



GROW GRAND ISLAND

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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INTRODUCTION

As part of the community's ongoing efforts to make Grand Island and the surrounding region as attractive and supportive as possible for small business growth, existing business expansions, and new business relocations, a diverse group of partners including the Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation, the Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, and the Grand Island/Hall County Convention and Visitors Bureau have initiated a process – *Grow Grand Island* – to further enhance the business development initiatives in the area. This process will result in a new, holistic Business Development Strategy that will help the community and the aforementioned partners focus business development resources in a manner that maximizes efficiency and effectiveness, enhances prospects for quality growth, and increases well-being for business and workers.

This document represents the second complete draft of this Business Development Strategy. Over the course of the coming months, this Strategy and its recommendations will be reviewed and finalized by the *Grow Grand Island* Steering Committee. Work on the final phase of the process, the Implementation Plan, will begin shortly thereafter. While the Business Development Strategy addresses "what" Grand Island as a community seeks to pursue to enhance its business development activities, the Implementation Plan will define "how" the community and the various organizations engaged in business development will collectively and collaboratively implement the Strategy. Specifically, the forthcoming Implementation Plan will delineate organizational roles and responsibilities, required partnerships to support effective and collaborative implementation, resource requirements (staff and financial), and metrics for gauging return on investment in the recommendations included in this Business Development Strategy.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The roughly eight-month, four-phase research and strategic planning process will be informed by extensive resident and business input gathered via focus groups, interviews, a community survey, and steering committee guidance.

PHASE I: COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT

The Competitive Assessment provides a detailed examination of Grand Island's competitiveness as a place to live, work, visit, and do business. It leverages quantitative and qualitative research (including focus groups and a community survey), and will highlight the key "stories" facing Grand Island as it seeks to support existing businesses, attract new businesses, and encourage entrepreneurship. Collectively, these stories highlight the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges as identified by resident and business input and key demographic, socioeconomic, and economic trends. The community's competitiveness is benchmarked against three communities with which the area competes for both jobs and workers.

PHASE II: TARGET SECTOR ANALYSIS & MARKETING REVIEW

The Target Sector Analysis provides a detailed examination of the community's economic composition, identifying those business sectors which have the greatest potential to create new jobs and elevate standards of living in the community, focusing limited economic development resources on those opportunities that are likely to provide the greatest return on investment for the community, its businesses, and its workers. The accompanying Marketing Review analyzes the existing economic and community marketing efforts of the EDC, CVB, and Chamber to identify any areas for improvement.

PHASE III: BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The third phase of the process brings together the findings from the first two phases to create a holistic, consensus-based Business Development Strategy to guide collaborative initiatives that support existing business growth, encourage entrepreneurship, and increase the community's competitiveness for new corporate investment. Strategic recommendations will be driven by the research findings – both qualitative and quantitative input. Examples of best practice programs, policies, and initiatives from communities around the country will also be included to help inform strategic recommendations and their subsequent implementation.

PHASE IV: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The final phase of the strategic planning process is the development of an Implementation Plan that supports the effective and efficient implementation of the Business Development Strategy's various recommendations. The Implementation Plan will examine the capacity of the EDC, CVB, and Chamber to effectively implement the Business Development Strategy and will identify lead implementers, key partners, potential costs, and timelines for implementation for each recommendation. Performance metrics for gauging the effectiveness of implementation efforts will also be included.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The strategic planning process is guided by a Steering Committee of representatives from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. These individuals will oversee the entire planning effort, help identify strategic priorities for Grand Island, build consensus, and serve as public advocates for the betterment of Grand Island and its community, business, economic, and workforce development. The following individuals have volunteered their time to serve on the Steering Committee.

Committee Member	Representing Organization
Brandi Bosselman Lofing (co-chair)	Bosselman Holdings
Don Smith (co-chair)	The Grand Island Independent
Amos Anson	The Chocolate Bar
Carlos Barcenas	Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services
Tonja Broadwell	Kelly Supply
Chuck Cooper	Crane Trust Nature & Visitors Center
Nathan DeLaet	Rodeway Inn
Dr. Robin Dexter	Grand Island Public Schools
Barb Engberg	Live Well Physical Therapy
Matt Fisher	Grand Island Northwest Public Schools
Peg Gilbert	Grand Island City Council
Jay Gnuse	Chief Industries, Inc.
Kurt Haecker	Home Federal Bank
John Hoggatt	First National Bank - Grand Island
Dr. Chad Hudnall	Family Eye Care
Bill Hunter	Syngenta Seeds
Jay Kaspar	INSUR Inc.
Dave Koubek	Chief Industries, Inc.
Matt Maser	Five Points Bank
Joseph McDermott	Nebraska State Fair
Dan McElligott	Saint Francis Hospital
Mark Miller	Eakes Office Plus
Ray O'Connor	O'Connor Enterprises
Mike Olson	Central Nebraska Regional Airport
Justin Oseka	Oseka Homes
Kirk Palmer	Pioneer Hy-Bred
Angela Reynolds	Central Community College
Dave Richardson	Equitable Bank
Tammy Slater	Goodwill Industries
Mike Swanson	Hall County Convention & Visitors Bureau
Gloria Thesenvitz	Nova-Tech, Inc.

SUMMARY: COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT

The Competitive Assessment provides a comprehensive overview of the trends and issues facing Grand Island and Hall County in 2014 and beyond within the context of resident and business input, and considering the larger implications of economic and business development activities. It is the first step in the research process informing the *Grow Grand Island* Business Development Strategy; a critical step in understanding the community's position and the issues that it faces in an increasingly competitive environment for new jobs and corporate investment. Seven key "stories" frame the discussion, each blending various demographic, socioeconomic, economic, and quality of life indicators with resident input to highlight the issues that merit strategic attention. In total, more than 1,700 residents in the Grand Island region shared their input to inform this Assessment and the forthcoming Business Development Strategy.



This input and the quantitative research has revealed a community that has much to be proud of, but also much to prepare for if it seeks to realize its residents' and businesses' collective vision for a preferred future. The issues identified through this research are organized into a series of "stories" about Grand Island – its past, its present, and its future. Seven stories frame the discussion, each weaving multiple data points with resident input to highlight the issues that merit strategic attention. This Executive Summary provides a brief review of the seven stories that are discussed in detail within the full Community Assessment. These seven stories are:

1. Consistent Growth and Emergent Diversity
2. Economic Resilience in Times of Turbulence: Obvious Benefits but Concealed Challenges
3. Economic Evolution: The Changing Composition of Jobs
4. Workforce Quality, Availability, and Sustainability
5. Developing a Talent Pipeline: Education and Training Capacity
6. Business Development Considerations and Location Factors
7. Quality of Life: Attractiveness to Residents and Visitors

The full Competitive Assessment includes a detailed discussion of the relevant data and resident input supporting each story, as well as information on data sources, methodologies, and input methods used to guide the research.

1. CONSISTENT GROWTH AND EMERGENT DIVERSITY

Population in the City of Grand Island has nearly doubled since 1960, rising from roughly 25,000 to more than 50,000 in the last fifty years. And with the City of Grand Island representing 83 percent of Hall County's population, the County has not surprisingly experienced similar rates of growth as a whole. **As the population in Hall County has grown, so too has its diversity. Between 2002 and 2012, Hall County added 6,623 net new residents. Growth in the Hispanic population (6,339 net new residents) accounted for nearly 96 percent of all population growth in Hall County during this period. In 2002, the Hispanic population represented roughly 16 percent of all residents in Hall County. By 2012, the Hispanic share of population has grown to nearly 25 percent.** Focus group participants most frequently discussed the ways in which population diversification is impacting three facets of the community: the school system, the work place, and health and social services.

In the early-mid 2000s, Hall County experienced a relatively consistent trend of annual net out-migration. The relative stability of the regional economy has contributed to a reversal of this trend in recent years; between 2007 and 2010 there was a positive net inflow of new residents. **However, it is the relatively high levels of international in-migration that set Grand Island apart from its competitors.** Between 2010 and 2012, the community added 546 net new international in-migrants, more than double the level of any other comparison community. At this rate, the community is adding nearly 2,000 net new international immigrants each decade.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the data covering the characteristics of in-migrants is their educational attainment levels; during the three-year period from 2010 – 2012, nearly one-quarter of all in-migrants to Hall County had not graduated high school (23.8 percent of in-migrants as compared to 16.2 percent of the entire adult population). Less than ten percent of in-migrants possessed a bachelor's degree or higher (as compared to 17.1 percent of the entire adult population). This has important implications for future business, economic, and workforce development. Although many jobs in the community do not require a college education, and in fact, may only require on-the-job training, the educational attainment levels of in-migrants and the existing population will serve as an inhibitor to future economic diversification efforts that seek to grow high-wage employment opportunities in a variety of different sectors.

2. ECONOMIC RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF TURBULENCE: OBVIOUS BENEFITS BUT CONCEALED CHALLENGES

The relatively robust population growth documented in the previous section can be attributed to the community's economic growth; Hall County added nearly 4,400 jobs between 2003 and 2013. The county was able to weather the recession better than any of the comparison communities, with employment actually expanding by 3.6 percent between 2008 and 2013, a five-year period that corresponds with the national recession and subsequent recovery. As of early 2014, the nation has still yet to recoup all jobs lost since the onset of the Great Recession. Many other communities continue to recover slowly but Grand Island, and to a lesser degree the state of Nebraska, has continued to expand during a time of national economic turbulence. **In fact, between 2008 and 2013, Hall County captured 36 percent of all job growth across the state of Nebraska.**

Given the fact that unemployment did not rise nearly as significantly during the Great Recession as what was experienced in the three comparison communities and nationwide, we should expect that Grand Island's households fared relatively well in terms of income growth and poverty during the period of recession and subsequent recovery. Unfortunately, we observe the exact opposite. **The community's residents experienced below average income growth and above average increases in poverty relative to its competitors and the national average.** The logical explanation for this seemingly illogical trend is three-fold. First, wages are not increasing in Grand Island as fast as they are elsewhere. Second, the recession and what relatively little unemployment accompanied it in Grand Island has disproportionately impacted those at the lowest end of the

wage and income scale. And third, the community's in-migrants are, on average, not particularly well educated and thus, are not supporting employment opportunities in occupations paying above average wages. All of these three contributing factors are connected by a single common thread: the fact that employment growth has, by and large, been concentrated in sectors paying below average wages.

3. ECONOMIC EVOLUTION: THE CHANGING COMPOSITION OF JOBS

The relative resiliency of the Grand Island, Central Nebraska, and state economies can be partially attributed to their heavy association with agriculture – crop and animal production, as well as agriculture-related machinery production and animal processing. **Although most associate Grand Island with agriculture and manufacturing, it is a much more diverse economy than many might expect.** In fact, agriculture and manufacturing account for roughly one in five jobs (21 percent) in the county. During the last ten years, growth has occurred in a wide variety of sectors but, as previously mentioned, much of that growth has been concentrated in relatively low wage sectors, depressing income growth in the community. The growing population in Hall County and surrounding areas has generated consistent growth in demand for retail, food service, entertainment, and health care. Grand Island, as the largest community in the region, has captured much of this demand, and accordingly, much of the associated growth in jobs and tax revenues. This growth in retail, food service, and entertainment employment, as well as accommodation (hotels, motels, etc.) employment has also been supported by the expansion of travel and tourism assets, notably the Nebraska State Fair and facilities at Fonner Park.

Manufacturing activity in Hall County has grown substantially during a time when manufacturing's decline nationwide has been well documented. Between 2003 and 2013, manufacturers added nearly 1,200 jobs, expanding by approximately 19 percent. **The continued growth of manufacturing Grand Island is a truly remarkable feature of its economy, one that sets it apart from the overwhelming majority of communities nationwide.** Given the relative strength of the manufacturing sector in Hall County, it is no surprise that transportation and warehousing employment has expanded considerably as well. The sector has added 384 new jobs since 2003, growing at a pace (30 percent) that far outpaces that of transportation and warehousing employment nationwide (seven percent).

4. WORKFORCE QUALITY, AVAILABILITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

When asked to identify the greatest challenge facing the community from an economic development standpoint, interviewees, focus group participants, and survey respondents overwhelmingly cited concerns related to workforce sustainability. But Grand Island is not alone in this regard. Employers and communities across the nation are preparing and planning for the impending retirement of Baby Boomers and the effect that it will have on their business and local economies. As older employees retire, communities will need to supply enough younger workers to replace them or be able to attract more new workers to the community to balance out the loss of retirees.

Many communities across the country find themselves in an unfortunate position where their young pipeline of workers (those aged 25-44) is smaller than the cohort capturing Baby Boomers and impending retirees (ages 45-64). Hall County is fortunate not to be in this position; as of 2012, its young cohort (25-44) is slightly larger than its cohort of impending retirees in the coming decade (ages 45-64). Data covering the age of workers by sector illustrate that many of the community's largest sectors are among the least susceptible to impending retirements. For example, just 17.2 percent of the manufacturing workforce in Hall County is age 55 and over, as compared to 22.1 percent nationwide. Despite relatively favorable age dynamics, manufacturers reported significant shortages in a wide variety of fields from machinists to welders. Employers from a wide array of sectors indicated that Grand Island struggles to retain its younger workers, and struggles to attract former high school graduates to return to the community after attending college outside of the region. A continuation of recent trends of positive

annual net in-migration is critical to the sustainability of the community's workforce and its ability to replace Baby Boomers that will be exiting the workforce in the years to come.

While worker shortages are a challenge for existing employers and the community at large, one source of these shortages – where labor demand is exceptionally high relative to the average community in recent years – is a relatively good problem to have these days. This second imbalance – where the number of net in-migrants required to fill available jobs exceeds the number of actual net in-migrants – can be attributed to a variety of factors. Among them are external factors such as the relative immobility of households during the Great Recession (due largely to falling home values) and internal factors such as the education and skills attainment of residents, and the attractiveness of the community to younger workers from a quality of life standpoint. These internal causes are factors that community and business leaders can affect.

5. DEVELOPING A TALENT PIPELINE: EDUCATION AND TRAINING CAPACITY

Although there is a desire among residents and community leaders for more diverse, higher-paying jobs that have higher education requirements, the reality is that businesses in many subsectors will not relocate to an area that does not have a readily-available and well-educated workforce. **Unfortunately, the educational attainment level of Grand Island's adult population places the community at a significant disadvantage in this competition for higher-wage jobs in more "white collar" sectors. Just 17.1 percent of its adult population (age 25+) has a bachelor's degree or higher, as compared to 28.5 percent statewide and 28.7 percent nationwide. On the other end of the spectrum, 16.2 percent have no high school diploma, as compared to just 9.4 percent statewide and 14.1 percent nationwide.** Further, the community has not kept pace with its competition in recent years in terms of improving four-year degree attainment rates and reducing the percentage with no high school diploma. However, there was a significant increase in the number of people with an associate degree, indicating that workers are upgrading their qualifications and formal education by way of Central Community College.

Without question, the most important asset in improving the educational attainment and lifelong earning potential of Grand Island's residents is its public school system. While opinions regarding school quality often vary within a community, the quality of public education is typically among residents most frequently cited concerns during the public input phase across communities. This was not the case in Grand Island. Across Grand Island Public Schools and Grand Island Northwest Public Schools, nearly 80 percent of survey respondents with some experience in these systems (either as students or parents) indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "children in this district receive a high-quality education." Just 8.3 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. The recent addition of the Career Pathways Institute (CPI) to the community's portfolio of education offerings was applauded by residents; CPI is and should continue to be an immense asset for the region.

However, some data covering student performance and outcomes relative to the state of Nebraska does not seem to align with resident input. During the 2012 – 2013 school year, the graduation rate at Grand Island Public Schools was 87.0 percent, trailing the 88.5 percent statewide average. Student performance on end of grade tests (NeSA) shows that student proficiency in three subject areas (reading, writing, and mathematics) is lower in Grand Island Public Schools than the state average in both eighth and eleventh grade.

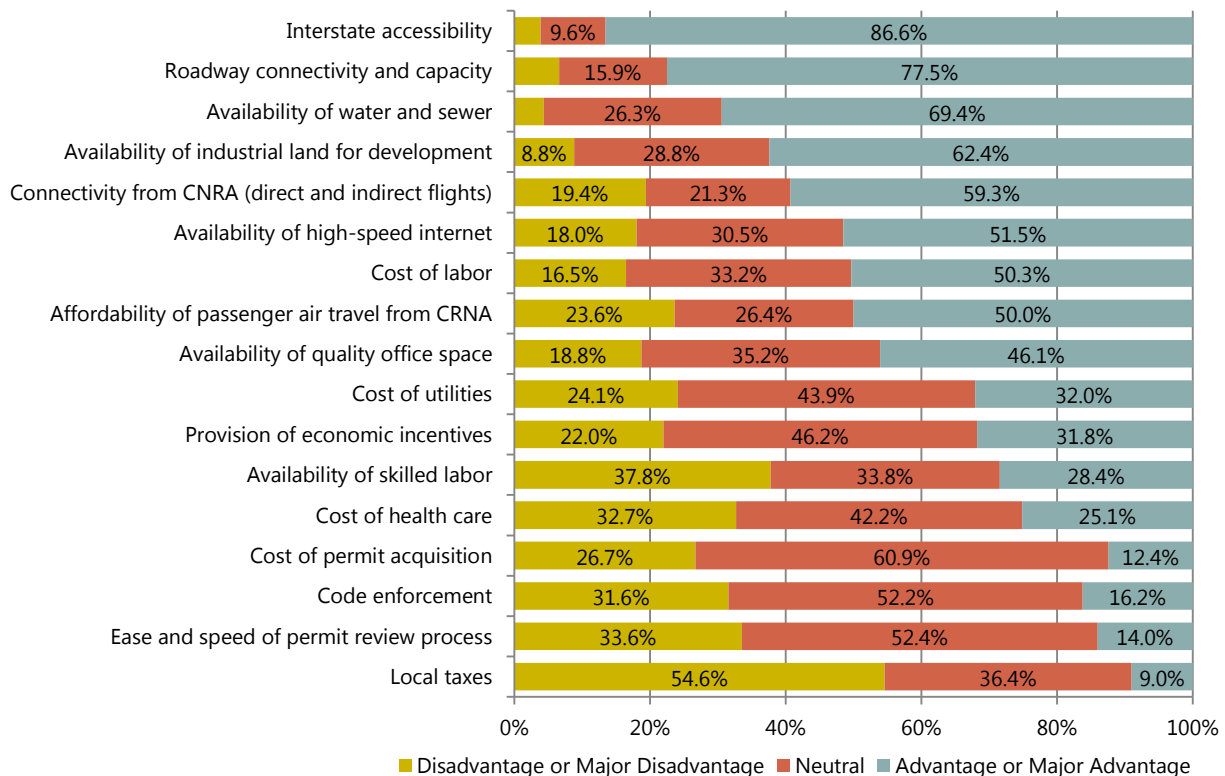
Post-secondary education is somewhat limited in Grand Island, and while CPI and Central Community College are tremendous assets that will help to close the gap in some of the labor shortages that it is faced with, the community's lack of a strong four-year presence is a disadvantage compared to other communities. Central Community College thus fills the void left by the relative lack of four-year institutions by providing critical adult education in a variety of different subject matters, with certificate and degree attainment levels in some subjects that are exceptionally high relative to other community colleges. One such example is the immense participation in business, management, and related programs; more than 300 certificates and 100 associate degrees were

granted in the 2012 – 2013 school year. Given the previously-documented challenges associated with attracting young, educated workers to the community, adult re-education is essential to the community's desire to attract and develop higher-paying jobs in more knowledge-intensive sectors. Enhanced four-year capacity is a clear strategic priority in the years and decades ahead.

6. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS AND LOCATION FACTORS

Access to two- and four-year degree pipelines, as well as quality pre-K – 12 public schools, are critical site considerations for firms considering relocation. In addition to education and training capacity, there are many other considerations for prospective businesses evaluating relocation, existing businesses considering expansion, and entrepreneurs considering a new venture. Among the many positive attributes of the community that support business relocation and expansion is the community's central location in the state and nation. When asked to identify the community's greatest strength or asset from an economic development standpoint, the word "location" was the most frequently mentioned, along with adjoining words such as "central" and "center" and related concepts such as interstate access. Respondents also frequently mentioned work ethic; words such as "workforce" and "work" were frequently followed or preceded by words such as "ethic" and "hard (working)." The existing business community and its growth were also cited. The following chart summarizes the feedback received from more than 550 members of the business community regarding various factors influencing the community's business climate.

SURVEY RESULTS: "PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS OF GRAND ISLAND'S BUSINESS CLIMATE ACCORDING TO THE DEGREE TO WHICH EACH IS AN ADVANTAGE OR DISADVANTAGE TO EXISTING AND PROSPECTIVE NEW BUSINESSES."



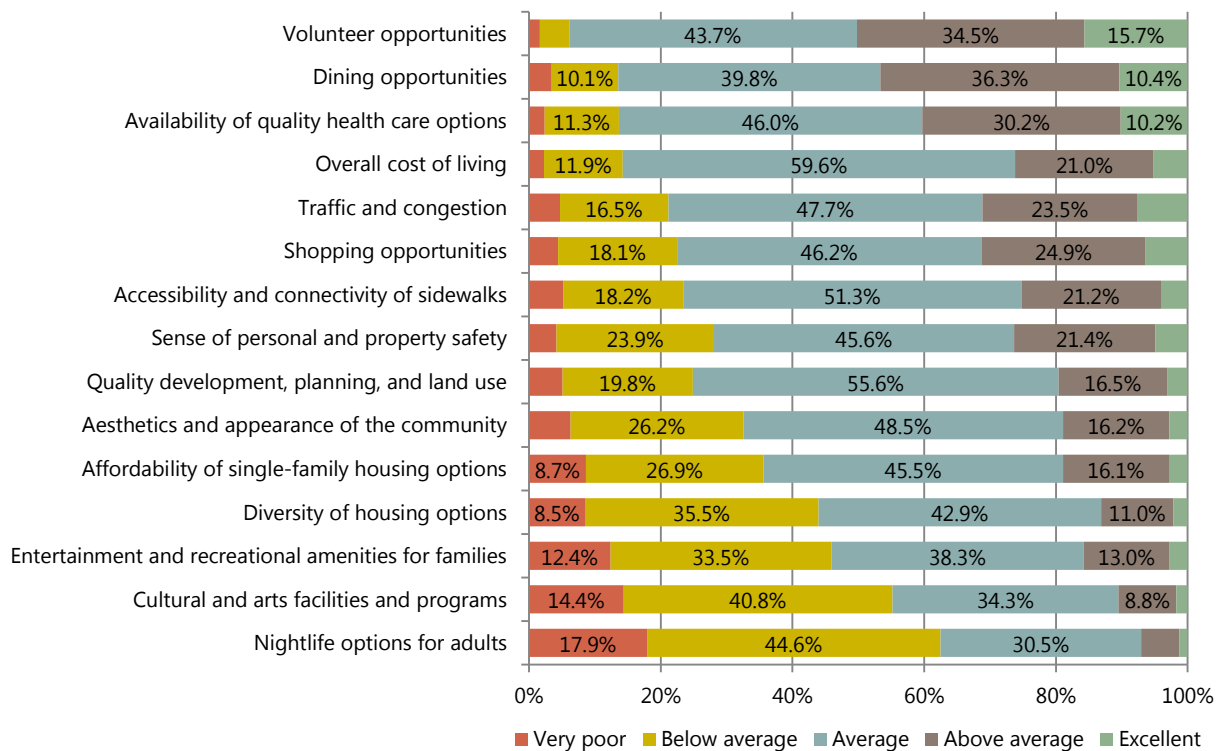
Source: Market Street Services; Grand Island Business Development Strategy Survey (2014)

Question was presented to 556 individuals that self-identified themselves as owners, executives, or managers at their place of employment.

7. QUALITY OF LIFE: ATTRACTIVENESS TO RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

As the national economy continues to recover, attracting future employees to an area requires more than a job opportunity. Young workers especially place a high value on the quality of life offerings in a community, from nightlife to recreational opportunities to aesthetics. They are increasingly choosing a place to live first, and then choosing a place to work, a dynamic that is changing the way communities invest to support talent attraction and retention. Families seek welcoming communities that offer a good place to raise a family and include quality school systems, low crime, and family-friendly amenities. When asked to identify “the community’s greatest strength as a place to live, work, visit, and do business,” the most frequently-mentioned words by survey respondents – “small” and “town” – were mentioned within the context of the community’s “small town feel.” While residents wish to maintain the community’s small town feel and “Midwestern values,” its residents also strive for more diverse, quality options in the areas of housing, recreation, arts, and entertainment. The following chart summarizes the feedback received from survey respondents regarding a variety factors influencing quality of life.

SURVEY RESULTS: “PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS OF GRAND ISLAND'S QUALITY OF LIFE, BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCES WHERE YOU LIVE.”



Source: *Market Street Services*; Grand Island Business Development Strategy Survey (2014)
Question was presented to all 1,618 residents that responded to the community survey.

The full Competitive Assessment presents a more detailed analysis of the trends and issues discussed in this summary, including roughly twenty graphics and additional survey results.

SUMMARY: TARGET SECTOR ANALYSIS

Communities across the country are pursuing differentiated economic development strategies that seek to support the development of “targeted” business sectors which may benefit from specific competitive advantages provided by the community, its location, and its asset base. The practice of “targeting” has grown as communities have witnessed the advantages that are afforded to the companies by such agglomerations or “clusters.”



KEY CONCEPTS RELATED TO TARGET SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

CLUSTERS: Agglomerations – or “clusters” – represent groups of interrelated businesses that choose to co-locate for one reason or another. The historical growth of clustered economic activity in areas such as the Silicon Valley, Route 128 in Massachusetts, and the Research Triangle Park in North Carolina are oft-cited and well developed case studies for other regions across the nation as they strive to develop similar agglomerations of related businesses. But there are countless examples of such clusters around the country and the world. Clustering can occur among competing or cooperative firms with a variety of different catalysts supporting these agglomerations. A group of suppliers may choose to locate in proximity to a major manufacturer for research and development efficiencies and reduced transportation costs. For example, an immense aerospace cluster has developed around the Boeing Integrated Defense Systems operations in St. Louis, Missouri. Other firms may co-locate in a specific area in order to take advantage of a specialized labor pool or to be in close proximity to specific infrastructure.

While the factors that have led to clustering vary tremendously by region and sector, such agglomerations occur over time because a location has an asset base that affords the sector and the companies that operate within them some form of competitive advantage. The competitive advantages derived by these firms often result in comparatively high potential for employment growth and wealth creation. As the cluster grows, so too do the benefits afforded to the companies within the cluster: the available workforce grows, the potential for collaboration expands, competition may drive down costs, buyer and supplier networks expand, among other potential impacts.

TARGETS: Even so, many communities and economic regions choose to strategically target sectors of economic activity that may not currently be characterized by a strong agglomeration – or “cluster” – of related businesses. A targeted sector – or simply a “target” – is any type of business activity that is strategically pursued by an economic development organization and its partners for growth and development. That is to say, a target is an area where financial and staff resources, and the programs and policies they support, are specifically focused. Targets are ideally those segments of an economy where competitive advantages exist, prospects for future growth are greatest, and return on investment is likely highest. A target can be a single business sector with high growth potential or a cluster of businesses in related sectors. But as previously mentioned, many choose to target business sectors that are not presently concentrated or agglomerated in their community. This may be because such activities are rapidly expanding, exhibit potential to become clusters in the years and decades to come, or align with other strategic objectives of the community.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ASSET BASE: Strategic targeting is predicated upon a solid understanding of a community's strengths and weaknesses, specifically as they relate to the needs of specific business sectors and the companies that operate within these sectors. The factors that medium to large companies consider when evaluating a community as potential location for a new facility are often referred to as site location factors, site selection factors, or site considerations. These factors vary tremendously by sector. For example, data center operations typically seek locations with low natural disaster risk, affordable and abundant water necessary for cooling, and redundant and exceptional fiber-optic, broadband infrastructure, among other attributes. Corporate headquarters typically seek locations with a well-educated workforce, exceptional passenger air connectivity, and abundant amenities. Accordingly, communities that are able to offer such characteristics are better positioned to attract these kinds of operations. Understanding the community's asset base – inclusive of a wide variety of these potential site location factors – is critical to understanding the community's competitiveness for various business sectors. Likewise, an understanding of its deficiencies in terms of such site location factors will help the community identify areas that need further investment if the community wishes to transform such deficiencies into future assets.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH: Targeted businesses sectors that exhibit an existing concentration or agglomeration of establishments with similar activities have likely flourished in the community because it has an attractive asset base which aligns with the sector's primary site location considerations. Other sectors that share similar site location factors may not currently be concentrated in the community, but the presence of the aforementioned asset base makes the community an attractive location for such activity. Accordingly, such sectors represent opportunities where the community may be particularly successful in marketing and recruitment efforts that seek to attract new corporate investments or relocations that would benefit from the community's existing asset base.

For decades many communities and their economic development organizations have exclusively associated "economic development" with "business recruitment." While the recruitment of new companies is an important component of any targeted economic development program, it is only one leg of the stool. The growth of regional economies and their target business sectors are overwhelmingly driven by existing businesses and entrepreneurs. A variety of studies have shown that between 70 percent and up to 95 percent of the country's job creation over various time periods has been attributable to the expansion of existing companies. While new investments generate ribbon cuttings and headlines, existing businesses and entrepreneurs are creating the majority of jobs in our country. Accordingly, any effort to develop target sectors and nurture employment growth within them must focus upon the needs of existing businesses as well as entrepreneurs.

Holistic economic development must also focus on developing the asset base that supports the competitiveness of target business sectors and the companies that operate within them. This is necessary to alleviate barriers to expansion for existing companies and mitigate any potential risks that could lead to layoffs or business closures. But such strategies that focus on developing the community's asset base also contribute to long-term viability of the community as a location for a more diverse array of sectors, including sectors that the community is not currently competitive for in today's climate but which it hopes to develop in future decades.

COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT: KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO TARGET SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

It is important to understand a community's underlying asset base, as well as any deficiencies, as they relate to its competitiveness for specific types of economic activity. The Competitive Assessment provided a comprehensive examination of the community and its competitiveness as a place to live, work, and do business. This Assessment identified a number of assets supporting the viability of certain business sectors, as well as a variety of challenges that inhibit to the community's competitiveness for other types of activity. The following list provides some of the qualities that contribute to the community's strengths and weaknesses as they relate to its asset base or site location considerations. Although not a comprehensive review of the Competitive Assessment's findings, it does provide a basic overview of some important findings that influence target sector competitiveness.

BUSINESS LOCATION CONSIDERATIONS: COMMUNITY ASSETS THAT ENHANCE COMPETITIVENESS FOR CERTAIN BUSINESS SECTORS AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

- ✓ Central location in the United States
- ✓ Affordability and reliability of electricity
- ✓ Availability of land for industrial and commercial development
- ✓ Accessibility and connectivity of rail network
- ✓ Strong training pipeline supported by Central Community College and Career Pathways Institute
- ✓ Relative abundance of workers in certain manufacturing skill sets
- ✓ Relatively young manufacturing workforce as compared to the average American community
- ✓ Relatively low wages for many occupations provide a labor cost advantage
- ✓ Relatively low cost of living

BUSINESS LOCATION CONSIDERATIONS: COMMUNITY WEAKNESSES THAT INHIBIT COMPETITIVENESS FOR CERTAIN BUSINESS SECTORS AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

- ✓ Very small percentage of the workforce with a bachelor's degree or higher
- ✓ Proximity to four-year degree opportunities / lack of a large four-year campus
- ✓ Workforce shortages reported for a variety of skills and occupations
- ✓ Cultural amenities that may appeal to well-educated or those from larger metros
- ✓ Passenger air connectivity when compared to most medium and large metropolitan areas
- ✓ Existing class A office space

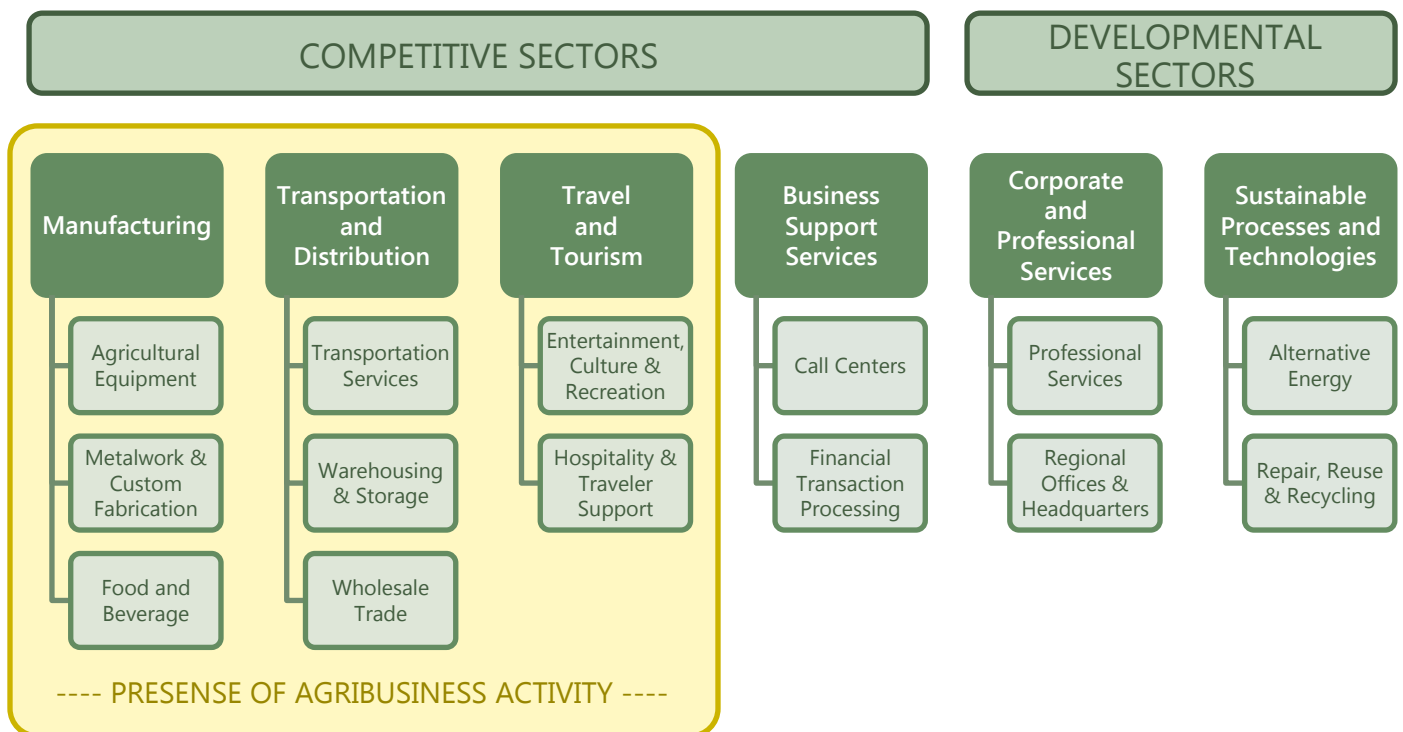
The aforementioned findings from the Competitive Assessment suggest that Grand Island is a community with an asset base that is particularly attractive to manufacturing and distribution activities, but potentially unattractive to many "white-collar" sectors (professional services, information technology, corporate headquarters, etc.) that so many residents desire. It is also important to emphasize that the above list of strengths and weaknesses varies by sector. For example, passenger air connectivity at Central Nebraska Regional Airport is a great asset for the community and its residents, and many existing businesses are fortunate to have the option of flying to a few cities from CNRA, but this connectivity may be considered a weakness by certain prospective employers (i.e. professional services and corporate operations) that have relatively high rates of business travel.

RECOMMENDED TARGET SECTORS

Market Street Services has identified six strategic economic development targets – four **competitive sectors** and two **developmental sectors** – that merit strategic targeting of economic, community, workforce, and business development resources in Grand Island and Hall County.

“**Competitive sectors**” represent those sectors that are currently concentrated to some degree in Grand Island and the surrounding region, exhibit strong near-term (five-year) growth potential, and currently benefit from some existing asset base from which existing and prospective companies derive some competitive advantage(s).

“**Developmental sectors**” represent those sectors for which the community is not currently competitive but may have long-term development potential with adequate investment in the community’s asset base. Although these sectors may not drive significant job creation in the near-term, they align with other desired attributes of the community as identified by residents. Such attributes include greater economic diversification, more plentiful “white collar” jobs, and the development of an economic identity outside of manufacturing and agriculture.



Although not a specific target sector, **Agribusiness** is a foundation of the community and woven throughout many of the recommended targets. It is a unifying theme between the community’s **Manufacturing**, **Transportation and Distribution**, and **Travel and Tourism** targets. It represents the community’s past, present, and future identity, yet many residents have expressed a desire to see the community’s economy continue to diversify in ways that are not necessarily tied to the community’s agricultural, agribusiness, and agritourism roots.

The full Target Sector Analysis presents a more comprehensive evaluation of the factors influencing the competitiveness of specific economic activities that reflect *Market Street’s* recommendations for target business sectors in Grand Island and Hall County, including a review of sector performance, workforce attributes, and site location considerations.

GROW GRAND ISLAND

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The two key research phases reviewed in the preceding sections – the Competitive Assessment and the Target Business Review – have revealed a variety of challenges and opportunities facing Grand Island as the community seeks to enhance its economic improvement and business development efforts. This research, inclusive of resident and business input, has indicated that Grand Island’s business community needs and desires a collaborative and comprehensive approach to business development activities. This necessitates a strategic focus that seeks to care for the needs of three constituencies that are often referred to as the “three legs of the economic development stool.” These “three legs” are: existing businesses, entrepreneurs, and prospective new businesses (potential relocations). Accordingly, a holistic approach to business development in Grand Island is one that builds and maintains programs, policies, and initiatives that:

1. Facilitate the expansion of **existing businesses** and mitigate potential layoffs or business closures,
2. Provide **entrepreneurs** with necessary assistance and nurture an entrepreneurial culture, and,
3. Enhance the community’s **image** and marketing activities to support business and talent attraction.

Such programs, policies, and initiatives that support existing businesses, entrepreneurs, and prospective new businesses will need to be complemented by investments that:

4. Promote **workforce** sustainability through educational attainment and skills acquisition that align with employer needs, and
5. Develop and enhance **community assets** – infrastructure, facilities, amenities, etc. – that appeal to existing and prospective new businesses and workers.



Collectively, these five issues represent the community's "pillars" – pillars which are the foundation of Grand Island's approach to business development. **Collaborative, cooperative, and effective partnerships** represent the glue or cement that hold our pillars together and ensure that we have a strong foundation for business development. Furthermore, these five areas all support target sector development; rather than a distinct set of recommendations for individual target sectors, this strategy acknowledges the simple fact that many strategic recommendations can and should influence the competitiveness of multiple sectors.

As these five pillars are the foundation of the community's approach to business development, so too are they the foundation of the Business Development Strategy. Accordingly, the recommendations contained within this Strategy are organized in five sections corresponding to each pillar. Each pillar is guided by a **goal statement**. Within each pillar are a set of tactical recommendations, with each recommendation supported by the following content: a brief statement of justification for the recommendation, a brief discussion of the appropriate actions to take in implementation, and the identification of best practices when relevant.

Best practices are programs, initiatives, or policies that have proven successful in other communities around the country facing similar challenges as Grand Island or seeking to capitalize on similar opportunities. *Market Street Services* is constantly studying what has worked in other communities – and what has not – in order to provide our clients with guidance that could aid their implementation efforts.

Once the tactical recommendations have been approved by the Steering Committee, input from the Committee will help identify implementation priorities and partners. ***It must be noted that, while specific organizations may have been referenced throughout this draft strategy when defining the justification and associated actions for certain recommendations, these references to specific organizations are by no means an exhaustive or exclusive list of the many organizations that can and should be engaged as partners in facilitating collaborative implementation.*** The forthcoming Implementation Plan will identify the full scope of partners that should be engaged in supporting the implementation of each individual recommendation, as well as volunteer leadership structures and augmentations to staff capacity at key organizations that are necessary to support effective implementation. The Implementation Plan will also provide a timeline for implementing each recommendation, a discussion of potential implementation costs and funding sources, and a set of performance metrics for evaluating success and return on investment.

Finally, It is important to acknowledge that a great deal of work is already underway related to each of these five areas. The community and its various organizations engaged in business development activities have advanced many important programs and initiatives that support **existing businesses**, nurture the growth of **entrepreneurs** and the development of an entrepreneurial culture, and enhance the community's **image**. And collectively, the community has invested heavily in promoting **workforce** sustainability and enhancing its base of competitive **community assets**. But the primary enemies in community, economic, workforce, and business development are complacency and the status quo. Successful communities never stop planning, and never stop pursuing positive change. The five pillars and accompanying recommendations in the *Grow Grand Island* Business Development Strategy must reflect the fact that the community has much to be proud of, but also much to develop to remain competitive for jobs and talent, and to elevate standard of living for all residents.

1. Existing Businesses

Goal: Maintain a business climate that supports the growth of existing businesses in Grand Island.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: SUMMARY

- 1.1 *Launch a collaborative Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) outreach program that seeks to facilitate expansions and mitigate layoffs by conducting a series of site visits and surveys with existing businesses in and around Grand Island.*
- 1.2 *Launch the Grow Grand Island Export Initiative to support the development of new international trade relationships for Grand Island area manufacturers.*
- 1.3 *Launch an Economic Gardening program in partnership with NDED and the Edward Lowe Foundation.*
- 1.4 *Launch a local-sourcing campaign – The Grow Grand Island Challenge – that challenges businesses to identify at least one non-local supplier of goods and/or services and switch to a local provider of that same good or service.*
- 1.5 *Work with neighboring communities in Central Nebraska to evaluate the potential benefits of developing regional cluster councils to address sector-specific issues and challenges that are common throughout Central Nebraska.*
- 1.6 *Launch ENGINE – Engaging the Next Generation of Grand Island, Nebraska – a comprehensive leadership development and community service program that cultivates the next generation of business leadership in Grand Island.*

Existing Businesses: Strategic Recommendations

1.1 LAUNCH A COLLABORATIVE BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION (BRE) OUTREACH PROGRAM THAT SEEKS TO FACILITATE EXPANSIONS AND MITIGATE LAYOFFS BY CONDUCTING A SERIES OF SITE VISITS AND SURVEYS WITH EXISTING BUSINESSES IN AND AROUND GRAND ISLAND.

Various studies have indicated that expansions of existing businesses represent between 60 percent and upwards of 90 percent of a community's job creation. Further, a layoff event at a large employer or, even worse, a business closure, can have significant adverse impacts on unemployment and other community attributes such as foreclosures and child poverty.

Grand Island should develop a collaborative approach to Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) outreach; an approach that leverages the staff expertise and resources of multiple organizations and partners influencing the business climate. Very simply, no single organization – be it a chamber of commerce, economic development corporation, local government, state government, utility, or otherwise – can meet the needs of existing businesses and address their challenges alone. This Business Development Strategy identifies the necessary components of an effective program. The forthcoming Implementation Plan will discuss the partnership structures required to facilitate such a collaborative approach across organizations.

The development of a new approach to BRE in Grand Island should begin with a review of current outreach methods and the information gathered from existing businesses to date. Relevant partners at the local, regional, and state level should be engaged, and the intent of the program should be communicated to the existing business community in Grand Island. The primary intentions of the programs are to:

- ✓ understand the challenges and opportunities facing existing businesses;
- ✓ alleviate burdens and barriers to competitiveness;
- ✓ support expansion plans;
- ✓ prevent existing business from relocating elsewhere;
- ✓ identify businesses poised for future expansion, and;
- ✓ identify relocation prospects based on relationships with existing businesses.

An effective BRE program should utilize multiple methods for engaging the existing business community. Site visits with in-person interviews should be conducted annually with the community's largest businesses (50+ employees). Additional site visits and/or telephone interviews should be scheduled with smaller and medium-sized businesses if staff time and resources permit. All businesses should be engaged using online survey methods. Specialized software that supports BRE surveying (such as Synchronist and ExecutivePulse) should be acquired. Protocols should be developed within the collaborative team for follow-up actions based on site visits, interviews, and surveys. Such protocols and other program elements should be modeled after best practice BRE programs around the country. Finally, the team should develop an early warning system (utilizing the acquired software and information gathered from business responses to surveys and interviews) that is sufficient to identify firms at-risk of contraction or closure and ways in which community, economic, and workforce development partners can help employers increase their competitive positions and reduce barriers to competitiveness. The community's BRE program and associated outreach efforts should in no way be tied to member recruitment efforts for any organizations supporting economic and business development.

BEST PRACTICE: BUSINESS FIRST, GREATER RICHMOND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP (RICHMOND, VA)

1.2 LAUNCH THE GROW GRAND ISLAND EXPORT INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW INTERNATIONAL TRADE RELATIONSHIPS FOR GRAND ISLAND AREA MANUFACTURERS.

Manufacturers in Hall County exported more than \$2.3 billion in products to external domestic markets (other parts of the country) and international markets in 2013. During the stakeholder input process, some major manufacturers indicated that demand for their products is rising the fastest in international markets, and in many cases, in developing countries. With President Obama's administration aggressively promoting a new National Export Initiative that seeks to double the level of American exports between 2010 and 2015, there is a tremendous amount of investment in export assistance programs. Grand Island's manufacturers should leverage these available forms of assistance and others that are offered at the state level. Accordingly, the community should launch an Export Initiative that contains two primary components: 1) increasing exposure to and utilization of available state and federal support services via a "Trade Development Day," and 2) the development of a reverse trade mission.

- ✓ **Trade Development Day:** Develop a day-long program in collaboration with state and federal officials to educate existing businesses about export assistance programs and connect them to appropriate contacts at the state and federal level that can support the development of company-specific export promotion plans and facilitate new business relationships. The first half of the day's agenda should include presentations and panels from state and federal officials regarding available programs, including executives from existing businesses in Nebraska that can share their success stories based on assistance received from state and federal partners. The second half of the day's agenda could include short windows (15-20 minutes) allowing representatives from existing Grand Island and Hall County employers to meet with state and federal officials, discuss their broad objectives, and schedule a time for further consultation and assistance. The following aspects of federal and state programs should be discussed, promoted, and utilized:
 - **Federal Programs:** Grand Island's business development community should work with state representatives of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Export-Import Bank of the United States (Ex-Im Bank) to educate manufacturers about available forms of assistance and promote greater utilization of existing services such as the SBA's International Trade Loan program and the Ex-Im Bank's guaranteed term financing for international buyers of U.S. exports. The International Trade Administration (ITA) also frequently helps companies negotiate the removal of barriers to exporting, such as changes to international regulations that impact market access. The ITA's U.S. Commercial Service operated Regional Export Assistance Centers (located in Omaha in the state of Nebraska) helps U.S. companies develop customized export promotion plans and then facilitate meetings with international delegates and key business connections in foreign countries.
 - **State Programs:** Representatives from NDED's Office of International Trade and Investment are tasked with assisting Nebraska companies with their international marketing and business development efforts. This is accomplished through site visits to provide technical assistance and consultation, provision of proprietary market research, trade show promotion, and match marketing whereby Nebraska firms are introduced to potential buyers overseas. The Office maintains staff in Tokyo, Japan to help Nebraska companies develop new relationship in the country. The state also maintains a contract with a provider of similar services in the Chinese market. Representatives from the Office of International Trade and Investment should be invited to speak to local companies alongside U.S. Department of Commerce officials at the event.

- ✓ **Reverse Trade Mission:** Some communities have worked with their state and federal partners to organize reverse trade missions, hosting foreign trade commissioners and consuls to expose them to existing businesses and their export potential as well as the community's assets that can attract new foreign direct investment. Many communities have found that such reverse missions can be cost-effective and provide strong exposure for local companies and the community as a whole. The Governor's Office, NDED, and Nebraska Diplomats have organized reverse trade missions in recent years, including one in 2011 that focused on the energy and food/beverage industries. The Governor's Office boasts that two such missions have resulted in \$4.17 billion in foreign investment from 28 different companies creating more than 1,000 jobs.¹ Potential exists to work with relevant state partners to develop and host another reverse trade mission focused on target sectors in Grand Island.

1.3 LAUNCH AN ECONOMIC GARDENING PROGRAM IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NDED AND THE EDWARD LOWE FOUNDATION.

Grand Island and the surrounding area are home to a number of companies that started in the region and have grown tremendously to be among the community's largest employers. These success stories are a great source of pride for residents and the business community; many expressed a desire in the stakeholder input phase to see the community provide more intentional support to accelerate the growth of companies that have the potential to become the next great "homegrown" success story.

Numerous communities across the country have incorporated elements of "economic gardening" – an approach to economic development that emphasizes small business development over new firm recruitment – into their business development efforts. Economic gardening seeks to provide second-stage companies that are poised for growth with free or low-cost access to otherwise expensive market and business intelligence. The program aims to help these second-stage companies identify new market opportunities, identify sales leads and develop new business relationships, and optimize their existing business and marketing plans, among other issues. Some communities, particularly some of the early adopters and innovators in the field of economic gardening, have adopted the principles of the program as their core economic development strategy; many others seek to incorporate economic gardening principles into a more comprehensive and holistic approach to economic development. With existing resources provided by NDED and the Edward Lowe Foundation already in place to support the implementation of economic gardening in Nebraska communities, there is merit in Grand Island seeking to utilize these resources and enhance its suite of available services to the existing business community.

NDED and Edward Lowe have partnered to provide assistance to five existing Nebraska firms. Entrepreneur Support Organizations (ESOs) such as business development centers, chambers of commerce, and EDCs, must nominate eligible and interested firms to participate in the program. Eligible companies have been operating in Nebraska for at least two years, generate annual revenue between \$750,000 and \$50 million, employ between six and 99 full-time employees, and are able to demonstrate employment and/or revenue growth during any two of the past five years. Selected companies will receive free assistance from the NDED and Edward Lowe team.

The Grand Island business development community should attempt to identify one or more eligible participants and refer them to NDED for program participation. All potentially eligible firms in the community should be identified, with a goal of referring one or more to NDED for participation in the state program. If participating business(es) find the program to be valuable, the Grand Island business development community should consider working with Edward Lowe to extend their services to other establishments in the community.

¹ Olson, B. (2012, August 23). How Nebraska is Winning Foreign Business. *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*.

1.4 LAUNCH A LOCAL-SOURCING CAMPAIGN – THE GROW GRAND ISLAND CHALLENGE – THAT CHALLENGES BUSINESSES TO IDENTIFY AT LEAST ONE NON-LOCAL SUPPLIER OF GOODS AND/OR SERVICES AND SWITCH TO A LOCAL PROVIDER OF THAT SAME GOOD OR SERVICE.

Communities across the country have, for many decades, promoted “buy local” campaigns that encourage residents to patronize local businesses. A local-sourcing challenge targeting area businesses would apply this concept to business expenditures as opposed to consumer expenditures, helping to reduce the “leakage” of business expenditures – and associated impacts such as jobs, wages, and tax revenues – to businesses located outside the community.

The Grow Grand Island Challenge would implore local businesses to evaluate their supplier network and seek to identify one or more local alternatives to a non-local supplier. Such alternatives could be providers of specific inputs to manufacturing processes (such as machine shops and custom fabricated parts) or business services such as graphic design, legal services, or accounting and tax preparation. The Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation, and other relevant business development partners could utilize their membership databases and inventories of area businesses to develop a comprehensive database of local businesses and the goods or services that they provide. This database could then be used by individual businesses to identify and connect with local providers of goods and/or services that could potentially be an alternative to their current, non-local supplier.

Once the database and other necessary resources are developed, an aggressive outreach and public relations campaign should launch the program and issue the challenge to the local business community. Potential exists to partner with a college or university to estimate the potential economic and fiscal impact of large scale participation in the challenge. All participating businesses should be recognized and honored for “accepting the challenge,” potentially providing each participating business with a sticker, decal, or certificate to display on their door in their place of business that acknowledges that “We accepted the Grow Grand Island Challenge!” Businesses should provide evidence of their participation and if desired, should quantify the amount of expenditure that was redirected to the community. Those with the greatest impact could be recognized more prominently in a variety of different ways (awards, media coverage, etc.).

1.5 WORK WITH NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES IN CENTRAL NEBRASKA TO EVALUATE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF DEVELOPING REGIONAL CLUSTER COUNCILS TO ADDRESS SECTOR-SPECIFIC ISSUES AND CHALLENGES THAT ARE COMMON THROUGHOUT CENTRAL NEBRASKA.

While many of the recommendations included in this Business Development Strategy provide support to existing businesses, entrepreneurs, and prospective new businesses in a variety of different sectors, specific sectors of the economy (manufacturing, business support services, travel and tourism, etc.) clearly have individual challenges and needs. These sector-specific challenges are often best identified and addressed on an ongoing basis by business-driven, sector-based councils – often referred to as “cluster councils.” Throughout the stakeholder input phase, some members of the business community indicated that the community and its existing businesses could, at times, potentially benefit from a more regional approach to economic improvement and business development when relevant and appropriate. Cluster councils are an appropriate opportunity and logical way to operationalize a more regional approach.

Cluster councils could be organized for specific sectors that are prevalent in Grand Island and adjacent communities – ideally beginning with Grand Island’s identified target sectors and associated niche subsectors. Councils would be comprised of representatives from the business community, as well as any other individuals

from relevant organizations that support the competitiveness of that sector and/or help address its challenges. Such partners include but are not limited to higher education institutions and supportive organizations such as chamber of commerce and economic development staff. When organized properly and meeting frequently, such a council can nurture the development of networks among businesses and other entities that influence cluster competitiveness. They can provide leadership in advancing strategic initiatives, inform the efforts of economic development practitioners, identify workforce concerns, inform legislative agendas, and assist with a wide variety of initiatives that support a targeted, collaborative, and potentially regional approach to economic development.

The Grand Island business development should first reach out to its existing business community in target sectors to evaluate their interest in developing a sector-specific, business-led council. If sufficient interest exists among Grand Island businesses in a specific sector/target/cluster, the community should reach out to relevant partners in surrounding communities and counties to evaluate their interest in forming regional cluster councils. The following guidelines can help establish the foundation for a council structure(s):

Membership and Directors: Councils should include executive representation from private businesses of all sizes, institutions of higher education, utilities, policymakers, and other key business, economic, and workforce development professionals. Professional business and economic development staff should be assigned to the Council(s). Co-chairs could be elected, guiding a group of 10 – 20 “Council Directors.” Any business with operations related to the council’s focus can join the Council and become “members” at no cost.

Mission and Agenda: Councils should craft their own mission statements, define their desired role in target sector development efforts, and establish their own agenda, potentially including but certainly not limited to:

- ✓ Facilitating networking and development opportunities for existing companies
- ✓ Identifying policy priorities at the local, state, and federal level, informing legislative agendas
- ✓ Identifying talent issues and appropriate solutions (new training and degree programs)
- ✓ Advancing collaborative solutions to site and infrastructure development
- ✓ Providing guidance on optimal media and messages to prioritize marketing and advertising efforts
- ✓ Advancing political, financial, and resource support for strategic initiatives
- ✓ Assisting with the identification of potential recruitment targets (i.e. suppliers and buyers)
- ✓ Traveling with professional economic development staff on targeted marketing missions
- ✓ Attending industry events with professional economic development staff

Meeting Schedule: Councils should set their own meeting schedules but ideally would meet at least quarterly and potentially monthly, depending on the established agenda and perceived needs of the Council(s).

Funding to Advance Mission and Agenda: Once council members have identified an agenda to pursue, they will be responsible for identifying private sources of funding to advance their priorities. Professional business and economic development staff can aid in the identification of other available resources (public monies, non-profit sources, grants, etc.).

1.6 LAUNCH ENGINE – ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION OF GRAND ISLAND, NEBRASKA – A COMPREHENSIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAM THAT CULTIVATES THE NEXT GENERATION OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP IN GRAND ISLAND.

During the stakeholder input process, many business leaders expressed a desire to see a more intentional effort to develop young business leaders in the community. Some feared that the community will struggle to retain its best and brightest in the years and decades ahead, while others simply wanted to ensure that the business community and its leaders maintain a sense of corporate responsibility and a level of community engagement.

Countless communities around the country attempt to develop the next generation of business leadership through formal leadership programs that often focus educating these individuals about different aspects of the community so that they can find their area of interest, become more engaged, and eventually, lead. While these programs have demonstrated their value year after year, they often fall short in one key area: providing participants with actual leadership opportunities.

The Grand Island business development community should evaluate interest in developing a program – Engaging the Next Generation of Grand Island, Nebraska (ENGINE) – to provide a variety of different opportunities for young professionals to become involved in the community improvement and business development initiatives, including but not limited to other initiatives identified in this *Grow Grand Island Business Development Strategy*. Consideration should be given to the potential for ENGINE to align its membership and programming with that of Leadership Tomorrow.

Guidelines should be established for eligible participants, potentially restricting participation to those between certain ages (such as 25 – 44). The program would establish “work groups” that focus on specific areas of interest to the ENGINE membership. Such work groups could align with the five “pillars” of this strategy or could focus on other issuers such as community beautification, parks and recreation, or other quality of life attributes. The program would require new members to participate in a brief, half-day session (potentially held quarterly) to expose individuals to the various workgroups and their missions and agenda, and help pair them with workgroups that align with their interest(s). Participating individuals could be “sponsored” by their place of employment, requiring an annual fee to cover administrative costs of the program as well as monies to support the implementation of volunteer-led efforts. Alternatively, a fundraising “workgroup” could be established to support other workgroups while providing opportunities for interested individuals to gain experience in fundraising and program development.

Ultimately, the goals of the program should be to:

1. Develop the next generation of business leadership.
2. Expand the base of residents and businesses actively volunteering in the community.
3. Promote corporate and individual responsibility and ownership for community improvement.
4. Support talent retention by creating meaningful, lasting connections to the community among young, future leaders.

BEST PRACTICE: NORTHWEST ARKANSAS EMERGING LEADERS (ROGERS, AR)

2. Entrepreneurs

Goal: Encourage entrepreneurship and provide necessary resources to support startup growth.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: SUMMARY

- 2.1 *Develop a comprehensive database of small businesses in the community that can be used to support a survey-based component of the community's Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) outreach program that specifically targets small businesses.*
- 2.2 *Establish a privately-financed pre-seed microloan fund providing small loans to existing and potential future entrepreneurs that currently lack access to traditional bank financing.*
- 2.3 *Launch an angel investment fund and complementary forum for entrepreneurs to pitch their business to the fund's investors.*
- 2.4 *Establish a comprehensive entrepreneurship program(s) and a complementary student business incubator to promote student entrepreneurship.*
- 2.5 *Evaluate the viability of developing a Fabrication Lab (also known as a FabLab, TechShop, or MakerSpace) to provide budding entrepreneurs with a place to develop prototypes and advance concepts for marketable goods that could become viable businesses.*

Entrepreneurs: Strategic Recommendations

2.1 DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE DATABASE OF SMALL BUSINESSES IN THE COMMUNITY AND LAUNCH A SURVEY-BASED COMPONENT OF THE COMMUNITY'S BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION (BRE) OUTREACH PROGRAM THAT SPECIFICALLY TARGETS SMALL BUSINESSES.

There are hundreds of small businesses in Grand Island, many of which may be sole proprietors, and many of which may be unaware of available forms of assistance in the community, uneducated about basic principles or financial and business management, or unlikely to proactively seek help in growing their business. Small business service delivery is typically reactive in nature; an individual schedules a meeting or walks in the door, and the service provider reacts and responds to their request or need. However, there is a need to more proactively assist the hundreds of entrepreneurs and small business owners that may be unaware of the types of available assistance in the community. Proactive communication rather than reactive response is the foundation for improving awareness.

The first step in aiding small businesses and encouraging entrepreneurship in the community is to inventory the existing small businesses (less than 10 employees) in the community to fully understand the scale and scope of entrepreneurship. Many of the aforementioned entrepreneurs, sole proprietors, or small businesses may not be found in any existing contact database for organizations such as the Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, the Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation, the Grand Island Convention and Visitors Bureau, or others. In these cases, proprietary databases such as ReferenceUSA and Dun & Bradstreet, as well as local sources such as license applications, can be utilized in an attempt to fill any gaps.

Together, these various sources should be used to compile contact information and relevant, public corporate information into a single comprehensive database that can be used to support proactive outreach efforts regarding available forms of small business assistance. The database should also be utilized to:

1. Contact all identified entrepreneurs and small business owners, either via electronic or postal mail, with a personalized letter that demonstrates the community's commitment to increasing the competitiveness of small businesses and providing necessary forms of assistance. It should also educate them about the community BRE program and an upcoming survey that will seek to better understand their needs and growth potential, and provide them with contact information for relevant providers of small business assistance in the community and state.
2. Circulate online surveys that are a component of the community's recommended approach to existing business retention and expansion (BRE) outreach (see recommendation 1.1). BRE surveys should be developed utilizing proprietary software that includes customizable questionnaires for entities implementing BRE programs (such as Synchronist and Executive Pulse).

2.2 ESTABLISH A PRIVATELY-FINANCED PRE-SEED MICROLOAN FUND PROVIDING SMALL LOANS TO EXISTING AND POTENTIAL FUTURE ENTREPRENEURS THAT CURRENTLY LACK ACCESS TO TRADITIONAL BANK FINANCING.

Many existing and potential future entrepreneurs have difficulty financing their business in the early stages for a variety of reasons. Some lack revenue streams or sufficient credit history required to secure traditional financing while others may not have a fully formed idea or marketable prototype. These individuals often rely on their personal savings and/or those of family members and friends to help finance their efforts. Challenges identifying

sources of capital are often exacerbated in smaller metropolitan areas (and especially rural areas) where there are often few if any alternatives to traditional bank financing. The development of a pre-seed microloan fund in Grand Island could help bridge this gap for some existing and potential future entrepreneurs that lack options, including sufficient personal savings to further develop their idea or launch their business.

Pre-seed funds target potential entrepreneurs with an established idea and business model but no existing revenues. They also often target individuals with little to no savings or credit history. These loans are often used to develop prototypes, test market viability, or make initial capital investments required for startup activities. Grand Island's business development community should work with business leaders to evaluate options for initial capitalization and management of a pre-seed microloan fund. Once interest is established and initial capital identified, investors and the administering entity should establish eligibility criteria and loan terms, define acceptable uses of monies, and establish a loan review committee. Companies and individuals that receive funds should be encouraged to seek guidance from providers of small business assistance services in the community.

2.3 LAUNCH AN ANGEL INVESTMENT FUND AND COMPLEMENTARY FORUM FOR ENTREPRENEURS TO PITCH THEIR BUSINESS TO THE FUND'S INVESTORS.

Angel investors can be another valuable source of non-traditional capital in communities of all sizes. Unlike venture capital which typically targets more mature firms with larger investments, angel investment often targets very early stage startups, providing relatively small investments (often between \$20,000 and \$50,000). Angel investors are typically high net worth individuals that seek to invest in businesses that are in their early stages in exchange for what is typically a small equity share in the business. When pooling individual resources, angel investors often form angel funds to collectively invest in businesses, and leverage the expertise of all investors when aiding the businesses and entrepreneurs in which they've invested. Such capital is an important complement to more traditional sources of capital that are often unwilling to take on the risk that angel investors are willing to assume.

Grand Island's business development community should continue ongoing efforts to develop an angel fund in partnership with Invest Nebraska. Invest Nebraska's Angel Sidecar Fund provides matching investments to companies receiving angel investments from an organized angel fund that includes at least three local investors. Potential investors in and around Grand Island will need to be identified and a formal fund will need to be established and promoted.

Once a pool of qualified investors have been identified and a fund developed, the fund should work with partners in the business development community develop and launch an annual forum whereby existing and potential future entrepreneurs can "pitch" their idea to the fund and its investors. Companies interested in pitching their idea or business to the angel investors should be paired with business mentors and advisors in the community and across the state to help them prepare their "pitch." Companies receiving investments will receive guidance from their investors; those that do not receive investments from the fund should be paired with other providers of small business assistance, mentorship, and guidance.

2.4 ESTABLISH A COMPREHENSIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM(S) AND A COMPLEMENTARY STUDENT BUSINESS INCUBATOR TO PROMOTE STUDENT ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

Career Pathways Institute (CPI) was frequently mentioned by residents and community leaders as a source of pride and valued addition to the community's asset base. While CPI focuses heavily on preparing work-ready individuals out of high school for a variety of careers through hands-on learning, the Institute does not currently deliver entrepreneurship curriculum or provide real-life experience forming and developing a viable business.

There are a numerous models for formally integrating entrepreneurship education into the classroom, including but not limited to the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), the National Federation of Independent Business Entrepreneur-in-the-Classroom, the Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education's National Content Standards, and the Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA). The community and its school systems should evaluate these programs and determine if they can efficiently and effectively meet the school systems' objectives as well as community objectives to nurture a culture of entrepreneurship. To evaluate possibilities, the community could convene a half-day workshop for area administrators and educators to review and discuss the choices available to them to expand entrepreneurship education.

A student business incubator could be developed at CPI or on campus at Grand Island Senior High School or Northwest High School to complement the formal curriculum. Student business incubators are becoming increasingly popular in two-year and four-year colleges and universities as these institutions attempt to provide students with opportunities to gain first-hand experience in all facets of starting, growing, and maintaining a business. However, their existence within high schools is relatively limited but occasionally found within charter schools that focus on leadership and entrepreneurship, and which have greater flexibility in terms of curriculum and instruction. The development of a student business incubator as a component of a broader entrepreneurship education program would represent another bold initiative for the community and its school system(s). The community and the school system(s) should reach out to local businesses to gauge their interest and willingness to support the establishment of the incubator in a variety of ways, potentially including but not limited to:

- ✓ serving as corporate sponsors of the incubation program;
- ✓ serving as mentors and instructors during the incubation program;
- ✓ reviewing student business plans and providing feedback;
- ✓ providing funds to support program development and management of the incubator, and;
- ✓ providing small investments to support the launch and development of student startups.

The development of a Student Business Plan Competition could be a lower-cost but likely less impactful alternative to the development of a formal student business incubator. Those graduating from the student business incubator and/or participating in a student business plan competition could potentially be provided with some financial incentive to continue working on their business idea following graduation. This could potentially include a partial scholarship to a local college or university and/or continued free mentorship and advice from the business community and relevant partners. Ultimately, the program should be intended to develop an entrepreneurial mindset and educate students about fundamental business principles. Any student-formed companies that become successful members of the Grand Island business community should be considered a positive byproduct of the program, but not its primary intent.

BEST PRACTICE: YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS ACADEMY (MULTIPLE LOCATIONS NATIONWIDE)

BEST PRACTICE: BUSINESS INCUBATOR STARTUP, BARRINGTON HIGH SCHOOL (BARRINGTON, IL)

2.5 EVALUATE THE VIABILITY OF DEVELOPING A FABRICATION LAB (ALSO KNOWN AS A FAB LAB, TECHSHOP, OR MAKERSPACE) TO PROVIDE BUDDING ENTREPRENEURS WITH A PLACE TO DEVELOP PROTOTYPES AND ADVANCE CONCEPTS FOR MARKETABLE GOODS THAT COULD BECOME VIABLE BUSINESSES.

Fabrication labs (also known as Fab Labs, TechShops, or Makerspaces) are spreading rapidly across the country and the world as the “maker movement” gains popularity. The maker movement describes the transition of what has typically been described as “do it yourself” (DIY) production into a more sophisticated process whereby the average individual, through technology improvements (such as 3-D printing, robotics, and automation) is now able to personally produce far more sophisticated prototypes and products. The culture has evolved into one that embraces hands-on learning, tinkering, and innovation.

In the most basic terms, fab labs are places where makers convene and tinker. They are equipped with a variety of tools and equipment where individuals with common interests in technologies and production techniques from computers to machining to 3-D printing can collaborate to develop an idea or independently work to advance their concept. They are often used by individuals that have a viable product idea but would otherwise lack access to the tools and resources that are provided by the fab lab. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) started a Fab Lab movement and supports a network of labs around the world that are implementing a common approach, with standard tools, resources, and instruction based on MIT’s model. Countless others have formed around the country and operate independently from MIT’s model.

Grand Island clearly has a strong workforce with skills in production techniques and technologies that are taught, supported, and available to explore further at fab labs. Many individuals have acquired skills in machining, robotics, welding, wiring, and countless others production processes, and may have developed their own business ideas through their work experiences. A fabrication lab would provide them with an opportunity and venue to develop their idea further.

The Grand Island business development community should work with Central Community College (CCC) and area businesses to evaluate their interest and willingness to support the development of a Fab Lab in Grand Island. CCC is a logical location for such a laboratory to reside, and employers may be willing to provide monies to sponsor the program and/or donate depreciated or potentially near-new equipment to the laboratory. Fab labs typically contain equipment such as lasercutters, sign cutters and milling machines.

3. Image

Goal: Promote a positive image and market the area to potential new businesses, workers, and visitors.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: SUMMARY

- 3.1 *Launch a comprehensive internal marketing campaign to develop a positive self-image, encourage the community's own residents to be its best ambassadors, and increase resident engagement in community improvement initiatives.*
- 3.2 *Launch a national public relations campaign to promote positive stories about Grand Island and Central Nebraska in national media outlets.*
- 3.3 *Develop long-range Corridor Improvement Plans and signature gateway beautification projects to promote positive first impressions upon entering the community.*
- 3.4 *Proceed with planned updates to the Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation and Grand Island Chamber of Commerce websites, and regularly update websites with relevant information demanded by internal and external audiences, consistent with the findings of the Marketing Review.*
- 3.5 *Realign marketing expenditures at the Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation in a manner that is consistent with the findings of the Marketing Review, such that expenditures primarily focus on the most effective techniques including inbound marketing trips.*
- 3.6 *Proactively maintain strong relationships with NDED staff overseeing business recruitment and regional business development to ensure that state partners are well-informed of the assets in Grand Island, and the planned investments in the Grow Grand Island Business Development Strategy.*
- 3.7 *Evaluate a variety of mechanisms to facilitate the acquisition and assemblage of tax-delinquent or otherwise vacant parcels and the subsequent return of these parcels to revenue-generating uses.*

Image: Strategic Recommendations

- 3.1 *Launch a comprehensive internal marketing campaign to develop a positive self-image, encourage the community's own residents to be its best ambassadors, and increase resident engagement in community improvement initiatives.*

During the public input phase, many residents and business leaders expressed concerns that perceptions about Grand Island and Central Nebraska – whether accurate or inaccurate – are inhibiting the community's ability to realize its full potential. One survey respondent indicated that the community's greatest challenge was "...overcoming current perceptions that the community lacks local cultural value, transparent government, and overall sense of place." The old saying that "perception is reality" is unquestionably true when it comes to resident and visitor impressions of a place. But the evaluations that residents made themselves underscore many of the same challenges that some have cited as "perceived" problems; in other words, a self-fulfilled prophecy. Residents frequently brought up Grand Island's perception to outsiders as one of the negatives about the area, but looking at their own evaluations of the community that they call home, the self-perception of Grand Island is not particularly strong in many critical areas impacting quality of place.

The development and launch of a comprehensive internal marketing campaign, including the establishment of a "community ambassadors" program and a Community Improvement Ideas Contest, could greatly impact the community's self-image. Addressing this self-image is a logical and necessary first step before launching a comprehensive external marketing and public relations campaign that targets non-residents (see recommendation 3.2). This comprehensive internal marketing campaign could potentially include up to three core components:

1. **The "Us" Campaign:** The Grand Island Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) is currently implementing a program that seeks to profile residents (Grand Island's "characters") in the context of what they and the community have to offer to travelers and tourists. The campaign will hopefully help raise awareness among residents about the community's assets so that they too can be effective ambassadors and salespersons.

The CVB should consider working with other partners in the business development community to expand this campaign in future years to focus on other segments of the community (outside of travel and tourism) and the "characters" that influence them. Partnerships with media outlets, particularly the Independent, could help transform the current campaign model (which includes a series of posters and ads) into a one that includes a regular (potentially weekly or monthly) series of articles that profiles individuals, businesses, or organizations in the community that are making a difference. The objective would be to increase awareness of all the positive momentum and energy in Grand Island, and build enthusiasm for Grand Island's present and future.

2. **Ambassadors Program:** Staffs at hotels, restaurants, and tourist attractions, among other locations frequently come into contact with visitors and these interactions are often a part of visitors' first impressions. In order to help travelers and tourists feel welcome and informed about what they community has to offer, they need to be well educated about available amenities, promotions, and community events, while focusing on exceptional customer service. The development of a Tourism Ambassadors program could help achieve these objectives and complement other initiatives that seek to establish existing residents as strong salespersons for the community. Such a program could offer

courses covering assets, sales strategies, customer service, and other relevant issues to staff at hotels, attractions, and other travel and tourism assets, with a goal of creating a travel and tourism sector staffed with professionals that serve as “tourism ambassadors” and promote a common message about the community. They effectively become extensions of the community’s convention and visitors bureau. The community already has a strong track record of developing residents into effective ambassadors as volunteers at the Nebraska State Fair.

3. **Community Improvement Ideas Contest:** An effective way to incite passion among residents is to provide them with the opportunity to directly influence community projects. A community’s residents have an immense number of untapped and underdeveloped ideas for improving the place that they call “home.” Many ideas have emerged from the thousands of residents that participated in the *Grow Grand Island* public input process, and many of these ideas have made their way into this strategy. However, many other residents have tremendous ideas – large and small – that could transform the community. The launch of a Community Improvement Ideas Contest could provide a forum for residents to submit ideas, discuss these ideas, vote on the ideas submitted, and even fund the most deserving ideas.

The business development community could work with the City and other relevant partners to develop a web-based system to solicit ideas for community improvement projects (anything ranging from public art to streetscaping to new amenities) from residents of Grand Island. Technology such as MindMixer, UserVoice, and IdeasScale –online town halls that enable residents to share and vote on ideas – can support the contest. Paper surveys or public forums could complement online technologies to allow those without computers or internet access to provide input. Citizen Selection Committees could review the various ideas and organize those receiving the most votes from residents into a finalists round, with finalists categorized by estimated project cost, subject area, neighborhood/geography, or other attributes. This short list could then be resubmitted to the public for voting with one winner emerging from each category. Selected projects could be funded using public and private monies, with local government and/or charitable foundations providing 1:1 matching grants up to a certain level to complement monies donated by the public and raised via crowdfunding using web-based platforms such as Kickstarter, Crowdrise, Crowdfunder, or IndieGoGo.

BEST PRACTICE: RALLY ST. LOUIS (ST. LOUIS, MO)

3.2 *Launch a national public relations to promote positive stories about Grand Island and Central Nebraska in national media outlets.*

Following the launch of internal marketing campaign components (see recommendation 3.1), the community and its business development partners should retain a national marketing and public relations consultant with significant experience in community and economic development marketing to develop and launch a national public relations campaign. The campaign should identify priority target markets in terms of geography and intended audience. Specific audiences should include business leadership in target sectors. The goal of the campaign should be to seed positive stories about Grand Island and Central Nebraska in prominent national media outlets. Collaboration with state partners such as the Governor’s Office, NDED, and the Nebraska Tourism Commission could result in a more cost-effective campaign. The community should continue to work with state partners to host journalist tours that expose writers from key trade publications, industry news outlets, and other relevant media to the community’s assets, investments, and positive change.

3.3 Develop long-range Corridor Improvement Plans and signature gateway beautification projects to promote positive first impressions upon entering the community.

First impressions are immensely important in terms of talent recruitment, business recruitment, and destination marketing. These first impressions of the community are largely formed along key corridors and at key gateways to the community, including but not limited to the area surrounding the airport and the primary points of entry from Interstate 80 (Highway 281 and South Locust Street). There are parts of these gateways and corridors that make positive impressions but there are parts that leave plenty to be desired. The City of Grand Island, Hall County, the Regional Planning Commission, the Nebraska Department of Roads, and other relevant partners should work together to develop long-range Corridor Improvement Plans for Highway 281 and South Locust Street. Such plans should include a focus on aesthetic elements such as streetscaping and landscaping, signage and wayfinding, lighting, litter prevention, utilities (below ground when financially and operationally feasible), and road maintenance. These plans should also include consideration for one or more signature beautification projects at the community's interstate interchanges and near the airport. A large-scale investment in landscaping and beautification at the Highway 281 or South Locust Street interchange could differentiate the community from its peers along Interstate 80 and leave lasting positive impressions on passers-by that do not even exit the interstate. Similarly, a significant investment in a landmark sculpture that aligns with the community's image and identity (such as a large crane) could have a tremendous impact on visitors impressions of Grand Island.

3.4 Proceed with planned updates to the Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation and Grand Island Chamber of Commerce websites, and regularly update websites with relevant information demanded by internal and external audiences, consistent with the findings of the Marketing Review.

As of September 2014, the Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and the Grand Island Chamber of Commerce are both currently in various stages of updating their websites. The EDC recently launched a new brand identity with a new logo and color palette that have been incorporated into the organizations pre-existing website. Further updates are planned. The Chamber has recently unveiled a new website in August that also includes a new brand identity that shares a common color palette with the EDC. These positive developments should be enhanced by continued updates to content, messages, data, news, and other relevant information, consistent with the findings of the *Grow Grand Island* Marketing Review which details best practice website elements for chambers of commerce and economic development organizations. Although the Marketing Review that analyzed the effectiveness of the Chamber's previous website was completed in June prior to the launch of the new Chamber website, the best practice guidance contained in the Marketing Review is still relevant and should be followed as the EDC and Chamber continue to update their websites with content demanded by internal and external audiences.

3.5 Realign marketing expenditures at the Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation in a manner that is consistent with the findings of the Marketing Review, such that expenditures primarily focus on the most effective techniques including inbound marketing trips.

The Marketing Review completed for the *Grow Grand Island* process highlighted a variety of best practice economic development marketing techniques and identified the marketing techniques that site selectors and corporate executives perceive to be the most important, valuable, and effective. As the EDC develops its budget for targeted marketing in future years, it should realign expenditures in a manner that focuses on the most effective techniques (face-to-face contact with site selectors and executives through inbound and outbound trips, and enhanced web-based marketing) while eliminating expenditures on the least effective techniques (print advertisements, direct mail, and exhibits/booths at trade shows). Specifically, print advertisement expenditures

should be eliminated in favor of inbound marketing trips whereby site selection consultants are hosted and exposed to the community's asset base and inventory of available land and buildings.

3.6 Proactively maintain strong relationships with NDED staff overseeing business recruitment and regional business development to ensure that state partners are well-informed of the assets in Grand Island, and the planned investments in the Grow Grand Island Business Development Strategy.

Many potential business relocation projects and leads come through a state agency such as NDED. Communities that present themselves professionally and positively, and have a history of successful projects and lead conversion, are likely to gain the respect and trust of staff at these state agencies that often manage projects before individual communities at the local level become involved. Accordingly, it is important to maintain strong professional relationships with representatives from NDED. These individuals need to be constantly aware of the community's inventory of available sites, any recent updates to these sites, and other recent changes in the community that may impact its marketability and attractiveness to prospects. These individuals also need to be educated about the *Grow Grand Island* process, its recommendations, and its intended impacts. Relationships and trust can be developed in a variety of ways but there is no substitute for face-to-face interaction. Trips to meet with NDED staff and hosting these staff members in Grand Island are worthwhile pursuits.

3.7 Evaluate a variety of mechanisms to facilitate the acquisition and assemblage of tax-delinquent or otherwise vacant parcels and the subsequent return of these parcels to revenue-generating uses.

During the public input process, residents mentioned that housing availability and the growth of blighted properties and areas of town were concerns. One strategy that has proven effective in catalyzing redevelopment and revitalization in communities across the country is for government authorizes to obtain and "bank" (hold) land and then redistribute this land for desirable public and/or private-sector projects. In many cases, land banking is performed specifically to acquire tax-delinquent properties. However, an authority in Grand Island could be used to acquire tax-delinquent properties, otherwise abandoned properties, and those that may have been damaged by natural disasters. One of the greatest challenges with land banking is that banked properties are often those in the greatest need of rehabilitation and are thus less attractive to developers. As a result, banked land is often offered at below market cost to investors as a development incentive.

The community should evaluate its current inventory of tax delinquent properties as well as its current capacity to support demolitions and the effective return of tax-delinquent properties to tax revenue producing uses. If a land bank authority is determined to be a viable and productive complement to the City's existing efforts, the community will need to work with state partners to facilities amendments to LB97, the state enabling legislation for land bank authorities that currently permits such authorities in Douglas and Sarpy County only.

4. Workforce

Goal: Improve education and skills attainment to develop a workforce that meets the needs of our community's employers.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: SUMMARY

- 4.1 *Continue to work with regional employers to optimize career pathways and programs offered in public schools, including but not limited to those at Career Pathways Institute (CPI).*
- 4.2 *Evaluate short-term and long-term opportunities to expand the availability of two-year and four-year degree options in Grand Island, with consideration given to the potentially catalytic redevelopment role of a higher education presence and accompanying student population on downtown Grand Island.*
- 4.3 *Develop a comprehensive internship and apprenticeship initiative – Learn and Earn – that challenges all local businesses to develop at least one internship or apprenticeship for high school students (summer only) and recent college graduates or work-ready individuals (year round).*
- 4.4 *Develop a Parent Academy and Parent Resource Center to promote parental engagement in student learning and school activities, while also supporting basic adult skills attainment in areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and English language to improve employment prospects for interested parents.*
- 4.5 *Establish a gap-financing scholarship program – Grand Island Graduates (GI Grads) – that provides partial scholarships to supplement all other forms of financial aid for individuals interested in pursuing training, certification, and degree programs offered at Central Community College.*

Workforce: Strategic Recommendations

4.1 Continue to work with regional employers to optimize career pathways and programs offered in public schools, including but not limited to those at Career Pathways Institute (CPI).

The recent addition of the Career Pathways Institute to the community's portfolio of education offerings was applauded by residents throughout input. The Institute allows high school students to spend half of their day in traditional classrooms at their high school, and the other half the day in hands-on-learning environments at CPI. The facilities at CPI are truly state-of-the-art, with new machinery and equipment that has been donated by regional businesses. There is little doubt that CPI is and should continue to be an immense asset for the region, and a key piece of the puzzle in preparing a sustainable workforce – a young workforce – with the skills and interests that match those demanded by regional employers.

The business development should continue to work with regional employers and local school systems to optimize curriculum and align programs with the needs of employers. Specifically, the community will need to evaluate which programs can and should fill remaining space at the existing CPI campus, while also evaluating the demand for programs and the potential need to expand CPI facilities to another physical, satellite campus, potentially located at Doniphan High School or Northwest High School.

In addition, the community has expressed a desire to see greater emphasis on dual credit programs, with expansion of such opportunities for students. Dual degree programs – which allow high schoolers to take college courses and begin earning credits – help students transition to college life more easily and increase likelihood of completing their college degree.

4.2 Evaluate short-term and long-term opportunities to expand the availability of two-year and four-year degree options in Grand Island, with consideration given to the potentially catalytic redevelopment role of a higher education presence and accompanying student population on downtown Grand Island.

Post-secondary education is somewhat limited in Grand Island, and while CPI and Central Community College (CCC) are tremendous assets that will help to close the gap in some of the labor shortages that it is faced with, the community's lack of a strong four-year presence is a disadvantage compared to other communities. Input participants frequently mentioned the lack of four-year degree options as a principal business development challenge, as well as an attribute that inhibits the community's ability to develop and retain younger workers by way of a "college atmosphere" that appeals to recent college graduates from other parts of the state and country. The private, liberal arts Doane College and the University of Nebraska extension office offer courses at College Park but capacity and diversity in offerings are very limited. CCC thus fills the void left by the relative lack of four-year institutions by providing critical adult education in a variety of different subject matters.

While the expansion of four-year degree options is a potentially long-term opportunity that could take decades to develop, the business community has expressed a more immediate interest and need to further develop the two-year college system and atmosphere. In addition to continued expansion of curriculum and training programs, employers would like to see the community work with CCC to evaluate opportunities to expand extra- and co-curricular opportunities for students that can help develop more of a college atmosphere in and around campus. This includes but is not limited to the development of housing for students and the expansion of athletics and arts programs.

The long-term expansion of four-year degree opportunities will undoubtedly require a mix of public and private expansion given the existing opportunities in the community. Doane College may have the potential to expand their offerings if sufficient demand for new and existing programs can justify such expansion. Grand Island may also have the potential to attract a satellite campus of a public institution, or a specific department from an existing institution. The community's leadership should work with existing higher education institutions in Grand Island and public institutions lacking an existing presence in the community to evaluate their long-term interest in potentially establishing greater presence in the Grand Island region, and particularly, in downtown Grand Island. An influx of students would increase daytime traffic to restaurants, increase the viability of new retail establishments, and potentially support demand for residential development such as lofts above storefronts that align with the recommendations of the Grand Island Downtown Redevelopment Study.

BEST PRACTICE: RIVERPARK CAMPUS, COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY (COLUMBUS, GA)

- 4.3 *Develop a comprehensive internship and apprenticeship initiative – Learn and Earn – that challenges all local businesses to develop at least one internship or apprenticeship for high school students (summer only) and recent college graduates or work-ready individuals (year round).*

Internships are an effective way to increase the likelihood that a given student will remain in the community after graduation from high school or college by increasing their professional network, ties to a specific employer, and experience as an employee in Grand Island. They can have similar effects on individuals graduating from colleges in other parts of the state that come to Grand Island for an internship.

The “Learn and Earn” initiative would launch by issuing a challenge to all local businesses to develop at least one internship or apprenticeship for high school students (summer only) and/or college students and recent college graduates (year round). The business development community should host a series of forums that seek to educate employers about the initiative as well as important considerations such as labor laws and how to develop an effective and mutually-beneficial internship or apprenticeship program. Commitments from regional employers should be secured and an online portal should be developed to provide employers with a place to upload available internships and apprenticeships. The portal would also allow interested students to upload their resumes and search for opportunities that match their interests. A brief marketing strategy targeting college students and graduates should be developed, which should include media outreach, targeted advertising at college campuses throughout the state, and an interactive website that allows students to search for internship opportunities by keyword or by subject area/major/degree program. The community could establish a goal of developing and providing at least 100 internship or apprenticeship opportunities each year.

- 4.4 *Develop a Parent Academy and Parent Resource Center to promote parental engagement in student learning and school activities, while also supporting basic adult skills attainment in areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and English language to improve employment prospects for interested parents.*

When discussing challenges facing public school systems, residents from communities around the country frequently mention low levels of parental involvement as a key barrier to the improvement of student outcomes. Although the issue of parental engagement in schools wasn't raised frequently in public input sessions in Grand Island, many did mention a desire to see greater emphasis on parental engagement at home. And the principal barrier to greater parental involvement in child learning was perceived by many to be an issue of adult education. Very simply, a mother or father that has difficulty reading, speaking English, or solving mathematical problems on their own will have little ability to help their children develop in these areas. As the population in Hall County has

grown, so too has its diversity. Growth in the Hispanic population (6,339 net new residents) accounted for nearly 96 percent of all population growth in Hall County (6,623 net new residents) from 2002 to 2012.

Focus group participants frequently discussed the ways in which population diversification is impacting three facets of the community: the school system, the work place, and health and social services. The rapid growth of the Hispanic population and other ethnic minorities is drastically changing the demographics of student populations at certain schools, and both language and cultural barriers present challenges for teachers and administrators that must adjust to a changing student population with varied needs. A diverse array of employers including but not limited to manufacturers reported that language barriers – principally a relative lack of English knowledge among some Hispanic residents – inhibits their employment prospects, with limited choices among area employers and thereby limited opportunities for upward mobility. Health care service providers reported challenges associated with language and cultural barriers with both Hispanic and other international immigrant populations, barriers that inhibit their ability to provide adequate and preventative health care services.

Countless school systems around the country offer parenting programs that typically provide evening courses on covering issues such as parent-child communication, discipline tactics, and study support and standardized test preparation – skills that can help ensure that children have a positive family and learning environment outside of the classroom. However, few offer courses that seek to elevate basic knowledge and skills of parents so that they can better aid their children, while at the same time benefitting themselves through re-education and potentially improved employment prospects.

The business development community should work with Grand Island Public Schools to launch a Parent Academy in the community. A work group could be formed to evaluate best practice parenting programs from around the country, and identify suitable and appropriate components for Grand Island's Parent Academy. Resource needs should be evaluated when developing course content and schedules. Parents should be surveyed to identify which topics and subject areas are most appealing and most in-demand. Other school systems in the region should be approached to evaluate their interest in potential partnerships to promote cost-effective and efficient service delivery.

A Parent Resource Center, inclusive of a Language Lab, should also be considered as a physical space to host Parent Academy courses and provide parents with resources that can support their personal skills attainment (such as English language) in ways that occur outside the formal instruction of a Parent Academy course. This could include the provision of free or low-cost access to language learning software. The business development community should work with the region's school systems, Central Community College, and other organizations such as the Literacy Council and the Multicultural Coalition of Grand Island to ensure that services are not duplicative but rather, are complementary and help promote efficiency in service delivery. The Parent Resource Center would ideally contain at least one classroom and one computer lab. Corporate sponsorships from one or more major employers should be sought to support the development and operations of the Parent Academy and Parent Resource Center.

BEST PRACTICE: PARENT UNIVERSITY, MESA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MESA, AZ)

BEST PRACTICE: PARENT INSTITUTE FOR QUALITY EDUCATION (STATE OF CALIFORNIA)

4.5 *Establish a gap-financing scholarship program – Grand Island Graduates (GI Grads) – that provides partial scholarships to supplement all other forms of financial aid for individuals interested in pursuing training, certification, and degree programs offered at Central Community College.*

Countless studies have documented the rising cost of tuition at our nation's colleges and universities and the impact of these increases on affordability, equity in access, and student debt, among many other impacts. Other studies have shown that the cost of college applications and a lack of education regarding available forms of financial aid and the methods to apply for such aid can be significant barriers to an individual's pursuit of further education beyond high school. Stakeholder input in Grand Island revealed that there are certain barriers to entry for specific programs at CCC (such as truck driver training) that are tied to an individual's inability to access necessary financial aid.

The community should evaluate best practice gap financing programs, including the successful Tulsa Achieves program at Tulsa Community College which provides up to 100 percent of local community college tuition and fees for students graduating from Tulsa County high schools with a GPA of 2.0 or higher. The program offers gap financing – above and beyond any financial aid received from other sources – and requires recipients to perform at least 40 hours of community services each year. A similar program – Grand Island Graduates (GI Grads) – could be developed to help remove barriers to greater two-year degree and certificate attainment.

GI Grads could also be complemented by the launch of a "Financial Aid Saturdays" program that provides hands on assistance to students and families navigating the college and financial aid application process. Such a program would be modelled after the Austin Chamber's successful Financial Aid Saturdays initiative whereby volunteers from the community meet with families and provide free, hands-on assistance in filling out financial aid applications/forms. The community should study this best practice program and gain commitments from counselors, administrators, teachers, social workers, and other members of the community to volunteer their time on select Saturdays each month to educate families about financial aid opportunities and help them complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), among other forms of financial aid such as the recommended GI Grads program.

Finally, GI Grads could also be supported by an effort to promote matching contributions from regional employers who would like to support the continuing education and skill acquisition of their employees. Some employers in the community already provide such financial assistance to employees that make a long-term employment commitment.

BEST PRACTICE: TULSA ACHIEVES, TULSA COMMUNITY COLLEGE (TULSA, OK)

BEST PRACTICE: FINANCIAL AID SATURDAYS (AUSTIN, TX)

5. Community Assets

Goal: Develop and enhance community assets that appeal to potential future businesses, residents, and visitors.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: SUMMARY

- 5.1 *Work with relevant state and local partners to evaluate a variety of potential uses and redevelopment projects for the Veterans Home site that align with and support community improvement and business development objectives.*
- 5.2 *Work with NDED to develop and pilot a Certified Ready Site program that provides developers and site selectors with confidence that a "certified" industrial site is "shovel ready" for development.*
- 5.3 *Evaluate the potential benefits of establishing a Foreign Trade Zone to promote job creation in target sectors such as Manufacturing, Transportation and Distribution, and Repair, Reuse, and Recycling.*
- 5.4 *Evaluate opportunities to utilize state-enabled "enhanced employment areas" that generate revenues to support redevelopment objectives in targeted areas.*
- 5.5 *Develop a local incentive fund to support the attraction of large livestock shows, trade shows, and other events to Grand Island based on their potential economic impact.*
- 5.6 *Continue to advance the development and utilization of facilities in and around Fonner Park, as well as other unique assets in the community such as the Heartland Public Shooting Park.*
- 5.7 *Support the implementation of Central Nebraska Regional Airport's (CNRA) Capital Improvement Plan and continue to advance the expansion of passenger air service to major markets.*
- 5.8 *Work with the City of Grand Island and all relevant partners in the community to align implementation efforts associated with Grow Grand Island and the City's Grand Vision process.*
- 5.9 *Implement the recommendations of the Community Housing Study for Grand Island to ensure that ample, affordable, and attractive housing is available to meet the diverse needs of existing and potential future residents.*
- 5.10 *Support reinvestment in the downtown area by implementing the recommendations of the Grand Island Downtown Redevelopment Study, focusing on the advancement of three catalytic projects identified in the Study: residential conversions, a boutique hotel, and reuse of the Kauffman Plaza/Park.*

Community Assets: Strategic Recommendations

5.1 *Work with relevant state and local partners to evaluate a variety of potential uses and redevelopment projects for the Veterans Home site that align with and support community improvement and business development objectives.*

It was evident during the public input phase that the impending relocation of the Veterans Home to Kearney has caused much anger and embarrassment among the community's residents, not simply due to the pride that they have in the facility and its history in Grand Island, but also due to an abundance of negative press that the city received as a result. This move will take roughly 350 jobs with it. Although the loss of the Veterans Home stirred up emotions, there was clear consensus that the community must move forward and seek to identify other opportunities that could bring value to the community. Any potential reuse of the site will ideally and presumably need to provide value to both the state of Nebraska (as the property owner) and the community of Grand Island.

A number of potential ideas for reuse of the site have been discussed throughout the *Grow Grand Island* process. And while the business community and residents of Grand Island cannot dictate the site's future use, they can and should attempt to identify viable and preferred uses, and present a united effort to advance the most preferred uses. Potential concepts for reuse discussed during the *Grow Grand Island* process include but are not limited to the development of a:

- ✓ four-year college or university campus or satellite campus;
- ✓ new University of Nebraska Innovation Park to support startup growth in addition to the attraction of larger technology-intensive operations;
- ✓ private residential assisted living facility;
- ✓ landmark cultural or recreational amenity and tourism attraction, such as an athletic complex capable of hosting large youth tournaments or an amphitheater capable of hosting large outdoor concerts, performances, and movie screenings, etc., and;
- ✓ new public, residential state high school – The Nebraska School of Science and Mathematics

Support for two concepts – a new University of Nebraska Innovation Park and the establishment of a new Nebraska School of Science and Mathematics – have gained the greatest support during this process. Potential exists to potentially combine these two concepts on the existing Veterans home property.

The development of a new public, residential state high school – The Nebraska School of Science and Mathematics – would be modeled after the successful development of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics which was developed in a former hospital facility in Durham, North Carolina. The residential magnet school attracts the best and brightest high students from North Carolina's 100 counties. Similar schools have emerged in other states around the country. The potential location of such a facility in Grand Island could have positive impacts on other pillars and associated goals from this strategy (Workforce, Image, etc.). It would expose Grand Island to hundreds of the state's most academically gifted students, and potentially create lasting connections to the community and local employers through internships, student projects, and other forms of collaboration. The potential co-location of a new Innovation Park adjacent to the School could provide opportunities for students to collaborate with startups and utilize other resources that may be available at the Park. The Innovation Park and the School could both have a specific focus on agri-business applications, a logical niche focus for the state and the Grand Island region. Tenants at the Innovation Park could potentially access

land used for Husker Harvest Days as a testing ground for products and processes. The opportunities for synergy with other objectives and recommendations in this strategy are immense.

Outreach to representatives from the University of Nebraska will be necessary to evaluate the existing utilization of Innovation Park in Lincoln and the need for potential future expansion. The community should study the best practice North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics and gain support for such a development locally and in partnership with its elected representatives. Once supported is gained locally for the concept(s), the community should begin working with key elected and appointed leadership to evaluate potential re-uses and advance mutually-beneficial opportunities.

BEST PRACTICE: NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS (DURHAM, NC)

5.2 *Work with NDED to develop and pilot a Certified Ready Site program that provides developers and site selectors with confidence that "certified" industrial sites are "shovel ready" for development.*

The Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation currently has hundreds of acres of industrial sites in its inventory of properties. Many of these properties have already had a significant amount of pre-development site preparation completed. Prospective companies and developers prefer sites that are "shovel ready" or near shovel ready – meaning that they can begin development in the least amount of time. Shovel readiness depends on a variety of factors from infrastructure extension to environmental studies and audits to permitting. A number of state departments of economic development, occasionally in partnership with large utilities, have developed "certified site" programs that seek to provide developers with confidence that a given property has completed a certain amount of pre-development site preparation. Such certification programs are increasingly popular at the state-level as the site selection process is incredibly time-sensitive. Site certification is frequently mentioned by site selectors as an effective way to increase the visibility of your community and the likelihood that your community will be considered for prospective relocations and new developments.

The EDC and its various partners in the business development community should consider working with NDED to develop guidelines for a certified site program in Nebraska, with Grand Island serving as the "pilot" community for the new program. Becoming a pilot community and presenting the state with one or more of its first certified sites would greatly enhance the marketability of the community's existing inventory of industrial land, and provide Grand Island with a tremendous advantage in securing large projects seeking relatively large industrial sites in Central Nebraska.

5.3 *Evaluate the potential benefits of establishing a Foreign Trade Zone to promote job creation in target sectors such as Manufacturing, Transportation and Distribution, and Repair, Reuse, and Recycling.*

Foreign trade zones (FTZ) are specially designated areas where customs duties (tariffs) may be deferred until the time in which they are sold to the end user, as opposed to the payment at the time of importing. For all intents and purposes, merchandise located in a FTZ is considered to be outside the United States, meaning that no customs duty is due until the time in which it leaves the FTZ. FTZs also permit "inverted tariffs" whereby the customs duty is reduced based on the value added to a finished product as opposed to the value of the intermediate good(s) imported. Products that are re-exported outside the United States are exempt from tariffs. Additional benefits include the logistical advantages afforded to companies from streamlined customs procedures. The Grand Island business development community should continue to work with existing employers and state partners to evaluate the need for and potential benefit of establishing a foreign trade zone (in addition to Case New Holland's subzone status) in Grand Island.

5.4 Evaluate opportunities to utilize state-enabled “enhanced employment areas” that generate revenues to support redevelopment in targeted areas.

The City of Grand Island has recently discussed the potential use of a relatively underutilized state-enabled redevelopment tool called enhanced employment areas (EEAs). EEAs are districts whereby cities levy an occupation tax to cover the cost of debt service on bonds issued to pay for infrastructure improvements within the EEA. The tool essentially provides another mechanism for communities to catalyze redevelopment and encourage developers to pursue projects in targeted areas where public infrastructure enhancements will increase the attractiveness of the area to private investment. Guidelines for establishment of an EEA are extensive and some communities have cited a relatively cumbersome process as a barrier to greater utilization. The business development community should continue to work with the City to evaluate the potential benefits of and targeted areas for EEA designation, with consideration given to the potential role of an EEA in catalyzing developments identified in plans such as the Grand Island Downtown Redevelopment Study, the Community Housing Study, Grander Vision, and this *Grow Grand Island* Business Development Strategy.

5.5 Develop a local incentive fund to support the attraction of large livestock shows, trade shows, and other events to Grand Island based on their potential economic impact.

In today's competitive environment for conventions, trade shows, exhibits, corporate and association meetings, and other large events, convention and visitors bureaus need to be able to offer a wide array of services to meeting planners. First-rate customer service and a demonstrated commitment to improving the financial and logistical viability of the community and its sites as a host for such events are critical to securing new business. Cash incentives are increasingly becoming the norm, and expected by many meeting planners if they are going to select a community. The CVB and the community at large could benefit greatly from the development of a local incentive fund to provide relatively small, direct cash inducements to bring more business to Grand Island and its facilities. Cash incentives are typically awarded on the basis of number of anticipated room nights or the estimated economic and/or fiscal impact of the event to the community.

5.6 Continue to advance the development and utilization of facilities in and around Fonner Park, as well as other unique assets in the community such as the Heartland Public Shooting Park.

The various facilities in and around Fonner Park are collectively a tremendous and unique asset for the community. From the Nebraska State Fair to concerts and sporting events at the Heartland Events Center to livestock shows, the facilities at Fonner Park attract an immense amount of travel and tourism expenditures to Grand Island. While predominantly utilized for livestock shows and other agri-business uses, the facilities at Fonner Park are certainly capable of attracting a wide variety of uses including large scale conventions, exhibitions, and trade shows. Such events have been hosted at Fonner Park in recent years and the community has expressed a desire to see these facilities utilized more frequently in a manner that provides benefit to both Fonner Park and the entire community. The community should continue to work through the Grand Island Livestock Complex Authority (GILCA) to advance efforts to increase utilization of these facilities, and develop complementary amenities and assets on or adjacent to Fonner Park that increase the overall attractiveness of the community to a variety of different potential uses for these facilities. Many large scale conventions, trade shows, and exhibitions seek facilities with a large block of adjoining or nearby (walking distance) hotel rooms to accommodate guests. As a component of its efforts to support Fonner Park's continued prosperity and positive impact on Grand Island and the surrounding region, the community should evaluate the long-term need for additional hotel rooms and the potential economic impact that such rooms could have on the community's ability to attract a more diverse and frequent set of uses for facilities at Fonner Park.

5.7 *Support the implementation of Central Nebraska Regional Airport's (CNRA) Capital Improvement Plan and continue to advance the expansion of passenger air service to major markets*

The Competitive Assessment and the Target Business Analysis both identified CNRA as a critical asset to the region, one that affords residents and businesses with an advantage that many communities of similar size cannot enjoy. However, improvements to the airport's facilities and infrastructure are necessary to support continued expansion of passenger service to other major markets while enabling other forms of traffic, including certain aircraft commonly used for freight transport. The airport launched its five-year, \$27 million Capital Improvement Plan in 2013. The Plan includes the development of a new passenger terminal for commercial aviation that will more than triple the square footage of the existing terminal, the development of a new general aviation terminal, the addition of more than 600 new parking spaces, and the extension of the main runway from 7,000 to 8,000 feet, among other projects. Implementation of the Capital Improvement Plan will greatly enhance the quality of the visitor experience, the benefits enjoyed by residents and businesses on a daily basis, and the prospects for economic and business development for the community at large. Its impact cannot be overstated. The business development should continue to work with CNRA to advance implementation of the Plan, identify other short-term and long-term needs that may not be covered by the Plan, and coordinate other community projects such as the recommended signature gateway beautification projects (see recommendation 3.3) that may impact or benefit the airport and its operations.

5.8 *Work with the City of Grand Island and all relevant partners in the community to align implementation efforts associated with Grow Grand Island and the City's Grander Vision process.*

Although the visioning process is still underway and its recommendations yet to be determined as of August 2014, the City's Grander Vision process has engaged residents to solicit input on the community's greatest needs as a place to live, input that was received from a comparable number of residents and stakeholders as those that participated in the *Grow Grand Island* input process. While the Grander Vision process focuses on community improvement in Grand Island in the context of its competitiveness as a place to live, and the *Grow Grand Island* process focuses on community improvement in the context of its competitiveness as a place to do business, both process and their recommendations can and should be viewed as entirely complementary. With the quality of the workforce emerging as corporate executives' and site selectors' top concern in recent years across the United States, and with Grand Island's employers citing workforce sustainability, talent retention, and talent recruitment as among their top concerns, it is clear that a community's competitiveness as a place to live and as a place to do business cannot be decoupled.

Acknowledging that Grander Vision recommendations have yet to be developed and publicly released, it is reasonable to assume that these recommendations will at least in part be supportive of the five pillars and associated goals identified in this Business Development Strategy. Accordingly, support for the implementation of Grander Vision recommendations should also help achieve these goals. For example, it is possible that the completion of the athletic fields at Veterans Park will be a specific objective in the Grander Vision process. This is just one example of amenity improvement and quality of life enhancement that supports workforce attraction and retention.

The participation of a few individuals in both strategic planning processes can help bridge divides during the strategic planning phases, but it is the spirit of "collaborative, cooperative, and effective partnerships" that has

been identified as the desired attribute of *Grow Grand Island* implementation that will be necessary to ensure that implementation of both strategies is coordinated in an efficient and effective manner.

5.9 Implement the recommendations of the Community Housing Study for Grand Island to ensure that ample, affordable, and attractive housing is available to meet the diverse needs of existing and potential future residents.

When asked to identify the greatest challenge facing Grand Island as a place to live, work, do business, or visit, “housing” was one of the most frequently mentioned words by the 1,600+ respondents to the community survey. The general consensus among residents was that, generally speaking, many quality options are too expensive for the average resident and most affordable housing options are of generally poor quality. The Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation, Grand Island Community Redevelopment Authority, Nebraska Investment Finance Authority, and a variety of other community partners are well aware of these concerns and have partnered to produce a Community Housing Study that estimates the anticipated demand for new housing by type, price, and other attributes, in order to support an effective housing development strategy. Implementation of these recommendations (as with other existing plans such as the airport’s Capital Improvement Plan, the City’s Grandeur Vision Plan, and the Downtown Redevelopment Study) should be viewed as an integral part of the implementation of the *Grow Grand Island* Business Development Strategy and considered equally critical to the community’s success and future prosperity.

5.10 Support reinvestment in the downtown area by implementing the recommendations of the Grand Island Downtown Redevelopment Study, focusing on the advancement of three catalytic projects identified in the Study: residential conversions, a boutique hotel, and reuse of the Kauffman Plaza/Park.

Similar to the issue of housing, downtown redevelopment was frequently mentioned during the public input phase. In fact, when asked to indicate what they would like to see different about Grand Island in ten years, the most frequently mentioned word by survey respondents was “downtown.” And again, similar to the issue of housing, the community is fortunate in that it has already recognized this concern and taken action to address it, completing a Downtown Redevelopment Study in 2013 as it did with the Community Housing Study. As with the aforementioned other studies already completed for the community that contain recommendations supportive of business development objectives, the Downtown Redevelopment Study’s recommendations should be viewed as an integral part of the *Grow Grand Island* Business Development Strategy.

CONCLUSION: NEXT STEPS

This document represents the second complete draft of this Business Development Strategy. Over the course of the coming months, this Strategy and its recommendations will be reviewed and finalized by the *Grow Grand Island* Steering Committee. Work on the last phase of the process, the Implementation Plan, will begin shortly thereafter. While the Business Development Strategy addresses “what” Grand Island as a community seeks to pursue to enhance its business development activities, the Implementation Plan will define “how” the community and the various organizations engaged in business development will collectively and collaboratively implement the Strategy. Specifically, the forthcoming Implementation Plan will delineate organizational roles and responsibilities, required partnerships to support effective and collaborative implementation, resource requirements (staff and financial), and metrics for gauging return on investment in the recommendations included in this Business Development Strategy.

APPENDIX A: BEST PRACTICES

BUSINESS FIRST, GREATER RICHMOND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP (RICHMOND, VA)

Launched in 2006, Business First is a collaborative, regional, existing business retention and expansion (BRE) program of the Greater Richmond Regional Partnership and its local government partners. Professional economic development staff and trained volunteers from the business community interview CEOs and other top company officials to fully understand the company's competitiveness and its long-term prospects for growth. Interviews cover a wide range of topics and findings include hiring prospects for the next year, perceptions of the regional workforce and specific skill shortages, projected sales, and business climate issues. The data allows the GRP to gauge the health of the regional economy, develop an early warning system to foretell potential future layoffs, and provide targeted solutions to existing businesses. Companies reached by the program receive a high level of customer service and access to a wide variety of resources. The program also responds to specific requests for assistance. By partnering with local government entities, the program leverages the full suite of available resources and provides customized service to businesses.

Thousands of face-to-face interviews have been conducted with business owners and chief executives throughout the region since 2006, collecting a tremendous amount of valuable information and feedback on everything from regulatory issues to expansion plans to workforce needs. The Partnership works with a network of partners to provide a variety of support in areas such as local government services, finance, workforce development, international trade and business planning. All participant responses are confidential and used to provide direct assistance where needed. Information is also aggregated to help develop a better understanding of critical business issues facing the region at-large.

Since 2006, the program has helped create more than 2,000 new jobs from employer expansion and retain more than 2,500 jobs that were at risk of elimination from workforce reductions, closures, or relocations. During the height of the national recession (FY 2010–2011), Business First staffers and volunteers met with 567 companies. Assisted companies created 1,045 jobs, invested \$68 million in capital investment, and retained 172 jobs during the year. The program has been recognized by the Virginia Chamber of Commerce for its significant contributions to economic development. The Partnership produces a detailed annual report specifically devoted to the Business First program and its successes, and has its own website which helps convey the program's intent and allow staff to "get their foot in door." This annual report and the Business First program have received numerous awards from organizations such as the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and the Southern Economic Development Council (SEDC).

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS EMERGING LEADERS, ROGERS-LOWELL AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (NORTHWEST ARKANSAS)

Realizing the need to connect to the young professionals and future leaders of the community, the Chamber developed the Northwest Arkansas Emerging Leaders (NWAEL) in 2008. Membership and participation in the program is open to anyone in the area that is looking to get involved in the community and strengthen their leadership skills. Membership has increased significantly since the formation of the program, with the number of members growing from approximately 100 in 2009 to nearly 450 in 2013.

One of the strengths of the program is that rather than simply teaching members how to leader through educational sessions, as some traditional leadership programs do, the Northwest Arkansas Emerging Leaders aims to develop leadership skills through experience by actively engaging the members in workgroups, projects,

and programs. There are five workgroups – legacy, political and government affairs, sustainability, greenways and trails, and community enrichment – that members can be a part of based on their individual interest. Each workgroup meets monthly and is charged with developing programs that will benefit the community.

Over the past several years, the organization has hosted dozens of events and programs aimed at educating and engaging the members and making a positive impact on the community. Such projects include *Lunch with a Leader*, a *Board Service Certification Program*, the *Bike to School Initiative*, *Voter Registration Drive*, and the creation of a *Recycling Alliance*. The Greenways and Trails Workgroup also helped to develop a Community Bike Program, which provides free bikes for the public to use on the city's network of trails.

The program provides valuable opportunities to its members and as a result, is helping the members to strengthen their leadership skills and knowledge, grow their careers, and expand their networks. The education and support provided to these members is invaluable in helping to build a stronger future generation of leaders in the Northwest Arkansas region.

YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS ACADEMY (MULTIPLE LOCATIONS NATIONWIDE)

The Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) is a national program adopted and supported by numerous chambers of commerce and school districts around the country. The program engaged students in grades 6-12 to teach business principles, generate business ideas, conduct market research, develop business and marketing plans, and pitch ideas to potential investors. At the conclusion of the program, students will develop real products and operate incorporated enterprises.

The program was founded in 2004 at the University of Rochester in partnership with the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. As of 2013, the program serves thousands of students in nearly 175 communities across the United States. More than 1,000 student businesses have been launched. According to the Young Entrepreneurs Academy, graduates of the program at various sites across the country have exceptionally positive student outcomes in a variety of areas, including a 100 percent on-time graduation rate. Nearly all graduates (99 percent) enroll in college of some form. Nearly one in five graduates (19 percent) has started a second business.

The program has grown to be offered as an after-school program as well as a credit-earning within a high school's curriculum. Volunteers from the business community are engaged in the program as mentors, advisors, speakers, CEO Roundtable members, field trip hosts, and providers of in-kind specialized services to student businesses (i.e. web development, logo and graphic design, etc.).

For the 2014-2015 academic year, the program is being implemented in 92 different communities across 33 states. The Young Entrepreneurs Academy, Inc. requires sponsoring chambers of commerce to commit \$7,600 annually for three years in order to launch the program. Grants are available from the United States Chamber of Commerce Foundation. While many sponsoring chambers of commerce elect to offer the program free of charge, some require modest tuition (\$300 - \$500 per student) to cover remaining costs.

BUSINESS INCUBATOR STARTUP, BARRINGTON HIGH SCHOOL (BARRINGTON, IL)

During the 2013-2014 academic year, sophomores and juniors at Barrington High School attended what is believed to be the first lean-principles business incubator program based on a high school campus. The year-long curriculum was based on "lean launchpad" principles taught by Steve Blank, Stanford entrepreneurship professor and author of *The Startup Owner's Manual*. The program was the brainchild of two local entrepreneurs.

The course is designed to get students excited about becoming true entrepreneurs. This course gives them the opportunity to create and fully develop their own product or service. Real world entrepreneurs and business

experts serve as coaches and mentors for student teams through the processes of ideation, market research, and business plan development. Students learn about marketing, accounting, human resources, and the legal aspects of running a business in order to prepare them for Pitch Week.

Thirty-one student teams explained their ideas to investors during Pitch Week this year. The five best were chosen to present at a pitch event hosted by CNBC personality Jim Iurio. Individual investors and the school's Barrington 220 Educational Foundation invested in the winning companies to help them turn their business plans into reality during the summer and following school year. The startup to win the most funding in this inaugural year of the program won \$25,000 to develop a tracking app "Find My Bus." Other winning student enterprises include Warrior Wipes (medical-grade cleaning wipes for sports equipment), TechWurk (a website that pairs nonprofits with web developers willing to offer free site design), and The Study Projects (a website that facilitates collaborative study habits).

RALLY ST. LOUIS (ST. LOUIS, MO)

Rally St. Louis is an online platform, born out of the "St. Louis Doesn't Suck" campaign that was launched in an effort to change the negative perception outsiders had about St. Louis. The campaign sought to bring attention to and highlight the positive aspects of the community – the low cost of living, quality education options, plentiful employment opportunities, and the recreation and cultural resources. Through the suggestions and opinions of ways to market St. Louis' positive aspects, the online platform, Rally St. Louis, was created in November 2012. The online avenue allows for all residents to participate in community development and more accurately portrays the diverse region's needs by giving residents that typically aren't in positions of power to make such decisions, an opportunity to voice their opinions and desires for the community.

The success and popularity of the platform rests on this fact that, rather than rely on a singular organization to decide what is best for the community, St. Louis residents all have an outlet to submit their own ideas on how to improve and market their community. A board, made up of community stakeholders, social organizations, and local businesses, sifts through all the submitted ideas and posts those that they feel would potentially best benefit the area. The platform empowers residents to take an active part in the bettering of their community and further allows for easy access to then vote on which ideas they support. The ideas citizens submit are categorized in a range of topics that includes beautification projects, educational programs, marketing ideas, and non-profit organizations. Those ideas with the top number of votes then go through a funding phase after the budgeting committee has estimated the costs and resources needed to complete the project. Residents and organizations can then support the idea through a donation on the website to fund the project. Several projects have materialized including a children's exhibit at the airport and an urban community garden, among others.

RIVERPARK CAMPUS, COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY (COLUMBUS, GA)

Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia is home to nearly 7,000 undergraduate students. The University's main campus is located roughly six miles from Downtown Columbus, but the University has undoubtedly been the greatest catalyst for downtown redevelopment in Columbus in recent decades.

Columbus State intended to develop new facilities to support its performing arts program, and realized that Downtown Columbus - outside of its main campus - could be a potential location for new facilities. After much planning, the University developed its RiverPark campus in Downtown Columbus and relocated the University's Art, Music, Theatre, Communications and History Departments. The University acquired vacant space in Downtown Columbus and redeveloped much of the area – often preserving existing façades – to include student apartments for up to 360 students. Investments also included a collaborative effort to develop the city's RiverCenter for the Performing Arts, which is home to the University's Music Department.

Downtown business has thrived with many new coffee shops, bookstores, restaurants, and nightlife opening and flourishing, in part due to the influx of college students. The University operates a shuttle between the main campus and its RiverPark campus.

PARENT UNIVERSITY, MESA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MESA, AZ)

With the philosophy that parenting is a continuous learning process and that the foundation for a child's education is laid at home, the Mesa Public School system launched a Parent University program in 1985. The diverse offering of sessions and workshops, held in junior high school auditoriums and other local school sites, now boasts attendance rates of 4,000 parents annually. The program is publicized through radio announcements, target fliers, brochures sent home with every student, and announcements in the monthly district newsletter.

Topics for sessions are relevant, often specifically requested by parents, and led by local and national speakers and experts. The most popular areas of instruction are discipline and communication. Participant feedback concludes each workshop, where parents are asked to identify what they liked about the session, what they learned, what actions they will take, what improvements are needed, and what else they would like to learn about. Given the presence of a relatively large Hispanic population, many courses are also available in Spanish.

Courses in 2013 include but are not limited to: Ten Steps to Positive Discipline, Master Your Emotions, Motivate Your Teen to Read, Setting Limits Without Guilt, Raising a Successful Teen, One Family/Two Different Parenting Styles, Dads of Children with Special Needs, The Critical Path to College, and How to Stay Calm When Your Kids – and Life – Push Your Buttons.

Parent University is funded through a small registration fee for participants, in addition to grants, partnerships with local nonprofit agencies like Mesa United Way. Scholarships are available for parents with financial need.

PARENT INSTITUTE FOR QUALITY EDUCATION (STATE OF CALIFORNIA)

The Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) began in California in 1987 when Reverend Vahac Mardirosian (retired pastor and community activist) and Dr. Albert Ochoa (San Diego State University professor) engaged parents to discuss social conditions, the school system, and persistent problems of low academic achievement in their community. The initial session was so popular that the program evolved into eight different sessions. At the end of this initial process, Dr. Ochoa took the lessons from these eight sessions and developed a formal nine-week curriculum for workshops targeting K-12 parents.

PIQE quickly spread to school districts throughout California. The workshop is offered by certified instructors trained by PIQE, and educates parents on a variety of topics including motivation, communication, discipline, school system organization, college preparation, and overcoming obstacles in child learning. The program is typically supported in part by the school system (leveraging Title 1, Title 111 and No Child Left Behind funds) with contributions from charities and grants. The program is offered free of charge to parents and is typically offered in morning and evening sessions to accommodate various schedules. Since starting in California, PIQE has spread to other regions of the country including the Washington D.C. metropolitan area and communities throughout Texas, Arizona, and Minnesota. As of 2009, over 375,000 parents have graduated from PIQE's parent involvement training classes in California alone.

TULSA ACHIEVES, TULSA COMMUNITY COLLEGE (TULSA, OK)

Implemented in 2007, Tulsa Achieves is a gap-funding program that provides up to 100 percent of local community college tuition and fees for students graduating from Tulsa County high schools. The program was implemented, in part, due to the rising costs of higher education and gives students in the area the opportunity

to achieve their educational needs debt-free. The Tulsa Community College further developed a Textbook Trust for Tulsa Achieves students to offset textbook expenses. In the past seven years, the program has helped approximately 10,000 students.

To be a part of the program, students must graduate with at least a 2.00 grade point average from any school in the county and attend the community college the fall semester immediately following high school graduation. In addition to providing financial support, the program is structured to encourage and help students succeed. Those enrolled in the program are required to complete 40 hours of volunteer service each academic year and to take a course on strategies for academic success. There are also several tutorials offered to the students to help them succeed and an academic advisor that monitors the progress of students along the way. Those students that wish to transfer to a four-year school are given support in that process as well.

On average, the cost per students in the program is approximately \$3,400 per year, and the operating budget for the program is mostly funded through property taxes. Those costs cover the gap between federal and/or state financial aid and the full cost of tuition and fees. Roughly 80 percent of students that enter the program end up finishing it. Avoiding student loan debt from tuition and other costs associated with post-secondary education is helping to create a stronger future workforce for the Tulsa community.

FINANCIAL AID SATURDAYS, AUSTIN CHAMBER (AUSTIN, TEXAS)

While the Austin metro area has one of the most educated workforces in the nation, the Greater Austin Chamber recognized that much of the highly-educated population was the result of in-migration for high-technology sector jobs and University of Texas - Austin enrollment. With the support of three local school districts, six higher education institutions, and 12 community organizations and companies, the Greater Austin Chamber worked in the first phase of its "20,010 by 2010" program to boost local higher education enrollment by 30 percent over 48 months. The goal is to grow total regional enrollment in institutions of higher education to 20,010 by 2010.

A component of this effort was a program called Financial Aid Saturdays. In order to help meet increased higher education enrollment goals, the Chamber provided support to Austin, Round Rock, and Manor Independent School Districts (ISDs) to increase FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) submission by 15 percent for students graduating in 2007. The Chamber organized and trained volunteers to make calls, answer questions, and walk students and their families through the process of applying for financial aid. In the first phase of the program, the Chamber's more than 200 volunteers assisted over 500 families in filing FAFSA applications.

NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS (DURHAM, NC)

When the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics (NCSSM) opened in 1980 on the vacated Watts Hospital campus in Durham, it was the first public, residential high school with a specialized STEM curriculum. Each year, sophomores with high intellectual ability and commitment to scholarship across the state of North Carolina apply to spend their junior and senior years at NCSSM. Enrollment is competitive. The school enrolls 340 new juniors in a roughly equal percentage from all of the state's 13 congressional districts every year. An additional 700+ students are served each year by the school's distance education program.

Students take four or five core academic courses per trimester including at least six science courses, five mathematics courses, four English courses, two social sciences courses, and up to six language courses during their two years at NCSSM. Students must also complete two years of campus work service and a community service project. It is estimated that students contribute roughly 21,000 volunteer hours each year to North Carolina charities. In addition to requirements, students also participate in a number of elective academic programs including extensive opportunities in the arts and music. Students are also provided with exposure to a

research track where they can focus their studies on research methods and are provided with the opportunity to work in an off-campus lab or other real-world setting at an area university or in a Research Triangle Park lab. During the winter trimester of each year, students take a break from their ordinary classes for one week to pursue supervised independent research projects.

In the class of 2013, 56 percent of students were Caucasian, 27 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, eight percent were African American/Black, six percent were Hispanic/Latino, three percent were two or more races, and less than one percent were American Indian or Alaskan Native.