

HomeTown Competitiveness Opportunity Retreat Report



Data gathering

112 key informant interviews
4 focus groups
977 completed surveys
82 completed teen surveys

Mobilizing Local Leaders

For small towns to compete in the 21st century, they must tap into everyone's knowledge, talent and goals. Rural communities need to recruit and nurture diversity in leadership.

ENVIRONMENT

The community survey and individual interviews have highlighted several Greene County strengths.

1. Many survey respondents were women who felt that minorities and women are accepted in all types of leadership positions.
2. Our churches and business are seen as very responsive to community needs and work together well. In addition, civic groups, political parties, business, and agricultural organizations have begun to take a more proactive stance in county issues. The Chamber Coalition has begun work on county tourism, Farm Bureau hosted an information meeting on land use planning, the political parties have been successful in finding candidates to run for most offices, the Greene County Foundation is viewed as a county wide convener and the Citizens Academy has introduced a growing number of participants to the issues and wealth of Greene County.
3. Resoundingly, we are a very self-reliant community and believe we must do it ourselves, yet we also see ourselves as willing to accept outside help.
4. The community survey also pointed out that there are not any strong negative factors to overcome, but rather a need to better educate. Many survey respondents (30-50%) provided middle of the road responses indicating neither a strong favorable or unfavorable opinion but rather a "don't know."
5. A growing number of younger candidates have stepped forward and name recognition alone no longer ensures election. Campaigning has become a requirement to win elections.

"We need more qualified leaders running for town, city, and county positions."

"Greene County should develop a county wide network for resources, people, money, places, dates, economic development."

"A focused effort toward our goals --- we all seem to want the same thing, just disagree on how to get there. Then things are stalled because no one wants to "step up to the plate" and offend someone."

6. Interviews with leaders indicated many recognize the challenges facing the county and feel more needs to be done to prepare for the next 5-10 years. There is a growing recognition that the county must work together rather than one community competing against another.

GAPS

Gaps in Greene County leadership can be summed up as: lack of knowledge, lack of communication, lack of youth and lack of public support and involvement. Again survey data and interviews indicate:

1. Leadership supports economic development, and understands it may require addressing controversial issues, however, is reluctant to do so.
2. The public supports job development but there is not an understanding of what is required for business and job attraction. The public wants jobs, jobs, jobs, but also their roads paved and their taxes lowered. There doesn't seem to be an understanding of what kind of investments are required to bring jobs to Greene County
3. It is widely recognized that youth are not invited, involved or included in many leadership opportunities. It is, however, recognized that it must change if the county is to have a more positive future.
4. There is mixed reaction to encouraging our children to consider a future in Greene County. Children leaving the area seems to be implied and accepted. Numerous scholarships are offered to youth with little regard as to how the investment can help build or support Greene County.
5. Communication remains a problem. Local media coverage is not seen as countywide and in some instances is seen as a divider rather than a unifier. With Greene County's large geographical scope there remains a divide with media coverage segmented, western Greene County – Terre Haute/Vincennes, Eastern Greene County, Bloomington and Bedford. A lack of a local radio station, cable station, or one county wide internet portal further compounds the problem.
6. Commissioner and County Council meetings are held during the work day, which inhibits public participation. Meeting minutes are available only upon request.
7. Old ways, old thoughts, and old attitudes die hard, east versus west remains a barrier and a crutch for those who wish to use it.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Find ways to educate the public on county issues and create an inventory of interested people to serve on local appointed positions.
2. Develop mechanisms for elected officials to provide reviews to the public on issues regarding the county and how tax dollars are used.

3. Find ways to better connect our substantial scholarship base to help attract and encourage youth to return to the area.
4. Find ways to connect the resources of existing school, community based, and agency based leadership programs to build a leadership network and leadership ladder that has service to Greene County as a goal. Resources include: Boys' and Girls' State, Farm Bureau, REMC, 4-H, school based service learning, Citizens Academy.
5. Find ways to improve county wide communication.

Leadership Recommendations

- 1. Organize a Citizens Academy Alumni organization and identify a role for the group that addresses the findings of the HTC leadership pillar.**
- 2. Implement the G5 concept presented by this year's Citizens Academy, as a mechanism to bring all five school student leadership teams together on a single county wide project under the mentorship of the Citizens Academy Alumni.**

Energizing Entrepreneurship

Too many rural communities invest in businesses that export, rather than build, local wealth. IHTC and its partners encourage communities to become involved in nurturing local enterprise. Ultimately, IHTC's goal is to help communities build comprehensive and robust Entrepreneurial Development Systems. These systems of support provide a range of assistance for entrepreneurial businesses in a community.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Community: The media are somewhat supportive of entrepreneurship but there is room for improvement. Community members acknowledge the importance of supporting local businesses but many hesitate to be customers until it is well-established – a philosophy that can be devastating for a business start-up.

Entrepreneurship: Community awareness of available entrepreneurial training, resources or programs is sparse but the community indicates the desire to support entrepreneurs and related economic development efforts. According to local entrepreneurs, some of the biggest barriers experienced include lack of capital, competition, access to viable markets and inadequate cash-flow.

Youth Entrepreneurship: The perception is that the schools are only interested in those students who are academically-inclined and, even these are conditioned to be employees rather than employers. There is also some consensus that the community very seldom is open to ideas from young people.

Economic Development Efforts: There seems to be consensus that the community's economic development should focus on the entire community (both town and country businesses) and include business attraction, supporting existing businesses and helping new businesses get started.

GAPS

In the Greene County Economic Development Corporation (GCEDC) program that was developed with input from local and regional partners, three prime audiences were identified: youth, baby-boomers and high-tech.

Youth: There are relatively few youth entrepreneurship programs in Greene County.

Boomers: Many in this group are retired or semi-retired and are seeking their individual "work of passion." Additional research and interviews need to be conducted in this market.

"It's time to realize that growing small business is more effective than chasing large companies."

"We need more jobs available so that we don't stay primarily a community with the majority of our citizens being retired, disabled, or on some type of government aid."

High-tech: This group requires more sophisticated support mechanisms, such as a university-based incubator and a technology center. Both are being considered at the WestGate@Crane development but will require considerable financial and academic support to launch and sustain.

No mechanism to track home-based businesses currently exists.

Currently, the most common category of Greene County entrepreneurs is termed "Boot-strap," and use a "create your own job" approach. Their efforts are need-based, providing the additional income necessary for financial survival. Structured support for this mechanism is lacking.

There appears to be a lack of available funding for program research and development appropriate to each of the target audiences.

OPPORTUNITIES

Create infrastructure for entrepreneurs. Expand high speed internet access to support home-based businesses; create a business incubator and more business space, provide staffing placement assistance, and encourage proper land usage to support smart economic growth.

Help provide financial support for entrepreneurs. Create an angel investor/venture capital program, a revolving loan fund to provide low-interest loans and for the government to provide tax breaks for new and existing small businesses.

Provide more information on *how to start a business and what resources exist:* Website, developing a mailing list and newsletter via the GCEDC, developing an entrepreneurs' toolkit, and more public relations/marketing of available resources.

Create networking opportunities. An online social network medium to facilitate intra-community connection and be attractive for younger entrepreneurs: gathering information, advice, mentorship, partnerships, etc. Facilitate mentorships and in-person networking opportunities.

Offer more entrepreneurship training: Assess specific needs and link with existing educators.

Develop a 'support Greene businesses' campaign. Educate residents on local businesses and their value to our community, and encourage residents to shop local and thus support local economy.

Encourage youth entrepreneurship: 4-H entrepreneurship program, business plan competitions, church-based summer-school 'boot-camps,' coordinating summer internship programs for high school / college students with local businesses, creating networking opportunities and mentorships and possibly creating a micro-loan or grant fund for youth entrepreneurs.

Encourage new business development in strategic areas. Including eco-tourism (Goose Pond associated), agricultural value-added processing and niche product marketing opportunities, green business/alternative energy sources, technology developments (WestGate and NSWC

Crane-related), I-69 related business opportunities, products/services to meet the aging baby boomers in the community.

Coordination of the arts/crafts sector: A co-op gallery or other initiatives in order to collectively improve the business atmosphere for the individual artists. Nashville is suggested to be a good example.

Create a downtown revitalization initiative: A downtown business association in each town/city to help rehabilitate old buildings, strengthen existing businesses and improve aesthetics.

Entrepreneurship Recommendations:

- 1. Develop and support a countywide entrepreneurship training and support network for youth and “bootstrap” business startups.**
- 2. Explore ESI as a mechanism for the youth program and work on coordinating existing resources for startups. Continue to identify gaps in service and service delivery.**

Philanthropy

Rural residents do not always recognize local wealth because so much of it is invested in assets, such as land. Literally billions of dollars are at stake over the next few decades. However, this wealth is increasingly being inherited by family members that have moved away from the community. IHTC sets a target of converting at least 5% of the local wealth into charitable assets endowed in community foundations to fund community and economic development.

ENVIRONMENT

The current net worth for the county was \$1.44 billion in 2005. Over the next 50 years, the estimated transfer of wealth (TOW) for the county is \$1.35 billion. During the coming decade, the TOW is \$300 million. If, over the coming decade alone, just 5% of this TOW opportunity could be captured into county endowments, nearly \$15 million would be realized. With a conservative 5% payout, an estimated \$750,000 would be available annually for community betterment.

The Greene County Foundation has current net assets of \$4.2 million. Only 22% of those assets are unrestricted. The Greene County United Way has recently lost its state and federal charters and has dissolved.

"I think all community members should have a chance to make a difference through philanthropy."

"Teens want to volunteer but we don't hear about what the opportunities are."

"It would be nice if we had money for local projects that wasn't tied by governmental strings."

GAPS

There are no mechanisms in place to capture income-based contributions to charity. There is an information gap on the nature of bequests and the role of the foundation. There are many adults and youth in the community willing and able to volunteer to work for nonprofits, but no way to access information or support around meaningful volunteer opportunities. There is a lot of potential human capital in Greene County.

Philanthropy Recommendations:

- 1. Develop a Community Chest type program in Greene County that will allow income based giving that meets immediate needs.**
- 2. Continue to reach out and educate the community on the importance of building endowed community wealth for local projects and programs.**
- 3. Develop a volunteer connection program that matches our community's human resources with community needs.**

Youth

Often young people are driven away from their hometowns. IHTC has developed a formula that small towns can use in their efforts to halt this trend. The formula provides small towns with realistic goals for youth attraction. IHTC teaches people how to increase youth engagement, create career opportunities and entrepreneurial support, and nurture a sense of ownership in the community.

ENVIRONMENT

Youth in Greene County respond positively (71.3%) when surveyed whether they picture themselves living their adult lives in Greene County. They believe that it's a good place to raise a family (strong family values), secondly they have strong family ties, and thirdly it is a bargain in regards to cost of living. This attitude among youth contrasts sharply with the views of older key informants.

A view widely held in common from surveys and interviews is a strongly held belief that **higher education is the highway to better employment** opportunity mostly external to Greene County due to the consensus belief that here are more numerous and better paying jobs external to Greene County. A new perspective, consistent with modern rural economic development thinking and the Home Town Competitiveness model, is that youth, while going away to achieve education, world view and networks, should be encouraged at a young age to focus upon their return to utilize that network for economic growth. They would then have the best of both worlds enriching their lives more completely and benefiting the community with their talents and family traditions. Youth responding to surveys, however, have not embraced this perspective likely because a majority of their mentors and influence adults have not embraced it fully.

GAPS

Traditional youth programs consist of strong institutional silos solidified by the sincere commitment of limited resources toward proven youth programs. Strong credible bridges in philosophy and communication that result in an erosion of the silos is needed. Limited resources and critical mass require associations that are functional and formal between the stakeholders i.e. youth, parents, adults involved in all youth oriented activities.

Policy influence by youth perspective on a formal basis is absent. Youth leadership could be formally introduced and responsible for policy decisions in all areas of Greene County leadership activities. Active engagement of youth by all administrative entities in Greene County at younger ages would empower youth in leadership positions and result in the new blood which might move Greene County forward.

"We need to start engaging youth in the future of the community."

"We need to encourage creative education instead of just meeting graduation requirements."

"School sport activities divide youth rather than network youth in Greene County."

Entrepreneurship within youth in Greene County is suppressed by adult direction that “higher education with the goal of better employment “ is the ultimate, rather than the concept that “achieving and accomplishing professional success for family and community” is more consistent with the values these youth might find more enriching. Few programs expose how enriching entrepreneurship can be and how it can fit many personal and professional goals. Traditional programs dealing with entrepreneurship need refreshment to excite and inspire a larger share of youth and provide underprivileged youth greater self image, larger world view and a greater appreciation of diverse cultures to appreciate opportunities for professional success in our new global economy.

OPPORTUNITIES

The Home Town Competitiveness initiative provides opportunities to bring all stakeholders to the table that share the sincere commitment to youth. Following are specific opportunities identified by the youth pillar task force to fill gaps.

Conduct a **comprehensive review** of youth, young adult and adult mentor perspectives to prioritize initiatives.

Recruit a **county wide youth leadership team** to liaison with county government and a consolidated youth administrative group to represent youth perspective in the county.

Reenergize youth programs with new and exciting events which would engage and mobilize adult volunteers alongside youth and encourage crossover participation among youth in Greene County.

Reinvigorate youth/parent engagement with youth mentoring groups in a consolidated and consistently functioning environment.

Develop a **consistent program of youth leadership, entrepreneurship and philanthropy** for the very young and for parents so that the desire to be “an employee” is overcome by the realization of self value achievement for family and community.

Youth Recommendations:

- 1. Recruit and support a countywide youth leadership team to liaison with county government and a consolidated youth administrative group to represent youth perspective in the county.**
- 2. Develop an entrepreneurship training program for Greene County youth based on ESI.**