



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ENVISION EAST CENTRAL IOWA

2022-2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy - Iowa, USA

May 2022



SNAPSHOT – ENVISION EAST CENTRAL IOWA HIGHLIGHTS

The Envision East Central Iowa planning process 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 OF THE ENVISION EAST CENTRAL IOWA PLANNING



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.



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.



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.



FOCUS ON CREATING SHARED PROSPERITY AS A FOUNDATIONAL STEP

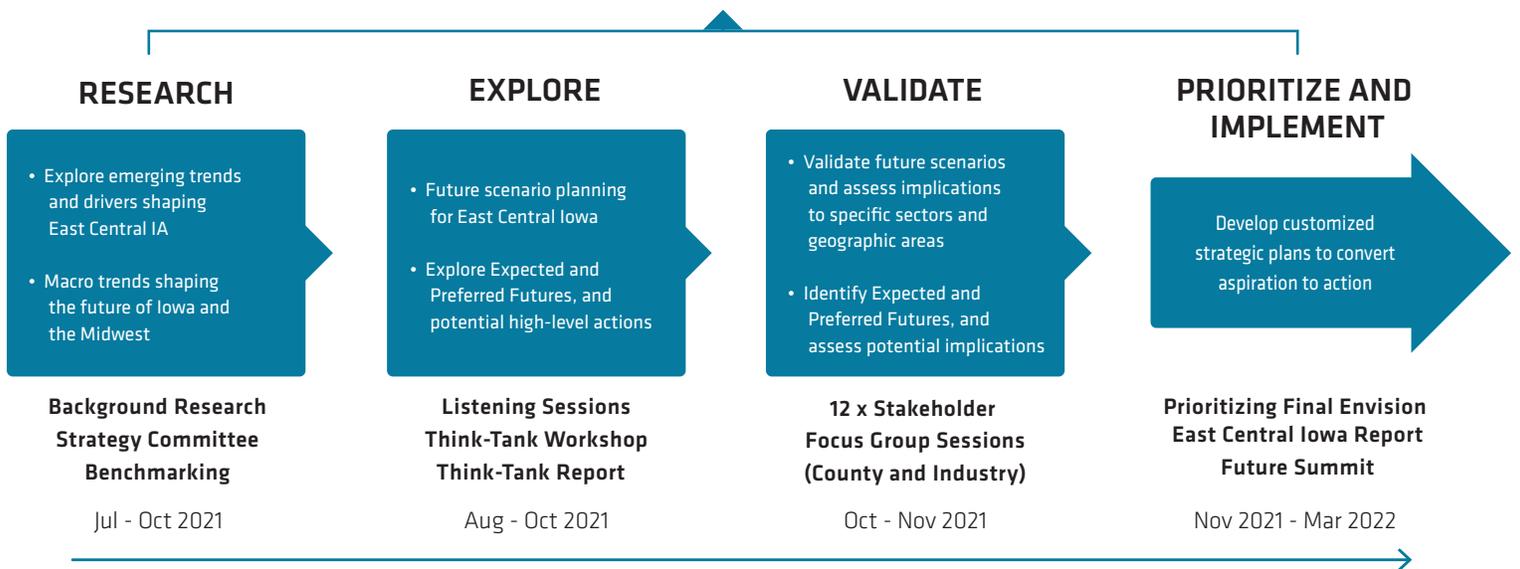
The planning process has identified creating and expanding pathways for shared prosperity as the highest short-term priority. There is a desire to address disparities and remove barriers to individual and family prosperity and success. The regional stakeholders have embraced a future value proposition 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.

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.

over
500
people have
contributed
to the plan’s
development

ENVISION EAST CENTRAL IOWA



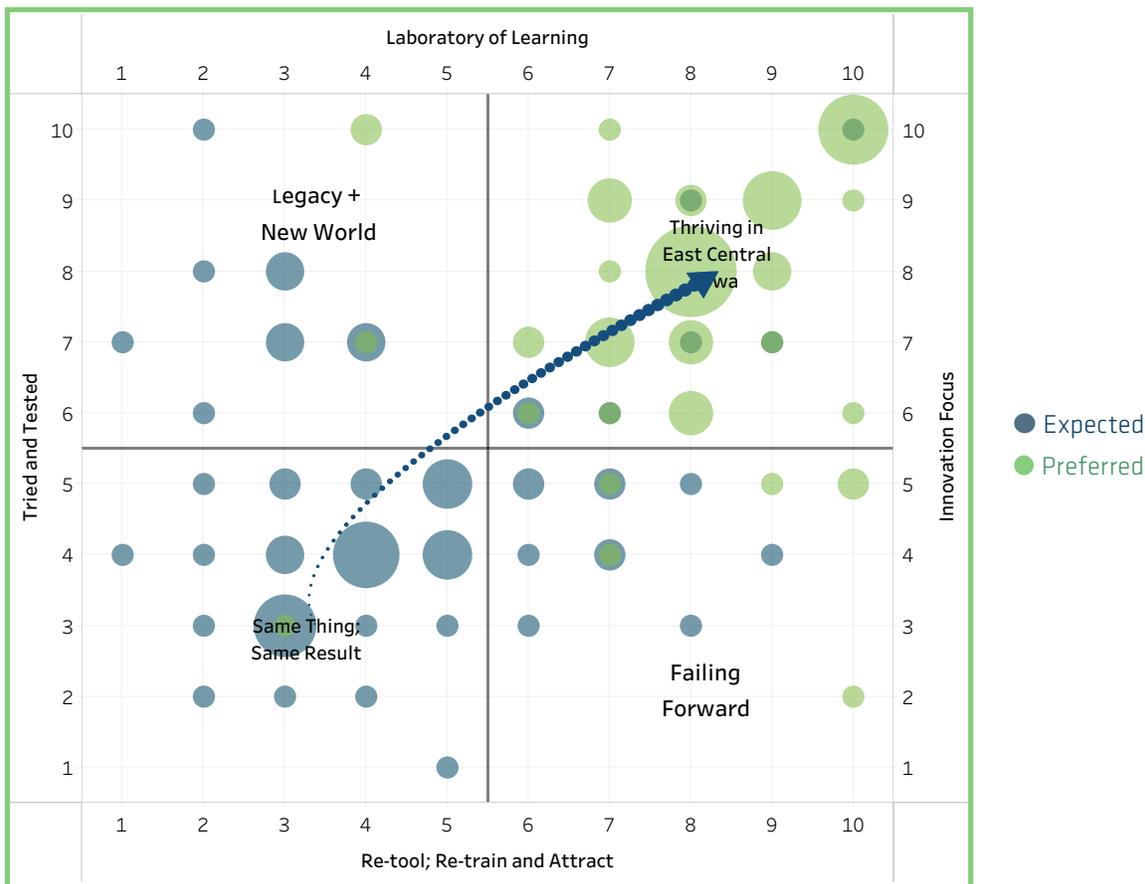
“We are strong-willed, resilient, and will have weathered a pandemic together! We have incredible assets at our disposal and will be poised to make some great decisions together.”

- Envision East Central Iowa Stakeholder Survey Respondent



EXPECTED AND PREFERRED FUTURES

During the Envision East Central Iowa planning process, a scenario planning process mapped out a range of plausible futures. These were built around different possible approaches to tackling the major themes of ‘Development Approach’ and ‘Workforce and Social Evolution’. Think-Tank participants were asked about their views about the future 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. 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.’



The preferred future ‘Thriving in East Central Iowa,’ is a future that is built on two themes:

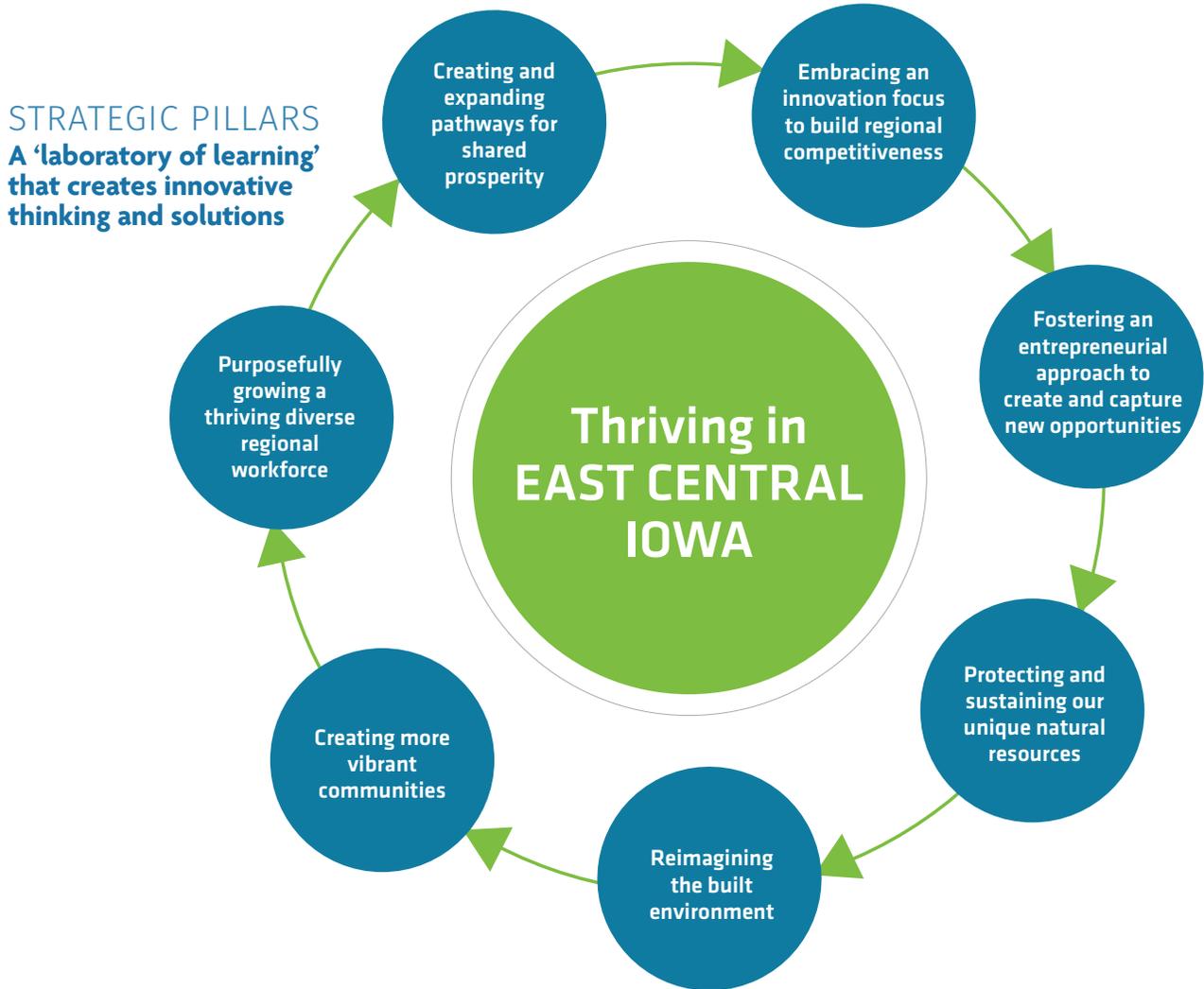
INNOVATION FOCUS There is a strong focus on innovation and new sectors; including building on existing industries in creative ways; but also investing in emerging green economies such as biosciences, tech, and renewable energy. There is a strong mixed-use approach, with an emphasis on re-development and repurposing aimed to maximize existing infrastructure. There is focus on more diverse housing types; green building, new modes of transportation, and sectors that spur broad innovation.

LABORATORY OF LEARNING There is a focus on workforce and workplace transformation, with a holistic approach to work and employees, including emphasis on quality of jobs and broader metrics of success (wellness/happiness). Workplaces deliberately become more fluid with new work patterns. Education is more flexible and constantly available, amplifying a lifelong learning approach. Communities evolve to deliberately foster new ideas, cultures, and experiences. There is a broad approach to attracting people, with appeal as an inclusive regional community that values equity and diversity.



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 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.

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.

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

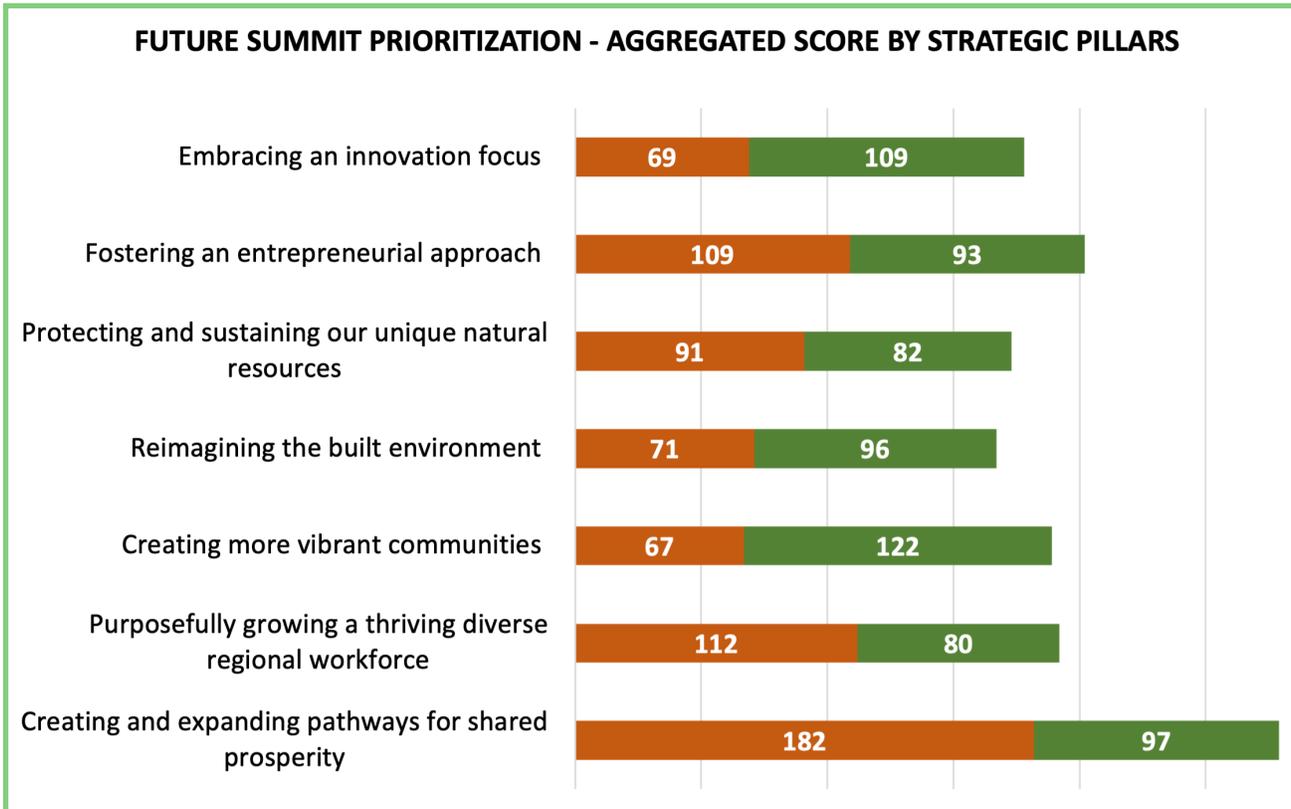
- Support the widespread creation of quality sustainable and affordable housing
- Develop and promote a coordinated plan for childcare in the region
- Expand access to fast affordable broadband across the region



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)



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**

NEXT STEPS & 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 organizations, 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.

**LEARN MORE AT
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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



Thank you to our strategy committee member organizations!



United Way of Johnson & Washington Counties



CITY OF IOWA CITY



CEDAR RAPIDS
City of Five Seasons



IOWA CITY
AREA DEVELOPMENT
DRIVING INNOVATION



Benton Development Group



Washington Economic Development Group
Innovative Business • Creative Culture • Healthy Lifestyle



United Way
of East Central Iowa

County of
Washington Iowa

