



Preliminary Report

Northeast Ohio
Regional Town Meeting II
September 16, 2006

On Saturday, September 16th, 900 people gathered from across Northeast Ohio at the University of Akron to prioritize goals and solutions for addressing the region's greatest challenges. This second Voices & Choices Regional Town Meeting was the culmination of a region-wide discussion that has engaged more than 20,000 people in deliberations over the past year.

Participants in the Regional Town Meeting were representative of the diversity of the Northeast Ohio region. Over the course of the day, they evaluated a series of 49 solutions that have been developed to address six top challenges that have emerged from the Voices & Choices process. Building on this, participants prioritized goals and solutions, discussed how the region should market itself, and identified actions that they could take to strengthen the region.

The public priorities articulated at the Regional Town Meeting will be used to shape the development of the region's competitive economic agenda that will be finalized in the next few months.



Regional Town Meeting participant discussion

Hope for the Future

At the beginning of the day, participants were asked to identify things going on in the region that give them hope for the future of Northeast Ohio.

Participants said that the discussion of progress, solutions, and successes gave them hope for the future. Examples of regional collaboration in education, government, business and foundations were also mentioned.

Others felt the growing sense of civic engagement from the region's diverse citizenship gave them hope for the future.

Additionally, participants said that "just being at the table today" increased their awareness that we must work together as a region to create a shared regional identity and a better understanding of our region's assets.

Others indicated that the presence of youth and their involvement in the meeting's discussion demonstrated our future assets and the importance of education and expanding educational opportunities for the worker of tomorrow.

Finally, the infusion of new industries and technological advances and advances in healthcare were seen as reasons to be hopeful about the future.



Local Artist Cornelius Butler



Chief Rocka Entertainment Performs
"We Have a Voice!"



Local Artist Danny Ratcliff

Who Was in the Room?

	9/16/06	NEO
<u>GENDER</u>		
Male	47%	48%
Female	53%	52%
<u>AGE</u>		
15-19	14%	10%
20-34	15%	25%
35-44	11%	22%
45-54	25%	18%
55-64	20%	11%
Over 65	16%	20%
<u>RACE/ETHNICITY</u>		
African American	30%	14%
Asian American	0%	1%
Caucasian	61%	82%
Hispanic/Latino	3%	2%
Native American	1%	>1%
More than one race	5%	1%
Other	2%	>1%
<u>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</u>		
Employed, working full-time	50%	64%
Employed, Part-time	13%	31%
Not employed, homemaker,	21%	7%
Unemployed, seeking	7%	
employment		
Other	7%	
Prefer not to answer	2%	
<u>COUNTY CLUSTERS</u>		
Ashland/Wayne/Richland	10%	7%
Ashtabula/ Lake/Geauga	6%	10%
Cuyahoga	34%	33%
Lorain	6%	7%
Summit/Portage/ Medina	29%	20%
Stark/Carroll	9%	10%
Trumbull/Mahoning/Colum.	5%	14%
Outside NEO	1%	
<u>INCOME-HOUSEHOLD</u>		
<\$20K	12%	23%
\$20K-\$29K	7%	13%
\$30K-\$39K	7%	13%
\$40K-\$49K	7%	11%
\$50K-\$59K	9%	10%
\$60K-\$74K	11%	11%
>\$75	33%	20%
Prefer not to answer	14%	
<u>TYPE OF COMMUNITY</u>		
Urban	36%	85%
Suburban	35%	
Rural	6%	15%
Small town	17%	
Other	6%	

TOP RANKING GOALS WITHIN EACH CHALLENGE

Participants finished the morning by evaluating goals within each of the six challenges areas. The top goals in each challenge area were:

TRAINING WORKERS FOR CURRENT & FUTURE JOBS

- Make a college education in the region more affordable and achievable
- Improve workforce training programs and ensure they match the needs of both workers and employers

IMPROVING RACIAL INCLUSION AND INCOME EQUITY

- Increase the availability of quality education and training for low-income and minority individuals

ATTRACTING AND GROWING BUSINESSES

- Increase public and private investment and support for businesses and local entrepreneurs
- Reduce the cost of doing business in the region and increase business productivity

REDUCING GOVERNMENT FRAGMENTATION & INEFFICIENCY

- Encourage local governments to work together or combine services to reduce duplication

ENSURING EQUITABLE SCHOOL FUNDING & ACCOUNTABILITY

- Ensure that schools and students have the financial resources they need to succeed
- Create a more innovative education system to support the needs of students
- Increase parental and community involvement in students' education

REDUCING SPRAWL & INCREASING REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

- Plan for the future development and growth of the region

TOP RANKING GOALS ACROSS CHALLENGES

Participants also ranked the top goals across the six challenge areas. Their highest priority goals were:

- Plan for the future development and growth of the region
- Insure that students have the financial resources they need to succeed
- Improve workforce training programs



Next Steps by the Fund for Our Economic Future for NEO's Agenda

...release the regional action agenda at the end of the year that incorporates input from *Voices & Choices*, the Dashboard (economists), and key regional leaders.

...partner with powerful people with resources to move the agenda forward.

...utilize all of its tools --- grantmaking, leadership alignment, civic engagement, marketing and communications, and public affairs --- to implement the region's agenda.

...continue the open dialogue, providing citizens with ongoing opportunities to offer agenda feedback through an online forum later this year.

TOP RANKING SOLUTIONS

To address the top ranking goals, participants spent the afternoon allocating "NEO Bucks" toward the solutions they believed would have the most impact.

1. Advocate for the state of Ohio to shift how it funds public schools to ensure that all schools have adequate resources.
2. Invest in internship and mentoring programs to provide students with work experience that is focused on the needs of businesses.
3. Advocate for the State of Ohio to increase funding for higher education so that tuitions can be lowered and scholarships made available for those with the greatest needs.
4. Advocate for the State of Ohio to develop a health care system that provides health care coverage for all to reduce burden on businesses.
5. Invest in establishing a region-wide association of local and regional planning agencies to coordinate regional planning, collaborate on the creation of a common U.S. Census definition of the Northeast Ohio region, and enhance our capacity to understand and influence our collective future.
6. Invest in creating a region-wide land use and development plan to address patterns of growth and decline at a regional level and to provide a framework for long-term development of the region.
7. Invest in programs that enable high school students to take college-level courses at no cost to the student and with special emphasis on potential first-generation college students.
8. Expand and create organizations (called incubators) that support the growth of small businesses in the region through advice from experts, networking opportunities and other support programs.

Northeast Ohio Online Dialogues

Northeast Ohio has spoken. Talking about Real Action for our Tough Choices.

20,000 people have offered real solutions for the region's economic challenges. Now it is time for you to be a part of creating actions to further the public's agenda. Join hundreds of your fellow Northeast Ohio citizens for a historic online dialogue this September and October.

Go to www.voiceschoices.org to identify actions for the issue that you feel will turn this region around. Name your priority: Job Training. Schools. Racial Equality. Business Attraction. And more.

Be a part of the action. Join Northeast Ohio's online dialogues.

September 20 to October 30, 2006.

800-929-2319

www.voiceschoices.org

