

DEKALB COUNTY THRIVING!

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for DeKalb County (2018–2023)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2015, five organizations with a stake in the economic vitality of DeKalb County, Illinois launched a process to develop a countywide economic development vision and priority activities for the region. These partners included DeKalb County Government, the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation (DCEDC), the DeKalb County Community Foundation (DCCF), the DeKalb County Farm Bureau, and Northern Illinois University (NIU). After months of collecting input from across the county, a vision statement was created that highlighted DeKalb County’s greatest assets:

“People + Place + Partnership Make DeKalb County Thrive!”

Six asset-based priorities emerged from the visioning process:

Asset	Priorities
People:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing local leadership 2. Helping connect people to jobs
Place:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Retaining, expanding, and attracting business 4. Improving infrastructure
Partnership:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Supporting community economic planning and coordination 6. Identifying and pursuing funding opportunities

Building on this initial community visioning phase, the partners convened business and community leaders from throughout DeKalb County to create and implement a comprehensive economic development strategy or CEDS plan. The resulting framework consists of five economic development goals and twenty implementation strategies.

Goal 1: Ensure DeKalb County has a talent pipeline that meets the needs of workers and employers.

Strategies:

1. Conduct and regularly update a labor market analysis for the county.
2. Strengthen the relationship between employers and NIU, Kishwaukee College, and high schools throughout the county.
3. Support the development of housing stock that meets the needs of a range of workers.
4. Use commuting data to identify new worker recruitment targets.

Goal 2: Identify and recruit target industries.

Strategies:

1. Identify strong and growing industry sectors.
2. Focus recruitment efforts on logistics, agriculture, and other known economic development targets.
3. Attract technology-based companies and start-ups to a research and development park in collaboration with NIU.

Goal 3: Create a countywide business climate in DeKalb County that contributes to business success.

Strategies:

1. Streamline regulations for business location and expansion.
2. Convene an economic development boot camp for local officials.
3. Encourage the adoption of consistent economic development marketing messages.
4. Publicize available economic development tools.

Goal 4: Brand and promote the “DeKalb County Experience” that focuses on the county’s unique assets.

Strategies:

1. Support entrepreneurship and innovation throughout the county.
2. Incorporate the county’s innovative agricultural practices into marketing messages.
3. Increase awareness of area arts, culture, and entertainment.
4. Create and maintain a quality of life dashboard.

Goal 5: Collaborate countywide to maximize the economic health of all communities in DeKalb County.

Strategies:

1. Market all communities in the county.
2. Coordinate and communicate activities between countywide stakeholders.
3. Market strategically important development targets throughout DeKalb County.
4. Promote opportunities for communities to benefit economically from collaboration.
5. Fund infrastructure improvements.

These goals and strategies are intended to help prioritize and align economic development investments by the DeKalb County Government, countywide organizations, and individual communities. The final step in this planning process is to involve all partners and stakeholders in identifying specific implementation activities and related measures. Each goal will have both short-term (i.e., 1-2 years) implementation opportunities as well as more complex and resource-intensive activities that may take several years to achieve. As a result, while this CEDS framework may serve DeKalb County for the next three to five years, implementation activities will need to be monitored on an ongoing basis and adjusted to ensure countywide priorities are being met and resources are optimized.