

Leading Regional Growth

The Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce
Strategic Plan 2011-2014

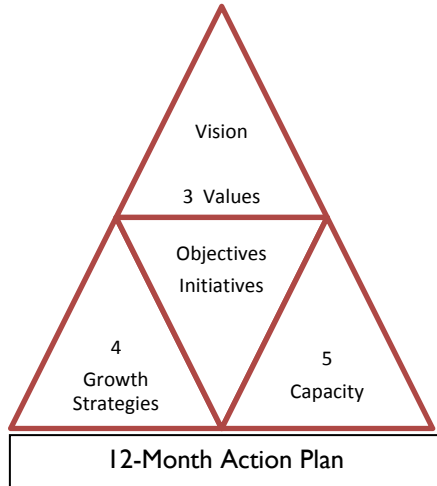


Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce Strategic Plan 2011-2014

Executive Summary

The Leading Regional Growth Strategic Plan for 2011-2014 outlines the vision, values and initiatives that will drive change and growth for The Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce in its next stage of evolution.

The objectives and initiatives supporting four Major Growth Strategies are represented under each of the three values in the Strategic Plan: Leadership, Excellence and Integrity. As detailed in the 2011—2014 Strategic Plan, the 4 Major Growth Strategies for GECC are regionalism, leadership, advancement of education in technology and sustainability. Personal connection and focused collaboration will engage our business community in the strategies (see page 12).



In addition, there are 5 Capacity areas that are identified as needed to support the plan’s success in the major change areas: use of technology applications for education and communication for members, marketing communications for programs, chamber staff development, council program simplification and alignment to goals, and income stream improvements (see page 10 and 11).

Finally the strategic plan includes an action plan that explains the steps to be taken by the staff and councils to disseminate and begin implementation of the plan components within the next 12 months.

The structure of this plan is designed to most simply communicate the direction and areas of focus for the future growth of the Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce. The philosophies of this plan serve as a guideline for leadership focus decision making. Councils and staff are to realign their efforts to achieve the objectives and strategies outlined in these documents. Clarification and alignment should be development through dialog at all levels of the organization. Consequently, this document should be revised and serve as a living document to build strength and growth throughout the organization in the following areas.

Vision	Values	Growth Strategies	Capacities
GECC has the vision to be a leader in regional development to support members with strengthening their leadership positions, achieving operational excellence, and advancing their careers in our communities to ultimately - lead business and lead the community – to be a thriving force of change for the sustainability of future generations.	<p>Leadership – Guidance and mentorship for growth</p> <p>Excellence – Building knowledge and capabilities of people to be the best</p> <p>Integrity – Building trust by doing what we say we will do</p>	<p>Regionalism</p> <p>Strong leadership</p> <p>Advancement of education in technology</p> <p>Sustainability for future generations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-examine our use and offering of technology • Focus our marketing communications on advocating the strengths of our core programs • Make internal improvements in staff development, technology and programs • Conduct a review /communication plan of Council leaders and members to determine opportunities for improved engagement • Evaluate all income streams to project growth potential

Leading Regional Growth

The Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce (GECC) believes in the development and growth of businesses as the backbone of our economy. Historically an entrepreneurial county, Elkhart County has especially suffered in these economic times due to lack of investment in large vehicles, manufactured housing and supplier manufacturer businesses. This has created the need for new entrepreneurial leadership in an area that is better aligned to achieve local and regional growth for the future. GECC believes regionalism is the solution to sustaining growth in challenging economic times for the following reasons:

1. In metropolitan areas some problems cannot be solved within municipal boundaries, and decisions made by one municipality can have adverse impacts on other municipalities and the environment.
2. Regional coordination and planning is also crucial for the success of undertakings that are too large or complex for any one unit of government to address.
3. A multitude of programs and projects are initiated each year at the federal, state, regional, and local levels. These programs have specific goals which often conflict with one another. Regional planning creates the needed venue and framework to coordinate these programs and goals into a congruent whole and supporting the goals and objectives of the region. This coordination is needed to integrate various federal, state, regional, and local plans, and to improve the effectiveness, mutual reinforcement, and synergy among various planning efforts. Qualification for federal and state programs and funding are increasingly contingent upon regional-based program focus. This helps make the plans more coherent and less confusing to the public.
4. With a concerted effort to ensure that the various public and private representatives have coordinated their efforts, their constituent groups and citizens will also be more likely to support it – thus unifying efforts to achieve the quality of life desired in the region.
5. As municipal budgets are strained and programs suspended or curtailed, cooperative program delivery schemes that provide for the coordination of services and the pooling of resources become more important. Long-term and area-wide planning for the delivery and combining of these services become critical in the task of maintaining services by improving the efficiency of delivery and cost-effectiveness through economies of scale.

Therefore, GECC believes the benefits from regionalism and regional approaches to planning and coordination of services come from the effectiveness and efficiency of pooling resources, and from utilizing the available structure and capacity within regional development organizations. In this planning period, our regional collaboration will drive the area wide leadership and governance framework, program diversity and capacity, and long-term strategic focus to serve as the lead entities to better integrate economic development and programming.

Strategic Plan Objectives

GECC has the vision to be a leader in regional development to support members with strengthening their leadership positions, achieving operational excellence, and advancing their careers in our communities to ultimately - lead business and lead the community – to be a thriving force of change for the sustainability of future generations.

In order to fulfill our organization vision, so that members can achieve theirs, GECC will focus on three value-based strategic directions over the next three years: Leadership, Excellence and Integrity. These three focus areas or “pillars” are directly tied to the needs you as members expressed to us during the strategic planning process. Members and planners called for extensive just-in-time knowledge and constantly expanding opportunities to improve themselves and their organizations.

The only way GECC can successfully increase our Leadership, Excellence and Integrity is if we employ all four of our available tools/resources and Councils on each pillar of the strategic areas. Those four tools are: programs, volunteer resources (human capital and network), information flow and staff/partner knowledge. In the past, GECC has been organized, staffed and in some ways defined by its methods of delivery. The current and future chamber world, like the rest of the business world, will seek relevant, actionable information without regard to media type or method. This new flexible model will reduce redundancy and improve access for all through networks, programs, web and yet-to-be developed media.

There are four, significant growth strategies in the overall way we do business that will result from change of philosophy. They are detailed at the end of the plan.

These sections below will explore ambitions and plans affecting Leadership, Excellence and Integrity. We have heard and responded to member requests and requirements in this plan and will pace the change in a fiscally responsible way, ensuring that our aspirations do not exceed our capacity.

Leadership

Guidance and Mentorship for Growth

The Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce (GECC) advocates leaders and the development of their businesses and organizations in our community. Leaders drive passion to achieve great things. The more we can do to support our leaders to be successful and grow, the stronger our collective business community will be at surpassing their expectations for recovery. The GECC will apply our resources to help members become stronger leaders who build stronger businesses and organizations that provide jobs and develop our regional economy.

- **Business Development and Diversification.** GECC is committed to developing a thriving community of entrepreneurs and service-oriented leaders who will take progressive measures to grow our economy. Our goal is to create an engaging, inspiring and open space for leaders of all genders and races to demonstrate their talents and serve our community. The purpose of these efforts moving forward is to push Elkhart County beyond the media stigma and give leaders the confidence to collaborate and expand ideas for the future.
 - Minority Business Development Council
 - Women’s Council
 - Beautification Council
- **Local and Regional Business Ownership and Economic Development.** We will develop business retention programs to keep businesses thriving in our community and will work in partnership with the EDC to assure that successful development and retention programs appeal to their prospects and strong efforts to bring new businesses and job opportunities to our area. We will be a leader of regionalization and assist economic development resources with the integration of surrounding communities into our web by acknowledging their contribution to our economic well-being.
 - Economic Development Council
 - Bristol Business Council
 - Be an active partner with regional economic development organizations
- **Technology Development and Utilization.** Technology sets the pace for business growth and development. Our leaders need the best technology to build thriving businesses that will compete

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in today's global economy. Our partnership with NCI provides a foundational resource for understanding and implementing new technologies. Starting 2011, we will showcase NCI and expert resources to leaders to overcome the lack of awareness about such resources and their potential impact on growing our business and service community to the next level.

- Technology Council
- Connecting and Developing Leaders. In addition to the programs above, collaboration and mentorship of leaders is our best opportunity to reduce brain drain and keep our best leading innovations in the community. GECC will utilize Ambassador Recognition, Business of The Month, Business of the Year, The Elkhart Leadership Academy, Young Professionals, hosted business community events, and modern technology platforms to engage, recognize and inspire leaders who make a difference.
 - Business Recognition Council
 - Leadership Council
 - Young Professionals
 - Networking Events
 - Annual Outing Council
 - Ambassadors Council
 - After-hours Events
 - Web-based Communications

LEADERSHIP STRATEGY KEY TO SUCCESS

Recognizing the need for Leadership to believe in and take progressive steps to build our business and service community. Be a source for inspiration and encouragement for growth and learning when perhaps it seems that no one is looking. Engage the media with showing how Elkhart is an example of recovery that other communities should use as a success benchmark.

ECONOMICS OF CHANGE

The infrastructure for this value system is place with the various councils mentioned above. The GECC staff will engage the community in the larger belief and message of inspiration by engaging their hearts in growing Elkhart and taking leadership with its economic revitalization. The success of these activities will be driven by the ability to engage top progressive leaders into the life and blood of GECC programs that lead change led by proven community leaders. Over the next three years, a diverse set of leaders will be vetted, engaged and supported by the staff and GECC resources with their vision for Greater Elkhart in the years to come.

Excellence

Developing the Knowledge and Capabilities of People to Be the Best

Knowledge is power. GECC will pool together the best educational resources in the region to provide businesses and organizations both online and hands-on toolkits to inform and develop their people. After developing formal and informal partnerships, we will be relentlessly offering and marketing programs and learning opportunities to leaders in the community. Over the next three years, GECC will grow to be known as the best resource for high quality learning programs for all businesses and organizations. GECC will be the “go to” resource for business growth learning.

- Education / Workforce Training. Our workforce is behind the curve in being educated about modern technological advancements of complex machinery and computerization of work processes. GECC will partner with the best online tools and resources in the region (technical colleges, universities, NCI, contracted specialists, educationally-focused consultants and coaches) to provide learning workshops and training programs for the most demanded topics.
 - Education Council
 - OSHA Council
 - Environmental Council

- Youth and Future Workforce Development. iTunes University is just one example of free learning content delivered in a format that appeals to future leaders. Mentorship via programs like SCORE, ASSETS and JumpStart are just a couple of examples of live interaction and coaching programs that develop character and challenge and inspire future leaders to follow their passion and to live their dreams. FIVE STAR LIFE, CARES, and CROSSROADS are existing programs building young leaders in K-12, middle school and high school classrooms. All of these lifelong learning programs will be promoted by GECC to gain volunteer and engagement opportunities with the purpose of building tomorrow’s leaders today. When we inspire our youth here at home we keep them here.
 - Education Council
 - Young Professionals

EXCELLENCE STRATEGY KEY TO SUCCESS

Recognizing the need for education of our workforce is the power that will take our community to the next level of advancement for sustainability and relevance in today's competitive environment. We will build a culture for learning in all business environments to assure that lack of knowledge is not an excuse for lack of growth.

ECONOMICS OF CHANGE

GECC will create a web-based platform for collecting program ideas and making them available to the community. The programs will be rated and detailed with the requirements and consistently displayed outcomes that leaders can expect as member organizations. The program listing and content will be available to members only.

Integrity

Building Trust by Doing What We Say We Will Do

Our business community deserves to have the infrastructure, resources and people required to live sustainable lives. GECC will be advocates for sustainable living by influencing public policy, healthcare systems, environmental structures and infrastructure that will help Elkhart uphold the standard for quality of life and grow to be a place where businesses can thrive and provide meaningful jobs to our community.

- **Government Regulation.** GECC will maintain a strong foothold in government policy by being active participants in state and federal policy leadership and reform. Further, GECC will assure that the business community understands what policies mean and how they will impact their ability to grow and thrive in our community. Through assuring active learning and awareness of policies such as healthcare and tax reforms, our business community will vote and stand firm on decisions that are in the best interest of growth, development, and regional and national competitiveness as a business-friendly environment.
 - Government Council
 - Transportation Council
 - Economic Development Council
 - Environmental Council
 - OSHA Council

- **Business Retention & Sustainability.** In these times, businesses are concerned with doing more with less in order to survive. GECC will engage all possible resources (NCI, EDC, Downtown Elkhart Inc.) to educate and bring awareness about sources that will benefit economic growth during times of transition and reinvention.

How our businesses impact our environment also has a large effect on business owners' willingness to be located in Elkhart County. Our economic, political, demographic, regulatory and futuristic landscape need to continually be assessed and planned for growth and long-term sustainability.

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We define sustainability as aligning our limited resources to do what is right and preserve our environment, people and profits for the betterment of future generations. This requires that the businesses of our community reduce taking substances from the earth's crust; reduce creating harmful of man-made materials; reduce degradation of the physical environment; and reduce undermining the capacity of people to meet their needs. GECC is committed to the education and promotion of these principles.

GECC and NCI resources will exchange information about policy and regulatory issues affecting organizations in our business community and be a clearinghouse for understanding how to improve our environment for viability and growth for future generations.

- Environmental Council
- Government Council
- Economic Development Council
- Beautification Council

EXCELLENCE STRATEGY KEY TO SUCCESS

Being internally aware of public policy and how it will impact our business community. Being visible in political arenas and demonstrate active advocacy for business. Expand the capacity to share information about policy to inform and inspire the business community to engage in reform for long-term growth.

ECONOMICS OF CHANGE

GECC will maintain the human capital, online and collaborative educational resources to understand and share information about public policy and how it impacts our business community.

Capacity

Maintaining the Team Behind the Plan

As the economy changes so too will our resources. Resource pools will grow and shrink for GECC as markets, products, and processes change. Technology will change what we deliver and how, as well as what we charge. Many elements of GECC's business model have proven to be flexible and resilient. The model will inevitably be tested in the future and we must be ready to address elements of our pricing, marketing, product mix, and administration and investment decisions to ensure that we are sustainable. Following are the resources that we foresee requiring change in the next three years.

1. We need to re-examine our use and offering of technology. As a manufacturing region, technology drives change and the ability to compete. Our region needs to revitalize technology solutions for their businesses - and so must we. We need to better promote and utilize resources such as NCI to help members understand the resources available to learn about new manufacturing and service technology sources. Educational vehicles such as podcasts, videos, presentation and social media outlets connect people and display technological leadership to our members.
2. We will focus our marketing communications on advocating the strengths of our core programs. We will market GECC as a regional leader and initiator of business growth and innovation, while focusing our strengths in manufacturing technology, OSHA, business / professional education, public policy, transportation and government.
3. Internal improvements to be started FY 2011-2012 include: 1) expand staff cross-training to help with information dissemination; 2) increase staff awareness of member concerns by empowering more staff professionals to go "on the road" and recommend our portfolio of resources; 3) require advanced training on technology for all GECC staff; and 4) complete evaluation of all program effectiveness to help determine which should be considered as core vs. non-core programs to determine opportunities for seeking potential regional partners.
4. We will conduct a review /communication plan of Council leaders and members to determine opportunities for improved engagement, evaluation of leadership, size, programs and promotion of group vitality. Council members and programs will be adjusted accordingly per

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the collaborative findings.

5. While GECC's revenue stream is relatively diverse, all income streams will be evaluated to identify projected:
 - a. There will be an increased reliance upon volunteers and outside influencers to build new membership. Modest growth in member count is expected in 2011-2014, but revenue is expected to grow by targeting better programs in education throughout the region for our core program areas.
 - b. Focus new revenue streams on educational boutique programs throughout the region in core focus areas.
 - c. Acquire staffing to fulfill the desires of current staff for succession planning including the President position. Secure upcoming leaders with relationships to grow membership and exposure of the chamber.
 - d. Revitalize and utilize the Chamber Coalition Initiative to launch our role in regionalism and expand membership and program revenue streams in core areas.
 - e. New revenue opportunities are always under review.

4 Major Growth Strategies

Many programs and services may be streamlined, eliminated, added or changed as a result of this plan. At the same time, the planning task force and members recommended only a few completely new or dramatically changed strategies for achieving our vision and mission:

- 1. Regionalism.** We will be a leader in regional development by initiating dialog will other chambers and organizations interested in partnering to maximize our individual strengths into a collective pool of resources to support the growth of businesses in our region.
- 2. Strong Leadership.** In order to expand resources, achieve fairness, connection and engagement at all levels in the organization, we must promote fresh, enthusiastic leaders who are making a difference in our region and give them a voice to allow our communities to evolve and thrive.
- 3. Advancement of Education in Technology.** Technology drives change and as the state's leading manufacturing region, we must drive the utilization of new technologies to keep our member businesses relevant in today's global economy.
- 4. Sustainability for Future Generations.** Sustainability assures that we prosper in the future. As a manufacturing region, we need to consider our product and material life cycles to protect our environment, people and profits. This requires utilizing technology and innovation to reduce costs and create products and services that are relevant to the marketplace.

To achieve these goals we will demonstrate personal connection and focused collaboration at all times to support and build our membership.

- **Personal Connection.** To enhance personal and organizational networks, we must move beyond simply forming/serving subgroups, committees and "communities." Good peer groups are essential, but we must find multiple ways to foster direct connections between members.
- **Focused Collaboration.** Historically our eagerness to serve has developed many new initiatives and councils to manage. As we embark on the direction presented in this plan, we need to assure that we focus on differentiating and developing our core program strengths and collaborate with others in our non-core areas. We need to focus our efforts on the balance of program excellence while partnering with others who compliment our core advantage.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of our volunteer leadership, staff management team and others who have engaged in the strategic planning process, a huge Chamber “thank-you” to Shelley Moore and Insight Strategic Concepts for guiding us through this comprehensive process. The Plan will provide critical guidance and direction for our Chamber for the next 3-5 years. This will be a working document with accountability benchmarks and timelines, and will help assure the continuation of the level of excellence, professionalism, and leadership our Members and the community expect from our Chamber.

Again, thanks to all Board Members, volunteers and Staff who contributed their time and talent to the formation of the Plan.

Working together we will make it happen!

Phil Penn
President