



# STATE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

## East 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 and the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign's Laboratory for Community Development 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

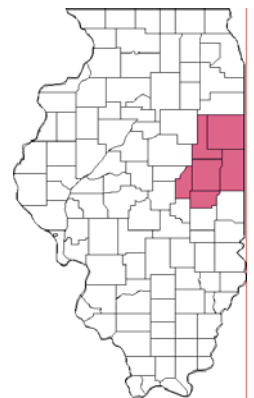
judged suitable, feasible, and acceptable for implementation, contingent on the availability of implementation financing. In the end, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity identified and supported 45 of the suggested projects. Projects that were funded were projects that build 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 six county [Champaign, Douglas, Ford, Iroquois, Piatt and Vermillion counties] East Central Illinois region is a sparsely populated area of 4,356 square miles. The population density of 77 persons per square mile is slightly more than one-third of the Illinois average of 217 persons per square mile. Champaign county is home to more than half of the region's population. Only two other cities, Danville and Rantoul, have populations greater than 10,000. Key characteristics of the region include:



**Industry Clusters:** Since 1970, the service sector, centered in Champaign County, has displaced government as the leading source of employment. Employment in the service sector has doubled since 1970. The manufacturing sector is relatively healthy and growing modestly. The region has more manufacturing establishments today than in the mid-1970s and employment is increasing. Nearly all of the growth is occurring in Champaign County, which has added over 4,000 manufacturing jobs since 1976. The trade sector has experienced modest growth in earnings, but has enjoyed substantial growth in employment, where it is second only to the service sector. Agriculture continues to be an important part of the economy, especially in the rural counties. The agricultural service sector is growing moderately while employment in farming is declining. Earnings in this sector are somewhat volatile and represent less than five percent for total regional income.

**Population:** The region has been characterized by slow growth for at least the last two decades. Between 1990 and 2000, the population grew by 1.2%, with none of the counties experiencing a population growth even comparable to the over 6% increase in population for the state. Some counties experienced population decreases—Vermillion county lost over 4,300 residents (a 4.9% decrease) between 1990 and 2000. Population projections for the region indicate modest growth rates similar to those projected for the State. Champaign County is projected to be the growth center for the region. The presence of the University of Illinois creates an unusually youthful age profile for the area with a median age well below the Illinois average. The rural counties are more typical of smaller downstate counties with large proportions of persons 65 years and older.

**Labor Force:** In 1999 the regional labor force numbered 179,243, an increase of 8.7% over 1977 when the labor force numbered 164,914. Most notable are losses of 13% in Vermillion County and 16.3% in Ford County. Both counties experienced significant losses in basic industries and population in the 1970s and 1980s. The labor force in Champaign County grew 27.4%, an increase of over 20,000. Ninety percent of all job growth went to Champaign County residents between

1970 and 2000. An increasing share of the regional labor force commutes to Champaign County for employment.

**Education:** Educational attainment rates are skewed by the University of Illinois presence in the region. The proportion of adults with high school and college diplomas is equal to the state and significantly higher than most rural areas. Champaign County is second only to DuPage County in the proportion of adults with college degrees.

**Income:** Per capita incomes have lagged behind Illinois in recent years. Income in the region is about 80% of the Illinois average income. Farm income remains important in Ford, Iroquois, and Piatt counties, but has little influence in counties with better developed service, manufacturing, and trade sectors.

## **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 East 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.

## **REGIONAL STRATEGIES**

In 2001, summit meetings were held in the East Central region to discuss what regional actions are needed to support the regional vision statement. Participants developed and then prioritized strategic goals and objectives.

A principal focus for the summit was brainstorming ideas and suggestions—programmatic, administrative or legislative actions—that would enable economic development in the region. Summit participants were divided into three groups to discuss actions that were needed at the regional level. Building on the prior year's process, the three groups focused on regionalism, sustainable development, and workforce development. A key expectation of the entire economic development strategy process was that the summits would build

## East Central Region Vision Statement

*The East Central region of Illinois will be a place that is characterized by employers who offer solid benefit packages to recruit and retain employees and training programs to empower workers to bring needed skills to the workplace; a quality of life that attracts former residents back to the region; an integrated economy that includes “low tech” workforce; and an educated workforce that includes those basic skills, technical skills and college educations; and local school districts that are less reliant on property taxes. The area will have an equitable distribution of benefits and geographically and socially; a workforce that is prepared and ready, through job training in place (basic job skills, life skills), just-in-time training and continuing education; an infrastructure that includes transportation, technology and communications across the region, moving workers to jobs and providing connections to metro areas; value-added manufacturing and development opportunities resulting from public/private partnerships; a diversified local economy that blends the “old economy” with the “new economy;” and institutions and government entities that are responsive to economic development opportunities. It will also have a regional (multi-county) approach to promoting business opportunities and the quality of life of the area; a modern, high quality infrastructure in counties outside Champaign County, particularly as to technology, energy, communications and transportation; and incentives for businesses to adopt new technologies. Finally, the East Central Region will have local crime and public safety; a strong public transportation system; involved and informed citizens; a high quality of life that includes diversity, accessibility, the arts, restaurants, services, education, transportation, parks and recreational activities; managed and planned growth; an equitable local tax base that supports both retention of existing businesses and attracts new and balanced growth; accessible and affordable housing with a high prevalence of home ownership; and preserved prime farmland and communities that are stewards of the environment.*

cohesion among the region's public and private leaders. The discussions would develop regional actions that would serve as ‘springboards’ in encouraging regionally oriented economic development. Some of the ideas included the following:

### **Goal: Promote technology transfer and commercialization efforts**

- Strengthen the partnership between local business/industry/local government and the University of Illinois research park to create an environment for more business locations in east central Illinois.

### **Goal: Support retention of Illinois’ diverse base of firms**

- Develop a strong retention program that provides services to existing businesses to help them compete.
- Provide training/retraining for employment.

- Develop a regional marketing plan that will educate business on current resources available to them in the region.

### **Goal: Adopt modern business practices in government, including digital technology**

- Assess and inventory what local governments are doing regarding e-government.
- Create regional forums to pool resources and coordinate activities.
- Provide funds to local governments to improve e-government initiatives and fund leadership programs.

### **Goal: Support regional coordination and cooperation among development organizations**

- Use the six-county region as a base to develop broader regional initiatives.

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

- The University of Illinois should organize workshops to help each county plan for preserving agricultural lands.
- Implement land-use zoning regulations on drainage, development of easements, residential development and property rights.
- Outline requirements and guidelines for small communities.

**PROJECTS AND CAPACITY BUILDING**

To encourage regional leadership to address regional issues, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the University of Illinois at Springfield and the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign’s Laboratory for Community Development have partnered to provide brokering/advocacy, grant administration or offer technical assistance in support of the East 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 East 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 east 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 and East Central Illinois.

**East Central Illinois Projects Descriptions, Strategic Goal and Outputs**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Project</b>                                   | <b>Strategic Goal of Region</b>  | <b>Outputs</b>  |
|-------------|--|--|---|
| 2002        | Telecommunications 101 Seminar                   | <i>Adopt modern business practices in government, including digital technology</i>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sponsored local resident attendance at professional conference on telecommunications</li> </ul>        |
| 2002        | Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Needs | <i>Adopt modern business practices in government, including digital technology</i>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of needs in region.</li> <li>• Survey instrument</li> </ul>                                 |
| 2002        | Regional Advisory Board                          | <i>Support regional coordination and cooperation among development organizations</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional council established</li> <li>• Region information summit held</li> </ul>                      |
| 2003        | Community Economic Development Tool Website      | <i>Support regional coordination and cooperation among development organizations</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website with tools for strategic planning</li> <li>• Interactive site for community sharing</li> </ul> |

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The Institute for Legal, Administrative and Policy Studies (ILAPS) is part of The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Center for Governmental Studies is a public policy center of the University of Illinois at Springfield. ILAPS helps government entities develop and implement effective policies and programs; and focuses research and service efforts on state, regional, and national legal systems.

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

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