

News and Information Services

USI leads gathering of regional leaders to discuss EVV-Crane I-69 Innovation Corridor development

On Monday, November 12, the University of Southern Indiana led a gathering of southwest Indiana government leaders; business, healthcare, and education representatives; and economic development officials to discuss how the region can capitalize on the construction of Interstate 69 from Evansville to the Naval Surface Warfare Center Crane Division (NSWC Crane) as a corridor of innovation, entrepreneurship, and creativity.

The discussion, led by USI's Outreach and Engagement staff, was held at the Event Center in Huntingburg, Indiana, and included the mayors of Evansville, Huntingburg, Jasper, Loogootee, Oakland City, Petersburg, Princeton, and Washington, as well as Dr. Sue Ellspermann, founding director of USI's [Center for Applied Research and Economic Development](#) (CARED) and lieutenant governor-elect of Indiana.

Ellspermann has been centrally involved in the effort to develop the corridor intentionally with an eye toward innovation and job growth. Officials from NSWC Crane, multiple businesses throughout the region, Indiana University, Ivy Tech Community College, Oakland City University, Purdue University, and Vincennes University also were involved in the discussion.

"The opportunities are endless for I-69 development and our region," said Dr. Mark C. Bernhard, USI's associate provost for Outreach and Engagement and chair of the EVV-Crane I-69 Innovation Corridor Executive Committee. "We are pleased with the commitment and excitement that participants expressed. We look forward to more stakeholder and business involvement, as we realize our vision will require the talents and efforts of many people."

I-69 is one of the few new-terrain interstates currently under construction in the United States. Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) Deputy Commissioner Samuel Sarvis presented an overview of the project to date and announced that the 67-mile section from Evansville to Crane [will open Monday, November 19](#).

Daniela Vidal, who was appointed director of CARED in July, shared data identifying the I-69 corridor region's current Innovation Index – consisting of human capital, economic dynamics, productivity and employment, and economic well-being – with a goal of increasing the index 20 percent by 2025.

Within the four Innovation Index components, participants envisioned what the corridor would look like, identified potential roadblocks to progress, and suggested actionable next steps.

A 2008 study commissioned through CARED by the towns of Oakland City, Petersburg, and Washington, Indiana, and prepared by Dr. Sudesh Mujumdar, USI associate professor of economics, and Dr. Tim Schibik, USI professor of economics, reviewed a federal study of interstates and communities comparable to I-69.

Best practices in the study included investment in upgrading and expanding infrastructure, acquisition of key parcels of land and rezoning efforts, and investments in improving school quality, among others.

The EVV-Crane I-69 Innovation Corridor executive committee plans to meet in early December and reengage the broader group shortly thereafter.

