

Looking Forward: Strategic investments & Responsible Growth for Our Region in 2026

By Lloyd Winnecke, CEO, Evansville Regional Economic Partnership

As CEO of the Evansville Regional Economic Partnership, I have the privilege of seeing Southwest Indiana not just as it is today, but as it can be tomorrow. Our organization's mission is straightforward and ambitious: Attract critical investment across Gibson, Posey, Vanderburgh, and Warrick counties to grow businesses, increase population, and improve the overall quality of life for everyone who calls this region home.

In 2025, we experienced measurable progress. One of our most transformative long-term priorities—the I-69 Ohio River Crossing—took major steps toward completion, with bridge approaches completed in Kentucky and now under construction in Indiana. This project alone will reshape how our region connects to global markets, talent, and opportunity for generations to come.

The momentum does not stop there. Over the past year, projects announced or committed in our region totaled \$1.14 billion in investment and are expected to create 730 local jobs. These are not abstract statistics; they represent families choosing to stay, newcomers choosing to move here, and communities gaining renewed confidence in their future. Importantly, our work serves businesses of all sizes. Through the Indiana Small Business Development Center, regional small and start-up businesses secured \$5.9 million in growth capital—fueling the next generation of Indiana-based entrepreneurs, from app developers and food-truck owners to new storefronts. We thrive when supporting both global employers and local dreamers.

We cannot rest on our laurels. To accelerate responsible growth, we must remain intentional and bold. Our regional population is growing, but slowly. New residents are attracted by quality-of-place investments and the high-quality jobs we continue to attract. We're only beginning and have a robust pipeline of prospects to begin the new year.

In 2026, we will focus on attracting businesses of all types and sizes, with investments ranging from several thousand dollars to several billion. These investments matter because they fund the foundations of strong communities: excellent schools, better roads, and regional amenities such as parks, trails, and community centers that make Southwest Indiana a place where people want to live, work, play, and raise the next generation of Hoosiers (and Purple Aces and Screaming Eagles).

We are committed to responsible, long-term development that addresses the challenges of tomorrow. Large utility-load projects will play a critical role in our future, not only for their scale, but for their strategic value in a rapidly transforming economy. These investments strengthen supply chains, secure our manufacturing base, and position our region at the forefront of emerging technologies that will drive growth for decades. As

inflation and the cost of living remain top concerns, thoughtful planning and increased utility demand can unlock critical infrastructure investment.

Strategic, responsible growth can move us toward a more vibrant and resilient future. Every investment represents a choice. Decline, too, is a choice. But it is not an option.

At the Evansville Regional Economic Partnership, we are choosing progress, opportunity, and a Southwest Indiana that confidently steps forward into 2026 and beyond.