

INDIANA RURAL FORUMS

MODULE #7 ***FOSTER YOUTH ENGAGEMENT*** ***(May 3, 2007)***

***Indiana Rural Forums modules are based upon the work of the Rural
Indiana Strategy for Excellence (RISE) 2020 Strategic Framework***

Overview of RISE 2020 and the Strategic Options Report

In July of 2005, Lieutenant Governor Becky Skillman initiated an effort to assist the Daniels-Skillman Administration in creating a vision and strategic framework for rural Indiana's future. Although this framework would help guide the Indiana Office of Rural Affairs, it would be much more than that. It would link governmental efforts with other public, private, academic, and philanthropic initiatives to enhance the quality of life and economic vitality of Indiana's rural countryside.

In the ensuing six months, over 150 Hoosiers, representing the broad diversity of institutions, organizations, governments and constituencies of our state, have worked diligently to create a contemporary, dynamic vision for the future of rural Indiana. They also began to build the platform and mobilize the constituencies necessary to begin the common journey towards this future.

This was a very dynamic and transparent process. Commitment from all sectors was phenomenal, involving many meetings, conference calls, and email exchanges. Final decisions were, surprisingly, almost totally consensus-based. This effort included establishing eight work groups, which met independently and then integrated their sector approaches into a broader, more meaningful mosaic. The sector groups included community capacity, cultural assets, economic development, education and workforce, health and human services, finance, natural resource assets, and transportation.

The strategic roadmap that resulted from this dynamic grassroots initiative contains three key components - a foundation, seven pillars, and their associated strategic options. The **Strategic Options Report**, used by the Indiana Rural Forums as the framework for regional discussions, is the result of the recommendations made by the work groups, and the input received from rural residents and service providers at public input meetings.

Indiana Rural Forums - Module Packets

The module packets presented and utilized during the Indiana Rural Forums are based upon the seven pillars of the RISE 2020 initiative. These pillars include:

- Asset Based Community Development
- Civic Leadership and Engagement
- Wealth Creation and Retention
- Regional Frameworks
- Rural Innovation
- Foster Youth Engagement
- Diversity, Access and Inclusiveness

Regional discussions will revolve around the strategies and approaches recommended for each pillar in the **Strategic Options Report**.

RISE 2020 Strategic Options Report and Regional Discussion Questions

On behalf of the Purdue Center for Regional Development, USDA-Rural Development and Purdue Extension Service we would like to welcome you to the Indiana Rural Forums and especially this regional discussion. Your conversation today is being facilitated by representatives of the Purdue Extension Service and USDA-Rural Development. This regional dialogue will be approximately thirty minutes in length and, at the conclusion of the discussion; all thirteen locations will join back up with the main studio where each location will give a brief report of their discussion. To begin:

- **Introduce yourself and indicate what organization you work for and your role.**

- **Please review and reflect on the following questions:**
 - a. How can you involve youth and young adults in local initiatives or boards such as economic development, healthcare, leadership, technology or community amenities?
 - b. Can you identify 5 youth organizations that are active in your community and list a way in which each could help with a community problem?
 - b. If we are to encourage the youth to remain in our rural communities after graduation, what 5 actions must be taken? Who should be involved in implementing those 5 actions?
 - c. If communities are to be successful in attracting young people and their families back to rural America, what 3 strategies should be implemented? Who should be involved in implementing those 3 strategies?

- **Review the Strategic Options Report section included in this module. Is there at least one action or initiative that your discussion group would like to address on a regional basis? If so, how can the Purdue Center for Regional Development, USDA-Rural Development, and the Purdue Extension Service assist your group with those follow-up actions?**

V. Engage the youth and young adults of rural Indiana in achieving the RISE 2020 vision, so they build a rural countryside in which they wish to stay, and other young people wish to come.

Too often, the voices and talents of young people are overlooked or undervalued, ignoring the fact they represent the future of rural Indiana. Rural youth must be actively and meaningfully involved by:

- ❑ Engaging youth directly in civic decision-making, providing them with the skills and opportunities for personal development and the desire to return to their home communities after experiencing the outside world.

- ❑ Channeling the energies of young people into constructive action within and for their communities.

Today, rural conversations quickly move to the loss of young people. Across the country, many states are talking about brain drain and Indiana is no exception.

The first step is to stop talking about youth and start talking to youth. Communities talk about youth services and then try to plan them without involving youth. Let them lead the project. Youth and young adults should be active in community affairs, but only as full partners, not “junior” members. We also need to find out what social and cultural needs they seek so we can provide an inviting environment.

Young people are interested in career opportunities and their interests are very broad. Can their career choices be found in rural Indiana or are we even sure what they are seeking? Do we have jobs for them upon graduation? If we can answer “yes,” many will return by choice. Quality education matters and access to high speed Internet and cellular connectivity is a given to this digital generation. If it is only optional or substandard, they may well go elsewhere.

In that same manner, rural communities must take bold steps to understand and embrace youth-oriented lifestyles. Ultimately, young people can help build exciting and appealing communities, but only if they are engaged first.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS:

- Involve youth and young adults in policy development, leadership, educational initiatives and programs impacting their families, communities, and regions.
 - ✧ *Provide economic opportunities and quality of life amenities that encourage young people to remain in and attract other young people to rural Indiana communities.*
 - ◆ *Develop business clusters to concentrate resources around regional assets*
 - ◆ *Encourage young people to develop innovative strategies for the delivery of public goods and services*
 - ◆ *Create an environment in which adults encourage and allow young people to bring forth new ideas that can reinvent and refresh Indiana’s rural culture*

- ◆ Utilize market research to recruit jobs that young people want to pursue for their careers
- ✧ *Cultivate business entrepreneurship among young people in rural Indiana.*
 - ◆ *Integrate entrepreneurship into K-12 and post-secondary curricula*
 - ◆ *Work with youth organizations to promote entrepreneurship and place-based businesses*
 - ◆ *Establish a specialty loan program, in partnership with schools, to create new businesses by young people*
- ✧ *Enrich Indiana's human capital and transform it into a world-class workforce and a progressive civic society.*
 - ◆ *Foster civic engagement through community service projects and organizations*
 - ◆ *Provide challenge grants for youth groups to pursue civic change*
 - ◆ *Create and fund prototype programs in schools for civic engagement*
 - ◆ *Develop youth leadership training programs to encourage civic involvement and community development.*
 - ◆ *Engage young people in high schools and colleges to participate in RISE 2020*
- ✧ Promote youth engagement in the civic structures of their communities, such as serving on government and non-governmental councils and boards.
 - ◆ Young people should be challenged to address local issues through school coursework, extra-curricular activity and community structures
 - ◆ Include schools and youth in community conversations, especially with RISE 2020 discussions