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Forward Wayne County Reports Five-Year Results, Launches 7inSeven for 2026–2033

RICHMOND, IN — Forward Wayne County today released results for its Big Indicators of Success, the six community-wide goals that guided collective impact work across the county from 2020 through 2025. The county met its population target and made measurable progress on wages, educational attainment, and assessed value, while falling short on poverty reduction and on three growth targets set before the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the county landscape.

Results at a glance

2020–2025 Indicator	Status	Result
Population of 66,101	**Achieved**	66,169 residents — a slower decline than the previous decade
Raise per capita personal income	**Not achieved, Progress**	$54,628 — below the state average, but rising steadily year over year
Reduce the poverty rate	**Not achieved**	18.3% — down modestly from the prior year
60% of adults 25-64 with a certification, associate degree, or higher	**Not achieved**	52% — A four-point gain over five years — significant movement toward the goal
35% of adults 25-64 with an associate degree or higher	**Not achieved**	31.4% — an admirable result in a difficult period
Increase gross assessed value at or above the state average	**Not achieved, Progress**	Up 35.75% over five years, compared with 52.7% statewide

“We set these goals in a very different world, and then a pandemic landed in the middle of them,” said Acacia St. John, Director of Forward Wayne County. “What matters is that Wayne County kept moving. Our population did not fall as projections said it would. Wages went up. More of our neighbors hold a credential or a degree than five years ago. We are going to celebrate every one of those wins, no matter how small, because each one represents real work by real people in this community.”

Progress

The population indicator was the clearest success. Wayne County finished the period at 66,169 residents, above the 66,101 target and reflecting a notably slower rate of decline than the county experienced in the previous decade. Per capita personal income reached $54,628. That figure remains below the Indiana average, but the county has posted steady year-over-year increases rather than flat or falling wages.

Educational attainment moved in the right direction on both measures. The share of adults ages 25 to 64 holding a certification, associate degree, or higher reached 52%, a four-point gain over five years and a meaningful shift in the county’s workforce readiness. Degree attainment alone reached 31.4% of adults in that age range. Neither figure met its target, but both represent hundreds, if not thousands of individual residents who completed training or earned a credential during the period.

Gross assessed value grew 35.75% over the five years. The goal was to match or exceed the state, which grew 52.7%, so the indicator was not achieved, though a one-third increase in the county’s tax base represents substantial private

investment in property and development. The poverty rate finished at 18.3%, down modestly from the prior year, but well short of the reduction the county set out to achieve. It remains the community's most persistent challenge.

"None of this happens because of one organization," St. John said. "Our employers, our high schools, our post-secondary institutions, our municipal partners, and the residents of Wayne County showed up to make this progress. And we will continue the work."

Looking ahead: 7inSeven, 2026–2033

The Forward Wayne County Steering Committee has approved a new set of priority areas and metrics for 2026 through 2033, known as 7inSeven, seven metrics over seven years that will follow the countywide strategic investment plan announced earlier this year.

Forward Wayne County's priority areas under Our People and Our Community remain unchanged but will shift to a sharpened focus on Neighborhood Development, Government and Policy, and Arts and Culture. The seven metrics include:

1. **Population.** Grow the county's population by 1%.
2. **Assessed Value.** Increase gross assessed value at or above the state average each year.
3. **Per Capita Income.** Raise per capita personal income at a rate equal to or higher than inflation.
4. **Recreational Amenities.** Establish or update four recreational amenities across the county.
5. **Housing Units.** Increase homeownership by 5% and establish 200 new housing units per year.
6. **Revitalization and Beautification.** Complete one revitalization project in at least 10 incorporated communities across the county.
7. **Placemaking and Arts.** Establish or update four placemaking and arts projects across the county.

The first three metrics, population, assessed value, and per capita income, are standard community development indicators that allow Wayne County to benchmark itself against peer counties. The remaining four turn attention to the physical and cultural fabric of the county: places to gather, homes to live in, Main Streets worth walking, and a varied arts environment that give a community its character.

"Comparison benchmarks tell you where you stand. Neighborhoods, housing, Main Streets, and the arts tell you who you are," said Rebecca Gilliam, Executive Director of the Wayne County Foundation. "Those are the things people actually point to when they talk about home. 7inSeven measures both and that's by design. "

As with the Big Indicators of Success, 7inSeven will follow a collective impact model. No single metric belongs to a single organization; progress depends on partners across the county working these metrics together.

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