

Gary, IN – SEED

Location: Gary, IN

Venue: Indiana University Northwest

Intro to the City, Distinctive Aspects and Demographics:

Gary, Indiana, is located in Lake County, just 25 miles from downtown Chicago. Adjacent to Lake Michigan and the Indiana Dunes National Park, the city has a strong industrial legacy and is home to large steel mills. Founded in 1906 and named after Elbert Henry Gary, a founding chairman of U.S. Steel, the city's industrial roots have shaped its identity. Despite economic challenges, Gary is taking significant steps to revitalize its economy and foster growth through strategic partnerships and investments.

Distinctive Aspects and Demographics: Gary's population of 67,652 is predominantly African American (77.6%), with smaller White (13.1%) and Hispanic/Latino (9.4%) communities. Nearly one-third (32.2%) of residents live in poverty, and the city has a median household income of \$36,874. Despite challenges, 88.2% of residents over 25 have a high school diploma or higher, and 75.7% of households have broadband internet access. Housing is affordable, with a median value of \$81,800. Gary's demographic makeup includes a higher proportion of women (53.4%) and a significant number of young residents, with 27.6% under 18. These factors highlight both opportunities and challenges for local development efforts.

Regional Assets: Gary boasts numerous regional assets that support its economic potential and cultural vitality. Infrastructure such as the Port of Indiana, major interstates, railways, and the Gary/Chicago International Airport positions the city as a critical logistics hub. Expansions like the South Shore Line increase connectivity. Entertainment and tourism assets include the Indiana Dunes National Park, the Gary Air Show, and the RailCats baseball stadium. Additionally, investments such as the Hard Rock Casino and partnerships with businesses like Indiana Sugars are driving economic momentum. These resources provide a strong foundation for revitalizing Gary's economy and enhancing its appeal.

The Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: Gary's entrepreneurial ecosystem is in its formative stages, with growing energy around business development. Key initiatives include the Greater Gary



Business Growth Council and the efforts of Economic Recovery Corps Fellow Eze Redwood. Local organizations are striving to foster entrepreneurship, including teaching these skills to youth, but efforts remain fragmented. Challenges include literacy gaps, limited technology skills, a scarcity mindset, and intense personal pressures. Entrepreneurs often struggle with foundational business knowledge, long-term planning, and creating sustainable models. Indiana University Northwest's Business Academy has long been a cornerstone of entrepreneurial support, and the SEED program aims to strengthen these efforts.

The Poverty and Disadvantage Challenge in Gary: Entrepreneurs in Gary face significant barriers tied to poverty and systemic challenges. Many individuals lack access to basic business and technology skills, face financial literacy gaps, and juggle caregiving responsibilities while working additional jobs. A scarcity mindset limits innovation, with many focusing on grant-funded nonprofits or turning hobbies into businesses without proper planning. Addressing these obstacles will require coordinated support, mentorship, and educational resources to build the confidence and capacity of aspiring entrepreneurs.

Program Management and Annual Cycle: The SEED program, housed within Indiana University Northwest's Business Academy, will launch in summer 2025 under the leadership of Jana Szostek. While focused on Gary, the program will also serve Lake County residents. A unique feature of SEED is its integration of IU Northwest students, helping them pursue entrepreneurial dreams. Local Entrepreneurial Support Organizations will be engaged as mentors, fostering collaboration and growth within the ecosystem. By identifying and supporting emerging entrepreneurs, SEED aims to create a lasting impact on Gary's economic development.

Program Goals: The SEED program aspires to bolster Gary's entrepreneurial ecosystem by empowering local entrepreneurs and cultivating a culture of innovation. It aims to address systemic barriers to entrepreneurship while fostering collaboration among organizations. Through mentorship, education, and strategic partnerships, SEED seeks to create a sustainable foundation for entrepreneurship in Gary, eventually expanding its reach to Northwest Indiana. By leveraging local assets and talent, the program aims to transform challenges into opportunities for long-term economic growth.

