



Cities and town across Indiana are having great success drawing new residents who are remote workers and can choose to live anywhere. Locations like Noblesville are selling their many amenities, including recreational outlets such as Morse Reservoir.

REMOTE TALENT RECRUITMENT

A 'Match Made in Heaven' for Indiana

By Anthony Schoettle

Indiana has become one of the nation's leaders in recruiting remote workers to its borders, and economic development officials say the growing initiative is providing a vital boost to the state's economy.

Fueled by a platform and program management offered by a privately run Hoosier firm, MakeMyMove, and matching funds from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) and Lilly Endowment Inc., the remote worker recruitment effort launched in 2021 has attracted 1,463 residents to 32 Indiana counties. The new Hoosiers will bring in more than \$58.6 million in annual economic impact and prompt the creation of 334 new jobs – not including the remote jobs.

This success is just the tip of the iceberg, says Evan Hock, a former Angie's List executive who co-founded TMap in 2017, which morphed into MakeMyMove three years later.

"We think there are tens of thousands of people who would move here," Hock declares. "It's just a matter of finding and recruiting them."

Luring them in

Most Indiana cities and regions offer between \$5,000 to \$10,000 in cash and a bevy of other benefits. There's usually a minimum salary requirement for the remote workers recruited, but many applicants to the program exceed that.

At first glance, the remote worker recruitment strategy seems counterintuitive. Why go after remote workers one by one when you can recruit companies that would bring in hundreds or thousands of jobs and people? There are various reasons why remote worker recruitment is taking root.

First, many economic development directors say they don't have the population to fill the jobs a new company would bring in or create. Hock says Indiana sees remote worker recruitment "as a tool to grow both the economy and the population."

"We have to grow organically from the inside as much as we do in bringing entire companies from outside," stresses Noblesville Mayor Chris Jensen, who launched a remote worker recruitment program there. "We don't have 500 workers to bring in a big company. We must bring in the workers, so we can go after those big companies down the road."

Recruited remote workers, Jensen notes, often bring spouses, children and other family members, who become productive

members of the current and future local workforce.

Additionally, the remote workers recruited are often highly educated (nearly 75% have college degrees), high-earning individuals that want to be engaged in the community in which they move. Places like Evansville, Muncie, Noblesville and Tell City have capitalized on this by connecting new remote-working residents with non-profit organizations and government agencies and even offered meet-and-greets with the mayor and other area high-ranking public and private officials. Some cities and towns have made board appointments one of the benefits they offer.

Coming together

"Without talent, the work we do wouldn't matter. Therefore, it's vital that we put time and effort into making our communities desirable, affordable and vibrant places for people to live, work and play," surmises Tony Denhart, IEDC executive vice president of talent and workforce.

"MakeMyMove has been a valuable partner in our work. They help not only market the state and provide an incentive to move, but what they ultimately do is make Indiana an option for people who otherwise may not give our state a chance. The financial incentive is great, but what we've heard time

and time again is that people from across the U.S., particularly the coasts and other high-cost-of-living cities, are moving to Indiana and falling in love with their ability to thrive here.”

Hock says the IEDC’s role is vital as the state agency “ensures these programs have the financial and political support they need to succeed.” As of January, the IEDC has contributed \$6.7 million into the initiative, according to organization officials.

Erin Emerson, Perry County Development Corporation president and CEO, had wanted to delve into talent recruitment for years. Perry County, nestled along the Ohio River on the Kentucky border, has a declining population, and needed a way to boost its economy.

“Even if we keep all our high school graduates, and that’s not likely, we wouldn’t be able to meet the demand for all the job openings here,” Emerson notes.

Several of the county’s largest employers told Perry County officials they have the potential to grow their operations but are concerned about finding workers to hire in the area. Perry County’s county seat, Tell City, is 45 minutes from the nearest major city – Owensboro, Kentucky – and more than an hour from Evansville.

“If we want to grow our economy and the various business sectors we have, we have to grow the workforce,” Emerson relates. “We want to continue to welcome economic opportunities. It became very clear we had to increase the population and vary our workforce here in town.”

Early reviews, results

So far, Indiana has attracted remote workers from 47 states and five countries.

“We’re making this competition visible in a way that it hasn’t been before,” Hock stresses. “Talent is more mobile than it’s ever been before. People are voting with their feet. The states that win in the long term are the ones that see this as a competition and get out in front of this.

“I think Indiana is going to be a model that others will try to replicate,” he adds. “But the legislation and (program) infrastructure we’ve developed give us a one- to two-year leg up.”

Jensen, who spent six years in Gov. Mitch Daniels’ administration, admits he had “mixed thoughts” when this idea was first introduced to him.

“When using tax dollars, you have to make sure you’re getting a return on investment for the taxpayer,” Jensen emphasizes. “We sat

Remote Recruitment Snapshot

A variety of Indiana communities are launching these remote recruitment initiatives. Here are a few examples of the successes to date:

Larger Cities

- Noblesville: 85 households moved (209 people, average income \$142,000)
- Muncie: 66 households moved (166 people, average income \$102,000)

Smaller Cities

- Richmond: 23 households moved (50 people, average income \$113,000)
- Terre Haute: 34 households moved (52 people, average income \$90,000)

Rural Communities

- Radius Indiana (includes Crawford, Dubois, Daviess, Greene, Orange, Martin, Washington and Lawrence counties): 80 households moved (213 people, average income \$100,000)
- Perry County: 14 households moved (33 people, average income \$95,000)

down and really crunched that out. It has to benefit the current residents as well as the mover. We’re not just standing out on the street corner handing out checks to anyone who wants to move here.

“There are multiple ways this program is helping grow the Noblesville economy,” he imparts.

Noblesville has seen an \$8.4 million economic impact from the initiative, Jensen relays. Of the 83 remote workers that have moved to Noblesville in the last two years, 26 have bought houses with an average price of \$477,500, and 57 are renters paying an average of \$1,715 monthly. The campaign has earned Noblesville 1.5 million social media impressions, generating 8,000 applicants from remote workers seeking benefits.

Perry County offers remote workers \$7,000 cash – \$3,500 when they arrive and \$3,500 one year later – as well as a free one-year gym membership and high-speed wireless hookup and gift certificates to various retail outlets and eateries.

Emerson acknowledges the cost isn’t insignificant for her small community. There are other challenges as well, including finding housing for the new residents.

“I have found this can be labor intensive,” she acknowledges. “It’s exhausting, but it’s almost like guaranteed success. These people want to come here, and they want to give back and be the types of citizens we so desperately want. They’re helping grow our economy and our schools. It’s the perfect program for us. It’s a match made in heaven.”



In addition to giving remote workers a cash incentive, Perry County and Tell City officials shower those new residents with a welcome basket full of local goodies and coupons.

RESOURCES: Tony Denhart, Indiana Economic Development Corporation, at www.iedc.in.gov | Erin Emerson, Perry County Development Corporation, at www.pickperry.com | Evan Hock, MakeMyMove, at www.makemymove.com | Chris Jensen, city of Noblesville, at noblesville.in.gov