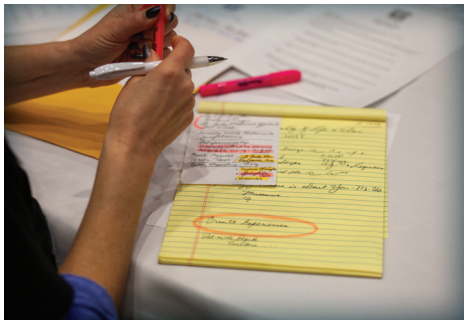
THE BIG TABLE®

GREATER PEORIA

CONNECT → DISCUSS → INSPIRE → TAKE ACTION!

Welcome
STORY of US
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION
THE BIG TABLE
QUALITY of LIFE & PLACE
WORFORCE & EDUCATION
HOW DO WE CHANGE
BIAS
INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

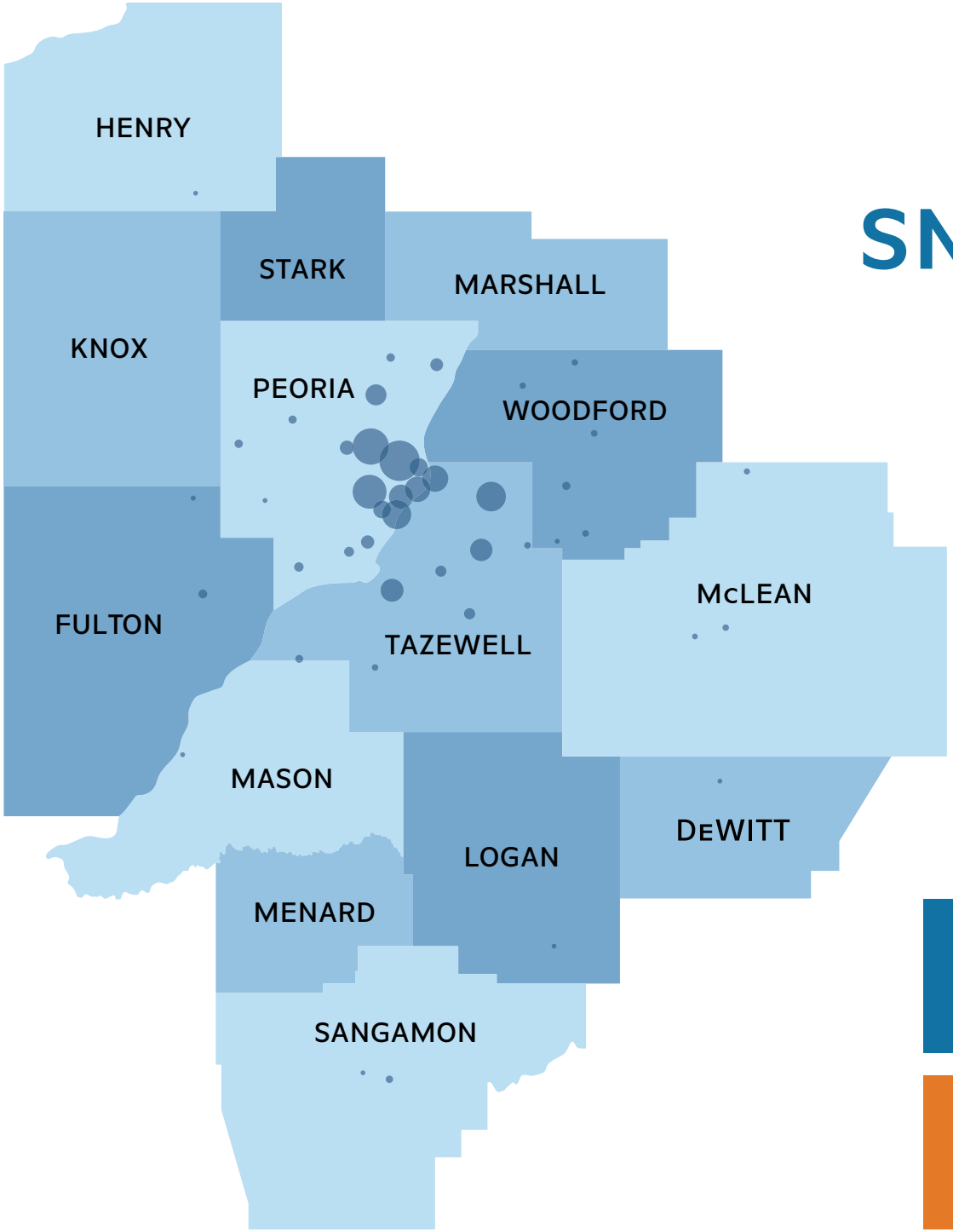


THE BIG TABLE 2019

The Big Table was a daylong regional community building event held at the Peoria Civic Center on October 15, 2019. It served as a platform for community members to get together, exchange ideas, discuss common challenges and opportunities, and share ideas to make the Greater Peoria Region a better place to live, work and play.

Nearly 700 residents from around the region participated in the Big Table event. Their discussions focused on four major areas: workforce development, diversity and inclusion, innovation and entrepreneurship, and quality of life and place. Through small breakout groups facilitated by trained volunteers, conversations examined these topics from a regional perspective in order to generate ideas on how we can create a healthy and thriving region. This report summarizes the results of these discussions, including common themes derived from more than 1,000 poster boards and numerous videos.

Most importantly, the Big Table Greater Peoria created a platform for new connections among community members, allowing us an opportunity to discuss important issues—together.



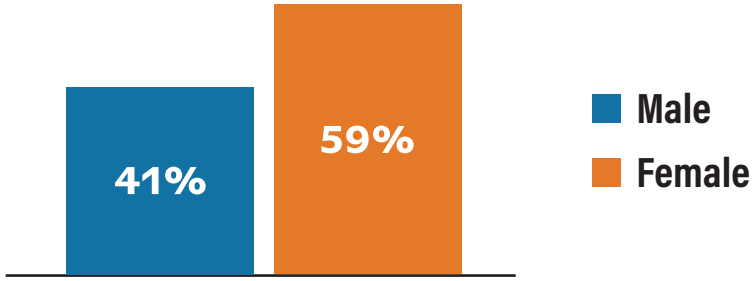
DATA SNAPSHOT

PARTICIPANTS

640 REGISTRANTS
108 TABLE FACILITATORS

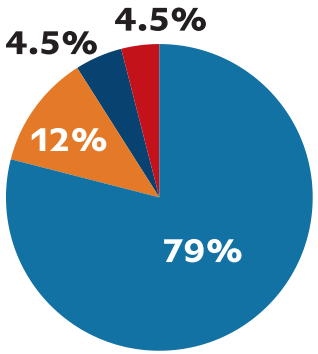
28 UNIQUE ZIP CODES FROM THROUGHOUT THE REGION

GENDER

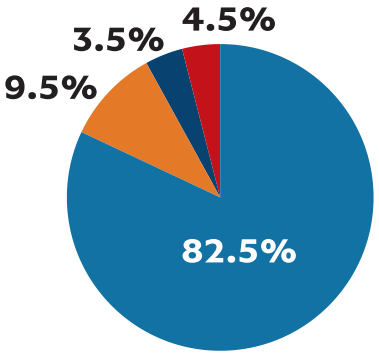


ETHNICITY

BIG TABLE



GREATER PEORIA



White/Caucasian
Black/African-American
Hispanic/Latino
Other

EXIT SURVEY RESULTS

More than 150 participants took part in the Big Table exit survey. Here are some of the results:

97% **Didn't know everyone** at their table prior to the event

80% Feel like their table discussion **developed an idea** that could help strengthen and improve the community

64% Feel **more attached to the region,** rather than just the city

76% Feel **more optimistic** about the next five years

94% **Were satisfied** with their Big Table experience

96% **Would attend** this event or a similar event in the future

I PARTICIPATED!
Workforce Development & Education
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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Workforce development is necessary to cultivate the high-quality workers for sustaining and growing the regional economy. It is comprised of multiple interconnected facets that come together to meet our community's employment needs. As the economy continues to shift from manufacturing to professional and service jobs, workforce development must adapt to new realities.

To that end, the Workforce Development Alliance is connecting employers, educators and other stakeholders with under-credentialed adults to ensure at least 60% of the population have the certifications necessary to obtain gainful employment and earn a family-sustaining wage.

SURVEY RESULTS

Participants rated workforce development on the following factors using a five-point scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree."

There is a need to improve:

4.74

There are opportunities to improve:

4.47

Demands have changed in the last decade:

4.33

Based on in-depth research from secondary data, combined with multiple sources of primary data, workforce development, diversity & inclusion, innovation & entrepreneurship, and quality of life & place were identified as the four strategic areas of focus for The Big Table Greater Peoria event. Of the three survey questions, there was only a statistically significant difference for "There is a need to improve" among the four strategic areas. Specifically, workforce development and diversity & inclusion were rated significantly higher than innovation & entrepreneurship and quality of life & place.

COMMON VIEWS

Many participants felt the key to our region's workforce development efforts is to remove major barriers, such as financial issues and resources. Schools, businesses and families must play an active role in preparing young people on their career understanding, planning and education preparation.

"EFFECTIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT WILL DICTATE THE FUTURE OF OUR REGION."

"WE NEED TO START THE PROCESS EARLY IN SCHOOLS AND AT HOME. TO SUCCEED, WE NEED TO DECIDE ON CLEAR GOALS."

Barriers that keep our community from developing its workforce:

- **Financial barriers:** Some young people are unable to afford the cost of education.
- **Worker migration:** Talented and highly educated people often leave the area for other cities.
- **Lack of awareness:** Young people may not have knowledge of the connection between education and career paths—or may be unaware of existing educational resources.
- **Lack of motivation:** Some young people don't have the motivation to attain more education or employment.
- **Lack of knowledge:** Parents don't have enough knowledge or information to guide their children on education and career planning.

What needs to change to better support workforce development? Discussion from participants revealed the following:

Changes needed in the educational system:

- **More career guidance** should be integrated into education, instead of just saying "go to college."
- **More job readiness and interpersonal training** should be done to prepare students for future careers. Career-centered training should focus on basic skills such as good attitudes, teamwork and professionalism.
- **More resources and education should be provided to parents** so they can guide their children at home about early career planning.
- **Schools should partner with local employers on career introduction programs** and have guest speakers talk to students about future jobs.

Companies or businesses can improve in four areas:

- **Provide more educational opportunities to sponsor young students** who are committed to pursue higher education and careers.
- **Offer financial support for their own employees** to pursue additional education in order to progress in their careers.
- **Provide more paid internships, apprenticeships and job shadowing opportunities** to students who are close to graduating and ready to move into the workforce.
- **Partner with schools to provide career coaching or mentorships** for students who are preparing to enter the workforce.

Organizations can improve by:

- **Better advocating the quality of life in our community** to encourage young graduates to stay.
- **Assisting nonprofit organizations** to provide economic aid so people can achieve their education goals.

How to best support individuals with multiple barriers in gaining living-wage careers:

- **Provide more life skills training,** such as budgeting—in addition to technical skills.
- **Provide more "soft skills" training,** such as work ethic, verbal and nonverbal communication, teamwork and trustworthiness.
- **Change the culture** to embrace any post-secondary advancement—not just four-year college degrees.

I PARTICIPATED!
Diversity &
Inclusion
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GREATER PEORIA

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Diversity involves the range of human differences, including generations, personalities, race, gender and sexual orientation, among others. Inclusion is involvement and empowerment, where the inherent worth and dignity of all people are recognized. Together, diversity and inclusion is a powerful combination that supports and enhances a thriving community.

A diverse and inclusive community makes everyone feel comfortable, while embracing and leveraging the strengths of our differences. Moreover, values related to diversity and inclusion are critical to attracting young professionals to the region.

SURVEY RESULTS

Participants rated diversity & inclusion on the following factors using a five-point scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree."

There is a need to improve:

4.73

There are opportunities to improve:

4.48

Demands have changed in the last decade:

4.15

COMMON VIEWS

Many participants believe there is significant segregation amongst the communities of the Greater Peoria region. When any of our communities or neighborhoods struggle, it impacts everyone. This includes general community infrastructure, such as schools and transportation, as well as our overall mood and sense of well-being.

"BE WILLING TO SHARE AND LISTEN, AND BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT CHANGE."

"DIVERSITY GOES WELL BEYOND NUMBERS. IT IS A CHANGE IN VALUES."

What we have done well:

Many larger corporations offer diversity training for their employees, which helps foster an inclusive culture, while other local institutions have been initiating conversations about creating a more diverse and inclusive workforce. The LGBTQ community has also thrived in recent years.

What we can improve:

- **Segregation:** Some neighborhoods and school districts are effectively segregated, while profiling and labeling continue. There are large inequities in poverty based on racial differences.
- **Uneven distribution of resources:** Common infrastructure like sidewalks, bus stations, grocery stores, schools and healthcare resources are not equitably distributed.
- **Better understanding:** We need to understand that diversity and inclusion is not just about race, gender, religion and sexual orientation, but also about diversity of identity, ideas and experiences.

How to create stronger alliances within our community:

- **Initiate discussion.** Step out of our comfort zones and conduct open conversations with others.
- **Listen to other perspectives and believe what you hear.** Change starts with all of us—each individual.
- **Bust stereotypes.** People should be recognized for their skills and capabilities, not judged on stereotypes or bias.
- **Reduce and remove barriers that prevent people from moving to other areas.** Neighborhood and school integration improves overall community health.
- **Increase minority representation in public decision making.** Everyone needs to have a seat at the table.

Innovation &
Entrepreneurship
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INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Innovation and entrepreneurship are key building blocks for a competitive and dynamic modern economy. They have the ability to improve standards of living and create wealth—not only for those who innovate, but for the community as a whole. Improvements in these areas can be multiplied by continuing to build on past initiatives.

SURVEY RESULTS

Participants rated innovation & entrepreneurship on the following factors using a five-point scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree."

There is a need to improve:

4.34

There are opportunities to improve:

4.37

Demands have changed in the last decade:

4.31

COMMON VIEWS

Participants were proud of our region's history of innovation as well as our current innovation activities, and believe that sustaining these activities is important. They also understand the importance of applying and commercializing new technologies to generate business opportunities, boost economic growth and retain local talent.

"WE HAVE SO MUCH CREATIVE RESEARCH IN THIS COMMUNITY—INCLUDING INNOVATIVE HEALTHCARE RESEARCH, THE AG LAB, BRADLEY UNIVERSITY AND THE CATERPILLAR TECH CENTER. *WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?"*

Participants saw a variety of possibilities for future innovation in Greater Peoria, including:

- **Technology:** Caterpillar innovation, Big Data, autonomous mobility, agricultural technologies
- **Healthcare:** Telehealth, health solutions, information systems
- **Art:** Creativity and innovation in the local arts community

Barriers for innovators and business owners:

- **Financial challenges,** including lack of funding, startup loans, financial literacy, taxation and other business expenditures.
- **Lack of market:** Not enough current demand or need for products/business.
- **Fear of failure:** Only 10 to 20 percent of startups are successful, making entrepreneurship a risk for most people.
- **Lack of qualified employees:** The gap between the present workforce and the skills needed by employers remains significant.
- **Lack of awareness of local support:** Many people are unaware of organizations like SCORE Peoria, the Minority Business Development Center and the Illinois Small Business Development Center at Bradley University.

How institutions (government, education, corporations) can help:

- **Inspire entrepreneurs** by validating their ideas and developing innovation think tanks.
- **Promote awareness of local business resources and support** so prospective entrepreneurs and innovators know where they can get assistance.
- **Provide more funding and other resources to startups,** in addition to promoting general small business growth.
- **Celebrate and encourage entrepreneurship and innovation** more often and more vigorously.

How individuals can help:

- **Support the regional market:** Encourage people to shop local to increase market demand and drive business innovation.
- **Stay involved:** Participate in community events like The Big Table to provide feedback and share ideas and resources.
- **Foster a culture of innovation and progress.** Change perspectives on innovation and be open to new ideas and concepts. Push political leaders to take initiative to provide incentives that encourage innovation.

THE BIG TABLE
GREATER PEORIA
Quality of Life
& Place

QUALITY OF LIFE & PLACE

Quality of place encompasses all the physical characteristics of a community—the way it is planned, designed, developed and maintained—which affect the quality of life for both residents and visitors. This plays a critical role in attracting a highly skilled workforce, keeping people in our region, and building a vibrant and thriving community.

SURVEY RESULTS

Participants rated quality of place on the following factors using a five-point scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree."

There is a need to improve:

4.22

There are opportunities to improve:

4.41

Demands have changed in the last decade:

4.28

COMMON VIEWS

Participants believe Greater Peoria has a lot to offer, including affordable housing, good school districts, family-friendly activities, and a wealth of natural recreation areas. However, there are significant challenges as well, from major businesses moving out of town to safety issues in some communities.

> **"BLOOM** WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED."

Regional assets that participants are most proud of:

- **A nationally recognized medical community** with two major health systems, a college of medicine and multiple research institutions.
- **A rich history** encompassing Abraham Lincoln's monumental "Peoria Speech," feminist figure and Peoria native Betty Friedan, Lydia Moss Bradley's founding of Bradley University, and much more.
- **Quality of life,** including affordable housing, easy commutes, quality schools, access to healthcare, renowned private businesses, and natural resources such as award-winning park districts, trails and river areas.

Words and themes that define our region:

Participants were asked to share words that they would use to describe Peoria...

POSITIVE WORDS

- **Healthcare**
- **Opportunity**
- **Innovation**
- **Diversity**
- **Philanthropic**
- **Family-Friendly**
- **Midwest Hospitality**

NEGATIVE WORDS

- **Uncertainty** (major business moving out of Peoria, layoffs and a declining housing market)
- **Declining population**
- **Segregation**

What areas we can improve in our community:

- **A better business environment,** including easier government procedures and favorable tax policies toward business.
- **Addressing safety concerns** in the neighborhoods and communities that need it.
- **Improved infrastructure,** including public transportation options, a more pedestrian-friendly environment, and additional efforts to bring people downtown during the week.
- **Better community engagement and networking** among different communities and across regions.
- **Attracting talent and young graduates** to stay and live in the Greater Peoria Region.
- **Encouraging media to report more positive news** about our communities.

How individuals can help:

- **Utilize our assets.** Support local sports teams, attend arts and cultural events, and take part in recreational opportunities.
- **Shop local.** Keep your dollars circulating locally and support the businesses that make our region unique.
- **Participate in local government.** Attend City Council meetings and contact your elected officials so they know how they can help—or run for office yourself!
- **Get involved in the community.** Engage with your neighborhood association, volunteer at local schools, and advocate for the things you wish to see thrive.
- **Support local nonprofits.** Help them lift up the underserved so all of us can live happy, healthy and fulfilling lives.
- **Stay here**—and make the changes you want to see!

"QUALITY OF LIFE IS FOR ALL COMMUNITIES. IT IS THE COMMON THREAD THAT CREATES THE DNA OF OUR REGION."

NEXT STEPS

The Big Table Greater Peoria identified a range of critical information, but identifying our successes and challenges is just the beginning. The real power of this event will come from the ensuing strategies that evolve out of it. Utilizing data from this report, the CEO Council will focus on new ways to improve workforce development, diversity and inclusion, innovation and entrepreneurship, and quality of life and place. By collaborating with key stakeholders in the community, we can leverage the findings from this report to create a regional strategy that keeps Greater Peoria healthy and thriving well into the future.

Some of these next steps will include:

- **Continuing the great conversations from this inaugural event.** In addition to the five Big Table: Rural Matters discussions held in December 2019 and January 2020, we plan to hold a second Big Table Greater Peoria discussion later this year.
- **Creating a regional strategic plan with measurable goals to focus on areas of improvement.** The data and analysis from this report will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy currently being created by the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council.
- **Providing a mechanism to continue sharing stories and exchanging ideas.** The Big Table website will continue to be updated with communications. Sign up to receive the latest updates, and follow The Big Table Greater Peoria on Facebook. If you are interested in getting involved in a current initiative—or starting a new initiative—contact us through the website.

The Big Table has provided a great starting place for creating meaningful connections, but there is a lot of room to grow. Talking is only the first step. We will continue the conversation, but we must also turn talk into action. This is a collaborative effort, and we need your help! No single organization, program or strategy is going to fix everything. But by working together, we can create an amazing community in which to live, work and play.

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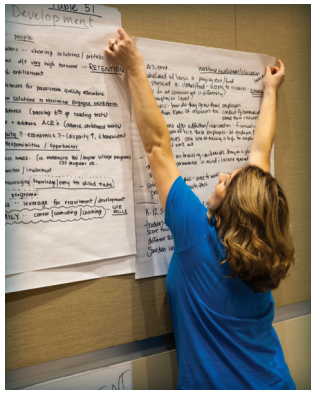
ANY VOICES.
ONE VISION.



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The Big Table 2019 report was produced for Greater Peoria by the CEO Council.

The CEO Council brings regional leaders together to collaborate and formulate initiatives focused on developing our community towards a better tomorrow. To learn more, visit peoriaceocouncil.org.

RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

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COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

The Big Table was brought to you by: Black Business Alliance Peoria Chapter, CEO Council, East Peoria Chamber of Commerce, Enjoy Peoria, Greater Peoria Economic Development Council, LGBT Chamber of Commerce of Illinois, Pekin Area Chamber of Commerce, Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce, Peoria Heights Chamber of Commerce, Peoria Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Morton Chamber of Commerce, Morton Economic Development Council, and Washington Chamber of Commerce.

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THE BIG TABLE
GREATER PEORIA

RURAL MATTERS

Five counties. Five conversations. One region *working together*.

Between December 2019 and January 2020, the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council worked with numerous local partners to extend the **Big Table Greater Peoria** initiative throughout the five-county region. Neighbors joined together to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing rural and small town communities in Greater Peoria. Each meeting was open to the public as a place to openly discuss issues and propose strategies that support community and economic development.

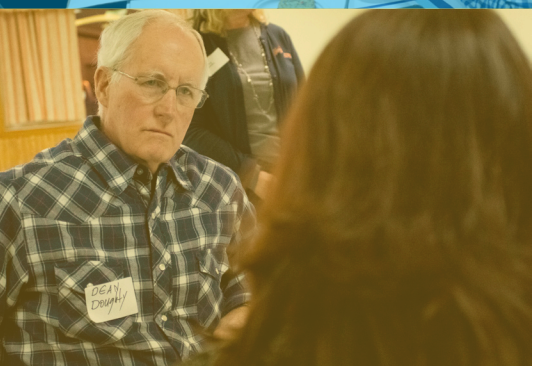
5 Events

HAVANA
METAMORA
BRIMFIELD
DELAVAN
LINCOLN

240 Participants

from

47 Zip codes



Survey Results

Response rate **38.33%** | Male **51.09%** | Female **48.91%**

97% white | **2%** African American or Black | **1%** Latinx or Hispanic

Survey participants rated **rural development** on the following factors using a five-point scale where **1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree."**

There is **a significant need to improve rural communities** and development for the future success of the Greater Peoria Region.	**4.7**
There are opportunities for improving rural communities in the Greater Peoria region.	**4.4**
Demands have changed significantly for rural communities and economic development in the last decade.	**4.4**

A Variety of Topics

The event participants identified the discussion topics important to their communities. After creating a list of topics, table were designated for each discussion and participants chose which table(s) to join. Over the five events, a range of issues were discussed and many were **recurring topics**:

- Natural Resources
- **Local Assets & Tourism**
- Job Retention & Creation
- **Small Business Development**
- **Education**
- Industrial Hemp
- **Infrastructure & Broadband**
- **Quality of Life**
- **Focusing Business Attraction**
- Childcare
- **Grocery Stores**
- **Entrepreneurship**
- Senior Housing
- **Local Foods Infrastructure**
- **Improving Quality of Life**
- **Historic Preservation**
- **Agriculture & Agtech**
- **Youth Engagement & Mentorship**
- Senior Food Security
- Bike and pedestrian transportation
- Improving Communication with Government

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Affordable places to live and do business	Broadband still lacking in certain areas
Many exceptional school districts	Closures of grocery stores and other local businesses
Premium agricultural assets	Lack of startup and small business support and resources
Tourism assets (natural resources and historic places)	Small town economic development capacity
Community spirit and close relationships	Pockets of persistent poverty
Opportunities	**Threats**
Business attraction: agriculture and logistics	Outmigration of residents, especially youth
Retain and attract retirees	Aging population and workforce
Remote workers and entrepreneurs; live here work anywhere	Real and perceived Illinois business climate challenges
Grow and attract agriculture innovation businesses	Shrinkage of dominant/historic employers
Leverage natural resources and historic places for tourism	Continued shifts in the retail industry (online and box stores)

What's next?

The Greater Peoria EDC is incorporating all the input gathered at at Big Table Greater Peoria events into the **2020 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**. The CEDS provides our region with a road map to improving the regional economy. It also serves as a line of communication to resource partners and funding bodies. Learn more about the CEDS process and document at **www.cedscentral.com**. Additional outreach will continue with all participants and regional community and economic development partners to build on the momentum created through the Big Table Greater Peoria initiative.

Stay in the loop with the Big Table Greater Peoria at www.bigtablegp.com

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Economic Development Council