



# READI 2.0: Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Strategy (Application)

This application form will serve as the development strategy and basis for the IEDC’s READI 2.0 investment commitment. Regions should consider this application as a chance to develop a compelling proposal to focus on transformative opportunities for regional growth in alignment with IEDC objectives.

Regions may include specific projects that the region is requesting funding commitment from the IEDC as well as example projects to help the Board understand the types of investments the region may consider making as it implements its multi-year strategy. The application should not include every investment the region may make in the event the IEDC commits funding to its implementation, but projects must be contemplated by, or be aligned with, the strategies included within the application.

Successful applications should demonstrate how regions align with the state’s economic development priorities, including how the region’s application will help the IEDC meet or exceed the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) the Board establishes for the READI 2.0 program.

Applications must be submitted by an eligible regional economic development and acceleration development organization as defined in the READI 2.0 Policy Overview and comply with the requirements of the **READI 2.0 Policy: Application Guidance and Evaluation Framework**.

The Executive Summary and any appendices may be branded or customized by the regions so long as the content of the submission complies with the requirements outlined in the **READI 2.0 Policy: Application Guidance and Evaluation Framework** and requirements stated in this application. Appendices can include other regional plans such as a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), examples of projects aligned with key strategies, and any additional information that supports the vision described in this application.

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## General Information

This information will also be submitted into the Grant Management Tool.

<b>Legal name as registered with Indiana Secretary of State (Region Name)</b>	Southern Indiana Housing and Community Development Corporation dba South Central Indiana Talent Region
<b>Region ID</b>	423725
<b>Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN)</b>	35-1934465
<b>Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN)</b>	35-1934465
<b>Duns &amp; Bradstreet D-UN-S Number (DUNS)</b>	963218743
<b>Unique Entity Identifier Number (UEI)</b>	V5GBXTJLJ1K5
<b>Assistance Listing (CFDA) Number</b>	21.027
<b>Business Structure</b>	Community Development Corp./Corporate Entity, Tax Exempt, Nonprofit Organization
<b>Company's Taxable Yearend (M/D)</b>	12/31
<b>List counties within your region.</b>	Bartholomew, Jackson, and Jennings
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.southcentralreadi.com/">https://www.southcentralreadi.com/</a>

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## Part I: Executive Summary

*The executive summary will be an opportunity for each region to provide an overview of their application, how their region came together to identify priorities, showcase their vision for the future, and outline strategies to accomplish their goals. Please review the following criteria carefully and incorporate it into your Executive Summary.*

### Executive summary components:

- **Vision:**
  - Describe the region’s overall vision for the future and intent of the application:
    - Summarize the plan including overall goals, strategies, and potential actions.
    - Describe what the region seeks to accomplish/ the outcomes it expects to see if the plan is implemented successfully with the funding requested.
- **Regional assets and unique qualities:**
  - Describe the region’s unique qualities that will be leveraged to retain and grow its population and increase economic opportunity for current and future residents.
- **Benchmark communities:**
  - Identify which regional community/communities across the country or around the world the region is using to benchmark itself against and why they were selected.
- **Alignment with state’s economic development goals:**
  - Highlight how the region’s plan will help achieve the state’s goals for the initiative.
- **Regional collaboration:**
  - Describe how the region sought broad stakeholder engagement in the development of the Application and how the region will maintain regional collaboration for at least the next five years. Regional collaboration should include key stakeholders throughout the region, including, but not limited to, local units of government, county representatives, higher educational institutions, large employers, key economic organizations, and other non-profit organizations. The application should identify key stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities for the development of strategies through implementation.
  - Explain the interconnections between the participating communities including employment, traffic flows, historical regional engagement/strategic planning, etc. and how this informed the region in its formation/continuation.

### Formatting criteria:

Regions may use their branded letterhead or other branded format for the executive summary and attach it to their application. Please review the following format requirements:

- Use sans-serif font
- Minimum 11 pt. font
- Must not exceed three pages or 2000 words
- 1” margins

## Part II: READI 1.0 Evaluation

***READI 1.0 was the first iteration of the READI initiative and has demonstrated the impact and viability of investing in Indiana communities to drive growth and prosperity. As READI 1.0 project commitment concludes, the IEDC is interested in understanding the regions' experience. Regions will utilize this section to reflect on their experience and performance in READI 1.0. Please read each question carefully.***

Provide an honest assessment of the region's participation in the first phase of the READI initiative, including: (500 words max)

- How did the region identify and prioritize projects for investment?
- How did the region engage stakeholders in the process?
- Please provide a summary/status of the region's READI 1.0 investment to date.

Our region has a legacy of collaboration that existed long before READI 1.0. For over twenty years, the South Central Indiana Talent Region has worked together to improve educational and employment opportunities in Bartholomew, Jackson, and Jennings Counties. With READI 1.0 funding, the region seized the opportunity to enhance collaboration by developing a regional plan. As planning for READI 2.0 began, we looked back, and were very pleased with the results. Consequently, we remain committed to the same four key priorities identified in READI 1.0 as we advance to READI 2.0.

The success of READI 1.0 can be attributed to engagement with community leaders and stakeholders across the region. We held workshops in each county, and then facilitated regional meetings to refine South Central Indiana's needs and priority strategies. Over 450 voices were heard throughout the planning process. Our strategies in READI 1.0 were then vetted by smaller stakeholder groups with specific expertise, including downtown leaders, county commissioners, chambers of commerce, local economic development organizations, tourism bureaus, and school superintendents.

Projects were identified through the planning process, with stakeholders proposing improvements to support shared objectives. Once received, each project was carefully vetted to assess regional impact, shovel ready status, and feasibility of utilization for ARPA dollars. The steering committee then convened to prioritize projects with the biggest impact in the three-county region. The South Central Indiana Talent Region was awarded \$30M, and 12 of our 14 projects are under construction (or finished). Progress has also been made on projects outside of READI 1.0, as unfunded projects such as the planned Columbus downtown housing project are already complete.

The first iteration of the READI initiative generated \$82M in public investment and \$102M in private investment to date. Projects moved quickly, with funds obligated well ahead of schedule and with \$9M spent to date. Many projects are already done, or are nearing completion, and have demonstrated expected results. Notably, the healthcare facilities within the innovative NexusPark project in Bartholomew County are now open, and the fieldhouse and other elements will open soon. This project featured the redevelopment and adaptive reuse of the mostly vacant 400,000 square foot Fair Oaks Mall into a health, wellness, sports, and fitness facility. In partnership with Vincennes University, the Jackson County Learning Center saw the expansion of technical programming. The first two classes of trainees have graduated, supporting the needs of incumbent workers and local employers. In tandem with investments made at the Propeller Makerspace, over \$5M in private venture capital was deployed, helping fund 15 startups. Finally, as another example, the Town of Edinburgh successfully extended Main Street one-half mile to the town's southern border at County Road 900 North. This infrastructure investment enhances connectivity and supports industrial development in the area.

Identify lessons learned and any issues that, if addressed, would increase opportunities for successful implementation of the region's READI 2.0 application. (500 words max)

Our region learned three main lessons from the READI 1.0 planning process.

First, we are confident that the goals we established for READI 1.0 were on point, and stakeholders confirmed that they are still relevant; however, some strategies lacked depth. For READI 2.0, we have focused on strategy development. By outlining complete strategies, we will be better equipped to establish a regional project pipeline and select quality regional projects that support our desired outcomes. To better detail these strategies, we have conducted additional community planning and stakeholder outreach related to key topics, gathering regional experts to refine our education, childcare, and innovation strategies.

Second, we needed to establish a pipeline of high-impact regional projects. When information about READI 1.0 was released, it was apparent that the City of Columbus already had many key projects planned out but awaiting funds. This positioned the city to capitalize on any number of funding opportunities. When READI 1.0 was announced, the city was able to strategically select projects best suited for the funding. In contrast, Jackson and Jennings County leaders had to first conduct preliminary scoping studies to transform concepts into tangible projects.

Acknowledging this disparity, community leaders recognized the importance of building and supporting a pipeline of projects to address regional priorities. Great progress has been made to develop this project pipeline. The City of North Vernon has adopted a new comprehensive plan, trails plan, downtown redevelopment plan, and feasibility study for a new community sports and wellness facility. The City of Seymour worked with the Brookings Institution and LISC to cast a bold vision for equitable community growth. The City of Columbus has continued to plan as well, adopting the City View plan for a new 690-acre mixed-use healthcare, commercial, and residential district to attract the construction of 965 new homes. The region's leaders have communicated with one another, lending support throughout this process. This work has equipped the region with a robust set of priority projects that are fully scoped and ready to move forward when funding is available, whatever the source.

Finally, we expected more private investment during READI 1.0. While the region has exceeded the IEDC's goals for public and private investment ratios, the numbers fall short of what we expected to achieve. In part, this was due to ARPA restrictions and a smaller pool of available READI 1.0 funds. That is, fewer grant dollars resulted in fewer projects to attract private match. Even so, we were proud of the achievements realized with READI 1.0, and we are eager to leverage our READI 1.0 experience to deploy bold, innovative READI 2.0 strategies.

Describe the current capacity of the regional organization as well as strengths, weaknesses, and whether potential changes or support are needed to enhance the organization's long-term viability and sustainability. (500 words max)

Our regional organization is the Southern Indiana Housing Community Development Corporation (SIHCDC). The SIHCDC exists to promote the general and public welfare of the residents of 11 Indiana counties, including Bartholomew, Jackson, and Jennings Counties. The corporation seeks to do this by improving the quantity and quality of housing in the communities it serves, and by assisting in the development of employment opportunities. The SIHCDC contracts with Administrative Resources association (ARa) for staffing. ARa has served communities in South Central Indiana, and beyond, for fifty years. The mission of the ARa is to improve the quality of life of its member communities by its proactive approach to the development and implementation of community and economic development projects.

Together, the SIHCDC and ARa have the expertise needed to lead the region through the planning and implementation of READI 2.0. These organizations have a combined staff of six individuals, and both are governed by a board of directors, which provides oversight. Both the SIHCDC and the ARa routinely provide grant administration, planning assistance, loan program management, housing services, labor standards services, and more to communities in the region. They also have extensive experience administering state and federal funds. In the first round of the READI initiative, the SIHCDC performed well, helping drive the success of the region. Both organizations are trusted partners with the credibility to promote success in the South Central region.

Our region acknowledges that it is unusual for a community development corporation to provide the organizational capacity for the region. However, we do not foresee any adverse effects, nor did any problems arise in READI 1.0 with this approach. Consequently, we feel comfortable continuing to use SIHCDC as the lead organization for the region. The biggest challenge facing the SIHCDC is that they do not have a dedicated revenue stream to support ongoing efforts to lead, convene, and plan on behalf of the region. Administrative expenses for regional initiatives were covered through READI 1.0. There is not a separate funding stream for this effort. These expenses are currently handled as overhead for the organization, with no staff members solely dedicated to regional programming. To sustain the regional function of the SIHCDC in South Central Indiana, a dedicated revenue stream is needed. This would allow the organization to place one or more staff members in a role centered on regionalism, and the pursuit of shared priorities. Alternatives to address this are being explored by the ARa, SIHCDC, and their respective board of directors.

## Part III: Review of Regional Data

*Keeping in mind the analysis from the previous section, regions should provide the identified data points in this section and describe how these metrics have shifted over the years. The purpose of this section is to use the economic and demographic changes occurring in the region to allow regions to conduct projections of these metrics to determine how they will contribute to the overall success of the READI 2.0 program.*

### Section A: Regional Data

Provide updated datapoints on the following key performance indicators table below. Please gather metrics from the identified sources (e.g., U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Economic Analysis or state sources). Regions may use the same data set as their READI 1.0 applications if U.S. Census data updates are not available. Please indicate the year used for each data point.

Key performance indicators	Indiana	Region
Total population ( <i>U.S. Census Bureau</i> )	611,784,403 (2022)	156,193 (2022)
Total employment ( <i>U.S. Census Bureau</i> )	3,286,714 (2022)	76,234 (2022)
Per capita income ( <i>Bureau of Economic Analysis</i> )	\$58,323 (2022)	\$56,001 (2022)
Total population with bachelor's degree or higher ( <i>U.S. Census Bureau</i> )	1,279,648 or 28.2% (2022)	28,055 or 26.3% (2022)
Total housing units ( <i>U.S. Census Bureau</i> )	2,931,710 (2022)	66,118 (2022)
Total rental housing units ( <i>U.S. Census Bureau</i> )	793,030 (2022)	16,498 (2022)
Total owner-occupied units ( <i>U.S. Census Bureau</i> )	1,860,566 (2022)	44,310 (2022)
Number of new business start-ups (Small Business Development Center)	82,971 (2022)	1,343 (2022)

Please describe the current landscape of childcare within your region. Information could include current challenges to childcare, the number of facilities and/or seats and quality of childcare in your area. Visit the READI website for supplemental information that may be available. (250 words max)

The primary childcare challenge facing our region is lack of capacity. According to Brighter Futures Indiana, approximately 7,571 children under the age of six may need care. Licensed capacity can only support 4,467 of those children, or 59%. Half of the region's need for childcare is in Bartholomew County, while the other half is split between Jackson and Jennings Counties.

Our region also struggles to balance the affordability of childcare with fair wages. Childcare providers tell us that they could add more seats if they could attract more workers. Due to low wages, workers are discouraged from pursuing childcare credentials, or maintaining a career in childcare, since doing so threatens their financial stability. Providers tell us that families can't afford higher rates, which suppresses wages and limits capacity. It's a vicious cycle in which everyone ends up dissatisfied. The region is working with Lilly Endowment, Inc. GIFT VIII Planning Grant to identify shared strategies to offset fixed operating costs so providers can afford to pay childcare workers more.

Finally, there is a need for more Spanish-speaking providers in our region. In recent years, there has been an influx of Hispanic/Latino families as workers move here in pursuit of job opportunities. Consequently, there is an increased demand for Spanish-speaking staff and language programming at childcare centers. Today, we need providers to serve a total of 2,500 Hispanic/Latino students. This number is growing daily.

Please describe the current innovation ecosystem within your region. Think about current challenges or barriers to innovation activities, the number of new business start-ups and current resources to increase innovative activities in your area (patents, research and development funding, etc.). (250 words max)

Our region's economy has traditionally been driven by the design and manufacturing of internal combustion engines and related components. This is both a strength and a weakness as gas engines are in the early stages of being phased out in favor of alternative mobility technologies. To state the challenge succinctly, approximately 19,000 jobs (1 in 5) in the region are directly tied to engine manufacturing, so we must evolve or else face catastrophic disruption. To meet the challenge, our regional strategy includes supporting entrepreneurship, developing shovel-ready sites for business growth, recruiting foreign direct investment, and leveraging existing engineering strengths to promote investments in next generation mobility.

Companies like Cummins, Aisin, Toyota Material Handling, Forvia, and LHP Engineering are leading the way in this transition, with the latter two proposing to jointly create a new non-profit Vehicle Innovation Center to serve statewide and national interests.

The Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) reports 3,648 new business applications in our region since 2020. To increase the pace of business start-ups and diversify our economy, our region will strengthen the work of Catalyst Columbus, Propeller, SCORE South Central Indiana, Indiana SBDC, and the minority-focused TIME program, all of which support small business development.

The region is also attracting investment in diversified sectors, like food manufacturing, pharmaceutical production, and others. To welcome more foreign and domestic investment, the region will build infrastructure for shovel-ready sites, leverage relationships with 52 foreign firms in the region, and enhance collaborations between organizations.

List your top 10 employers. List your civic institutions including higher education and philanthropic organizations. Please specify companies or organizations, not industries. (250 words max)

#### TOP EMPLOYERS

- \*Cummins Inc., Bartholomew & Jackson Counties – 8,500+ FTE (2023)
- \*Aisin USA, Jackson County – 2,150+ FTE (2023)
- \*Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation, Bartholomew County – 2,100+ FTE (2023)
- \*Toyota Material Handling, Inc., Bartholomew County – 1,950+ FTE (2023)
- \*NTN Driveshaft Inc., Bartholomew County – 1,900+ FTE (2023)
- \*Valeo North America, Inc., Jackson County – 1,770+ FTE (2023)
- \*Columbus Regional Health, Bartholomew County – 1,700+ FTE (2023)
- \*Schneck Medical Center, Jackson County – 1,110+ FTE (2023)
- \*Wal-Mart Distribution Center, Jackson County – 1,000+ FTE (2023)
- \*Dorel Juvenile Group, Bartholomew County – 880+ FTE (2023)

#### CIVIC INSTITUTIONS (HIGHER EDUCATION)

- \*AirPark Columbus (Indiana University Columbus, Purdue University Columbus, Ivy Tech) – Columbus
- \*Vincennes University – Seymour
- \*Ivy Tech – Seymour
- \*Community Education Coalition (CEC) – Regional
- \*Jackson County Education Coalition – Seymour

#### OTHER CIVIC INSTITUTIONS

- \*Administrative Resources Association (ARa) – Regional



- \*Southern Indiana Housing and Community Development Corporation (SIHCDC)
- \*Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce
- \*Jackson County Chamber
- \*Greater Columbus Economic Development Corporation
- \*Jackson County Industrial Development Corporation
- \*Jennings County Economic Development Corporation
- \*Heritage Fund – The Community Foundation of Bartholomew County
- \*Community Foundation of Jackson County
- \*Jennings County Community Foundation
- \*The Cummins Foundation
- \*Su Casa
- \*Sans Souchi
- \*Boys and Girls Club
- \*Landmark Columbus Foundation
- \*Thrive Alliance

List the counties or areas that are considered rural and rural-mix. List the counties or areas that are considered disadvantaged communities. Visit the READI website for supplemental information that may be available. (250 words max)

#### RURAL AND DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

- \*Rural: Jennings County
- \*Rural Mixed: Jackson County
- \*Disadvantaged: Jackson County

A key goal for our region is to invest in rural areas to bring income and education levels on par with our urban areas. Half of our region's population is rural or rural mixed. To achieve our goal, we expect 50% of our investment to go to our rural counties.

Jackson County has areas of chronic distress, such as the Burkhart Opportunity Zone. This district was the primary focus of the 2023 Brookings-LISC Study for Seymour. It includes a large Hispanic/Latino population and lower than typical income levels. The recommendations of the Brookings-LISC Study have been incorporated into the region's strategies and are a focus of this application. Potential investments to serve this area include an immigrant welcome center and additional housing.

The Burkhart Opportunity Zone may be the only area that technically qualifies as an area of chronic distress, but there are multiple other areas in the region that have experienced distress. A key example is the Country Squire Lakes neighborhood in Jennings County. This unincorporated district of approximately 3,021 residents has a median household income of \$50,078, well under the rest of Jennings County (\$66,892) and the state (\$67,173). Our READI 1.0 plan featured a project to address blight and improve infrastructure, resulting in renewed private investment in the district. With READI 2.0, the region hopes to continue investment in this underserved area.

Based on the datapoints above, describe how the region's metrics have shifted since 2021. What are your anticipated projections of change given your READI 1.0 projects? (250 words max)

Our region observed trends from 2010 to 2020, and 2020 to 2022. These timeframes capture some changes from READI 1.0; however, several projects are incomplete, and their effects have yet to be felt. Key observations include:

**OUR REGION IS GROWING.** Jackson County, home to Seymour, is the fastest growing rural county in Indiana. Since 2010, the county's population has increased by 9.6%. In the same period, Bartholomew County, home to Columbus, grew by over 7%. As a whole, the South Central Indiana Talent Region has grown by 6.6% since 2010.

**OUR REGION IS BECOMING MORE DIVERSE.** Between 2020 and 2022, the Hispanic population in the region grew by over 11%. Jackson County experienced the largest increase in its Hispanic/Latino population with an increase of 17.1%, or over 500 people. This follows a 10.2% decline between 2010 and 2020.

**HOUSING DEVELOPMENT HAS STAGNATED.** From 2020 to 2022, the total number of units in the region stayed approximately the same, even with a growing population. While READI 1.0 funding has been used to support infrastructure, new housing development fails to keep up with demand.

**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IS ON THE RISE.** Because of investments such as the EcO Network, our region has seen an increase in educational attainment. From 2010 to 2020, the population over 25 with a bachelor's degree or higher increased by 43.9%. Even so, our region continues to lag behind the state. Only 26.3% of residents hold at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 28.2% for Indiana.

Identify a regional community outside of the state of Indiana that is similar to your region to use as a benchmark. Provide the selected metrics in the table below. When selecting a peer community, please consider the following key components for comparison (not all datapoints need to be an exact match):

- Population size (± 5000)
- Median income (± \$5000)
- Industries
- Similar assets
- General demographics
- Geography

Key performance indicators	Region	Peer Community Sheboygan, Wisconsin MSA
Total population	156,193 (2022)	117,741 (2022)
Total employment	76,234 (2022)	61,062 (2022)
Per capita income	\$56,001 (2022)	\$60,359 (2022)
Total population with bachelor’s degree or higher	28,055 or 26.3% (2022)	21,885 or 26.6% (2022)
Total housing units	66,118 (2022)	52,375 (2022)
Total rental housing units	16,498 or 27.1% (2022)	13,883 or 28.3% (2022)
Total owner-occupied housing units	44,310 or 72.9% (2022)	35,152 or 71.7% (2022)

Based on the identified benchmark community, describe any specific best practices, defining strategies, or measurable goals the community is doing that inspires action for your region. (500 words max)

We chose to compare our region to the top-ranked small metros for manufacturing identified by *Business Facilities Magazine* in 2022. Our region is currently ranked first, followed by greater Sheboygan (WI), Lima (OH), and Decatur (IL). This list reflects mostly Midwestern economies centered around manufacturing and offered key lessons for South Central Indiana. Of these peers, Sheboygan has the closest parallels to the region.

While our region’s population is 33% larger, the population of the City of Columbus (50,896) and the City of Sheboygan (49,805) are similar. Both are also within a 70-minute drive of a larger metro – Milwaukee for Sheboygan, and Indianapolis or Louisville for our region. Both areas also record 31%+ manufacturing employment.

Of the leading small metros identified by *Business Facilities Magazine*, the South Central Talent Region has the second largest median household income at \$67,614, behind only Napa, California. Per capita income for our region at \$56,001 is among the highest compared to other identified metros, although Sheboygan and Decatur lead on this metric.

The economies of both top ranked manufacturing hubs have evolved over time. Historically known for furniture manufacturing, Sheboygan’s top employer is now Kohler, best known for its plumbing products. In addition to Kohler, Sheboygan is home to other manufacturers that make a range of products, from cheese to plastics, each of which employs over 1,000 people. Sheboygan has also diversified their top employers beyond manufacturing, with over 1,000 employed at ACUITY, an insurance provider.

The key lesson learned from this evaluation is that successful manufacturing hubs have diversified economies that include multiple manufacturing sectors – and seek employment opportunities beyond manufacturing. What is not evident from our peer evaluation is strong leadership from other regions in transitioning to new economic realities, nor an aligned strategy to support the changes needed to advance innovation and develop the workforce. The South Central Indiana Talent Region is ahead of its peers in this area, although much work remains.

Finally, this data evaluation would be incomplete if the differences in metrics within the region were not acknowledged. Addressing these disparities is one of the region's key challenges and is a key factor limiting overall regional success. Consider the differences in per capita income between our three counties. Bartholomew County leads with \$61,920, while Jackson and Jennings County come in at \$49,379 and \$49,178, respectively. Median household income shows the same trend, with Jackson and Jennings County lagging. Educational attainment is a key factor in this disparity. Over 70% of the region's college graduates are in Bartholomew County, even though the county is home to less than half of the region's population. Closing these gaps will be necessary for the region to advance.

## Section B: Regional Needs Assessment

Please describe the region's current barriers to growth (e.g., housing challenges, childcare availability, or infrastructure). Think about housing, infrastructure, childcare, and/or other feasibility studies your region has recently completed or conversations and meetings with your regional stakeholders. Examples can be attached as part of the appendix. (500 words max)

Our region faces the following barriers to growth: a transitioning economy, talent development, housing, infrastructure, childcare, and quality of place.

**A TRANSITIONING ECONOMY:** As the nation transitions to alternative energy vehicles, our region is in danger of being left behind. With one in five of our region's jobs tied to internal combustion engines and related components, our current automotive manufacturing base must undergo radical change at the threat of disinvestment and distress. Our vision is to support innovation around the total transformation of our economy toward next generation mobility.

**TALENT AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:** Talent attraction, retention, and development are barriers to regional growth. To support the transition to new mobility technologies, we not only need the mechanical engineers we've been attracting for generations, but we need a broader range of STEM careers. Our region must attract and develop a workforce of electrical engineers, robotics engineers, precision manufacturing specialists, and many more jobs like these. To support this transition to high-tech jobs, we must increase educational attainment across the region. We must also develop viable pathways to these careers for individuals already in the workforce.

**HOUSING DEVELOPMENT:** New home construction is needed to support growth. While our region's population has grown since the first round of the READI initiative, new housing development has failed to keep pace with demand. Rural areas, including Jennings and Jackson Counties, have seen very little housing investment. Without a full range of housing products to choose from, our region will struggle to attract new talent. Our region needs bold investments in housing to sustain our current success.

**INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT:** Our region needs infrastructure investment to support job growth and housing expansion. There are few developable sites in the region with adequate infrastructure. As we invest in infrastructure and housing, it's important to focus on redevelopment and blight elimination whenever possible. By focusing on underinvested neighborhoods and communities, we can revitalize these areas and ensure widespread prosperity in South Central Indiana.

**CHILDCARE CHALLENGES:** More seats are needed in regional childcare centers to support growth. Working families may choose to live elsewhere if the childcare services they need are unavailable or unaffordable. As discussed previously, there is also a need to increase wages for childcare workers, to attract qualified employees and expand capacity. Additionally, with the growing Hispanic/Latino population in the region, there is demand for Spanish-speaking staff and language programming in regional childcare facilities.

**QUALITY OF PLACE:** To support growth, we must work to enhance character, expand cultural and recreational amenities, and provide other unique offerings in our communities. Cities and towns in our region should be beautiful, inviting places to live in and visit, with ample places to explore, gather, and relax. Our parks, trails, downtowns, and streetscapes should reflect a commitment to thriving communities and vibrancy.

Given the regional data and needs assessment, highlight the region's three to five priority needs. (500 words max)

For the second round of the READI initiative, our region is focusing on four priorities related to the economy, talent, housing, and quality of place.

**TRANSITION OUR ECONOMY:** While our region has long been a powerhouse in manufacturing internal combustion engines, that economy is declining. On August 5, 2021, President Biden signed an executive order setting a national goal that half of all cars and trucks sold in the U.S. should be zero-emission vehicles by 2030. These vehicles will include pure electric vehicles, hybrids, and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles. All major automakers have announced plans to shift from internal combustion engines to electric or other power solutions. This shift will not only impact engine manufacturing, but all the associated exhaust and mechanical parts manufactured in our region. With one in five of the region's jobs related to mobility, we need to support innovation and entrepreneurship around next generation mobility. We can lead the transition to more sustainable transportation in Indiana, while promoting economic growth and development.

**BUILD A HIGH-TECH TALENT PIPELINE:** The shift to electric as well as autonomous vehicles means the region needs more electrical and software engineers on top of the talented mechanical and industrial engineers who already call the region home. Talent in advanced manufacturing needs cultivating, specifically the skills to adapt to changing production environments. As such, our region must ensure the education system is recalibrated to rapidly support modern automotive engineering, electrical engineering, control systems, and cybersecurity. We must also ensure that graduates are connected to jobs in the region, so that we can retain the workers we educate here.

**ADD HOUSING TO SUPPORT GROWTH:** Across the region, new homes are not being built at the rate they were prior to 2000. Existing single-family homes and multi-family units are of mixed quality, and only 17 percent of the existing housing stock has been constructed in the past twenty years – approximately 10 percent lower than decades prior. The lack of supply will have a negative impact on population growth and talent attraction within the region if not addressed. In addition to developing new housing, our region must ensure that existing neighborhoods are attractive and desirable. We can accomplish this by tackling blight and abandonment.

**ENHANCE LOCAL QUALITY OF PLACE:** To attract talent, our region must have prosperous communities that are defined by lively, activated, and inclusive public spaces. Our region should be inviting, with defined character, and enhanced connectivity. Place-based investment was a priority of the READI 1.0 initiative and continues to be a priority for READI 2.0. In READI 1.0, our region was very intentional about selecting projects that would build off one another and catalyze change. Projects included riverfront redevelopment in Columbus, the NexusPark health, wellness, sports, and fitness facility, also in Columbus, and the Quarry Adventure Park in North Vernon. As we continue to grow, our region must expand existing quality of place amenities and develop new amenities with broad appeal and regional impact.

## Part IV: Regional Growth Strategies and Action Plan

*Use the information from previous sections to help identify goals to meet your region’s priorities and focus on those that improve quality of life, quality of place, and quality of opportunity objectives within your region. While identifying goals and their respective strategies, please consider:*

- The impact this plan will have on rural and rural-mix communities based on their needs and opportunities. How will the region promote these communities, and evaluation of investment opportunities?
- The impact this plan will have on disadvantaged communities based on their needs and opportunities. How will the region promote these communities, and evaluation of investment opportunities?
- How do these goals and strategies align with the state’s economic development priorities?
- How do these goals and strategies align with your region’s vision?
- How will the plan support the growth of an entrepreneurial ecosystem within your region?
- How does the plan engage with anchor institutions (e.g. major employers, higher educational institutions, and other key organizations)?
- How do the proposed investments encourage creating high quality, vibrant places with an eye toward attracting and retaining people?
- How does the plan focus on blight reduction/remediation?

### Section A: Goals and Strategies

Please list three to five goals to meet your region’s priorities. (50 words maximum per goal)

<p><b>Goal 1:</b></p>	<p><b>INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP</b> Position the region’s economy for a resilient future by advancing innovation and entrepreneurship around the region’s existing powerful technologies and future opportunities.</p>
<p><b>Goal 2:</b></p>	<p><b>EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT</b> Build and retain a resilient workforce and enhance regional prosperity by expanding both local and regional access to degree and certificate programs directly linked to well-paying jobs in the region, while providing needed support services such as childcare to ensure an available workforce.</p>
<p><b>Goal 3:</b></p>	<p><b>HOUSING</b> Grow the region’s population through investments that stimulate and sustain housing in the region.</p>
<p><b>Goal 4:</b></p>	<p><b>QUALITY OF PLACE</b> Encourage accelerated population growth and retention through intentional investment in high-impact quality of place initiatives.</p>

Identify 3-5 strategies to help achieve each identified goal. (300 words maximum per goal area)

<p><b>Goal 1 Strategies:</b></p>	<p><b>INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP STRATEGIES</b>                  To ensure a resilient future, we must transform our regional economy. By leveraging the ongoing transition away from internal combustion engines, our region can embrace innovation in manufacturing and become a leader in next generation mobility. At the same time, we can diversify our economy, and develop a healthy employment ecosystem with opportunities in different industries, sectors, and firms. Supporting strategies include:</p> <p><b>PROMOTE INVESTMENTS IN NEXT GENERATION MOBILITY.</b>                  We will support research, development, testing, and certification of new mobility technologies to transition away from an economy focused on internal combustion engines. A key component of this strategy is creating a non-profit Vehicle Innovation Center to promote the development of next generation mobility technologies and encourage collaboration among local businesses and entrepreneurs.</p> <p><b>ATTRACT FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT.</b>                  We will continue to promote investment in existing foreign-owned companies in the region and promote new foreign direct investment.</p> <p><b>SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESSES.</b>                  We will diversify the region’s economy by supporting small business growth with entrepreneurial support programming. Initiatives will include promoting innovation and entrepreneurship through the Catalyst program offered through the Columbus Chamber of Commerce. We will also continue to provide small business coaching through the SCORE South Central Indiana program.</p> <p><b>DEVELOP SHOVEL-READY SITES.</b>                  We will develop infrastructure and buildings to provide expedited and shovel-ready employer sites. These sites are essential to be able to accommodate growth associated with strategies outlined in this plan.</p> <p><b>IMPROVE COLLABORATION.</b>                  We will improve access to and collaboration among organizations promoting innovation and entrepreneurship.</p>
<p><b>Goal 2 Strategies:</b></p>	<p><b>EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES</b>                  To successfully transform the regional economy, we must build and retain a resilient workforce. From advanced manufacturing to healthcare, education is key. We will expand access to degree and certificate programs, connect graduates to well-paying regional jobs, and increase access to childcare for students and workers. Supporting strategies include:</p> <p><b>EXPAND STEM POST-SECONDARY CREDENTIALS AND DEGREES.</b>                  We will support the AirPark Columbus College Campus and the Jackson County Learning Center as regional education hubs. Through communication and collaboration, we will ensure these institutions provide STEM education pathways that meet the workforce needs of the Advanced Manufacturing, Technology, and Healthcare industry sectors. Priorities include expanding engineering and technology degree programs, health sciences lab facilities, and student housing.</p>



	<p><b>EXPAND K-12 STEM AND CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION PATHWAYS.</b>                  We will support K-12 STEM and Career and Technical Education Pathways, providing seamless transitions from high school to programs at the AirPark Columbus College Campus and Jackson County Learning Center. These programs will connect students to high demand, well-paying jobs with local employers.</p> <p><b>TRAIN EXISTING WORKERS FOR ADVANCEMENT.</b>                  We will train existing workers for advancement, with a focus on marginalized populations in diversifying rural communities. This will involve expanding access to degree and certificate programs, and strengthening partnerships with local community colleges, universities, and employers to ensure that programs are directly related to local career opportunities.</p> <p><b>EXPAND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.</b>                  We will support childcare expansion strategies to create a more equitable and sustainable early learning ecosystem centered on families, caregivers, professionals, and children. Access to quality early childhood education is a vital supporting mechanism for economically successful communities. This system-wide approach will serve as a model for other regions. A key component of this strategy will be to implement recommendations from the recently commissioned, regional childcare study funded by Lilly Endowment.</p>
<p><b>Goal 3 Strategies:</b></p>	<p><b>HOUSING STRATEGIES</b>                  New housing development fails to keep up with demand from current and future residents. To support population growth in the region, we must stimulate and sustain housing development at a range of types and prices. Supporting strategies include:</p> <p><b>EXPAND HOUSING AVAILABILITY AND CHOICE.</b>                  We will support the development of a full range of housing products to address the severe lack of housing in the region. This includes the development of single-family (detached) housing, but also townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, small multi-family units and apartments. A mix of both rental and owner-occupied units are needed. In downtown districts, mixed-use, infill development will be encouraged to grow the supply of housing without extending infrastructure.</p> <p><b>CREATE NEW HOUSING NEIGHBORHOODS.</b>                  Each county in the region has proposed bold housing investments. In North Vernon, a 60-unit mixed-use development is planned at the site of a devastating downtown fire. Both Columbus and Seymour have proposed large-scale housing investments, including City View and the Freeman Village housing projects. These investments will ultimately lead to over 2,000 new housing units in the region and will be critical to attracting and retaining residents. New neighborhoods will emphasize walkability and connectivity to jobs and services.</p> <p><b>EXTEND INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT HOUSING.</b>                  The region lacks developable sites that are already served by adequate infrastructure. Water, sewer, storm, electric, street, and broadband investments are all needed to serve priority development sites in the region.</p> <p><b>SUPPORT HOUSING AFFORDABILITY.</b></p>

	<p>There is a need for housing designed for first-time homebuyers, and middle-income, essential workers in the region. To meet this need, we will support a mix of housing products at varying densities within our region.</p> <p>COMPLETE NEIGHBORHOOD BLIGHT ABATEMENT. We will pursue blight abatement to support reinvestment in neighborhoods, rural areas, and mixed-use districts.</p>
<p><b>Goal 4 Strategies:</b></p>	<p>QUALITY OF PLACE STRATEGIES Our region is committed to strategic investments in quality of place. By revitalizing our downtowns, eliminating blight, and expanding access to enriching amenities, we can create welcoming, vibrant communities that attract and retain residents. Supporting strategies include:</p> <p>PROMOTE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION. We will encourage downtown revitalization through blight elimination, redevelopment, mixed-use development, and placemaking programs. In our historic downtowns, this means continuing façade and structural improvements, activating parks and public spaces, investing in arts and cultural amenities, and re-using or removing blighted structures.</p> <p>CONNECT PEOPLE TO WORK AND PLAY. A key recommendation of the Brookings-LISC Study for Seymour is to connect people to work and play, supporting communities with satisfying job opportunities and abundant recreation amenities. These connections include investments in parks, trails, and sidewalks in communities across the region.</p> <p>BUILD VIBRANT ATTRACTIONS. We will encourage the development of attractions that promote tourism and excite residents. Tourism in the region will be further supported through efforts to increase the supply of hotel rooms in the region and establish a regional conference/event center.</p> <p>DEVELOP INDOOR RECREATION AMENITIES. Too many of the region’s indoor recreation amenities have closed, leaving residents with few recreation options in inclement weather. To address this, we will prioritize the creation of new places for recreation and socializing, including the creation of new indoor recreation facilities.</p> <p>WELCOME NEW IMMIGRANTS. With so many new immigrants coming to the region for employment opportunities, more needs to be done to welcome immigrant families and incorporate them into the social and support structures of the community. A key component of this strategy is developing an immigrant welcome center in Seymour per the recommendations of the Brookings-LISC Study.</p>

## Section B: Funding Request

This section should be utilized to estimate and set target goals for READI 2.0. Regions should include funding from other programs that the region or organizations are seeking, such as EPA funding, College and Community Collaboration Grant, Next Level Trails, other federal funding, or any other philanthropic initiatives. READI 1.0 data from projects funded can be used as a baseline to estimate totals below. If projects have been identified for READI 2.0, those can also be utilized to fill in this section.

<b>Overall planned investment required to implement the strategies successfully</b>	\$586,000,000
<b>Requested READI 2.0 funds</b>	\$75,000,000
<b>Anticipated matching funding sources</b>	\$511,000,000
<i>Private funding</i>	\$400,000,000
<i>Philanthropic funding</i>	\$2,000,000
<i>Local funding</i>	\$105,000,000
<i>Other State funding</i>	\$2,000,000
<i>Federal funding</i>	\$2,000,000
<b>Percentage of anticipated READI funding towards rural and rural-mix communities</b>	50%
<b>Percentage of anticipated READI funding towards disadvantaged communities</b>	25%

## Section C: Action Plan

For each goal/strategy, identify the action plan for proposed implementation. This includes description of specific opportunities/projects and/or examples of the types of investments the region is considering in achieving its goals. Include suggested **milestones and timelines** for each strategy. (300 words maximum per goal area)

<p><b>Goal 1 Action Plan:</b></p>	<p><b>INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP ACTION PLAN:</b></p> <p>Our region’s biggest need is advancing innovation in next generation mobility. To support this need, our region proposes to create the non-profit Vehicle Innovation Center. Led by Forvia and LHP Engineering, the center is intended to promote the development of next generation mobility technologies through collaboration between local businesses and entrepreneurs. The project would be located adjacent to Forvia’s existing test track, allowing concept development and testing to all occur on-site. The Vehicle Innovation Center is made possible through a combination of public and private funds and is expected to launch in the last quarter of 2024.</p> <p>Other proposed investments include infrastructure upgrades/expansion, shell buildings, and small business and entrepreneurship support. These investments will promote industrial development, while also meeting the needs of small businesses, allowing them to scale-up their operations over time.</p> <p>Additionally, a joint innovation and entrepreneurship center to house local and regional programs is proposed in Bartholomew County. This would include SCORE South Central Indiana, Indiana Small Business Development Center, Catalyst (regional entrepreneurship coaching), TIME (minority small business development), Columbus Chamber, and the Greater Columbus Economic Development Corporation.</p> <p><b>MILESTONES</b></p> <p>Property needed for the Vehicle Innovation Center has been secured and matching funds are in place, allowing this project to move quickly to construction. Our goal is for the facility to open within two years of funding availability.</p>
<p><b>Goal 2 Action Plan:</b></p>	<p><b>EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN:</b></p> <p>To address the need for workers with certificates and degrees in STEM fields, we intend to support initiatives at the AirPark Columbus College Campus. Central to this investment will be expanding engineering, technology, and health sciences lab facilities. We will also support efforts to expand housing options for students.</p> <p>To prepare students for college or the workforce, we will support K-12 STEM and CTE pathways. A key initiative will be expanding career and technical education programs at local high schools. In Jennings County, the school corporation expanded on-campus CTE programs in READI 1.0. These programs have already proven to be successful. Naturally, we are excited to move forward on our vision to create a new Panther Tech facility to accommodate a full range of programs for students. In Bartholomew County, our goal is to expand biology and health sciences pathway facilities to equip students for strong local health care careers.</p> <p>Additionally, we will support training for incumbent workers to prepare them for careers in</p>

	<p>next generation mobility. In READI 1.0, Jackson County partnered with Vincennes University and local employers to provide equipment and programming for worker training. With READI 2.0, our vision is to expand the Jackson County Learning Center and add additional equipment to allow for advanced training programs.</p> <p>Finally, we recognize the need to support early childhood education in the region. Our vision is to expand facilities related to early childhood and Pre-K education, especially within our local schools, to increase childcare capacity.</p> <p><b>MILESTONES</b> Property for the projects has been secured and funding is available. Our goal is to open these facilities within 3 years of funding availability.</p> <p><b>RURAL/DISADVANTAGED IMPACT</b> Approximately half of this investment will occur in rural/disadvantaged communities.</p>
<p><b>Goal 3 Action Plan:</b></p>	<p><b>HOUSING ACTION PLAN:</b> Each county has proposed significant housing investments. In North Vernon, there are plans to construct a new 60-unit mixed use housing complex in the downtown. The development will be built on the site of a major 2014 downtown fire, helping revitalize an area struck by tragedy.</p> <p>In Seymour, as recommended by the Brookings-LISC Study, there are plans for a new mixed-use and mixed-density housing project to be known as Freeman Village. This could ultimately include over 1,000 housing units.</p> <p>Finally, in Columbus, City View is a new, 690-acre mixed-use healthcare, commercial, and residential district to be developed in a partnership between Columbus Regional Health and the City of Columbus. The master plan is complete and has been formally adopted by the City. It includes 965 new homes.</p> <p><b>MILESTONES</b> Within 4 years, our goal is to see the first phase of housing complete for the Freeman Village and City View projects with 100 units complete in each. Within 6 years, our goal is for 500 units to be completed at each site. For the North Vernon apartments, our goal is to complete this within 3 years of funding availability.</p> <p><b>RURAL/DISADVANTAGED IMPACT</b> Our goal is to see at least 40% of the housing investment in rural and disadvantaged communities.</p>

<p><b>Goal 4 Action Plan:</b></p>	<p><b>QUALITY OF PLACE ACTION PLAN:</b>            In Columbus, there are plans to renovate the Main Library and North Christian Church, as outlined in the Bartholomew County Public Library (BCPL) County-Wide Facilities Strategy. Renovations would improve facilities, promote engagement, and expand offerings at these locations.</p> <p>Across the region, there are also plans for three new entertainment venues, including the construction of a Performing Arts Hall in Columbus. In North Vernon, a new outdoor pavilion is planned for the area adjacent to the Park Theatre.</p> <p>The City of Seymour is also planning to renovate an existing downtown building to accommodate a new downtown theater. This building has specifically been chosen as the upper level can house a new immigrant welcome center, serving as a cultural bridge in the community.</p> <p><b>MILESTONES</b>            Within 4 years of funding award, our goal is to see each of these projects complete and in operation.</p> <p><b>RURAL/DISADVANTAGED IMPACT</b>            Our goal is to see 50% of the quality of place investment occur in rural and disadvantaged communities.</p>
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A 4:1 match will be required for READI 2.0 investment. Based on this requirement, what is your expected commitment from public and private partners including anchor institutions? What are their expected roles in helping to implement the plan? (500 words max)

As a region, we are excited to see how our partners have rallied around our shared priorities. We expect a \$507M commitment from public, private, and philanthropic partners. On top of financial support, our partners are committed to implementing the strategies laid out in the plan. Below, we've provided a snapshot of our partner engagement in South Central Indiana.

**OUR TOP EMPLOYERS ARE PARTNERING TO DRIVE INNOVATION.** We are excited that Forvia and LHP Engineering intend to partner with other private companies, non-profits, and universities to drive innovation in the region. Forvia is the 7th largest automotive supplier in the world, and Columbus is home to their North American "Clean Mobility Crossroads" R&D Center. LHP Engineering was founded in Columbus over 20 years ago and employs 500 persons globally at its sites in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Together, with READI 2.0 support, they are proposing to create the non-profit Vehicle Innovation Center to facilitate innovation, validation, and integration of clean-energy mobility applications. This center will propel new R&D spending in Indiana, develop emerging mobility technologies that will benefit the nation, and support manufacturing jobs in our region.

**OUR EDUCATION PARTNERS ARE MOBILIZED FOR READI 2.0.** Our region has a history of impactful collaboration around education. The Community Education Coalition (CEC) represents a 25-year partnership of education, business, and community focused on aligning the region's learning system with economic growth and quality of life. The CEC has raised and leveraged more than \$75M to bolster the region's educational attainment since 2008. The CEC supports the regional AirPark Columbus College Campus – home to IU Columbus, Purdue Polytechnic, and Ivy Tech – to expand educational programming and student success in engineering, health sciences, and other STEM fields.

In Jackson County, the Jackson County Industrial Development Corporation, Community Foundation of Jackson County, and Jackson County Education Coalition are partnering with Vincennes University to expand the Jackson County Learning Center and provide advanced workforce training programs. In North Vernon, the Jennings County School Corporation has moved forward on plans to create Panther Tech, a new Career and Technical Education facility. This initiative started during READI 1.0 with expanded programming, and the school corporation has now drafted plans for a permanent building to house these programs.

**WE ARE BUILDING HOUSING THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS.** Our regional partners are committed to resolving housing challenges, to pave the way for growth. The City of Columbus and Columbus Regional Health are partnering to develop City View, a mixed-use neighborhood that will include a new hospital campus and 965 single-family homes. In Seymour, the region's anchor institutions have rallied around the housing recommendations included in the Brookings-LISC Study. The City of Seymour, Jackson County Industrial Development Corporation, and Community Foundation of Jackson County are now partnering to bring the vision of Freeman Village to life. In Jennings County, the community seeks to build on the success of their single-family housing project from READI 1.0 and tackle the construction of downtown mixed-use development at the site of a former fire.

Describe the process the region will utilize for intake, prioritization, and evaluation of projects. (1000 words max)

#### STEP 1: COLLECT PROJECT IDEAS TO BUILD A PROJECT PIPELINE (COMPLETE)

A lesson learned from READI 1.0 is that the region needs to continually scope out projects to address the region's biggest priorities. For READI 2.0, we have performed much better. Updated community plans that identified priority projects have been completed in each county including the City View Master Plan in Bartholomew County, the Brookings-LISC Study in Seymour, and a new comprehensive plan in North Vernon. Scoping plans were also completed for the leading projects in each county.

In May 2023, our region held its formal kickoff for READI 2.0. As we gathered in the board room of the Community Foundation of Jackson County, our region shared progress on the key initiatives each county had been working on to address regional priorities. This conversation formed the basis of our regional project pipeline. This meeting also marked the beginning of the process of reaching out to stakeholders, community leaders, and anchor institutions to identify additional projects from across the region. The results of this process were used to create the Regional Project Pipeline Report that is included as an appendix to this application.

Working together, the READI Steering Committee prioritized the projects in the Regional Project Pipeline Report and concluded that they could move forward immediately with projects leveraging \$56M in READI 2.0 funding. If additional funding were available, the region could move forward with additional projects. These additional projects are also regional priorities but are more aspirational in nature as not all matching funds are in place.

#### STEP 2: UPON AWARD, ISSUE A CALL FOR PROJECTS

During READI 1.0, our region did the work to narrow our list of projects down to a \$50M request for the application and repeated the exercise to reduce the list to \$30M in awards. This was an incredibly challenging process, and our lesson learned was that we only want to do that exercise once for READI 2.0. We also recognized that the status of some projects changed considerably after the original application, but before funds were obligated.

Based on these lessons learned, our intent is to issue a formal Call for Projects in the spring/summer of 2024 after the region's award is determined. The process will be open to any project, including those collected during the Project Survey, those on the Regional Project Pipeline Report, and new project ideas. This Call for Projects will allow us to collect current and accurate project details, match commitments, and related documentation so that regional leaders can make an informed decision on which projects to prioritize.

#### STEP 3: EVALUATE AND SCORE SUBMISSIONS

Upon receipt of project submissions through our call for projects, each project will be evaluated and scored. The first evaluation will include threshold evaluation to determine if the project meets eligibility and if the project can follow procurement requirements. Next, the project will be rated according to a scoring matrix. This matrix will be published as part of the Call for Projects but is expected to include the following general criteria:

##### *Evaluation Criteria*

- \*Alignment with Region's Goals and Strategies (25%)
- \*Impact on State KPIs (25%)
- \*Shovel Ready Status (15%)
- \*Highest Regional Priority Project (Shovel Worthy Status) (15%)
- \*Public/Private Match Ratios (15%)
- \*Impact on Rural/Disadvantaged Communities (5%)
- \*Economic Impact (TBD pending IEDC Policies)

#### STEP 4: PRIORITIZE PROJECTS

Project scoring will be reviewed by the READI Steering Committee. This committee consists of an equal number of



representatives from each of the three counties. The Steering Committee will make final recommendations related to project selection. These decisions will be reviewed with IEDC, and then a formal decision will be made by the SIHCDC Board of Directors.

If applicable, explain how the proposed or potential investments described above leverage additional investments within immediate proximity of another investment. You may consider a plan to make additional investments within the surrounding area to enhance the viability and economic benefit (e.g., accelerating population growth) of the project's implementation. (250 words max)

Many of our investments are part of ongoing district investments. Consider the following examples:

**BURKHART OPPORTUNITY ZONE:** The Brookings-LISC Study for the City of Seymour focused on an east side district known as the Burkhart Opportunity Zone. In the coming years, the city expects to complete multiple investments in this district to address the needs identified in this plan. This includes the recommended immigrant welcome center (to be located downtown) and the first phase of the Freeman Village housing project.

**CITY VIEW:** The City of Columbus, in partnership with Columbus Regional Health, created the City View Master Plan to inform the development of a 690-acre neighborhood southwest of downtown Columbus. The plan features the creation of a new hospital campus, nature-based public spaces, and 965 new homes. The city hopes to begin investment in this district with READI 2.0 support and expects to see significant ongoing public and private investment over the next several years.

**DOWNTOWN NORTH VERNON:** A priority investment for READI 2.0 is the construction of new downtown apartments at the site of a devastating fire that wrought havoc in 2012. This investment in North Vernon isn't isolated, but rather part of broader downtown revitalization efforts dating back to the restoration of the Park Theatre 20 years ago. North Vernon Main Street recently completed an updated downtown master plan, a new trails plan calls for a downtown trail, and the city is actively working to address blighted properties that are preventing North Vernon from reaching its true potential.

Broad stakeholder input in the planning and execution of READI 2.0 projects will be critical for a successful regional development strategy. Describe how the region proactively engaged a diverse group of individuals, organizations, and interest groups during the planning process and how you solicited input when developing the plan. Describe any challenges and how the region came together. (500 words max)

**OUR LEADERS CAME TOGETHER QUICKLY FOR READI 1.0.** With the announcement of READI 1.0, our region held a series of meetings with potential partners from throughout South Central Indiana. Discussions included more than 20 elected officials at the city and county level, executives from economic development organizations, major employers, education providers, and leaders from community foundations and other non-profits. Conversations collectively focused on the economic prosperity of the region through business support, educational attainment, workforce development, tourism, talent attraction, and more. To advance the work of the South Central Indiana Talent Region, a Steering Committee of twelve representatives from among the three participating counties was formed.

**WE PROACTIVELY ENGAGED THE PUBLIC.** The engagement process for the regional development plan during READI 1.0 took place over a two-month period and engaged over 450 participants from across the region. A custom website, [www.SouthCentralREADI.com](http://www.SouthCentralREADI.com), was used to distribute project information and to collect public feedback. Informational videos were developed and posted on the website that provided an overview of the program, as well as findings from local and regional workshops. A public input survey was crafted to identify key issues and opportunities in the region. Stakeholders used social media to share and advertise the website, videos, and survey.

**COUNTY STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS.** A series of county workshops were held that involved city, town, and county elected officials, key businesses, and other community leaders. The purpose was to identify priorities for each entity, gauge interest in participation, and identify areas of overlap between local, county, and regional priorities. A total of four county workshops were held in Jennings, Jackson, and Bartholomew Counties. These workshops gathered input from over 120 participants. During these workshops, a series of exercises helped meeting participants identify values and priorities on the local level, as well as the county level.

**REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP.** After the county workshops, a regional workshop brought together leaders and members of the public from all three counties to compare notes on what was learned. Participants were able to see how local values and priorities aligned, and how these common values and priorities could be used to develop regional goals. Over 70 representatives participated in this regional workshop, which resulted in consensus on the four regional goals included in the READI 1.0 plan.

**GOALS AND STRATEGIES STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS.** For READI 2.0, our Steering Committee reviewed the goals and strategies formed in READI 1.0 and sought input from regional leaders and key stakeholders. It quickly became apparent that the goals from READI 1.0 remained priorities for the region. Based on this initial feedback, we launched stakeholder work sessions around education, childcare, innovation and entrepreneurship, and related topics to dig deeper into the goals and build out complete strategies around each.

How do you plan to maintain stakeholder engagement? (250 words max)

Stakeholders in the South Central Indiana Talent Region have regularly engaged for over 20 years, with notable pre-READI examples being regional collaborations conducted via the South Central Indiana Economic Development (SCIED) group, multi-county Foreign Trade Missions, and efforts of the Community Education Coalition, to name just a few examples. Collaborations like these required regular public/private stakeholder engagement and have brought millions of dollars of public and private investments to our region. The results have been nationally recognized, including winning the Lumina Foundation's "Talent Hub" designation.

With READI 1.0, our communities came together in a focused way as described in the previous question. Whereas previous cross-border collaborations had often focused on singular areas of importance (e.g., economic development marketing, or educational attainment systems), READI 1.0 created an opportunity for us to take a comprehensive approach to our regional collaborations. The results were impactful.

Our READI Steering Committee has continued to meet regularly throughout the implementation phase of READI 1.0. With the announcement of READI 2.0, our core stakeholder group has typically met bi-weekly during the planning phase. With a successful READI 2.0 award, we will make an official call for projects that will bring together additional stakeholders. Worthy projects will involve a mix of public and private stakeholders, and stakeholder engagement comes second nature to us.

As we've done for over 20 years through a variety of efforts, stakeholder engagement will be a hallmark of our ongoing work.

How will the organization sustain itself? (250 words max)

The Southern Indiana Housing and Community Development Corporation (SIHCDC) will serve as the regional organization for the South Central Indiana Talent Region. The SIHCDC contracts with the Administrative Resources association (ARa) to provide staffing for the Community Development Corporation.

The ARa has served the South Central region for over 50 years, providing planning and administrative services to member communities. It is a not-for-profit governmental association owned by cities and towns in the South Central region, including Columbus, North Vernon, and Seymour. The organization has developed, acquired funding for, and administered more federal, state, and private community development projects than any other organization in Indiana. With a staff of six community development professionals, they have been and will continue to be a trusted partner to the region. Notably, SIHCDC and ARa have just hired a new Executive Director, who will start March 1, only the third Executive Director in its 50-year history.

Operations for the organizations are currently supported by project administrative fees, as well as membership fees. To date, administrative fees through READI 1.0 have supported ongoing regional activities. The SIHCDC has been able to utilize existing staff to cover its regional role and other pre-existing responsibilities. However, the region recognizes that there is an increasing need for one or more staff members dedicated to regional responsibilities. The region also recognizes that a dedicated funding stream may be needed to fund regional activities and is evaluating alternatives to address this need.

If applicable, use this space to describe the plan to maintain, or activate the asset(s) the IEDC is investing in if more information is needed. (250 words max)

## Part V: Outcomes, KPIs and Metrics

*In this section, regions will have a chance to discuss the desired outcomes and intended impacts of their plan. Regions may highlight how these potential impacts align with the state’s priorities. You will have an opportunity to provide your own metrics for success.*

Define the region’s expected outcomes if the plan is successfully implemented. Consider the economic development potential of this plan and how this plan demonstrates both regional and local impact. (250 words max)

**INNOVATION WILL MULTIPLY**  
 \*Our goal is to see per capita income grow across the region. We expect to see per capita income grow in rural counties (Jackson and Jennings) by 3.4% per year, resulting in regional per capita income of \$82,631 by 2032.  
 \*Our goal is to see an increase in new business startups with growth of 0.5% per year.

**EDUCATION WILL INCREASE AND EQUALIZE**  
 \*Our goal is for educational attainment to increase across the region. We expect to see educational attainment in rural counties grow from 16.9% to 25.2% of adults 25+ with a bachelor’s degree by 2032. This would allow the region’s educational attainment to increase to 29.4% by 2032.  
 \*Our goal is to increase childcare capacity across the region. We expect to add 70 additional seats per year.

**HOUSING WILL BECOME AVAILABLE**  
 \*Our goal is to see an increase in single-family and rental housing units in the region, with an emphasis on housing growth in rural areas. We expect to see 200 single family units and 200 rental units added per year over the next 10 years, with at least 40% of units in rural counties.

**WE WILL USE QUALITY OF PLACE TO ATTRACT POPULATION**  
 \*Two of our three counties are already growing. To accelerate regional growth, our goal is to see Jennings County’s population stabilize by 2027 and show growth from 2027 to 2032. Our ultimate goal is to increase our annual growth rate for the region to 0.45% by 2027 and 0.51% by 2032.

Please complete the table below with 5-year and 10-year projections with Indiana’s economic development priorities.

Key performance indicators	Current	5-year projection	10-year projection
Total population	156,193 (2022)	159,774 (2027)	163,916 (2032)
Total employment	76,234 (2022)	79,608 (2027)	83,132 (2032)
Per capita income	\$56,001 (2022)	\$68,025 (2027)	\$82,631 (2032)
Educational attainment (Population 25+ with a bachelor’s degree or higher)	28,055 or 26.3% (2022)	30,779 or 27.8% (2027)	33,768 or 29.4% (2032)
Total new housing units	66,118 (2022)	+1,592 (2022 to 2027) 67,710 (2027)	+1,800 (2027 to 2032) 69,510 (2032)
New rental housing units	16,498 or 27.1% (2022)	+871 (2022 to 2027) 17,369 or 27.7% (2027)	+981 (2027 to 2032) 18,349 or 28.4% (2032)
New owner-occupied housing units	44,310 or 72.9% (2022)	+977 (2022 to 2027) 45,287 or 72.3% (2027)	+999 (2027 to 2032) 46,286 or 71.6% (2032)
Percentage of affordable housing units	60%	60%	60%

Please describe your 5-year and 10-year projections for childcare within your region. Factors you may want to consider: (150 words max)

- Increase the number of childcare facilities and/or the number of seats in specific counties or regional total with the overall goal of decreasing childcare deserts in the state.
- Increase quality of childcare.

In order for licensed childcare capacity to keep pace with population growth, the region will need to add approximately 112 new seats from 2022 to 2027, and 121 new seats from 2027 to 2032, or approximately 24 seats per year. These projections align with the status quo in which licensed capacity insufficiently covers children under the age of six who may need care. As of 2024, only 59% of children in the region can be served by licensed and documented home facilities. To bridge the childcare gap, our goal is to serve at least 65% of children in need of care, which corresponds to an increase of 686 seats by 2032, or approximately 70 additional seats each year.

Please describe your 5-year and 10-year projections for innovation activities within your region. Factors you may want to consider: (150 words max)

- Increase specific number or percentage of new business start-ups within specific counties or increase regional total.
- Increase number of patent filings or SBIR/STTR activity.
- Increase in research and development spending of university or other partners.

Since 2016, our region has seen an annual increase in the number of new business applications filed. In 2022, there were 1,343 new business applications across the three-county region, with approximately half of those applications coming from Bartholomew County. Our goal is to sustain this growth in new business applications at a rate of 0.5% annually in alignment with projected regional population growth. This would manifest in 1,375 new business start-ups in 2027, and 1,412 start-ups in 2032. Proposed READI 2.0 projects, including an Incubator Program in Jackson County, can support entrepreneurs and promote innovation in the region, potentially elevating these numbers. New business start-ups should be encouraged throughout the region, but especially in Jackson and Jennings County to promote economic growth in rural communities.

Include additional metrics that are specific to the region if applicable. (150 words max)

One of our key goals is to help rural areas (Jackson and Jennings Counties) increase per capita income, educational attainment, and the number of new housing units. Our intentional focus on rural areas is intended to help raise their performance to be closer to numbers in urban areas. Key metrics include:

\*We would like to see per capita income grow by 3.4% per year, resulting in a per capita income of \$72,000 in each rural county by 2032.

\*We would like to see educational attainment in rural counties grow from 16.9% to 25.2% of adults 25+ with a bachelor's degree by 2032.

\*We would like to see housing growth in rural areas. In Jackson and Jennings Counties, we want to see a total of 80 single family units and 80 rental units added per year over the next 10 years.

## Part VI: Appendix

*In this section, regions may include supplemental information necessary to provide context, background, and/or rationale for this application. Examples of supplemental materials are:*

- *Feasibility studies*
- *Housing studies*
- *Childcare studies*
- *Infrastructure studies*
- *Survey or other data*
- *CEDS*
- *READI 1.0 Plan*