



THE RIGHT PLACE **STRATEGIC PLAN**

2023-2025



TABLE OF CONTENTS

02	Leadership & Team
03	Executive Summary
04	Introduction
07	Strategic Framework
09	Goals and Strategies
10	GOAL ONE: Fostering Economic Growth
15	GOAL TWO: Champion Inclusive Opportunities
19	GOAL THREE: Elevate Greater Grand Rapids
23	GOAL FOUR: Boost Regional Impact

STRATEGIC PLAN LEADERSHIP

Thank you to our stakeholders, investors, and community leaders who contributed to the development of this plan. Your leadership and support make the creation and implementation of this plan possible.

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Corewell Health



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President, Mercy Health Saint Mary's

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Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan

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Co-CEO, Atomic Object

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Julie Rietberg

CEO, Greater Regional Alliance of Realtors

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Julius Suchy

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Director, Merrill Lynch Wealth Management
Market Executive and Market President,
Bank of America

Jim Teets*

Chairman & CEO, ADAC Automotive

Randy Thelen*

President & CEO, The Right Place, Inc.

David L. Van Andel*

Chairman & CEO, Van Andel Institute

Al Vanderberg

County Administrator/Controller, Kent County

Mike VanGessel

CEO, Rockford Construction

Sozon Vatikiotis

Chief Operating Officer, Acrisure, LLC

Mark Washington

City Manager, City of Grand Rapids

Mark J. Wassink

Managing Partner, Warner Norcross + Judd, LLP

Thomas G. Welch, Jr.

Regional President,
Fifth Third Bank - West Michigan

Sean P. Welsh*

Regional President - Western Michigan,
PNC Bank

*Member of the Executive Committee

¹Manufacturers Council Chair

²Technology Council Representative

STRATEGIC PLAN TEAM

Amy Holloway

EY US Economic Development
Advisory Services Leader

Evan Fay

EY US Senior, Economic Development
Advisory Services

Jennifer M. Vernon

EY US Manager, Economic Development
Advisory Services

Jung Kim

EY US Manager, Economic Development
Advisory Services

Randy Thelen

President & CEO, The Right Place, Inc.

Brad Comment

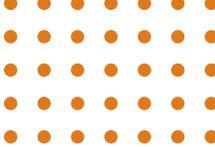
Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives
The Right Place, Inc.

John Wiegand

Business Intelligence & Research Manager
The Right Place, Inc.

Rafael Martinez

Business Intelligence & Research Manager
The Right Place, Inc.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As The Right Place works towards its mission of driving sustainable economic growth and shared prosperity for all in the Greater Grand Rapids region, this strategic plan will serve as our roadmap to success. Developed in partnership with Ernst & Young and over 300 local leaders, the following pages detail a three-year strategic framework that builds towards a 10-year vision: To be amongst the best regional economies in the Midwest.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

Foster economic growth

Drive growth and sustainability with existing regional businesses while attracting strategic businesses to bolster the region's economic prosperity

Champion inclusive opportunities

Expand economic opportunities to create a more vibrant economy

Elevate Greater Grand Rapids

Amplify our story to position the region as a destination of choice

Boost regional impact

Deepen the bonds among our communities to create a more globally competitive region

PEOPLE. PLACE. PROSPERITY.

Progress towards these goals and our vision will be achieved by continued commitment to the areas of People, Place, and Prosperity and in our strategic growth industries of Advanced Manufacturing, Health Sciences, and Technology.

We will measure this plan's impact through four high-level metrics:

4,000 Jobs retained or created by the end of **2025**

\$26.50 Average wage by the end of **2025**

\$550M In capital investment by the end of **2025**

\$100M In community development investment by the end of **2025**

INTRODUCTION

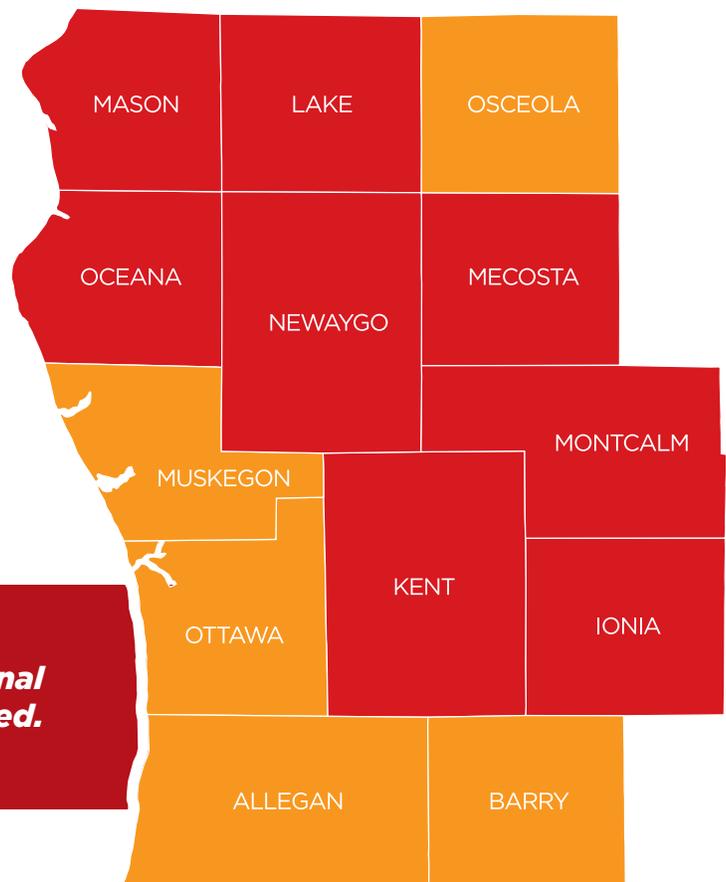
In July 2022, The Right Place, Inc. (RPI) began the process of the next three-year strategic plan. As the economy continues to experience its post-pandemic transition, this strategic plan provides a framework for the role of RPI in Greater Grand Rapids' future economic prosperity. Since 1985, RPI has conducted strategic planning exercises resulting in either a three- or five-year strategic plan. As we prepared this 3-year strategy, we did so while contemplating a 10-year vision to be among the best regional economies in the greater Midwest. This approach will provide agility in navigating short-run economic disruptions while remaining focused on long-term economic growth.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION AND REGION

RPI is the leading economic development organization for the Greater Grand Rapids region. RPI exists to catalyze economic growth by serving as the convener of the region's business community, amplifier with education and workforce development providers, and partner to public entities to enhance the region's vibrancy through placemaking and community development.

- **The vision of RPI is that the Greater Grand Rapids Region will be the most resilient, productive, and equitable regional economy in the nation.**
- **The mission of RPI is to drive sustainable economic growth and shared prosperity for all in the Greater Grand Rapids Region.**

As defined by the State of Michigan, the Greater Grand Rapids region is comprised of thirteen counties in western Michigan, seven of which RPI has formal partnership agreements with, in addition to its work in Kent County. The Economic Development Directors of the seven partner counties are team members of RPI, leading to a cohesive and comprehensive regional effort. In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding guides the partnership with neighboring organizations: Lakeshore Advantage and Muskegon County Economic Development.

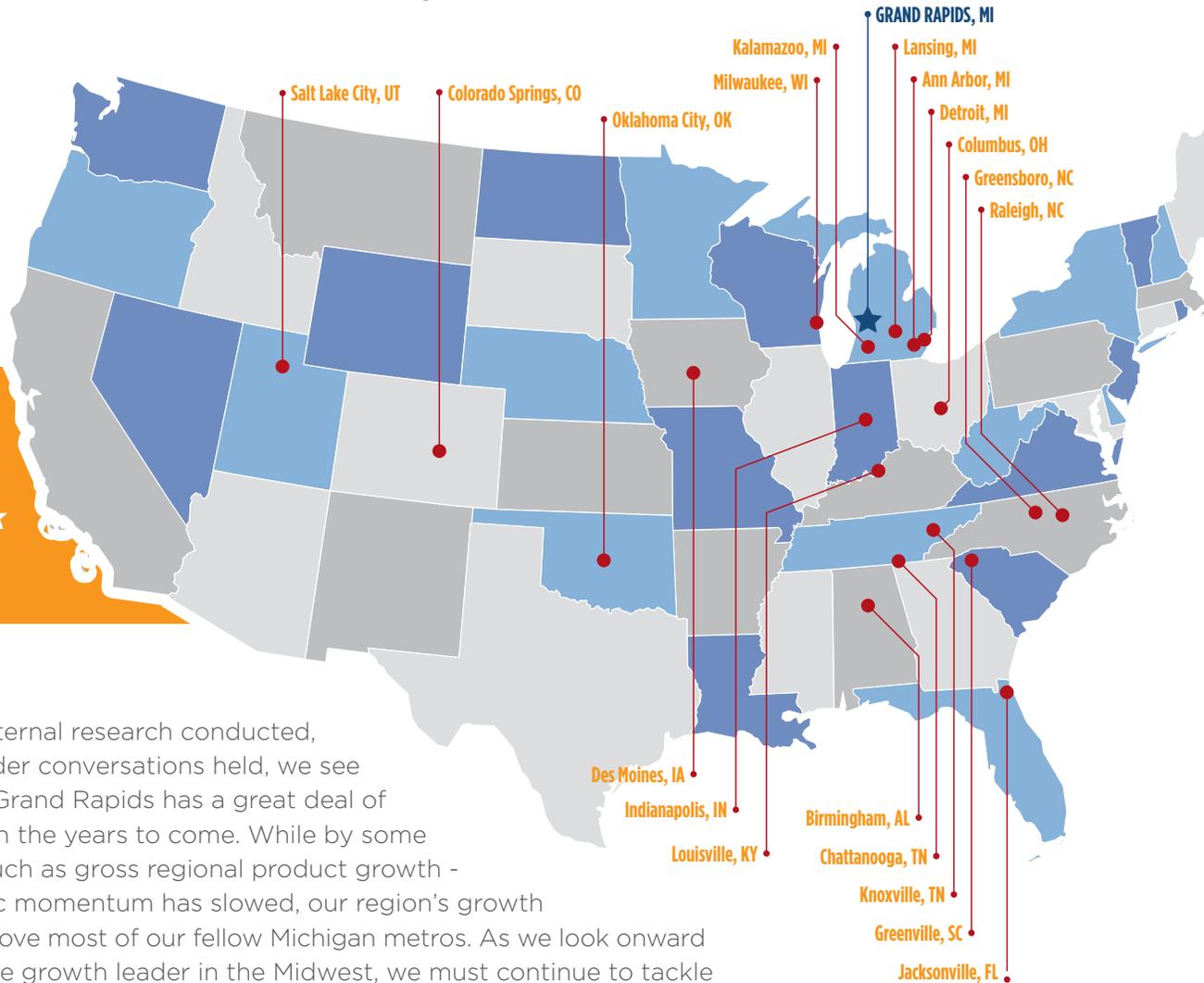


The Right Place's eight county regional collaborative is represented in red.

PROCESS AND FINDINGS

This strategic plan is the result of a three-part process, completed over a six-month period in partnership with Ernst & Young: data analysis of 20 benchmarked metropolitan regions, extensive stakeholder engagement, and co-creation of goals and strategic priorities between RPI staff and board. Our bold vision and long-term time horizon necessitated that we stretch ourselves in selecting peer and aspirant benchmark metros for comparison. Compared to these regions, Greater Grand Rapids fares well in some areas, such as labor force participation, cost of living, and housing affordability; yet lags in others such as employment growth, STEM workers as a share of workforce, and median wage.

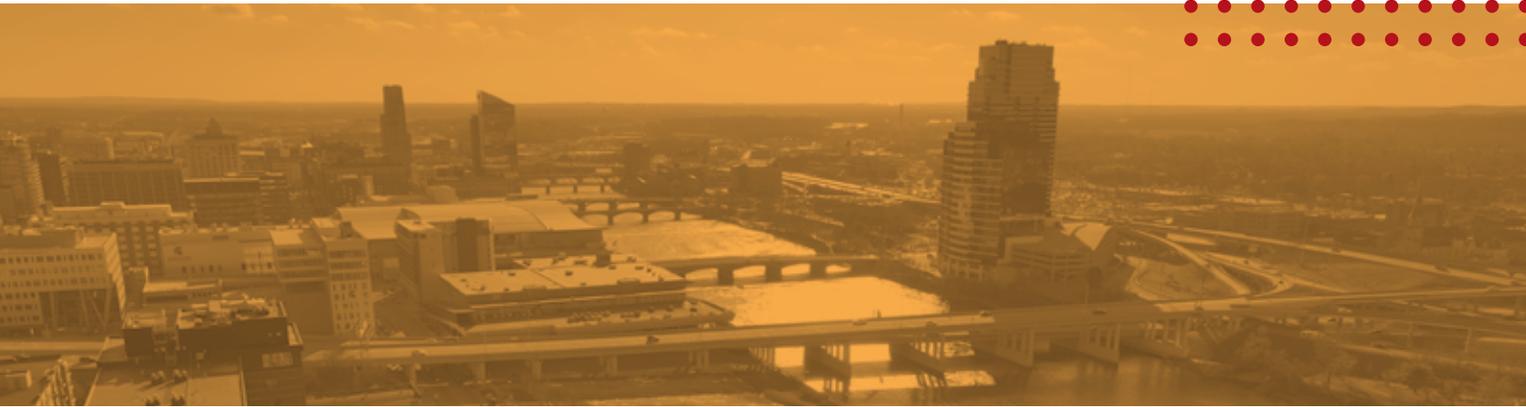
Peer and aspirant benchmark metros.



From both internal research conducted, and stakeholder conversations held, we see that Greater Grand Rapids has a great deal of opportunity in the years to come. While by some measures - such as gross regional product growth - pre-pandemic momentum has slowed, our region's growth still stands above most of our fellow Michigan metros. As we look onward to become the growth leader in the Midwest, we must continue to tackle longstanding issues impacting the overall competitiveness of the region, such as industry diversification, capacity for innovation, and talent retention.

RPI has long been the catalyst for positive change in the region. Guided by an engaged group of business, municipal, education and community leaders, the organization has sought to proactively address the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities that face the region. Most notably, capitalizing on the traction the region has developed in creating investments and jobs in strategic industries: Advanced Manufacturing, Health Sciences, and Technology. Furthermore, the recently launched Tech Strategy, inaugural Tech Week, Rapid Roots talent program, and Developer Day are prime examples of the initiatives RPI puts forth to position the region to compete with the highest performing metros in the country.





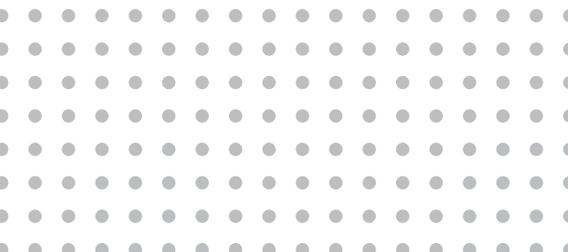
So, the time has come again to define the priorities that will guide our work for the coming years and set Greater Grand Rapids on a path to become the growth leader of the Midwest over the next 10 years.

The following key themes provide the inspiration behind this three-year strategy and are distilled from extensive stakeholder engagement, which included conversations with over 300 business and community leaders throughout the Greater Grand Rapids region.

- **Our region's long-term economic growth depends on its ability to drive innovation and industry advancement in our strategic growth areas.**
- **A more inclusive and welcoming region is essential to growing the talent base that will support our future economy.**
- **Investments in placemaking, site readiness, and infrastructure are needed to retain, grow and attract new industries, businesses, and talent.**
- **The perception and awareness of Greater Grand Rapids impacts our ability to retain and attract talent, business, and investment.**
- **The global competitiveness of Greater Grand Rapids is enhanced by thinking and acting regionally.**

The details behind these key themes are described in this strategy, along with the goals, priorities, and potential initiatives we plan to activate over the next three years. Measurements of activity and impact associated with each of these goals will illustrate our progress over time, and this strategy is designed to drive the region towards its ultimate 10-year vision as the growth leader in the Midwest. This progress will be measured by gains in:

			
GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT	POPULATION GROWTH	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT AND THE SHARE OF STEM/TECH TALENT IN REGION	MEDIAN WAGE





STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Our ultimate vision for the next 10 years is to position Greater Grand Rapids as the growth leader of the Midwest.

Progress toward this goal and vision will be achieved by our continued commitment to the areas of People, Place, and Prosperity and in our strategic growth industries of Advanced Manufacturing, Health Sciences, and Technology.

STRATEGIC GROWTH INDUSTRIES

RPI supports the growth of companies exporting goods & services outside the region, with its strategic efforts focused in the areas of Advanced Manufacturing, Health Sciences, and Technology.

Advanced Manufacturing



Manufacturing, which includes aerospace and defense, alternative energy, automotive, food processing, and medical device, currently accounts for 19% of all jobs in the region and remains the heart of Greater Grand Rapids' economy. In a 2020 study of 'Cities with the Most Manufacturing Jobs,' the Grand Rapids-Kentwood MSA was found to have the most manufacturing jobs per capita of any large metropolitan area in the U.S. The region's concentration of manufacturing jobs amounts to twice that of the national average.

Health Sciences



Greater Grand Rapids is home to some of the most advanced healthcare, research, manufacturing and education facilities in the Midwest. The Greater Grand Rapids region is also host to the highest concentration of medical device manufacturers in Michigan. Greater Grand Rapids is a single source for high-tech biotechnology and medical device solutions.

Technology



The technology sector is both an industry vertical and a horizontal enabler for other industries in the Greater Grand Rapids region. From full-service, large-scale managed IT solutions to custom software, online, and app development, the region's industry can both build solutions from the ground up and play a role in optimizing industrial processes. Whether it's a pure digital solution or developing integrated technology products, our tech companies have the knowledge and resources to make it happen. Technology workers currently comprise over 6% of the region's total labor force, and the 2022 Tech Strategy charts a course to grow that figure to 10%, creating a nexus of talent that will lead to economic resilience and innovation.



PEOPLE

We aspire to be a region where everyone can achieve their highest potential.

We work toward this aspiration by strategizing with regional talent partners, leveraging our business network to amplify best practices, and benchmark area talent development, retention, and attraction efforts.

PLACE

We aspire to be a region of choice, where people choose to visit, locate, & stay.

We work toward this aspiration by focusing on strategies related to placemaking, infrastructure enhancements, site development and transformational projects.

PROSPERITY

We aspire to be a vibrant economy that provides good careers & opportunities for all.

We work toward this aspiration through strategies focused on business retention, expansion, and attraction, economic inclusion, and business intelligence.

Strength in all three of these pillars is integral to the success of the region and therefore provided the lens through which the strategic goals for 2023-2025 were developed.

THE GOALS FOR OUR 2023-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN ARE:

Foster economic growth

Drive growth and sustainability with existing regional businesses while attracting strategic businesses to bolster the region's economic prosperity

Champion inclusive opportunities

Expand economic opportunities to create a more vibrant economy

Elevate Greater Grand Rapids

Amplify our story to position the region as a destination of choice

Boost regional impact

Deepen the bonds among our communities to create a more globally competitive region

As our team makes progress within each of these goal areas, through the strategies outlined in the following pages, we will measure outcomes within our high-level metrics through the overarching metrics below:

4,000 Jobs retained or created by the end of **2025**

\$26.50 Average wage by the end of **2025**

\$550M In capital investment by the end of **2025**

\$100M In community development investment by the end of **2025**

In the pages that follow, we outline 10-year measures for each strategic pillar that are imperative to our ambition to be the leading Midwest metro by 2033. These measures are long-term in nature and guide our team's work within each goal area.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Establishing clear goals and strategic objectives allows an organization to operationalize its mission. Each of the following goals provides measurable objectives by which RPI will focus strategic activities that support our mission and overarching vision.

During strategic framework discussions, RPI staff and board examined goals and strategic objectives through the lens of what role we might play in creating a new initiative, amplifying an existing initiative, or aligning existing regional initiatives.

The following goals are not presented in order of priority. In fact, the strategic objectives under each goal are inherently linked together and reinforce each other as they provide the framework through which RPI will fulfill its mission, and ultimately, achieve its vision.

In keeping with RPI's strategic pillars, each goal has strategies that align with People, Place and Prosperity and are grouped as such.



GOAL ONE: FOSTER ECONOMIC GROWTH

Drive growth and sustainability with existing in-region businesses while attracting businesses to strategic industries to bolster the region's economic prosperity.

The economic strength of a region depends on the diverse makeup of its industries, businesses, occupations, and its ability to leverage competitive assets to both support existing employers and drive new business ventures.

Our economy is dependent on the Advanced Manufacturing sector, and as a result, Production and Transportation & Material Moving occupations. While regional manufacturing sector employment growth has declined over the last five years, the opportunity to strengthen the cluster has never been stronger. As new technologies create efficiencies on the manufacturing floor, Greater Grand Rapids along with its partners can shepherd the region's companies through growth and modernization.

The importance of economic diversification to our region is highlighted in gross regional product growth that lagged behind our peers between 2015-2020 and negative employment growth between 2016-2021. While some of this decline can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, several peer and aspirant regions experienced similar initial impacts, yet rebounded more rapidly than Greater Grand Rapids. Based on available data, we can infer that the comparative resiliency of these regions is likely tied to their more diverse economic makeup. All had higher STEM workers as a share of total employment, venture funding per capita, and GRP growth over the same period of time.

LONG-TERM IMPACT MEASURES

- Capital investment in strategic growth areas
- Job growth in strategic growth areas
- Increased establishments within strategic growth areas
- Share of residents with an associate's degree or higher
- Gross regional product
- Venture funding per capita

Rank	Benchmark Metro	Pop. Growth 2016-2021
1	Raleigh, NC	11.1%
2	Jacksonville, FL	11.0%
3	Des Moines, IA	7.2%
4	Colorado Springs, CO	7.1%
5	Salt Lake City, UT	6.6%
6	Greenville, SC	6.4%
7	Indianapolis, IN	6.0%
8	Knoxville, TN	5.7%
9	Oklahoma City, OK	5.0%
10	Columbus, OH	4.8%
11	Grand Rapids, MI	3.5%
12	Birmingham, AL	2.9%
13	Chattanooga, TN	2.9%
14	Greensboro, NC	2.7%
15	Louisville, KY	2.6%
16	Detroit, MI	1.1%
17	Ann Arbor, MI	0.9%
18	Kalamazoo, MI	-0.1%
19	Milwaukee, WI	-0.6%
20	Lansing, MI	-0.9%

Source: Census Bureau, Population Estimates

Rank	Benchmark Metro	GDP Growth 2015-2020
1	Salt Lake City, UT	31.1%
2	Jacksonville, FL	28.2%
3	Raleigh, NC	27.3%
4	Colorado Springs, CO	22.9%
5	Knoxville, TN	17.8%
6	Greenville, SC	17.8%
7	Columbus, OH	17.6%
8	Indianapolis, IN	17.4%
9	Ann Arbor, MI	17.1%
10	Des Moines, IA	16.5%
11	Kalamazoo, MI	16.2%
12	Chattanooga, TN	15.4%
13	Lansing, MI	13.8%
14	Louisville, KY	12.4%
15	Grand Rapids, MI	12.0%
16	Birmingham, AL	11.4%
17	Milwaukee, WI	8.6%
18	Detroit, MI	5.6%
19	Greensboro, NC	4.5%
20	Oklahoma City, OK	1.5%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Rank	Benchmark Metro	Employment Growth, 2016-2021
1	Salt Lake City, UT	10.6%
2	Raleigh, NC	10.1%
3	Jacksonville, FL	9.5%
4	Colorado Springs, CO	8.7%
5	Knoxville, TN	3.9%
6	Indianapolis, IN	3.6%
7	Greenville, SC	3.5%
8	Chattanooga, TN	3.5%
9	Columbus, OH	3.4%
10	Oklahoma City, OK	2.5%
11	Des Moines, IA	1.9%
12	Birmingham, AL	1.4%
13	Ann Arbor, MI	0.2%
14	Louisville, KY	0.2%
15	Grand Rapids, MI	-0.9%
16	Kalamazoo, MI	-1.2%
17	Greensboro, NC	-1.3%
18	Detroit, MI	-3.0%
19	Milwaukee, WI	-3.7%
20	Lansing, MI	-4.1%

Source: Lightcast

Rank	Benchmark Metro	Tech Workers as Share of Total Employment, 2021
1	Raleigh, NC	14.7%
2	Colorado Springs, CO	12.9%
3	Ann Arbor, MI	12.1%
4	Detroit, MI	11.5%
5	Salt Lake City, UT	11.1%
6	Milwaukee, WI	7.8%
7	Knoxville, TN	7.4%
8	Columbus, OH	7.3%
9	Des Moines, IA	7.1%
10	Indianapolis, IN	6.7%
11	Greenville, SC	6.6%
12	Grand Rapids, MI	6.5%
13	Birmingham, AL	5.8%
14	Jacksonville, FL	5.8%
15	Lansing, MI	5.7%
16	Louisville, KY	5.7%
17	Greensboro, NC	5.2%
18	Oklahoma City, OK	5.0%
19	Kalamazoo, MI	4.0%
20	Chattanooga, TN	4.0%

Source: Lightcast

RPI is addressing economic diversity in part through our Greater Grand Rapids Tech Strategy. Broadly, the Tech Strategy outlines tactics for both RPI and our regional partners to grow the employment, ecosystem, and resource pool for technology-based firms in the region. This growth in technology firms and tech talent also supports the ongoing and rapidly-increasing industry transformation taking place in our long-standing strategic growth sectors of Advanced Manufacturing and Health Sciences.

Strategic Growth Industries

RPI supports economic growth across all industry sectors, with strategic efforts focused on continued growth and transformation in the areas of Advanced Manufacturing, Health Sciences, and Technology.



**ADVANCED
MANUFACTURING**



**HEALTH
SCIENCES**



TECHNOLOGY

Greater Grand Rapids' long-term economic growth depends on its ability to drive innovation and industry diversification. Additionally, avoiding disruption among existing clusters will require proactive investment in the areas of People, Place, and Prosperity. The strategies and initiatives below outline ways in which RPI can contribute to the enduring strength of the regional economy and build toward our future.

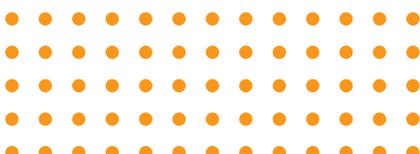
PRIORITIZING PEOPLE

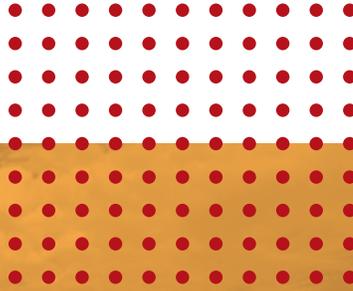
Champion employer engagement in building robust talent pipelines for the region's strategic growth areas

Talent fuels innovation and economic growth. While many partners contribute to building a pipeline of talent in Greater Grand Rapids, employers play a critical role by defining their future talent needs, driving awareness and excitement for their sectors, providing the opportunities, and creating environments where that talent can thrive. RPI will leverage our expanding talent capabilities, the initiatives of partner organizations, and connections to the business community to engage employers in building more robust talent pipelines to support the region's strategic growth areas.

Initiatives include:

- **Convening partners in the strategic growth areas to define career lattices and identify gaps in the region's current education and training programs.**
- **Developing shared goals and plans for employer engagement in the talent pipeline, starting in high school.**
- **Increasing awareness of career paths in advanced manufacturing among the region's high schools and community colleges.**
- **Partnering with Hello West Michigan on targeted talent attraction efforts, especially in the tech sector and across diverse populations.**





PRIORITIZING PLACE

Position Greater Grand Rapids for transformational investment with quality development opportunities

RPI is the “front door” to Greater Grand Rapids for the development community. We have a keen sense of the local economy, business climate, and national trends. Leveraging both knowledge and networks, RPI can better command the space we occupy as the regional expert in economic development to guide investments throughout the region, from broadband infrastructure and transformational real estate projects to industrial site-readiness and public placemaking.

Initiatives include:

- **Expanding outreach and relationship building with developers inside and outside the region.**
- **Establishing and clearly defining goals for a “Development Council” of developers, construction firms, commercial brokers, architects and others in the development ecosystem.**
- **Showcasing the region to potential investors.**
- **Identifying gaps in the region’s product inventory and providing relevant cases for support for new real estate investments.**
- **Convening regional partners to identify opportunities and develop plans for transformational infrastructure and development initiatives.**
- **Exposing private developers to development opportunities.**



PRIORITIZING PROSPERITY

Advance the region's strategic growth areas through proactive business retention, expansion, and attraction initiatives

Through years of refinement, the region's strategic growth areas reflect industries in which Greater Grand Rapids has a distinctive advantage – Advanced Manufacturing, Health Sciences and Technology. The established industry councils keep RPI attuned with the needs of existing industries and provide a conduit for sharing resources and regional updates. These initiatives and others demonstrate RPI's commitment to providing best-in-class support for businesses in the region and the region's reputation as a competitive business environment.

The recent wave of federal programs to support infrastructure, re-shoring of manufacturing, and job creation present a unique opportunity for economies, like Greater Grand Rapids, with a strong manufacturing industry presence. In addition to providing funding, some programs outline frameworks for collaboration between academia, industry, and government to advance the development of new technologies and processes in advanced manufacturing. Ultimately, regional economies able to take advantage of these funding opportunities will realize increased international competitiveness, resilience, and economic growth.

Initiatives include:

- **Dedicating staff and establishing councils for all strategic growth areas and clearly defining roles and goals for these councils.**
- **Building relationships with consultants and industry influencers to better position the region's opportunities on a global scale.**
- **Partnering with employers to showcase the region at select global industry events.**
- **Connecting existing industry with the tools and resources to support their business growth and transformation, to including existing Industry 4.0 work with the Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center.**
- **Providing timely updates to statewide partners and all economic development allies, serving as a best-in-class model for the state and peer regions.**
- **Leveraging relationships at the state level to advocate for economic policies for emerging sectors and digital transformation.**

Technology touches every sector today and it will play an integral role in strengthening our existing industries and diversifying our overall economy. Our commitment to adding 20,000 new jobs in the tech sector over the next 10 years is bold and illustrates the importance tech plays in the success of our region long term.



PRIORITIZING PROSPERITY

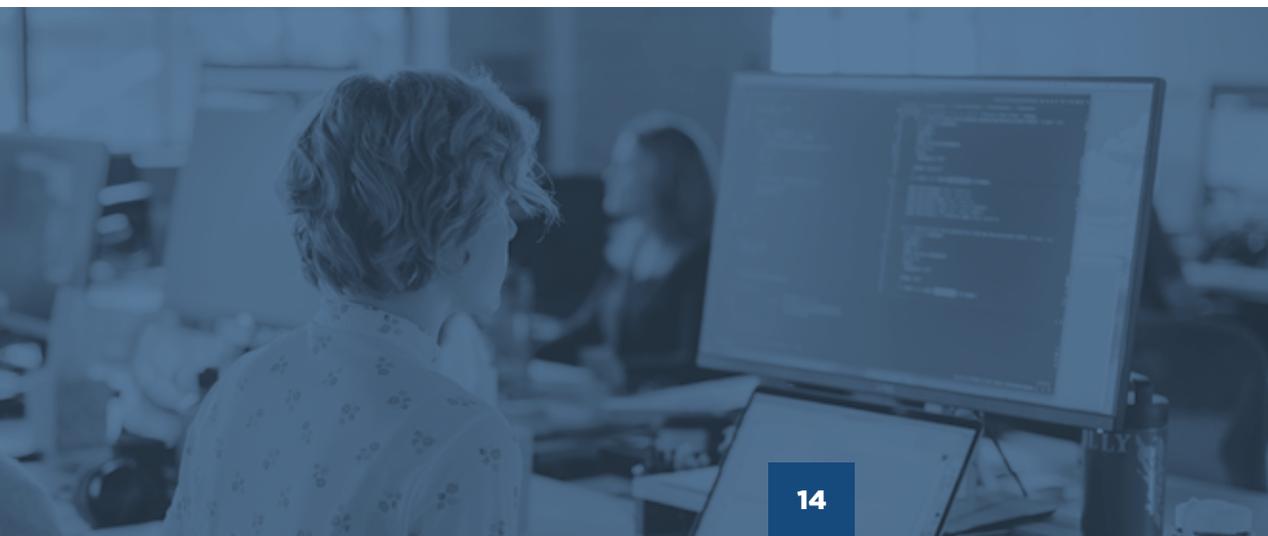
Enhance the region's reputation and capacity for tech and innovation

Tech hubs have become the engines for economic growth, spurring regional prosperity that leads to rising wages and job opportunity in all industries. Enhancing the region's reputation and capacity in the areas of tech and innovation is critical to its future success. RPI recognizes this importance and intends to accelerate Greater Grand Rapids' position as a tech hub; a regional priority laid out in detail within our Tech Strategy. This strategy, published in August 2022, emphasizes the imperatives of tech talent, innovation ecosystem, and business growth to accomplish this ambitious goal.

Integration of technology and innovation across all Greater Grand Rapids strategic growth areas can accelerate economic prosperity. In medical device manufacturing, for example, advanced manufacturing techniques such as 3D printing can improve the speed and accuracy of the manufacturing process, leading to higher quality and consistency. As there is increasing regional focus on attracting and developing technology talent and creating a nexus of technology-based companies, the spillover effects can include digital transformation across myriad Greater Grand Rapids industries.

Initiatives include:

- **Inventory and map resources for businesses in the technology and innovation sectors.**
- **Hosting a series of events to educate employers in Manufacturing and Health Sciences on technology trends and showcase local capabilities, including Tech Week Grand Rapids.**
- **Leveraging relationships with regional business leaders to develop a mentor network for emerging tech leaders.**
- **Develop mechanisms for better connecting early-stage investment capital in the region with companies seeking investment.**
- **Amplifying existing regional pitch and reverse-pitch competitions.**
- **RPI's Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center - West will work to educate and advise regional manufacturers of the opportunities provided by the growing Greater Grand Rapids tech community.**
- **Leading intercommunity visits to established tech markets to inspire and drive action among business and community leaders.**
- **Engage a Tech Scout in Silicon Valley and Europe for Tech Business Attraction, access to venture capital, and introducing Greater Grand Rapids businesses to market opportunities.**



GOAL TWO: CHAMPION INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES

Expand economic opportunities to create a more vibrant economy

Inclusive economic growth involves ongoing, intentional engagement from the economic development and business community. Regions that are successful in attracting and retaining talent, entrepreneurs, investment, and businesses are more demographically and economically diverse.

LONG-TERM IMPACT MEASURES

- Population growth, total
- Diverse population growth
- Net migration rate
- Labor force participation
- Gini coefficient
- Women and minorities in management roles
- Minority-owned share of businesses
- Employment growth within minority-owned businesses



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

RPI must consider how the region can remain competitive for talent, investment, and jobs by ensuring opportunities exist for all to participate. These initiatives could address barriers to employment and further heighten labor force participation, which is already the third highest among peer metros; support growth in minority and woman-owned businesses; and boost collaboration with workforce partners to enhance participation in growth industry skills development.

The Greater Grand Rapids economy features a relatively diverse distribution of employment across its strategic growth areas, however in recent years employment growth has trailed behind 14 of the 20 peer metros examined. The region fell into similar rankings across other economic and demographic indicators (see the Data Appendix for raw data and comparisons); frequently landing in the bottom half among the benchmarks in metrics such as diverse population growth (13th), minority share of traded industry firms (17th), and median wage (16th). Through intentional partnerships, RPI can work to improve upon these metrics and ultimately shepherd the region toward becoming a more inclusive place to live and work.

Greater Grand Rapids shows promise in becoming one of the most inclusive economies in the Midwest. The region's strategic growth areas offer ample opportunity for diverse employment growth and there are myriad community partners ready to continue building an inclusive Greater Grand Rapids through their programs of work.

The following strategies outline ways in which RPI can both support and lead the region in championing inclusive opportunities.

PRIORITIZING PEOPLE

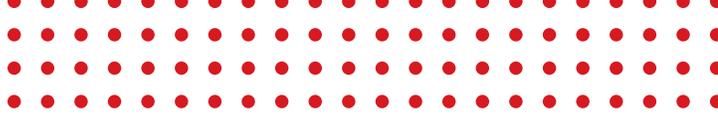
Collaborate with community partners, colleges/universities, and other stakeholders to ensure inclusive talent opportunities throughout the region

Placing people at the heart of the region's inclusion strategy is of utmost importance. RPI has strong relationships with Greater Grand Rapids employers, colleges and universities, and community leadership which we will leverage to convene and create inclusive opportunities across the region. By both strengthening existing relationships and creating new pathways, RPI can affect greater diversity in the talent pipelines for our strategic growth areas.

Initiatives include:

- **Collaboration with TalentFirst to increase utilization of the diversity, equity, and inclusion survey for the region.**
- **Expand the Talent Learning Lab with a resource library and toolkits geared toward creating an inclusive hiring continuum.**
- **Amplify the good work of our top trainers of diverse talent by leveraging RPI's extensive business outreach efforts, promoting the programs already in place and helping identify gaps to be filled.**
- **Collaborate with regional partners to ensure diverse populations have access to existing resources for newcomers/transplants and to create additional resources and/or programs.**





PRIORITIZING PEOPLE

Provide platforms for identifying and addressing barriers to employment

Barriers to employment in the Greater Grand Rapids region take many different shapes, though they are not unique to the region. Across the United States, barriers such as housing affordability and availability, access to public transportation options, and the digital divide are hindering labor force participation. Throughout stakeholder engagement, the region's business community urged involvement in overcoming these barriers. Where possible, RPI will amplify and align existing initiatives to addressing barriers like housing, childcare, and transit. Where there are gaps in need of solutions, RPI can serve as the convener for partners who are positioned to fill them.

Initiatives include:

- **Provide resources to employers to increase talent retention.**
- **Serve as the liaison between key stakeholders and employers.**
- **Identify grants that eliminate barriers for employment.**
- **Convene relevant solutions providers and resources when barriers to work are identified.**
- **When appropriate, provide advocacy and leadership for regional solutions.**

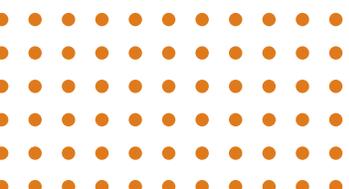
PRIORITIZING PLACE

Prioritize place-based projects in underserved communities

As the Greater Grand Rapids economy emerges from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of equitable recovery cannot be overstated. The region has an ambitious vision of building a community for all, which cannot be fully accomplished without addressing the development needs and physical environs in which this growth can take place. Through thought leadership and regional convening power, RPI can enhance the regional environment by building awareness and capacity for development opportunities in underserved communities. Elevating the region's capacity for place-based investments in underserved communities will create positive impact for Greater Grand Rapids.

Initiatives include:

- **Facilitating connections and support for minority and first-time developers.**
- **Increase opportunity awareness for investment in underserved communities.**
- **Long-term strategy planning for housing through municipal and developer networks.**
- **Facilitating investments in public placemaking projects in underserved communities.**





PRIORITIZING PROSPERITY

Support business growth and resiliency among minority and woman-owned businesses

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (U.S. EDA) defines resiliency as “the ability to recover quickly from a shock; the ability to withstand a shock; or the ability to avoid the shock altogether.” Minority- and women-owned businesses were disproportionately impacted by the economic shock of the pandemic, both by the economic downturn and the lack of aid that followed. RPI can play a role in strengthening the resilience of the Greater Grand Rapids business community by serving as a force multiplier for existing business resources in the region. Elevating knowledge of and connectivity to resources, capital and supplier diversity initiatives are all ways in which RPI can enable greater resiliency and prosperity for the minority and woman-owned small business community.

Initiatives include:

- **Elevate advanced manufacturing-focused supply chain diversity model.**
- **Serve as a resource and connector for Minority/Women-owned Business Enterprise networks and mentoring programs.**
- **Identify and advocate for new financing mechanisms that reduce barriers to capital for Minority/Women-owned Business Enterprises.**

GOAL THREE: ELEVATE GREATER GRAND RAPIDS

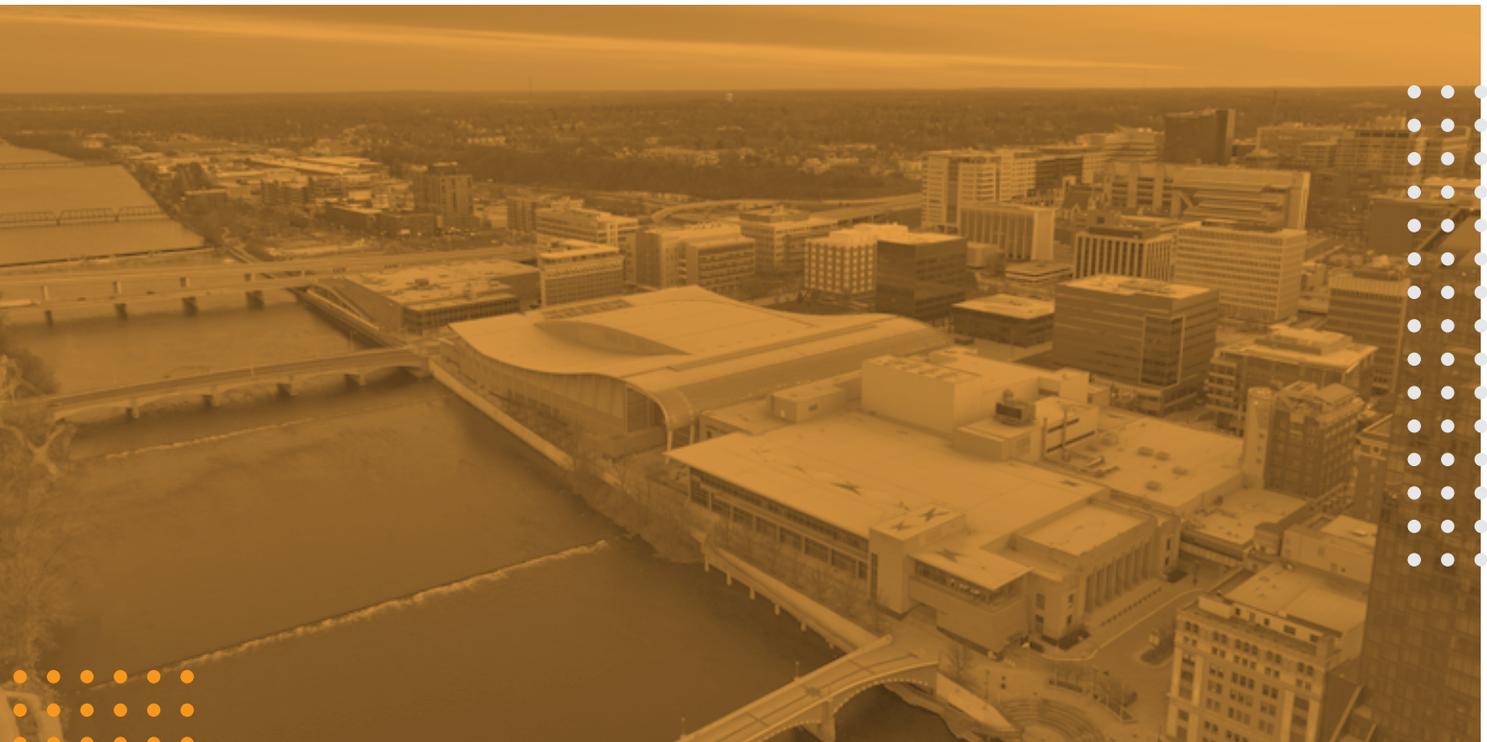
Amplify our story to position the region as a destination of choice for business and talent.

Being ‘the best kept secret’ is not a position of strength. With Baby Boomers retiring in mass and a laborforce that is shrinking nationwide, the long talked about ‘war for talent’ is well upon us. Countless participants throughout the strategic planning process suggested the lack of perception and awareness for Greater Grand Rapids impacts its ability to attract talent and investment. There are plenty of things to celebrate in Greater Grand Rapids, but with so many partners and initiatives, it is often hard to paint to a complete picture of what it means to be Greater Grand Rapids. By leading the way in projecting the region’s success to targeted audiences around the country, RPI can play a pivotal role in cementing Greater Grand Rapids as the destination of choice for investors, innovators, businesses, and the talent they need.

The strategies and initiatives below outline ways in which RPI can amplify the region’s story to position the region as a destination of choice.

LONG-TERM IMPACT MEASURES

- Regional rankings and recognitions
- Digital engagements
- Earned media mentions
- Earned media reach
- Prosperity event registrants



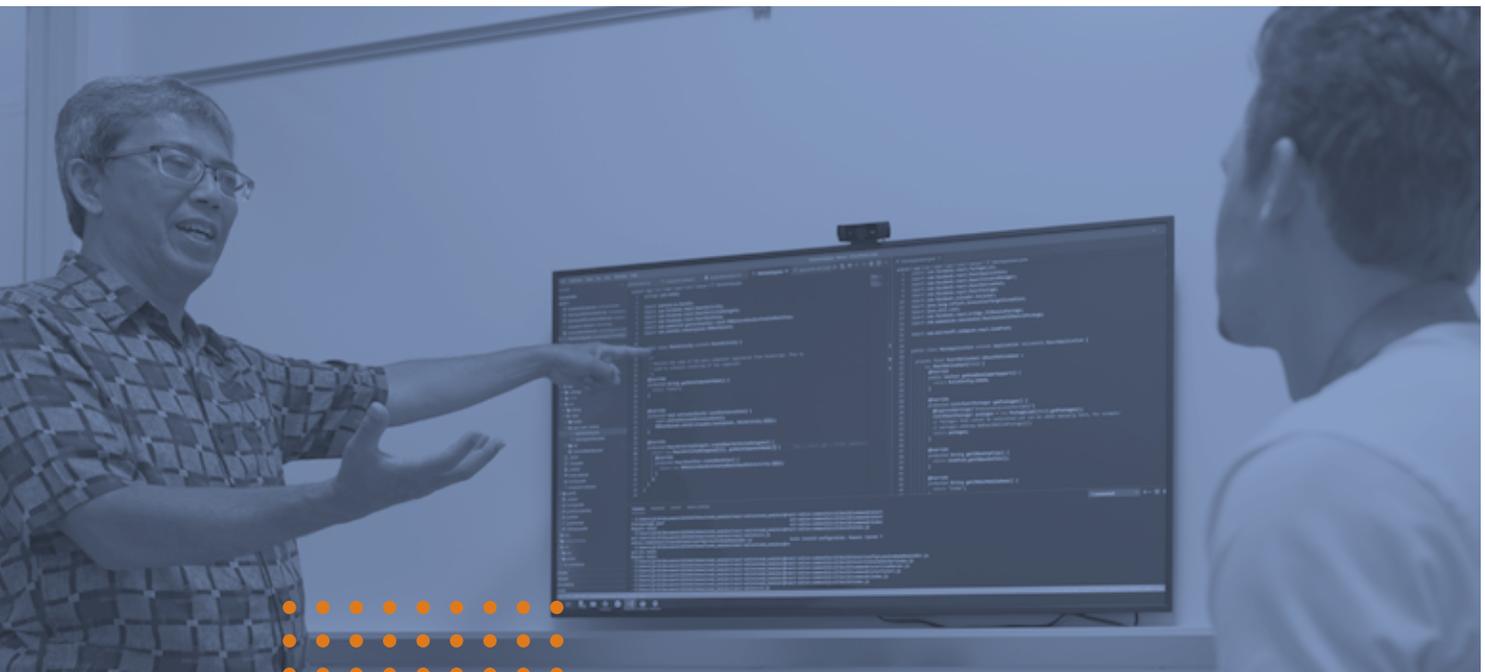
PRIORITIZING PEOPLE

Amplify the region's talent attraction and retention efforts

Initiatives to attract and retain talent have become commonplace in economic development. Successful talent initiatives require messaging that balances livability, economic opportunity, and connection to the region. First, generating awareness to peak interest. Then, showcasing the community and economic opportunities and provide a sense of connection to the region. The people-based initiatives outlined in this strategy can kickstart more targeted investments in talent attraction moving forward.

Initiatives include:

- **Supporting the development of platforms and campaigns to promote opportunities within select strategic growth areas.**
- **Elevate regional stories through content creation and distribution.**
- **Partnering with Hello West Michigan to identify targeted geography and industry-focused talent attraction messaging and initiatives.**
- **Supporting employee attraction efforts with regional resources and recruiting events.**
- **Partnering with higher education institutions and employers to increase graduate retention through increased career connection events for jobs, apprenticeships, internships.**
- **Targeting alumni of the area's higher education institutions, encouraging them to 'boomerang' back to the region.**
- **Partner with Experience GR, Pure Michigan and other travel promotion entities to reinforce the great quality of life enjoyed by our residents.**





PRIORITIZING PLACE

Showcase Greater Grand Rapids' unique place-based assets to developers and investors within the region and beyond

In addition to the benefits of tourism and talent attraction, place-based marketing can also create opportunities for future investment. Presenting these opportunities through the right balance of market research and storytelling can make all the difference to investor audiences within and beyond the Greater Grand Rapids region.

Initiatives include:

- **Promoting regional place-based assets in RPI marketing materials and other third party national publications.**
- **Visiting national developers to share the Greater Grand Rapids story directly.**
- **Providing market research to highlight the place-based development opportunities in the region.**
- **Pursuing funding, through state and federal grants, for regional place-based initiatives.**
- **Enhancing unique regional natural assets, such as the region's blueways and greenways.**
- **Initiate and support public art programs in collaboration with local communities.**

Perception and awareness, or the lack thereof, can impact the decisions made by the target audiences most relevant to RPI – companies, developers, site selectors, innovators and talent. Driving a positive narrative and amplifying our region's success – locally, regionally and globally – is essential to attracting talent, industry and investment to Greater Grand Rapids.

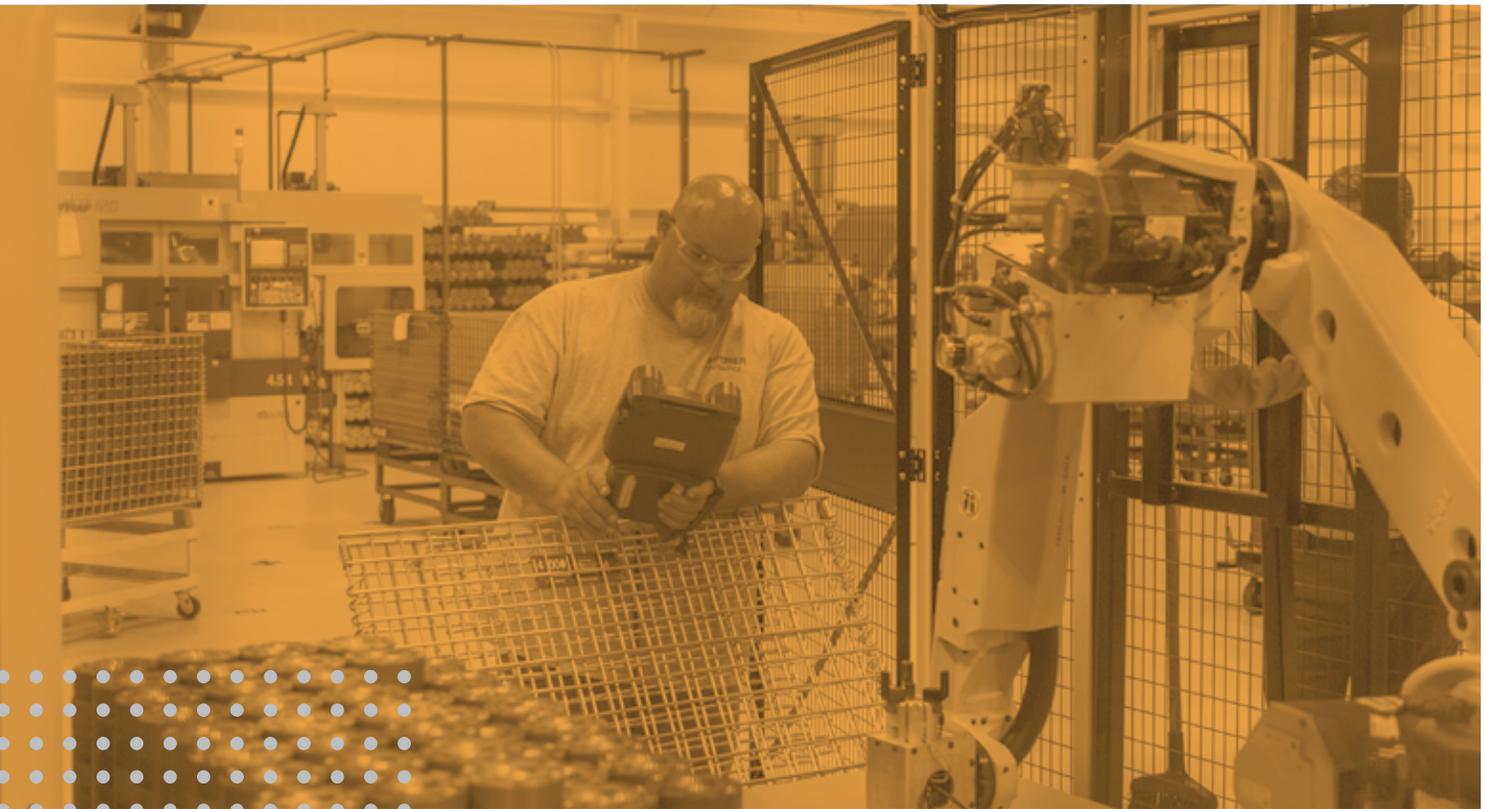
PRIORITIZING PROSPERITY

Promote the success and innovation of the region's business community

The stories of success and innovation in Greater Grand Rapids should not be the region's best kept secrets. RPI's ability to compile, create and elevate content that tells a cohesive story of success is key to positioning the region as a destination of choice in the minds of innovators, investors, employers and talent.

Initiatives include:

- **Developing a framework for partners to share Greater Grand Rapids success stories.**
- **Featuring assets, innovations and employers in regularly scheduled postings.**
- **Highlighting positive findings from select business intelligence reports to local, regional and state media.**
- **Collaborate with Michigan Economic Development Corporation on national media opportunities.**
- **Having a presence at local industry associations and partnering with business leaders to showcase the region at national/global industry association meetings and events.**



GOAL FOUR: BOOST REGIONAL IMPACT

Deepen the bonds within our communities and across the state to create a more globally competitive region

The eight counties of Greater Grand Rapids served by The Right Place make for a diverse and powerful region. The strength of this region is further amplified when these Counties work together and learn from each other. RPI has demonstrated our elevated commitment to regionalism with the 2021 Regional Partnership Strategy and its inclusion of those County partners in this strategic planning process. One organization alone cannot carry the banner of regionalism, it must be nurtured beyond economic development relationships to all community leaders. These bonds extend from economic development to infrastructure, transportation planning, livability, and talent.

While the primary focus of the regional partnerships is business growth, the capacity for growth depends heavily on the overall competitiveness of the region. The knowledge and networks of RPI and the communities themselves are powerful tools for building capacity and global competitiveness. In all these areas, RPI has a role in convening partners, connecting with resources, educating on trends, advocating for change, and aligning in action.

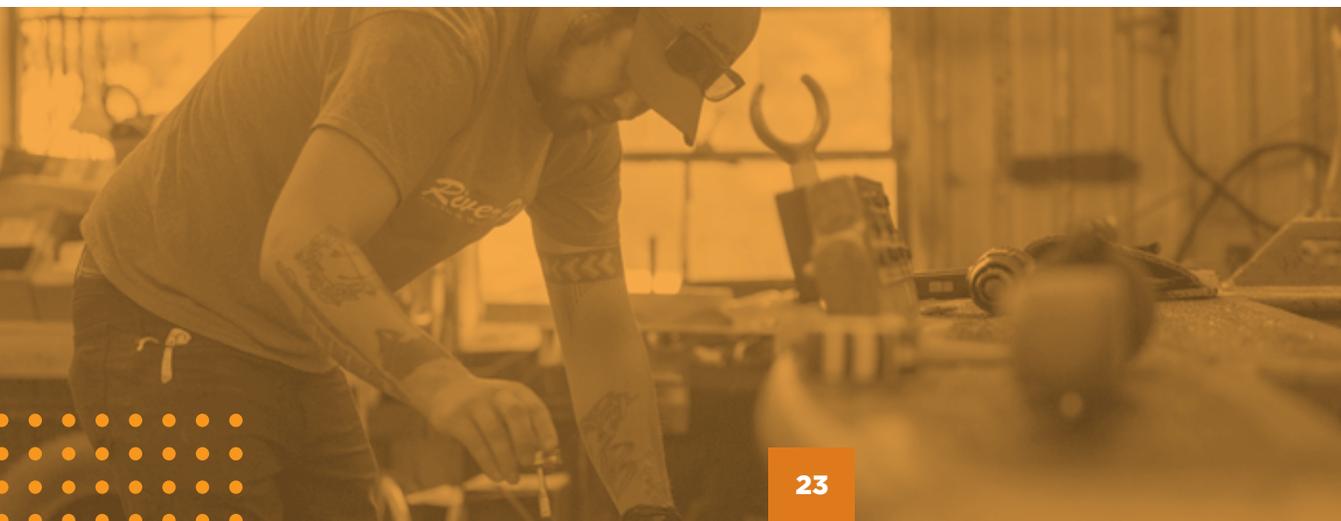
In addition to strengthening regional partnerships, it is imperative that Greater Grand Rapids partners continue to forge relationships at the state level. Ensuring that state leadership is aware of the economic climate and regional successes of Greater Grand Rapids carries high importance, especially when considering the amount of federal funding being deployed for infrastructure, job creation, and re-shoring of manufacturing. These partnerships are not only important from a political and fiscal perspective, however. As the state of Michigan continues to compete on the world's stage for economic development projects, strong relationships at the state level are key to ensuring the story of Greater Grand Rapids is woven into the narrative.

Being the growth leader of the Midwest will require all eight counties working together towards a shared set of regional goals. The established relationships are a steppingstone for deeper bonds and a more promising economic future.

LONG-TERM IMPACT MEASURES

1. Business growth through retention, expansion and attraction efforts
2. Infrastructure improvements
3. Talent pipeline initiatives

From the county partners questionnaire conducted by EY in 2021



PRIORITIZING PEOPLE

Focus on building the talent pipeline and increasing awareness for career opportunities

Talent is essential to economic growth and effective talent solutions are often resource intensive. Together with community partners, RPI has developed several valuable talent initiatives that can be scaled and shared across the greater region. Additionally, the knowledge gained from launching these initiatives could be valuable to partners across the region as they do the same. Expanding the regional bonds into the talent sphere serves to strengthen the region's competitiveness in the long term.

Initiatives include:

- **Convening regional stakeholders to discuss opportunities and challenges in talent development, sharing leading practices, and conducting regional plans when relevant.**
- **Identifying grant opportunities to bolster talent pipelines in regional communities.**
- **Expanding the talent assessment for regional employers to identify gaps and provide best practices.**
- **Continue to support key Hello West Michigan programming to attract talent to the region.**
- **Launching a regional tech-focused job fair to connect employers with local talent.**

PRIORITIZING PLACE

Convene regional planning efforts for further regional connectivity

As the growth engine for regional economic development, RPI plays a key role in aligning planning efforts for initiatives around transportation, infrastructure, housing, and placemaking. Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, the concept of RPI serving as a conduit for best practices emerged. By continuing to regularly gather regional partners around a table to discuss and develop solutions for pressing regional issues, RPI can affect regional progress and cultivate a sense of place across Greater Grand Rapids.

Initiatives include:

- **Educating communities on the trends, benefits, and resources for placemaking.**
- **Developing a prospectus of priority regional placemaking initiatives that could be leveraged for soliciting investment.**
- **Supporting regional broadband access, adoption, and affordability initiatives.**
- **Convening partners to identify regional strategies and planning in transportation and mobility.**



PRIORITIZING PROSPERITY

Continue to drive and support business growth

Jobs and capital investment were the impetus for this regional partnership and remain the highest priority. RPI continues to support existing industries and attract new business to the region. At the same time, RPI must also strengthen local support for traditional economic development by providing educational sessions for the many levels of leadership within the regional partner counties.

Initiatives include:

- **Leading business retention, expansion, and attraction efforts for the regional partners.**
- **Supporting regional partners in project management.**
- **Expanding relationships with regional leadership to ensure cohesive messaging and approach during client interactions.**
- **Conducting formal reviews after each project win or loss to share how the region is or can be more competitive.**
- **Providing annual trainings on economic development topics for newly elected/appointed community leaders.**

DATA APPENDIX

To aid in assessing the Greater Grand Rapids growth position, 19 peer and aspirant benchmark economies were chosen to compare across 30 indicators; 10 related to people, 10 related to place, and 10 related to prosperity.

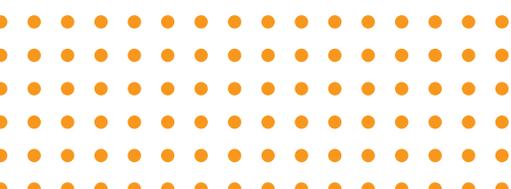
The peer and aspirant benchmark metros included:

- **Ann Arbor, MI**
- **Birmingham, AL**
- **Chattanooga, TN**
- **Colorado Springs, CO**
- **Columbus, OH**
- **Des Moines, IA**
- **Detroit, MI**
- **Greensboro, NC**
- **Greenville, SC**
- **Indianapolis, IN**
- **Jacksonville, FL**
- **Kalamazoo, MI**
- **Knoxville, TN**
- **Lansing, MI**
- **Louisville, KY**
- **Milwaukee, WI**
- **Oklahoma City, OK**
- **Raleigh, NC**
- **Salt Lake City, UT**

Indicators were chosen to help contextualize how Greater Grand Rapids is performing overall. Examples of these metrics are total employment growth, population growth, per capita gross regional product (GRP) and growth, household income levels and their growth, and average salary levels and their growth.

By these measures, Greater Grand Rapids is doing exceptionally well in some areas and has more room for improvement in others. Most often, Greater Grand Rapids scores better than the state and national averages. However, to be a leader in the Midwest we are comparing ourselves to aspirational markets in the Midwest as well as emerging and leading markets throughout the country.

The full benchmark report is included in this section and key data points relevant to this strategy are referenced directly in the strategy report.





THE RIGHT PLACE

Advancing the West Michigan Economy

125 Ottawa Avenue NW, Suite 450
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

☎ 616.771.0325

📠 616.771.0555

✉ info@rightplace.org

🌐 rightplace.org