



They Came. They Saw. They Stayed.

LifeinIndy.com shares personal stories to boost city's profile as a desirable place to live and work

When Luke Zhang arrived in the United States, he was 16 years old and bound for a private high school near Orlando, Florida. Born and raised in Wenzhou, China, Zhang chose to make the long journey to Florida to challenge himself academically and “to write my own life story.”

Twelve years later he had a Bachelor of Science degree

from Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Terre Haute, Indiana, and a job as a senior data scientist with a technology firm, Indianapolis-based KSM Consulting (KSMC). He also had purchased a house in the northern Indianapolis suburb of Carmel.

As a Rose-Hulman graduate with majors in computer science, software engineering and mathematics, Zhang was recruited by technology firms on both coasts. But he chose to accept an offer from an Indianapolis start-up firm where he worked for three years before joining KSMC. He had first experienced the city in the summer following his freshman year in college when he was one of the interns (dubbed “X-terns”) hosted by Tech Point, a growth accelerator for Indiana’s technology sector, to introduce technology students to Indianapolis. He had liked it, which led him back.

“When it comes to tech jobs, nobody ever talks about the Midwest,” Zhang says. “The people in the Indianapolis tech community are friendly and accessible. Here people are able to max out their potential.”

Inspired by gratitude for the reception he received in Indianapolis, Zhang volunteers with Indy Chamber’s Project Amplify, a five-year coordinated effort to transform the city’s image locally and globally. As an ‘Indyfluencer,’ Zhang shares his experiences of living and working in the Indianapolis region through LifeinIndy.com, Project Amplify’s search-optimized website.

The site and coordinated social media strategy offer an array of photos, videos and personal stories about the city. In 2020,

Lilly Endowment made a \$2,792,930 grant to the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce Foundation to support Indy Chamber’s Project Amplify. It is the first coordinated effort to provide a single source of information about life in Indianapolis—from neighborhoods and nightlife to cost of living and quality of life.

The LifeinIndy.com website is intended as a recruitment tool for businesses and a relocation resource for individuals and families. What makes the site more than a branding exercise is its personal touch—it features stories from real people like Zhang, who have settled here and are ambassadors for the city.

Research suggests that people who live in the Midwest know a little about Indianapolis, according to Michael Huber, Indy Chamber’s president and chief executive officer. But outside of the Midwest, people have almost no perception of the city. “And no perception can be worse than a negative perception,” Huber adds.

LifeinIndy.com seeks to improve the perception, especially among individuals who are open to building their lives and careers in the Indianapolis region.

● Luke Zhang (below) has such an affinity for Indianapolis that he has become an ‘Indyfluencer’ on the Indy Chamber’s new digital platform, LifeinIndy.com.



About LIFE IN INDY

Imagine a place where passion meets innovation.

That's the Indianapolis region—a place where creators and doers come together to inspire progress and discover solutions. Where our hospitality is only matched by our ambition. And where everyone can find their community in a place they love to call home.



Life in Indy is all about creating the life you want to live. Take a few minutes to explore our region, and you just might realize that Indianapolis is the perfect place for you to grow.

"The Indianapolis region as a cluster of communities has grown significantly in recent years," says Huber, "and its economy is one of the most dynamic in the country, especially in terms of metropolitan areas with a population in the one- to two-million range. There's access to sports, to arts and culture, to an active lifestyle, to community leaders. When people move here, the common reaction is: 'I had no idea all this was here. It's unlike anyplace else I've lived.'"

For years, Indy Chamber had been learning about the need for an information resource from local business leaders. There had been attempts by other organizations and companies to provide relocation resources, but nothing of the scale or magnitude of Project Amplify. Driven by two guiding principles—what the audience needs to hear outweighs what Indy Chamber wants to say and the initiative grows stronger with each additional diverse voice it showcases—the project's aim is to provide an authentic panorama of Indianapolis rather than a rose-colored-glasses snapshot.

To do that, says Joe Pellman, Indy Chamber's executive director of regional image marketing and the leader of Project Amplify, the effort must be coordinated across an array of corporate, civic, cultural, and community organizations. "For this to succeed," says Pellman, "it has to be a collaborative effort."

To develop LifeInIndy.com, Indy Chamber convened a group of regional marketing professionals from businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies to serve as its "Story Board." Additionally, the Chamber sought input from the Talent Summit, a gathering of human resources and recruiting professionals, and members of the Regional Strategy Council, which oversees economic development strategy at Indy Chamber.

Indy Chamber also tapped a variety of other organizations and individuals for their perspectives, including Julie Heath. The executive director of the Speak Easy, the city's first collaborative workspace for entrepreneurs, Heath also is a co-founder of New to Indy, a meet-up group that helps transplants to the city find one another and build personal and professional networks.

Heath helped start the group after she and her husband moved to Indianapolis from Philadelphia in 2016. While her husband's new job brought them to Indy, Heath was trying to figure out how to plug in professionally. Through connections with other newcomers, she tapped into what she called a hidden brain trust: the partners of professionals who moved here for jobs.

● Michael Huber (opposite left) and Joe Pellman (opposite right) lead LifeInIndy.com, a project of the Indy Chamber designed to uncover and share authentic stories about what it is like to live and work in Indianapolis.

It was that brain trust that Heath turned to when Indy Chamber asked her to lead discussions about Project Amplify with Central Indiana stakeholders. The resulting conversations helped Indy Chamber identify three key factors as it designed LifeinIndy.com. Content should:

- **reflect diversity and inclusion**
- **include input from people who had experience relocating to Indianapolis; and**
- **draw on the combined expertise of the project's partners to amplify the stories being told.**

From the beginning, says Pellman, everyone working on the concept knew that the website had to offer visitors an abundance of useful, insightful information obtained from diverse sources and provide a variety of perspectives. “This has to be about both quality and quantity.”

To achieve both aims, the website was designed to be user-friendly and information rich. From the home page, a visitor can select from four major categories: Community, Things to Do, Career Opportunities, and About. Each category contains multiple subject headings. Under Community, for example, are education, find your neighborhood, cost of living and transportation. Written content and photography are augmented by video to help tell stories within each of the categories.

As suggested by Heath's working group, diversity and inclusion are essential elements of those stories.

“We're making an effort to tell ethnically diverse stories,” says Huber, “as well as stories from LGBTQ residents.”

While it encompasses a variety of topics, LifeinIndy.com isn't the final word on any of them. The website links to other content, including websites for Indyhub, 16 Tech, Indy Black Millennials, TechPoint and the Network of Women in Business.

LifeinIndy.com complements the city's other major online resource designed to attract people to the city, VisitIndy.com. A product of the Indianapolis' tourism agency Visit Indy, VisitIndy.com is focused on promoting the city to tourists and convention planners.

“That's a great resource, but the city deserves to have a residential equivalent,” says Shelly Towns, the chief marketing officer for Marathon Health, primary care platform. Towns, who formerly worked for Angie's List, says competing for talent in the technology and healthcare sectors requires selling Indianapolis as a viable alternative to other cities. “There hasn't been a coordinated effort to market Indy at scale on the talent side. That's what Life in Indy represents. It's a way to brand our city in a differentiated way and tell that story consistently.”

Another Indyfluencer who stepped up to share her story is Lisa Anderson. Originally from Denver, she has lived in Indianapolis twice—the first time in 2001 when her boyfriend (now husband) accepted a job with Eli Lilly and Company. Moving from Austin, Texas, they stayed for nine years before relocating to Southern California. In 2012, they returned to Indianapolis, this time voluntarily because her husband had transitioned to consulting and they were free to live anywhere they wanted. “We liked Indianapolis, so we chose to come back,” says Anderson, who works for the Indiana Public Employees Retirement Fund.

But the first few months after her 2001 arrival, Anderson kept asking herself, “How long do we have to stay here?” Gradually, she got her bearings. “After we had kids,” she says, “we got really comfortable because we connected with other families.”

As someone who didn't settle into Indianapolis right away, Anderson is uniquely positioned to connect with reluctant relocators. Compared to other cities, she says, Indianapolis is underrated. “Living here is easy. There's something for everyone.”

According to Pellman, the success of LifeinIndy.com will be determined by multiple indicators: the amount of traffic the website attracts, the number of people with postsecondary credentials who move to the Indianapolis area, the number of employers using the site and resource library as part of their recruitment efforts, and the number of visitors to the site who contact an Indyfluencer.

Luke Zhang is happy to connect with those virtual visitors. “I'm passionate about promoting Indianapolis,” he says. “The city has been good to me, and I want to give back.”



**Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow Initiative
Strengthens Leadership and Addresses
Communities' Most Pressing Needs**

GIFT VII





Traditionally, we've played a supporting role in community issues, but GIFT VII was the catalyst we needed to step into a leadership role that was desperately needed.

— Clayton Boyles, executive director of the Dubois County Community Foundation.

In 2020, the community foundation in south central Indiana was one of 11 foundations in the state to receive a large-scale leadership grant through the competitive component of the seventh phase of Lilly Endowment's Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (GIFT) initiative.

Through its GIFT initiative, the Endowment has encouraged Indiana community foundations to seek input broadly from the residents in their communities to identify and prioritize compelling needs and opportunities and then to work with community stakeholders to develop and fund strategies to address those needs and opportunities.

Through the seventh phase of the initiative—GIFT VII—the Endowment provided \$125.6 million in grants to help build upon the momentum and successes community foundations achieved in the initiative's earlier phases. GIFT VII provided multiple funding opportunities, including planning grants, matching fund grants, board engagement grants, community leadership grants and large-scale leadership grants. GIFT VII, which began in 2018 and wrapped up in 2020, was designed to help community foundations strengthen their leadership competencies and their financial conditions.

GIFT VII planning grants totaling \$5.6 million helped foundations to connect with and convene broad cross sections of their communities to research, identify and better understand the highest priority challenges and opportunities affecting residents. "The planning grant was an important piece of the exploration process," says Clayton Boyles, executive director of the Dubois County Community Foundation (below). "We thought we were going in one direction, but our research took us in another. It was a pivotal part of the learning process, giving us time and resources to gain more understanding that helped us make better informed decisions."

Dubois County in southern Indiana, like many other communities across the state, is feeling the impact of substance abuse and addiction and unaddressed mental health

● The Community Foundation of St. Joseph County is using a GIFT VII grant to strengthen its 21st Century Scholars Initiative, which supports students like Quentez Columbus (with school counselor Gaye Johnson), who are working to reach their higher education goals.



AT A GLANCE

Lilly Endowment created GIFT in 1990 to help local communities in Indiana develop the philanthropic capacity to identify and address local needs and challenges. When GIFT began, there were about a dozen Indiana community foundations. Today, there are 94 community foundations and affiliate funds making grants to support local charitable organizations in all of Indiana's 92 counties. The combined community foundation assets have grown from \$100 million in 1990 to \$4 billion at the end of 2019 (\$3.2 billion for those foundations that have regularly participated in GIFT).

issues. “Lilly Endowment charged us with addressing a complex, deep issue affecting our community,” Boyles says. “The breadth and depth of the challenge of substance abuse are evident in the ripple effect it has on our community.”

Employers are facing workforce shortages. Child protective services is seeing an increase in caseloads. The criminal justice system is struggling with repeat offenders who are not receiving behavioral health treatment. As a result, overall quality of life in the county is diminished, according to Boyles.

Following the GIFT VII planning period, foundations were invited to apply for a second round of funding to help them play a leading role in addressing the priorities they identified through the planning grant process. Through the process of applying for a planning grant and a

leadership grant, the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County in northern Indiana was able to better understand the county’s high rates of generational poverty and below-average median household income. As a recipient of a large-scale leadership grant, the foundation received \$4 million to support the creation and implementation of the 21st Century Scholar Success Initiative.

● Shala George (with high school counselor Kristin Gaines) is preparing to enroll at Indiana University with the support of the 21st Century Scholars Initiative in St. Joseph County. ● Students Cesar Cervera, Kylie Kruger (with advisor Kathy Miller), Forest Wallace and Quentez Columbus are 21st Century Scholars taking part in St. Joseph County programs to help them achieve higher education success (next page).





Through the initiative, St. Joseph County leaders are working to double the number of local 8th grade students enrolled in the 21st Century Scholars program, a statewide effort to help ensure that every Hoosier student can access a college education. With its new initiative, the community foundation will provide mentoring and other support to help students complete college and launch promising careers. The foundation is partnering with leaders in K-12 education, higher education, economic development and social services to design and implement the initiative.

"We know that improving educational attainment is the only reliable path out of poverty," said Rose Meissner (above), president of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County. "Every additional level of education correlates to higher income and more secure employment. And so many causes our community cares about correlate with higher income, including better health outcomes, more active civic engagement, improved parenting, reduced incarceration and higher rates of home ownership."

Under round two of GIFT VII, the Endowment made grants totaling \$11.25 million to 85 community foundations serving 89 Indiana counties. The grants are funding a wide range of priorities, from improving educational attainment to strengthening economic and workforce development efforts, transportation plans and health outcomes.

A third round of grants was competitive. The Endowment encouraged foundations to consider what kind of large-scale leadership projects could make a significant difference in their communities. The Endowment made 11 grants in this round totaling \$33.5 million to address a variety of priorities, including heritage preservation and revitalization efforts, mental health and addiction recovery needs, affordable housing and workforce development, among others.

In connection with its large-scale leadership grant, Dubois County Community Foundation has developed a broad coalition of 40 community members and stakeholders committed to improving access to services that address mental health needs and substance abuse disorders.

"Our vision is a community with effective resources to holistically rehabilitate and provide treatment and support to those in need of behavioral health services. Our hope is that anyone in our community can access services that address mental health and substance abuse disorders if and when they want help," Boyles says. "We also hope that Dubois County can be a leader in our region to help improve access in our neighboring counties."



Organizers are gathering input from a wide variety of stakeholders to identify greatest needs and build trust.

In August 2020, the National Urban League announced the creation of the Indianapolis African American Quality of Life Initiative, a place-based effort to address decades of disparities in education, employment, housing, health outcomes and economic well-being that have affected African Americans in Indianapolis.

Funded by a \$100 million Lilly Endowment grant to the National Urban League, the initiative is designed to encourage collaboration between the National Urban League, the Indianapolis Urban League

“This initiative represents a historic opportunity to build a model for other communities to emulate,” said National Urban League President and CEO Marc H. Morial when the grant was announced. “The economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has wrought unprecedented destruction on Black urban communities, many of which never recovered from the Great Recession, and it will take an unprecedented approach to rebuild and revitalize them. This initiative will seek to combine the resources, infrastructure, expertise and passion of the Indianapolis public, private and civic institutions in a way that could have a profound effect not only on Indianapolis’ economic future, but also on the national recovery.”

Data about life in Indianapolis reflect inequality experienced by Black residents that can have a cascading effect on educational attainment, employment opportunities and economic security and mobility. According to IUL:

Initiative Focuses on Quality of Life in Indianapolis’ Black Community

(IUL) and the African American Coalition of Indianapolis (the Coalition). Together, the organizations are working to identify areas of greatest need and the programs, policies and other ventures that will make meaningful improvements in the daily lives and future prospects of Black residents in Indianapolis. Through the initiative, the National Urban League will make grants in Indianapolis to support the most promising efforts—including collaborations—designed to lead to lasting change.

- **Twenty-eight percent of Indianapolis’ 250,000 Black residents live in poverty.**
- **Homeownership among Black residents in Indianapolis declined from 46 percent in 2007 (before the start of the Great Recession) to 31 percent in 2020.**
- **An estimated 82,000 Black Indianapolis residents live in food deserts—neighborhoods with low access to healthy, affordable food.**
- **Seventy percent of Black students in Indianapolis fail to pass K-12 standardized tests.**



It is against this backdrop that the initiative is taking shape. During the early months of the five-year grant period, the initiative has been focused on gathering input from a broad cross section of Indianapolis' diverse Black community. The goals of that outreach: refine the priorities IUL and the Coalition have framed for the initiative—education, employment, affordable housing and homeownership, health and wellness and business development and entrepreneurship—and build buy-in and trust.

IUL's president and CEO Anthony Mason and the Coalition's chairman Willis K. Bright Jr. are co-managers of the initiative. Working with two Indianapolis consulting firms—Engaging Solutions LLC and Karlin J & Associates—initiative leaders have connected with approximately 700 people during community conversations and one-on-one interviews with stakeholders. They include leaders in education, employment, community development, neighborhood revitalization, public health and religious life. Also part of the process was the dispatch of 'community ambassadors' who have reached out to individuals, families and organizations from neighborhoods that were underrepresented in community meetings and stakeholder conversations. For this initiative to be successful, according to Mason, people from diverse generations, economic backgrounds and geographic locations across the city need to be heard.

"At this moment in time, the reach has to be more than the usual suspects. Because if you talk to emerging leaders or individuals who have felt like they have been excluded in the past, they will tell you their concerns have not been represented," he says. "They have not been heard."

Participants span five generations, from the young adults of Generation Z to the so-called Silent Generation in their 70s and 80s. They come from different parts of the city, spanning high-poverty neighborhoods to affluent suburbs. And those who are connected with civic and community organizations represent a spectrum of groups: long-established ones such as Indiana Black Expo and the Indianapolis NAACP and newer grassroots organizations, including Purpose 4 My Pain, which supports individuals affected by gun violence, and Circle Up Indy, an economic empowerment organization based in the Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood.

Participants are bringing different perspectives about what life is like in this city. "This initiative needs all of their perspectives—and more—to be successful," Mason says.

Bright adds that if the initiative improves opportunities for Black residents, the whole city will benefit. For example, he suggests that efforts to support greater academic achievement among Black students can lead to educational improvements in Indianapolis that will make a difference in the lives of all students.

"Improving the condition of any sector that has been marginalized in the community will have positive ripple effects," Bright says. "As people's lives become better, they have far better opportunities and are more inclined to contribute to the greater community."

By the end of summer 2021, initiative leaders plan to issue the initiative's first round of requests for proposals. They anticipate that initial grants will be made by year's end.

As important as grants will be to help improve lives in Indianapolis, Mason believes that the initiative has another objective: developing a culture of trust so that hope can flourish.

"We want this initiative to foster a sense of hope and aspiration so that people can be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that are to come," Mason says. "I believe this process we're embarking on can go a long way in creating that sense of trust. Trust leads to hope and a good faith belief that something better is on the horizon, something better than what people have experienced to date."

AT A GLANCE

National Urban League: Founded in 1910 and headquartered in New York City, the National Urban League is a civil rights organization whose mission is to help African Americans and others in underserved communities achieve social parity, economic self-reliance and civil rights. It promotes economic empowerment through education, improving access to housing, community development, workforce development, entrepreneurship, health and quality of life.

Indianapolis Urban League: Established in 1965 as an affiliate of the National Urban League, the Indianapolis Urban League is a non-partisan, community-based social services and civil rights organization with a mission to help African Americans and other disadvantaged people achieve social and economic equality. Lilly Endowment has made grants to the Indianapolis Urban League since 1967, supporting various programs, including those focused on education, workforce development and youth.

African American Coalition of Indianapolis: Founded in 2000, the African American Coalition of Indianapolis is a non-partisan collaboration of African-American civic, social, professional, service and community organizations working to strengthen the engagement of African Americans in civic life and in the local, state and national political process.

● Anthony Mason (left) and Willis K. Bright Jr. are co-managers of the Indianapolis African American Quality of Life Initiative.

Memorial Salutes Those Who Served in the 'Great War'

As the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, historians looked for lessons from a century earlier when the planet was gripped by the 1918 influenza pandemic. World War I loomed large in that retrospective, as the earlier pandemic spread widely when the soldiers of many nations returned home from battlefields in Europe and northern Africa.



The World War I Centennial Commission weathered pandemic-related construction delays in 2020 to make significant progress on the first national memorial located in Washington, D.C., that will honor U.S. soldiers who served in the Great War. The \$50 million project, being funded largely by private donations, is supported by a \$5 million Lilly Endowment grant approved in 2019.



World War I was of particular significance to the Endowment's founders, as J.K. Lilly Jr. (above) served as an officer in the medical supply service in France during the war. J.K. Jr. was one of the nearly 5 million Americans who served during U.S. involvement in the war.

The memorial is being developed in Pershing Park (below) located on Pennsylvania Avenue near the White House. A focal point will be a 58.5-foot-long bronze sculpture (center) depicting the journey of one emblematic soldier as he departs home, serves on the battlefield and returns from the front. From his New Jersey studio during 2020, artist

Sabin Howard continued work on the project, sculpting in clay the first 11 of 38 figures that will be featured in the bas-relief wall. The figures will be cast in bronze at a foundry in England and returned to the United States for a planned installation at the memorial site in 2024.

