



## Indiana Rural Development Council, Inc. 2007 Annual Report

“...to convene, converse, collaborate, and celebrate”

These four core objectives summarize the Indiana Rural Development Council’s efforts in 2007. Operating as an independent, non-profit organization, the Council values its role as a private-public partnership that advocates for the vitality of rural Indiana.

During the past year, the Council used the RISE 2020 – Rural Indiana Strategy for Excellence – framework, to focus outwardly on the needs of rural communities and resource partner groups. Internally, the Council structured its work plan into four areas explained later in this report. The Council’s leaders recognized and appreciated the crosswalking nature of community sectors, RISE 2020 framework, and its own organizational work plan.

The first six months were dominated by activities leading up to the RISE 2020 Congress in June. Each of the eight Sector Work Groups met twice to develop their sector priorities. These 38 priorities were published in the *RISE 2020 Rural Priorities Report* that was presented at the Congress. Nearly two hundred citizens, leaders, and service providers listened, discussed, and voted during the Congress to create Indiana’s Top Ten Rural Priorities. A brochure was published with the Top Ten and the final report was also published on IRDC’s website.

The strength of RISE 2020 is its ability to resonate with communities, regions, organizations, agencies, and many other partners. From mayoral races to regional development projects, countywide rural summits to state and federal agencies planning initiatives, the RISE 2020 framework provided an opportunity agenda – a new way for people to convene, converse and collaborate.

Following the Congress, IRDC set about defining its work plan for the next 18-36 months. Crosswalking, a key principle of the RISE 2020 framework, helped channel the Council’s efforts by focusing on who and how various audiences should be engaged. The resulting plan reaffirmed the Council’s mission statement, while its purpose and core objectives were updated. The plan’s strategies and tactics will be driven through four areas:

- Communities and Customers
- Resource Partners
- Membership and Advocacy
- RISE 2020

The plan also called for a new governance plan to focus more expertise in the four program areas and condense the Board of Directors to a more manageable size.

In reviewing the other key activities of 2007, they easily grouped into the four new program areas.

## Communities and Customers

IRDC worked with individual communities, regional groups, national groups and international visitors. Communities sought insights, assistance, and connections to other resources. The Environmental Infrastructure Working Group Task Force (EIWG) continued to work with several resource providers to assist eight communities looking for solutions to water and sewer issues. By working with Ball State's Building Better Communities program, IRDC was able to help Swayzee's community leaders start planning from scratch. IRDC continued to assist with several projects in the Whitewater Valley region. Also in southeastern Indiana, the Leadership Learning Lab (L3) continued building leadership capacity in twelve counties. IRDC worked with the group on numerous occasions to strengthen regional efforts and to share L3's story with others. Through its work with the International Center of Indianapolis, IRDC hosted a group from nine central African nations wanting to learn more about agriculture and rural development. In each case, IRDC worked with key partners to improve the effectiveness of the outreach experience.

## Resource Partners

Founded as a partnership, IRDC continues to value its relationships above all else. The only way to effectively serve communities and citizens is through collaboration. The Indiana Rural Health Association and the Indiana Office of Rural Health have been very active partners in RISE 2020. They along with their partners earned a \$16 million grant from Federal Communications Commission to advance tele-health and telemedicine in rural Indiana. On another front, IRDC worked with several local and regional groups pursuing tourism, arts, culture, and heritage projects. Many communities are exploring cultural trails as an exciting way to crosswalk many sectors, build upon unique assets, and enrich the quality of life in communities large and small.

As a follow-up to the RISE 2020 Congress, transportation interests starting pursuing the creation of Rural Planning Organizations. IRDC shared the RISE 2020 framework to show the value of collaboration in transportation. IRDC also partnered with the Indiana Leadership Association and its members to strengthen civic leadership and engagement. As part of its commitment to Youth Engagement, IRDC participated in the National FFA Convention during its annual visit to Indianapolis in October. Finally, IRDC continued to assist the Indiana Cooperative Development Center with many projects and as a member of its leadership team.

## Membership and Advocacy

The RISE 2020 Congress provided a platform to identify key issues important to Indiana's rural communities. Lawmakers and others can use these priorities to craft effective local, state, and federal policies. In September, IRDC hosted a Rural Listening Session for the Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform. Board members and service group members provided input to questions from the Commission's staff members. IRDC was asked to convene the meeting to insure that the Commission would receive input from rural voices.

In 2008, IRDC will introduce a new membership program for individuals, partner groups and businesses. The goal is to strengthen IRDC's role as the voice for rural Indiana's stakeholders.

## RISE 2020

IRDC takes seriously its role as the organizational steward for RISE 2020. Recognizing that those who engage the framework own the framework, the Council worked very hard to share RISE 2020's Foundation and Pillars with many different audiences. IRDC shared RISE 2020 with leaders in Warren, Carmel, Swayzee, Hartford City, Union County, Whitewater Valley, Connersville, Westfield and Harrison County. On the state level, IRDC presented RISE 2020 to the Indiana Rural Health Association (twice), Indiana Agricultural Leadership Institute, Indiana Cultural Tourism Conference, and the Indiana Rural Summit.

IRDC had a unique opportunity to present RISE 2020 to three key audiences outside of Indiana. In late winter, the Texas Rural Innovators Forum hosted Chuck Fluharty, Rural Policy Research Institute, and IRDC's Phil Anderson to speak about rural development globally and RISE 2020 in Indiana respectively. In May, Anderson shared RISE 2020's exciting opportunities as the Herman James Guest Lecturer at Ohio University. In October, the National Rural Funders Collaborative met in Indianapolis to learn more about RISE 2020. A team of presenters shared the federal government, state government, academic, non-profit, and philanthropic roles and opportunities with the framework.

The Rural Forums were a 9-part statewide teleconference series hosted by Purdue University's Center for Regional Development (PCRD) and USDA-Rural Development (USDA-RD). The first broadcast addressed the RISE 2020 Foundation and each subsequent broadcast was dedicated to one of the Seven Pillars. The final forum featured Nebraska's HomeTown Competitiveness program, which shares pillars with RISE 2020.

As RISE 2020 continues to evolve, there will be opportunities to convene people around each of the seven pillars. In early 2007, IRDC convened the Civic Leadership & Engagement (CLE) Pillar Team to identify a number of key leadership concerns and opportunities. The group met three times to develop and pursue its agenda.

The Indiana-Scotland Rural Learning Exchange began in October of 2006 with an Indiana delegation participating in the international Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Conference on Rural Development in Edinburgh followed by a visit to the Dumfries and Galloway region. In 2007, the exchange continued with teleconferences on entrepreneurship, leadership, Asset-Based Community Development. The exchange culminated in October with a visit by twelve Scottish leaders to Indiana. The group met with state and federal officials, RISE 2020 partners, and visited with leaders from several small communities – Greensburg, Milroy, Morristown, Metamora, Vevay, North Vernon, French Lick-West Baden, Paoli, Starlight and Scottsburg. Representatives from Scotland and Indiana agreed to continue the exchange and share learning opportunities.

In early 2007, several rural partners began investigating Nebraska's HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC) program. Six key partners adapted the program for Indiana, PCRD, USDA-RD, Ball State University's Building Better Communities program, Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, Indiana Grantmakers Alliance, and IRDC. The Indiana-HTC

program was introduced in July with over 60 communities attending an awareness seminar. In the fall, fourteen communities submitted applications for the Phase 1 Pilot Program. All fourteen communities were visited in November with pilot communities chosen before the year's end.

Several exciting new RISE 2020 projects were initiated as the year came to a close. First, a small group of innovative leaders collaborated to host the first-ever LaPorte County Rural Summit. IRDC, PCRD and USDA-RD participated in the event that provided a model for other counties and regions to bring awareness to RISE 2020 and build upon local assets and leadership opportunities. Second, Purdue Extension, in cooperation with IRDC, began in-service training for its Economic and Community Development Specialists and other community leaders to familiarize them with RISE 2020. Third, at the IRDC Annual Meeting, IRDC and Purdue Extension announced the March 2008 release of the *RISE 2020 Community Guidebook: Helping Communities Help Themselves*.

### Organizational Excellence

From innovative programming to strategic planning to stewardship of RISE 2020, IRDC's leaders strengthened the Council's unique partnership and its evolving role in rural development.

IRDC's new website was launched in May in time to carry the RISE 2020 Congress Priorities Report. Throughout the year, the website was updated to improve its effectiveness. The site carried the Congress' Top Ten Priorities, new on-line EIWG access, and conference information. Heading into 2008, IRDC plans to publish the RISE 2020 Community Guidebook online and launch a new RISE 2020 sister site, *Rural Ideas That Work*, to focus on "better practices."

### Conclusion

After a year of *convening, conversing, and collaborating*, IRDC's Rural Conference in Anderson provided an opportunity to *celebrate*. The conference featured rural leaders making a difference in several communities. It also provided an opportunity to honor Lane Ralph with the Mayor William Graham Rural Champions Award. Ralph, Deputy State Director for Senator Richard Lugar, is a long time IRDC board member, a champion of rural issues, and an insightful advocate for communities.

RISE 2020 has created a special moment in time by which rural communities can pursue opportunity-based agendas. By working with government, business, academia, non-profit, philanthropic, and youth partners, IRDC will continue to help rural communities be great places to live, learn, work, and play.