Grant lets IU’s go-to guys keep us informed

John Krauss often gets the call when it comes to meshing research with public policy. The director of Indiana University’s Public Policy Institute and its Center for Urban Policy and the Environment has spent the past 15 years “making information understandable to decision makers.”

Today, the Lilly Endowment will grant the centers $2 million. Clearly the endowment believes in the work. The new grant brings the endowment’s total commitment to the centers to $20 million since 1992.

Indiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Randall Shepard and former Gov. Joe Kernan made the call to Krauss when Gov. Mitch Daniels tapped them to examine the state’s governmental structure. Krauss led the behind-the-scenes work that led to the Kernan-Shepard report that will guide the debate on government consolidation.

Indianapolis mayors back to Bill Hudnut, for whom Krauss worked, have used his research. Mayor Greg Ballard most recently tapped the IU centers to help with distributing a $39 million federal grant to alleviate problems caused by foreclosures and abandoned homes.

“John’s team provides historical and current data to match with the city’s, and they are able to translate it into a visual that everyone can understand,” said Moira Caristadt, president of the Indianapolis Neighborhood Housing Partnership. “Then we’re able to work as a community to make strategic decisions.”

Translational research is the buzz phrase for what the centers do. Krauss defines it as “taking complex issues, researching them until we understand them, and then identifying what the choices are for policymakers.”

The latest grant, Krauss said, “allows us to be relevant.” That relevance has been counted on by more than 200 state and local agencies and universities looking to remain relevant themselves.