



# READI 2.0

## EVANSVILLE REGION APPLICATION

FEBRUARY 16, 2024

riverREADI • talentREADI • playREADI • liveREADI • bridgeREADI



“*Evansville. People like it.*”

This tagline from the 1970s still has impact today, though now we’d say “The Evansville Region. People like it.” And we’re actively working to have 10,000 more new people like it. People who will join us here as we transform our corner of the state, as we reclaim our riverfronts, as we leverage a new bridge, and as we expand opportunities for all our people and businesses. Led by the Southwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA), we ask for and will share how we will use \$75,000,000 to transform lives, businesses, and cities. This is a bold ask for a bold program. But of course, Indiana and the Evansville Region are for the bold. By the end of this application – through our vision, demonstrated prior success, a deliberate plan, and our unparalleled collaboration – we will ensure the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and State of Indiana hold the same certainty we do: the Evansville Region is ready to deliver on its bold plan.

Gibson, Posey, Warrick, and Vanderburgh counties are united in our *goals* – goals that propel the State of Indiana in achieving its goals. We are united in our *strategies* – strategies that strike a calculated balance between fun and future growth. And most importantly, we are united in our *plan* – our plan to achieve the high standards we set for ourselves like taking a \$75,000,000 READI 2.0 award and leveraging it for more than \$700,000,000 in projects that will come to define our region as well as Indiana.

EXCELLENCE IN REGIONALISM

The Evansville Region is anchored by our most defining asset – the Ohio River – and home to a thriving mix of business and industry, engaging nightlife, and diverse cultural events. The region provides abundant opportunities for prosperity and personal achievement yet allows people and businesses to stand out and make a distinct impact here. There are 23 incorporated communities within our four counties, ranging from 257 people to nearly 120,000. Vanderburgh County, which is home to the City of Evansville, has a population of 180,000 and accounts for 59% of the regional population (301,588). As Indiana’s third largest city, Evansville is the employment, retail, entertainment, education, and transportation hub for the Tri-State labor shed which is composed of Southwest Indiana, Northwest Kentucky, and Southeast Illinois. Yet, the other three counties also have major employers and population drivers contributing to regional prosperity. Two interstates, a regional airport, a major inland waterway port, and the coming I-69 Ohio River Crossing Bridge (ORX) make our region a logistics and transportation powerhouse.

Regionalism is embedded in every aspect of this application. Thanks to the vision of some of our largest employers, ours was the first region in 2015 to sign into existence a four-county ordinance creating our RDA, which has not stopped meeting since that time. It serves as an example and resource to other regions across the state. The RDA provided leadership and oversight to our \$42,000,000 Regional Cities award and the ongoing successful execution of \$50,000,000 in READI 1.0 dollars – leveraging these state investments into over \$1.25B in total investment. With no plans of slowing down, our RDA will provide regional leadership well beyond five years from now. Boldly, it is our commitment to regional synergy that makes our plan standout. In 2019, business leaders, anchor institutions, and economic development professionals from each of our counties convened to set region-wide priorities, agree to benchmark cities, and develop a data-driven approach to holding ourselves accountable. The result was Talent EVV.

BENCHMARK COMMUNITIES AND DATA

The first task of Talent EVV was to analyze the data from the Evansville Region and benchmark communities, identifying 36 key metrics to track our progress over time. The benchmark cities we hold ourselves accountable against meet specific criteria: similar demographics and industry makeup, Midwest or adjacent location, home to an inland waterway, and the absence of a land-grant university.

Nine communities were chosen to compare against these metrics. These metrics are tracked annually to assess how the Evansville Region is performing. For READI 2.0 purposes, in accordance with application guidelines, Roanoke, Virginia is selected as our most comparable benchmark community. Two unique accelerators stand out: innovation and site-readiness in their “Innovation Corridor” and prioritizing blight remediation and proximity to nature in the development of industry, housing, and quality of life amenities.



In 2022, we looked at our success to date. Although much was achieved, we saw the potential for even greater success. Talent EVV was moved under the leadership of the Evansville Regional Economic Partnership (E-REP) to advance its reach and alignment with more businesses, elected officials, and anchor institutions. Collaboration has certainly grown, and we have specific metrics and timelines we are working towards achieving, all of which are aligned with the state’s key performance indicators.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Examples of stakeholder engagement for READI is most easily demonstrated in two avenues: riverfront work and READI prioritization.

Beginning in the 1928 *Evansville City Beautiful* Plan, and in every master plan since, the public has been consistent and clear: invest in a more active, connected, and vibrant Ohio Riverfront. More recently, in 2023, local nonprofit Leadership Everyone concluded the broadest local listening initiative ever undertaken. Thousands came to sessions and completed surveys from all four counties, and still the same response echoed: the Ohio Riverfront is not living up to its potential for recreation, commerce, and housing opportunities.

Thanks to READI 1.0, we began the Ohio River Vision & Strategic Plan by hiring Sasaki, a world-renowned landscape architecture and urban design firm. Sasaki’s public engagement found the regional responses from our public input sessions surpassed every other they have ever conducted – from Chicago to Athens to Shanghai and every corner of the globe in between.

We also engaged the public in READI projects and plans. During both rounds of READI, we did a call for projects through social platforms, news media, and the E-REP website asking anyone in the community for projects to help accomplish our goals. Once those were compiled, elected officials, business executives, nonprofit leaders, and philanthropic partners weighed in via a Steering Committee that advised the RDA in READI 1.0 project selection and again in the preparation of our READI 2.0 application.

STRATEGIES

Knowing our goals – especially population growth – are the main drivers for both Talent EVV and our READI efforts, the Evansville Region continues our focus on five strategies to serve as our unique accelerators:

- **RiverREADI:** Connect 50 miles of riverfront with inspiring public amenities, engaging consumer attractions, and new housing overlooking the Ohio River.
- **TalentREADI:** Grow high-paying jobs filled by attracted talent and our people we have developed for careers of the future.
- **PlayREADI:** Improve quality of place for a healthier, more fulfilling, and fun life.
- **LiveREADI:** Build housing that attracts our targeted talent near employment clusters.
- **BridgeREADI:** Capitalize throughout the region on opportunities brought by the I-69 ORX.

A BOLD VISION DRIVEN BY ACTION

Action plans are designed to execute these five strategies. This application highlights potential investments informed by studies of benchmark cities, public input, and nationally recognized consultants. We showcase how we will utilize READI 2.0 funding to attract unprecedented private investment, complimentary public investment, and gain national recognition for the great things we offer. And we know how to gain national attention, like we did in 2023, when the *Wall Street Journal* named Evansville #3 on their list of “Great Places to Live for Remote Workers” or *Niche.com* naming Evansville #8 City for Lowest Cost of Living.

We are a region whose action plans are aspirational yet attainable. A region where riverfront communities will be transformed from pretty views of a powerful river into dynamic, activated gathering places that make lasting impressions and drive **population growth**. A region with a **thriving workforce** fueled by opportunities like the I-69 ORX that propel high-capacity logistics infrastructure. A region with a network of arts, culture, and active lifestyle amenities that empower our people to **live well** and that are admired by visitors. A region with an earned reputation for **upward mobility** enabled by educational institutions, valued by our people, and anchored by our businesses.

*A region for everyone – building national recognition as a great place to call home.*



Provide an honest assessment of the region’s participation in the first phase of the initiative, including how the region identified and prioritized projects for investment, engaged stakeholders in the process and the status of the region’s investment to date. (500)

The key to our READI 1.0 success was clarity in our purpose, which was to advance the goals of our existing Talent EVV strategy. READI 1.0 was an enabler for that strategy; it advanced projects that aligned to goals in categories known as TalentREADI, LiveREADI, PlayREADI, RiverREADI, WorkREADI, BizREADI, and BridgeREADI. We launched a public call for projects, which allowed anyone to submit project ideas that tied directly to those categories. We received projects from community leaders who were engaged in Talent EVV as well as anchor institutions, cultural destinations, and community-based organizations that looked to grow the region.

To evaluate Talent EVV’s proposed READI projects, the Evansville Region collaborated with Broad Ripple Strategies. The consulting firm used a matrix with various criteria, including best practices from aspirational cities, the latest place-based economic research, and its 30 years of experience. This helped estimate the impact and return on investment for projects. After being filtered through this matrix, projects were presented to both a Steering Committee (25 community leaders from large employers, elected office, philanthropic organizations, and anchor institutions) and a Working Group (approximately 100 community members). The groups’ feedback informed the funding recommendations of the Evansville Regional Economic Partnership (E-REP), which serves as management arm to the Regional Development Authority (RDA). In two categories, LiveREADI and PlayREADI, E-REP oversaw a Request for Proposals process that opened the opportunity for additional proposals to be submitted by the public. Hearing project plans from applicants throughout the region allowed E-REP to assess more projects and ultimately make thoughtful recommendations to the RDA based on project readiness, creativity, and alignment. Recommendations were made at the monthly public meetings of the RDA which heard the recommendations, deliberated, and ultimately voted whether to move forward with an allocation.

Following our allocations, we notified project leads of the RDA’s award decisions and created a process of accountability and open communication for subgrantees. Three projects needed awards reallocated. However, through our support and management of projects, we anticipated these months in advance and were ready to pivot with recommended projects when final decisions were made.

Our region hosted the state’s first READI groundbreakings, which took place in Gibson County with Governor Holcomb in attendance. In October 2023, we hosted Lieutenant Governor Crouch at our first ribbon cutting. Another notable measure of success: private investment in our projects exceeded the 60% minimum for a total of \$235,000,000 and local incentives exceeded the state’s investment in our projects by 12%. In total, READI 1.0 is funding 23 projects with over \$340,000,000 in total investment. That equates to more than 550 high-quality housing units near large employers, 200 new high-paying jobs, millions in new trails and parks, and long-term strategic plans for high-value growth along our riverfronts, corridors, and under-construction I-69 ORX. Our region has exceeded the READI 1.0 goals so far and are poised to do it again with READI 2.0.

Identify lessons learned and any issues that if addressed would increase opportunities for successful implementation of the region’s updated plan/application. (500)

The challenging economic landscape of 2022 and 2023 led to many lessons learned during READI 1.0, which gives our region an opportunity to better position itself for READI 2.0. We are better equipped to navigate challenges like shifting project timelines, finding alternative funding sources, and thinking bigger and bolder about the future 20 years from now.

We successfully allocated all \$50 million by the requested deadline. However, one lesson learned was that every project is unique and as such there’s not a one-size-fits-all funding timeline. With our highest-potential and most catalytic projects, it was helpful to have READI funds committed early in the process because it allowed project leads to secure more private investment and solidify local incentives more quickly. In other instances, the READI 1.0 award came too early. The economy was impacted by factors beyond projects’ control, such as lowered debt capacity and increased construction costs that forced some projects to change plans and timelines. A benefit in READI 2.0 is the RDA will have a longer window to select projects and more flexibility in how to leverage the funding. This additional time provides an opportunity to assemble more complex capital stacks for larger projects that better serve regional and state goals.

Second, after experiencing the above challenges, we have more ideas this round on how to support various project sizes in a more strategic way. There are projects – particularly in our rural areas – that are transformational locally but individually may

not be large enough to pursue READI funding. We learned new ways to support projects through READI dollars and continue to find additional tools, which save READI funds for more impact to a greater number of residents, employers, and units of government. The ability to utilize READI 2.0 dollars as debt this round presents additional opportunities to be creative in effectively stewarding the award.

Lastly, READI 1.0 funded several planning projects, which allow us to funnel READI 2.0 resources to projects that fulfill bigger visions drafted by nationally recognized advisory firms. Our Ohio River Vision and Strategic Plan (covering 50 miles of transformative riverfront investments) by Sasaki, and the Regional Site Development Plan (leveraging the future impact of the new I-69 Ohio River Crossing (ORX), its corridors, and Ohio River) by MKSK for long-term growth at the southern entrance of the State of Indiana, are both setting vision that the region will utilize to guide strategic investments for decades to come.

These lessons learned will inform our READI 2.0 execution to better serve Talent EVV goals of population growth, thriving workforce, living well, and upward mobility.

Describe the capacity of the regional organization, its strengths, weaknesses, and whether changes/support are needed to enhance its long-term viability and sustainability. (500)

Our RDA consists of five appointed members – one from each county and a fifth from the City of Evansville. Currently, those members include Evan Beck (Warrick County), Tim Hollander (Gibson County), Richard Leger (City of Evansville), Beth McFadin Higgins (Posey County), and Jim Ryan (Vanderburgh County). It is a dynamic, high-functioning board featuring some of our region’s top leaders. This quasi-governmental organization was initially formed to advance the efforts following a \$42,000,000 award in the Regional Cities Initiative. In many ways, the RDA is the codified version of our extensive history of regional cooperation and benefit.

Throughout the READI 1.0 process, RDA members or E-REP staff were called upon by other regions to ask about best practices, advise on the execution of regional awards, and about our success in working regionally. The RDA continues to exist to create more impactful opportunities for the entire region rather than simply dividing resources between counties, municipalities, or organizations.

E-REP, the management arm of the RDA, was the result of a 2021 merger between several organizations: the Economic Development Coalition of Southwest Indiana, Growth Alliance for Greater Evansville, Southwest Indiana Chamber of Commerce, Posey County Economic Development Partnership, Downtown Evansville Community Development Corporation, and the Evansville Sports Corporation. E-REP is now well-equipped and works closely with Success Warrick County and Gibson County EDC – local economic development organizations (LEDOs) – to advance Talent EVV goals.

E-REP, through strong partnerships mentioned above, is the regional champion in the following spaces:

- **Quality of Place:** Vibrant businesses and its workers are attracted to equally vibrant places. E-REP meets regularly with communities and key stakeholders to share the latest trends, resources and funding opportunities while making connections to our state and federal partners and providing technical assistance (such as grant services) to boost and expand regional infrastructure, housing, and amenities.
- **Talent Attraction:** As the region’s biggest cheerleaders, E-REP shines a spotlight on positive news and strengthens pride. It promotes our region’s strengths by telling impactful stories of its people, places, and institutions. It also executes digitally enabled talent marketing and provide resources for employers to attract (and retain) the workforce they need.
- **Business Retention and Expansion:** E-REP understands the importance of sustaining and bringing added investment to the region through companies who are already thriving here. Our Business Retention & Expansion program offers effective, on-the-ground support to businesses and data-driven guidance on targeted growth opportunities.
- **Regional Planning:** A cohesive outlook takes planning and collaboration for the greater good of our region. E-REP is the keeper of our community’s shared vision known as Talent EVV. In addition, it is also currently guiding and facilitating the pursuit of a new, five-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Economic Development District efforts, and Certified Tech Park (CTP) work.

The RDA is thriving, and E-REP is enhancing outcomes of the region’s long-term strategy through cohesive leadership. Entity structure changes are not needed to support READI 2.0 efforts.



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 (U.S. Census Bureau)	6,751,340 (2021)	301,588 (2021)
Total employment (U.S. Census Bureau)	3,020,345 (2022)	154,431 (2022)
Per capita PERSONAL income (Bureau of Economic Analysis)	\$51,645.95 (2021)	\$58,161.50 (2021)
Total population with bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau)	1,253,299 (2021)	63,880 (2022)
Total housing units (U.S. Census Bureau)	2,911,562 (2021)	135,736 (2021)
Total rental housing units (U.S. Census Bureau)	790,648 (2021)	46,150 (2021)
Total owner-occupied units (U.S. Census Bureau)	1,831,953 (2021)	89,586 (2021)
Number of new business start-ups (Small Business Development Center)	2090 new entities from 2019-2023	181 new entities from 2019 - 2023

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 Community Foundation Alliance is utilizing a Lilly Endowment planning grant to assess the most critical gaps in childcare for our four counties. This data will inform our strategy for years to come. Providing affordable, high-quality childcare leads to increased workforce participation, higher-educated and skilled workforce, job creation, and population growth. The region’s childcare efforts are led by Building Blocks, a 28-county-serving nonprofit advancing the development of high-quality childcare through advocacy, training, and Indiana Paths to Quality certification. Working with several large employers, care centers, and government entities, Building Blocks helps Southwest Indiana become a leader in the state in quality care, while identifying the greatest needs for improvement.

Currently, regional capacity can serve 71% of children ages 0-6 with a parent or guardian in the workforce, led in part by several of our largest companies offering employer-provided childcare. Additional services are particularly needed for second shift and lower-income households. Large employers are interested in growing their capacity. For example, Toyota Motor Manufacturing Indiana’s Driving Possibilities Initiative is making significant investments to develop additional childcare services and enhanced school-hour programs at public elementary schools in two counties– one of which is home to qualified census tracts. The YMCA is another leader in this area, with plans to expand their childcare offerings to include services for ages 0-5 in the coming year.

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)

The region’s innovation ecosystem is small but growing. Barriers exist from the absence of a research university and few tech start-ups. However, there are regional businesses, higher education campuses, and business support organizations leveraging developments in tech, federal funding, and programing to create innovative technology, processes, and products.

- anu™ recently received over \$1,300,000 in federal and Elevate Venture grants for research on multispectral photomorphogenesis deployed in its undercounter rotary cultivation chambers, which provide consumers with fresh-grown vegetables from their own kitchens.
- Geopolitical and carbon-free power strategies demand a reshoring of small modular nuclear reactor (SMR) technology. The federal government is assessing the expansion of existing facilities and workforces in Posey County to develop SMR components for export and domestic uses and is considering financing up to \$4B for SMRs to be developed for export to U.S. allies.
- At USI, the Center for Applied Business Technology is developing cutting edge neuro-marketing technology among other advancements. By studying consumer and employee eye movements, this technology helps businesses better place items in stores or manufacturing settings, which can improve sales, productivity, and worker safety. USI is building partnerships to demonstrate how this technology can support local businesses with students leading the research.
- The Southwest Indiana Small Business Development Center, regularly leading the State in meeting goals, averages 35 new business starts annually. In the next decade, 350 new businesses could use its Cowork Evansville facility or participate in its Supplier Diversity Program, catalyzing growth aligned with regional strategic goals.

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)

- Employers:**

  - Deaconess Health System (10,500 employees)
  - Toyota Motor Manufacturing Indiana (7,500 employees)
  - Evansville Vanderburgh School Corp. (3,450 employees)
  - Berry Global (3,200 employees)
  - Ascension St. Vincent (3,000 employees)
  - Koch Enterprises (2,800 employees)
  - TJ Maxx (2,300 employees)
  - University of Southern Indiana (2,119 employees)
  - OneMain Financial (1,250 employees)
  - Sabic Innovative Plastics (1,200 employees)
- Higher Ed:**

  - University of Southern Indiana (9,178 Enrollment 2022)
  - University of Evansville (2,017 Enrollment 2022)
  - Ivy Tech (4,929 enrollment)
  - Oakland City University (880 Enrollment 2022)
  - Stone Family Center for Health Sciences (500 students)
    - 60% IU Students
    - 20% University of Evansville Students
    - 20% University of Southern Indiana Students
    - 92 current residencies

- Philanthropic:**
- Community Foundation Alliance
  - Welborn Baptist Foundation
  - CenterPoint Energy Foundation

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)

Our region’s rural communities include Posey County and Gibson counties. Posey County is home to 25,116 residents and several large industrial employers. Mount Vernon is home to the Port of Indiana, which handles almost 6.7 million tons of freight annually, the highest volume port in the State. Gibson County is home to 32,924 residents and Toyota Motor Manufacturing Indiana plus several of its suppliers. While the average wages of these counties are among Indiana’s highest due to industrial and manufacturing employment, both contain areas of poverty and disinvestment. Warrick County contains large swaths of rural and agricultural land, though it is technically not classified as a rural or rural-mix county.

Vanderburgh County is the sole county designated as a disadvantaged community with many of the City of Evansville’s urban core and south side neighborhoods in Qualified Census Tracts.

How have region’s metrics shifted since 2021? What are your anticipated projections of change given your READI 1.0 projects? (250 words max)

Regional employers and anchor institutions began Talent EVV with a data-driven approach. They noted if we improve our most important metrics’ trajectories then we change our future. Thirty-six indicators were identified, with nine specified as critical: population growth, young adult population, minority population, poverty rate, bachelor’s degree or higher attainment, employment growth, average wage, health index, and high school graduation rates. While the region ranks in the lower half on six of nine indicators compared to benchmark communities, progress is happening. In 2020, the first year of tracking, three metrics worsened. In 2023, seven metrics improved, two stayed constant, and zero worsened.

Successful collaborations welcomed during the first full year of READI 1.0 investments in 2023. Many of these will continue with READI 2.0 to improve our metrics:

- Groundbreaking on 364 apartments near major employers and within 15 miles of state borders, with a goal of 900 new rental housing units through READI 2.0.
- Regional riverfront strategy.
- Evansville’s MakeMyMove remote worker campaign leads the state with 16 people plus families relocating with an average wage of \$110,481. In 2024, the goal is 25 more workers, resulting in \$2,500,000 of new consumer spending.
- Targeted delivery of “e is for everyone” marketing campaign to talent outside the region.
- Expansion of partnerships creating more student apprenticeships with major employers.
- Creation of a Supplier Diversity Program and CDFI-Friendly organization.
- Micro-transit creating equitable transportation options.
- U.S. Department of Education Promise Neighborhood grant bringing \$30,000,000 in federal funding.

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: Roanoke, VA MSA
Total Population	301,588	315,251
Total employment	154,431	152,465
Per capita income	\$58,162.50	\$53,519
Total population with bachelor’s degree or higher	63,880	73,846
Total housing units	135,736	147,601
Total rental housing units	46,150	44,280
Total owner-occupied housing units	89,586	103,321

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)

As mentioned earlier, when Talent EVV launched in 2017, the region’s largest employers and anchor institutions collectively identified five peer and four aspirational cities based on similar demographics, industry makeup, Midwest or adjacent location, and the absence of a land-grant university. Since then, Chmura Economics & Analytics provides an annual dashboard of nine statistics to measure progress. One peer city, Roanoke, Virginia, is nearest our population and located along a river. Also like us, it prioritizes investment in five key areas of opportunity to drive growth and prosperity. Two of those serve as unique accelerators:

**1. Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Roanoke created an Innovation Corridor to attract and retain investment related to life sciences, technology, and research. Distinct features include site-ready locations, access to two-thirds of U.S. population within a day’s drive, connection to community leaders that support cluster development, and proximity to amenities like workforce housing, trails, restaurants, and entertainment. Roanoke’s focus on the corridor connects to two strategies of our READI plan: BridgeREADI and TalentREADI. Our BridgeREADI strategy includes site development with leveraging the connectivity of the I-69 corridor. This Roanoke best practice gives our region a blueprint for creating investment and growth from site-ready locations, and how proximity and logistics enhance the impact of the strategy. Another inspiration from Roanoke’s corridor is their intentionality with locating high-wage jobs close to desirable residential and recreational areas.

Locally, this type of corridor development will be informed by our READI 1.0 work in identifying prime development sites near transportation assets like I-69, a highway made even more important by the coming I-69 Ohio River Crossing (ORX). Roanoke recognizes the value of placing higher education and healthcare institutions near start-ups and business expansions within its corridor. Ease of access is driving the acceleration of entrepreneurship and innovation in Roanoke and could do the same at our Downtown Evansville Medical Campus. We see how Roanoke’s strategy can guide future growth of similar developments in Downtown Evansville (containing Regional Cities and READI 1.0 projects) as well as the Warrick Wellness Trail area into an active and connected part of our regional economic development.

**2. Economic Opportunity & Community Vibrancy:** Across Roanoke’s region, public-private partnerships have taken old manufacturing plants and industrial sites and redeveloped them into mixed-use developments that focus on workforce housing, entertainment, restaurants, and new commercial space. This focus on housing development through blight revitalization connects directly with our Population Growth goal and both RiverREADI and LiveREADI strategies. Our focus is on the development of public amenities, attractions, and housing along the Ohio River or other key regional corridors replacing aging and underperforming buildings. Roanoke also recognized the importance of connectivity with the natural environment through these developments. Many of its mixed-use sites were intentionally selected due to their proximity to trails, greenways, and rivers, as in our RiverREADI strategy, and our Sasaki consulting efforts.

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)

Low levels of inbound migration, challenges to retaining our best and brightest, and difficulty converting college students to residents upon graduation are impacted by the following:

- **Lack of desired amenities:** Local public engagement data indicates residents desire quality of place amenities (at least) on par to other communities – waterfront amenities, improved parks, sporting facilities, trail systems, public art, and more varied cultural destinations. Our non-white population is well-below the national average and diverse cultural offerings are lacking, which impacts external perceptions from minority populations.
- **Quality housing:** Our region lacks sufficient dwelling units across income levels. We need affordable units and have a pent-up demand for market-rate apartments. Particularly in the city centers, pre-1960 housing requires significant maintenance to stay livable; meanwhile, the demand for new builds is greatly challenged by supply chain disruptions and lending environments, sometimes delaying READI 1.0 developments.
- **Site Development & Infrastructure:** Our region has access to a robust and growing interstate system and ample train and barge transportation capacities. However, despite access to utilities and our logistical advantages, the area has few shovel-ready sites of impactful size to attract in-demand employers.
- **Talent Supply:** Our two largest sectors, health and life sciences and advanced manufacturing, employ nearly 50,000 workers. We have identified technology, sustainability, finance, retail, and education as sectors that will continue to grow the

regional economy. But even with these opportunities, we are not retaining needed workers and the talent pipeline is underproducing.

- **Innovation and Business Expansion:** Small businesses employ 44% of our workforce. Concurrently, our largest employers are competing in the global economy. Both need access to best-in-class research and innovation. Times are changing faster than ever and the potential impacts of not innovating to expand capacity with local industry would be devastating.
- **Health:** Six key areas have demanded our focus in recent years: healthy living, improved built environments, maternal and child health, workplace wellness, reduced tobacco usage, and enhanced healthcare transportation. While these areas remain pivotal, we know other metrics have arisen. Mental health, loneliness, addressing population disparities—especially within minority and refugee communities—and a deeper exploration of workplace wellness will only continue to grow in importance.
- **Connectivity and Transportation:** The Evansville Regional Airport (EVV) lags comparable metros in availability of non-stop destinations and scheduled departures. We have strong connectivity in terms of walkability with a high “walk score” in some urban areas, but sprawl and lack of sidewalks and trails limit many residents’ ability to transport without a vehicle, and a lack of bus connectivity to some large employers reduces employment options.
- **Behavioral Health:** We are faced with mental health challenges and addiction. We have a shortage of child/adolescent psychologists and psychiatrists, which must be remedied for our overall health and prosperity.
- **Childcare:** Though childcare is not the largest challenge facing our community, equitable options do present significant barriers and inequities because of a lack of availability for low-income families and second-shift workers.

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

Efforts are in vain if we lose population. Meeting these key needs will drive population and economic growth:

1. **Investment in ‘place’:** We know quality of place, attractive and attainable housing, and quality of life are critical to attracting and retaining population and talent. Current residents, world-class consultants, and the study of our benchmark communities all tell us that investments are needed here to create great quality of place amenities. Amenities that capitalize on our riverfronts to create a world-class destination promoting active lifestyles which welcomes visitors and residents alike have the potential for the greatest impact. Trails that lead to our riverfront, paths that connect housing to our parks and schools, and public spaces with restaurants, shopping and urban housing types are the sorts of investments that will empower our growth.
2. **Talent supply and higher quality jobs:** We have growing industries; talent to fill those jobs is our limiting factor. We need to grow our highly trained workforce and population to fill these jobs while preparing the way for higher-wage jobs to come. Education, certifications, and creating a more health-conscious environment will empower current residents to meet their full potential and see a path to growth, which increases population retention. Concurrently we also need new jobs through innovation, expansion, or attraction in growing industry segments (life sciences, technology, smart manufacturing) to retain and attract residents to fill these roles while improving the standard of living for all our residents.
3. **Improving Health:** Poor health, premature deaths, and time lost from work and school cost our families and businesses every year. We need healthy people for a thriving community and economy. Additional healthcare resources for physical and mental health, and enhanced offerings to encourage healthy, active lifestyles are needed, such as in investments in equitable quality of life amenities. Investments near low-income residents are a priority as they are less likely to have access to transportation and are statistically less likely to obtain care for chronic diseases.
4. **Housing:** Our region has a shortage of housing that current and inbound residents want. New housing located near employment, schools, parks, and trails are tools for growing population. Our region’s largest foundations are taking a more active role in research to understand the macro-environment for housing in the region, even beyond our four counties, which will inform future housing decisions we make with READI 2.0 and other incentives in the future.
5. **Connectivity and Infrastructure:** Transportation is critical to the future of our businesses and the prosperity of our residents. Though we have many assets (Ohio River, Port, EVV, I-69, I-64, and I-69 ORX) we must continue to leverage our prime location and transportation infrastructure, including restoring air service, to drive economic prosperity. The READI 1.0 site development work led by MKSK will ensure we will capitalize on the opportunities we have before us with the I-69 ORX state and federal investments.

SECTION A

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

- Goal 1: Increase our population by 10,000 residents, half of which are in the early stage of their careers.
- Goal 2: Bring 5,000 high-paying job opportunities to our region and a highly trained workforce that is globally competent and locally relevant.
- Goal 3: Improve the quality and quantity of our residents’ lives.
- Goal 4: Reduce the percentage of households living in poverty.



Identify 3-5 strategies to help achieve each identified goal.

Goal 1 Strategies (300 words):

**Population Growth key strategy: RiverREADI** – Connect 50 miles of riverfront with inspiring public amenities, engaging consumer attractions, and new housing overlooking the Ohio River.

**Supporting strategies: TalentREADI, LiveREADI, PlayREADI, BridgeREADI**

RiverREADI fulfills a century of plans for enhanced riverfront development and responds to thousands of citizen surveys demanding a more activated destination. Found within Evansville’s first master plan in 1928 was the desire for expanded public spaces along the river, and since then, it has been repeatedly echoed through surveys, listening sessions, and consultancy reports. To further strengthen the importance of this strategy, our Talent EVV peer and aspirational riverfront cities have demonstrated the benefit of investing in dynamic, activated waterfronts.

There will be newly activated and inspired public space and mixed-use development, thoughtfully connected, and all planned by world-renowned urban designers and landscape architects at Sasaki. The renderings are breathtaking and included in the appendix, while the full plan will be completed in March 2024. This community-informed, Sasaki-led strategy includes three components for our riverfront downtowns:

- **Stitch the City:** Creating equitable destinations connecting to nearby neighborhoods via paths while also allowing for convenient parking and clear signage.
- **Hug the River:** Reorienting the way we interact with the Ohio River. As we reorient, we will connect via housing, commerce, recreation, and industry, all co-existing along the 50-mile riverfront.
- **Main Street & More:** Detailing a phased development of needed amenities, like quality housing and public space to connect the riverfront to regional downtowns and spread the growth of our urban neighborhoods.



Within these concepts, the plan calls for a wide variety of compelling amenities – from tranquil green spaces and inspiring arts and culture to busy athletic courts and adventurous boating and climbing. The new riverfront park will earn national recognition for its design, functionality, inclusivity, and fun!

**Goal 2 Strategies (300 words):**  
**Thriving Workforce key strategy: TalentREADI** – Grow high-paying jobs filled by attracted talent and our people we have developed for careers of the future.  
**Supporting strategies: BridgeREADI, LiveREADI**

The region is sized for success. It’s big enough to provide abundant opportunities for career and personal achievement and small enough to allow people and businesses to stand out. We need more people to fill our 11,000 vacant jobs and enhance our culture. TalentREADI focuses on talent development and job growth by targeting early-career workers who can build careers, connections, and families here, in addition to mid-career professionals and innovative entrepreneurs.

**Talent Development:** With talent availability arguably the most important competitive issue for economic development, we will ensure our workforce has the necessary skills for careers of the future. Having one of the most affordable housing markets in the country is not enough. We must prioritize that people have access to development opportunities to increase career options. When we add a highly trained workforce to existing assets, we become an even greater place for our people and businesses to stay, grow, and multiply.

**Job Growth:** Good jobs give our workforce the chance to increase household income and more career choices to aspire toward. Targeted investment strategy will grow and attract jobs to create wealth in our community – jobs with a “multiplier” effect, leading to even more local employment via suppliers, partnerships, and synergy. Capitalizing on our strengths in advanced manufacturing and health and life sciences, while leveraging our READI 1.0 cluster development work, we will focus on both expanding our existing jobs and attracting new ones to the region. This strategy focuses on growing high-paying jobs regionally through industry-leading innovation, small business development, and local supplier development.

**Goal 3 Strategies (300 words):**  
**Live Well key strategy: PlayREADI** – Improve quality of place for a healthier, more fulfilling, and fun life.  
**Supporting strategies: RiverREADI, LiveREADI, TalentREADI**

**Healthy:** Recreation, arts, culture, parks, trails, and the natural environment are arguably as important as job opportunities and schools for a well-lived life. The region’s four-season climate suits the development of various amenities, like trails, museums, and indoor sports facilities. Encouraging people to stay active, whether inside or out, has benefits beyond fun; these investments contribute to mental and physical health because of their wide-ranging social, economic, and community benefits leading to healthier and happier lives.

**Fulfilling:** “Serendipity” is not often used in economic development reports, but with it, there are undeniable economic, mental, and societal benefits. Serendipity, or unplanned meetings of people, can grow economic and social capital to create a strong sense of attachment to place. Making investments where people across the diversity spectrum can build relationships while getting outside to enjoy their city – like visiting meaningful arts or cultural amenities – will have impactful returns. Ultimately, relationships are the driving force in most people’s lives, and PlayREADI at its core is all about helping people live well in every area of their life.

**Fun:** PlayREADI is informed by thousands of people who voiced preferences through public engagement and called for more active and fun amenities throughout all four counties. With remote jobs seemingly here to stay, people can choose where they live and are doing so based on relational ties and enticing communities; our PlayREADI strategy addresses both aspects. PlayREADI is also closely tied to RiverREADI because the riverfront is an untapped asset for recreation and the number one quality of life amenity residents want.

**Goal 4 Strategies (300 words):**  
**Upward Mobility key strategy: LiveREADI** – Build housing that attracts our targeted talent near employment clusters.  
**Supporting strategies: TalentREADI, BridgeREADI, RiverREADI**

The Evansville Region needs the right housing mix to give people options when choosing where and how to live. This addresses upward mobility because quality housing is a basic need, and lack of housing at various price points imposes barriers to family stability and the attraction of talent. Quality housing of all types, when located near amenities and employment clusters, will attract regional workers who live across state lines to choose our region. It also allows workers without private transportation to enter the workforce. The housing mix should align with the types of jobs in the region – offering affordability for low-skill jobs and amenity-rich options in market-rate developments. If housing barriers prevent workers and jobs from finding each other, our region’s economy

and people suffer. Housing barriers include location, price, quality, and size. We will cohesively utilize investments, programs, and incentives from our various partners – private, local, state, federal, and philanthropic – to align preferences with jobs in urban, suburban, and rural areas while considering impacts on traffic, infrastructure, schools, and the environment. Our partners will move beyond private and non-profit developers to include a private housing consortium being formed in Posey County and student housing developers to attract younger residents to our higher-ed opportunities.

Downtown developments near the riverfront are well positioned near employers, amenities, and transportation, and that makes them an ideal place for us to develop mixed-use and mixed-income options. This new housing may be accomplished by simultaneously addressing another quality of place need: adaptive reuse or rehabilitating blight. Focusing on one type of housing exacerbates problems; we will target locations near employers and develop a mix of housing to excel upward mobility.

**Goal 5 Strategies (300 words):**  
**BridgeREADI:** Capitalize throughout the region on opportunities brought by the I-69 ORX

Our region has an incredible accelerator arriving in the coming decade: the I-69 Ohio River Crossing bridge (ORX) connecting Hoosiers to the international corridor from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. The interstate’s expansion will activate development parcels near I-69, leading to powerful public and private investments. The bridge will improve cross-river mobility for local traffic, while leveraging our location in the logistical center of the U.S. and within 3.5 hours of five cities with metro populations of more than 1,000,000.

Two planning efforts funded by READI 1.0 are advising preparation activities by identifying catalytic opportunities:

(1) The I-69 corridor development planning identifies potential industrial sites for future development across the region in areas near I-69, I-64, and the Port of Indiana – Mount Vernon. It also emphasizes the near-term need to develop an addition to the Vanderburgh Industrial Park along I-69. Recommendations for utility expansions, new and upgraded roadway networks, appropriate sizing of potential industrial sites, and thoughtfully planned complimentary zoning of adjacent land will ensure the region is ready for all development typologies in a thoughtfully planned network, poised to take advantage of the I-69 ORX opportunity.

(2) Highway 62/1st Avenue planning focuses on development in and around three of the region’s major employers who have future expansion capacity. Jacobsville is home to Berry Global, Deaconess Hospital and CenterPoint Energy. This neighborhood, within a qualified census tract, has seen targeted investment in the last decade. This plan focuses on continuing the redevelopment of Jacobsville and increasing unique and needed housing options near these employers. This effort will aid in improving the quality of life for residents and attracting new population growth near large employers that will benefit from the I-69 ORX.

SECTION B

	\$	%
Overall Planned Investment to Successfully Implement Strategies	\$704,000,000	
Requested READI 2.0 Funds	\$75,000,000	11%
Anticipated matching funding sources		
Private funding	\$434,000,000	
Philanthropic funding	\$66,000,000	
Subtotal Private:	\$500,000,000	71%
Local funding	\$70,000,000	
Federal funding	\$55,000,000	
Subtotal Public:	\$125,000,000	18%
Other State funding	\$4,000,000	<1%
% anticipated READI to rural & rural-mix communities		13%
% anticipated READI to disadvantaged communities		45%

A LEVERAGE RATIO OF 71/18/11!

SECTION C

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 each)

Goal 1 (Population Growth) Action Plan (300 words):

**Population Growth:** More jobs do not always mean more residents. We need to prioritize people. Our benchmark communities demonstrate the importance of quality of place in growing diverse populations. We must become known as a compelling and welcoming region that is a beautiful, vibrant, opportunity-rich, and inclusive place to call home.

Initiatives include:

- Downtown Evansville’s riverfront will be transformed into the “Great Bend Park,” celebrating its location on the Ohio River. This art-rich and activity-filled park will include a reduced-lane Riverside Drive, art, bike and kayak rentals, restaurants and bars, and new view-oriented housing. Key corridors have been identified so perpendicular streets leading to the riverfront have thoughtfully planned real estate and views, drawing more people to The Bend. Flood mitigation will be designed into the park in a way that protects the city but artfully adds to the design. Sasaki’s plan will include suggested phasing, milestones, and possible timelines.
- From Mount Vernon to Newburgh, all our riverfronts will be filled with people enjoying amenities including new trails, viewpoints, gardens, play areas, housing, shopping, and dining as the result of our Ohio River Vision & Strategic Plan (ORVSP). New connecting trails will provide multi-modal access to these engaging areas for public activities and commercial opportunities.
- Berry Global developing housing and wrap-around support for immigrants in the middle of the region where they will have easy access to amenities.
- Supplier Diversity Program and a CDFI-Friendly Enhancement Fund that supports and empowers minority-, veteran-, and women-owned businesses to grow and ensure these populations know this is a region where they can thrive. A \$4,000,000 fund will be raised in 2024 to come alongside out-of-market CDFI investments into the market. Our region is interested in utilizing READI 2.0 as a loan to support this initiative.
- MakeMyMove remote worker campaign (see Part 3).

Goal 2 (Thriving Workforce) Action Plan (300 words):

**Thriving Workforce:** Our pathway to adding 5,000 good jobs involves infrastructure in preparation for large-scale investments and workforce development to grow talent.

BridgeREADI efforts by MKSK identifies top sites for potential acquisition, including those needing investment to become shovel ready. TalentREADI efforts will address both workforce current needs while preparing regional talent for the future.

These investments will enhance quality of opportunity:

- MKSK is advising how we develop land assets for a future mega-site, advanced manufacturing, and/or supplier parks adjacent to office, retail, and residential developments. MKSK’s plan will be delivered in Q2 2024, and its execution is critical to leverage the ORX.
- Promise Neighborhoods, a federal grant program, awarded \$30,000,000 to a coalition of organizations led by the University of Evansville. It will create initiatives in QCTs to improve academic and developmental outcomes for children in areas of concentrated poverty and transform communities by increasing the capacity of entities focused on results for children and youth with a cradle-to-career approach.
- The first Orr Fellowship satellite outside of Central Indiana will be in our region, providing intensive post-graduate mentoring by executive leaders to select high-potential talent. In Central Indiana, over 70% of these young leaders are retained following the program.
- Childcare expansions at Toyota Motor Manufacturing Indiana, in partnership with Gibson and Vanderburgh County schools, and by the Southwest Indiana YMCA, will provide our next generation with a head start for educational and career excellence.

- The University of Southern Indiana’s Center for Applied Business Technologies will catalyze innovation across industry clusters with unique market-leading competencies. This talent will in turn create new value for existing businesses and those considering our region. The Center is already attracting private investment interest and will serve as a technological hub for our innovation ecosystem.

Goal 3 (Live Well) Action Plan (300 words):

Physical and mental health are critical drivers of Live Well. When people lead healthy lifestyles, are in environments designed to support healthy choices, and have easy and equitable access to basic needs – healthy outcomes are more likely achieved. Utilizing our PlayREADI, LiveREADI, RiverREADI and TalentREADI strategies, we will improve the quality and quantity of residents’ lives through investments in amenities for active lifestyles combined with expanded healthcare offerings.

Expected areas of focus include:

- Continuing the significant PlayREADI investments in parks, trails, arts/cultural, and active living amenities through the region. We utilized 30% of READI 1.0 for similar investments.
- RiverREADI driven investment along our riverfronts.
- Trail efforts to connect our region from Mount Vernon to Evansville to Newburgh, and connections away from the river, too. Trails connecting neighborhood parks to each other, and to larger, regional parks.
- Expansion of the Warrick Wellness Trail developments, including healthcare, recreational facilities, and multi-family housing.
- Our LiveREADI efforts will involve creating housing near employment clusters to reduce commuting, giving residents more time to enjoy our four-season climate.
- Arts and cultural investments to impact all areas of our residents’ lives. This could include investing in a new exhibition space for the Evansville Museum’s unexhibited Picasso, or riverfront areas for music or other cultural programming.
- Continued TalentREADI investments will include growth in healthcare and mental health research and education at the Downtown Evansville medical campus.
- Deaconess is making significant investments in additional training to hire more healthcare professionals, nurses, and lab techs. Similarly, Ivy Tech has plans for similar growth in training capacity.
- Partnership with Welborn Baptist Foundation on its Upgrade initiative, which provides funding for capital projects that integrate health and activity into the built environment.

Goal 4 (Upward Mobility) Action Plan (300 words):

The Upward Mobility action plan utilizes the LiveREADI strategy and involves affordable, workforce, and market-rate housing creation. Supporting strategies include BridgeREADI for site development and RiverREADI for waterfront residential options. Housing enables upward mobility when it is stable, affordable, available, and located near jobs or transportation.

Plans for affordable and workforce housing include:

- Designating a portion of READI to rehabilitate blighted properties on in rural downtowns in a region-wide manner rather than smaller, individual projects.
- Requiring workforce and affordable housing projects to seek other financing tools before seeking READI funds.
- Utilizing a READI loan to support creative rural solutions, like coordinating with a regional investor pooling patient capital to secure land and catalyze housing in Mount Vernon.
- Working alongside newly-elected Evansville Mayor Stephanie Terry in her goals to support affordable housing, and other supports like transportation, childcare, and workforce training are coordinated.



Available market-rate also creates opportunities for affordable housing to become less competitive among people who need it most. Plans for market-rate projects include:

- MKSK and Sasaki will detail high-impact options for future market-rate housing. Nearly 90% of Americans in the 2018 American Community Survey express a desire to live within walking distance of amenities. Walkable development slows sprawl and is less taxing on public infrastructure. Within these plans, if growth infrastructure is needed, we will consider the most impactful additions.
- Consideration of amenities that catalyze housing. Warrick County demonstrates the positive outcomes of developing amenities first, and letting single family homes follow. They saw 7% population growth from 2010-20.
- Mixed-use developments in Downtown Evansville. Previous developments created ripple effects on culture and community through follow-on investment. In a three-year period where downtowns across the country declined, Evansville saw 17 new restaurant and retail openings and 37% population growth.

**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)**

Talent EVV drives this READI 2.0 application, representing an alignment of organizations and agencies leading our region’s growth and development plan. Talent EVV’s core team is made up of six highly connected anchor institutions in the region, which closely track data to ensure the effectiveness of resources, efforts, as well as public and private investments towards our four goals. The core team reports to the business community on leading and lagging indicators and opportunities to best align large scale investments in the future. Through this application process, we have expanded the group to include members of our top 10 largest employers, largest foundations, Regional Development Authority (RDA) members, elected officials, and higher education partners. These partners are working to collaborate on strategic investment and ensure the four goals’ trajectories continue their improved path. These institutions will stay involved through execution and data validation (as explained in later responses.) Through this alignment of organizations, projects already identified will greatly exceed the minimum 4:1 match requirement. Based on current projections, we expect over \$225 million in private investments in our downtowns and riverfronts alone in the next four years, which is highly aligned with our riverREADI, LiveREADI, and playREADI strategies. Additional private investment of \$300 million is planned in healthcare, housing, manufacturing, work readiness, and site development along key corridors to further advance private investment aligned with our LiveREADI and TalentREADI strategies. In total, private investment in furthering our Talent EVV goals is expected to eclipse \$700 million dollars in the next four years.

We have clear and collaborative alignment with public sources beyond the state. We expect to have more than \$75 million in matching funds from other public sources to leverage alongside READI 2.0 dollars. Specifically, this funding will focus on expanding riverfront amenities in three counties, continuing Warrick Wellness Trail development, expanding housing in every county, improving corridor connections, and supporting the Downtown Evansville Medical campus. Regarding riverfront development, our lead ORVSP contractor (Sasaki) is tasked to advise us in identifying federal funds that align with our goals and advance riverfront development. When vetting their credentials and results in having funding attached to their plans as part of their selection process, Sasaki far exceeded other firms in the dollars they were able to attract to their plans. They have successfully worked with the Federal government and Army Corps of Engineers as a partner, permitter, and funder on projects across the country, specifically in midwestern cities like the Chicago Riverwalk and Cincinnati’s Smale Riverfront Park. Other federal dollars are coming into projects within our Upward Mobility goal, thanks to the \$30,000,000 Promise Neighborhood grant, which is being matched by \$32,000,000 of private investment in our region in areas of childcare, K-12 supports, and workforce development.

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

Our region has considerable experience in analyzing projects appropriate for state support, beginning with our successes in the Regional Cities Initiative and continuing through our current efforts with READI 1.0 and into the READI 2.0 application. The Talent EVV goals of Population Growth, Thriving Workforce, Live Well, and Upward Mobility drive our strategies and action plans. We have a deliberate, proven process for intake, evaluation, and prioritization of projects within those strategies and plans.

**Intake:** The first step of intake is clear communication. It is imperative that the public, elected officials, employers, higher education institutions, and nonprofits understand the goals of the State of Indiana through READI 2.0 and our region-level goals, so expectations are appropriate for submissions. Our region-wide calls for projects are also used to share the Talent EVV goals.

Through the news media, social channels, interfacing with elected officials, and meetings with developers, we ensure the broadest reach possible for project intake. We also host public information sessions, which are recorded for future sharing, and we provide information on the E-REP website. Additionally, we emphasize that potential project leads must submit detailed information, data, and

rationale through a public input form on the E-REP website, demonstrating how their project aligns with our aspirational goals.

**Evaluation:** The thorough nature of our intake form allows us to move swiftly to the next step of evaluation. In READI 1.0, through working with Broad Ripple Strategies, we developed an economic impact evaluation matrix. This matrix is the lens by which we view and evaluate projects because it is based on both quantitative and qualitative aspects. We will create a similar matrix for READI 2.0 to meet our goals, and the State’s KPIs.

**Quantitative Criteria:** Direct investment, follow-on investment potential, targeted job growth, increased wages, housing units, and improved wealth equity (investment in QCTs).

**Qualitative Criteria:** Benefit across full region, improved external perceptions, enhanced competitiveness for talent, improved health outcomes, timeline, sustainability, and (new for READI 2.0) location within rural counties.

The E-REP team serves as the management arm of the RDA and is comprised of economic and community development professionals with knowledge of READI, multiple funding sources, finance, project management, and the Talent EVV (and thus READI 2.0) goals. Proposals are evaluated by E-REP in accordance with the matrix. If a project scores well in the economic impact evaluation matrix, E-REP will meet with project leads and further review their high-ranking individual project. In this review, E-REP will determine alignment with our goals and strategies, as well as review finances, stated outputs, potential outcomes, rationale from the project team, and overall impact of the project and its achievability and sustainability. Projects that continue to rank well, and align with one or more of our four goals, will be evaluated from one final lens to determine the need for READI funds (the “but for” test), how KPIs are achieved, and how it truly provides catalytic change in our region. If a project makes it this far, E-REP will make a formal recommendation for a READI 2.0 award to the RDA.

**Prioritization:** This READI 2.0 application and future project prioritization is led by the RDA and supported by the team at E-REP and a regional steering committee. Our high functioning and experienced RDA members are appointed by elected officials from each of the four counties and the City of Evansville. To support the RDA’s ability to always think regionally, RDA members are also required to serve on E-REP’s Board of Directors and Executive Committee. The RDA is represented by Beth McFadin Higgins, Posey County Attorney and RDA Chair; Tim Hollander, President of Toyota Motor Manufacturing Indiana; Richard Leger, SVP of Indiana Electric at CenterPoint Energy; Evan Beck, CEO of Woodward Commercial Reality; and Jim Ryan, CEO of Old National Bank. These leaders are deeply committed to the creation of a thriving region and toward Talent EVV’s continued progress. The steering committee is comprised of business partners, elected officials, higher education and philanthropic representatives, and community organizations with both new and seasoned representatives in the work of READI 1.0. In READI 2.0, the steering committee has been particularly helpful in advising us on the most collaborative and innovative projects already underway in our region.

When E-REP makes a recommendation to the RDA, the members will analyze the projects to select the most transformative projects that will impact the region for decades to come. This selection is always made during a public meeting. We expect projects that improve quality of place, increase housing by substantial numbers, drive inbound population immigration, and create high-quality jobs for our current and future residents to be recommended for a READI 2.0 funding award. Once a selection is voted on and approved, the announcement will be made via a media release and posted on the READI page of the E-REP website for the duration of the program.

It is important to note that projects which do not score highly with the READI evaluation matrix, but are still a worthy economic development project, will continue to receive support from E-REP. The project knowledge gained during application is valuable to allow the regional and local economic development officials to use alternative funding sources or supports to provide the project to give it the best chance of moving forward. In READI 1.0, there were many connections made and alternative funding sources identified for projects that were not ultimately awarded READI 1.0 dollars.

**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)**

In recent years, we’re changing the trajectory around key areas tied to our four goals where we targeted public and private investment – informed by studies of benchmark cities, public input, and nationally recognized consultants. These types of investments will continue for years.

**Downtowns & Riverfronts:** \$51,600,000 of state funds have gone into projects in our regional downtowns in quality of life, housing, arts and culture, and business expansion opportunities has seen over \$530,000,000 in total investment. Since these investments, Downtown Evansville experienced 17 new restaurants and retail openings for a 37% population increase.

**Transportation Infrastructure:** Capitalizing on regional transportation assets including the 6th busiest inland U.S. port, the

intersection of two interstates, a regional airport, and the under-construction \$1+B ORX. Work with MKSK in READI 1.0 will inform the most strategic investments to multiply these assets’ impact.

**Regional Healthcare:** A downtown medical campus begun in Regional Cities has driven over \$100,000,000 in follow-on investment. With site control, vision, and collaborative partnerships, we are excited about the future including a planned investment from a nationally recognized provider.

**Business Capacity & Innovation:** Leveraging our investment in READI 1.0 for a Regional Cluster Strategy, we have identified the best opportunities to invest private dollars in projects to deliver outcomes. USI’s Biometrics and Applied Business Technology labs is one example of how higher education partnering with business will multiply impact of research and data for job and wage growth.

**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)**

The Evansville Region has a proven, dynamic history with public engagement, which has built trust with residents. Leadership Everyone is a collaborative partner that leads the “VOICE” initiative to engage in long-term, equitable community listening. Since 2016, they have conducted listening sessions across the region (including Henderson, KY). They overcame obstacles by going on-site to over 70 locations across the region and offering an online option, rather than asking residents to come to central locations. Leadership Everyone freely provides their data to any organization, greatly enhancing insights for collaborative regional projects. VOICE hosted an unveiling event in September 2023 to report on the themes to date. The top three desires (or as VOICE says, “visions”) that arose from over 5,000 responses were: Quality of Place (particularly riverfront and green space), community (especially connectivity in city cores), and economic opportunity. Increased DEI efforts were a theme throughout all the visions, interspersed within every category. The Evansville Region is 86% white, so in their sessions, they worked diligently to ensure racially diverse voices were heard, so we can work as a region to become a more welcoming place. This intentional effort resulted in 24% of responses coming from racial minorities.

Zooming in on the riverfront, we have data from a century of City of Evansville master plans that call for a more activated riverfront. Through the ORVSP funded by READI 1.0, we wanted to conduct broader public engagement to ensure we are planning for a riverfront that serves the entire region. In our RFP stage, we specifically asked firms to address their public engagement creativity and how they planned to engage diverse stakeholders. Sasaki outlined their expertise, and we saw it play out in their engagement. They prioritized doing two rounds of public engagement – one to set the broad themes for the riverfront, and then another a few months later to present specific design options where people could engage once again. In the first survey, Sasaki told us that the Evansville Region’s responses surpassed any number of responses they have ever received on a public engagement session or survey. We were proud of this statistic considering they work all over the world, and confident that we are on the right path forward with riverfront investment, confirmed by the equitable engagement of the community.

Finally, these last few months where we have focused specifically on the READI 2.0 application process, our RDA and E-REP have held steering committee meetings with local leaders and elected officials, core team meetings with local economic development officials, and produced a public relations strategy which included multiple press releases that were picked up in print, online, and television, and provided access to an early-stage submission portal where anyone was invited to share transformational project ideas. Interested developers, community members, and other stakeholders have interacted with our economic development team and received updates through our dedicated READI page on our website.

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

It is said that “creating is more fulfilling than consuming,” and mid-sized cities like Evansville give people more opportunities to get involved in creating. Engaged residents, who can see how their involvement has led to change, understand how needed they are. This creates another connection to these citizens, one that is almost impossible to have in larger regions. This connection can be continued through clear communication, transparency, and ongoing involvement opportunities. Ensuring people understand what steps are being taken to execute on listening and strategic planning is critical. Participants will see how their opinions were taken into consideration, utilized in decision making, and how their involvement led to positive outcomes.

Our engagement plan includes updates at evvregion.com/readi to share how funding is being used and provide news regarding regional project progress. This tool allows us to keep the public, interested developers, community members, business leaders, external stakeholders, and interested parties informed of the work being catalyzed here from the state’s investment. Also, the ongoing efforts of the Talent EVV Core Team, the source of our four goals and itself the result of long-term collaboration, will provide another avenue for continued connection and engagement. The help of Chmura Economic & Analytics, Talent EVV’s consultant, to identify and assess outcomes and subsequent needs will allow our stakeholders to see how our outcomes are moving the needle of our goals.

**How will the organization sustain itself? (250)**

The RDA is responsible for oversight and approval of regional awards like Regional Cities, READI 1.0, and soon READI 2.0. Since the RDA is a quasi-governmental entity, these are appointed and voluntary positions. The business and community leaders who serve in these positions are not compensated for their time and it hires E-REP to be its management arm. E-REP directly employs over 20 employees and is the umbrella or host organization for several other regionally aligned organizations including the Southwest Indiana Small Business Development Center, Downtown Evansville Community Development Corporation, Evansville Regional Sports Corporation, Indiana APEX Accelerator, Posey and Vanderburgh County local economic development, and Impact EVV Foundation. E-REP also performs traditional Chamber services for its thousands of members. This organizational structure allows for efficient use of resources, the highest level of collaboration, and ensures sustainability and longevity of both organizations.

The RDA is involved in planning efforts, monitoring the trajectory of regional goals, and deeply committed to regional collaboration. Given the representation of each county and the high impact they have, its involvement and dedication to convening exists for purposes beyond READI. The organization leads advocacy efforts, attends regional planning meetings for Talent EVV, and actively reviews data compiled during public engagement. The RDA is often the first call when an elected official has an idea or opportunity; and tirelessly, it helps others within the region see ways in which those ideas could be expanded and have exponentially higher impact by working collaboratively.

**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.**

Sustainability is a core evaluation metric the RDA and E-REP consider when evaluating projects for any funding recommendation, whether from READI or other sources. Many projects will be sustained by the increased economic output they bring, such as new housing sustained by the demand they absorb. Other projects need startup expenses partially covered (e.g. parks and trails), but ongoing operations or maintenance will be included in local budgets. Increasing capacity or innovation at universities may require capital funding up front, while ongoing use of the space will be covered by university budgets. Finally, with our proposed riverfront transformation efforts, we are working closely with Sasaki, which has extensive experience in funding the ongoing programming and maintenance of world-class public spaces around the globe to create sustainable income solutions. Sasaki’s recommendations will be part of its plan to be delivered in March 2024.

**PART 5** riverREADI • talentREADI • playREADI • liveREADI • bridgeREADI

**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)**

Our regional collaboration is unmatched; this is commented on by regional organizations throughout the State. Talent EVV has been our driving strategy for five years and that will not change. By investing resources, like READI 2.0, towards targeted projects that are data-driven and proven to change the trajectory of our most important goals, we will build a nationally recognized place to call home.

Our expected outcomes are outlined in the chart that follows, but a few important points:

- Our expected population growth is 10,000 new residents in the coming decade, but more than just new individuals, we are building a region where people are living healthier, happier lives; where businesses can connect to resources needed to be globally competitive and provide equitable, engaging career options; where people see pathways to contribute and make this community feel like home; and where we celebrate our unique assets and growing culture.
- The Ohio Riverfront remains one of greatest opportunities for transformational outcomes. It is our most unique and defining asset; its potential is unlimited. Private investment, alongside public sector engagement, will make our regional riverfronts a destination for attracting talent, dynamic development, and unparalleled attraction for arts and culture.
- 5,000 new, good jobs that come from expansion of our current businesses and the attraction of new ones. Our greatest tool to drive expansion efforts is the I-69 ORX’s subsequent planned development, which will elevate our location on the map, allowing our regional businesses to connect farther, faster.



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

See Master Planning Spreadsheet for 5.A.2 answers.

EVANSVILLE REGIONAL GOALS

KPIs	CURRENT	5 YR. PROJ.	INCREASE	10 YR. PROJ.
Total population	301,588	306,588	5,000	311,588
Total employment	154,431	156,931	2,500	159,431
Per capita personal income	57,329	71,079	\$13,750	84,829
Educational attainment	27.2%	30.7%	3.5%	31%
Total new housing units	135,732	137,332	1,600	138,932
New rental housing units	36,765	37,665	900	38,565
New owner-occupied housing units	87,066	87,766	700	88,466
Percentage of affordable housing units	67%	67%	Constant	67%

Please describe your 5-year and 10-year projections for childcare within your region.

Factors you may want to consider:

- 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 (150 words)

Projected population growth of 5,000 residents over the coming five years, leading to a 1.5% increase in the population of children zero-to-six region-wide and 8.5% in Warrick County. We have strong childcare offerings now but need continued growth to meet demand and improve quality. Efforts are underway to bring new, high-quality facilities to meet demand by employers like Toyota Indiana (who is adding 125 childcare openings) and quality improvements by Building Blocks, universities, and the YMCA. Universities will embed quality components of childcare in classrooms, Building Blocks will certify centers and provide critical support, and employers will increasing invest quality childcare as a tool in recruitment of talent to support population growth. Regionally, we will focus on improving availability of centers serving second shift, the quality of affordable centers available to qualified census tracts, and make future decisions based on data provided by the Community Foundation Alliance’s regional needs assessment.

Please describe your 5-year and 10-year projections for innovation activities within your region.

Factors you may want to consider:

- 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 (150 words)

Elevate Ventures reports our innovation activity is even with other regions without research institutions, with evidence of growth to come:

- Regional small businesses including anu, Ciholas, curvo, and Quarion Technologies are developing innovative solutions for consumer use, while large employers such as BWXT are developing FOAK small modular reactor technology, designed for export.
- In the coming five years, IU, USI and UE report increasing innovation spending of 100%, 400% and 3123% respectively, in health care research, neuro-marketing, and creative technologies among other fields. Deaconess also plans to increase its research spending by 800% between now and 2034.
- A relationship with the DoE’s ‘BOOST’ program and a local entrepreneur has formed and is the region’s path towards SBIR/STTR efforts.
- The regional ISBDC hired an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Navigator and is deepening its relationship with Elevate Ventures. In 2023, the center supported 35 startups; we predict 350 startups in the next decade.

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

The 36 metrics that are tracked by Talent EVV are: Population\*, Population Growth Rate, Median Age, Young Adult Population (those ages 20-34)\*, Median Household Income, Diversity (Minority Population)\*, Poverty rate\*, Disability, Labor Force Participation Rate for Disabled Individuals, Single Parent Household, Employment Growth\*, Unemployment Rate, Average Annual Wages\*, Real Average Annual Wage (2012 Fixed Dollar), Growth Rate of Economy (GDP), Manufacturing Industry Mix, Healthcare Industry Mix, PBS Industry Mix, Airport Enplanement, Labor Force Participation Rate, Labor Force Participation Rate for Minority Population, Patents, Small Businesses Establishment, Population with Associate’s Degree, Population with Bachelor’s Degree or higher\*, Minority Population with Bachelor’s Degree, Post-secondary Certifications, Early Childhood Education, % children attending pre-school, High School Graduation Rates\*, Cost of Living, Homeownership, Building Permits, Median Home Values, Health Insurance, Overall Health Index\*, and Obesity Rate. (Metrics marked with \* are the top nine tracked against benchmark communities annually.)

APPENDIX GUIDE



[READI 2.0  
STEERING COMMITTEE](#)



[EVANSVILLE PROMISE  
NEIGHBORHOOD](#)



[CHILDCARE DATA FROM  
BUILDING BLOCKS](#)



[READI 1.0 RDP](#)



[TALENT EVV  
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[OHIO RIVER VISION AND  
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[EVANSVILLE REGION  
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[RFP FOR EVANSVILLE  
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