

News and Information Services

USI names Thissen Innovation Corridor manager

Dr. Mark Bernhard, associate provost for [Outreach and Engagement](#) at the University of Southern Indiana, has named Michael Thissen Innovation Corridor manager in USI's [Center for Applied Research and Economic Development](#) (CARED).

Thissen will coordinate, promote, evaluate, and deliver programs and activities in support of developing an Innovation Corridor along I-69, initially between Evansville and Crane in Indiana. He will serve on the I-69 Innovation Corridor executive committee and provide direction and assistance to the I-69 Innovation Corridor task forces and other committee members to maximize their effectiveness in bringing development to the corridor.

Thissen was formerly employed as director of community affairs/senior advisor for the Office of Community and Rural Affairs for the State of Indiana. In this role, he represented the Lieutenant Governor to establish relationships with local units of government to help them identify their economic and community capacity building needs.

Prior to working for the State of Indiana, Thissen was the senior consultant and owner of Lighthouse Consulting. An economic and community development consulting firm in Grinnell, Iowa, Thissen specialized in advising and consulting on rural initiatives and assisted with entrepreneurial project management.

"Michael's background and experience are a perfect fit for this position," said Daniela Vidal, director of CARED.

"His previous work within the Office of Community and Rural Affairs for the state of Indiana has given him critical knowledge and key connections within the counties around the corridor. He has already started leveraging his current network and making new connections to jumpstart projects identified by the task forces."

Last year during an I-69 consortium meeting, five task forces were deployed to gather input and propose projects around the key components of the shared strategic framework for this initiative. These areas include brainpower, entrepreneurship and innovation networks, quality and connected places, branding, and civic collaboration. Over 100 individuals have been involved in the task forces and meetings have been held along the corridor. Some important outcomes from these efforts include the implementation of several key projects around workforce development and education; the creation of co-working spaces for innovators and entrepreneurs at Innovation Pointe; the creation of a network of experts, mentors, and investors who have already assisted with a number of projects; and a social media presence that communicates events and updates on corridor news, including [I-69 Innovation Corridor](#) and [I-69 Ignite](#).

"Southwest Indiana has tremendous opportunity for growth," said Thissen. "The I-69 infrastructure is pivotal in aligning and strengthening our region and I am very excited to assist the greater effort to build a strong corridor that will add to our quality of place and our capacity to innovate. We are uniquely strong in our production clusters and natural resources, and our ability in the arena of transport and trade will support the initiatives of all communities who will benefit."

Thissen holds a Bachelor of Science degree in anthropology and history from Washington University in Saint Louis. He also holds a certificate from the University of Oklahoma Economic Development Institute and is trained in Simplex Creative Problem Solving.

He is a member of the Indiana Economic Development Association, Indiana Business Council, Indiana Economic Development University Partners Working Group, Indiana's Rural Roundtable, Midwest Archaeological Association, and University of Oklahoma Economic Development Institute Alumni Network.

