- Infrastructure
 - Transportation hub- road, rail, river, air
- Housing
 - Increase in housing development
 - Housing for at-risk populations is improving
- Regionalism
 - Walls of NIMBYism are eroding
 - Ability to work together across sectors
- Agriculture
 - Family farms
 - Valuable agricultural base
- Healthcare resources
- Other
 - Affordable cost of living
 - Commuter tax proposed

What are the key issues facing your community/region?

- Quality/perception of education
 - Need to better connect with students and careers early
 - Some families don't value education
 - State school policy changes too often. They never stick with decisions long enough to know if they work
 - Career technical education should not be the catch for kids with problems
 - Gap in awareness among students and parents of options besides 4-year college
- Lack of amenities
 - Lack of public transportation
 - Bike trails and sidewalks fall short
 - No commuter rail
 - Must have broadband
 - Lack of affordable housing options for young professionals
 - No real shopping- retailers have left
- Land use/infrastructure
 - Transportation infrastructure
 - Water and wastewater
 - Land use planning
- Lack of affordable housing
 - Becomes a barrier to mobility and access to quality schools and jobs

- Retaining talent
 - Jobs good enough to keep our youth here
 - Salaries are too low to sustain young adults and their college debt
 - Competing against other places with good quality of life
 - Suburbs are attractive to young families, probably not to singles
- Workforce development
 - Employers want skilled workers and the supply is lacking
 - Manufacturers aren't invested in the community
 - Lots of young people who lack the skills/motivation to gain access to educational/employment opportunities
- Poverty and drugs
 - Widening gap between “haves” and “have nots”
 - Drugs, and not just illegal drugs
 - Low wages-no longer a “living” wage
 - Abuse/neglect cases are way up
 - Mental health issues
- Attitudes
 - Resistant to change
 - Lack of urgency
 - Communities don't want “poor people” in their neighborhoods and schools
 - Indiana refuses to invest in things for future success
 - Challenges to being a welcoming community- Latinos, LGBT, etc.
- Miscellaneous
 - Lack of diversity
 - Lack of youth activities for those not involved in sports and other extracurricular activities
 - Growing need for services to serve the aging community
 - We talk about millennials, not with them
 - Need more volunteer opportunities

What does your community need to thrive in the next 10 years?

- Infrastructure
 - Better public transportation
 - High speed internet at reasonable cost
 - Continued access to water
- Amenities
 - Become more livable
 - 18 and older singles don't have a lot to do
- Sustainability
 - Build communities for 10 years from now

- Services for marginalized populations
 - Aging population
 - Kids
 - Teen pregnancy
 - Childhood obesity
 - Children experimenting with alcohol
 - People living with HIV/Aids
 - People experiencing poverty
 - People with disabilities and a lack of accessibility
- Attract talent/economic and workforce development
 - More affordable housing in 75k to 125k range in nice, safe places
 - Sustainable housing- smaller better for millennials
 - Capitalize on agriculture
 - Need higher paying jobs
 - Focus on attracting young professionals. Balance with investments for retiring baby boomers
- Change in values and attitudes
 - Reach out to the next generation and embrace and provide leadership development
 - Need to get over being embarrassed of and making excuses for being a Hoosier
 - More diversity
 - Think globally
 - Instill in youth the responsibility to be part of the community
 - Think about a more shared future among neighboring communities
- Miscellaneous
 - Focus on family and caregiving support. Long-term care system strained by lack of support

What are the barriers to progress?

- Infrastructure
- General Assembly limits investment in broadband
- Inability to sustain connector buses make it hard to drive mass transit
- Lack of political will to keep up with technology needs
- Lack of autonomy
 - Need home rule, more local control, and leadership
 - If your community tries something different, state will shut the door
 - GA limits local resources and initiatives
- Attitudes
 - Negativity; resistance to change
 - Need to have a conversation that failure is a learning process

- Marginalization of minority populations
 - Indiana could make brave decisions on immigration-assimilation instead of intimidation
 - Offer extras in the schools without hurting the have-nots who don't have transportation or parental support
 - Need bridges out of poverty
- Education
 - Funding being cut
 - Education not seen as valuable in some communities
 - Parents are not involved and then students have no support system; schools sometimes have to act as the parent
- Lack of collaboration
 - Too much self-interest over the common good
 - Communities have an incentive to compete rather than work toward a shared future
 - Harmful partisanship that discourages cooperation and the identification of areas of agreement
- Workforce development
 - Work skills missing
 - Issues in schools affect employers, too
- Economy
 - Lack of funding
 - Focused too much on being a low tax state
 - We might need another economic crisis to prompt change
- Leadership/civic engagement
 - Leaders need to articulate a vision
 - Get people involved in the community
 - Mentoring programs needed
 - Low civic engagement in Indiana
 - Needs to be more engagement between state elected officials and mid-sized communities

If you had unlimited funding, what would you do in your community to help it thrive?

- Develop infrastructure
 - Fix roads and sidewalks
 - Public transportation
 - Broadband everywhere
- Reform education
 - Universal funding of pre-K and post-secondary. If each person in the area moved up the ladder one rung (from no HS graduation to HS graduation, from HS graduation to Associate's degree, etc.), could raise per capita income by average of \$11K.

-
- Eliminate student debt
 - Smaller classes for more individualized attention
 - Give every high school grad two free years of community college
 - State grading system that reflects outcomes for all groups of students

 - Address poverty
 - Address the cliff effect of poverty-once you reach a certain income, all of your benefits go away

 - Aid marginalized populations
 - Age- and ability-friendly communities
 - Public hospitals that provide medical care and prescriptions for those who need it

 - Increase amenities
 - Parks, roads, theaters, etc.
 - Uplift downtowns

 - Increase housing
 - Affordable housing for all members of the community
 - Increase supply

 - Sentencing reform
 - Reform the court system so that nonviolent offenders do not have to stay in jail

 - Work on sustainability
 - Flood protection and decrease environmental footprint

 - Workforce development
 - Mid-level job growth

 - Change attitudes and set priorities
 - Need a nucleus of people willing to stand up and serve
 - People need to quit complaining and do something
 - The leadership in government has to allow entrepreneurs and businesses to take risks
 - Governmental officials must feel like they can do big things and not wait for someone else
 - Find dollars to support risk and innovation

 - Other
 - Consolidate services while maintaining local characteristics
 - Create a millennials incubator
 - Give them 10k and watch them do great things
 - Provide tech support
 - Provide connections and space