



# ENVISION EAST CENTRAL IOWA

2022-2026 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY - IOWA, USA

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May 2022



# ENVISION EAST CENTRAL IOWA COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY REPORT

IOWA, USA

May 2022

This report presents the outcomes of the East Central Iowa comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) planning project. This project was termed 'Envision East Central Iowa'. This report has been produced as part of the Envision East Central Iowa planning project which aims to develop a new economic development strategy that will guide regional decision-making over the next five to ten years. It should be noted that formal CEDS requirements mandate a five-year time horizon; this report postulates on both a five and ten-year horizon.

**Report Prepared by:**



**This project is partially funded by the Economic Development  
Administration of the US Department of Commerce.**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	1	6.0 Strategic Pillars and Action Areas .....	25
SNAPSHOT – REPORT HIGHLIGHTS .....	2	6.1 Strategic Pillars .....	26
1.0 Introduction – Overview of the Planning Process .....	3	6.2 Strategic Actions- Summary .....	27
1.1 How to Use this Report .....	4	6.3 Pillar 1: Embracing an innovation focus to build regional competitiveness .....	28
1.2 Setting the Context - What is a CEDS? .....	5	6.4 Pillar 2: Fostering an entrepreneurial approach to create and capture new opportunities .....	30
1.3 Stakeholder Engagement Metrics .....	6	6.5 Pillar 3: Protecting and sustaining our unique natural resources .....	32
1.4 Intentions for Envision East Central Iowa .....	7	6.6 Pillar 4: Reimagining the built environment .....	34
1.5 Planning in Uncertain Times – Recovery and Resiliency .....	8	6.7 Pillar 5: Creating more vibrant communities.....	36
2.0 Summary Background – Regional Profile .....	9	6.8 Pillar 6: Purposefully growing a thriving diverse regional workforce .....	38
3.0 East Central Iowa’s Strategic Positioning – A Trends Analysis .....	10	6.9 Pillar 7: Creating and expanding pathways for shared prosperity.....	40
3.2 Importance of Food, Energy, and Water.....	12	7.0 Implementation – Identifying Key Priorities ...	42
3.3 Changing Societal Values and Consumer Demands ...	13	7.1 Priorities for Action .....	43
3.4 Changing Weather Conditions and Patterns.....	14	7.2 Next steps .....	44
3.5 Digital Technologies and Accelerating Speed of Change .....	15	8.0 Appendix A: Focus Group Locations and Type .....	46
3.6 Leveraging Innovation Capacity in East Central Iowa .....	16	9.0 For More Information .....	47
3.7 Staying Ahead – The Grand Challenge for the Region .....	17	10.0 CONSULTANT TEAM - About Future iQ .....	48
4.0 East Central Iowa’s Strategic Positioning – Leveraging Local Assets .....	18		
4.1 Regional SWOT Analysis .....	19		
4.2 Major Regional Assets .....	20		
5.0 Future Strategic Direction .....	21		
5.1 Identifying the Preferred Future – Vision for East Central Iowa .....	21		
5.2 Scenarios of the Future – Framework for Exploration.....	22		
5.3 Expected and Preferred Futures .....	23		
5.4 County and Industry Focus Groups – Validating the Preferred Future .....	24		



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been guided by a local 'Envision East Central Iowa Strategy Committee', established by East Central Iowa Council of Governments. (ECICOG). ECICOG is an intergovernmental council established in 1973 by Benton, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington counties. ECICOG was created to promote regional cooperation and to provide professional planning services to local governments in the East Central Iowa region. ECICOG thanks the Economic Development Administration of US Department of Commerce for their contribution to this project with a CARES Act grant, as well as the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation, United Way of East Central Iowa, and Kirkwood Community College for their financial contributions.

### CEDS Strategy Committee Members

- Jasmine Almoayyed, VP Continuing Education, Kirkwood Community College
- Mary Audia, Executive Director, Washington Economic Development Group
- Kim Becicka, VP Continuing Education (retired), Kirkwood Community College
- Eric Engelmann, Partner, ISA Ventures
- Les Garner, President & CEO, Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation
- Nick Glew, President, MEDCO
- Katie Knight, President & CEO, United Way Johnson and Washington Counties
- Jeff Kueter, Director of Corporate Engagement, University of Iowa
- Derek Lumsden, Executive Director, Jones County Economic Development
- Kate Moreland, President, ICAD
- Doug Neumann, Executive Director, Cedar Rapids Economic Alliance
- Brent Oleson, Deputy Director, Policy & Community Relations, Linn County
- Jennifer Pratt, Community Development Director, City of Cedar Rapids
- Kristin Roberts, President & CEO, United Way of East Central Iowa
- Kate Robertson, Executive Director, Benton County Development Group and Iowa County Community Development
- Tracy Seeman, County Supervisor, Benton County
- Rod Sullivan, County Supervisor, Johnson County
- Janice Weiner, Alderperson, City of Iowa City
- Bob Yoder, County Supervisor, Washington County
- Jon Zirkelbach, County Supervisor, Jones County
- Karey Chase, Director of Community Impact, United Way of East Central Iowa

### ECICOG Staff

- Karen Kurt, Executive Director
- Adam Bentley, Senior Planner/Economic Development Specialist
- Brittany Rempe, Communications Specialist

### ECICOG Board of Directors

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# SNAPSHOT – REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

This report lays out the agreed future vision, value proposition, and strategic positioning for the East Central Iowa region. It identifies the key strategic actions and priorities needed to achieve the preferred future.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS and OUTCOMES OF THE ENVISION EAST CENTRAL IOWA PROCESS



### 1. SIGNIFICANT APPETITE TO THINK BIG AND TAKE ACTION

Throughout the planning process, regional stakeholders have worked together to identify an ambitious future regional vision, which represents significant change from the current trajectory. There was recognition that the region has the potential to become a nationally and globally significant region. The institutional partners in the project have shown a keen willingness to step forward and be part of the implementation process and demonstrated a collective desire to move forward together.



### 2. STRONG DESIRE TO BUILD AN INNOVATION FOCUS

A key strategic lever for the region's future is building a strong innovation focus. This plays to existing regional strengths and leverages the current capacity for human knowledge creation and educational technology. The optimal future pathway was identified as applying this innovation focus to existing industry clusters to build industrial diversification, and simultaneously applying it to spur new entrepreneurial activity and business creation in promising emerging sectors.



### 3. WILLINGNESS TO BE A LABORATORY OF LEARNING

Workforce capacity is a critical issue for all regions. East Central Iowa has identified a unique desire to 'lean into' the workforce and social evolution dimension and tackle the grand challenges of today's society. There is willingness and desire to see the regional community evolve to intentionally foster new ideas, cultures, and experiences. The desired outcome is to build a thriving diverse regional workforce, that can actively lead in workplace and workforce transformation.



### 4. FOCUS ON CREATING SHARED PROSPERITY AS A FOUNDATIONAL STEP

The planning process has identified creating and expanding pathways for shared prosperity as the highest short-term priority. There is a desire to address disparities and remove barriers to individual and family prosperity and success. The regional stakeholders have embraced a future value proposition of being a community that welcomes, absorbs, and nurtures people. This represents a broad new approach to attracting people, by creating an inclusive regional community that values equity and diversity.



ECICOG staff, Strategy Committee members, and community stakeholders made significant contributions to the visioning and planning process. In total, over 500 people have contributed to the plan development.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION – OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

Envision East Central Iowa worked with a cross section of regional stakeholders to explore the region’s economic development ecosystem and how it could evolve in the future. A key focus of the plan is a collaborative approach to build an inclusive and resilient environment for the region. The 8-month long visioning and strategic planning process began in July 2021 and ended in March 2022. This report represents Future IQ’s analysis of the research and engagement outcomes. It outlines how the extensive accumulated data has informed the identification of a preferred future and key strategic action areas for future economic development in the East Central Iowa Region.

### ENVISION EAST CENTRAL IOWA



“We are strong-willed, resilient, and will have weathered a pandemic together! We have incredible assets at our disposal and will be poised to make some great decisions together.”

- Envision East Central Iowa Stakeholder Survey Respondent

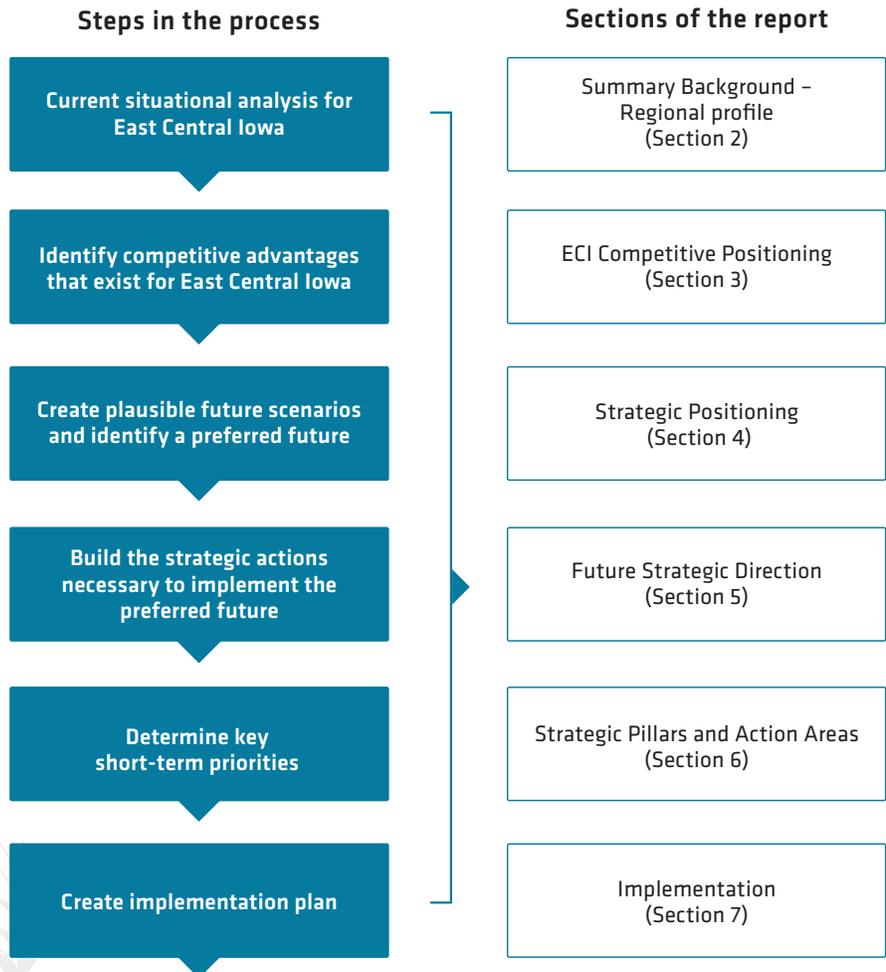


As Economic Development Districts (EDD) across the United States emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, regions are facing new realities that will impact communities. Anticipating these changes and being 'future ready' is essential for building resiliency and sustainability.

## 1.1 HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report lays out the findings from each key step in the planning process. The process moved from background analysis and exploration, through to identifying key priorities for the future. This work represents robust 'future gazing' where regional stakeholders considered possible directions and the impacts and consequences of those directions. The process, and the report, then drill down deeper into what people saw as the optimal or preferred future. This understanding helps lay the groundwork for figuring out 'how we get there.' The preferred future identified through this process presents a compelling and enticing vision for how East Central Iowa could evolve as a regional community over the next decade.

### ENVISION EAST CENTRAL IOWA





Envision East Central Iowa is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development that is designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resilience of the region over the next five years.

## 1.2 SETTING THE CONTEXT - WHAT IS A CEDS?

The CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy) is a pre-requisite for the federal designation as an Economic Development District and must be updated every five years. Although East Central Iowa’s last CEDS was updated in 2018, regional leadership led by the East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) decided to advance the timeline due to the impacts of COVID-19. The new East Central Iowa CEDS is called ‘Envision East Central Iowa.’

“A CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development. A CEDS is the result of a regionally owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region.”

- Economic Development Administration (EDA), 2015

According to the EDA’s regulations and guidelines, a CEDS must incorporate the concept of economic resilience (the ability to avoid, withstand, and recover from economic shifts, natural disasters, the impacts of climate change, etc.) and meet the following general criteria:

- It is developed with broad-based community participation
- It is readily accessible to regional stakeholders
- It is usable to stakeholders as a guide to the regional economy and for action to improve it
- Seen through the lens of economic resiliency, the four required elements (Summary Background, SWOT Analysis, Strategic Direction/Action Plan, Evaluation Framework) logically build upon each other to result in a coherent, targeted document.

This project has been partially funded through the EDA CARES Act grant and as a result, the new Envision East Central Iowa includes a discussion of COVID-19 impacts and opportunities, and how the region can promote recovery and build resilience moving forward.





Envision East Central Iowa involved a wide, deep, and transparent engagement process. Reports were published on the ECICOG website, and the project was widely promoted in the regional community.

### 1.3 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT METRICS

Envision East Central Iowa is built on extensive stakeholder input. This engagement was a central design feature of the planning process. The engagement and data-driven methodology progressively focused the discussion on emerging key themes and stakeholder aspirations for the future. The purpose of the process was to arrive at a 'point of consensus' that represented the shared vision for the future, and a comprehensive strategic plan - with actions - that propels the region towards that preferred future.

A key feature of the engagement and planning process was the mixture of virtual and in-person sessions. Where possible, in-person sessions were held (such as initial listening sessions and focus groups). However, adjustments were made based on prevailing health guidance and some sessions, such as the community Think-Tank, were held virtually.



#### DATA INSIGHTS:

- Due to the challenges of the covid-19 pandemic, stakeholder engagement took place in a combination of in-person and virtual settings. The attendance of 122 stakeholders at the 5-hour virtual Think-Tank reflected the dedication of regional leadership to the success of this project.



The intentions of the Envision East Central Iowa plan lay out important guidelines that helped inform the plan. A key focus was ensuring that the planning approach reached out to the rural counties and sought their input and involvement.

## 1.4 INTENTIONS FOR ENVISION EAST CENTRAL IOWA

In July 2021, a Strategy Committee consisting of 22 regional representatives was created to guide the project. Committee members felt it was important to establish an overarching orientation for the new Envision East Central Iowa plan. Early in the process, the committee developed the following set of intentions for Envision East Central Iowa.

Stated intentions for the Envision East Central Iowa:

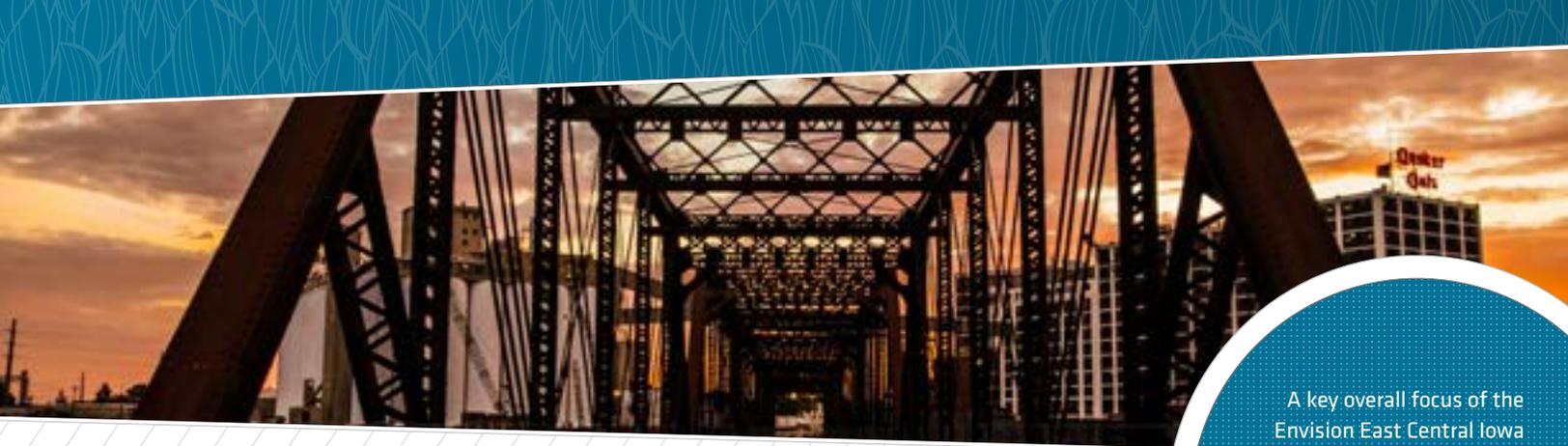
1. **Create a common vision** that will energize and unite the region around an economic development strategy and its implementation while acknowledging that implementation of the vision may look different in various areas of the region.
2. **Build economic pathways for success** for both businesses and individuals, especially for those who are underrepresented, have significant barriers, or experienced greater harm due to COVID-19.
3. **Embrace, celebrate and leverage our varied and diverse strengths**, at both community and regional levels.
4. **Be inclusive** of different voices and perspectives.
5. **Identify areas for collaboration on economic development projects**, including ways existing assets and institutions can be leveraged for greater success across the region.
6. **Identify success markers** to promote collective accountability after plan adoption.

For a complete list of Strategy Committee Members, please see the acknowledgments section of this report. The Strategy Committee represented an excellent cross section of the region. Of special note was the balance between the urban and rural voices. In addition, there was a wide range of perspectives with specialty interest areas that spanned economic development, municipal government and community focused not-for-profits. This broad perspective is reflected in the stated intentions.

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“The opportunity is to leverage great people and community to be intentional about the future we want to create. We can be a leader in reimagining healthcare and education. We can clean up our waterways and transition our ag lands to growing food to feed our communities. We can be a leader in renewable energy and clean air and water. We can be a place where people thrive...”

- Envision East Central Iowa Stakeholder Survey Respondent



A key overall focus of the Envision East Central Iowa plan is to build future economic vibrancy and resiliency and allow the region to capitalize on trends and opportunities in a post-Covid phase.

## 1.5 PLANNING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES – RECOVERY AND RESILIENCY

This Envision East Central Iowa report has been developed in the context of significant change and upheaval. The two major macro events are:

- The August 2020 Midwest derecho, which affected parts of the Midwestern United States (predominantly eastern Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana). The region incurred significant damage.
- The COVID-19 pandemic, which has fundamentally impacted the region along with the rest of the United States.

These dramatic events create an environment of change and heighten awareness about the importance of resilience in regional economic and community planning. The impacts of the derecho were more acute, such as the loss of tree canopy and destruction of buildings. The pandemic is likely to have more lasting impacts and lead to massive systemic change across a range of issues. There was an already-existing undercurrent of change that has only been amplified and accelerated by the pandemic. There are obvious accelerations occurring in terms of workplace transformation, application of automation, and impacts on supply chains.

The opportunity of the Envision East Central Iowa planning has been to bring fresh thinking to how the region can steer its future, in the context of accelerating change. The larger uncertainties that are still unfolding include issues such as:

- **Workplace and workforce transformation:** To what degree will workplace and workforce patterns return to ‘normal,’ or to what degree will we see new hybrid and remote models become the norm? How could evolving workplace transformation impact employers and employees in East Central Iowa?
- **Migration and settlement patterns:** Population migrations typically are slow-moving patterns, but there is evidence the pandemic induced a shift from large urban centers to newer and smaller cities. Will this persist, and how might it present an opportunity for East Central Iowa?
- **Supply chains:** Supply chain constraints, together with global trade tensions, are placing medium-term pressure on all industrial sectors. How does this potentially present challenges or opportunities to the future of the region’s industries?

Envision East Central Iowa planning has explored macro trends and probed various plausible scenarios. This scenario-based strategic planning has provided a framework to consider variable futures, and possible implications for the region.





This six-county EDD region has enough heft to be a strong regional player. It has the second most significant economic concentration in Iowa and is home to well-regarded institutions and companies.

## 2.0 SUMMARY BACKGROUND – REGIONAL PROFILE

The East Central Iowa region, for the purposes of planning, is a six-county region. This region has a population of just over 450,000 and has two main urban concentrations around the cities of Cedar Rapids and Iowa City.

As a companion report to Envision East Central Iowa, a data-based benchmark of the region has been prepared. This includes regional profile data and some longitudinal trends analysis. The regional profile report supports this primary plan and provides analysis to help understand the current regional profile and trends. Key aspects include:

- Demographic indicators
- Trends from 2000 to 2020
- Socio-economic indicators
- Innovation index
- Key regional industry sectors and clusters

Some of the key highlights of this analysis include:

- Understanding the regional population growth - the region has grown from approximately 385,000 people in 2000, to nearly 470,000 in 2020. All counties showed some growth, but the vast majority occurred in Johnson and Linn counties and to a lesser extent in and Washington County. The remaining rural counties have shown minimal growth.
- The overall regional population is becoming more urban, with a slightly declining rural population, versus a significantly increasing urban population.
- From 2000 to 2020, the non-white portion of the population has grown from 6.2% to 16.1% of the population.
- A significant concentration of educational assets is translating into growing a talent pool.
- The Innovation Index shows the region performing well on a comparative basis to other regions in the USA, ranking 56th out of 393 regional Economic Development Districts (Note: Not all USA is covered by Economic Development Districts). The region ranks particularly well on Human Capital and Knowledge Creation (42/393) and Economic Well-Being (29/393).



The region also has some specific geographic strengths that are enhanced by the strong logistics infrastructure, which includes excellent regional airport, rail, and interstate connections. The region is also a significant food production and manufacturing center and is home to strong educational institutions.



East Central Iowa has an opportunity to build a key strategic proposition - as a place for people to thrive and adapt to change. The future will be significantly shaped by the ability of the regional team to rally around workforce opportunities and challenges.

### 3.0 EAST CENTRAL IOWA'S STRATEGIC POSITIONING – A TRENDS ANALYSIS

Envision East Central Iowa is intended to guide the region's leadership as they anticipate and plan for the next five to ten years. Key to future planning is understanding where the region fits into a future landscape at regional, national, and global levels. The following section explores key macro trends shaping the future of communities across the United States that are particularly relevant to East Central Iowa. These trends represent a set of converging forces that are reshaping industry, society, and our lives. These will impact parts of East Central Iowa in different ways. The decade ahead will be one of rapidly accelerating innovation and social change, fueled by technology and new funding from governments and industry.

The key is to understand the trends, anticipate implications, and then design region-wide and localized strategies to adapt or leverage these forces of change. This speed of change has the potential to leave behind some business, sectors, and communities. Specifically, the key trend topic areas covered in this section include:

- Workforce and Workplace Transformation
- Changing Societal Values and Consumer Demands
- Digital Technologies and the Accelerating Speed of Change
- Importance of Food, Energy, and Water
- Changing Weather Conditions and Patterns
- Innovation Capacity

Of most relevance to the discussions about trends is the speed and scale at which change is occurring. Newly developed innovations are being implemented daily, changing the face of industries and society in rapid and profound ways. Manufacturing is at the forefront of this technological transformation, but other industries are also being rapidly reshaped. This includes agriculture, bio and med-tech, healthcare, energy, transportation and mobility, financial services, and retail.

“Change represents opportunity in that growth in the manufacturing sector is a logical and central strategy for the East Central Iowa region.”

- Envision East Central Iowa Steering Committee Member



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#### FUTURE INSIGHTS FOR EAST CENTRAL IOWA:

- Exploring the main trends and their implications is critical to robust future thinking. It is also equally important to consider how these trends combine and interact to create specific new opportunities and challenges.
- The global pandemic has served to accelerate many existing trends, especially at the level of workplace transformation and the application of process automation. This pace of change amplifies challenges and opportunities.

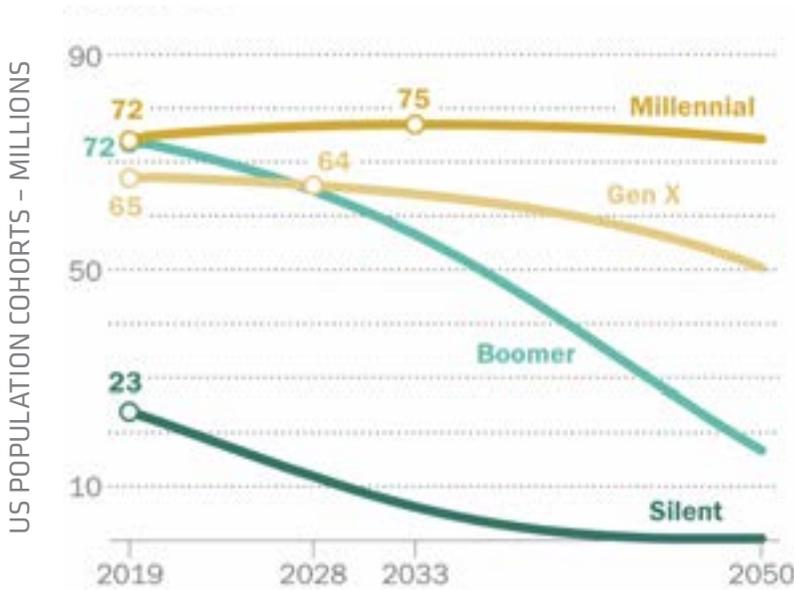


Iowa is already uniquely positioned in a global context, as it attracts some of the top talent in the world to its universities. Translating this talent into local workforce systems must be a key approach.

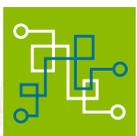
### 3.1 WORKFORCE AND WORKPLACE TRANSFORMATION

One of the key impacts of the pandemic is an acceleration in the transformation of the workforce and workplace. The current skills gap is causing employers to scramble and compete for workers of all skill levels. The next five years will see radical changes in how workplaces are structured and how skilled workers are integrated into the workforce. In addition, the generational workforce composition is rapidly changing. Millennials and Gen X are emerging as the dominant cohorts as baby-boomers begin to retire in significant numbers. This will bring with it new values, behaviors, and expectations. The urgent need for workforce solutions and workplace transformations offers a grand challenge to apply innovation and new thinking.

#### US Projected population by generation (millions) [NOTE: Gen Z population cohort data is not included]



Source: PEW Research Center - tabulations based on U.S. Census Bureau population estimates released April 2020 and population projections released December 2017. (Millennials refers to the population ages of 23 to 28, as of 2019).



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#### FUTURE INSIGHTS FOR EAST CENTRAL IOWA:

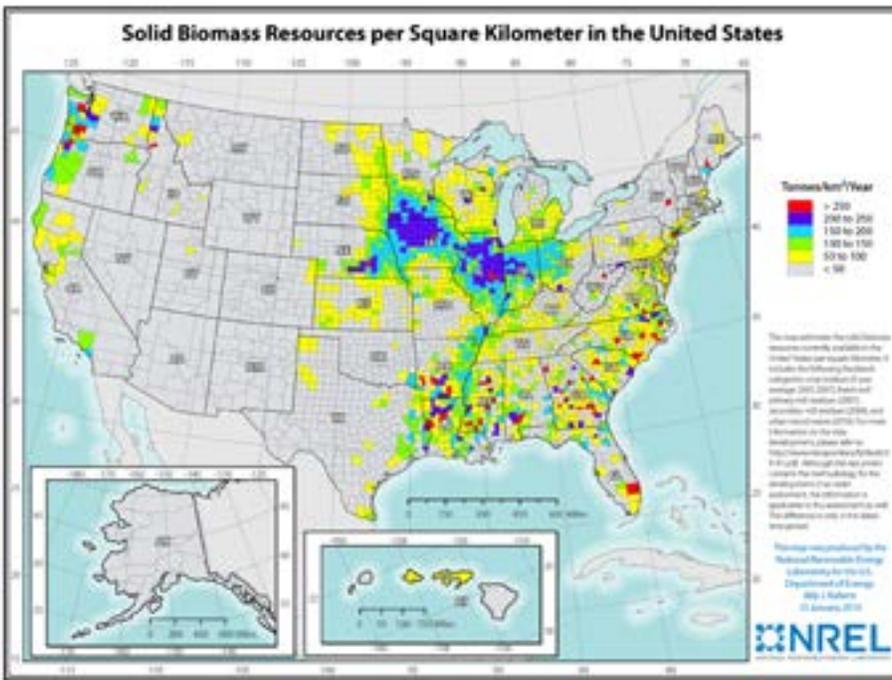
- According to a recent *Morgan Stanley report* (Aug 2019), millennials and gen z will drive demand for housing, particularly rentals, by 2034.
- More than 60% of those between the ages of 22 and 37 are aware of the implications their food choices have on the environment and many are taking steps to lessen that impact. A recent California example of changing societal values around the way livestock is raised (CA Proposition 12) has had considerable impact in Iowa.



With food, bioprocessing and biotechnology as key industries, East Central Iowa has an outsized role to play in the future of supplying food to the world. Biomass offers a potent resource for emerging plant-based products such as biofuels, bioplastics, and plant-based proteins.

### 3.2 IMPORTANCE OF FOOD, ENERGY, AND WATER

The growing global population will mean a dramatic increase in the global need for food (60% growth), energy (50%) and water (40%) by 2050 (FAO, 2015). Overall, there is a global disconnect between where food can be grown and where it will need to be consumed, which will be amplified by climate change. The ability to produce food and biomass is a key economic driver for the upper Midwest region. East Central Iowa has some of the highest levels of solid biomass resources per square kilometer in both the United States and the world. The region is uniquely positioned to be a key player in the coming food revolution, with its combination of food production capability, abundant fresh water, and access to renewable energy.



Source: NREL, 2014.



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#### FUTURE INSIGHTS FOR EAST CENTRAL IOWA:

- The upper Midwest will emerge as one of the most important food producing regions in the world, and Iowa is uniquely positioned as a key location. The challenge is to find creative and innovative ways to ensure this delivers strong economic prosperity throughout the region.
- It is estimated that as much as two thirds of the world population could be water-stressed by 2025. With 20% of global freshwater resources located in the Upper-Midwest, East Central Iowa could play a significant role in the stewardship of the world's freshwater resources.

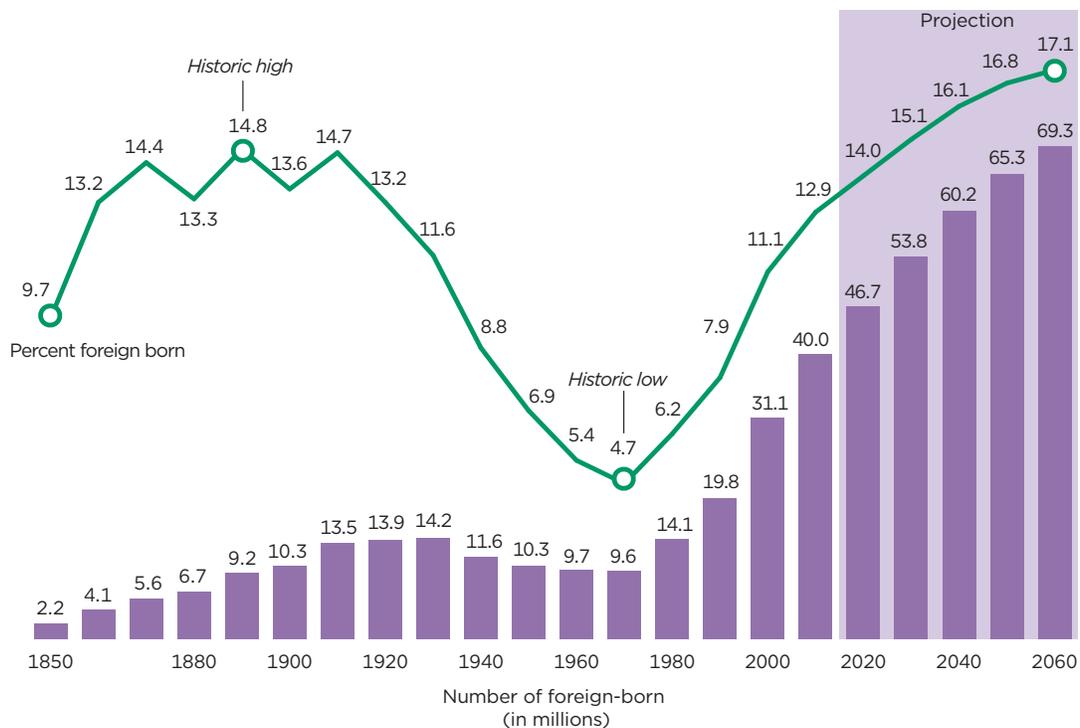


### 3.3 CHANGING SOCIETAL VALUES AND CONSUMER DEMANDS

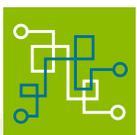
U.S. society is changing rapidly, and this will cascade through to societal values and consumer choices. Through their purchases, consumers have the power to influence and drive changes in food and product production, processing, and supply chains. In addition, societal values shape many dimensions, including the types of community people will prefer, where they will want to live, and workplace expectations. In the next decade, the U.S. is projected to see higher rates of immigration and more foreign-born residents.

#### Foreign-Born People Living in the United States: 1850 to 2010, Projected 2022 to 2060

By 2028, the foreign-born share of the U.S. population is projected to be higher than at any time since 1850.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1850-2000 Decennial Censuses, American Community Survey 2010, 2017 National Population Projections for 2020-2060.



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#### FUTURE INSIGHTS FOR EAST CENTRAL IOWA:

- Solving the workforce challenge will be a key focus for East Central Iowa over the coming years. This offers the opportunity for innovative new thinking about how workplaces are designed and function, and how workforce can be found, attracted, and supported.
- Industry 4.0 has brought with it accelerated workforce changes. Combined with the global trends, these changes will require an intensely people-focused approach to economic and workforce development. This approach needs to include intentional encouragement of immigration to the area if East Central Iowa is to continue to grow.

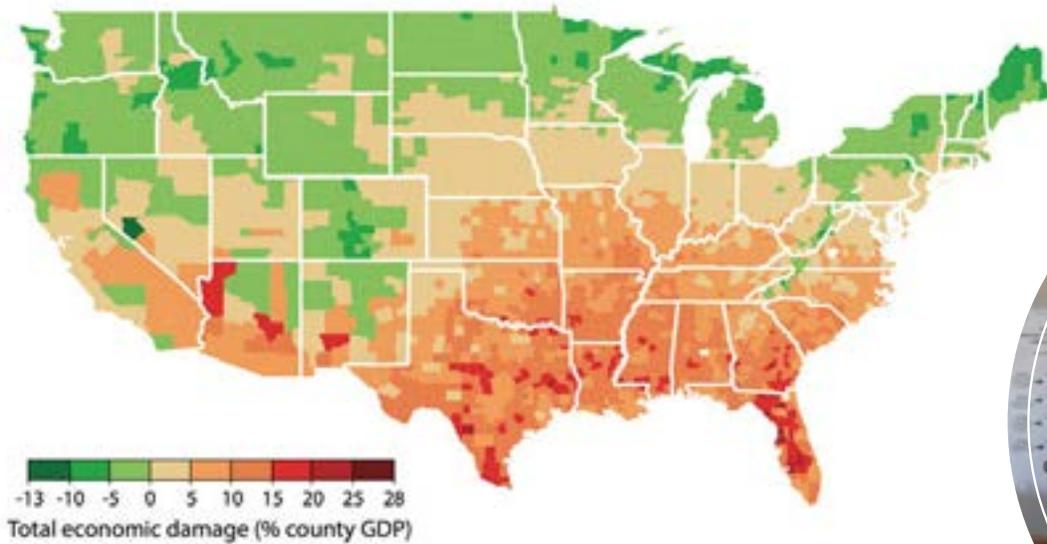


The longer-term impacts of climate change could trigger a gradual migration of US population from the south and coastal areas, to the north and center of the country.

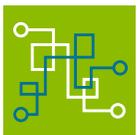
### 3.4 CHANGING WEATHER CONDITIONS AND PATTERNS

Climate change is impacting all areas of the world. From wildfires in the West, flooding in the South and on the East Coast, to changes in weather patterns across the country, the United States is experiencing its damaging effects on a regular basis. It is widely predicted that in Iowa, climate change will bring an increase of heavy precipitation and flooding. It is also anticipated that warming of the state will bring longer frost-free growing seasons and higher concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide that would increase yields for many crops during an average year. In the U.S., long term GDP impacts are forecast to be predominately negative in the south and positive in the north. This predicts significant economic and social disruption and dislocations, triggered by the impacts of climate change.

#### Mapping the Potential Economic Effects of Climate Change



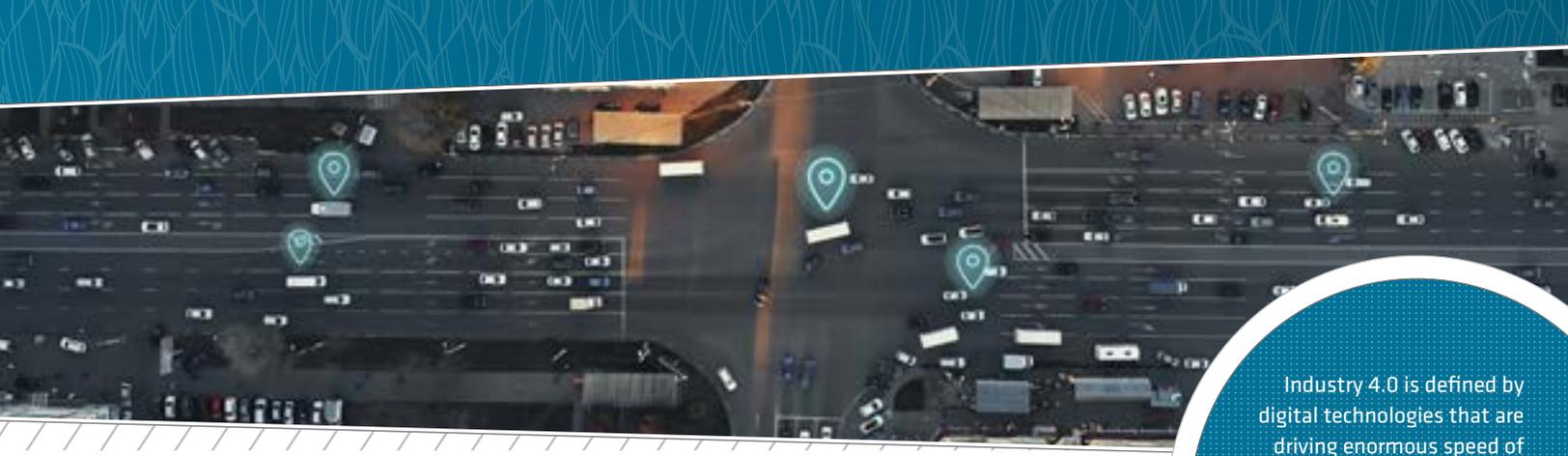
Source: Christopher Joyce, MPR News, June 29, 2017.



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#### FUTURE INSIGHTS FOR EAST CENTRAL IOWA:

- The upper Midwest is in a unique position of being a region where climate change may bring GDP increases and some climatic benefits, such as more moderate winter climates. This long-term trend could increase the region's attractiveness.
- The potential migration of people and businesses offers the opportunity to create a new relevance and era of growth in East Central Iowa. The challenge is to ensure the policy settings make the region an attractive destination in the upper Midwest.

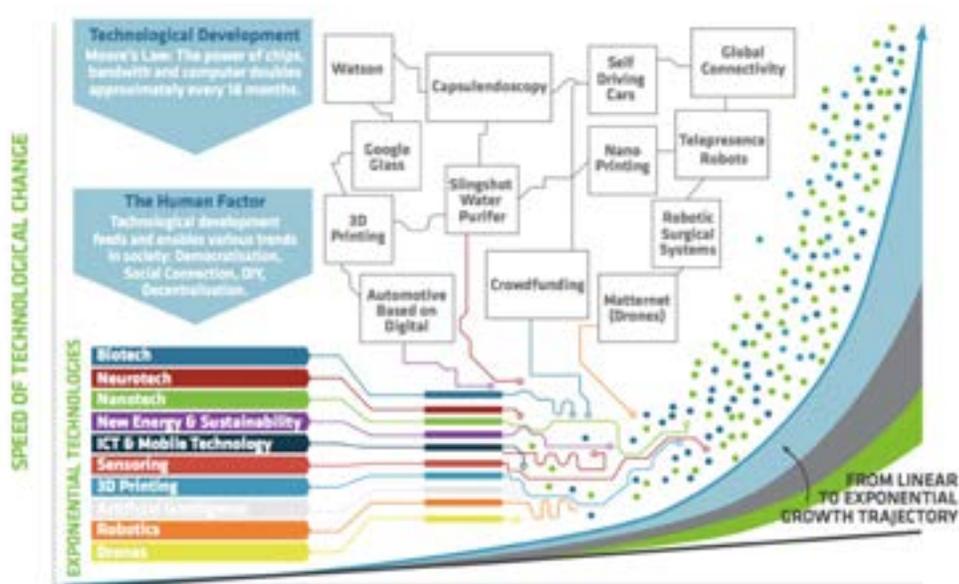


Industry 4.0 is defined by digital technologies that are driving enormous speed of change. The challenge for industry sector ecosystems will be to absorb the pace of change. This is driving new collaborations, partnerships, and business models.

### 3.5 DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND ACCELERATING SPEED OF CHANGE

The innovations being developed as part of the industry 4.0 revolution are being implemented rapidly and at scale. There are many technologies that are developing at exponential speed. These technologies are also beginning to integrate to create seamless systems. For example, the combination of autonomous vehicles, electrification of transport and advanced logistics could well transform distribution systems. The same integration and transformation are also happening across sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and health services.

#### Exponential change created by the emergence of highly integrated systems



Source: Deloitte, 2014. *Industry 4.0 Challenges and solutions for the digital transformation and use of exponential technologies*



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#### FUTURE INSIGHTS FOR EAST CENTRAL IOWA:

- East Central Iowa has the potential to be a 'living laboratory' for experimentation that adapts to the rapidly changing technological landscape. It has a strong innovation foundation, that will be vital in a world of accelerating technologies.
- The converging technologies will create an acceleration of system-wide transformation. This will especially favor regions that have well developed ecosystems, where innovations and ideas are shared rapidly between parts of the value chain, and where the political will exists to accept these changes.

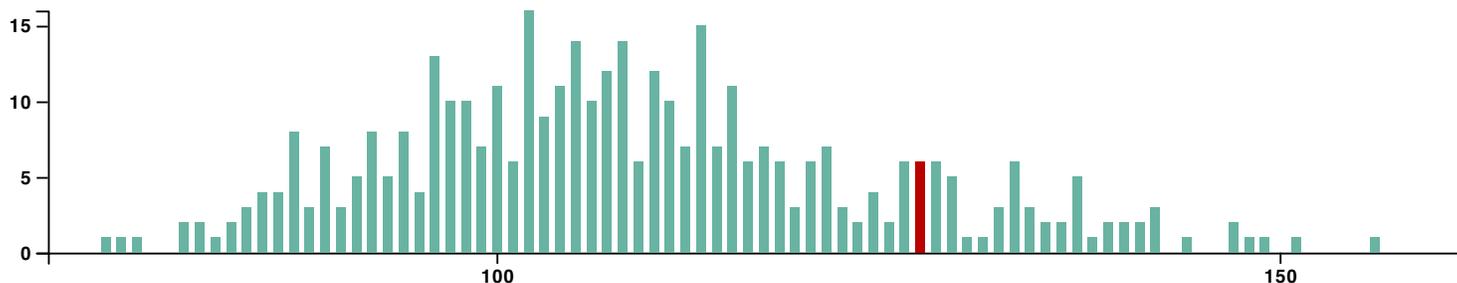


East Central Iowa has great potential to leverage its capacity for innovation to grow its regional competitiveness on a national scale.

### 3.6 LEVERAGING INNOVATION CAPACITY IN EAST CENTRAL IOWA

Data from the Stats America Innovation Index can be used to visualize and understand a region’s weaknesses, strengths, and potential. For regions identified as Economic Development Districts (EDDs) by the EDA, the Innovation Intelligence Index of a region provides a comparison of all 393 EDDs in the United States. The Innovation Intelligence Index is a high-level summary index calculated from five major index categories. The Envision East Central Iowa region is identified as having a high relative Innovation Capacity, which is a critical future building block for the regional economy and community.

#### Innovation Intelligence Index for East Central Iowa



The graph above shows the distribution of index values for all counties. The value for the East Central Iowa Council of Governments is highlighted in red.

Source: StatsAmerica website 2021 <https://www.statsamerica.org/innovation/>



#### FUTURE INSIGHTS FOR EAST CENTRAL IOWA:

- Overall, East Central Iowa measures comparably well in innovation capacity relative to other economic development districts. This region ranks 56 out of 393 on overall Innovation Intelligence Index.
- It is notable that East Central Iowa is ranked high on the Economic Wellbeing Index (ranked 29 out of 393 U.S. Economic Development Districts). Key factors measured in this index are residential internet connectivity and income, average unemployment rate, and government transfers to total personal income ratio. This should be emphasized as a benefit to workforce development in the region.

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The key emerging trends outlined in this chapter are likely to lead to significant change over the next decade. As East Central Iowa emerges from the pandemic, it will be important for the region to have a clear desired trajectory – a vision – and set of strategies to navigate a rapidly-evolving world.

### 3.7 STAYING AHEAD – THE GRAND CHALLENGE FOR THE REGION

The East Central Iowa region has a significant population and economic scale, with the heft and momentum to continue to grow and prosper. The region has built a solid concentration of infrastructure assets, industries, and human talent. There are important macro trends that provide future ‘tailwinds’ for the regional economy and are creating potential new opportunities.

However, the next decade is likely to be a period of rapid and unprecedented change that will dramatically reshape industries and societies. Iowa’s overall population stagnation will eventually impact the East Central Iowa Region, and only through ‘wider arm’ policies will the region be able to keep up. There are also the combined effects of rapidly emerging exponential industry 4.0 technologies, and social change propelled by generational population shifts. This creates an environment for significant potential change and turbulence. The global pandemic has amplified some important underlying disruptive trends, especially in the areas of workforce, workplace, supply chains, and logistics. This period of accelerated change presents challenges, but also offers great opportunity, for those regions that can harness these macro forces.

The critical grand challenge for East Central Iowa, over the next decade, will be to ensure the regional community is able to absorb and adapt to rapidly changing societal values and shifting demographic make-up. We will see generational shifts in the workforce and leadership, which will bring new expectations and opportunities. The decade ahead will be defined by innovation, in technological, societal, and workforce realms.

East Central Iowa has an opportunity to capitalize on its human and economic strengths to expand its capacity as a leading hub of innovation. This will require intentional effort that connects social evolution with economic innovation.





A core asset for the region will be its future workforce. Evolving the region to be an appealing and viable location will be essential to attracting and retaining future population and skilled people.

## 4.0 EAST CENTRAL IOWA'S STRATEGIC POSITIONING – LEVERAGING LOCAL ASSETS

The East Central Iowa region has achieved a critical population size and regional recognition. In the regional benchmark analysis, produced as part of the Envision East Central Iowa planning project, it is noted that the region is approaching a population of half a million people, and is forecast to continue to grow. The benchmark also highlights:

- ✓ The regional population is growing and changing and there is a relatively rapid expansion in the diversity of the population. Over the last 20 years, the region has changed from being about 70% urbanized to 80% urbanized.
- ✓ The East Central Iowa region performs comparably in terms of socio-economic indicators relative to Iowa and US. However, there are some indications that disparity gaps are growing, and household prosperity may be challenged. The region's higher education facilities are an outstanding strength that provide residents with access to world class education and can help produce a skilled future-ready workforce and regional community.
- ✓ Economic concentration is occurring in the two metro counties (Johnson and Linn), and their relative share of the GDP is increasing significantly.
- ✓ East Central Iowa measures comparably well in innovation capacity relative to other economic development districts. This region ranks 56 out of 393 Economic Development Districts (within the US) on the overall Innovation Intelligence Index.
- ✓ The region has outperformed the US and Iowa in relative GDP growth between 2000 and 2020. However, the full impacts of the pandemic and the medium-term rate of recovery are still to play out.
- ✓ There is a transition occurring in the regional economy, as the pivot occurs to technology driven clusters and industries.
- ✓ The relative employment is declining in the Food / Bioprocessing, Manufacturing and Logistics and Transportation clusters, and there are strong relative employment increases in Engineering and Automation, and Education and Technology Services clusters.

This analysis highlights some trends and changes occurring in the region, which can be leveraged for future strategic actions. There is a strength in large core industry clusters, especially educational technology, and services, and this can be leveraged to spur innovation and a skilled local workforce. The region has a strong agricultural and food cluster and production capacity, which can be further leveraged as bio-industries evolve and change. Emerging trends and increasing demands for a variety of plant-based products could play to the region's traditional strengths.



A highlight of the SWOT analysis work is the significance placed on the 'human component', with many topics directly referencing the community demographics and fabric, liveability and amenities, and workforce capacity and skills.

## 4.1 REGIONAL SWOT ANALYSIS

The primary data for the East Central Iowa SWOT Analysis was generated by the Envision East Central Iowa Stakeholder Survey conducted in August through September 2021. The information was then vetted and validated at the Envision East Central Iowa Think-Tank, 12 industry and county Focus Group sessions, and the Strategy Development Session. Below is a high-level summary of the SWOT Analysis for Envision East Central Iowa. For a complete analysis and breakdown of SWOT elements, please see the Envision East Central Iowa Think-Tank Report at [envision-eci.org](https://envision-eci.org).

### Strengths

- Educational opportunities
- Sense of community
- Cost of living
- People – friendliness & work ethic
- Healthcare services
- Geographic location
- Arts & entertainment
- Recreation opportunities

### Weaknesses

- Lack of diversity (people & economy)
- Workforce shortage; attracting and retaining youth
- Lack of amenities & entertainment
- Affordable housing
- State politics
- Transportation options
- Regional collaboration
- Childcare access/availability

### Opportunities

- Workforce attraction & retention
- Increase in-migration
- Growth – population & business
- Quality of life amenities
- Expanded housing options
- Educational opportunities
- Business attraction
- Infrastructure investment

### Threats

- Workforce and population shortages
- Brain drain/loss of youth
- Political division & competition
- Housing supply
- Climate change/natural disasters
- Loss of businesses
- Resistance to diversity/new groups
- Childcare access/availability

### What is a SWOT Analysis?

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis is defined by the EDA as “a strategic planning tool that ensures a clear objective informed by a comprehensive understanding of a region’s capabilities and capacity. A SWOT analysis identifies the region’s competitive advantages—those indigenous assets that make the region special or competitive in the national and global economies—juxtaposed against those internal or external factors that can keep a region from realizing its potential.”





In addition to the strategic actions outlined in this plan, the region should make the necessary investments to ensure these assets continue to be a competitive advantage moving forward.

## 4.2 MAJOR REGIONAL ASSETS

The East Central Iowa region has several key clusters of physical, institutional, and cultural assets that can be leveraged to promote economic development. These include:

**LOGISTICS:** The East Central Iowa corridor serves as a hub for several modes of transportation, with significant rail and interstate connections as well as the Eastern Iowa Airport. Several logistics-based companies, such as the trucking firm CRST, call the region their home. A new intermodal hub, Travero, opened in 2021. With a tax-free trade designation, the Eastern Iowa Airport has the potential to accelerate international trade with the region.

**EDUCATION:** East Central Iowa is recognized as an education leader both within and outside of the region. With the University of Iowa (31,206 students), Kirkwood Community College (12,424 students) and several smaller private universities, the region has an edge in terms of attracting and re-training workforce. In addition, area residents value education as a key contributor to the region's high quality of life.

**RESEARCH:** The region is the home of the University of Iowa, a tier 1 research university. There is an opportunity to transfer technology and research findings from the University to start or grow business or new sectors within the region. Many existing area companies, such as ACT, can trace their origins to research conducted at the University of Iowa. Additional opportunities can be leveraged from the myriad of university research facilities. For example, the University's National Advanced Driving Simulator is a world class research facility of increasing importance with the rise of autonomous vehicles. Similar opportunities exist in the bio-technology field with the Center for Biocatalysis and Bioprocessing.

**DIVERSE ECONOMY:** East Central Iowa is fortunate to have a diverse economy with multiple large employers. Key industry clusters include insurance and finance; educational technology and services; engineering and automation; biotechnology and medical technology; and food and bioprocessing. This diversity has promoted a stable economic environment. Some of the region's core industries, such as food processing, experience growth during economic downturns, offsetting losses in other areas. Several business parks exist in the region support these diverse clusters.

**AGRICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT:** The region's nutrient-rich soil, combined with regular rainfall, creates some of the most productive farmland in the world. This production capacity is directly tied to some of the region's core industries. Maintaining, and potentially improving, soil and water health will have a direct impact on the economic well-being of future generations.

**CULTURE AND RECREATION:** East Central Iowa hosts many unique cultural and recreation assets. The City of Iowa City is a UNESCO City of Literature due to the world-renowned Iowa Writers Workshop. In Iowa County, the Amana Colonies are a National Historic Landmark and popular tourist destination. Iowa was the first state to put the Railbanking Act of 1983 to use for the development of bike trails. As a result, the region has several notable trails, one of which will become part of the nationwide trail known as the Great American Rail Trail and the American Discovery Trail. Throughout the Envision East Central Iowa process, participants expressed a desire to build on these types of assets and to do a better job of making others outside of the region aware of these amenities.



The scenario planning process encourages curiosity and collaboration by providing a way to explore plausible future scenarios from a speculative standpoint. This transparency allows for 'intellectual collisions' to occur in a safe and collaborative environment.

## 5.0 FUTURE STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Themes were identified for the two axes on the scenario matrix based on community survey responses, input from ECICOG staff, and discussions among the Strategy Committee. These themes were Development Approach and Workforce / Social Evolution.

### 5.1 IDENTIFYING THE PREFERRED FUTURE – VISION FOR EAST CENTRAL IOWA

To identify the preferred future or vision for East Central Iowa's economic development, regional stakeholders participated in a scenario-planning workshop called a Think-Tank. The five-hour Envision East Central Iowa scenario-based Think-Tank event was conducted virtually on September 29, 2021. Approximately 122 people attended including key business, education, government, and non-profit stakeholders. The Think-Tank was intended to build a vision for future economic development planning for East Central Iowa that will guide stakeholders looking out to 2030.

The scenario planning process provides a method to explore plausible futures and consider the implications of various future scenarios. The Think-Tank workshop aimed to:

- Deepen the understanding and examination of how external events and local conditions could shape decision-making
- Identify and understand the key influences, trends, and dynamics that will shape the region looking out to 2030
- Create and describe four plausible long-term scenarios for the East Central Iowa
- Explore alignment around a shared future vision

The scenarios developed during the scenario planning process are important to provide a framework to discuss future possible outcomes and implications for economic development strategies for East Central Iowa. In addition, the Think-Tank deliberations assisted in identifying key actions for the region and exploring how various groups might collaborate to best contribute to future policymaking. The process involved exploration of local trends and forces of change as well as development of a scenario matrix defining four plausible scenario spaces for the future. The event concluded with discussion of the scenarios, selection of a preferred scenario, and the compilation of potential high-level strategic actions. For additional information and details on the Envision East Central Iowa's visioning process, please read the *Envision East Central Iowa's Think-Tank Report*.



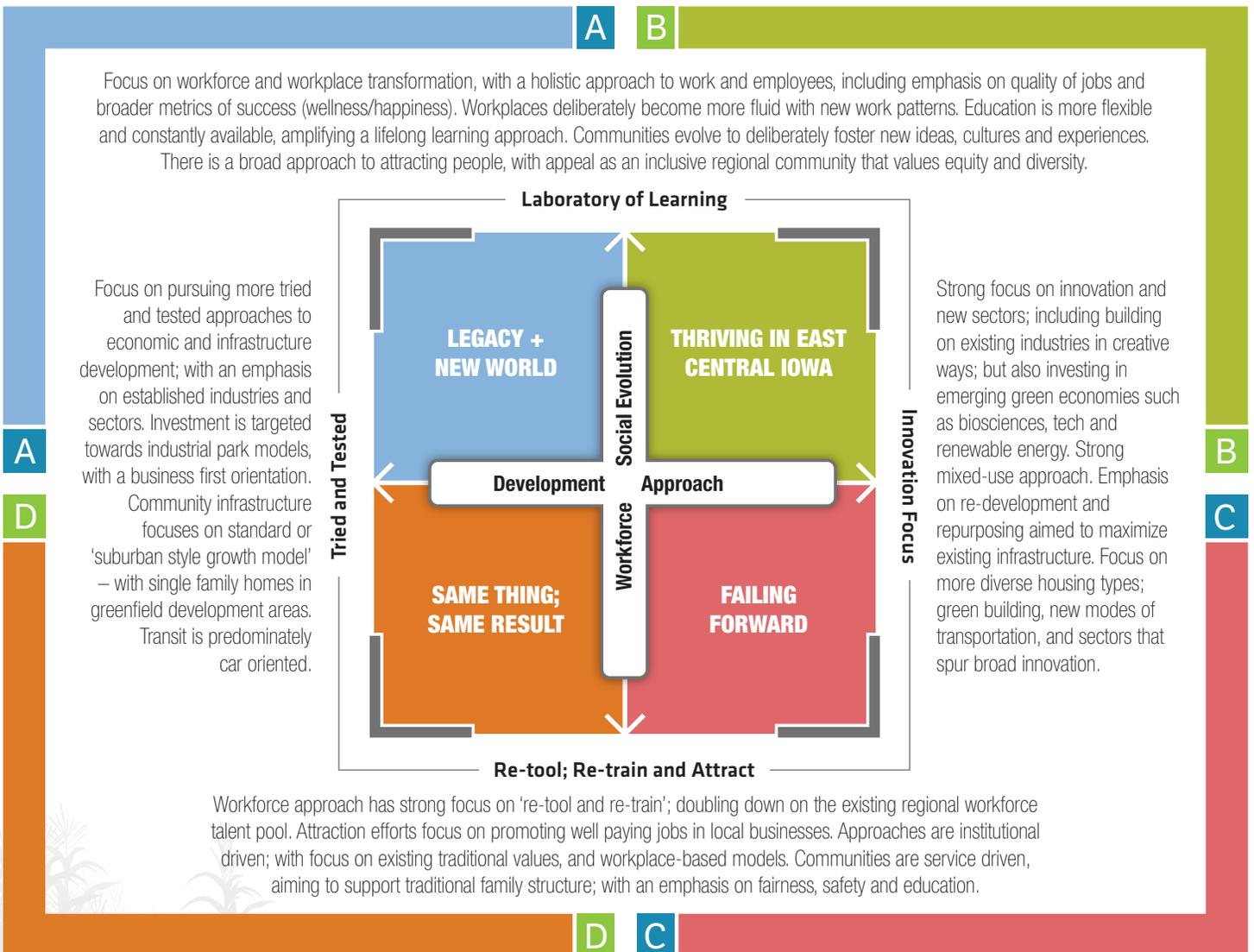


The scenario development process at the Think-Tank allowed stakeholders to examine the implications and consequences of different and plausible future directions.

## 5.2 SCENARIOS OF THE FUTURE – FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORATION

During the East Central Iowa Think-Tank, four different future scenarios were created. The scenarios were created using the scenario matrix framework, which was built around the two macro themes of **Workforce and Social Evolution**, and **Development Approach**.

Plausible Scenario Matrix 2030



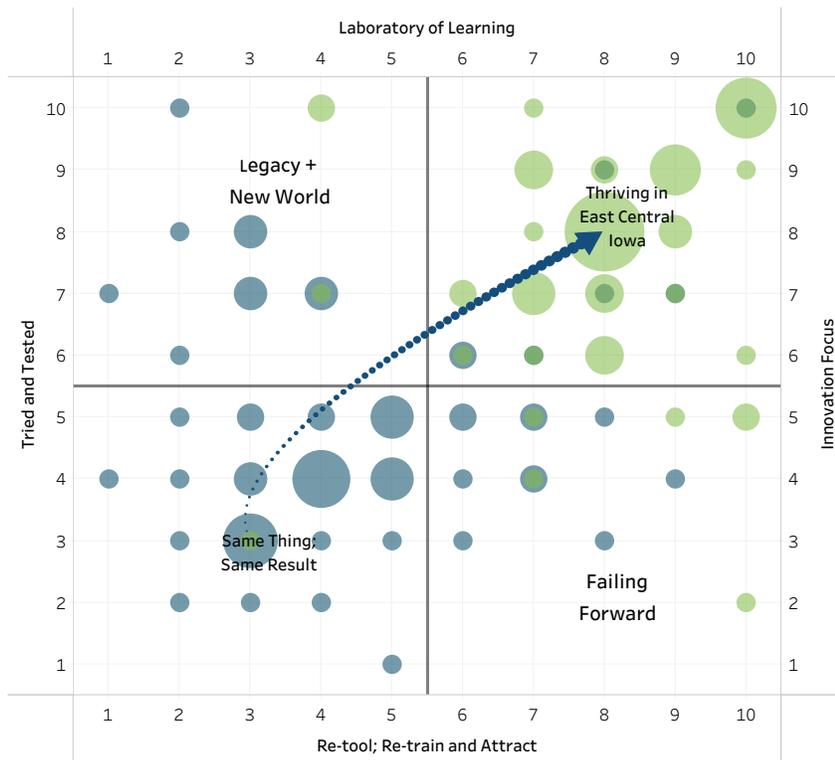


The preferred future 'Thriving in East Central Iowa' outlines a shared vision for the region. The trajectory from expected to preferred future constitutes the strategic actions needed to make this vision become a reality.

### 5.3 EXPECTED AND PREFERRED FUTURES

Think-Tank participants took an Expected and Preferred Survey that included two questions about the trajectory of East Central Iowa. The first question was about the expected future – the future deemed most likely to happen if there is no change in the current trajectory of East Central Iowa. Workshop participants generally indicated Scenario D, "Same thing; same result, as the scenario they believed best represented the current direction for East Central Iowa. The second question was about the preferred future – the future most desired by participants. Think-Tank participants expressed a clear preference for Scenario B, 'Thriving in East Central Iowa.'

#### Getting from the Expected to Preferred Future



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#### FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- A definite preference for the 'Thriving in East Central Iowa' scenario indicates a clear mandate for regional stakeholders to take actions that support that vision for the future.
- The clear distance and direction between expected and preferred futures for East Central Iowa indicate that focus is required to adopt an innovation approach to economic and infrastructure development, as well as a more holistic, equitable, and inclusive approach to workforce and workplace transformation.



Storytelling around the compelling vision for East Central Iowa's economic development will be key in attracting and retaining a healthy workforce and workplace environment for the region.

## 5.4 COUNTY AND INDUSTRY FOCUS GROUPS – VALIDATING THE PREFERRED FUTURE

Following the Think-Tank, a series of 12 industry and county Focus Groups were held across the region. The purpose of the Focus Groups was to validate the preferred future and to gather strategic ideas on how to implement the preferred vision for the region. Below are brief descriptions of the high-level themes that emerged from the Focus Group discussions:

### Synopsis of high-level themes emerging from the Focus Groups:

- **Need for better regional storytelling:** Focus Group participants were enthusiastic about East Central Iowa assets, particularly its quality-of-life amenities such as recreational opportunities, healthcare systems, and low cost of living. The general feeling was that the region does not do enough to promote or market itself to the outside world. There was a desire to develop a storyline that attracts and retains youth to the region.
- **Opportunity for proactive workforce/workplace transformation:** Like all regions in the U.S. emerging from the pandemic, East Central Iowa is grappling with transforming its workforce and workplace. Focus Group participants were keen on developing the infrastructure to support workforce, including new populations, with affordable housing, amenities (especially childcare), and remote work options. The creation of a systems-wide onboarding procedure to incorporate diverse populations and was put forth as a distinguishing strategy to attract and retain people in the region.
- **Leverage regional educational resources:** High quality education at all levels was identified as one of the most distinguishing features of the East Central Iowa region. Leveraging the University's spin-out capacity, venture capital, and geographical connections was considered highly desirable. Expanding K-12 programs to include career development and broader educational options was also supported.
- **Importance of a regional approach:** The importance of creating a more cohesive region was highlighted in all of the Focus Group sessions. It was felt that collaboration needed to be elevated and more pathways for collaboration created. It was suggested that the region could use placemaking to unify the region; by building connectivity, walkability, and broadband capacity across the region to support/attract new growth and changing demographics.
- **Research and Development:** East Central Iowa's capacity for research and development (R&D) is very high with the presence of higher education and large companies that conduct R&D onsite. Focus Group participants were enthusiastic about mid-sized companies testing theories/R&D in food and building on the region's food production capacity. Becoming a test bed for tech companies was also encouraged as a strategy for attracting more innovation to the region.

For a listing of the Focus Groups and their locations, please see **Appendix A**.



## 6.0 STRATEGIC PILLARS AND ACTION AREAS

The Strategic Pillars are an organizing framework to help identify actions that will enable the region to pivot toward the preferred future. Together, these Strategic Pillars have an overarching intention, which is to contribute to the following:

- Foster regional collaboration and cooperation
- Strengthen and promote the long-term vision for the region
- Help define and promote the region's uniqueness and future competitive positioning
- Respect diversity and build a more inclusive regional community
- Build economic and community adaptability and resilience

These overarching intentions were the focus of many discussions throughout the planning process and were particularly important in the context of developing a plan for the region as it emerges from the impacts of the pandemic. The notion of adaptability and resilience were especially important, as the current environment has created elevated uncertainty and the acceleration of game changing trends, such as workplace transformation and supply chain constraints.

Another key element was the continued encouragement of a regional approach. Throughout the process, stakeholders highlighted that the region is better and stronger working together. This increases heft and influence which in turn attracts attention and resources. The best pathway for building a regional approach was seen as identifying key shared interest issues, where groups and entities could collaborate on solutions, at a regional scale. This was seen as a particularly important way to bring the strengths of the urban and rural communities together to think as a regional 'ecosystem' about key challenges and solutions.

Strategic Actions were identified under each pillar, and these were identified as the immediate practical action areas.



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### FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- Envision East Central Iowa is not intended to solve all regional challenges in the immediate short term. Rather, it presents a series of strategic actions that can be achieved in the short to medium term that will produce long-term results.
- The Strategic Actions are intended to produce systemic and catalytic shifts that will drive the future economic growth, agility, and vitality of the region and attract new people and investments. These actions are designed to build the future pathway to the preferred future.





## 6.1 STRATEGIC PILLARS

The Strategic Pillars for Envision East Central Iowa were developed with the Strategy Committee following the Think-Tank and the Focus Groups. The pillars represent the major theme or topic areas that underpin the preferred future for comprehensive economic development in East Central Iowa. They have been drawn directly from the scenario planning and stakeholder engagement process. The Strategic Actions are structured around these seven key strategic pillars, which are the fundamental building blocks that support the vision for the region.

### Strategic Pillars

A 'laboratory of learning' that creates innovative thinking and solutions





The Strategic Actions represent a series of catalytic actions that will propel the region towards the preferred future. They are intended to support existing or planning initiatives, and to fill critical gaps.

## 6.2 STRATEGIC ACTIONS- SUMMARY

Following the creation of the Strategic Pillars, the Strategy Committee identified a series of key Strategic Actions that help implement the intentions of each Strategic Pillar.

### Strategic Actions by Pillar

#### 1 Embracing an innovation focus to build regional competitiveness

- Capitalize on trends that are changing the location and nature of manufacturing
- Plan for the transformation of energy production systems
- Focus on capturing opportunities in the biosciences and bioeconomy
- Facilitate relocation of R&D facilities and functions to the region

#### 2 Fostering an entrepreneurial approach to create and capture new opportunities

- Develop systemic, coordinated support for entrepreneurs in our region
- Assist communities with the creation of innovation spaces
- Develop targeted marketing and storytelling to attract key industry clusters

#### 3 Protecting and sustaining our unique natural resources

- Support efforts to address flooding and water quality issues
- Support the move towards more regenerative land use practices
- Promote local level action that supports the transition to clean energy

#### 4 Reimagining the built environment

- Amplify the use of Iowa's Smart Planning Principles throughout the region
- Revitalize neighborhoods via rehabilitation, infill projects and adaptive reuse
- Build connectivity and walkability through transportation infrastructure and neighborhood design

#### 5 Creating more vibrant communities

- Stimulate the development of more unique events, cultural assets, and places
- Connect individual community assets to strengthen the region's vitality
- Expand and connect recreational opportunities region-wide

#### 6 Purposefully growing a thriving diverse regional workforce

- Develop an overall regional onboarding system unique to East Central Iowa
- Focus on support systems to assist immigrant populations thrive in the region
- Expand education initiatives for career connected learning

#### 7 Creating and expanding pathways for shared prosperity

- Support the widespread creation of quality sustainable and affordable housing
- Develop and promote a coordinated plan for childcare in the region
- Expand access to fast affordable broadband across the region



**Regional Differentiation:** The region has a strong innovation culture and outperforms many comparable regions on the national Innovation Index. Leveraging this innovation capacity can help identify and build new opportunities, in both existing and emerging industry sectors.

## 6.3 PILLAR 1: EMBRACING AN INNOVATION FOCUS TO BUILD REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

The East Central Iowa region has a foundation of strong, long-established industries, many with reputations as great innovators. It has core strength in manufacturing, food and bioprocessing, transportation, and education. The regional survey and rapid polling in the Thank-Tank identified that this industrial core is very important to the future of the region. However, it was determined that the region was not well prepared for the future challenges and opportunities associated with many of the key drivers associated with this core. Additionally, it was identified that significant changes were impacting the region now and in the near term. Underlying important trends include a shift to renewable energies, the reshoring of manufacturing supply chains, and growing importance of the region's bioeconomy. The preferred future 'Thriving in East Central Iowa' identifies a future where the region is applying a strong innovation focus to the development approach, including building on existing industries.



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### FUTURE INSIGHTS

- The coming decade will see the rapid adaption and deployment of industry 4.0 technologies across all sectors. Being 'future-ready' and embracing innovation will help industries adapt and evolve, and most importantly stay competitive.
- The region has remarkable strategic positioning in terms of the bioeconomy, given its productive capability. This should be a key focus area for the future.



## KEY STRATEGIC ACTION AREAS

### 1. Capitalize on trends that are changing the location and nature of manufacturing

With value and supply chains being disrupted by the pandemic and international trade tensions, there is an opportunity for the region to capture more of this activity by drawing parts of the system closer to the region. There is some evidence this has potential, as supply chains are re-shored to the US, and the innovation capacity of the region will be a key attractor.

### 2. Plan for the transformation of energy production systems

There is remarkable transformation occurring in the energy systems around the world, as the focus shifts to renewable energy and electrification. This offers both opportunity and challenge for the region. There is clear strength in renewables such as wind and solar, but there could be implications for the ethanol industry as the world moves away from internal combustion engine technology. However, ethanol could be an important input for the next generation of plant-based products such as plastics.

### 3. Focus on capturing opportunities in the biosciences and bioeconomy

The East Central Iowa region sits in the epicenter of the one of the most productive crop regions in the world. As climate change impacts global food production capability, this resource becomes even more important. While it is hard to predict all the future outcomes, it seems highly likely the world will increasingly be focused on plant-based products, across a wide range of categories and uses.

### 4. Facilitate relocation of R&D facilities and functions to the region

The region currently has a strong production capability in core industries such as manufacturing and food processing. There may be potential to attract the R&D components of large companies, or supply chains, to the region. The local innovation and technical capacity would be part of the draw.



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## FUTURE INSIGHTS

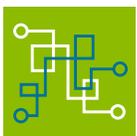
- The region has great infrastructure, such as the Eastern Iowa Airport, rail lines, Interstate 80/380 (4 lane assets: Hwy30, Hwy 218, Hwy 151), industrial parks, water/wastewater systems, communications networks, energy systems, and a productive workforce.
- In addition, parts of the region have excellent high speed broadband coverage. The broadband capacity in the rural areas will be essential to ensuring economic benefit are able to spread across the region.



**Regional Differentiation:**  
Building a strong entrepreneurial support ecosystem will help innovators gain traction in the region. This will help build future economic activity and deepen the region's economy, adding to the long-term resilience.

## 6.4 PILLAR 2: FOSTERING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL APPROACH TO CREATE AND CAPTURE NEW OPPORTUNITIES

The preferred future for the East Central Iowa region is predicated on a strong innovation focus that invests in existing industries in creative ways, and invests in emerging economies such as biosciences, technology, and renewable energy. This innovation will come from existing industry participants and will also be driven by entrepreneurs and an entrepreneurial approach. An example of this is the innovation that has occurred in educational and medical technologies. The region has a strong talent pipeline coming from the educational institutions, which can be converted into entrepreneurial applications.



### FUTURE INSIGHTS

- Entrepreneurship offers a pathway for human talent to stay in the region. The region is strong in human knowledge creation, and the opportunity is to convert this to business creation.
- People emerging from the educational systems could be supported to convert ideas into businesses, and anchor those in the regional ecosystem.

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## KEY STRATEGIC ACTION AREAS

### 1. **Develop systemic, coordinated support for entrepreneurs in our region**

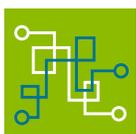
The action area proposes to develop a map of regional entrepreneurial resources, prioritize gaps, and develop a coordinated approach to supporting entrepreneurs. The broad concept is to develop a collaborative approach across the region, and institutions to develop an integrated support system that could help an entrepreneur at each step in the process of innovation and commercialization.

### 2. **Assist communities with the creation of innovation spaces**

The idea of creating innovation spaces in communities has potential. This helps give a local focus to innovation and provides a 'go-to' place for entrepreneurs. This model has been used with some significant success in various parts of the region and state, and often helps build profile for the opportunities.

### 3. **Develop targeted marketing and storytelling to attract key industry clusters**

The issue of storytelling and targeted marketing gathered a lot of support through the planning process. This was identified in the county and industry focus groups and in most of the engagement sessions. The overwhelming view is that there are great stories to be told and inspiring things happening, but that the region is not good at telling the story. In a more digital world, and where there is more flexibility in workplace models, this approach might offer great opportunity to attract new talented innovators.



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## FUTURE INSIGHTS

- The focus on a regional ecosystem to support entrepreneurial activity could deliver benefits to rural parts of the region. Currently the commuting patterns reflect the daily movement of people into the larger urban counties. The creation of entrepreneurial support spaces in communities can assist population stabilization in smaller communities and rural areas.
- Developing a good narrative about the region will be important to attract mobile talent and entrepreneurs. Some regional communities in the Midwest have done an excellent job in positioning themselves at alternatives to large urban centers, especially as new workplace models and hybrid work patterns flourish.

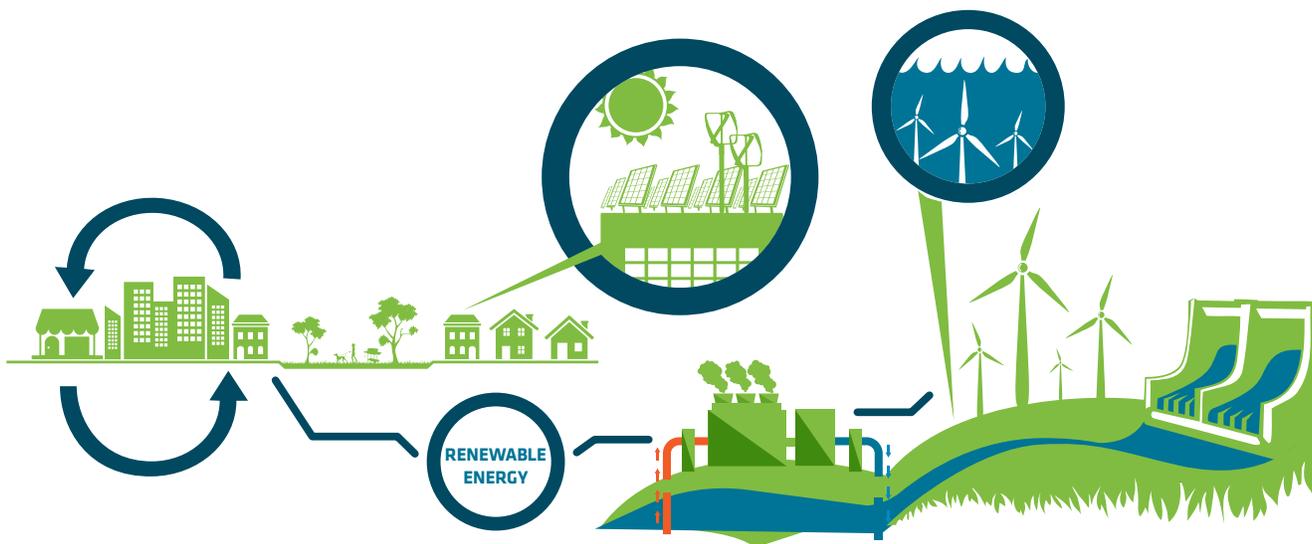




**Regional Differentiation:**  
A key value proposition to attract emerging generational cohorts will be a focus on who saves more in the areas of sustainability and resource protection.

## 6.5 PILLAR 3: PROTECTING AND SUSTAINING OUR UNIQUE NATURAL RESOURCES

The East Central Iowa region is built on a remarkable set of natural resources. The productive farmland is connected to the major river system, which in turn provides an environmental corridor through the middle of the region. It is predicted that, as a function of climate change, changing weather patterns will possibly spur crop yield increases while also increasing precipitation and potential flooding risks. To reduce flood risk and improve water quality, significant work is being done on watersheds and building systems to reduce flood risk. The broader topic of sustainability is front and center for the emerging population cohorts. This interest and focus extend to topics as diverse as urban landscapes, air quality and recycling and waste management systems.



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### FUTURE INSIGHTS

- A focus on sustainability is a critical step to build future resilience, both economic and environmental. This topic area includes issues such as housing, energy consumption, recycling, waste management and electrification of vehicle fleets.
- The region could 'lean into' a larger approach to environmental sustainability and use this as a demonstration of its appeal and relevance to new cohorts. This is an opportunity to apply innovation and regional solutions.



## KEY STRATEGIC ACTION AREAS

### 1. Support efforts to address flooding and water quality issues

Water quality issues in the river watershed are impacted by the agricultural landscape. The urban landscape can also have a major impact. The region can promote the adoption of conservation practices in urban and rural areas to slow runoff and improve water quality. There is a need for long term elevation of the regional watershed work, especially to build resilience for future higher intensity rainfall events. Urban and rural communities may need to upgrade water and sewer facilities to improve their performance and environmental impact. This will require funding and policy solutions at the local, regional, and state level.

### 2. Support the move towards more regenerative land use practices

There is an emerging trend toward more regenerative land use practices. These practices offer the opportunity to improve soil quality and health and buffer against the impacts of climate change. The approach can also see more carbon stored in soils, helping offset emissions.

### 3. Promote local-level action that supports the transition to clean energy

As energy systems transform, there is the opportunity for more distributed production and storage of energy, via battery and other technologies. This allows scaling of solutions from individual homes and buildings to the community level. There is also considerable gain from focusing on energy efficiency, including housing that is more efficient and adapted to changing weather regimes. These topics are of keen interest to the emerging generations, who are looking for creative ways to demonstrate and take individual and collective action.



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## FUTURE INSIGHTS

- Efforts to protect and sustain the region's unique natural resources will require collaboration across the region and between the rural and urban areas. The watershed system is clearly a shared responsibility.
- The broad topic of environmental sustainability offers a wide swath of opportunities for innovation and new economic activity. It is also becoming a baseline requirement, as people increasingly come to grips with climate change, emissions reduction, and begin to focus on protecting and improving the environment.





**Regional Differentiation:** Although traumatic, rebuilding after the devastating Derecho tornado provides a unique opportunity for the East Central Iowa region to revitalize and reimagine its built environment in a resilient, future-ready way.

## 6.6 PILLAR 4: REIMAGINING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Connected and walkable neighborhoods and communities both improve quality of life and provide considerable economic benefits. Investments in infrastructure and amenities are critical in transitioning overlooked or damaged areas into centers of activity and development. Parks and other kinds of public spaces often serve as catalysts for new residential, mixed-use, or commercial oriented projects. Results from the Stakeholder Survey indicate a strong desire for innovative solutions for local mobility options outside of roads and cars. Ideas developed at the Strategy Development session supported keen interest in promoting legislative initiatives at the state level that would eliminate barriers to reimagining East Central Iowa’s built environment to enable maximizing the value of existing infrastructure.



FutureInsight

### FUTURE INSIGHTS

- Demand for connectivity and walkability is growing in all communities, especially since the pandemic. Multi-modal connectivity foresees a future for East Central Iowa with fewer cars and many more options for transportation and mobility. This is appealing to all demographic groups throughout their lives.
- Adapting the built environment to the needs of residents is becoming a tool in workforce development. Millennials especially are drawn to places with green building, smart systems, and greater opportunity for connectivity and walkability.



## KEY STRATEGIC ACTION AREAS

### 1. Amplify the use of Iowa's Smart Planning Principles throughout the region

Reimagining East Central Iowa's built environment will require educating local leaders on the opportunity to grow wealth and reduce future maintenance costs by maximizing the use of their existing public works infrastructure. Envision East Central Iowa encourages the use of Iowa's 10 Smart Planning Principles to transform the region's built environment.

#### Iowa Smart Planning Principles

- Collaboration
- Efficiency, transparency, and consistency
- Clean, renewable and efficient energy
- Occupational diversity
- Revitalization
- Housing diversity
- Community character
- Natural resource and agricultural protection
- Sustainable design
- Transportation diversity

### 2. Revitalize neighborhoods via rehabilitation and adaptive reuse

Since the Derecho tornado in 2020, some East Central Iowa communities are still struggling to address the damage from the storm. Help is needed to revitalize neighborhoods and strengthen the tax base with infill and adaptive reuse projects. The region would see enormous benefit from educating communities on the cycle of disinvestment and providing tools to address troubled or neglected properties, especially in gateway areas.

### 3. Build connectivity and walkability through transportation infrastructure and neighborhood design

Throughout the Envision East Central Iowa planning process, stakeholders expressed the desire for more connectivity and walkability both between and within local communities in the region. The increasing importance of all types of mobility is a global trend that was accelerated during the pandemic. Given its central location within the state, further connecting regional transportation and trail system infrastructure would be beneficial for both commerce and health and wellbeing in the region.

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“We chose to move to Iowa City because it is a progressive town with a good arts and culture, dining, and outdoor recreation scene. We like the walkability and small town feel with the assets of a larger city.”

– Envision East Central Iowa Stakeholder Survey Respondent



FutureInsight

## FUTURE INSIGHTS

- Two key elements of Iowa's Smart Planning Principles are collaboration and revitalization. By purposefully working together on East Central Iowa's built environment revitalization, the urban and rural communities of the region have the potential to create well-connected, inclusive, and forward-looking initiatives that build resiliency for the region.
- The desire to further connect the region's trail network ecosystem was expressed in both rural and urban East Central Iowa county focus group sessions. Done correctly, the long-term benefits of such development could provide for an equitable distribution of resources throughout the region.



**Regional Differentiation:**  
Building vibrant communities is a key part of a regional value proposition, especially in terms of appealing to younger emerging population cohorts.

## 6.7 PILLAR 5: CREATING MORE VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

The strength of a community’s social ecosystem is built on community leadership, a sense of belonging, and inclusivity. Having strong connections and personal networks within a community provide individuals with a unique sense of belonging and a place called home. Storytelling is often used to create a sense of place, vibrancy, and identity. Survey respondents and focus group participants highlighted the fact that the region lacks connectivity and diversity, and there is a need to create more opportunities to celebrate together and promote the region’s assets.



### FUTURE INSIGHTS

FutureInsight

- Breaking down age, cultural, and economic barriers will make the East Central Iowa region a more diverse, safer, and more inclusive community for all residents.
- ‘Placemaking’ is an approach to planning and design of public space that focuses on cultivating greater civic identity, social cohesion, and sense of belonging. This approach, combined with powerful storytelling about the quality of life in the region could be a unique element of the Envision East Central Iowa implementation.



## KEY STRATEGIC ACTION AREAS

### 1. Stimulate the development of more unique events, cultural assets, and places

East Central Iowa is a unique region with its own cultural rhythms. The interconnected rural-urban aspect of the region allows residents to experience the best of both worlds. A consistent theme from survey respondents and focus group participants was the desire for more opportunities for community connections such as unique events, cultural assets, and places. Envision East Central Iowa implementation could assist communities with the development of unique brands and complimentary assets that result in a place attractive to existing and potential future residents.

### 2. Connect individual community assets to strengthen the region's vitality

The East Central Iowa region contains many community assets that are not connected in a coherent way. During the county focus groups, desire was expressed to make the region's recreation economy a powerful economic driver by connecting community assets via recreation (biking, waterway, ATV) or cultural (historic sites, artist studios) trails between communities. Envision East Central Iowa's implementation would create opportunities for communities to work together to create and market regional tourism experiences.

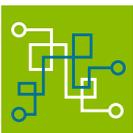
### 3. Expand and connect recreational opportunities region-wide

One of the macro emerging trends across the U.S. is the development of regional and national trail systems. East Central Iowa should aim to connect internal regional trail systems and collaborate with surrounding counties for trail and recreational integration. This will bring additional resources to the table, as well as provide the potential for East Central Iowa to be a significant destination on regional and state-wide trails.

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“There has been a huge emphasis and much progress on supporting local business and enhancing our regional trails network. These have both contributed enormously to our economic viability and growing future opportunities and these investments should continue and even increase.”

– Envision East Central Iowa Stakeholder Survey Respondent



FutureInsight

## FUTURE INSIGHTS

- A network of trails provides the basis of a multimodal transportation system and allows people options to travel across a community or region without travelling on roads. This would make East Central Iowa very attractive to recreation-oriented people and provide residents with expanded transportation options.
- A key part of creating connections and community is through a region's social infrastructure – those physical and social elements of a community that allow for gathering and connections. This infrastructure will be critical to building sustainability and resiliency into East Central Iowa's regional environment by providing the necessary elements that build quality of life and meaning for residents, workers, and visitors alike.



**Regional Differentiation:**  
 East Central Iowa will use a combination of intentionally recruiting of immigrant populations and a unique onboarding system aiming to attract new residents to the region.

## 6.8 PILLAR 6: PURPOSEFULLY GROWING A THRIVING DIVERSE REGIONAL WORKFORCE

Like everywhere in the United States, attracting and retaining workers to a community is becoming increasingly important. As the country emerges from the pandemic, the deep workplace and workforce impacts of the demographic shifts are becoming more apparent. Workforce and workplace transformation was at the forefront of discussion at the East Central Iowa’s Think-Tank, Focus Groups, and Strategy Committee meetings. The issue was identified by East Central Iowa Stakeholder Survey respondents as both the number one opportunity and number one threat to the region. How the region deals with workforce shortages going forward is a key future-splitting challenge for the region’s economic ecosystem. Given the region’s critical need for skills and workers, it will be necessary to differentiate itself from other areas in the country.



FutureInsight

### FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The pandemic accelerated the workplace trend of working from home. Given East Central Iowa’s high standard of living, maintaining excellent amenities and increasing housing options could accentuate the region’s attractiveness to young professionals and families who want to work remotely.
- Storytelling has become a key feature of workforce development. It will become increasingly important for regional stakeholders to do a better job at telling the story of why the region is a good place to live and work. This will be especially important in reaching out to immigrant and new population cohorts.



## KEY STRATEGIC ACTION AREAS

### 1. **Develop an overall regional onboarding system unique to East Central Iowa**

Workforce needs in East Central Iowa vary widely, requiring multiple skill levels and skill sets. Survey results show that a broad approach to workforce development will be needed to fulfill the region's needs. At the Strategy Development session, committee members imagined a unique onboarding process for East Central Iowa. This process would develop sophisticated systems that would bring people to the region and walk them through their working life. The process would seek to attract people from across the U.S. and from other countries.

### 2. **Focus on support systems to assist immigrant populations to thrive in the region**

It was widely recognized through the planning process that growing the region's workforce would involve providing safe and supportive environments for immigrant populations new to the region. Necessary support systems such as English as a Second Language programs will require funding and advocacy in the state. As part of the Envision East Central Iowa initiative, a working coalition could be created to study how best to attract and support new populations.

### 3. **Expand education initiatives for career connected learning**

Increasingly important to workforce development is the ability of a region to offer a wide range of educational opportunities to support the local demand for skillsets. This includes non-degree programs and experiential learning options, especially in the trades such as plumbing and carpentry. East Central Iowa's exceptional educational facilities perfectly positions the region to support local businesses with expanded programming. Building funding initiatives that connect employers to schools and create support structures for students will be key to provide career connected learning opportunities.

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“Policies and structures that encourage and excite people to actively choose East Central Iowa as a place to move to and to stay (is the single most important topic that East Central Iowa needs to focus on over the next 5 years). In order to grow the strength and diversity of the economic opportunities in East Central Iowa, we must attract people outside of the region to move here and must offer something that encourages the local talent we have to stay.”

– *Envision East Central Iowa Stakeholder Survey Respondent*



FutureInsight

### FUTURE INSIGHTS:

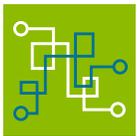
- As the trend to increased multiculturalism occurs in all communities and regions, learning how to assimilate people into both rural and urban communities will be essential. Articulating a shared vision and inclusive values will be a key requirement of community leadership.
- The future of education is rapidly evolving as technology offers new ways to learn. As the affordability of higher education is becoming an impediment to many, one solution for East Central Iowa might be to work with its strong regional nonprofit networks to explore creative funding models for education and technology to support workforce needs.



**Regional Differentiation:** East Central Iowa's relative high standard of living is a significant asset that should be highlighted and promoted as a key attraction for both businesses and workforce to the region.

## 6.9 PILLAR 7: CREATING AND EXPANDING PATHWAYS FOR SHARED PROSPERITY

Most East Central Iowa residents move to the region because of its high quality of life, educational opportunities, job opportunities, or family ties. The regional demographics reflect a more diverse and urban-based population. Throughout the Envision East Central Iowa planning process, stakeholders emphasized that Envision East Central Iowa should be a plan that creates and expands pathways for shared prosperity for all residents. In particular, the plan should address current shared barriers to prosperity, identified as availability and access to housing, childcare, and broadband.



FutureInsight

### FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- Providing for basic needs is the cornerstone of strong economies. The barriers to prosperity identified by regional stakeholders go to the heart of healthy communities and addressing them will be the first steps to building economic stability and resiliency throughout the region.
- The pandemic has amplified disparities throughout the nation and region. The continued trend of the widening gap between economic groups reinforces the need for a regional approach to creating and expanding pathways to shared prosperity.



## KEY STRATEGIC ACTION AREAS

### 1. Support the widespread creation of quality sustainable and affordable housing

Like most communities in the U.S., there is a clear need for new types of housing options such as condos, senior living, accessible dwelling units, and live / work / play options. Strategy development session participants specifically cited availability, lending and code issues, quality, and placement of housing as critical elements to solving the housing crisis. There was support for an East Central Iowa Regional Housing Summit and an initiative to coordinate the resources of the region's strong nonprofit network to compete for funding on behalf of East Central Iowa.

### 2. Develop and promote a coordinated plan for childcare in the region

Childcare is a critical issue in workforce development and family stability. Stakeholder survey respondents cited childcare access and availability as one of the biggest threats to the region. During the pandemic, a significant number of women dropped out of the workforce due to lack of quality childcare across the country. This finding was supported by a 2021 childcare feasibility study by Jones County. This challenge could be addressed by developing and promoting a coordinated plan for childcare for East Central Iowa.

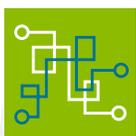
### 3. Expand access to fast affordable broadband across the region

Access to fast affordable broadband is seen as critical for residents and businesses alike. During the pandemic, lack of access disproportionately affected poorer communities and placed some students at a severe disadvantage for learning. Currently, access to broadband is uneven across the East Central Iowa region. Recent Covid-era federal funding for making broadband widely available provides the region with a wonderful opportunity to provide greater access to residents and businesses.

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“Improve the overall economic well-being of our residents, which will in turn help with housing, health, and other issues. Better paying jobs, lower housing costs, and better access to childcare and education. Remote work hub for other cities? It's a great place to raise a family!”

– Envision East Central Iowa Stakeholder Survey Respondent



FutureInsight

#### FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- During the Insurance and Finance Focus Group, it was suggested that the region form a finance group that would create a concentrated insurance fund to support sustainability efforts in the region. This could be coordinated with county sustainability programs currently underway.
- The federal Build Back Better Infrastructure Bill provides funding for housing, childcare and broadband and aims to help build resiliency in the region.



## 7.0 IMPLEMENTATION – IDENTIFYING KEY PRIORITIES

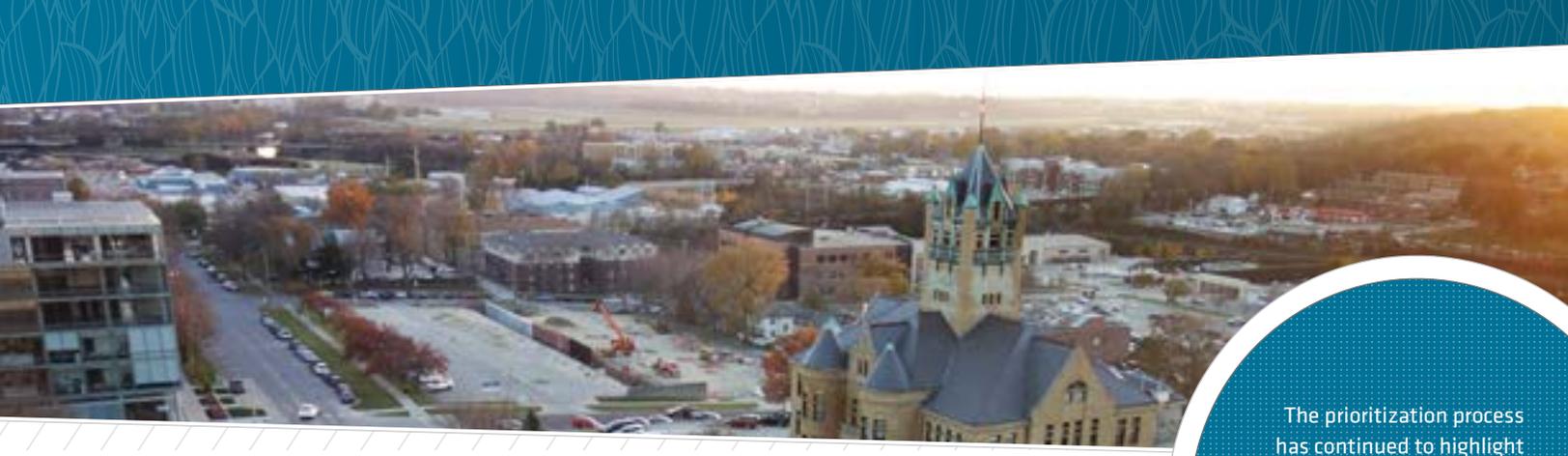
The Envision East Central Iowa planning identified the 22 most important Strategic Actions, which are presented in the previous sections. As a final stage in the Envision East Central Iowa planning process, there was a 2-step process to identify priority actions:

- **DECISION MAKING TOOL** - The Strategy Committee assessed each of the actions against a decision-making tool and framework. The actions were assessed against four criteria, which were: 'Urgency for action', 'Impact on the regional vision', 'Achievability in the 3- to 5-year timeframe', and 'Ability to strategically differentiate the region'.
- **REGIONAL FUTURE SUMMIT** - A regional Future Summit was held on March 1, 2022, with approximately 100 local stakeholders. During this session, people were asked to prioritize the Strategic Action, based on priority short and long-term timeframes.

The outcomes from these two steps produced very similar results. The prioritization steps highlighted several main themes:

- All of the strategic actions were consistently identified as important and a high priority. This gave significant confidence and validation that the action list was robust and well-focused.
- The regional workforce and societal evolution are the most pressing and immediate areas. There is a clear desire to bring innovative and transformational approaches to building a stronger, more inclusive, and adaptable social fabric. This includes embracing the demographic and cultural changes and finding ways to help build shared prosperity. This was highlighted in the priority actions, including:
  - Support the widespread creation of quality sustainable and affordable housing
  - Develop and promote a coordinated plan for childcare in the region
  - Focus on support systems that assist immigrant populations to thrive in the region
  - Expand education initiatives for career connected learning
  - Develop an overall regional onboarding system unique to East Central Iowa
- The overall economic development approach needs to be focused on innovation. It is critically important in the medium and long term and has the potential to deliver long term payoffs. The notable strategic actions included:
  - Develop systemic, coordinated support for entrepreneurs in our region
  - Develop targeted marketing and storytelling to attract key industry clusters
- Other notable priorities included actions that promote the livability and appeal of the region and neighborhoods. This included connecting recreation assets and addressing environmental sustainability issues.

The prioritization outcomes from the Future Summit are presented in the following section.



The prioritization process has continued to highlight the key importance of the 22 identified actions, and the over seven pillars. This provides a robust validation of this set of actions.

## 7.1 PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

During the regional Future Summit held on March 1, 2022, participants were given the opportunity to allocate priority to each of the strategic actions. Participants were asked to nominate:

- Which actions will best address the immediate needs for the region? **(red)**
- Which actions will best deliver long-term payoffs for the region? **(green)**

**FUTURE SUMMIT PRIORITIZATION - AGGREGATED SCORE BY STRATEGIC PILLARS**



Within this aggregated Strategic Pillar data, it is worth noting that all actions received scores for short- and long-term priority. The three highest rated actions for short-term priority were:

- Develop systemic, coordinated support for entrepreneurs in our region
- Support the widespread creation of quality sustainable and affordable housing
- Develop and promote a coordinated plan for childcare in the region



## 7.2 NEXT STEPS

The following implementation framework lays out the teams that will convene to work on implementation steps. Organized by Strategic Pillar, the framework highlights the Interim Leads for each of the identified Strategic Pillars. Key organizations are also included as potential resources to help guide the next steps in the implementation process.

### PILLAR 1: Embracing an innovation focus to build regional competitiveness

**Interim Pillar Leads:** Doug Neumann, *Executive Director*, Cedar Rapids Economic Alliance  
Kate Moreland, *President*, Iowa City Area Development (ICAD)

**Organizations involved:** Iowa Economic Development Authority, Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, Iowa City Area Development, county economic development partners, state universities, regional employers, University of Iowa, Venture Iowa, NewBoCo, Cedar Rapids Economic Development staff, Jones County Economic Development, Benton Development Group, Iowa County Community Development, Washington Economic Development Group

### PILLAR 2: Fostering an entrepreneurial approach to create and capture new opportunities

**Interim Pillar Leads:** Doug Neumann, *Executive Director*, Cedar Rapids Economic Alliance  
Kate Moreland, *President*, Iowa City Area Development (ICAD)

**Organizations involved:** Iowa City Area Development, Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, county economic development partners, NewBoCo, NewBoCo Market, Rural Ideas Network, Venture Iowa, Entrepreneurial Development Center, Small Business Administration, Iowa City Development Group, East Central Iowa Council of Governments, Iowa Economic Development Authority, Jones County Economic Development, Benton Development Group, Iowa County Community Development, Washington Economic Development Group

### PILLAR 3: Protecting and sustaining our unique natural resources

**Interim Pillar Leads:** Karen Kurt, *Executive Director*, ECICOG

**Organizations involved:** County conservation boards, soil and water conservation districts, watershed management authorities, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, East Central Iowa Council of Governments, cities and counties, Iowa DNR, Iowa Homeland Security, environmental and sustainability groups, Iowa Learning Farms, Farm Bureau, Iowa State extension offices, Iowa City Area Development, Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, area businesses, utility partners, Jones County Economic Development, Benton Development Group, Iowa County Community Development, Washington Economic Development Group





#### PILLAR 4: Reimagining the built environment

**Interim Pillar Leads:** Karen Kurt, *Executive Director*, ECICOG

Jennifer Pratt, *Community Development Director*, City of Cedar Rapids

Derek Lumsden, *Executive Director*, Jones County Economic Development

**Organizations involved:** East Central Iowa Council of Governments, metropolitan planning organizations, cities and counties, county economic development partners, utilities, area developers, main street organizations, Jones County Economic Development, Benton Development Group, Iowa County Community Development, Washington Economic Development Group

#### PILLAR 5: Creating more vibrant communities

**Interim Pillar Leads:** Rod Sullivan, *County Supervisor*, Johnson County

Doug Neumann, *Executive Director*, Cedar Rapids Economic Alliance

Derek Lumsden, *Executive Director*, Jones County Economic Development

**Organizations involved:** Tourism organizations, Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, Iowa City Area Development Group, county economic development partners, cities and counties, chambers of commerce, main street organizations, art/cultural / historical/ recreational entities, Travel Iowa, East Council Iowa Council of Governments, county conservation organizations, Jones County Economic Development, Benton Development Group, Iowa County Community Development, Washington Economic Development Group

#### PILLAR 6: Purposefully growing a thriving diverse regional workforce

**Interim Pillar Leads:** Kate Moreland, *President*, ICAD

Doug Neumann, *Executive Director*, Cedar Rapids Economic Alliance

Jasmine Almoayyed, *VP Continuing Education*, Kirkwood Community College

**Organizations involved:** Kirkwood Community College, University of Iowa, Iowa City Area Development Group, Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, county economic development partners, regional employers, United Way, Inclusive ICR, Catherine McAuley Center, Center for Worker Justice, school districts, Iowa Workforce Development, Jones County Economic Development, Benton Development Group, Iowa County Community Development, Washington Economic Development Group

#### PILLAR 7: Creating pathways for shared prosperity

**Interim Pillar Leads:** Rod Sullivan, *County Supervisor*, Johnson County

Karen Kurt, *Executive Director*, ECICOG

Karey Chase, *Director of Community Impact*, United Way of East Central Iowa

**Organizations involved:** Cities and counties, chambers of commerce, Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, Iowa City Area Development Group, county economic development partners, regional employers, Kirkwood Community College, Iowa Childcare Resource and Referral, Iowa Women's Foundation, housing trust funds, Johnson County Affordable Housing Commission, East Central Iowa Council of Governments, utilities, regional broadband providers, Jones County Economic Development, Benton Development Group, Iowa County Community Development, Washington Economic Development Group



## 8.0 APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS AND TYPE

Six county and six industry sector focus groups were held in October and November 2021. These sessions reviewed the accumulated results from the project and began to define the priorities, strategies, and action steps needed to place East Central Iowa on the trajectory towards its preferred future.

### Schedule of Focus Groups

October 20, 2021

- Jones County, *Monticello City Council Chambers*, 9:00am-11:00am

October 21, 2021

- Washington County, *Washington Public Library*, 9:30am-11:30am
- Benton & Iowa Counties, *Fireside Winery*, 2:00pm-4:00pm

October 22, 2021

- Food & Bio-Processing, *Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance*, 8:00am-9:30am
- Insurance & Finance, *Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance*, 10:30am-12:00pm
- Engineering & Automation, *Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance*, 1:30pm-3:00pm

October 25, 2021

- Main Street & Small Business, *Virtual Session*, 9:00am-10:30am
- Education Technology & Services, *MERGE Iowa City*, 12:00pm-1:30pm
- Bio-Technology & Medical Technology, *BioVentures Center*, 2:30pm-4:00pm

October 26, 2021

- Jones County, *Lawrence Community Center*, 9:00am-11:00am

November 15, 2021

- Linn County, *ECICOG Meeting Room*, 8:00am-10:00am
- Linn County, *Virtual Session*, 1:00pm-3:00pm



LEARN MORE AT  
[ENVISION-ECI.ORG](http://ENVISION-ECI.ORG)

## 9.0 FOR MORE INFORMATION

This project has been guided by a local 'Envision East Central Iowa Strategy Committee', established by East Central Iowa Council of Governments. This committee was made up of numerous partner organization, many of which have committed to participate in the implementation stages. The next steps will allow interested local and regional stakeholders to join implementation teams, that are being assembled for each Strategic Pillar.

For additional information, please contact:

**KAREN KURT**

Executive Director ECICOG

East Central Iowa Council of Governments

Phone: 319-289-0059

Email: [karen.kurt@ecicog.org](mailto:karen.kurt@ecicog.org)



### THANK YOU TO OUR STRATEGY COMMITTEE MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS!





## 10.0 CONSULTING TEAM - ABOUT FUTURE IQ

Future iQ specializes in applying innovative tools and approaches to assist municipalities, organizations, regions and industries shape their economic and community futures. With nearly two decades of experience, the company has a global clientele spanning three continents. To learn more about Future iQ, and our recent projects visit [www.future-iq.com](http://www.future-iq.com) or by email at [info@future-iq.com](mailto:info@future-iq.com).

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**David Beurle**  
CEO, Future iQ



**Heather Branigin**  
VP - Foresight Research



**Envision East Central Iowa  
Think-Tank Report**  
October 2021



**Envision East Central Iowa  
Benchmark Report**  
April 2022



**Envision East Central Iowa  
CEDS Report**  
May 2022



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