



# Community Conversations *Participant Guide*

FEBRUARY 2006 | [WWW.VOICESCHOICES.ORG](http://WWW.VOICESCHOICES.ORG)



## Voices & Choices

One Region. One Future.

*Jobs*

*Education*

*Equity*

*Quality of Life*

*Cooperation*

## The Fund for Our Economic Future

The Fund is an unprecedented collaboration among over 70 philanthropic organizations from across Northeast Ohio. Its goal is to encourage and advance an agenda for regional economic transformation. The three-year initiative has raised nearly \$30 million to further its objectives. ([www.futurefundneo.org](http://www.futurefundneo.org))

## AmericaSpeaks

AmericaSpeaks is a nonprofit organization that engages citizens in the most important public decisions that impact their lives. Since 1997, AmericaSpeaks has conducted 21st Century Town Meetings across the country and around the world on such subjects as the redevelopment of the World Trade Center after 9/11, the creation of Washington, D.C.'s municipal budget, and the development of global priorities at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. ([www.americaspeaks.org](http://www.americaspeaks.org))

## The Universities Collaborative

The Universities Collaborative is a coalition of local institutions of higher learning that is serving as a key partner in the implementation of Voices & Choices and the Dashboard of Regional Economic Indicators. The Collaborative will play a significant role in strengthening the region's civic infrastructure and capacity through Voices & Choices.



# Voices & Choices

## Community Conversations

Voices & Choices is your opportunity to help shape the future of Northeast Ohio. You are joining thousands of residents from across the region who are working together to decide what we must do to create more jobs and better opportunities, and to improve quality of life for all.

This winter and spring, hundreds of conversations will be held across Northeast Ohio to consider the challenges facing our region and to identify priorities for moving forward.

Conversations will take place in homes, schools, businesses, places of worship, community centers and more.

Your conversation will build upon the input generated by other Northeast Ohio residents in a series of forums last Fall. Together with thousands of other citizens, you will help to create an action plan to revitalize our region. Specifically, the decisions you make today will shape a series of choices that will be presented to the region this spring.



## Voices & Choices Accomplishments

### **Citizen Interviews**

August – December 2005

3,000 citizens identify Northeast Ohio's greatest strengths and assets in one-on-one interviews across the region.

### **Leadership Workshops**

August – September 2005

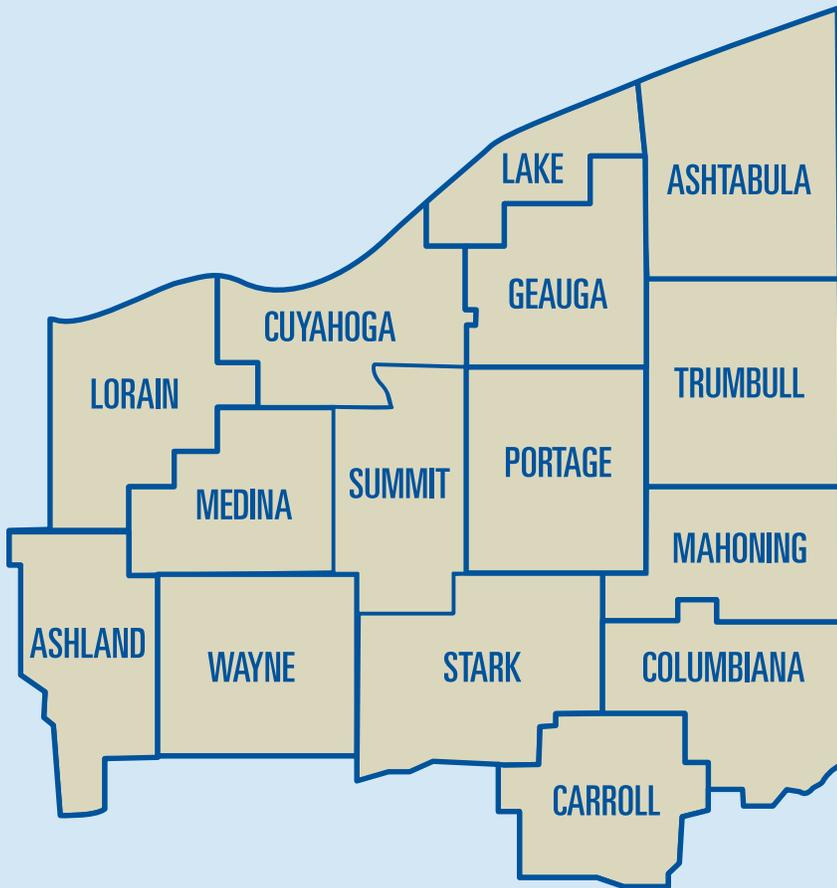
1,000 leaders representing governments, businesses, and non-profits discuss the greatest challenges and opportunities facing Northeast Ohio at 11 four-hour workshops.

### **Regional Town Meeting**

November 2005

750 citizens and leaders prioritize the challenges facing the region and identify potential solutions at the largest Town Meeting ever held in the region.

# A Quick Glance at Northeast Ohio



## **TOTAL AREA:**

7,124 sq. miles

## **POPULATION:**

4 million people

## **TOTAL EMPLOYMENT:**

1.8 million (2003)

## **ANNUAL AVERAGE WAGE:**

\$33,700 (2000)

## **MAJOR INDUSTRIES:**

Metalworking, plastic products and chemicals, motor vehicles and equipment, insurance, biomedical, instrumentation, controls and electronics

## **LARGEST CITIES:**

Cleveland (478,403)

Akron (217,074)

Parma (85,655)

Youngstown (82,026)

Canton (80,806)

Lorain (68,652)

## What Makes Us a Region?

*We share a common history  
and industrial past*

*We share a common workforce  
that travels across the 15  
counties for work; 23% of our  
workforce lives in one county  
and works in another*

*We share common assets, like  
our universities, our natural  
resources, our health care  
system, and our cultural  
institutions*

*We share a growing  
transportation system and  
infrastructure that links us  
together*

*We depend on each other for  
our future prosperity*

*Together, we are competing  
against other regions around  
the world for jobs and  
opportunities*

# One Region. One Future.

## Competing as a Regional Economy



### Global Competition

The world is changing. The communities of Northeast Ohio are competing against other regions across the country and around the globe for better jobs and opportunities. Individually, our communities are not large enough to succeed in this global competition. We need to pool our resources and work together as a team if we are going to win.

### Regional Strength

The 15 counties of Northeast Ohio are home to more than 4 million people, making the region larger in population than 23 states. Our regional economy is greater than many small countries and employs one-third of all workers in the state of Ohio. Together, thinking and acting as a region, Northeast Ohio can be a collective force to be reckoned with in the global economy.

### Team Northeast Ohio

One way to think about why the region must work together to compete is to consider a favorite sports team. Each player on a team has a certain set of skills; he or she may be fast or tall or strong. But alone, individual strengths are not enough to succeed. In order to win, a player, even a superstar, must combine his or her strengths with those of his or her teammates.

The same is true for a region. A city may have a number of assets: like a strong university or a pool of skilled workers. But these strengths are not enough to compete with regions around the world. Alone, our major cities – Akron, Canton, Cleveland, Lorain, and Youngstown cannot attract new industries, spur innovation, or prepare a workforce on the scale we need to compete globally.

In Northeast Ohio, we have two options. We can continue to operate independently and continue to compete against our own regional teammates. Or, we can take a hard look at the strengths and challenges of our team and create a game plan so we can compete at the highest possible level in a world where the playing field is evolving and new competitors join the game every day.

# What We Love About Northeast Ohio

*What makes  
**Northeast Ohio**  
special to you?*

*What would  
**you miss most**  
if you moved away  
from Northeast Ohio?*

*What keeps people  
**here or attracts**  
new people to  
the region?*

*Nearly 3,000 citizens have taken part in Voices & Choices interviews to identify what is best about Northeast Ohio that should be preserved and built upon as we work to revitalize the region. The following themes are emerging from an analysis of a sample of these interviews.*

*Keep these assets in mind as you consider the region's most important challenges and what we should do about them.*

*“The thing that makes Ohio different would be the way people act towards one another. We always treat fellow Ohioans with respect and dignity.”*



## **It's About the People**

When asked what makes Northeast Ohio special, many citizens report their deep attachment to the region because their “roots are here” and because they value their family and friends who live here. Many people say with pride that they were “born and raised here.” Others moved here – or moved back after having left – in order to be close to family and friends.

People talk about our culture and how Northeast Ohio residents treat each other. “Northeast Ohioans are genuinely friendlier than people from other places.” They will lend a hand to neighbors and those in need, smile and say hello to strangers and “keep an eye out” for each other. Many describe Northeast Ohioans as hardworking and helpful people.

Residents often comment on how much they enjoy the diversity in their communities. The types of diversity they mention are ethnic and racial, age, education, political persuasions, sexual orientation and religion. Many people enjoy learning about new cultures through dining, music and festivals, thanks to the region's diversity.

“True, we have our cities close by and the hustle and bustle that go with that, and we couldn’t do without them, but here you can retreat into the countryside and enjoy a more relaxed frame of mind.”



## Our Quality of Life: The Feel of the Place

People like the sense of belonging that they feel in Northeast Ohio. Many say they enjoy living in a place where they are known and where they know others. They treasure their involvement with churches, civic and fraternal organizations, school committees and sports teams. They like knowing what’s happening with the people in their community. They like having places to gather and see familiar faces as well.

Many people value the region’s education system, the range of job opportunities here, and feeling safe. They say that the region is a good place to raise a family with room for kids to play and opportunities for them to learn and develop talents. The moderate cost of living in the region is important to many people. Affordable housing is often cited as an asset, although it is also considered to be in too short supply.

People enjoy the diversity of communities in the region with large cities within easy reach of rural areas. One person described the region as: “Cities to cows in 20 minutes.”

“I would miss Lake Erie if I moved from the area. I would miss the cool lake breeze and the sunsets.”



## Our Natural Surroundings

One of the reasons Northeast Ohioans love their region so much is because it’s so beautiful. Sunsets over the Great Lake, rolling hills, glowing fields of corn, deep silent white winters, and brisk, crisp deeply hued autumns all create a constantly changing view. There are quaint 19th century homes, impressive bank and government buildings, and churches and cemeteries fit for the movies.

Lake Erie has a special place in the hearts of Northeast Ohioans, although people value the many other bodies of water across the region as well. As one moves away from Lake Erie, the contours of the land and the scenic beauty of farms and still natural areas is anchoring and reassuring.

Farming is part of the fabric that makes Northeast Ohio what it is. Those who live in rural or farming areas appreciate the connection with the earth, the hard work, and the special community that agriculture fosters.

Finally, the weather is a constant topic of conversation. Whether one complains or praises, the changing seasons mark the passage of time, give variety to daily life, and sometimes provide us with the sense that we are all in this together.



## Lots to Do

The number of local and world-renowned music, art and cultural institutions and venues in our region is phenomenal, and spread out through the region making them accessible to thousands of people of all ages. The array of available options suits every taste and budget. People enjoy the area's restaurants and shopping.

Northeast Ohioans are loyal to their teams and vocal about it. The belonging we feel as fans, spectators or participants is a tie that binds us together. Youngsters participate in community and school teams that many find rewarding. In addition, there are loads of places to bike, fish, bowl, or enjoy the many recreational opportunities that come with a four-season climate.

Amusement parks, zoos, wineries, libraries, tourist attractions and so much more are right in northeast Ohioans' backyards. People also appreciate the urban amenities of the region's large cities.

## Infrastructure

Northeast Ohio's infrastructure makes it very accessible and easy to get around. People love that they can get across the entire region with ease and reach other major cities and travel destinations. Easy access to airports, highways, shopping, and arts and culture districts are important to many people.

By car, one can get to work, school and leisure activities quickly and with essentially no rush hour. The traffic conditions are particularly appreciated by people who have lived in other metropolitan areas. The availability of public transportation (rail and bus) systems are also appreciated by residents who use them.



# Discussion Topics

Voices & Choices has divided the regional conversation into five topic areas in order to make sure that the diverse set of issues facing the region are talked about:

- 1** Employment & Economic Growth
- 2** Education & Skills
- 3** Equity & Fairness
- 4** Quality of Life & Place
- 5** Cooperation & Governance

During your Community Conversation, you will have the chance to talk about the most important challenges facing the region and brainstorm solutions in at least one of these five topic areas. If you have time, your group may choose to talk about several topics.

The five topic areas are not meant to be exhaustive or to suggest that you ignore how issues are related to one another. Rather, they are intended to encourage you to think about the broad diversity of issues that may be considered in setting an economic agenda for the future.

The following pages of this Participant Guide, as well as five accompanying Fact Sheets, provide background information on each of the five topic areas to inform our discussions.

# Employment & Economic Growth



While Northeast Ohio has many great strengths, the region also faces many great challenges. In the area of Employment & Economic Growth, Northeast Ohio must find ways to support the creation of more jobs with higher wages, so that everyone can provide for their needs and the needs of their families.

## What Sets Thriving Regions Apart?

The Fund for Our Economic Future selected a team of national and local economists to analyze Northeast Ohio's economy and identify the factors that are most closely related to thriving economies.

Based on their analysis, the economists identified three important attributes of competitive economies in the area of Employment & Economic Growth that contribute to a strong regional economy:

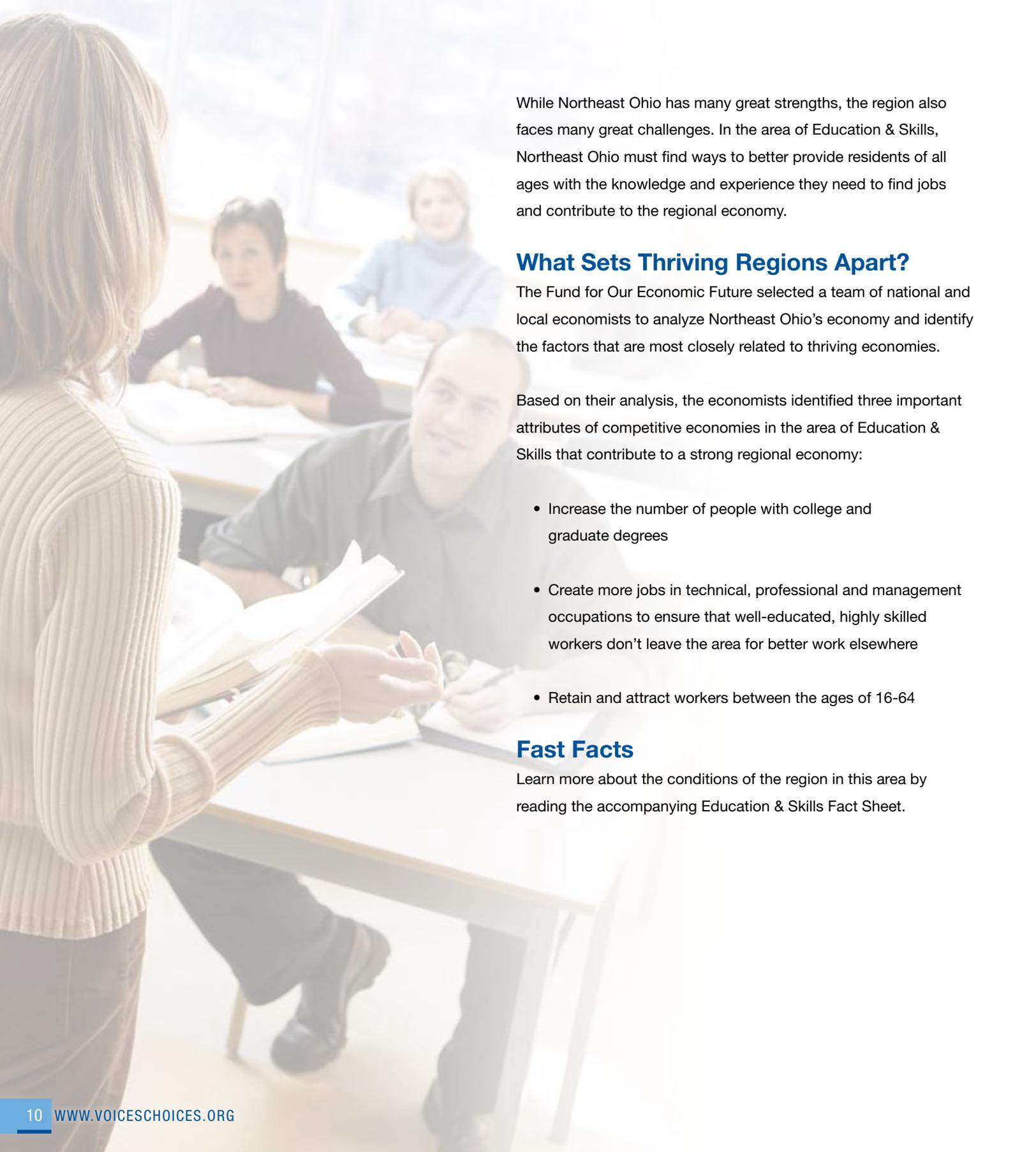
- Create a better mix of businesses and industries that are more productive and competitive than traditional Northeast Ohio industries
- Support the creation of new businesses, entrepreneurs and innovations in the region
- Encourage immigrants to settle in the region and minorities to open their own businesses here

## Fast Facts

Learn more about the conditions of the region in this area by reading the accompanying Employment & Economic Growth Fact Sheet.



# Education & Skills



While Northeast Ohio has many great strengths, the region also faces many great challenges. In the area of Education & Skills, Northeast Ohio must find ways to better provide residents of all ages with the knowledge and experience they need to find jobs and contribute to the regional economy.

## What Sets Thriving Regions Apart?

The Fund for Our Economic Future selected a team of national and local economists to analyze Northeast Ohio's economy and identify the factors that are most closely related to thriving economies.

Based on their analysis, the economists identified three important attributes of competitive economies in the area of Education & Skills that contribute to a strong regional economy:

- Increase the number of people with college and graduate degrees
- Create more jobs in technical, professional and management occupations to ensure that well-educated, highly skilled workers don't leave the area for better work elsewhere
- Retain and attract workers between the ages of 16-64

## Fast Facts

Learn more about the conditions of the region in this area by reading the accompanying Education & Skills Fact Sheet.



# Equity & Fairness

While Northeast Ohio has many great strengths, the region also faces many great challenges. In the area of Equity & Fairness, Northeast Ohio must find ways to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to provide for their families and that no one is left behind.

## What Sets Thriving Regions Apart?

The Fund for Our Economic Future selected a team of national and local economists to analyze Northeast Ohio's economy and identify the factors that are most closely related to thriving economies.

Based on their analysis, the economists identified three important attributes of competitive economies in the area of Equity & Fairness that contribute to a strong regional economy:

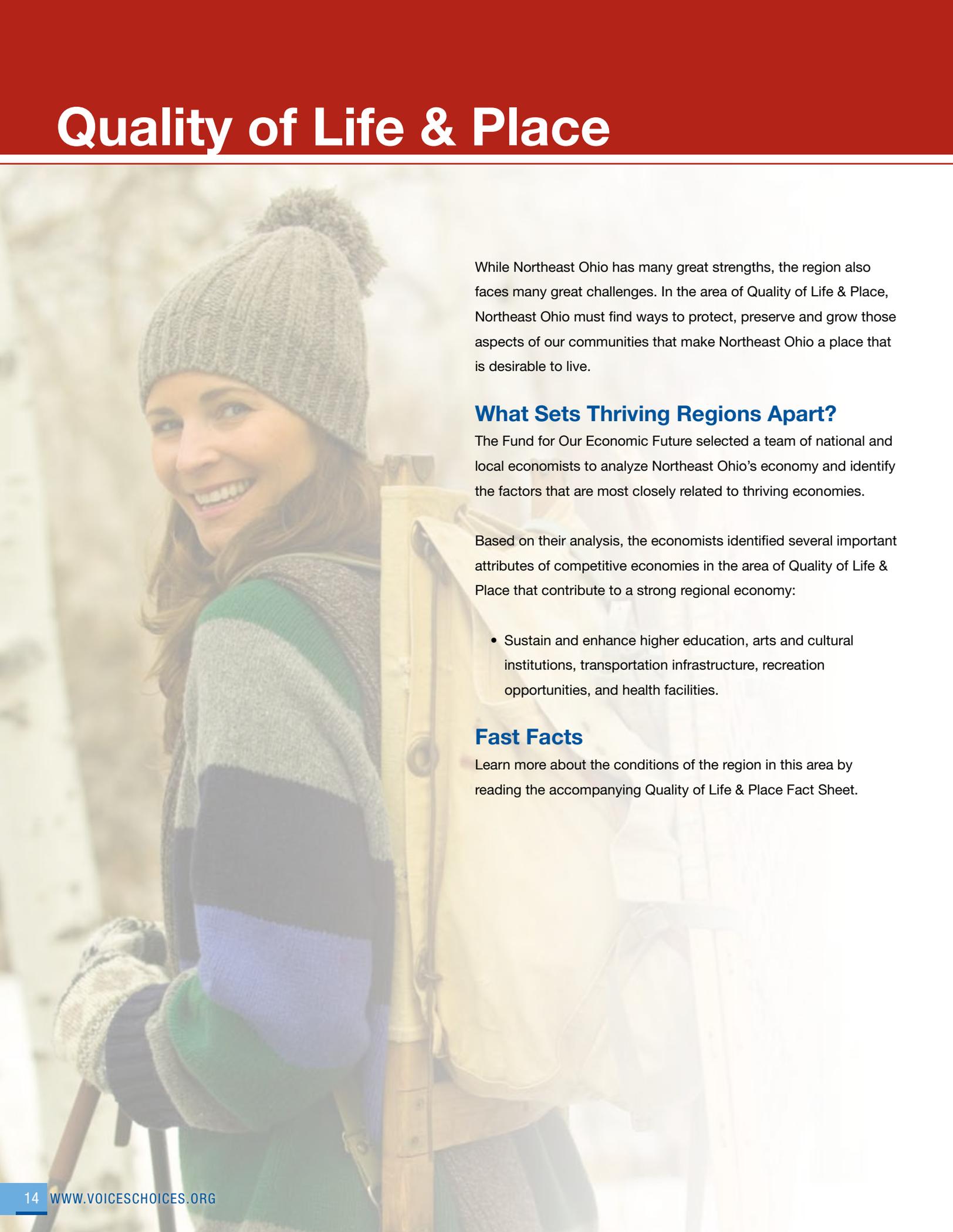
- Decrease the amount of racial isolation experienced by the African American community in the region and improve access to jobs, quality schools and other opportunities
- Improve income equality among people (less distinction between “haves and have nots”)
- Reduce the concentration of poverty in core cities and the number of children living in high poverty neighborhoods

## Fast Facts

Learn more about the conditions of the region in this area by reading the accompanying Equity & Fairness Fact Sheet.



# Quality of Life & Place

A smiling woman with long brown hair, wearing a grey knit beanie with a pom-pom, a grey and green striped sweater, and a yellow backpack, is standing in a snowy, wooded area. She is holding ski poles and looking towards the camera.

While Northeast Ohio has many great strengths, the region also faces many great challenges. In the area of Quality of Life & Place, Northeast Ohio must find ways to protect, preserve and grow those aspects of our communities that make Northeast Ohio a place that is desirable to live.

## What Sets Thriving Regions Apart?

The Fund for Our Economic Future selected a team of national and local economists to analyze Northeast Ohio's economy and identify the factors that are most closely related to thriving economies.

Based on their analysis, the economists identified several important attributes of competitive economies in the area of Quality of Life & Place that contribute to a strong regional economy:

- Sustain and enhance higher education, arts and cultural institutions, transportation infrastructure, recreation opportunities, and health facilities.

## Fast Facts

Learn more about the conditions of the region in this area by reading the accompanying Quality of Life & Place Fact Sheet.



# Cooperation & Governance

A photograph of three business professionals in a meeting. Two women and one man are standing outdoors, engaged in conversation. The woman on the left is wearing a dark blazer and skirt, the woman in the middle is wearing a light blue blazer and pantsuit, and the man on the right is wearing a dark suit. They are all gesturing with their hands as they talk.

While Northeast Ohio has many great strengths, the region also faces many great challenges. In the area of Cooperation & Governance, Northeast Ohio must find ways to work together and share resources so that we can increase our productivity and our collective strength.

## What Sets Thriving Regions Apart?

The Fund for Our Economic Future selected a team of national and local economists to analyze Northeast Ohio's economy and identify the factors that are most closely related to thriving economies.

Based on their analysis, the economists identified three important attributes of competitive economies in the area of Cooperation & Governance that contribute to a strong regional economy:

- Reduce the number of political jurisdictions in the region
- Decrease the costs associated with maintaining and replacing old housing and infrastructure, like roads and sewers
- Strengthen the region's tax base so that it can support increased social and public services without needing to raise individual or corporate taxes

## Fast Facts

Learn more about the conditions of the region in this area by reading the accompanying Cooperation & Governance Fact Sheet.



# Personal Commitments

Revitalizing Northeast Ohio will require everyone to do their part: government, businesses, community groups, schools, foundations and citizens themselves. This fall, Voices & Choices will begin working with leaders and citizens to act on the agenda that emerges from the process.

In the meantime, we can all take steps to begin strengthening the region. Below is a list of ideas that people have committed to at previous forums to improve Northeast Ohio.

## What Commitments will you make?

### Strengthen the Region

- Write a letter to the editor about important regional issues
- Contact local leaders about important regional issues
- Buy local made goods, support Northeast Ohio-owned retailers and restaurants.
- Mentor at least three young people this year so that they don't feel the need to leave the region
- Make an effort to learn more about regional issues
- Support Northeast Ohio's downtowns. Commit to going downtown at least five times this year
- Start an internship program at your company – or encourage your company's management to do so
- Encourage friends and family from elsewhere to visit Northeast Ohio
- Make an effort to visit other parts of Northeast Ohio
- Volunteer in your community
- Act on some of the ideas and priorities that you talked about in your discussion

### Advance Voices & Choices

- Make a presentation to a local group about Voices & Choices
- Host your own Community Conversation
- Volunteer to help a Voices & Choices Community Organizer to reach out to others in your community
- Sign up to be a member of the Voices & Choices facilitator network
- Sign up to participate in the Regional Town Meeting



# Evaluation Form



Date of Conversation: \_\_\_\_\_ Name of Conversation Host: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) Did you learn something during your conversation?  Yes  No
- 2) Rate the quality of this conversation  Poor  Fair  Good  Excellent
- 3) Rate the helpfulness of the materials and video for this conversation  Poor  Fair  Good  Excellent
- 4) How committed are you to remaining involved with Voices & Choices?  
 Not at all committed  
 Somewhat committed  
 Committed  
 Very committed

5) What worked well to make this a good conversation?

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6) What could have made this a better conversation?

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Tear your evaluation form out of this guide. Either hand it in to your host or sent it to:

**Voices & Choices**  
7575 Northcliff Avenue, Suite 201  
Brooklyn, OH 44144  
216.749.8266 (fax)



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