



GROW

QUAD CITIES

FORWARD QC

5-Year Economic Development Strategy
2025-2030



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INTRODUCTION

Forward QC is the regional five-year economic development strategy that will advance the Quad Cities region as the top market among our peer metros. Regional collaboration is critical to advancing ourselves, our businesses, our communities and our bi-state region. This strategy will accelerate the Quad Cities in three lanes: business development, workforce and quality of place. Forward QC will be supported by a dynamic regional marketing plan aimed at storytelling and promoting the Quad Cities region to enhance our image, attractiveness and competitiveness.

Forward QC is a strategy designed to capitalize on our opportunities, build on our successes and elevate our community to unprecedented heights. Now more than ever, we need to work together, seek out new voices and ideas and embrace change. Forward QC will lead us. This economic development strategy aims to unlock growth and economic opportunities across diverse industry sectors and is founded on principles of equity and inclusive prosperity. It provides the opportunity to think bigger and aim higher, to double down on ensuring that diverse voices are heard, acknowledged and supported.

The Forward QC strategy serves as our roadmap for the future. Public and private leaders are aligned on common objectives: accelerating the development of homegrown talent, creating vibrant places, diversifying our economy, improving our image and fostering collaboration for a stronger community. Our collective efforts will usher in a new wave of growth and prosperity for the Quad Cities region.

TIMELINE & PROCESS

Forward QC is the guiding five-year strategic plan for Grow Quad Cities - the newly created regional economic development organization for the Quad Cities. Establishing our regional economic development organization was essential prior to the creation of this five-year strategy as it serves as the implementation organization.

Phase I: CREATION AND FUNDING OF GROW QUAD CITIES

Grow Quad Cities is a public-private regional economic development organization created and incorporated in 2025. In the creation of this new organization, leadership and economic development staff had to first renew our public sector service level agreements with our local municipal partners. This involved reviewing the services offered to our public partners to ensure that our regional economic development efforts aligned with county and city goals and visions for economic growth.

Once aligned with our public partners, additional direction and investment were needed by our private sector businesses. Ongoing fundraising efforts will continue to ensure that we have ample funding to continue the work outlined within this strategic plan. Both the public and private sector have representation on the board of directors to provide guidance and leadership in the development of our regional economic development priorities.

PHASE II: QUAD CITIES COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT

Our in-house business intelligence team conducted a competitive assessment of our region to gather critical data points, trends and areas affecting the Quad Cities. We have integrated this information into the strategic plan to help prioritize our strategies for success. Regular benchmarking of our attractiveness and competitiveness compared to our peers will be a regular and ongoing exercise.

PHASE III: FORWARD QC

Our final phase resulted in the development of a next-level strategic plan for the Quad Cities that blends ongoing areas of focus that warrant continuation with new programs and initiatives to establish the region's strategic priorities for the next five years. Each key initiative for the strategic plan has had review and comments from our board of directors, municipalities and key stakeholders.

FORWARD QC EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is critical that a holistic community and economic development vision plan serves to integrate and align key efforts working towards the same goal: making the Quad Cities a first-choice destination for companies and talent. This new five-year strategy is oriented around a set of top-line goals and underlying objectives containing key initiatives designed to achieve desired outcomes represented by a holistic set of performance and activity benchmarks.

OBJECTIVE 1: REGIONAL BUSINESS SUCCESS

Accelerating business and job creation in key sectors will cultivate increased industry diversification, corporate growth and business expansion opportunities. Initiatives will be focused on promoting the Quad Cities as a premier business destination, providing support services for existing industry growth, attracting new employers in targeted well-paying sectors and fostering an entrepreneurial and innovative ecosystem.

Key Initiatives:

- Business attraction, retention & expansion outreach programming, support & service
- Investor and developer outreach
- Existing industry support and service
- Entrepreneurial ecosystem building

Desired Outcomes:

- Retain, expand and support our existing business base
- Promote and attract new industries to the Quad Cities in priority industries
- Develop and grow new businesses through innovation and entrepreneurship

OBJECTIVE 2: THRIVING WORKFORCE

Talent is one of the most important factors in determining how communities compete for jobs and investment. Optimizing the potential of local education and training systems and institutions to deliver work-ready graduates for area companies remains the most sustainable solution to labor force availability constraints. Expanding the pool of adults fully engaged in the workforce and earning competitive, “livable wages” creates additional benefits for public health, public safety, retail development, housing and other quality of life components. Education is a proven tool to reduce local inequities and improve access to high-paying careers.

Key Initiatives:

- Career connections network
- Workforce connections

Desired Outcomes:

- Maintain a highly skilled workforce by providing access to career training programs and incentives to our employers
- Upskill our underutilized workforce into livable-wage careers
- Increase opportunities for cradle-to-career job attainment
- Recruit and retain top talent

OBJECTIVE 3: ATTRACTIVE & COMPETITIVE PLACE

Prioritizing placemaking will transform our physical locations into inviting spaces that encourage recreation, connectivity and entertainment across our region. Utilizing our regional assets such as the riverfront, entertainment and sports districts, we have the opportunity to recruit investment to create visionary, catalytic projects that transform our region and its image. New investments in the revitalization and development of key activity centers and corridors around the Quad Cities must be matched by coordinated strategies to develop new mixed-use, entertainment and business products and improve the condition and aesthetics of the built environment. These spaces and places can be a driving catalyst in regional population growth.

Key Initiatives:

- Quality of life development, a world-class riverfront
- Regional infrastructure investment & support
- Regional site readiness
- Regional storytelling

Desired Outcomes:

- Increase awareness of the Quad Cities location and opportunities
- Bring in new investment to launch the construction of mixed-use developments
- Increase regional competitiveness and attractiveness for business and lifestyle
- Achieve long-term population growth consistent with a thriving and growing MSA

Forward QC's three objectives can be achieved by the advancing and activating of a focused set of key initiatives that correspond to specific programs, projects, processes and investments. These key initiatives incorporate a range of ongoing and planned activities along with new concepts that can help move the Quad Cities region forward.

This strategic plan targets a selection of "high-impact" initiatives believed to be the root-cause objectives that filter down to related goals that constitute day-to-day workplan activity. Forward QC reflects the top priorities that emerged from the full breath of research and stakeholder feedback into the competitive issues, challenges and opportunities that the Quad Cities region faces as it strives to become a community of choice for talent and companies.

Key Initiatives are measured and benchmarked annually and evaluated towards our 5-year success rate.

TOP 5 REGIONAL METRICS: BENCHMARKING AGAINST PEER METROS

Appendix A contains a regional assessment that compares the Quad Cities metro area to 14 other peer metro areas on a variety of dimensions. The peer metro areas were chosen on the basis of characteristics including median age, percentage of persons age 25 and older with a bachelor’s degree or greater, median household income, labor market variables and population demographics. Data for these indicators are obtained from the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Economic Analysis and the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The regional assessment benchmarks the Quad Cities against these other metro areas and allows for ranking and comparison across multiple statistics. The statistics we have specifically chosen as metrics for ranking purposes include population growth, median household income, average annual payroll employment growth, percent of the population (age 25+) with a bachelor’s degree or higher and average GDP growth. These indicators are shown in the table below.

MSA	Population Growth 2019-2024	Median Household Income 2023	Ave. Annual Payroll Growth 2019-2024	% of Population 25+ w/Bach. Degree 2023	Ave. Real GDP Growth Rate 2021-2023
Akron, OH Metro Area	-0.04%	\$71,312	-0.2%	34.5%	0.5%
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	1.81%	\$69,627	0.7%	33.2%	1.7%
Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area	0.56%	\$70,572	-0.4%	35.1%	2.1%
Cedar Rapids, IA Metro Area	0.41%	\$77,084	-1.1%	32.8%	-1.0%
Chattanooga, TN-GA Metro Area	0.79%	\$68,666	2.2%	31.3%	2.5%
Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, IA-IL Metro Area	0.13%	\$71,925	-0.5%	29.4%	1.8%
Evansville, IN Metro Area	*	\$67,671	*	28.9%	*
Green Bay, WI Metro Area	0.72%	\$77,459	0.2%	29.9%	1.4%
Greenville-Anderson-Greer, SC Metro Area	1.60%	\$69,016	1.6%	33.7%	3.4%
Knoxville, TN Metro Area	1.94%	\$69,734	2.2%	31.9%	3.1%
Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN Metro Area	*	\$71,737	*	32.1%	*
Lynchburg, VA Metro Area	0.09%	\$67,782	-0.3%	30.9%	1.1%
Peoria, IL Metro Area	*	\$70,872	*	31.6%	*
Topeka, KS Metro Area	0.06%	\$68,160	0.5%	30.1%	0.4%
Wichita, KS Metro Area	0.65%	\$68,930	0.6%	31.5%	2.8%
Quad Cities Rank	9 out of 12	3 out of 15	11 out of 12	14 out of 15	6 out of 12

*Not comparable due to changes to MSA boundaries during this time.

OBJECTIVE 1: REGIONAL BUSINESS SUCCESS

KEY INITIATIVE: BUSINESS ATTRACTION, RETENTION & EXPANSION OUTREACH PROGRAMMING, SUPPORT & SERVICE

WHAT

New corporate attractions are essential for economic growth in a region. Grow QC markets the Quad Cities to corporate prospects outside the region through a number of means; developing and updating the content on the organization's economic development website (growquadcities.com); investing in paid media through advertising placements in key trade and business publications; creating dynamic storytelling content; building relationships with site selection professionals and corporate relocation officers; traveling to targeted relocation markets and industry conferences; in-market hosting of influencers and prospects; and coordinating efforts with our local economic development partners to leverage incentive tools to finalize relocation deals.

Likewise, our economic development efforts are equally focused on preserving the existing industry base through business retention outreach. This relationship building with existing industries and corporations provides opportunities to share critical business support services and resources to help maintain corporate presence in the region and potentially provide resources for corporate expansions. Existing industry expansion account for nearly 70% of all growth in our region, making these relationships and outreach a critical function of our economic development efforts. While we have been successful at the recruitment of industrial and manufacturing operations to the Quad Cities, and have built relationships with our industrial and manufacturing community, we are seeking to diversify our efforts into more industry and attraction opportunities.

WHY

Regional industry diversification is a cornerstone of resilient and sustainable economic development. When a region relies heavily on a single industry, whether it's manufacturing, agriculture, tourism or energy, it becomes vulnerable to economic shocks. A downturn in that one sector, whether due to global market shifts, technological disruption or environmental factors, can ripple through the entire local economy leading to job losses, reduced tax revenues and long-term stagnation.

Diversification, on the other hand, spreads economic risk across multiple sectors. By nurturing a mix of industries — such as healthcare, technology, logistics, education and green energy — a region can better withstand downturns in any one area. This economic balance creates a more stable environment for businesses and workers alike.

Moreover, a diversified economy fosters innovation and entrepreneurship. When different industries coexist, they often share ideas, talent and infrastructure, leading to cross-sector collaboration and new business opportunities. For example, a strong tech sector can support advancements in agriculture through precision farming or enhance manufacturing through automation and data analytics.

From a workforce perspective, diversification opens a broader range of career paths and skill development opportunities. This not only helps retain local talent but also attracts new residents seeking dynamic job markets and quality of life. It also encourages educational institutions to align their programs with a wider array of industry needs, strengthening the region's human capital.

Finally, a diversified economy is more attractive to investors. It signals long-term viability, adaptability and a proactive approach to economic planning. Investors are more likely to commit to regions that demonstrate resilience and a forward-thinking strategy.

In essence, regional industry diversification is not just a safeguard against economic downturns — it's a strategic pathway to innovation, inclusiveness and long-term prosperity.

HOW

STRATEGIES	MEASURES
Conduct business outreach to identify business growth and workforce needs, and potential expansion or retention projects	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BRE conversations (in-person, virtual and survey) with existing companies - target 130 per year 2. Total resource assistance (includes technical assistance by Grow QC, referrals to resource partners, business development introductions and financial assistance opportunities) - target 500 per year
Conduct QC regional economic assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data generation, analysis and reporting of new targeted industries that the Quad Cities region can support 2. Identification of available development inventory 3. Complete regional comparative and competitive analysis
Create and maintain growquadcities.com as a promotion and data resource for business decision makers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Successful launch of website 2. Target 1,000 unique visitors per month 3. Website clicks by known site selectors - target 100 per year
Out-of-market attraction engagements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage with site selectors, developers and company decision makers - target 100 per year 2. Attend 5 national trade shows in targeted industries 3. Host 2 familiarization tours in the Quad Cities per year
In-market relationship building	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct quarterly meetings with community economic development stakeholders and local economic development organizations (LEDOs) 2. Identify and develop relationships with regional partner organizations supporting economic development
New industry outreach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visit 10 corporations outside of industrial and manufacturing industries per year
Innovation ecosystem building	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lobby and apply for state and federal funding programs to support the Quad Cities Manufacturing Institute (QCMI) 2. Launch Innovation and technology committee through Regional Opportunities Council (ROC) 3. Convene top 10 tech leaders in the Quad Cities as a strategic think-tank

5-YEAR OUTCOMES

1. Successful business attraction projects across our diverse targeted industry priorities.
2. Increased project activity, requests for proposals and increased participation in site selector activity as a result of our new messaging and branding the Quad Cities as a diverse business location.
3. 1,000 new jobs created at a regional livable wage.
4. Enhanced investor engagement with business and industry leaders in the Quad Cities because of new outreach activities across diverse industry sectors.
5. Increased awareness of where the Quad Cities is located within the country.

KEY INITIATIVE: INVESTOR AND DEVELOPER OUTREACH

WHAT

Grow QC will formalize a process to cultivate a group of development firms to position as qualified partners for local and out-of-market economic development prospects. This will entail market research and identifying potential out-of-market national and international development and investment firms to engage in discussions on Quad Cities development opportunities and how to capture them.

Grow QC will seek to build relationships with interested developers to get them to understand the dynamics of the Quad Cities market, the types of projects drawn to the area and the development opportunities that are readily available. Ultimately, a goal will be to enlist developers as promoters and champions for business opportunities in the Quad Cities region.

As a more robust developer network is cultivated, discussions could expand to include potential incentives for preparation of shovel-ready land and risk-sharing with local and state economic development partners to enhance the supply of speculative buildings, office products, redevelopment and mixed-use sites. These would be supported by data and specific examples of the potential for ROI in our region.

WHY

Beyond the immediate financial boost, imported investment often brings with it new ideas, technologies and expertise. When companies from outside the region set up operations, they introduce best practices, advanced systems and global market access. This knowledge transfer can elevate local businesses, improve productivity and foster a culture of innovation.

Investment also plays a critical role in diversifying the local economy. By attracting capital into our underrepresented sectors such as mixed-use, entertainment or commercial office, we can reduce our dependence on a single industry and build a more resilient economic base. This diversification helps cushion the impact of economic downturns and creates a broader range of employment opportunities.

Imported investment signals confidence in our region's potential. The successful commitment of outside investment sends a message to other stakeholders or investors that the region is a viable and promising place to grow. This can trigger a ripple effect, encouraging further investment and development.

Locally, investment supports public revenue growth. As projects commence, they contribute to the local tax base. These revenues can be reinvested in public services, education, infrastructure and quality-of-life improvements creating a virtuous cycle of development. Importing investment will help unlock the full potential of the Quad Cities by fueling innovation, creating jobs, diversifying the economy and building a foundation for sustainable growth.

HOW

STRATEGIES	MEASURES
Conduct construction and development focused business intelligence research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report: competitive cost analysis of construction across different product types 2. Report: comparative analysis of development process vs. competition
Present investment opportunities to regional, national and international developers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create investor Opportunity Outlook presentations highlighting our region's development opportunities 2. Present to developers - target 10 annually
Identify and prepare investment-ready sites	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage with consultant to research and write Regional Site Readiness Report 2.0 2. Seek Iowa/Illinois and federal incentives for site readiness 3. Total of RFIs responded to vs. total of RFIs received 4. Collaborate with regional partners to identify opportunities and problem-solve challenges of potential sites

5-YEAR OUTCOMES

1. Attract investment for at least one national and/or international development project in the Quad Cities.
2. Investment Goal: \$300 million in new capital investment in the region.
3. Increased brand recognition nationally for the Quad Cities.

KEY INITIATIVE: EXISTING INDUSTRY SUPPORT AND SERVICE

WHAT

Business retention and expansion (BRE) visits will strengthen relationships with local businesses. Conducting on-site visits to record and track companies' current and projected growth trajectories, talent demands, expansion opportunities, infrastructure and technology needs and concerns that could be assisted through legislative and regulatory advocacy are key. Results of BRE visits will inform Grow QC staff and municipal partners on efforts to ensure that Quad Cities employers receive the support necessary to sustain and grow their operations. Additionally, BRE outreach helps inform us about our local economic competitive challenges and opportunities.

WHY

Every year, reports surface from regions across the country of large companies announcing relocations to new markets to the surprise of local governments and economic development professionals. Successful BRE efforts ensure that every possible action is taken ahead of time to keep these employers in the community. Increasingly, BRE activities are geared around issues of talent, today's number one competitive issue in economic development.

Acknowledging that existing businesses typically comprise around 80% of local jobs, we have long-established and implemented programs to assist companies with retaining and expanding employment. Our BRE efforts have proven to be important to proactively work with our local companies to ensure they remain in our community long term. Grow Quad Cities existing business services efforts will be complemented by multiple proposed Forward QC initiatives that address workforce development and capacity, housing, childcare, diversity and inclusion, and other inputs that affect companies' ability to retain and attract skilled talent.

HOW

STRATEGIES	MEASURES
Conduct business outreach visits with existing industries	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BRE conversations (in-person, virtual and survey) with existing companies - target 130 per year 2. Target minimum 20 new industry business outreach visits outside of manufacturing industry
Connect local businesses with state and federal resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Catalog available expansion, workforce and training incentive programs within an online resource guide hosted on our website 2. Launch business resources marketing and social media campaign
Maintain industry leading business retention and expansion program	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct benchmark assessment of Grow Quad Cities BRE program
Host industry roundtable events	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Host quarterly manufacturing roundtable events 2. Identify stakeholders in new priority industry sectors to create additional industry roundtables
Identify workforce gaps in existing industry base	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data collected and provided to higher education institutions and workforce training partners, and programs created as a result of this data 2. Continue to update annually the Top 100 High Priority Jobs report

5-YEAR OUTCOMES

1. Have a stronger connection to our local industry base across all priority industry sectors.
2. Increase awareness of opportunities and challenges that our local business community face to better align support efforts
3. Create better engagement opportunities for our local companies to build strong relationships and collaborate.

KEY INITIATIVE: ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM BUILDING

WHAT

Entrepreneurial ecosystem building is the process of cultivating a supportive environment where entrepreneurs can start, grow and sustain businesses. This environment is made up of several interdependent components that, when working together, create a thriving system for innovation and economic growth.

Separate from the entrepreneurs themselves, support organizations, access to capital, a strong talent pool of innovators, infrastructure and culture play critical roles in fostering a successful innovation ecosystem.

Grow Quad Cities will work to develop each of these areas to establish a strong entrepreneur and innovation ecosystem to help build a strong foundation of technology-focused industries.

WHY

Entrepreneurial ecosystem building is critically important to economic development because it lays the foundation for sustainable, inclusive and innovation-driven growth. By building strong ecosystems for entrepreneurs, we are not just supporting individual businesses, we are creating the conditions for long-term prosperity.

Startups and small businesses are responsible for a significant share of new employment opportunities, especially in emerging industries. By fostering an environment where new ventures can thrive, the Quad Cities can reduce unemployment and provide meaningful work for a diverse range of people.

Beyond jobs, entrepreneurship drives innovation. Entrepreneurs are often the first to identify unmet needs and develop creative solutions, whether through new technologies, services or business models. Their innovations can improve quality of life, increase productivity and even give rise to entirely new sectors of the economy.

Developing our entrepreneurial ecosystem will also contribute to our economic resilience. Our region currently relies heavily on a few large employers and industries, however, with a vibrant mix of startups and small businesses we will be better able to adapt to economic shocks. When one sector struggles, others can continue to grow, helping to stabilize our local economy.

A thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem will enhance our region's attractiveness to investors, talent and partners. It signals that our community is forward-thinking, dynamic and open to new ideas and can lead to increased investment, stronger partnerships with universities and corporations, and greater visibility on the global stage.

HOW

STRATEGIES	MEASURES
Start innovation-focused community group	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Target 12 participants for initial community group2. Identify startups/entrepreneurs - target 20 per year
Identify startup/entrepreneurial support resources, partners and programming	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify and catalog all existing start-up partner organizations2. Referrals/website clicks for information - target 50 per year
Identify sources for capital/investors for startups and entrepreneurs	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Create database tracking available start-up funding sources2. Referrals/website clicks for information - target 50 per year
Draft a plan for a regional technology incubator	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Engage with both Iowa and Illinois stakeholders, identify potential locations

5-YEAR OUTCOMES

1. Establish an Innovation Incubator supporting start-up companies.
2. Establish a Quad Cities start-up funding network.
3. Launch 5 successful start-up companies.

OBJECTIVE 2: THRIVING WORKFORCE

KEY INITIATIVE: CAREER CONNECTIONS NETWORK

WHAT

The CareerLink QC website will be a centralized, managed hub to connect high school students and graduates with local firms offering job shadowing, internship and apprenticeship opportunities. Grow QC staff, in collaboration with local stakeholders, will work closely with K-12 school districts, two-and-four-year colleges and employers to maintain a clearinghouse of experiential learning opportunities at Quad Cities employers. We'll work with education and training faculty and career placement agencies to ensure they are aware of – and utilizing – this resource for students looking for workplace experience in their desired fields. The implementation of this work-based learning matching platform website will help innovate and accelerate access to our talent pipeline, aligning with the Top 100 High Priority Jobs. These efforts will be focused at the secondary (6-12 grades) education level to provide access to job shadowing, internship and apprenticeship opportunities.

WHY

Our career connections network is part of the “cradle-to-career” workforce development strategy. The economic development agency is the “career” half, focused on career placement for our students while partnering locally with our education and community partners, focused on early childhood education. Internship and apprenticeship programs are powerful tools for economic development because they create a direct bridge between education and employment, aligning workforce skills with the needs of local industries. From a community perspective, these programs offer a wide range of long-term benefits that go far beyond individual career advancement.

At the heart of their value is talent development. Internships and apprenticeships give students and job seekers hands-on experience in real-world settings, allowing them to build practical skills that are often difficult to acquire in a classroom alone. This not only makes participants more employable but also ensures that local businesses have access to a pipeline of workers who are trained to meet their specific needs.

For employers, these programs reduce hiring risks and training costs. They allow companies to evaluate potential employees in a low-risk environment and shape their training to fit the company's culture and technical requirements. This leads to higher retention rates and a more productive workforce, which in turn strengthens the local economy. From a broader economic development standpoint, internships and apprenticeships help retain young talent in the region. When students and early-career professionals can find meaningful work experiences locally, they are more likely to stay, build careers and contribute to the community. This is especially important in regions that struggle with “brain drain,” where young people leave for opportunities elsewhere.

These programs also promote economic inclusion. By offering pathways into high-demand fields, especially for underrepresented or underserved populations, they help close opportunity gaps and ensure that more residents can participate in and benefit from economic growth.

Internships and apprenticeships foster stronger partnerships between education and industry. When schools, colleges and employers collaborate to design and implement these programs, it leads to more responsive curricula, better alignment with labor market needs and a more agile regional economy.

HOW

STRATEGIES	MEASURES
<p>Research, write and update annually Top 100 High Priority Jobs and Graduate Inventory Reports</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify top 5 occupations in each of the high-growth industries that pay a living wage 2. Track number of website clicks/downloads of resource and number of engagements/presentations with community and education partners
<p>Identify K-12 career awareness initiatives and opportunities that align with regional economic needs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create and promote calendar of job fairs and other initiatives for employers to participate in 2. Referrals/website clicks for information - target 50 per year
<p>Increase the number of work-based learning opportunities and provide equitable access through the creation and launch of CareerLinkQC.com - a matching online tool for internships, apprenticeships, tours and job shadows</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify and increase the number of work-based learning opportunities - target 100 per year by the 5th year 2. Track number of users, businesses and students 3. Track number of matches

5-YEAR OUTCOMES

1. Creation of 500 net new jobs identified in the Top 100 High Priority Jobs Report.
2. Place 300 students in work-based learning opportunities.
3. Have a fully adopted work-based learning matching portal on the CareerLink QC website, leveraged by both Iowa and Illinois public school systems, for regional bi-state opportunities and accessibility.

KEY INITIATIVE: WORKFORCE CONNECTIONS

WHAT

As part of our business retention efforts, Grow QC seeks to connect our local employers with workforce resources to strengthen the knowledge base of our workforce and ensure that our local businesses maintain skilled employees. Through collaboration with state resources, local training centers and higher educational partners, we will develop a robust workforce and training toolkit that provides support and resources to our local employers and new business attraction targets. Additionally, we will work to promote new programs, services and partnerships aimed at job seekers and/or our underemployed population to provide skills training for jobs of the future requiring more advanced skills, allowing them to reenter the workforce.

WHY

Providing workforce connections, also the responsibilities of the state workforce agencies, is a valuable component of a region's economic development strategy because it creates accessible, structured pathways for companies to upskill or train existing workforce and individuals, especially those who are unemployed, underemployed or changing careers, to enter or re-enter the workforce. These programs are not just about job training or placement, they are about building a stronger, more inclusive and more adaptable local economy.

From an economic development perspective, one of the most important benefits of a workforce program is its ability to expand the labor pool. Many regions face workforce shortages, particularly in skilled trades, healthcare, manufacturing and technology. Workforce and training programs help address this by equipping individuals with the foundational skills, certifications and confidence needed to step into these roles. This ensures that local employers have access to the talent they need to grow and remain competitive.

These programs also play a critical role in economic mobility and equity. They often serve populations that face barriers to employment — such as recent high school graduates, veterans, returning citizens or individuals without college degrees. Together, the entire QC region's workforce ecosystem offers targeted workforce training, career coaching and wraparound support services that help people overcome systemic challenges and participate fully in the economy. This not only improves individual livelihoods but also strengthens the social and economic fabric of the community.

Another key advantage is talent retention. When residents can find meaningful career pathways locally, they are more likely to stay in the region, raise families and contribute to the local economy. This helps reduce brain drain and supports a more stable, long-term workforce.

Workforce and training programs also foster stronger partnerships between education, workforce and industry. They encourage collaboration among community colleges, training providers, employers and economic development organizations to align training with real-world job opportunities. This alignment ensures that workforce development efforts are demand-driven and responsive to the evolving needs of the regional economy.

HOW

STRATEGIES	MEASURES
<p>Create workforce committee to establish meaningful connections with employers and education: discuss priorities of ThriveQC regional workforce study, bridge divide between activities in Iowa and Illinois, review graduation and labor participation data, examine underrepresented populations in critical and underrepresented occupations, increase awareness of incumbent worker training incentives for business</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify founding partners and organizational participants for committee launch 2. Create and track regional workforce dashboard measurables and benchmark progress against historical figures
<p>Partner with higher education to develop targeted training programs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Track referrals to and/or convenings with business training partners for new training programs 2. If data is available, track utilization
<p>Increase workforce business intelligence research and reporting</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create occupational dashboard to track progress in key industries 2. Examine and report workforce shortages in key industry clusters 3. Provide report of graduate shortages compared to regional job openings 4. Provide analysis of workforce alignment of all academic programs and labor market projections
<p>Build a campaign promoting high-wage, high-demand careers</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Track engagement with website and social media of new campaign
<p>Promote college and state agency business workforce resources: upskilling, retraining, workforce financial assistance and other resources</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Track resource referrals to colleges and workforce agencies for services
<p>Work with States of Iowa and Illinois to increase available funding for workforce training</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New programs and funding made available for workforce training and development

5-YEAR OUTCOMES

1. Higher education institutions and regional training partners have more programs available and utilized to meet the needs of employers in the Quad Cities.
2. We have a higher-skilled and trained workforce.
3. The percentage of individuals with degrees, certifications, associate's and bachelor's degrees has increased.
4. There are more available state resources for workforce training and employee upskilling.

OBJECTIVE 3: ATTRACTIVE & COMPETITIVE PLACE

KEY INITIATIVE: QUALITY OF LIFE DEVELOPMENT, A WORLD-CLASS RIVERFRONT

WHAT

Revitalizing a riverfront can be a transformative force for a region, breathing new life into underutilized spaces and unlocking a wide range of economic opportunities. When thoughtfully developed, riverfronts become vibrant destinations that attract people, businesses and investment.

Years of planning and proposed development along the Mississippi River have created a value proposition and investment opportunity to transform our piece of the nation's mightiest riverway into a flourishing bi-state lifestyle, entertainment and business district. These riverfront mixed-use development opportunities will recruit a new wave of business options and provide diversified housing accommodations to a multi-generational workforce, as well as grow regional population.

WHY

One of the most immediate impacts of revitalizing our riverfront is the rise in property values. Waterfront locations are inherently attractive, and as development progresses, nearby real estate often appreciates in value. This not only benefits property owners but also increases local tax revenues, providing municipalities with more resources to invest in infrastructure, schools and public services.

Riverfronts also have the power to draw tourists and residents alike. With the addition of parks, trails, restaurants and cultural venues, these areas become hubs of activity. Visitors spend money at local businesses, boosting the hospitality and retail sectors, and creating jobs in the process. This influx of economic activity can ripple outward, supporting a broader network of enterprises.

Commercial growth is another key benefit. Riverfronts often become magnets for new businesses, especially in mixed-use developments that combine residential, retail and office space. Entrepreneurs and startups are drawn to the energy and visibility of these areas, and the presence of amenities and scenic views makes them attractive places to work and live.

The development process itself generates employment, particularly in construction and related industries. Over the long term, the area supports sustainable jobs in tourism, maintenance and public services. These jobs contribute to a more resilient local economy.

Beyond economics, riverfront development enhances quality of life. Access to green spaces and water has been shown to improve mental and physical health, making the region more appealing to both residents and potential newcomers. This can be a powerful tool for attracting and retaining talent, especially among younger professionals who prioritize lifestyle and environment.

Most importantly, a revitalized riverfront can act as a catalyst for broader urban renewal. As investment flows into the waterfront, surrounding neighborhoods often experience a resurgence, with improved infrastructure, reduced blight and increased private investment.

HOW

STRATEGIES	MEASURES
<p>Develop a clear riverfront vision and investment plan: create a compelling riverfront development plan that outlines the long-term vision, land use, infrastructure needs and economic potential of the planned areas</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All riverfront development sites are identified and cataloged 2. Creation of Opportunity Outlook for Quad Cities riverfront development opportunities 3. Host/present to 5 developers the QC riverfront development opportunities.
<p>Establish available public-private partnership and incentive opportunities</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify and track amount of incentive opportunities for each site
<p>Launch targeted national and international marketing and investor outreach campaign using Riverfront Opportunity Outlook</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Track number of developer meetings, site tours and/or investment summits

5-YEAR OUTCOMES

1. Successful attraction of investment to build at least one mixed-use development project on Quad Cities riverfront development sites.
2. New capital investment of over \$100 million in riverfront development.
3. New business and lifestyle districts are created along the riverfront increasing the appeal of the Quad Cities as a lifestyle and business destination.
4. New office product is built to attract more business in our priority targeted industries.

KEY INITIATIVE: REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT & SUPPORT

WHAT

The Quad Cities regional transportation system is a multi-modal transportation network providing superior diversity of options. Access to these resources are critical in defining our competitive advantage as a region and value proposition. Multiple air, rail, waterway and road transit systems need coordinated regional efforts to maintain and expand these critical assets. Advocacy efforts will engage regional stakeholders with local, state and federal elected officials and agencies to ensure we maintain a strong transportation network.

In addition to our transportation network, it is essential that we continue to develop and support investment in our utility network to ensure that we have the available resources to support growth and development. Access to water, sewer and electric utilities is critical to the growth of our region.

WHY

Transportation systems and utilities enable commerce. Businesses rely on efficient logistics to receive raw materials, ship finished products and access markets near and far. Whether it's a manufacturer exporting goods through a nearby port, a logistics company moving freight by rail or a tech firm flying in clients and talent through a regional airport, transportation infrastructure is what keeps the economic engine running.

From an investment standpoint, regions with robust utility and transportation networks are far more attractive to companies considering relocation or expansion. Access to highways, rail lines, airports and ports as well as utility resources, reduces development and operational costs and increases speed to market — two critical factors in today's global economy. A well-connected region signals to investors that it is ready for business.

Transportation systems also create jobs and stimulate industry growth. Beyond the direct employment in sectors like trucking, aviation and shipping, these systems support a wide range of industries such as manufacturing, warehousing, tourism and retail. Airports and ports, in particular, often become economic anchors, attracting clusters of businesses and spurring development in surrounding areas.

Another key benefit is resilience. A region with multiple transportation options can better withstand disruptions, whether from supply chain breakdowns, natural disasters or global market shifts. This flexibility helps maintain business continuity and economic stability.

Transportation also plays a vital role in equity and access. It connects people, especially those in rural or underserved areas, to job centers, education and healthcare. A well-designed system ensures that economic opportunity is not limited by geography.

Finally, transportation infrastructure supports tourism and talent attraction. Airports and passenger rail lines serve as gateways welcoming visitors, students and skilled workers. A region that is easy to reach is more likely to attract and retain the people and businesses that drive innovation and growth.

HOW

STRATEGIES	MEASURES
Support Quad Cities International Airport growth and expansion	1. Establish community support group for Quad Cities International Airport flight operations recruitment
Maintain a database of all regional transportation nodes, service lines, infrastructure and future development plans	1. Publish database on website and track user engagements
Seek diverse and sustainable funding sources: federal and state grants, help establish public-private partnerships and seek out local funding mechanisms to support regional transportation infrastructure development	1. Track state and federal transportation funding awards to Quad Cities infrastructure projects 2. Meet annually with federal agencies to lobby for funding 3. Meet with Iowa and Illinois state agencies to lobby for infrastructure funding
Support utility infrastructure expansion and development	1. Number of engagements with local and regional utility partners
Support efforts to bring passenger rail service to the Quad Cities	1. Number of political engagements of support 2. Community engagement in political action campaigns supporting passenger rail
Riverway ports development support	1. Support completion of new barge terminal port project

5-YEAR OUTCOMES

1. Increased commercial passenger air service at Quad Cities International Airport.
2. Successful funding of passenger rail service between Chicago and Moline.
3. New waterway port district created to enhance transportation network.
4. Increased state and federal resources available for critical infrastructure needed for development.

KEY INITIATIVE: REGIONAL SITE READINESS

WHAT

Regional site readiness has become one of the most critical site determinants that influences the success of landing a project. Site readiness refers to land and infrastructure that is immediately available and attractive for business investment and development so that when a company is ready to build or expand, the region has sites that are not only available but also viable, competitive and low-risk.

Site readiness is about speed to market. In our current economic cycle, companies often have to make location decisions quickly. If a region can offer sites that are already zoned, permitted and equipped with essential infrastructure, such as roads, utilities, broadband and environmental clearances, it significantly increases the chances of landing a project. These “shovel-ready” sites reduce uncertainty and time delays, which are major factors in site selection.

WHY

Site readiness is critically important to our region because it lays the groundwork for attracting new investment, accelerating job creation and driving long-term economic growth. It is one of the most strategic actions our region can take to remain competitive across the national landscape.

When a company is looking to expand or relocate, time is often a deciding factor. Businesses want to move quickly from decision to development, and regions that can offer shovel-ready sites have a distinct advantage. These sites reduce risk, shorten timelines and lower costs for developers and companies, making the region more attractive for investment.

Site readiness also signals the Quad Cities regional preparedness and professionalism. It shows we understand the needs of business and are proactively removing barriers to development and helps build confidence among site selectors and corporate decision-makers, who are more likely to invest in communities that demonstrate foresight and coordination.

HOW

STRATEGIES	MEASURES
Continue to update site readiness studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.Feedback gathered on the needs of development sites2.Number of downloads of this resource from the website3.Incentive, grants or federal funding received to pay for identified needs
Advocate for site readiness funding at local, state and federal levels	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.Number of political outreach efforts made addressing site readiness2.Dollars allocated from new programming for site readiness
Continue to share and advocate for higher levels of site readiness, including site certification programs	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.Number of certified sites in the Quad Cities2.Number of development-ready sites3.Number of outreach campaigns and trips to advocate for site readiness dollars

5-YEAR OUTCOMES

- 1.Increased number of development-ready sites in the Quad Cities.
- 2.New state and federal funding programs for regional site readiness.
- 3.Complete analysis of key site development needs for all identified development sites in the Quad Cities.

KEY INITIATIVE: REGIONAL STORYTELLING

WHAT

The Quad Cities is a relative “hidden gem” of the Midwest. Raising awareness of our geographic location, available development opportunities, quality of life, competitive business advantages and regional economic strength all require a dedicated marketing effort. We have existing data that supports the Quad Cities, but we need to transform this data into compelling regional messaging via storytelling rather than just marketing.

WHY

Economic development isn't just about available land, infrastructure or investment. It's about narratives. When we tell the Quad Cities story, authentically and proudly, it attracts attention, fosters belonging and inspires innovation. It becomes a place not just to visit, but to invest in, to return to and to believe in.

Marketing is about selling, whether it be products, services or experiences. Storytelling is about connecting, to identity, to emotion and meaning. Marketing highlights features and benefits while storytelling reveals our values and heritage. Marketing grabs attention. Storytelling builds trust, loyalty and community pride.

More than ever, people and businesses crave authenticity. Our regional storytelling gives a voice to the Quad Cities, not just a place. It turns our geographic location into a living narrative, where you belong, not just go.

HOW

STRATEGIES	MEASURES
Develop regional business success stories	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify top 10 corporate stories to highlight2. Launch of marketing and social media campaign
Complete new marketing campaign	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Production of new marketing materials not in existence focused on: quality of life, new industries, development opportunities, and QC culture and lifestyle2. Metrics tracking of campaigns
Create new social media campaigns to amplify stories to targeted audiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Launch of and tracking of campaign reach and success
Website tracking and monitoring	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Tracking of all traditional website traffic and analytics

5-YEAR OUTCOMES

1. Establishment of a regional economic development message and image of the Quad Cities as a premier business destination.
2. Better awareness of the business opportunities in the Quad Cities.
3. Renewed Quad Cities pride in who we are and our quality of place.
4. Successful attraction of new talent to the region organically.

APPENDIX A: REGIONAL COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT

This Competitive Assessment presents data and research of the Quad Cities recent economic and demographic trends, current competitive issues and potential opportunities used to develop our objectives and key initiatives built into our five-year strategic plan, Forward QC.

OBJECTIVE 1: REGIONAL BUSINESS SUCCESS

The focus of economic development efforts over the last decade have been on capitalizing on the strength of our industrial manufacturing sector. Significant progress has been made in the recruitment of new manufacturers to the region and support of local corporate expansion. However, the Quad Cities has a much more diverse industry base outside of our core manufacturing industry. A renewed focus on showcasing our region within these diversified industry sectors will prove to have a long-term benefit on the economic sustainability of the Quad Cities region. This also provides differentiation of workforce opportunities and can have a positive effect on population growth.

- The Quad Cities has many industry verticals that are growing and thriving outside of industrial manufacturing and our representative cities have much broader economic development plans for community growth.
- In addition to industry growth, greenfield development is desired to bring community enhancement and quality of life projects to the Quad Cities.
- With industry diversification and quality of life development, we have an opportunity to increase our population growth rate which currently is sub 1%.
- Local employment reductions within our core manufacturing industry base continue to challenge our economic stability.

OBJECTIVE 2: THRIVING WORKFORCE

Talent shortages threaten to undermine economic vitality. There are increasing challenges for employers across the nation looking to hire qualified talent. The situation is more acute in the Quad Cities because of years of flat population growth and slowing in-migration. Employers of all sizes and industries reported significant challenges finding the workers they need to sustain and grow their businesses. The career network pipeline in the region's education and training institutions – supported by key community partners – has the potential to ease the region's talent issues, but challenges persist. Workforce availability is also constrained by key mitigating factors like housing, childcare and transportation

- As the Quad Cities talent supply constricts, continued slow population growth, negative domestic migration trends, unfavorable age dynamics and lower comparative educational attainment rates have complicated employers' efforts to find the talent they need to sustain and grow their businesses, especially in the most in-demand occupations, previously not a priority for economic development efforts.
- Our workforce development training pipeline in the Quad Cities offers many advantages to local businesses by way of developing public school apprentice programs, productive higher education institutions and effective career-exploration programs for key employment sectors, but capacity constraints and continuing challenges to better coordinate and connect talent development partners hamper efforts to improve student outcomes and address talent-supply shortages.
- Employers of all sizes in the Quad Cities struggle to attract talent to the region, with corporations increasingly looking out of market to find qualified workers and accepting – or promoting – opportunities for specialized, higher-wage talent to commute from out-of-market.
- The Quad Cities housing remains affordable, but lack of product across different styles and price ranges continues to hamper talent's ability to find the housing they need, while limited availability of affordable childcare further restricts workers' ability to access education and employment.

OBJECTIVE 3: ATTRACTIVE & COMPETITIVE PLACE

The most recent census data showing flat population growth of our region over the last decade served as a wake-up call that more urgency is needed to retain and attract the talent needed to support local businesses. The Quad Cities has made tremendous progress over the years towards becoming a place where talent wants to be, with investments in music, art and culture, outdoor sports and recreation, revitalized entertainment districts, and corridor beautification efforts leading the way. However, increased attraction of investment in building world class lifestyle, entertainment and experiential districts will provide the opportunity to renew, expand and launch new efforts to take the Quad Cities to the next level of competitiveness for quality of life and quality of place and to ensure more equitable outcomes for its citizens.

- The riverfront, the single largest asset in the Quad Cities, has potential to be a major growth tool for the region through investment in riverfront placemaking.
- Key strengths like affordable living costs, family-friendly parks and improving downtowns are important quality of life assets, while opportunities for continued downtown and neighborhood revitalization and other potentially high-impact initiatives are cause for optimism that the Quad Cities can eventually become a first-choice destination for talent.
- The median age for the Quad Cities metro area is 41 with a noticeable absence of the 18–26-year-old population which is essential for long-term economic sustainability. Investments in mixed-use development and destination lifestyle centers will make the Quad Cities more attractive to a younger demographic and typically provide a diversified housing stock for a younger transitional workforce.

OBJECTIVE 1: REGIONAL BUSINESS SUCCESS

Regional GDP in the six-county Davenport-Moline, IA-IL Combined Statistical Area (CSA) was \$33.9 billion in 2023. Inflation-adjusted GDP growth was 2.8% in 2021, 1.6% in 2022 and 2.1% in 2023. The last three years of growth were each well above the annual average since 2010 (0.6%).^[1]

The average growth rate for the four-county Davenport-Rock Island-Moline, IA-IL Metropolitan Area (MSA) over the period from 2021 to 2023 (for comparison with other metro areas) was 1.8% per year. The table below compares the Quad Cities with several metro areas which are similar in terms of demographics and economy.

REAL GDP GROWTH RATES (ANNUAL AVERAGE 2021-2023)

MSA	Average Real GDP Growth Rate 2021-2023
Akron, OH Metro Area	0.5%
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	1.7%
Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area	2.1%
Cedar Rapids, IA Metro Area	-1.0%
Chattanooga, TN-GA Metro Area	2.5%
Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, IA-IL Metro Area	1.8%
Evansville, IN Metro Area	*
Green Bay, WI Metro Area	1.4%
Greenville-Anderson-Greer, SC Metro Area	3.4%
Knoxville, TN Metro Area	3.1%
Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN Metro Area	*
Lynchburg, VA Metro Area	1.1%
Peoria, IL Metro Area	*
Topeka, KS Metro Area	0.4%
Wichita, KS Metro Area	2.8%

[1] Bureau of Economic Analysis

Population in the six-county area was approximately 471,000 in 2023 compared to about 472,500 in 2022. Since 2010, the population growth rate has been approximately level with only small changes (a fraction of a percent positive or negative) each year.[2] Net migration into the four-county Quad Cities metropolitan area in the period from 2016 to 2020 (most recent data available) has been slightly negative with about 1,800 domestic outmigration. However, net migration from several Midwestern metro areas into the Quad Cities was positive over this period led by net in-migration of 773 from the Chicago metro area, 339 from Omaha-Council Bluffs and 73 from Milwaukee.[3]

Manufacturing is the largest employer in the Quad Cities and the largest contributor to GDP. In 2024, manufacturing employed 36,000 workers in the Quad Cities, approximately twice as large of a share compared to the national average. That is, the location quotient is approximately 2 for manufacturing occupations.[4]

Within manufacturing, some of the most important categories are (location quotients in parentheses): machinery manufacturing (LQ=5.01), chemical manufacturing (LQ=1.58), food manufacturing (LQ=3.11) and primary metal manufacturing (LQ=7.94).

Outside of manufacturing, the largest major categories of economic activity are (in descending order):

- Government
- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Retail Trade
- Accommodation and Food Services
- Construction
- Wholesale Trade

Government includes the Rock Island Arsenal, which employs over 6,000 people, as well as other federal, state and local government employees. Health care and social assistance, which is dominated by health care jobs specifically, employs about 30,000 people in the Quad Cities.

Wholesale trade, despite being 7th in this list of largest sectors, is notable because of its high location quotient and large number of employees. The category “Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods” has a location quotient of 1.97 in the Quad Cities and employs over 9,000 people. Many of these jobs are linked to manufacturing firms, but represent different job functions aligned with sales rather than production.

[2] U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2019-2023

[3] U.S. Census Bureau

[4] Industrial and Occupational Data from Lightcast

The top 15 occupations with median hourly earnings greater than \$20/hour are listed below:

Description	Median Hourly Earnings	2024 Jobs	2024 Employment Concentration
General and Operations Managers	\$41.17	6,446	1.26
Laborers and Freight, Stock and Material Movers, Hand	\$20.45	4,680	1.13
Registered Nurses	\$34.10	4,341	0.94
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	\$25.53	4,234	1.30
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	\$25.80	2,510	1.09
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical and Executive	\$21.02	2,375	0.87
Bookkeeping, Accounting and Auditing Clerks	\$21.64	2,182	0.99
Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	\$31.44	2,147	1.18
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	\$28.31	2,005	1.05
Accountants and Auditors	\$36.39	1,915	0.87
Construction Laborers	\$23.29	1,881	0.94
First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	\$36.22	1,723	1.80
Welders, Cutters, Solderers and Brazers	\$22.57	1,699	2.68
Business Operations Specialists, All Other	\$41.43	1,662	0.99
Postsecondary Teachers	\$32.87	1,637	0.66

*Data from Lightcast

OBJECTIVE 2: THRIVING WORKFORCE

Population dynamics are one of the primary drivers of labor supply. Nationwide, birth rates have been falling over the last two decades. States with higher populations, such as Illinois, have seen more significant declines in the school-age population. More rural states, such as Iowa, have been more stable. Even so, the Iowa Department of Education forecasts approximately 7% fewer students enrolled in public K-12 schools in the Iowa portion of the Quad Cities area by the 2029-2030 academic year. This presents a significant challenge for workforce development.

The age distribution in the Quad Cities is flatter than in many areas of the country.

Under 5	5.8%
5-14	13.1%
15-24	12.3%
25-34	11.9%
35-44	12.7%
45-54	11.9%
55-64	13.4%
65-74	11.1%
75+	7.8%

The median age in the six-county area is approximately 41 years of age.[5]

Unlike some areas of the country which have already sustained significant shifts in the age distribution caused by the declining birth rate, the age 5-14 and 15-24 cohorts are each larger than the 25-34 cohort. The 5.8% of the population under 5 years of age is the projected decrease in K-12 enrollment in the next few years as incoming kindergarten classes will tend to be smaller than the outgoing graduating classes.

Public K-12 enrollment in the six-county area was 69,727 in the 2024-25 school year. If the projections by the Iowa Department of Education are correct and if the Illinois Quad Cities declines at a similar rate, this would mean that enrollment could fall by nearly 5,000 students by 2029-30.

In 2024, the overall graduation rate for public high schools in the six-county area was 87.0% compared to the national average of 86.4%.[6] This number has been relatively stable over the last few years.

According to the American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau), the post-secondary completion rate for the Quad Cities area was approximately 43.0% in 2023. This was slightly less than the national average of 45.0%.

Furthermore, the level of degree completion among Quad Cities residents in 2023 tended to be lower than the national average, except for associate's degrees. About 11% of adults age 25 and older in the six-county area have an associate's degree as their highest degree (national average 9%). About 18% have a bachelor's degree (national average 22%) and about 10% have a graduate or professional degree (national average 14%).

[5] U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates 2019-2023

[6] Illinois State Board of Education, Iowa Department of Education, National average as of August 19, 2025 reported by US News

Many of the occupations that make up the disproportionately large manufacturing sector of the Quad Cities do not require education beyond a high school diploma. Instead, these occupations (including some listed in the previous section) require on-the-job training, apprenticeships or short-term training programs not leading to a degree. The consequence of this is that the Quad Cities area is relatively less concentrated in occupations with higher educational requirements, compared to the national average. Because occupations with higher educational requirements tend to have higher wages and salaries, the lack of these jobs tends to lower the median income of an area.

Median household income in the six-county area was \$69,832 in 2023, compared to the national average of \$78,538. The following table illustrates bachelor’s degree completion, manufacturing intensity and household income for the Quad Cities and some of its peers.

Metro Area	% Bachelor’s or greater	% Manufacturing Employment	Median Household Income
Akron, OH Metro Area	34.5%	14.7%	\$71,312
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	33.2%	10.0%	\$69,627
Buffalo-Cheektowga, NY Metro Area	35.1%	10.8%	\$70,572
Cedar Rapids, IA Metro Area	32.8%	17.0%	\$77,084
Chattanooga, TN-GA Metro Area	31.3%	14.4%	\$68,666
Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, IA-IL Metro Area	29.4%	16.7%	\$71,925
Evansville, IN Metro Area	28.9%	17.2%	\$67,671
Green Bay, WI Metro Area	29.9%	19.2%	\$77,459
Greenville-Anderson-Greer, SC Metro Area	33.7%	16.9%	\$69,016
Knoxville, TN Metro Area	31.9%	10.5%	\$69,734
Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN Metro Area	32.1%	13.9%	\$71,737
Lynchburg, VA Metro Area	30.9%	12.9%	\$67,782
Peoria, IL Metro Area	31.6%	14.8%	\$70,872
Topeka, KS Metro Area	30.1%	10.0%	\$68,160
Wichita, KS	31.5%	17.3%	\$68,930

While the Quad Cities compares favorably with its manufacturing intensive peers in terms of income, it trails other Midwestern cities with significantly different demographics. For example, Sioux Falls, SD, has a somewhat higher rate of bachelor’s degree completion (35.7%) but much lower manufacturing employment (10.1%). The median household income in Sioux Falls is \$81,418 - one of the highest median incomes in the Midwest among cities that are neither a state capital nor the home of a major university. However, Sioux Falls has a higher concentration of occupations in the financial sector. This illustrates the effect of occupational concentration on incomes.

Despite the relatively large number of occupations with lower educational requirements, many of these occupations have earnings that are well above a “living wage,” which helps push the median income above that of many of our peer metro areas with similar reliance on manufacturing. For the Quad Cities, a living wage (according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator) is approximately \$19 to \$20 per hour.[7]

About 20% of employment in the six-county area is in occupations that are both in high demand and pay a living wage.[8] Not all of these jobs require a post-secondary degree. However, most of those that do not require a post-secondary degree require some kind of on-the-job training or an apprenticeship.

[7] <https://livingwage.mit.edu>

[8] Top 100 High-Priority Jobs Report, August 2025, Grow Quad Cities

OBJECTIVE 3: ATTRACTIVE & COMPETITIVE PLACE

Other metrics to indicate community progress include those related to quality of place. These include, but are not limited to:

- Crime rate
- Cost of living
- Walkability
- Median home price
- Community satisfaction

Crime rates

In terms of crime rates, progress is being made. The following data are for the largest 5 cities in the Quad Cities area (East Moline, Moline and Rock Island, IL; Bettendorf and Davenport, IA).

In 2024, the violent crime rate for these 5 cities was 438 per 100,000 and the property crime rate was 2,827 per 100,000.

Total violent crimes in the 5 cities decreased by 15.3% since 2015 and by 9.2% since 2023. Total property crimes decreased by 12.9% since 2015 and by 3.9% since 2023.

The U.S. violent crime rate in 2023 was 363.8 per 100,000. The property crime rate was 1,917 per 100,000.

Data sources for crime rates are the FBI Crime Data Explorer (cde.ucr.cjis.gov) and Statista ([statista.com](https://www.statista.com)).

Cost of Living

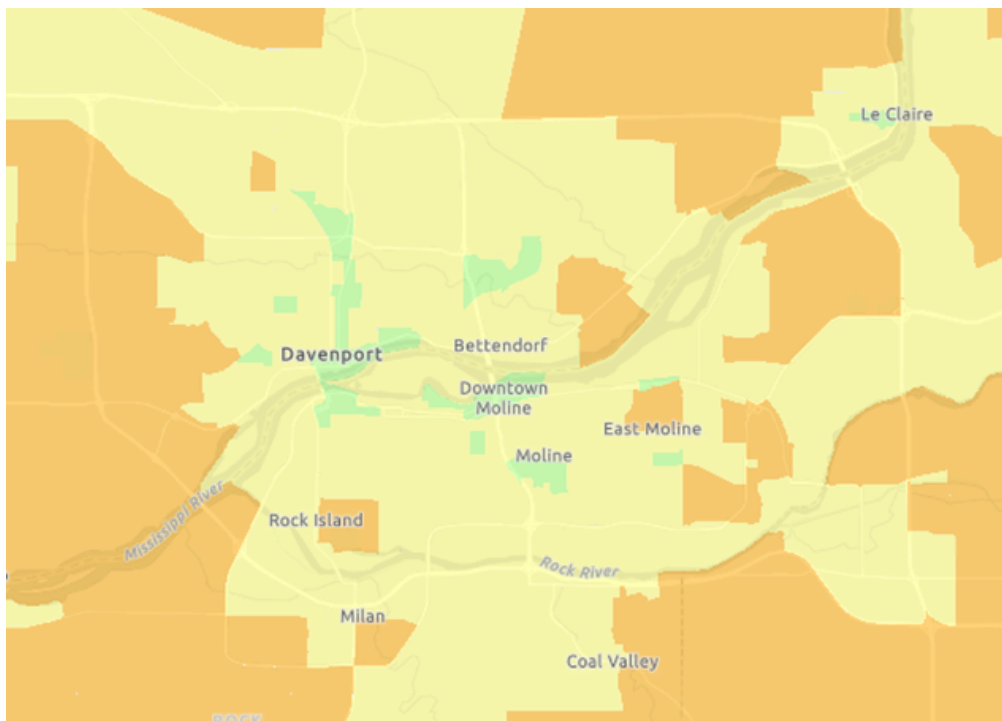
The Quad Cities area compares favorably with many of our peer metro areas and with the national average in terms of cost of living. The following table contains data on the Cost of Living Index for the period from 2024Q2 to 2025Q2 from the Council for Community and Economic Research.

MSA	Cost of Living Index (U.S. = 100)
Akron, OH Metro Area	85.7
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	90.8
Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area	96.8
Cedar Rapids, IA Metro Area	90.1
Chattanooga, TN-GA Metro Area	87.5
Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, IA-IL Metro Area	91.0
Evansville, IN Metro Area	93.0
Green Bay, WI Metro Area	91.6
Greenville-Anderson-Greer, SC Metro Area	90.8
Knoxville, TN Metro Area	86.2
Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN Metro Area	91.6
Lynchburg, VA Metro Area	93.5
Peoria, IL Metro Area	96.1
Topeka, KS Metro Area	86.4
Wichita, KS Metro Area	87.7

The cost of living in the Quad Cities is about 9% below the national average and is 9th lowest among the 15 metro areas compared.

Walkability

There are at least two prominent sources for data on walkability of cities. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) publishes an interactive map showing walkability scores by census block group.



Relative to the national average, green areas are above average walkability, yellow areas are below average and orange areas are the least walkable.

The EPA does not appear to update this data regularly, and the data used to create the map is mostly from 2017 and 2018. However, walkability is not a statistic that is likely to change rapidly. Its usefulness is primarily in highlighting areas in which improvements could be made.

Another source for walkability data is walkscore.com. This website publishes a score for cities and neighborhoods. The score (out of a maximum of 100) is based on multiple data points which appear to be updated on a regular basis (although the last ranking list of cities on their website was for 2021). As of September 2025, scores for the 5 largest cities in the Quad Cities were scored as follows:

East Moline: 33
Moline: 44
Rock Island: 44
Bettendorf: 29
Davenport: 44

Walkability scores for the primary cities of our peer metro areas ranged from 29 (Chattanooga, TN and Lynchburg, VA) to 67 (Buffalo, NY).

Larger cities tend to score better on measures of walkability because of population density. According to walkscore.com, the average score of the 130 cities with population of 200,000 or greater (which would include none of the cities in the Quad Cities area) was 48.

Median Home Price

The median home sale price in the Quad Cities metro area was \$192,000 in October 2025 according to Redfin (redfin.com). This was an increase of 7.8% over the previous year. Nationally, the median home sale price was \$444,000, an increase of 1.3% over last year.

Other relevant statistics are as follows:

	Sales	Months of Supply
October 2024	410	2.4
October 2025	463	2.0

Housing prices are closely related to other measures of affordability. Since housing is included in the overall cost of living, these measures tend to move together. Steady and sustainable growth of home prices is more desirable than large fluctuations driven by boom-and-bust cycles.

The following table shows how the Quad Cities compares to some of its peers in terms of home sales.

Metro Area	Median Sale Price October 2025	Year-over-Year Change of Median Sale Price	Months of Supply
Akron, OH Metro Area	\$245,000	11.3%	1.9
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	\$295,000	1.7%	4.6
Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area	\$281,000	6.0%	1.5
Cedar Rapids, IA Metro Area	\$235,000	9.3%	2.5
Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, IA-IL Metro Area	\$192,000	7.8%	2.0
Evansville, IN Metro Area	\$223,000	11.5%	2.5
Green Bay, WI Metro Area	\$350,000	9.4%	2.6
Greenville-Anderson-Greer, SC Metro Area	\$338,000	4.1%	4.1
Knoxville, TN Metro Area	\$390,000	-1.9%	4.4
Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN Metro Area	\$290,000	7.4%	2.6
Lynchburg, VA Metro Area	\$303,000	1.0%	2.7
Peoria, IL Metro Area	\$165,000	2.5%	1.7
Topeka, KS Metro Area	\$220,000	0.0%	1.7
Wichita, KS Metro Area	\$250,000	5.3%	2.5

Chattanooga, TN metro area not available.

Community Satisfaction

Survey data is the primary source of community satisfaction. A survey was conducted in 2019 by Visit Quad Cities which asked residents questions related to community satisfaction.[9] Among the results were these findings:

- 48% of residents answered that they agree with the statement “I brag about living in the Quad Cities.”
- 80% of residents answered that they agree with the statement “I am proud to call myself a Quad Citizen.” (Increase from 53% on the same question in a 2016 survey.)
- **Most liked quality of life aspects included:**
 - Cost of living
 - Good place to raise a family
 - Proximity to Mississippi River
- **Least liked quality of life aspects included:**
 - Road/street quality
 - Safety and crime level
 - Climate/weather

[9]https://visitquadcities.com/assets/uploads/files/Quad_Cities_Community_Survey_Report_Final_compressed.pdf

APPENDIX B: QUAD CITIES RANKING AMONG PEER METRO AREAS

Five economic indicators have been selected for the purpose of ranking the Quad Cities against peer metro areas. A cluster analysis was performed on data from all U.S. metro areas to identify those that are similar to the Quad Cities. Two of the variables are based on the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates from 2023 (household income and percent with a bachelor's degree). The others (population, employment and GDP) are based on growth over time. Population growth is the 5-year average from the ACS 1-year estimates. Payroll employment is the average growth rate based on annual data from the BLS. GDP growth is the average from 2021 to 2023. This period is shorter due to the fact that the COVID-19 recession caused massive changes from 2019 to 2020 and from 2020 to 2021 that are not as representative of economic activity after that period.

Three metro areas underwent changes in their geographic definition (i.e. counties were added or removed) during this period. Those three are not considered in the ranking for variables involving growth rates.

POPULATION GROWTH

MSA	Average Annual Population Growth 2019-2024
Knoxville, TN Metro Area	1.94%
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	1.81%
Greenville-Anderson-Greer, SC Metro Area	1.60%
Chattanooga, TN-GA Metro Area	0.79%
Green Bay, WI Metro Area	0.72%
Wichita, KS Metro Area	0.65%
Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area	0.56%
Cedar Rapids, IA Metro Area	0.41%
Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, IA-IL Metro Area	0.13%
Lynchburg, VA Metro Area	0.09%
Topeka, KS Metro Area	0.06%
Akron, OH Metro Area	-0.04%
Quad Cities Rank	9 out of 12

* Evansville, Louisville, and Peoria are not listed due to changes to MSA boundaries during this time.

Population growth in the Quad Cities has been positive, but low, over the last five years. Among peer metro areas, those with the fastest population growth are in the southeast whereas traditional Midwest manufacturing areas have seen stable populations. As population growth is vital to economic growth, it is important to increase our population growth rate and move up among our peers, especially those in our area such as Cedar Rapids.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

MSA	Median Household Income 2023
Green Bay, WI Metro Area	\$77,459
Cedar Rapids, IA Metro Area	\$77,084
Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, IA-IL Metro Area	\$71,925
Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN Metro Area	\$71,737
Akron, OH Metro Area	\$71,312
Peoria, IL Metro Area	\$70,872
Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area	\$70,572
Knoxville, TN Metro Area	\$69,734
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	\$69,627
Greenville-Anderson-Greer, SC Metro Area	\$69,016
Wichita, KS Metro Area	\$68,930
Chattanooga, TN-GA Metro Area	\$68,666
Topeka, KS Metro Area	\$68,160
Lynchburg, VA Metro Area	\$67,782
Evansville, IN Metro Area	\$67,671
Quad Cities Rank	3 out of 15

While median household income in the Quad Cities is ranked 3rd out of 15 peer metro areas, it is still far below the U.S. median of \$80,610 for 2023. Most of the cities identified as our peers have similar demographics and similar levels of manufacturing concentration with most having median household incomes of around \$70,000 plus or minus \$2,000.

In the data, median household income is positively associated with higher education levels, growing populations and a more diverse economy including strong technology and financial sectors. Our objective should be to maintain our standing among these peers and close the gap between our median income and that for the U.S.

AVERAGE ANNUAL PAYROLL EMPLOYMENT GROWTH 2019-2024

MSA	Avg. Annual Payroll Employment Growth 2019-2024
Chattanooga, TN-GA Metro Area	2.2%
Knoxville, TN Metro Area	2.2%
Greenville-Anderson-Greer, SC Metro Area	1.6%
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	0.7%
Wichita, KS Metro Area	0.6%
Topeka, KS Metro Area	0.5%
Green Bay, WI Metro Area	0.2%
Akron, OH Metro Area	-0.2%
Lynchburg, VA Metro Area	-0.3%
Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area	-0.4%
Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, IA-IL Metro Area	-0.5%
Cedar Rapids, IA Metro Area	-1.1%
Quad Cities Rank	11 out of 12

* Evansville, Louisville and Peoria are not listed due to changes to MSA boundaries during this time.

Average annual payroll employment growth was negative for the Quad Cities from 2019 to 2024. Growth was positive going into the COVID-19 recession, but never fully recovered. Manufacturing led an expansion of employment in the years after the recession, but saw significant contraction in 2024. Several of our Midwest peer metro areas saw a similar pattern while areas in the Southeast continued to see robust growth due to expansion in the service sector.

Job growth is correlated with population growth as well as with growth and investment in technology, artificial intelligence and financial services. Without population growth and economic diversification, job growth over the next five years is likely to be near zero. Also, job growth in the Quad Cities is highly correlated with national job growth.

Setting an appropriate metric for the growth of employment is complicated by its dependence on national economic conditions beyond our control. Provided the U.S. avoids a recession in the next few years, a short-term goal would be to stabilize the decline and return to pre-COVID-19 levels of employment. Note, however, that the latest annual data we have is for 2024, but partial data for 2025 is already negative. Therefore, stabilization at pre-COVID-19 levels would require well over 0.5% annual growth. In the event of a national recession, however, this is likely not possible. Even level employment (0% growth) would likely move us up in this ranking over a five-year period. Level employment is an appropriate benchmark as a minimum with additional growth up to 0.5% per year provided the U.S. labor market is growing at a historically average rate.

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION AGE 25+ WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE

MSA	% of Population Age 25+ with Bachelor's Degree 2023
Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area	35.1%
Akron, OH Metro Area	34.5%
Greenville-Anderson-Greer, SC Metro Area	33.7%
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	33.2%
Cedar Rapids, IA Metro Area	32.8%
Louisville/Jefferson County, KY-IN Metro Area	32.1%
Knoxville, TN Metro Area	31.9%
Peoria, IL Metro Area	31.6%
Wichita, KS Metro Area	31.5%
Chattanooga, TN-GA Metro Area	31.3%
Lynchburg, VA Metro Area	30.9%
Topeka, KS	30.1%
Green Bay, WI Metro Area	29.9%
Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, IA-IL Metro Area	29.4%
Evansville, IN Metro Area	28.9%
Quad Cities Rank	14 out of 15

About 38.7% of the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population aged 25 and over had at least a bachelor's degree in 2024. The latest regional data from the ACS 5-year estimate was released for 2023 (using 2019-2023 data). The Quad Cities and most of our peer metro areas have percentages that are considerably below the national average. The central tendency among our peers is close to 32% with the Quad Cities at 29.4%.

This is a very difficult measure to move in the short-term. One way to improve this measure would be to attract a number of firms that would be more likely to hire people with bachelor's degrees in order to retain graduates from our local universities in the area.

Another important way to impact this number would be to encourage bachelor’s degree completion among those with associate’s degrees. However, even here, the effects are slow to appear. In addition to the typical number of degrees awarded in a year, it would take another 2,000 degrees completed to cause a significant enough change to move us up one or two places in the ranking.

Grow Quad Cities is undertaking several initiatives to impact this measure including our Top 100 High Priority Jobs report to identify jobs paying livable wages, including many that require bachelor’s degrees. The goal would be to at least move this statistic by 0.1% per year.

AVERAGE REAL GDP GROWTH RATE 2021-2023

MSA	Average GDP Growth Rate 2021-2023
Greenville-Anderson-Greer, SC Metro Area	3.4%
Knoxville, TN Metro Area	3.1%
Wichita, KS Metro Area	2.8%
Chattanooga, TN-GA Metro Area	2.5%
Buffalo-Cheektowaga, NY Metro Area	2.1%
Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, IA-IL Metro Area	1.8%
Birmingham, AL Metro Area	1.7%
Green Bay, WI Metro Area	1.4%
Lynchburg, VA Metro Area	1.1%
Akron, OH Metro Area	0.5%
Topeka, KS Metro Area	0.4%
Cedar Rapids, IA Metro Area	-1.0%
Quad Cities Rank	6 out of 12

* Evansville, Louisville and Peoria are not listed due to changes to MSA boundaries during this time.

The Quad Cities ranked near the middle of our peer metro areas in terms of average real GDP growth from 2021 to 2023. Given that U.S. real GDP growth has averaged around 2 to 2.5% in recent years, and given that population growth accounts for about 1% of that, it would be reasonable to expect average real GDP growth for the Quad Cities should average somewhere between 1 to 1.5%, leaning toward the high end of that range. In fact, from 2001 to 2010, we averaged 1.6%. However, from 2010 to 2023, the average was only 0.6%.

Despite the above average years from 2021 to 2023, the next two years (2024 and 2025) are likely to be lower than average. Employment was in decline in those years, and exports were also lower than in 2022.

Provided the U.S. economy continues to avoid recession, and assuming that we see positive movement on other metrics such as population growth, educational attainment and job growth, the next few years should be better than 2024 and 2025. Ideally, we could return to an average more like what we experienced from 2001-2010. As a five-year goal, meeting or exceeding the above average years of 2021-2023 (1.8% growth) would be an appropriate benchmark from 2026 onward (understanding that 2024 and 2025 may be lower).