Lawrence County, Indiana

2017–2018

Seeking to harness innovative opportunities to modernize industry and quality of life, rural Indiana county launches new strategies

Program Details

Sustaining Hoosier Communities

Indiana University Bloomington
Maxwell Hall
750 E. Kirkwood Avenue
Bloomington, IN 47405

shc.indiana.edu
iushc@indiana.edu
Indiana County uses university partnership to combat opioid epidemic

Like much of the U.S. and the State of Indiana, Lawrence County faces a challenging opioid epidemic. In 2016, the state declared a public health emergency in response to rising hepatitis C rates and the county averaged nearly 50 nonfatal overdose visits to local emergency rooms per 100,000 people, according to the Indiana State Department of Health. In 2017, opioid deaths reported three times their 2014 total.

SHC work a "tremendous asset" for Lawrence County towns

The county turned to the Sustaining Hoosier Communities program (SHC) from Indiana University's Center for Rural Engagement. As part of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities (EPIC-N) Network, SHC brought in about 550 students during the 2017-2018 school year to focus on projects community members from Lawrence Country prioritized, ranging from opioid abuse to tourism to economic development to public health.

Bedford, Mitchell receive proposals, budgets, prototypes spanning public health to economic development

More than 14 projects resulted from the single year of development. The projects all involved at least a key stakeholder within the community and were all aimed at helping the county get ahead in critical areas such as public health and economic development.
Bedford Mayor Shawna Girgis called the initiative “a tremendous asset” to the community. “We are putting many of the plans that have been developed into action,” she said. Work on the area’s endemic opioid abuse problem was especially relevant. “We are especially grateful that we can continue our collaboration to determine how local leaders and organizations can best assist individuals and families that are impacted by addiction, given the ramifications that this issue has on every aspect of our community,” she said.

- **Analysis** on the health, environmental, and economic impact of the opioid epidemic, residents’ perceptions, and medical treatment options.
- **10-year plan to revitalize closed businesses**, such as the Avoca Fish Hatchery and limestone quarrying company, with new public spaces and stores in Bedford.
- **Prototype mobile application** for Mitchell, Indiana that links the sites of hometown hero Gus Grissom, the second American to travel to space.
- **Prototype for a forest-based light monitoring device** for the Hoosier National Forest.
- **Fundraising, marketing, and community engagement plans** for the Mitchell and Bedford Community Gardens.
- **Three, 45-minute financial literacy lesson plans** for middle school students in the Boys & Girls Club of Lawrence County.
- **Four surveys and five reports with recommendations** to address racial and cultural diversity in Bedford.
- **Educational materials with multiple recommendations for health programs** to address high rates of hypertension and cardiovascular disease in Mitchell.
- **Memorandums for the Indiana Coalition for Court Access** that examine current access to legal services for underserved residents of county.
- **27 design proposals** for redeveloped co-working space.
- **Multiple logo proposals** for towns of Bedford and Mitchell.
- **Recommendations on implementing public awareness** strategies for transportation improvements in Bedford.
- **Budget proposal for completion of Highway 50 bypass in Bedford.**

The county estimates that time spent by IU students preparing ideas to alleviate health problems and other community issues totaled more than 300,000 hours—an equivalent of nearly $7.1 million in consulting. The scope of the work was comprehensive and helped better position the communities in Lawrence County for any economic and public health challenges they may face in the future.

“**I hope other cities throughout rural Indiana are inspired to engage with the university to make their communities the best that they can be.**”

— Shawna Girgis, Mayor, City of Bedford, IN
"The faculty and students are such a resource and an inspiration, to us as professionals as well as residents."

— Shawna Girgis, Mayor, City of Bedford, IN