



# STATE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

## Central Region

### BACKGROUND

Since 1999, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (formerly The Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs) and public universities including University of Illinois at Springfield have been collaborating with business, government and civic leaders throughout Illinois to *"establish a consensus on a long term economic development strategy cognizant of the competitive position of the state's regions and the needs of commerce and industry."* State and Regional Development Strategy Act, 20 ILCS 695.

During calendar year 2000, the second year of the project, the five university partners surveyed over 29,000 individuals by direct mail and spoke with 950 participants at 19 summit meetings held around the state. From the surveys and summit meetings, a common set of 15 strategic goals and 40 development objectives were articulated.

In 2001, year three, the university partners held an additional 47 meetings in the 11 regions of the state where more than 1,100 stakeholders participated, contributing 4,004 volunteer hours to brainstorming strategies to achieve development objectives. The universities catalogued over 430 project suggestions for improving the economic characteristics of the regions and the state. About half of these programmatic, administrative, and legislative (PAL) strategies were judged suitable, feasible, and acceptable for implementation, contingent on the availability of

implementation financing. In the end, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity identified and supported 45 of the suggested projects. Projects that were funded were projects that build the capacity of development organizations regionally and statewide.

In 2002, the fourth year of this five-year process, the majority of efforts were focused on managing projects to completion. Projects that were implemented served to increase the knowledge base, document innovative practices/techniques, promote professional development, and shape institutional structure. These efforts built on the priorities identified through stakeholder participation with the statewide questionnaire as well as at the regional summits, designed to support local efforts while fostering a sense of regional partnership among participants.

This coming final year of Five Year State and Regional Development Strategy will focus on various projects that continue to enhance regional capacity building priorities such as workforce and economic development interfaces, ongoing regional capacity building related to previously identified stakeholder priorities. In addition, new summit meetings will assess if other priorities have emerged that need to be addressed in future years of this planning process.

### THE REGION

The fourteen county [Cass, Christian, Dewitt, Greene, Logan, Macon, Macoupin, Menard, Montgomery, Morgan, Moultrie, Sangamon, Scott, and Shelby counties] Central Illinois Region is an expanse of farmland, punctuated by several small, commercial centers and two metro counties (Sangamon and Macon) that serve as anchors for the region's economy. Over one-half of the region's population resides in Sangamon and Macon counties and they are home to the two largest cities, Springfield and Decatur, respectively. The secondary commercial centers with populations of 10,000 or more



are Jacksonville, Taylorville and Lincoln. Key characteristics of the region include:

**Industry Clusters:** As the region’s manufacturing base eroded in the 1970’s and 1980’s, the service sector grew. Between 1970 and 2000, the service sector added nearly 40,000 jobs—expanding the share of regional employment from 17.8% to 28.3%. Farm income remains important in several of the region’s counties, and agriculture and manufacturing sections remained two of the strong export sectors.

**Population:** The fourteen counties in the Central Illinois Region have a population density of 74.6 persons per square mile, about one-third the state average. Sangamon and Macon counties are the exception with densities very near the state average of 217 persons per square mile. Since 1900, the region’s population has grown by 41.2%. Over 90% of the population gains occurred in Sangamon County while most rural counties lost population or remained near the 1900 level. Between 1990 and 1999, population increased only 2.6%. Nearly 90% of that growth occurred in Sangamon County. Most rural counties had modest population gains and Macon had a 3.4% loss.

**Labor Force:** The regional labor force is growing at a sluggish pace, 7.2% since 1977. This rate, should it continue, may be inadequate to provide for the needs of an expanding economy. By the year 2020, the region’s employment–workforce–demand will be greater than the population. This suggests the need for the identification and implementation of creative workforce development strategies within the region. Further workers in rural areas are more likely than ever to commute to a job in a metro county. In 1990, one third of the workers in rural counties commuted to a job in another county. Part of this increase in the proportion of workers commuting is due to new business formations. The rate of new business formation is four times higher in metro counties than in rural areas.

**Education:** Regional educational attainment rates for high school and college are below the Illinois average. Sangamon is the only county that has high school and college attainment above the Illinois average.

**Income:** Per capita incomes across the region are well below the Illinois average and are growing more slowly.

In 1997, the regional per capita income was only 81.4% of the Illinois standard, down from 88.9% in 1970.

## **VISION/PRIORITIES STATEMENT**

A vision statement provides the ideal characteristics for the region. Regional stakeholders, including business, civic, and government leaders developed the vision for the Central region in spring 2000. The vision statement is based on experience and expertise of these regional participants and describes their ideal regional economy of the future.

The Central region of Illinois will be a place that is characterized by informed, effective and progressive leadership for economic development within the region; a skilled workforce capable of responding to labor market demands; vibrant, attractive and clean downtowns and central city areas within the region’s communities; a strong regional identity; a diverse economic base that makes maximum use of the region’s natural resources; effective working relations between the public and business sector leaders; “cutting-edge” regional telecommunications capabilities and capacities; a global perspective on business; a strong interest in the preservation of farmland and the promotion of sustainable growth strategies; and a high level quality of life within the region. As a result of the vision, participants anticipate that the region will work together to provide effective, responsive and efficient government at all levels; mechanisms to maximize public input and dialogue on important issues; a highly effective education system that graduates students with the requisite skills and educational abilities to meet the changing workforce market demands; a well-planned and efficient transportation system; affordable housing; accessible and efficient health care services; a strong network of social support and other social services; access to business start-up and venture capital; and high quality arts and cultural facilities, programming and services.

## **REGIONAL STRATEGIES**

In 2001, summit meetings were held in the Central region to discuss what regional actions are needed to support the regional vision statement. Participants

developed and then prioritized strategic goals and objectives.

**Goal: Business Retention and Expansion—Be responsive to businesses and entrepreneurial development needs.**

- Conduct regional promotion of area amenities for basic employment through adopting national database standards, and mapping and disseminating information for the region.
- Actively promote availability of investment funds and information for entrepreneurs.

**Goal: Reengineer Government-- Adopt Modern Business Practices in Government**

- Disseminate information (publications, websites, CDs/videos) about best practices and models of public/private partnerships.

**Goal: Human Capital Development--Enhance Workforce Development**

- Design a model work-skill partnership and implement it in the region.
- Create partnerships between business and school designed to support local efforts while fostering a sense of regional partnership among participants.

**Goal: Build basic workforce skills**

- Create and fund career counselors in public schools.

**Goal: Coordinate regional land uses and balanced growth**

- Support the continued development of clean coal technology

**Goal: Promote advanced broadband and wireless technology**

- Rural areas can seek the assistance of organizations like Rural Partners to provide advocacy assistance in attracting high-speed telecommunications access in local communities, where the demand is not high enough to attract high-speed companies.

- Conduct a community technology needs assessment in small communities to help drive technology advancement by suppliers.

**PROJECTS AND CAPACITY BUILDING**

To encourage regional leadership to address regional issues, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the University of Illinois at Springfield have partnered to provide brokering/advocacy, grant administration or offer technical assistance in support of the Central region's strategies. Projects that were funded were projects that build on the priorities identified at the regional summits and are designed to support local efforts while fostering a sense of regional partnership among participants. The outputs of the projects address Central Illinois issues and are useful to the region and other regions with similar economic development issues. These projects and outputs, along with the strategic goal they address are described in the table below.

Another goal of these projects has been *capacity building*—specifically to bring people in the region together to build capacity for regional cooperation and development. By creating linkages within the region through these activities, show how organizations can achieve more by working together. Tangible capacity building results from these projects include:

- Formed central Illinois network of economic development professionals, local government officials and citizens.
- Developed functioning community development team between Abraham Lincoln Center for Governmental Studies at UIS and University of Illinois Extension and Illinois Chamber.
- Grants management seminar.
- Developed faculty and doctoral student expertise on regional economic development and Central Illinois economic development issues.
- Websites focused on economic development issues in Central Illinois.

## Central Illinois Projects Descriptions, Strategic Goal and Outputs

Year	Project	Strategic Goal of Region	Outputs
2002	Business Plan for Development Finance	<b><i>Business Retention and Expansion</i></b> — Actively promote availability of investment funds and information for entrepreneurs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business plan for development finance organizations</li> <li>• Clearing house for information regarding capital investment organizations</li> </ul>
2002	Public-Private Partnership Best Practices	<b><i>Adopt modern business practices in government</i></b> -deliver innovative public services public/private partnership best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report on best practice criteria for evaluating public/private partnerships</li> <li>• Survey of economic development public/private partnerships</li> </ul>
2003	Digital Government Assessment	<b><i>Adopt Modern Business Practices in Government</i></b> -- facilitate information sharing and technical assistance among governments in the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey results of digital government in Illinois</li> <li>• Resource book on digital government</li> </ul>
2003	Research Statistics for Development Planning	<b><i>Business Retention and Expansion</i></b> — Conduct regional promotion of area amenities for basic employment through adopting national database standards and mapping/ disseminating information for the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CD containing statistics for development planning for the region and each county.</li> <li>• Case studies of research-based planning approach.</li> <li>• Handbook on research-base planning process.</li> </ul>
2003	Data Standards Software	<b><i>Business Retention and Expansion</i></b> — Conduct regional promotion of area amenities for basic employment through adopting national database standards and mapping/ disseminating information for the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report on data standards for Illinois counties</li> </ul>

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The project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of the report may be obtained by contacting:

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