

2008 Countywide Needs and Assets Assessment



Purpose

The purpose of the Community Needs and Assets Assessment is to provide:

- BCCF with information that will help guide decisions regarding prioritization of financial and other institutional resources
- information that can be used by other local groups (including the Brown County Partnership) when prioritizing services, preparing grant proposals, developing further research, etc.
- community information that local decision makers can use as they plan and implement strategies and projects



Assessment Design

There are three basic components to the data collection:

- A Written Survey to gather the perceptions and ideas from a broad range of Brown County residents. The goal was to collect at least 500 responses to the Written Survey. That goal was exceeded with about **550 individuals completing the survey.**
- **7 Key Stakeholder Interviews** to gather in-depth information.



Assessment Design

9 Focus Groups to gain a fuller understanding of the issues identified in the Written Survey and the Key Stakeholder Interviews. Focus Groups were organized around both key sector/stakeholder groups and county geography. **84 individuals participated in the focus groups.** Sector focus groups included:

Arts and Culture

Business

Education

Government

Seniors

Brown County Partnership



Geographic focus groups included:

Residents of Jackson Township

Residents of Van Buren Township

Residents of Washington Township

Advisory Group

The Community Needs and Assets Assessment data collection process was guided and implemented by an Advisory Group. Advisory Group members were:

- Scott Rudd – Government
- Jenny Lawrence – Arts Community
- Barb Bowman – Rural Community
- Kim Robinson – Social Service Community (esp. youth and seniors)
- Al Kosinski – Education
- Lisa Terry – Brown County Community Foundation



Reminder

- Tools like focus groups and surveys gather and explore perceptions
- Perceptions are important to understand because they drive behavior and because they give us clues to implementation strategies
- But, they may not be accurate in the realm of “objective reality”
- Written Survey data will be very useful in communicating re: need to funders and others; Focus Group data will be very useful in developing approaches and interventions



Written Survey



Demographic Overview – Written Survey

Gender and Age

- 64% female, 35% male

County population is about 50/50, but women typically are more apt to respond to a survey than man

- Few under 20 responses, other than that response percentages are generally consistent with county population



Demographic comparisons are from www.stats.indiana.edu

Demographic Overview – Written Survey

Township Response Rates

- Hamblen 18% (31%)
- Washington 41% (30%)
- Van Buren 10% (12%)
- Jackson 31% (28%)

Hamblen is under-represented, and Washington is slightly over-represented.



Demographic Overview – Written Survey

Work Location Response Rates

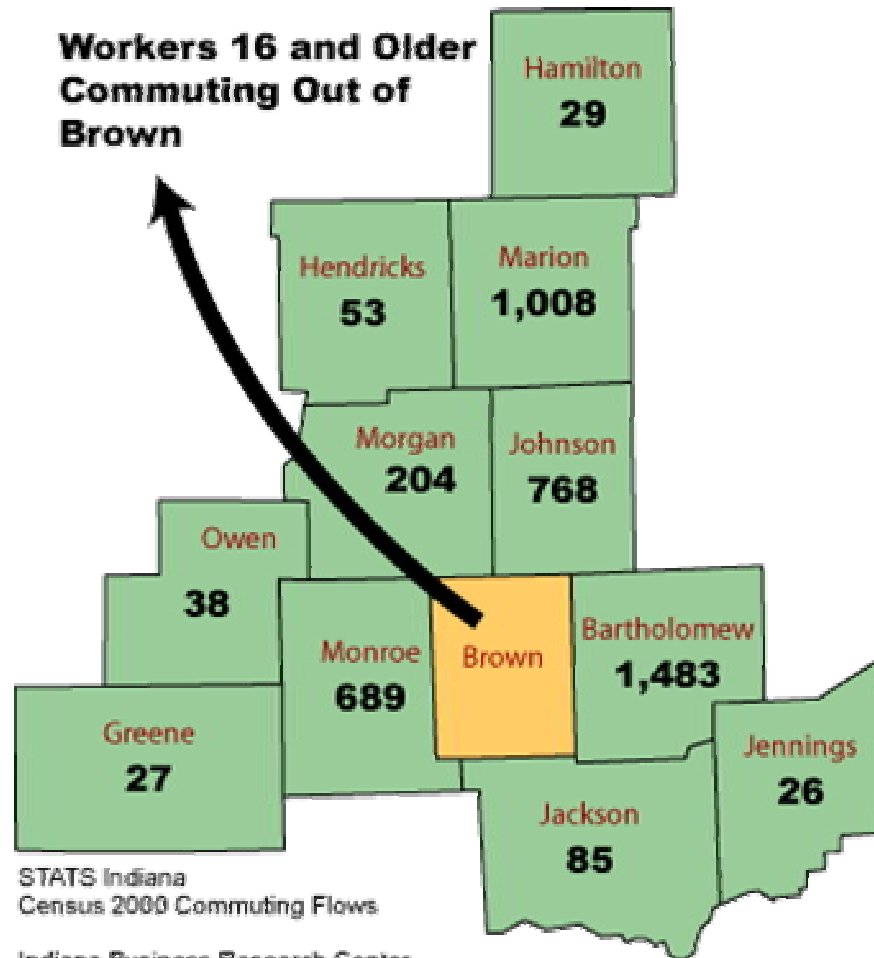
- In Brown County 52%
- Out of County 26%
- Don't Work 22%

Actual out-migration percentage is around 39%



Demographic Overview – Written Survey

Work Location Out-Migration



STATS Indiana
Census 2000 Commuting Flows

Indiana Business Research Center
Kelley School of Business, IU
June 2003



Written Survey Content Areas

- Housing
- Health
- Economic Development
- Education and Youth
- Arts and Leisure
- Safety and Support Services
- Environment and Infrastructure



Individuals and organizations working in these content areas now have data to draw on – numerical responses and a rich collection of comments

Written Survey Comment Areas

Priority Comments > 50% as “Concerned”

- Availability of better paying jobs (72%)
- Career advancement opportunities (63%)
- Effectiveness of septic and sewer (55%)
- Local drug and alcohol abuse levels (53%)
- Availability of affordable housing (51%)
- Amount of littering and dumping (51%)



Written Survey

Prioritization of Possible Projects

Top 5 “Very Important”

Improve sewer and water system (61%)

Continue to support and develop CRC (54%)

Promote county’s environmental aspects (52%)

Continue development of affordable housing options (51%)

Expand health support clinic (49%)



Written Survey

Prioritization of Possible Projects

Top 4 “Not Very Important”

Combine City and County offices (26%)

Establish a regional history center (25%)

Establish a regional arts and culture center (24%)

Develop a rural transportation system (19%)



Written Survey – Final Impressions

- 72% agree *Our county is a great place to live*
- 30% agree *In general things are going in the right direction*

While there is work to be done, there is available passion and commitment



Written Survey – Most Mentioned Attributes

- Beautiful
- Environment and Scenery
- Friendly
- Community and its people
- Arts, Artists, and Craftspeople
- Peaceful
- Rural

These can be important assets to leverage



Focus Groups



Overview -- Reminder

- Tools like focus groups and surveys gather and explore perceptions
- Perceptions are important to understand because they drive behavior and because they give us clues to implementation strategies
- But, they may not be accurate in the realm of “objective reality”



Demographic Overview – Focus Groups

84 Total Participants

- Arts and Culture – 5
 - Business – 7
 - Education – 7
 - Government – 9
 - Seniors – 7
 - BCP – 20
- Hamblen Township – Cancelled
Jackson Township – 7
Van Buren Township – 9
Washington Township -- 8



Focus Groups – Key Themes

- Unique and Challenging Demographics
- Absence of a Shared Vision
- Economic Development
- Leadership and Structural Challenges



Focus Group – Key Themes

Unique and Challenging Demographics

“Weekenders” These are individuals, with relatively significant assets, who have vacation homes in Brown County. These individuals tend to devote their resources – time, energy, and financial – to their primary communities of residence.

Retirees These individuals are *relatively* new to the community. While many of these individuals bring significant assets in terms of time, energy, experience, and finances they have been greeted by some with suspicion and not heartily “welcomed in” to community processes. Hence, they represent an untapped source of resources and talents that aren’t valued and leveraged as they could be. These individuals may also still have strong ties to their former communities of residence.

Out-Migraters These are individuals who out-migrate for work and spend the majority of their waking time and energy in the communities where their place of employment is located. These individuals don’t feel as anchored or connected to Brown County.

Long-Term or Life-Long Residents These are individuals who have lived and worked in Brown County for decades and in many cases, generations. It is believed that many of these residents have very different perspectives on the County, may “want to be left alone,” and don’t see the need for or value of economic or community development efforts.



Focus Group – Key Themes

Unique and Challenging Demographics

Tension Between Socio-Economic Levels

There is a wide and growing income gap, with fewer middle incomes. In addition to creating tension, these shifting demographics have caused housing prices to skyrocket, and property taxes to increase, making it difficult to both live and work in Brown County and further heightening the tension. Many also believe that this gap has skewed the per capita income data for the county, creating an unrealistic profile of the county's asset base and leading to further challenges.

Tension Between the “From Heres” and the “Come Heres”

The difference in perspective that comes along with this tension is profound. It contributes to trust issues and unbalanced participation in community processes.



Focus Group – Key Themes

Unique and Challenging Demographics

Many believe that a fundamental demographic shift is underway and that the demographic slices and tensions described above will continue to increase. Increasing tension between local/non-local and haves/have nots makes it difficult to work together on community issues. Some noted that the shift has created a growing “adversarial culture.”



Focus Group Key Themes

Absence of a Shared Vision

There is a major need for a unified, singular vision of what Brown County is going to be and to get all of the key stakeholders together to agree on a vision for moving forward. This should include an understanding of “who we are; where we are currently; and where we want to go.” Lack of consensus on the vision for moving forward leads to paralyzing conflict and growing tensions among stakeholder groups.



Focus Group Key Themes

Absence of a Shared Vision

Developing a shared vision will be difficult because all of the key organizations are “steeped in controversy.”

There is a need for a master plan – 5 – 10 year plan with values, goals, and strategies.

There is a need for increased communication regarding vision, goals, and strategy. Some of the people who “resist change” are probably doing so because actions taken seem so ad hoc and “out of the blue.” If there were a well-communicated plan perhaps things wouldn’t seem so disconnected and threatening. Increased communication is challenging due to lack of media available.



Focus Group Key Themes

Absence of a Shared Vision

Some believe that it is possible for the “2010 Report” to serve as the foundation for a master plan.

It is unclear where the leadership of a shared vision and planning process would/could come from.



Focus Group Key Themes

Economic Development

In order to remain viable, Brown County needs to work aggressively to develop creative and coordinated approaches to economic development that will lead to better paying jobs, a broader tax base, and access to a higher quality of life for Brown County residents. Without these approaches it is quite possible that the County economy will go into (continue?) a downward spiral that will significantly threaten the quality of life available to its residents.



Focus Group Key Themes

Economic Development

- Don't have a good comprehensive plan to deal with growth. Brown County needs the “right kind” of development and right now the parameters are being pushed because there isn't a clear plan
- Economic development must be planned in a way that fits with values. There is danger in the current approach – development without a good plan.
- A shared vision could provide the foundation for a comprehensive approach to economic development, with each group/entity working on their component in concert with the overall development framework.



Focus Group Key Themes

Economic Development

- Any economic development plan must build on Brown County's strengths and attributes including developing plans for eco-tourism and eco-development.
- Brown County infrastructure isn't business friendly – lack of high speed Internet, access to County water and sewer, government structure, affordable housing, etc.
- The approaches described above will require consistent, aligned leadership and government support.

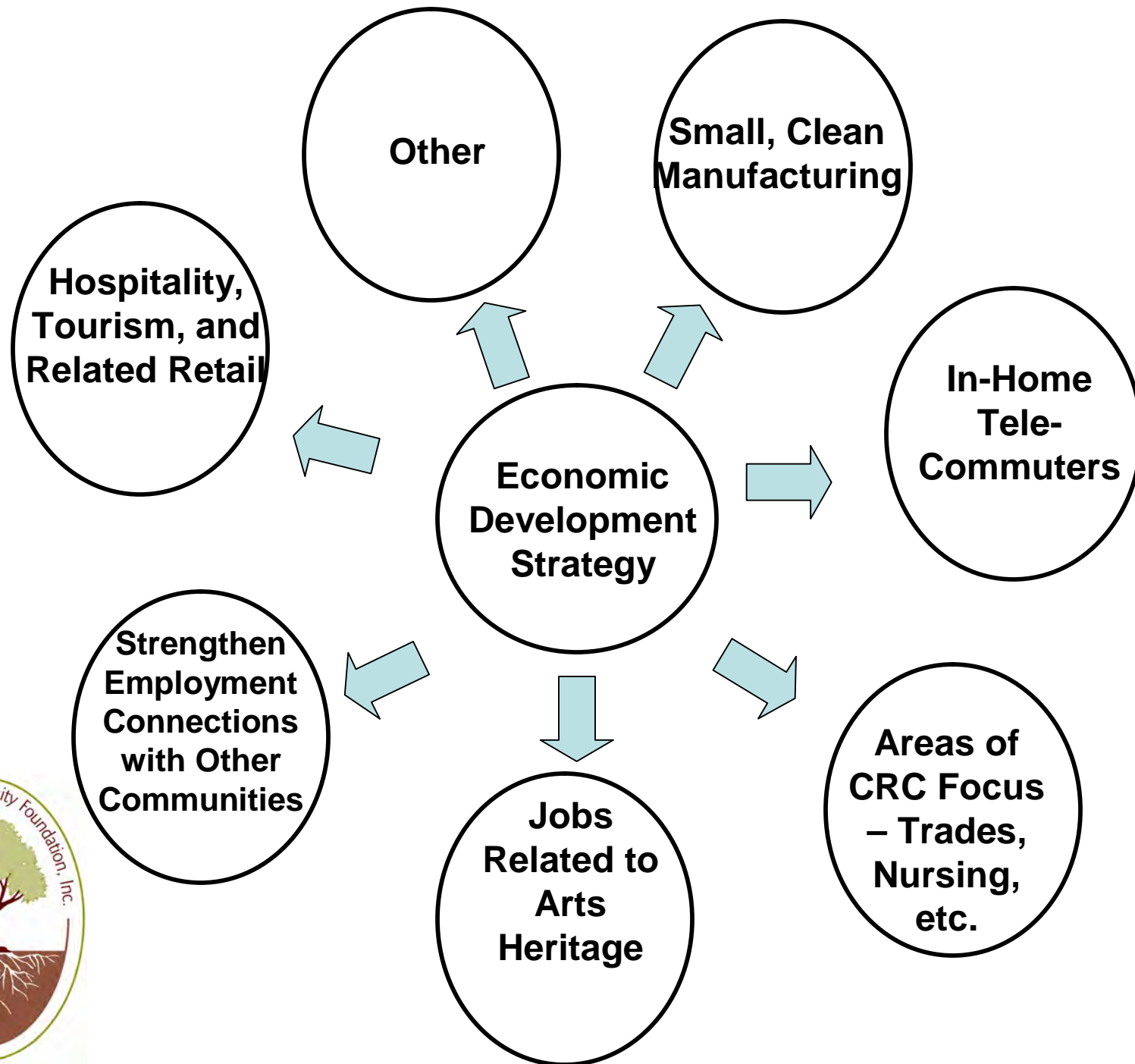


Focus Group Key Themes

Economic Development

- The economic development plan must include differentiated strategies for different sectors, including: arts and arts industry; small, clean manufacturing; in-home telecommuters; areas of CRC focus including trades and nursing; hospitality and tourism, including leveraging the environment; and, the identification of opportunities to strengthen connections with employers in other communities.





Focus Group Key Themes

Leadership and Structural Challenges

In Brown County, the government is structured in silos with no clear person(s)/office with responsibility/accountability for bringing people/offices together and holding appropriate parties accountable for results. Many feel that there needs to be somewhere within the County structure where the buck stops (e.g. Mayor, County Administrator, Town Manager, etc.). Resolving the leadership and structural challenges is a critical component to moving forward with the other key themes identified.



Focus Group Key Themes

Leadership and Structural Challenges

- While key community leaders need to come together, there is a lack of leadership, and key players don't understand how to make things happen.
- There is a lack of clarity re: who can bring individuals/groups to the table – both in terms of who is capable of playing a convening role and who would be accepted in that role.
- It is believed that current factions don't want to share ownership.



Focus Group Key Themes

Leadership and Structural Challenges

- There is a lot of duplication among organizations, if all were clear on their job, more could be accomplished. If there isn't a structure, people don't know how to work within it.
- There is a lack of capability to function within a structure throughout the organizations in the County.
- There is no one to bring groups together, the community is hard to navigate, there is no structure and then, out of necessity, single people pick up the ball and run with it, thereby further weakening the structure.



Possible Next Steps



Possible Next Steps

- Share information with Boards and other key groups in the community – Executive Summary will be on the BCCF website
- Meet in “issue groups” to take a closer look at the data, including the relevant comments and focus group notes – Finer analysis of the data can be obtained from BCCF
- Discuss some of the systemic issues – leadership, shared vision, etc. – at BCP and discuss possible approaches
- Use the information to inform decision-making and encourage others to as well



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“Together we grow” (from written survey comments)