



# STRATEGIC PLAN

2025-2027



# A LETTER FROM STÉPHANE FRIJIA, PRESIDENT & CEO

Economic development is more than an outcome, it's a process that demands that we constantly re-evaluate every aspect of our work and approach. This is why in 2022 we opted to operate within a three-year rolling strategic plan framework. As we embrace the journey ahead, this plan is a commitment to contributing to creating a community where every business, individual, family and dream can find the opportunity to grow and prosper.

This first update of our strategic plan builds on our very real reputation as the most collaborative region in the state while leveraging historical successes in attracting innovative investments through efforts like the State's READI program and the successful recruitment of global innovation leaders Plug and Play. This updated vision outlines a path that continues to focus on energizing our region through fresh ventures and capital and enriches our region's qualities to ensure that both businesses and individuals find a thriving environment here. We're dedicated to enhancing the vibrancy of our community through economic, cultural and social prosperity, building strong partnerships to make Northeast Indiana a hub of potential and opportunity.

We're determined to position our region as the forefront of innovation and technology in the Midwest; a place that draws the brightest minds and most innovative ideas, where our economic fabric is interwoven with ingenuity and forward-thinking. By creating a compelling and distinct regional identity, we aim to attract those looking to make a significant impact in an innovation-driven economy. This goal is about laying down a platform for progress and creativity for future generations to build upon.

At the heart of our strategy lies the principle of equitable and inclusive job creation. We envision a future where every resident of Northeast Indiana has access to opportunities that lead to success, embracing the rich diversity of our community as a fundamental strength. In a rapidly changing world, fostering a bias-free culture that celebrates and utilizes our collective talents is essential for creating a resilient and competitive economy. This approach ensures that our region is a place of economic excellence and opportunity for all.

As we move forward with these strategic aims, we thank you and continue to invite you to join us in transforming these visions into reality. Your support, insights and enthusiasm are crucial to our collective success. Together, let's create a Northeast Indiana that stands as a testament to what can be achieved when a community unites behind shared goals of growth, innovation and inclusivity.



**STÉPHANE FRIJIA**  
*PRESIDENT & CEO, NEI*



# WHERE PIONEER STARTS

## **INTRODUCTION FROM DAVID FINDLAY**

*NEI BOARD OF DIRECTORS CHAIRMAN & CEO OF LAKE CITY BANK*

Reflecting on the past three years, I am immensely proud of our collective achievements and the strategic foresight that has significantly enhanced our potential within Northeast Indiana. Together, we have pioneered new approaches to business attraction, regional branding and launched transformative regional initiatives.

Our community's civic and business leaders have demonstrated unparalleled commitment, driving us toward greater global competitiveness and economic resiliency. I am deeply grateful for the dedication of our Board of Directors, our investors, and our broad network of stakeholders whose efforts have been crucial in advancing our key strategies.

Our gratitude extends to the Regional Opportunities Council, whose members have collaborated with us to spearhead pivotal initiatives and regional projects. Their leadership in developing go-to-market strategies and business models is setting the stage for Northeast Indiana to evolve into a hub of excellence.

We have made significant progress in fostering an inclusive, sustainable and balanced economic growth across our diverse rural and urban landscapes. Establishing trust between the private and public sectors, we continue to build upon our shared vision for the collective growth of our communities, serving as potential blueprints for statewide initiatives.

Thank you all for your relentless support, insightful contributions and enduring commitment. Our achievements reflect not just numbers, but a deeper commitment to our shared mission.

And special thanks to Don Cates, CEO of 3 Rivers Credit Union, whom will succeed me as Chairman of the NEI Board of Directors. Don is exceptionally well-prepared to lead the NEI Board and guide the execution of our strategic vision.

**"I am honored to step into the role of Chairman for the NEI Board of Directors. As we continue to enhance our strategic initiatives, my commitment is to uphold our focus on driving positive economic development outcomes and our legacy of innovation and collaboration. Together, we will keep driving forward to create a thriving, competitive and resilient Northeast Indiana." - Don Cates, Vice-Chairman, NEI Board of Directors**

## OUR MISSION

Drive business investment and strengthen the region's global competitiveness and economic resiliency.

## OUR VISION

Be the location of choice for all businesses and people committed to being tomorrow's market leaders

## OUR VALUES

Integrity, Respect, Accountability, Excellence.

## OUR COMMUNITIES

Adams County

Allen County

DeKalb County

Huntington County

Kosciusko County

LaGrange County

Noble County

Steuben County

Wabash County

Wells County

Whitley County

# GOAL 1: GROWTH *SUPPORT AND AMPLIFY NORTHEAST INDIANA'S THRIVING MOMENTUM.*

**NEI will seek new business investments and to enhance regional attributes to drive growth, innovation and stability.**

We will focus on pursuing 60 diverse (70 % industrial and 30% office) new business investment opportunities (both domestic and international) to the region, while simultaneously working with the Regional Opportunities Council (ROC) members, and local and regional partners to improve the attributes that make our region attractive for all businesses and people.

Success in attracting new business investment relies on our collective ability to communicate effectively with potential investors, using messaging that highlights the value Northeast Indiana offers. Equally important is the region's readiness to meet the needs of these businesses, including the ability to quickly start operations in prepared locations and the provision of robust support for their risk management efforts through expert advice and programs. To achieve this objective, NEI will continue to partner with regional stakeholders and NEI investors to foster strong synergy between the business community and governmental bodies at both local and regional levels, in addition to executing a robust sales mission and marketing campaigns calendar.

## STRATEGIES

- i. Attraction.** Deploy clear value-propositions and a marketing approach that attracts global and domestic interest from businesses in high-wage advanced and critical industries.
- ii. Partnership.** Launch a Community Partnership Program (CPP) that deepens collaborations with existing industrial clusters, Northeast Indiana educational institutions, local economic development organizations and governmental agencies at all levels to boost infrastructure, readiness and overall competitiveness, laying the groundwork for new investments.
- iii. Consulting.** Improve NEI advisory and support services by broadening expertise and consulting resources, making it easier for potential investors to receive personalized guidance.
- iv. Support.** Support Mayors and Commissioners Caucus, Regional Development Authority (RDA) and Strategic Development Commission (SDC) to implement specific programs and align regional development objectives.

## GOAL 2: INNOVATION *MAKE NORTHEAST INDIANA A BEACON FOR INNOVATION AND TALENT.*

**Position Northeast Indiana to be recognized as a top destination for innovation and technology in the Midwest.**

NEI will work with regional stakeholders and Regional Opportunities Council (ROC) members to emphasize the region's commitment to innovation and technology developments and manufacturing, a key strength of our region.

Success in enhancing the region's reputation and identity hinges on how well it will appeal to investors and founders looking for growth opportunities in knowledge-intensive and high-value areas. NEI will focus on crafting a distinct and compelling regional image that resonates with the innovation economy's trends, aiming to capture the interest of key investors, founders and business leaders.

### STRATEGIES

- i. Storytelling.** Utilize success stories and case studies to highlight the region's innovation, technological strengths and shared values, highlighting Northeast Indiana's unique identity in both domestic and international business sectors, making it stand out as an attractive location of choice.
- ii. Digital.** Enhance the digital ecosystem and marketing materials of economic development partners across Northeast Indiana to present a unified, compelling and impactful message.
- iii. Partnerships.** Build and promote partnerships among regional stakeholders and ROC members that bolster innovation assets and entrepreneurial initiatives, aiming to attract investment and support new ventures in the region.
- iv. Attraction.** Directly market to well-funded startups and growing businesses in sectors that demand deep knowledge and generate high value, including outreach to venture capital and private equity firms.

## GOAL 3: INCLUSIVITY *ENSURE ACCESS TO SUCCESS FOR ALL IN NORTHEAST INDIANA.*

**Foster inclusive, sustainable and balanced economic growth across Northeast Indiana's diverse rural and urban landscapes.**

Demographic, social and technological changes are impacting current and future workforce. To compete for good investment and good jobs, the region will need to explore and develop stronger partnerships and new business models tapping more deeply into Northeast Indiana's ingenuity, with a focus on economic resiliency.

NEI will continue to lead and support regional stakeholders to develop, execute and promote community-minded growth strategies and investments in both rural and urban settings.

More coordinated and diverse initiatives and policy work will be needed to strengthen our clusters and increase their overall competitiveness and productivity in knowledge-intensive and high value-added economic activities.

### STRATEGIES

- i. Communities.** Engage with both urban and rural communities, in support of the RDA, to understand their economic goals and challenges, and shape community-driven policies and programs, in conjunction with the Regional Chamber of Indiana Northeast (RC), that bolster local industry and employment.
- ii. Infrastructure.** Enhance Northeast Indiana's ability to advocate, promote collaboration, convene and marshal resources to advance equitable infrastructure investment in all areas of the region to enable and accelerate job creation and business growth. Including: energy, water and wastewater, transportation (air, road and rail), and highspeed broadband.
- iii. Partnerships.** Support, advocate and promote inclusive talent attraction, education and skills training programs in partnership with educational institutions, local economic development organizations and governmental agencies at all levels, catering to both rural and urban residents to meet current and future job market demands.
- iv. Advocacy.** Work with federal policymakers, industry leaders and community organizations to define and advance Northeast Indiana's federal policy priorities, including securing funding for infrastructure, technology, industry clusters and supply chains and innovation ecosystems.





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