

NOVEMBER 2023



FINGER LAKES
REGIONAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE & CHALLENGES COMPETITION



Finger Lakes
Regional Economic
Development Council



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FRONT COVER IMAGES

GLOW With Your Hands, NASRCC (2023).

 Credit: Genesee County Economic Development Center

SunDensity, Round 3 top winner of Luminate, cuts ribbon on new facility at Sibley Square in downtown Rochester.

 Credit: Shari Voorhees-Vincent, Empire State Development

Apple Tree Acres Looking West Towards I-490 (July 2023).

LETTER FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

As we reflect on the past few years, we find ourselves inspired by the collaboration, resilience, and innovation exemplified by Finger Lakes communities. As co-chairs of the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council (FLREDC), it is with great pleasure and excitement that we share the Region's latest developments and successes and outline our priorities and strategies for the future. In particular, in this Plan we strengthen our commitment to being proactive in advancing equity, inclusion, and sustainability, with the vision of a future where the Region's knowledge-based economy enables all people, communities, businesses, and ecosystems to **THRIVE**. This update to our Strategic Plan lays out a concerted, ongoing effort to align and carry out our work through a lens of economic inclusion, ensuring that our Region's growth benefits all members of our diverse community.

The FLREDC, in partnership with a multitude of dedicated community partners, has worked diligently to further the economic prosperity of the Finger Lakes. Our Region has identified new growth opportunities in health sciences, agribusiness, and advanced manufacturing industries. This year, more than any other year, has seen emphasis on sustainability and clean energy/technology as the State moves towards zero-emission electricity by 2040. This trend will advance in years to come, and the Region can expect to see growing investment in climate-related sectors buoyed by significant State and Federal funding.

At the heart of our efforts is a continued dedication to key guiding priorities: fostering job growth, increasing regional wealth, driving private investment, and reducing poverty. Strategic partnerships have played a crucial role in advancing these key priorities. Cross-sector organizations involved in the ROC2025 regional

alliance, the Partnership for Downtown Rochester, the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI), and the public-private Regional Revitalization Partnership (RRP), to name a few, have been instrumental in propelling our shared vision forward.

This new Strategic Plan reflects on the progress of our Region since the FLREDC's creation, and updates the Finger Lakes' goals, challenges, opportunities, strategies, and priorities. It is the product of the work of our passionate community members, who have helped to make this Strategic Plan a guide for our future that is grounded in both reality and ambition. To those organizations and individuals who provided their valuable input and ideas: We thank you.

Looking forward, we are grateful for the substantial encouragement from Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature. Their generous allocation to the Finger Lakes Region in this year's state budget is a testament to their belief in the potential of our Region. From the nearly \$40 million for higher education projects in strategic workforce sectors, to \$96 million for constructing and improving transportation infrastructure and another \$15 million for the rejuvenation of green spaces, these initiatives will advance our Region as a sustainable, inclusive economic hub.

As we embark on the journey this new Strategic Plan promises to bring, we remain committed to supporting our businesses, families, education programs, and other civic institutions that are so fundamental to the sustainable economic growth of the Finger Lakes. Our collective passion, dedication, and vision will propel the Finger Lakes Region toward even greater success in the years to come.

Thank you for your continued partnership and dedication.



BOB DUFFY, CO-CHAIR
GREATER ROCHESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE




DR. DENISE BATTLES, CO-CHAIR
SUNY GENESEO



PART 1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND PROGRESS

The last few years have shown the resiliency of Finger Lakes communities as they faced the realities of a public health emergency, economic uncertainty, social unrest, and the warmest year in human history. No matter the challenge, we have adapted, collaborated, and innovated, coming out the other side stronger and more prepared for the future. This Strategic Plan update takes past, present, and expected successes and challenges into consideration to guide the Finger Lakes Region to a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable future. We aim not only for growth, but also for our businesses, people, and communities to truly thrive. The Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council (FLREDC) will seek to support and advance the priorities, strategies, and activities outlined in this Strategic Plan through funding prioritization, resource identification and alignment, advocacy, and convening. Implementation will largely be carried out by regional partners, businesses, and organizations.

The FLREDC has for many years been guided by a commitment to four key objectives: Grow Jobs, Increase Regional Wealth, Drive Private Sector Investment, and Reduce Poverty. Starting in 2019, the Finger Lakes REDC harmonized its performance metrics with that of ROC2025, a coordinated, collaborative capacity-building initiative dedicated to driving growth in Greater Rochester and the Region. These aligned metrics cover employment (job growth rate, civilian labor force, non-farm employment), the economy (regional GDP equivalent), personal income (real, per-capita), and poverty reduction (unemployment rate, poverty rate). In 2019, we established 53 benchmark communities against which we rank our Region in each of these metrics. We are very proud to say that our rank among the benchmark communities has improved across all of the metrics we established in 2019 (see tables to the right).

We commit to monitoring our progress from the implementation of this Strategic Plan in the same manner, to remain consistent with past practices, and to remain cohesive with our regional partners. However, we note that the topics of **equity and sustainability** deserve additional consideration in how we monitor our success.



In this strategy update, we are strengthening our commitment to advance equity and sustainability in the pursuit of our broader economic objectives. As previously touched on in the Environmental Justice section of the 2021 Annual Report, the FLREDC recognizes that a more inclusive economy provides longer-term benefits and vitality for our Region and its component communities. Further, economic inclusion and sustainability are not inherently incompatible,

and we seek to advance our economy with these priorities at the forefront. This explicit commitment reflects the values and concerns voiced by stakeholders and recognized by FLREDC members throughout the creation of this Plan. Going forward, the FLREDC will elevate the following priorities when reviewing proposed projects to ensure that the full set of recommended priority projects reflect:

PRIORITIES



EFFECTIVENESS

An efficient use of funds with the greatest impacts and an ability to measure outcomes transparently;



INCLUSIVITY

Geographic distribution across the Region, and components intended to include and positively impact a diversity of demographic and economic groups, particularly those that have historically been underrepresented or disadvantaged in economic growth;



ALIGNMENT

Leveraging of existing, successful programs within the Region, particularly where there is consideration of the inclusivity of said programs; and,



SUSTAINABILITY

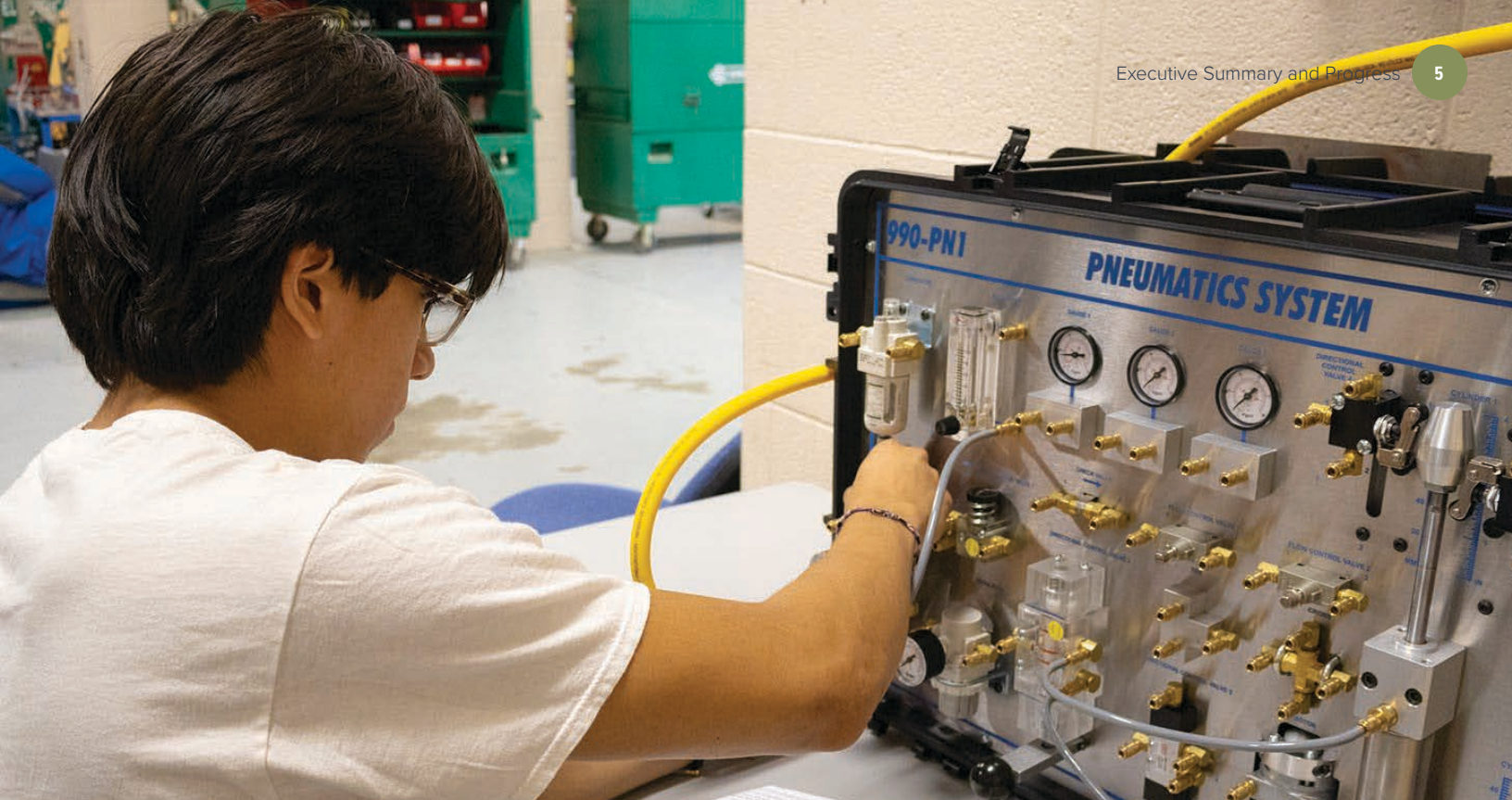
Contributions to a sustainable economy or inclusion of significant sustainability measures, including remediation and reuse of brownfields.

Despite strengthening our commitment to equity within the content of this plan, the FLREDC recognizes that there is still substantial work to be done to effectively incorporate equity and inclusion into our regional strategy, as well as in facilitating the implementation of equitable economic growth. To do so, the FLREDC is committed to ongoing collaboration, exploration, and work related to the following areas in advance of the future funding opportunities:

- Enhance outreach to a broader set of potential applicants.
- Build a regional evaluation framework that better incorporates equity and inclusion into the Statewide CFA Endorsement Standards and more comprehensively supports the FLREDC members in the scoring process.
- Provide guidance for potential applicants regarding equity strategies and how to incorporate them into a project.

- Explore ways in which regional partners can support awarded projects in advancing proposed strategies, considering current programming and capacity, and then provide guidance to awarded projects on how to access that support.
- Determine how to measure and track equity outcomes, considering existing tools and methodologies (e.g. payroll reporting that small businesses utilize to receive the IRS Work Opportunity Tax Credit).
- Determine whether there are feasible methods to follow up with awarded applicants regarding equity strategies.

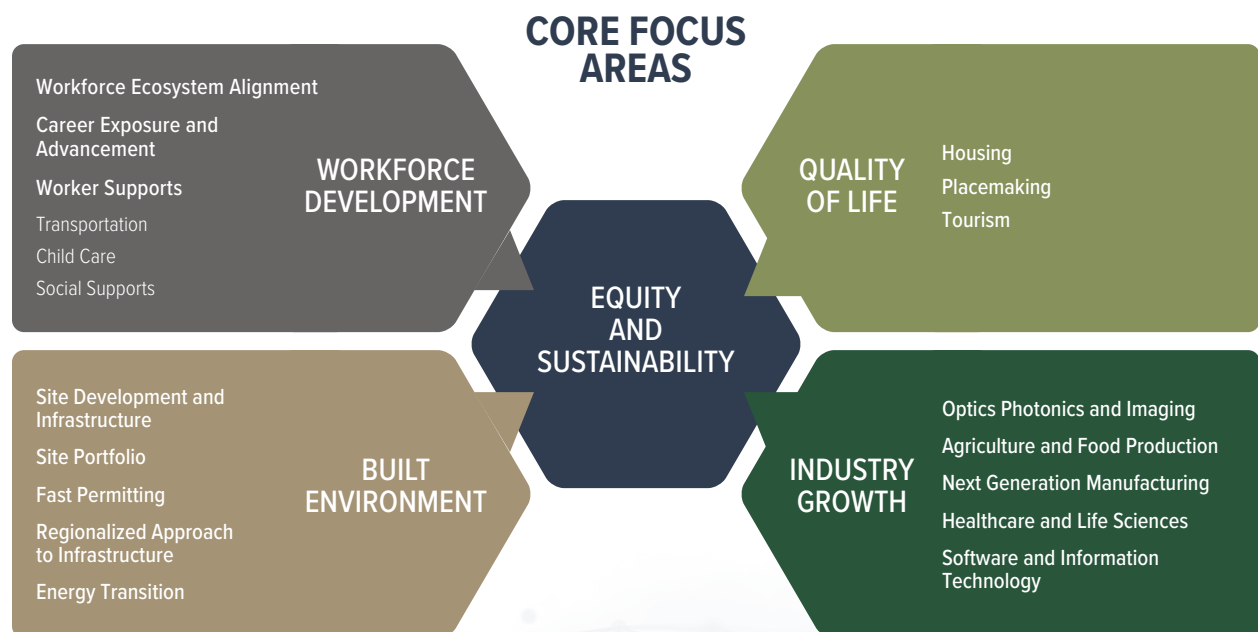
There will be challenges and limitations to address in doing this work, but it is worth doing. These challenges can also potentially be mitigated by making use of tools and strategies already implemented by regional partners, such as the *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)* developed by the Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council (GFLRPC).



▲ Mechatronics Bootcamp. Credit: Genesee County Economic Development Center

With the above objectives and priorities in focus, the FLREDC has designated four core focus areas for this Strategic Plan: Industry Growth, Built Environment, Workforce Development, and Quality of Life. In this past year alone, there have been multiple recognitions and

awards that point to our Region's capacity and ability to implement growth strategies, and we are now well positioned to leverage these efforts to advance our economic vision.



STRATEGY MAP

VISION A future where the Region's knowledge-based economy enables all people, communities, businesses, and ecosystems to thrive at rates that lead the nation.

TOPICS	TARGET AREAS	PEOPLE	COMMUNITIES	BUSINESSES
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historically-excluded populations Diversity (BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, Disability) Socioeconomic mobility Talent retention and attraction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban Suburban Rural
CORE FOCUS AREAS	QUALITY OF LIFE	Enhance access and availability to affordable "live/play" supports	Enhance community vibrancy through placemaking projects	Enhance and leverage community assets to attract new talent
	WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	Expand access and availability of affordable skills attainment and career pathways	Increase integration between community assets (e.g. public libraries) and regional workforce initiatives	Connect and accelerate employers' recruitment, hiring, and retention through regional workforce supports
	BUILT ENVIRONMENT	Regionalize infrastructure development to promote both expansion and cost effectiveness	Ensure community infrastructure meets current and future needs	Ensure regional infrastructure and local development can support critical requirements for attraction/expansion
	INDUSTRY GROWTH	Enable more access and availability of high-quality jobs with career pathways to earn at and beyond a living wage	Support communities in development opportunities to foster attraction and expansion of strategic industries	Identify, activate, and support growth within Region's strategic industry sectors

In late October 2023, the Buffalo-Rochester-Syracuse corridor was designated by the Biden Administration as one of 31 Tech Hubs through the CHIPS and Science Act. Spanning the Western New York, Finger Lakes, and Central New York regions, the NY SMART I-Corridor (New York Semiconductor Manufacturing and Research Technology Innovation Corridor) is activating a federally supported vision to become a global leader in semiconductor manufacturing over the next decade. The corridor builds on a rich inventory of assets across the entire semiconductor manufacturing value chain as well as undeniable momentum that includes:

- A growing semiconductor manufacturing base with over \$100B in planned fab investments,
- Over 100 existing supply chain providers in the semiconductor and semiconductor-adjacent industries,
- A concentration of world-leading scientific capabilities – in sensing, supply chain, and green tech – that position the corridor as the “go-to” location for innovation in semiconductor chip design, manufacturing, and testing, and

- The historic opportunity to leverage Governor Hochul's New York State Green CHIPS Program to accelerate industry attraction while balancing this economic opportunity with environmental sustainability.

The NY SMART I-Corridor represents the continued evolution of decades of successful collaboration across three Council Regions, highlighted by strong and enduring partnerships among the corridor's research universities and joint business attraction activities. **The Western New York, Finger Lakes, and Central New York Regional Councils are strongly committed to continue advancing shared priorities and leveraging complementary assets in support of the Tech Hub.**

MISSION Be a state and national leader in sustainable and equitable economic development

PRIORITIES



EFFECTIVENESS



INCLUSIVITY



ALIGNMENT



SUSTAINABILITY

WORKERS	COMMERCIAL DEVELOPERS	STARTUPS	INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecosystem Alignment • Career Exposure and Advancement • Worker Supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential • Industrial • Office/Healthcare • Retail • Brownfield/Historic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NextCorps • Luminate • Grow-NY • The Commissary • Cornell AgriTech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Tech Hub Designation • DoD/DoE/NSF Award Clusters • Excell Partners • The REMADE Institute • SBIR Clusters
Increase availability and access to affordable housing options	Encourage development with a focus on responsible and sustainable use	Leverage quality of life to attract, retain, and support early-stage companies	Leverage quality of life to attract, retain, and support world-class R&D talent
Ensure social supports to expand access to career and skill pathways	Invest in expanded career pathways for construction/building trades	Expand and diversify the talent pipeline and training resources available and affordable to startups	Unify high-demand skill sets across private, public, non-profit, and academic partners in the Region
Increase access to reliable, affordable broadband throughout the Region	Ensure regional infrastructure and local development can support critical requirements (time/cost)	Target and expand infrastructure and supports to aid early-stage growth requirements	Catalyze assets (e.g., UR LLE, RIT NanoLab, URM) with new investment to attract more R&D/commercialization
Align workforce development priorities to the near- and long- term needs of Region's industry sectors	Optimize Region's consumer and industry pipeline to balance supply and demand of in-Region development	Maintain and augment alignment of startup opportunities to Region's strategic industry sectors	Improve tech transfer and IP development to yield greater commercialization

In May 2023, the National Science Foundation awarded the University of Rochester a Regional Innovation Engines Development Award, which will bring together a variety of institutional, industrial, and business partners (including RIT, MCC, NextCorps, RochesterWorks!, Excell Partners, Greater Rochester Enterprise, SPIE, Optica, NY Photonics, AIM Photonics, and our many industry partners like Corning, L3Harris, Optimax, and General Atomics) to lay the groundwork for establishing an innovation and economic hub built around the “Science, Technology, and Engineering of Lasers and Laser Applications Research (STELLAR)” in the Rochester-Finger Lakes Region. Laser products are essential in a wide range of fields, including manufacturing, communications, inspection, environment sensing, defense, and security systems. But the manufacturing and packaging of lasers are increasingly being carried out overseas. At the same time, there’s a shortage of skilled workers in the optics and photonics industry. This effort will focus on building regional expertise and a diverse, workforce-focused laser ecosystem in the Region. This

emerging opportunity leverages scientific expertise from the Laboratory for Laser Energetics (LLE) at the University of Rochester, which expects to finalize a \$42 million expansion in spring 2024 with upgraded systems and expanded capabilities. This world-class asset helps advance materials science and energy research in collaboration with multiple Federal agencies.

While the federal Tech Hub and Regional Innovation Engine awards are only two examples, they clearly show our Region’s ability to collaborate and the resources we have at hand to build upon our existing innovation ecosystem and skill our Region’s workforce for high-tech, future-oriented jobs.



▲ NEXgistics Topping Out/Group Signing Beam (August 2023).
 Credit: Genesee County Economic Development Center



▲ Hunt Country Vineyards Bottling Line.
 Credit: Matt Kelly (Hunt Country Vineyards)

INDUSTRY GROWTH

This Strategic Plan maintains a focus on the target industry sectors first identified in the 2019 Plan update: optics, photonics and imaging; agriculture and food production; next generation manufacturing; healthcare and life sciences; and software and IT. Additionally, this plan emphasizes clean and renewable energy within the workforce development core focus area, which was introduced as a tradeable sector with growth potential in our 2022 workforce strategy. ROC2025 is also aligned with the FLREDC on these industry sectors, and works collaboratively with regional partners to implement marketing and accelerate growth through targeted initiatives focused on talent attraction and retention as well as business expansion, retention, and attraction. Innovation within these sectors has been at the core of regional growth over the last decade, and we believe it will continue to drive economic growth and prosperity into the future. By continuing support for ROC2025 to build regional capacity and strengthen ties between our employers and our nationally recognized educational institutions, we will enable the creation of new technologies and opportunities for our Region and beyond.

The regional, sector-based strategies from past Strategic Plan updates provided a solid foundation for future projects and expanded, initiative-based strategies presented in this Plan. Other core areas of the updated Plan address industry growth opportunities by growing the talent pipeline, aligning workforce training programs to the evolving needs of employers (including automation, recruitment, retention, and retirement), and continuing support for small- and medium-sized businesses to compete across their industries' full value chains.

Throughout this plan, we highlight **transformative projects** that have been supported by the FLREDC and other aligned State funding partners. These projects, along with other priority projects, have laid the groundwork for our Region's economic development success.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Our strategies for economic growth and sustainability require renewed investment in the built environment. Shovel-ready sites with efficient development processes are more important than ever to compete for business attraction and expansion opportunities. Further, only by expanding and updating water, sewer, electrical, broadband, and transportation infrastructure can businesses and communities succeed. By ensuring our systems are well-maintained and updated to utilize clean energy and deploy sustainable technologies, our Region will be well-positioned for expected population growth and resiliency in the face of climate change. Other overlapping built-environment priorities, specifically housing and placemaking, are included within the Quality of Life Core Focus Area below.



▲ Rochester Regional Health, Batavia
📷 Credit: Genesee County Economic Development Center

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In 2022, the FLREDC's Workforce and Talent Workgroup developed a Workforce Development Strategy in response to persistent labor and skill shortages for employers throughout the Region. Substantial State and regional investments in workforce development have been made since the creation of our 2011 Strategic Plan, including the establishment of the New York State Office of Strategic Workforce Development. However, there are still challenges in delivering effective and widespread supports, services, and trainings to populations who have the potential to bring new and expanded value to the economy. Building off of the 2022 strategy, the FLREDC will focus on three pillars that we believe will provide more equitable and transparent access to workforce development:

1. the creation of an aligned and collaborative ecosystem of workforce development and wraparound service providers;
2. expanding and enhancing opportunities for career exposure, placement, and advancement; and
3. providing individualized social and community supports that will help and empower individuals to overcome barriers to employment. Equitable access to employment and the provision of wraparound services are critical to unlocking the labor and skill value of our residents, and central to the workforce development strategies across our priority industry sectors.

QUALITY OF LIFE

The rich array of natural, cultural, and recreational opportunities in the Finger Lakes Region contributes to a great quality of life and expansive tourism industry. However, there is still work to do to retain and attract new talent and ensure that residents of our Region live full and quality lives. Like in many communities across the State and country, the availability, quality, and affordability of housing is becoming an increasing concern. In a recent quality of life survey conducted during the strategic planning process, resident respondents requested that housing be a top area of focus for the FLREDC in the coming years. In addition, efforts to strengthen placemaking and tourism, a known economic driver and opportunity to leave a positive first impression, would continue to make the Region more attractive. However, we need to be cautious not to over-use our natural resources and to instead prioritize development that leverages existing infrastructure. We also recognize the need to ensure that the benefits of quality of life improvements are felt by everyone. Responsible growth will ultimately broaden the tax base and boost the Region's economy, allowing for municipalities to create, maintain, update, and protect amenities, resources, and services.



▲ New build Butler Till downtown Rochester headquarters. Credit: Butler Till

STATE OF THE REGION

The Finger Lakes Region, renowned for its natural beauty and agricultural products, continues to recover from the pandemic alongside the rest of the nation. The past few years saw many new jobs and businesses, many of them aligned with the diligent efforts of community stakeholders in advancing the Region's economic development strategies. State grants and development programs like the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) and NY Forward have helped to beautify and promote interest in high-potential village, town, and city downtowns throughout our Region. The projects that have come to fruition with the aid of these resources have laid the groundwork for future development and are unlocking new opportunities. Amid this progress, the Finger Lakes must contend with significant structural challenges, including continued labor shortages, stagnant population growth, and uncertainty about a potential national economic slowdown. With this in mind, the FLREDC undertook an inclusive planning process to update its Strategic Plan, which has undergone updates since its creation in 2011. Strategic Plan updates in the past led to the creation of ROC2025 and other organizations that facilitate economic growth in our Region. The updates laid out in this Strategic Plan will encourage not only economic

growth, but also the protection of natural resources and more inclusive distribution of the benefits of that growth across communities and populations. To ensure that no one is left behind in this next chapter of our economic growth, the FLREDC and its partners developed this strategy update through the lens of equity and sustainability.

INDUSTRY & EMPLOYMENT¹

The Finger Lakes Region experienced job growth of approximately 3%, or 18,000 jobs, between 2013 and 2019. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the devastating loss of over 46,000 jobs. However, the Region sprung back and has since recovered over 28,000 jobs. This signals that the Region's growth and mitigation efforts have been successful, positioning the Region for net job growth and completed recovery in the coming years.

There are many examples of companies in the Finger Lakes' target industry sectors with recent and planned job expansions, and these are dependent on the quality of the Region's workforce development system. Examples of these expansions, some secured with the assistance of ESD investments, include:

- Corning Incorporated is expanding its operations at two locations in Monroe County to increase its manufacturing, administrative, and laser optics production operations. The combined \$137m investment is anticipated to create 270 new jobs when completed, as well as better serve the rapidly growing semiconductor market.
- AMD, a California-based semiconductor design company, has chosen to grow its business in Monroe County in the Finger Lakes Region and Dutchess County in the Mid-Hudson Region. The company anticipates adding 165 new jobs by 2025 between the two regions.
- Dairy product manufacturer HP Hood recently committed to creating up to 48 new jobs in Genesee County, adding to the 400 already employed. Coca-Cola plans to build a \$650 million fairlife production facility in Monroe County that will create up to 250 new jobs. The completion and operation of this dairy plant—the largest in the Northeast—positions New York State to be the third-largest producer of milk products in the nation.

Finger Lakes Region Industries

INDUSTRY	JOBS				CHANGE NUMBER/PERCENTAGE					
	2013	2019	2020	2023	2013 -2019	2013 -2019	2020 -2023	2013 -2023	2013 -2023	2013 -2023
11 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	11,392	10,860	10,675	10,212	-532	-4.7%	-463	-4.3%	-1,180	-10.4%
21 Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	570	721	697	821	151	26.5%	124	17.8%	251	44.0%
22 Utilities	1,661	1,704	1,635	1,554	43	2.6%	-81	-5.0%	-107	-6.4%
23 Construction	24,182	26,890	25,318	28,479	2,708	11.2%	3,161	12.5%	4,297	17.8%
31 Manufacturing	67,141	65,097	61,670	63,678	-2,044	-3.0%	2,008	3.3%	-3,463	-5.2%
42 Wholesale Trade	17,646	17,737	16,779	16,705	91	0.5%	-74	-0.4%	-941	-5.3%
44 Retail Trade	64,128	61,552	57,379	59,975	-2,576	-4.0%	2,596	4.5%	-4,153	-6.5%
48 Transportation and Warehousing	10,567	13,354	13,262	16,486	2,787	26.4%	3,224	24.3%	5,919	56.0%
51 Information	9,120	8,129	6,985	6,408	-991	-10.9%	-577	-8.3%	-2,712	-29.7%
52 Finance and Insurance	16,562	17,229	17,127	17,213	667	4.0%	86	0.5%	651	3.9%
53 Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	8,087	8,584	7,922	8,762	497	6.1%	840	10.6%	675	8.3%
54 Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	29,217	31,570	30,473	32,336	2,353	8.1%	1,863	6.1%	3,119	10.7%
55 Management of Companies and Enterprises	12,457	10,255	9,747	11,365	-2,202	-17.7%	1,618	16.6%	-1,092	-8.8%
56 Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	30,600	32,490	28,245	28,049	1,890	6.2%	-196	-0.7%	-2,551	-8.3%
61 Educational Services	34,443	37,339	36,865	33,720	2,896	8.4%	-3,145	-8.5%	-723	-2.1%
62 Health Care and Social Assistance	83,518	93,884	89,299	92,404	10,366	12.4%	3,105	3.5%	8,886	10.6%
71 Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	10,273	11,684	7,608	10,441	1,411	13.7%	2,833	37.2%	168	1.6%
72 Accommodation and Food Services	41,268	43,726	33,100	41,702	2,458	6.0%	8,602	26.0%	434	1.1%
81 Other Services (Except Public Administration)	26,313	24,457	21,707	22,455	-1,856	-7.1%	748	3.4%	-3,858	-14.7%
90 Government	91,349	91,466	85,266	85,969	117	0.1%	703	0.8%	-5,380	-5.9%
99 Unclassified Industry	648	579	559	1,693	-69	-10.6%	1,134	202.9%	1,045	161.3%
Totals	591,142	609,306	562,318	590,428	18,164	3.1%	28,110	5.0%	-714	-0.1%

Our economy has reshaped itself in last decade in response to changing technology and community needs and skills. A number of sectors were already contracting prior to the pandemic, which exacerbated losses that continue today.² Other sectors have seen recent job growth that exceeds the number of jobs lost from the pandemic. These sectors generally suffered the most from lockdowns and travel restrictions, and also received substantial support that enabled them to recover faster and become more resilient. Now, sectors like arts, entertainment, and recreation; accommodation and food services; construction; and professional, scientific, and technical services represent important sources of current and future employment. Their continued strong growth demonstrates not only the success of pandemic-era social and business supports, but also the growing skillsets and development interest in these sectors for our Region. Of particular note, the government sector contracted the most of any sector over the past decade, with a loss of 5,380 (5.9%) jobs. In contrast, the health care and social assistance sector grew the most over the same period, with 8,886 new jobs, a 10.6% increase.

¹ Industry and employment data is sourced from Lightcast and is seasonally adjusted.

² These industry sectors are: agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; manufacturing; retail trade; information; management of companies and enterprises; and other services (except public administration).

INCOME & HOUSING³

The Finger Lakes Region has a median household income of \$66,174, which is expected to increase 10.8% to \$73,309 by 2028. Monroe County, home to the City of Rochester, is expected to be a key driver of this income growth as higher-paying jobs and highly skilled individuals continue to gravitate toward metropolitan population centers. Monroe County also boasts the second-highest median home value in the Region—after Ontario County—at \$195,615, a testament to the value residents place on living in or near urban areas.

The supply and attainability of housing have become critical issues in recent years. The Region has relatively affordable housing compared to the State as a whole,³ with median sales prices in Q3 2023 ranging from \$168,250 in Orleans County to \$280,000 in Ontario County compared to the State median sale price of \$400,000. That being said, all except two counties in the Region saw a greater increase in median sale price from Q3 2022 to Q3 2023

than the State as a whole. This dynamic has varying impacts. Rapidly increasing housing costs are a concern for existing residents, particularly those of lower income. However, the relative affordability of housing in the Finger Lakes represents an important economic and community advantage amid the national housing affordability crisis.

In the Finger Lakes, over 60% of homeowner households have incomes sufficient to afford typical mortgages without being considered cost-burdened,⁴ and roughly 75% of renter households have incomes high enough to afford regional rental rates without being cost-burdened. However, this still means that one-third of homeowners and a quarter of renters in the Region are cost-burdened by housing, which is particularly concerning as costs continue to rise. This is a considerable threat to the Region's quality of life, economic security, and demographic future. Additionally, in the counties of Ontario, Seneca, and Yates, median home values are expected to grow faster than incomes, which threatens to price some current residents out of the market and increase housing insecurity. Governor Hochul's Pro-Housing Communities Program will be an important resource for our communities in addressing this challenge.

³ Income and housing data is sourced from Esri.

⁴ Source: New York State Association of REALTORS, Inc. (NYSAR) 3rd Quarter 2023 Quarterly Indicators Report.

⁵ Cost-burdened households are defined as those which spend more than 30% of household income on housing.

UNEMPLOYMENT & LABOR FORCE⁶

Unemployment rates across New York State have decreased from historic highs in 2020 and early 2021. Individuals and employers across the Region have adapted to the new normal, and the Region's unemployment rate stands at 3.2% as of September 2023—almost a full percentage point lower than the statewide figure of 4.0%. After the initial shock of the pandemic shutdowns, the Region's unemployment rate came down faster and has stayed lower than the State's. Further, all of the Region's counties had rates below 3.5% despite across the board increases compared to September 2022.

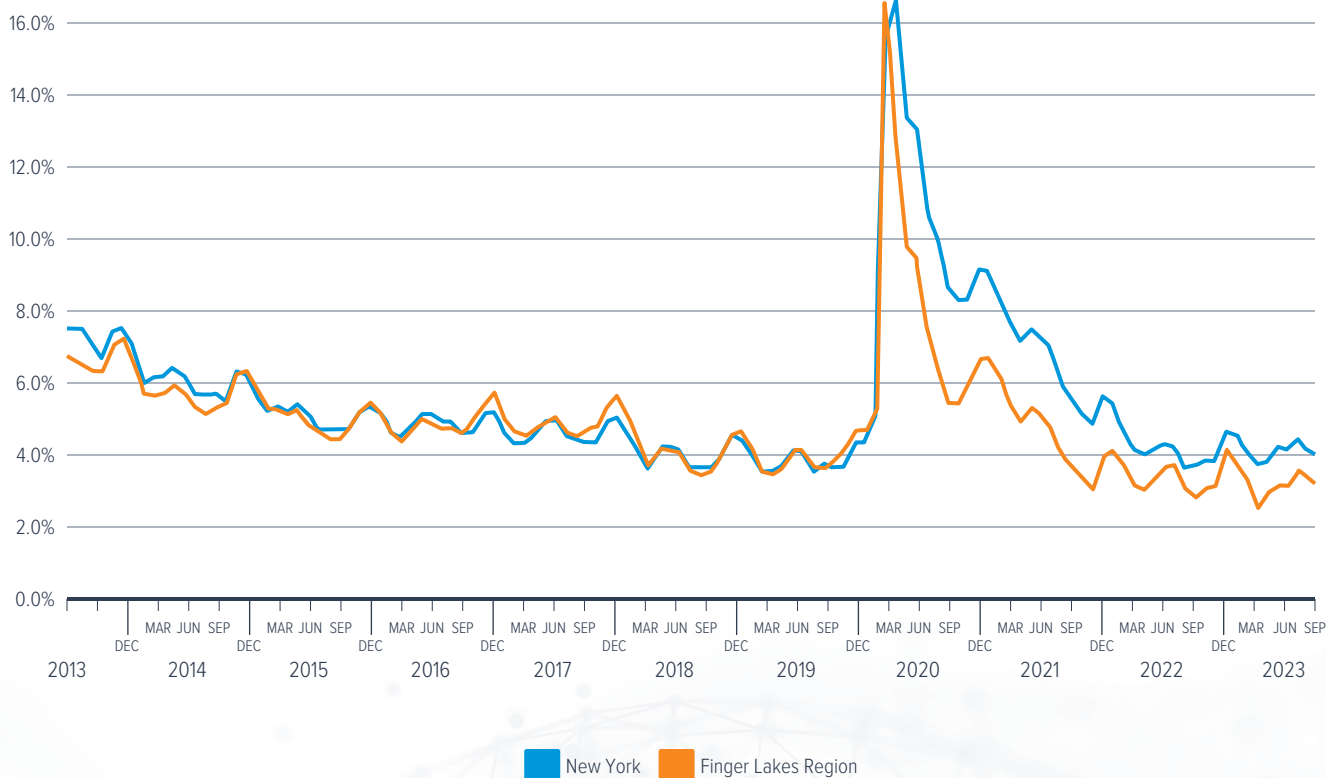
⁶ Unemployment and labor force data sourced from NYS Department of Labor Local Area Unemployment Statistics.

Labor shortages are a known obstacle for businesses in the Region, and this challenge continues to be a critical area of focus for the FLREDC, especially as it becomes clearer that nationwide structural labor market challenges are enduring well past the pandemic recovery period. Across the Region, labor force participation is improving. From September of 2022 to October of this year, the Region saw an increase of 6,600 individuals in the labor force, two-thirds of which is generated by the increase in Monroe County. The counties of Orleans, Wyoming, and Yates have experienced no or small improvements in labor force participation. Despite more individuals entering the labor force this year, each county in the Region still falls below pre-pandemic levels by as many as 1,300 individuals. The efforts of the FLREDC to strengthen the Region’s workforce have been important to the viability of the industries that call the Finger Lakes home, and the livelihoods of those they employ. Additional focus on creating a more inclusive workforce will only continue to bolster our Region’s industries and businesses into the future.

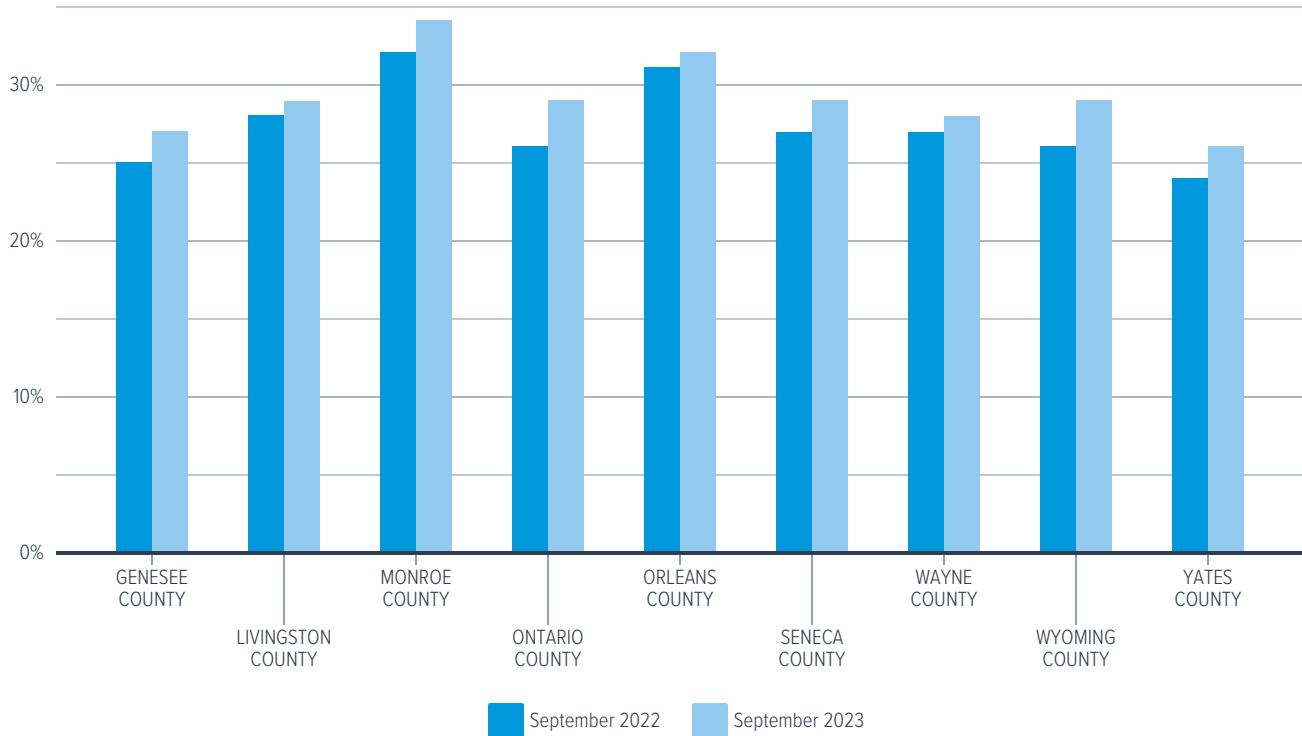
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Targeted and sustained investment in workforce development is vital to the Finger Lakes’ vision of economic vitality and broadly shared prosperity. This means supporting the creation of training opportunities that align with the needs of regional employers, that are accessible for all of our residents, and that address skill gaps that hamper the growth of our target industry sectors. Those skill gaps are very apparent in our agribusiness, life sciences, and technology and electronics industry clusters, which demand specialized skills that are in short supply in the Region’s pool of online job-seeker profiles. By better aligning training offerings to these skill requirements and emphasizing job placement as an outcome, the Finger Lakes can mitigate labor constraints on industry growth while preparing people for viable careers that can sustain their families and grow community wealth.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE SEPTEMBER 2013 – SEPTEMBER 2023



UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY COUNTY YEAR OVER YEAR



The Finger Lakes has already begun to benefit from investments from Governor Hochul's new Office of Strategic Workforce Development (OSWD), having already received \$3.3 million in OSWD grants and matching funds over just two award rounds to invest in workforce development initiatives led by Rochester Institute of Technology and RochesterWorks.⁷ This will continue to be an important resource for Finger Lakes stakeholders as we work together to strengthen industry-driven training, reach untapped labor pools, and ensure that residents benefit more equitably from future economic growth.

That said, the Finger Lakes' economic successes have not reached every household. Eleven percent of our population lives below the poverty level, 26% of households include at least one individual with a disability, 9.6% of households lack access to a vehicle, and one in five individuals is over the age of 65.⁸ Segments of these populations are economically vulnerable, finding it more difficult to obtain and maintain employment, depriving the Region of valuable workers. People without access to reliable transportation or affordable child care face particular barriers to maintaining employment and lack flexibility in pursuing jobs with greater opportunities for advancement. The



▲ Announcement of ROCSEEDS project, funded with NYS OSWD.

Pictured; Tyrone Reaves, Dave Seeley and Amber Rangel.

📷 Credit: RochesterWorks

Region must work to improve public transportation, ensure greater access to affordable child care, and provide other wraparound services that address various employment barriers that artificially constrain our labor pool.

⁷ These awards are from the first two rounds only. OSWD published its first progress report and comprehensive award listing in April 2023, before the third round of grants was awarded in June 2023.

⁸ Sourced from Esri.

STATUS OF PAST CFA PROJECTS

Since the FLREDC was established in 2011, 281 priority projects have been awarded over the course of 11 application rounds. Of these, 192 (68%) have been completed or are expected to be completed on schedule. Meanwhile, 11 are behind schedule and 78 are not underway yet, facing challenges, or have been canceled. The 208 projects that are completed or still underway represent \$163.3 million in REDC project awards and leverage \$1.1 billion from other funding sources. The Appendix provides an overview and listing of all previously funded priority projects.

SUMMARY STATUS OF PAST PRIORITY PROJECTS BY ROUND

Status	Round I	Round II	Round III	Round IV	Round V	Round VI	Round VII	Round VIII	Round IX	Round XI	Round XII	Total
●	6	19	13	22	21	13	8	11	-	-	-	113
●	-	-	-	4	3	8	13	10	9	20	12	79
●	1	-	-	1	4	1	1	-	1	-	2	11
●	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	4
●	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
●	1	10	3	15	13	6	8	8	3	5	1	73
Total	8	29	16	42	41	29	30	29	13	28	16	281

- Project is complete
- Project is on schedule
- Project is progressing more slowly than anticipated
- Project concerns need to be resolved
- Project contract not yet executed
- Project canceled or funding declined

LEVERAGE OF STATE INVESTMENT IN ALL PAST PRIORITY PROJECTS

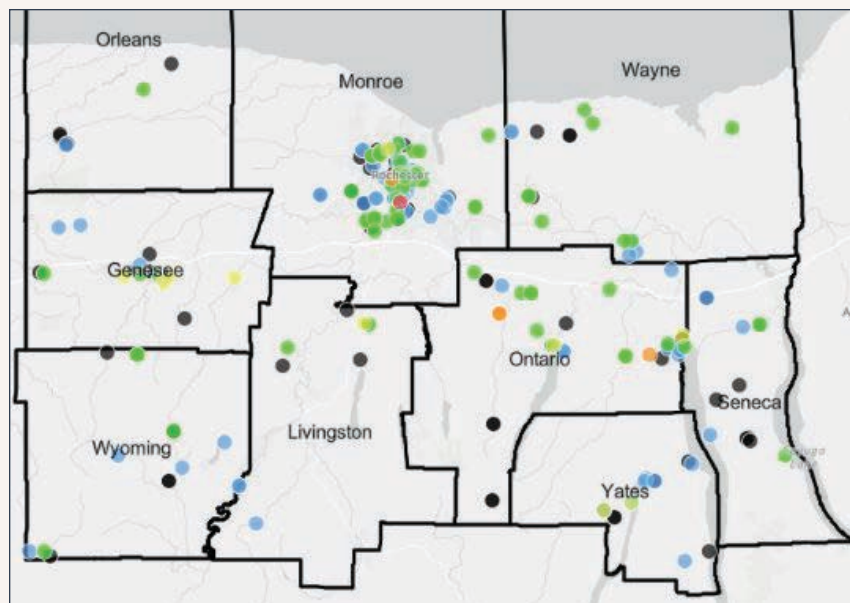
The table below lists the ratio of the total investment in past priority projects to the state investment over Rounds I through XII of the REDC.

Round	Total Number of Priority Projects	Total Amount of Priority Project Awards	Total Project Cost	Ratio of Award Amounts to Total Project Cost
Round I	7	\$10,350,000	\$26,428,836	1:2.55
Round II	19	\$22,990,518	\$198,019,539	1:8.61
Round III	13	\$6,609,134	\$108,165,405	1:16.37
Round IV	27	\$23,364,587	\$142,627,143	1:6.1
Round V	28	\$24,337,000	\$205,634,250	1:8.45
Round VI	23	\$17,586,470	\$173,146,762	1:9.85
Round VII	22	\$8,088,055	\$54,405,267	1:6.73
Round VIII	21	\$14,209,169	\$123,103,203	1:8.66
Round IX	10	\$5,551,571	\$34,554,167	1:6.22
Round XI	23	\$19,455,996	\$112,386,933	1:5.78
Round XII	15	\$10,712,000	\$77,782,364	1:7.26
Total	208	\$163,254,500	\$1,256,253,869	1:7.7

Project data is updated through October 2023. For additional analysis and full appendix of all projects, please visit <https://regionalcouncils.ny.gov/finger-lakes> to view the Project Tracking Dashboard.

GEORGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PAST PRIORITY PROJECTS







- | | |
|---|---|
| ● Project is complete | ● Project concerns need to be resolved |
| ● Project is on schedule | ● Project contract not yet executed |
| ● Project is progressing more slowly than anticipated | ● Project canceled or funding declined |









SUMMARY STATUS OF ALL PAST PROJECTS

OVERVIEW OF ALL PREVIOUSLY FUNDED CFA PROJECTS

Since the inception of the FLREDC, 1,253 projects have been funded to further the goals laid out in the original Strategic Plan, with 1,056 (84%) completed or anticipated to be completed on schedule. To date, 1,097 of the 1,253 projects have continued to progress, representing \$503.1 million in CFA awards. These projects have leveraged over \$2.9 billion of non-CFA funding, and are projected to create 6,852 jobs and retain an additional 23,076 jobs in the Region.

Status	Round I	Round II	Round III	Round IV	Round V	Round VI	Round VII	Round VIII	Round IX	Round X	Round XI	Round XII	Total
	86	64	82	78	99	70	58	61	28	5	-	-	631
	2	2	2	9	15	12	44	74	88	125	52	-	425
	1	-	1	2	4	2	2	-	6	2	2	-	22
	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	1	7	4	-	17
	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
	12	22	14	18	25	14	16	14	11	8	2	-	156
Total	101	88	99	107	143	100	122	152	134	147	60	-	1253

-  Project is complete
-  Project concerns need to be resolved
-  Project is on schedule
-  Project contract not yet executed
-  Project is progressing more slowly than anticipated
-  Project canceled or funding declined

LEVERAGE OF STATE INVESTMENT IN ALL CFA PROJECTS

Round	Total # of Awards	Total Amount of All CFA Awards	Total Project Cost	Ratio of Award Amount to Total Project Cost
Round I	89	\$59,570,265	\$281,782,167	1:4.73
Round II	66	\$36,731,640	\$241,156,248	1:6.57
Round III	85	\$22,965,505	\$227,208,057	1:9.89
Round IV	89	\$33,337,193	\$181,549,820	1:5.45
Round V	118	\$54,805,463	\$498,943,195	1:9.1
Round VI	86	\$31,279,414	\$228,702,168	1:7.31
Round VII	106	\$35,502,912	\$135,148,138	1:3.81
Round VIII	138	\$57,309,535	\$372,519,367	1:6.5
Round IX	123	\$44,786,061	\$270,410,670	1:6.04
Round XI	139	\$93,197,724	\$866,609,519	1:9.3
Round XII	58	\$33,617,712	\$129,827,500	1:3.86
Total	1097	\$503,103,424	\$3,433,856,847	1:6.83

JOB CREATION IN ALL CFA PROJECTS

The table below lists the total number of permanent jobs retained and created through the CFA.

Round	Projected Jobs Created	Projected Jobs Retained	Total
Round I	310	628	938
Round II	743	603	1346
Round III	87	176	263
Round IV	214	941	1155
Round V	474	1465	1939
Round VI	69	1294	1363
Round VII	551	1966	2517
Round VIII	895	6100	6995
Round IX	1671	3188	4859
Round XI	1305	5605	6910
Round XII	533	1110	1643
Total	6852	23076	29928

PART 2

REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE AND PARTICIPATION

The timing of the Finger Lakes' Strategic Plan update has put our Region in the unique position to be a State and national leader in ethical, meaningful economic development. Our economic vision for our Region's future is one where quality of life and the protection of our natural resources are central components of our economic success, balancing environmental stewardship, social equity, the built environment, and industry growth. This will enable all people, businesses, communities, and ecosystems to thrive.

Growth frequently takes center stage in economic development strategic plans, and for good reason; it sustains a flow of revenue and innovation that improves the Region's ability to provide for residents and businesses alike. In the past, economic growth was seen as synonymous with improvements in standards of living. But growth can also be inequitable and environmentally detrimental. Our Region has grown more conscious of the ways in which portions of our population have been historically excluded from economic opportunity, and more aware of the environmental externalities of our economic activities and ways of life.

The FLREDC and its partners recognize our responsibility to change these patterns. In pursuing the next wave of opportunity, we must be intentional about promoting both equity and sustainability, which are often interconnected. Additionally, the FLREDC must consider the vast array of platforms that constitute the concept of equity and how they can differ, particularly between urban and rural

areas. We must consider inequity related to race, religion, and gender, and also acknowledge the widening gaps in wealth, education, and skills. The strategies in this Plan are designed to shape a regional economy that is prosperous for all and values our natural resources as a driver rather than an input. We must foster investments that value long-term outcomes over short-term gains, and that are actively inclusive of diverse populations. Economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social equity are not mutually exclusive. In fact, by playing a leading role in the shift to sustainability and equity, our Region's industries will gain a competitive edge amid growing environmental regulatory and market pressures, and benefit from a stronger and more diverse workforce. Resilience and broadly shared prosperity will be hallmarks of our economic future.

Our Region is ready to advance this vision by infusing our decision-making with considerations of equity and sustainability. This will be reflected in the ways that the FLREDC evaluates and prioritizes investments in our Region. We will intentionally be inclusive, flexible, and mindful of the nuances of our communities' needs and desires. We will cultivate change in patterns of economic exclusion and environmental degradation. Only this will lead to a future in our Region where prosperity is enjoyed throughout our communities and among all of our residents and businesses.



CORE FOCUS AREA 1

Industry Growth

The FLREDC reaffirms prioritization of the same high-growth industry sectors that were identified in the Region's 2019 Strategic Plan update: optics, photonics and imaging; agriculture and food production; next generation manufacturing; healthcare and life sciences; and software and information technology. These sectors, which align with statewide target industries, have endured, experiencing considerable growth and benefiting the Region and our residents. For instance, the Finger Lakes Region is ranked first in the nation for per capita patents in optics, photonics, and imaging (OPI), while health care and social assistance was the fastest-growing sector over the past decade, increasing by 10.6%. The growth of these sectors creates broader economic opportunities for the Region and its residents. These sectors also drive a greater demand for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) occupations, helping to attract a highly skilled workforce and retain recent graduates from the Region's colleges and universities. Moreover, statistics from the New York State Department of Labor suggest the median wage of STEM occupations is \$68,360 a year, which is 42% higher than the median annual wage of \$48,130 for all workers in the Region.

Previous updates to the Strategic Plan provided sector-driven, asset-based strategies, including nurturing startups and accelerating commercialization opportunities. This update, while including and furthering many strategies of past Plans, also provides initiative-based recommendations that support multiple sectors and can be generalized to the Region. Implementation of such initiatives will largely be carried out by regional partners focused on regionwide business growth. For example, Greater Rochester Enterprise (GRE) currently manages an extensive pipeline of business attraction and expansion projects in target industry sectors through coordinated, regionwide relationship management. This established approach enables the Region to coordinate and streamline the engagement between a company's management teams and the Region's critical assets and stakeholders needed to meet critical growth requirements.

In addition to the strategies in this section, other Core Focus Areas will support industry growth through:

- 1 Talent recruitment (Quality of Life);**
- 2 Talent development (Workforce Development);**
- 3 Alignment of workforce training programs with evolving employer and industry needs (Workforce Development); and**
- 4 Facility and site development (Built Environment).**

Any one of the Core Focus Areas cannot be wholly successful on its own. Only progress across all 4 areas will advance our Economic Vision comprehensively.

Additionally, the Region will prioritize projects that enhance the economic participation of historically excluded populations, address social and economic disparities, and proactively consider equity and sustainability to ensure that the benefits of success are shared by all.

Regional and National Marketing

A sustained, well-resourced, and integrated marketing campaign is essential to ensuring the Region is increasingly part of the consideration set for talent and business. FLREDC seeks to support the continuation and expansion of ROC2025's "Greater ROC" campaign, the most significant, coordinated regional branding and marketing campaign in the Region's history. The Greater ROC initiative is reclaiming and reasserting the Region's story and visibility, elevating its reputation and profile as a place to live, work, play, and start or grow a business. As a fully integrated campaign, the effort connects and amplifies the Region's brand identity and key messaging across all economic development verticals, including business attraction, talent attraction and retention, and tourism, with targeted media buys both in-region and in key markets that align with our business and talent attraction objectives. Importantly, Greater ROC amplifies the stories and voices of residents, generating a bold and authentic message to broadcast.

Our Region can easily leverage its rich history of success, including in innovation, sustainability, and equity, to tell a story about our future economy. For example, the collective contributions from scientists, engineers, and supporters made possible the launch of the James Webb Space Telescope, which continues to define a new era of astronomy and demonstrate the Region's enduring strengths in optics and imaging. Industry-academic collaborations contribute to an abundance of regional intellectual assets. Upon its completion, the Region will also be home to the largest green hydrogen plant in North America, which combines the geographic proximity to clean hydropower with deep, technological knowhow to develop and commercialize fuel cells at a global scale. Similarly, remanufacturing and reuse have built on the Region's commitment to being a leader in sustainability and advanced manufacturing, including leveraging partnerships with higher education institutions to create new uses for obsolete components and modules. Meanwhile, the Region continues to take steps to promote upward mobility for more residents to participate in the regional economy. This includes the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative, which accelerated the number of "Level Up Champions" by 300% between 2021 and 2022. In total, 115 Level Champions have committed to wages of \$15 per hour or more, which helped increase wages for more than 12,000 jobs. We are poised to build on this history of innovation and industrial expertise and to collaboratively seize on new economic opportunities and emerging technologies.

Startups and Innovation

Entrepreneurs built our Region. The 2015 FLX Forward Upstate Revitalization Initiative Plan called for the Region to nurture start-ups, enable small businesses, and facilitate industrial research and development, particularly within the optics sector. Today, the Finger Lakes is a hub of innovation and entrepreneurship, and recent strategic investments have strengthened our startup ecosystem to better serve and capitalize enterprises across sectors. We must continue to foster a regional culture that encourages this innovation and entrepreneurship in order to be a place where new industries grow and existing businesses thrive by leveraging new technologies and products.

Within the Finger Lakes Region, Excell Partners and NextCorps, both affiliates of the University of Rochester, are among the local organizations that play critical roles in catalyzing entrepreneurial success. Excell, a venture capital firm, provides funding and guidance to high-growth startups with disruptive technologies. NextCorps offers a suite of business incubation and acceleration programs and services that have helped to put the Finger Lakes on the map as a leading technological hub. Our Region will also be shaped by the current wave of federal place-based economic development investments, including the U.S. Economic Development Administration's Tech Hubs and the National Science Foundation's Regional Innovation Engines programs, which aim to strengthening economic and national security by driving regional growth through collaborative consortia of diverse public, private, and academic partners.



LUMINATE

Luminate, a program of NextCorps, is the world's largest startup accelerator for companies working on technologies enabled by optics, photonics, and imaging (OPI). Luminate brings entrepreneurs from around the world together with OPI pioneers and qualified investors to speed innovation and time to market. Since its inception, Luminate has invested \$18 million in 63 startups. The companies in the portfolio now share a net worth of more than \$650 million.

The “NY SMART I-Corridor Tech Hub,” which includes Rochester and the Finger Lakes in its footprint, has received a federal Tech Hub designation. Its focus on enhancing semiconductor and related component manufacturing will require significant innovation powered by existing industry, startups, and higher education institutions. Concurrently, the National Science Foundation awarded the University of Rochester a \$1 million regional Innovation Engines Development Award grant to begin developing the next generation of lasers. These programs, along with our Region’s roots in optics and laser technology, position the Region well to create a world-class high-tech manufacturing ecosystem that nurtures and grows a diverse workforce and cutting-edge research and development. This will allow our businesses and communities to participate in and benefit from a national effort to reestablish U.S. global competitiveness.

Entrepreneurship is not easy, especially in an economy with increasing costs, stricter regulations, and complicated resource networks. Business incubators and accelerators like those offered by NextCorps provide young enterprises with critical supports as they develop and refine their business models, products and services, and capital stacks. Expanding access to capital is critical for our startup ecosystem. Luminare and Grow-NY, two annual competitions for new, growing companies, represent some of our largest target industries (optics and agribusiness, respectively) and are part of a larger, ongoing strategy of investments to grow these sectors regionally. Further, the coaching and mentoring services provided by these business incubator, accelerator, and competition networks are critical to startups’ commercialization journey. Entrepreneurial support services are an important component of the “economic gardening” approach valued in the Finger Lakes, including via the formal Economic Gardening program managed by GRE in partnership with the National Center for Economic Gardening where resources are deployed to help businesses and industries grow from within. In addition, the Region provides tailored resources to underrepresented founders, as Excell does for minority- and women-owned businesses. These ventures represent substantial potential for growth that will make our Region’s economy more robust, resilient, and equitable.



GROW-NY

Grow-NY is a food and agriculture competition that encourages innovation. Each year, \$3 million is awarded to seven finalists, \$1 million of which is awarded to the winner. The competition encourages companies to grow roots in our Region by connecting them with local industry partners and facilitating business development trips and mentorships.

Startups and innovation also have the potential to produce technologies that contend with rapidly evolving climate concerns and energy demands. Clean energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable practices are overarching themes throughout this Strategic Plan, and the startup ecosystem will be central in shaping the future of many regional industries that are involved in the energy transition, creating innovative solutions that will reduce our carbon footprint and lead to a more sustainable future.

Industry and University Collaboration

The Finger Lakes is home to a multitude of higher education institutions, including the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), the University of Rochester, SUNY Geneseo, SUNY Brockport, Cornell AgriTech, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, several other private colleges, and multiple SUNY community college campuses. Collaboration between these institutions and our regional businesses breeds innovation, research and development, and economic growth. The Region is home to several university-based R&D centers that work hand-in-hand with industry to develop new products and processes, adopt new technologies, and solve growth challenges, including RIT’s Center of Excellence in Advanced and Sustainable Manufacturing; RIT’s Additive



► 2023 CollegeFest. Credit: Mountain House Media

and Multifunctional Printing Center; the University of Rochester's Center of Excellence in Data Science, its Center for Emerging and Innovative Sciences, its Laboratory for Laser Energetics, and its Institute of Optics; the REMADE Institute; AIM Photonics; the NYS Pollution Prevention Institute; and more. Industry-academic collaboration has also seeded other initiatives to address gaps in our innovation economy.

Seminars, workshops, networking sessions, and other events are important ways to bring academic researchers and industry leaders together to promote knowledge exchange and spark collaboration around emerging opportunities. CampusROC's CollegeFest, created by the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce and ROC2025, is an annual celebration of college students that highlights internship and job opportunities and features workshops. Industry-academic collaboration is an engine for innovation and economic competitiveness, and these dynamics make our Region more attractive to high-caliber students and businesses.

Rochester Area Colleges, Inc. is a consortium of 19 colleges that meets regularly to facilitate resource sharing, as well as provides a central point of contact for the Region's higher education providers. While the group has traditionally engaged in collaborative career development opportunities and job placement services, there is an opportunity for the Region to foster partnerships that would leverage the strengths of the consortium. The Rochester Area Colleges platform can bring established enterprises and startups into the discussion, facilitating broad contact between our higher education sector and business sector to advance our workforce development and business growth strategies.

Conclusion

The Rochester metro is the country's #1 metro for innovation leadership potential, as ranked by the Technology Hub Index System developed by MIT economists Jonathan Gruber and Simon Johnson. This index reveals that the Finger Lakes has a powerful dose of all the ingredients needed for successful innovation-led growth, including quality research universities, a skilled and diverse workforce pipeline, sources of R&D, patent activity, and quality of life. We are home to a rich innovation ecosystem anchored by research-intensive industries, leading academic institutions, and a network of entrepreneurial support and investment organizations. At this juncture, we as a Region will leverage the power of that ecosystem not just for economic growth, but for more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable growth.

Strategies to Support/Promote

1 Support a sustained regional and national marketing campaign, particularly the existing Greater ROC campaign.

- A. Articulate unified identity to catalyze perception change and drive excitement.
- B. Intentionally cultivate current residents and businesses to build energy around the Region's story and potential.
- C. Continue site selector familiarization tours.
- D. Highlight Region's status as a "climate haven" in addition to its intellectual assets.
- E. Highlight Region's history with regenerative manufacturing, remanufacturing, & reuse.
- F. Bolster and support existing ROC2025 marketing efforts.

2 Make targeted investments in the startup ecosystem.

- A. Support Excell Partners, NextCorps, incubators, and accelerators.
- B. Expand targeted support for entrepreneurs, with a specific focus on increasing the number of technical assistance slots available to minority- and women-owned businesses.

- C. Utilize coaching and mentoring relationships to support new startups and entrepreneurs.
- D. Align Region's innovation support activities with the federal Tech Hub designation.

3 Leverage university-industry collaboration.

- A. Expand events and access to business association and alumni networks.
- B. Advance R&D and workforce development activities that support the success of the NY SMART I-Corridor Tech Hub and the Science, Technology, and Engineering of Lasers and Laser Applications Research (STELLAR) NSF Regional Innovation Engine.
- C. Engage with the Rochester Area Colleges, Inc. network to facilitate broad contact between our higher education sector and business sector to advance workforce development and business growth strategies.

4 Prioritize projects and collaborations that promote growth and resiliency of existing regional businesses.

- A. Support capital funding requests in targeted industry sectors.
- B. Continued support of small- and medium-sized businesses to compete across full value chain.
- C. Leverage the existing Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council's Supply Chain Analysis to support and grow supply chain industries associated with target industry sectors.
- D. Enhance connectivity between partner organizations offering supports for existing regional employers in areas spanning training, finance, operations, and energy efficiency.
- E. Increase and enhance awareness of existing companies with employment opportunities and examples of innovation advancing the Region's leadership position.



► Edwards executives meeting with Greater Rochester, NY region’s economic development, higher education, and workforce development experts at Monroe Community College. 📷 Credit: Greater Rochester Enterprise

- 5 Support future energy needs through new technologies.**
 - A. Prioritize support for existing businesses that show leadership in sustainability.
- 6 Continue and expand coordination of key industry allies and regional economic development partners, as currently led by GRE, to provide a customized approach within the business attraction process.**

- 7 Coordinate capacity building in related Core Focus Areas to position the Region for continued industry growth through business attraction opportunities in targeted sectors.**
 - A. Ensure adequate, quality housing to increase access to current and future workforce.
 - B. Identify and prioritize shovel-ready sites with infrastructure and capacity aligned to the exacting requirements of business attraction opportunities managed by regional partners, including GRE.
 - C. Coordinate workforce development programs in colleges and universities with community initiatives at K-12 with an emphasis on future, emerging industry needs.



CORE FOCUS AREA 2

Built Environment

Successful economic development and growth hinge on the built environment, including sites, infrastructure, and pre-development processes. Strategic investments must be made in these components of our Region to support industry and population growth. Since the inaugural Strategic Plan in 2011, which noted aging infrastructure in need of repair, the Region has undertaken a multitude of projects related to the built environment. Despite the success of infrastructure and built environment projects over the past twelve years, gaps and disparities remain that threaten to widen if neglected. In 2021, Senator Charles Schumer secured \$13.5 billion for the State in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, providing funding to fix the

145+ bridges in “poor condition” in the Region and lessen the \$400 million list of transportation infrastructure repairs needed in our Region. Our Region’s infrastructure is still in critical need of updates and expansions to sustain current functionality and improvements to create efficiencies and new opportunities where feasible. At the same time, we must adhere to smart growth and environmental justice principles, ensure efficient use of existing infrastructure, and shape development in a way that protects our health, natural resources, and quality of life. The strategies in this Strategic Plan update provide steps toward closing gaps in the built environment that hinder growth and move us toward a more equitable and sustainable future.



Site Development and Infrastructure

A lack of high-quality shovel-ready sites following a period of absorption of industrial product is now constraining the Finger Lakes' ability to support industry attraction and expansion. The Region includes several successful and promising industrial parks, such as the STAMP mega-site in Genesee County. Partners in the Region remain actively engaged with New York State in strategic efforts to identify additional inventory of shovel-ready sites to meet the needs of industrial users, including but not limited to the specific needs of companies within a growing U.S. semiconductor supply chain. A proactive approach to the identification and advancement of target sites, at least two of which should be mega-sites, will continue to prepare the Region for the large-scale opportunities of the future that are anticipated. These sites should be located near existing infrastructure and in areas with strong community support for development.

Advancing site readiness across the Region and preparing for growth will require ongoing efforts to:

- 1 Identify high-potential sites, leveraging local and regional site studies and assessments;**
- 2 Undertake preliminary engineering, design, and cost estimating;**
- 3 Invest in utilities and other infrastructure as appropriate;**
- 4 Undertake pre-development activities such as pre-permitting, GEIS, and geotechnical investigation; and**
- 5 Identify and line up funding resources for development.**

An expanded portfolio of attractive pad sites, spec buildings, and brownfield redevelopment opportunities incorporated into a well-maintained site portfolio, such as the listings on ZoomProspector maintained by GRE, will help to market the Region and help industry decisionmakers and site selectors envision the Finger Lakes as a destination for new investments.



STAMP GENESSEE COUNTY

The 1,250-acre Science & Technology Advanced Manufacturing Park (STAMP) in Genesee County has secured nearly \$1 billion in private capital investments and nearly 700 jobs. Plug Power is building the first green hydrogen generation facility in North America at STAMP, and Edwards operations at the mega-site will support semiconductor manufacturing in New York and the United States.



EASTMAN BUSINESS PARK

The Eastman Business Park has seen significant investment by companies that squarely fit within the Region's target industries, such as AIM Photonics, Delta X, LiDestri Food & Drink, Love Beets, Li-Cycle, Greenlight BioScience, Li-Metal, Kodak, NY-BEST and more.

New York State's FAST-NY program and shovel-ready designations will be important tools for our Region to advance our site portfolio and site readiness. The FLREDC will aim to align regional investments to maximize our utilization of FAST-NY resources, accelerate project timelines, and leverage the intersection of State and regional economic development priorities and initiatives. FAST-NY, brownfield redevelopment resources, and other such programs can help to make site development more financially feasible for developers, including underutilized sites that are critical to infill development and targeted community development.

Fast Permitting

Our Region must work to identify approaches to improving the permitting timeline for qualifying economic development investments, to mitigate what is a known risk to developers considering projects in New York State. This is particularly critical in this time of rising construction costs and interest rates, where project delays become especially costly. Successful models of fast permitting procedures have been adopted in Europe to promote renewable energy efforts, and the U.S. Department of Transportation's FAST-41 program targets large, complex infrastructure projects. These programs, among others, serve as a starting point for the Region to simplify permitting processes for economic development projects that meet regional and community development priorities.

Regionalized Approach to Infrastructure

Infrastructure is typically approached on a community-by-community basis. While this has its advantages, it is not the most effective or comprehensive way to address infrastructure needs. Local communities often lack the funding necessary to take on large projects on their own, and projects are constrained by municipal boundaries. The resulting inaccessibility disproportionately affects our Region's disabled population, lowering people's quality of life and sense of community belonging. A regionalized approach to infrastructure offers greater access to funding and the ability to design a complete solution based on the varying needs of component communities and populations.

To move towards regionalized infrastructure, the Region should conduct a comprehensive evaluation of water, wastewater, electric, and broadband infrastructure to identify gaps and capacity limitations, which could include supporting projects by individual communities or counties to conduct such studies. This infrastructure evaluation will enable the Region to prioritize needed investments, particularly those that efficiently solve challenges across multiple communities and serve a larger regional need. This may entail the development of new renewable energy systems, the replacement of private septic wastewater systems with municipal sewer systems, and/or the replacement of outdated water systems. By nature, infrastructure projects are large, complex, and expensive. Educating stakeholders on the costs and the necessity of big investments in infrastructure is imperative to the support of regionalization and improvement of the built environment for residents and businesses. This effort can leverage existing studies and reports of the Genesee Transportation Council and Genesee-Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council.

Broadband represents one of the most critical and immediate infrastructure needs, given its near necessity in supporting residents' economic opportunity, health, and education. Many communities remain underserved by broadband, and access is unaffordable for many households living at or below the poverty level. As a starting point, the Finger Lakes Region can look to Central New York, which completed a Regional Telecommunications Broadband Infrastructure Inventory and Community Survey Report in 2021. This report has informed the allocation of investments in the expansion and improvement of broadband infrastructure. The Federal Communications Commission maintains a mapping tool that can be used to facilitate broadband infrastructure projects and research. Additionally, the Finger Lakes Region can align itself with the NYS ConnectALL initiative, which allocated over \$1 billion to develop and improve digital infrastructure and access throughout the state.

- Pont De Rennes Pedestrian Bridge
Rochester, New York

Shaping the Built Environment for Sustainability and Equity

To shape the built environment in a way that aligns with the Region’s needs and goals, we must prioritize investments that promote sustainability and responsible land use, and that utilize materials, construction methods, and systems that advance decarbonization and other environmental considerations. First, the Region can focus on utilizing existing regional infrastructure assets. Infill development, adaptive reuse of vacant structures, and brownfield redevelopment of sites in proximity to utilities can advance the built environment in a more sustainable way. We must also prioritize investments in the energy transition itself, for example in relation to electrical grid updates, EV charging stations and equipment, and other low-emissions transportation assets. The Finger Lakes has an opportunity not just to reduce our own carbon footprint, but to position ourselves as a leader at the cutting edge of sustainable solutions.

Maintaining and improving the electrical grid is critical not just for integrating renewable energy and accommodating the electrification of transportation and buildings, but also for ensuring safety and livelihoods as weather events become more extreme and frequent.

Conclusion

The Finger Lakes’ path to prosperity requires a comprehensive, strategic approach to our shared built environment. Going forward, the FLREDC is focused on identifying and advancing sites for industrial development, promoting efficient regulatory and review processes for economic development investments, and prioritizing projects that directly advance sustainability, smart growth, and equity. With these strategies, and with renewed investment in regionalized, future-oriented infrastructure, the Finger Lakes will be positioned to welcome economic opportunity.

Strategies to Support/Promote

1 Regionalize and prioritize investments in site development and infrastructure.

- A. Advancing site readiness through sustained efforts to: (1) identify promising sites, (2) undertake preliminary engineering and design, (3) extend utilities and infrastructure, (4) undertake pre-permitting, GEIS, and geotech investigation, and (5) assemble development funding sources. This could include pad sites, actual spec buildings and/or brownfield redevelopment.
- B. Proactively leverage FAST-NY resources.
- C. Encourage “shovel-ready” designations.
- D. In particular, identify and advance multiple large sites and at least two potential “mega-sites” with nearby infrastructure and community support.



- 2 Support the development, publication, and maintenance of a site portfolio.**
- 3 Identify “fast permitting” approaches for economic development projects meeting regional priorities.**
- 4 Regionalize our approach to infrastructure:**
 - A. Conduct a community-wide capacity evaluation of water/wastewater/electric/broadband to identify gaps and capacity limitations.
 - B. Expand capacity where needed.
 - C. Invest in broadband projects for the unserved or underserved populations of the Region.
 - D. Educate stakeholders on the costs and necessity of significant investments in infrastructure.
 - E. Encourage investments in infrastructure that serve (or have the capacity to serve) more than one project.
 - F. Potential developments of thermal energy networks.
- 5 Prioritize built environment projects that meaningfully promote sustainability, responsible land use (including infill, adaptive, and brownfield reuse), and equity.**
- 6 Promote investments in the energy transition.**
 - A. Invest in low-emission transportation and electrification infrastructure.
 - B. Invest in grid upgrades to accommodate renewable energy and electrification of transportation and buildings.

CORE FOCUS AREA 3

Workforce Development

The 2011 Strategic Plan came on the heels of economic recovery following the Great Recession that disrupted the economy, employers, and workers in an unprecedented way. Now, emerging from another substantial disruption, it is a timely opportunity to update and expand the strategies of that plan. Workforce attraction and development have long been a focus of the FLREDC, which for over a decade has guided State and local investments in job creation and training. The Region has made meaningful progress in strengthening the workforce pipeline through projects like the creation of the FWD Center, Finger Lakes Performing Provider System’s healthcare-focused Career Pathway & Social Supports Program, and Monroe County Workforce System Scan. However, we must continue to address inclusion, workforce readiness, and skill gap challenges—now in the context of an extremely tight labor market, evolving employer needs, and stubborn nationwide labor shortages. Actively including more populations in our workforce programming, such as BIPOC, individuals with disabilities, and justice involved individuals, will expand the talent pipeline, bring new perspectives, and add value to our economy. In 2022, the FLREDC created a workforce development strategy in response to the growing challenges that our businesses are experiencing related to workforce attraction and retention. That strategy centers on the needs of three tradeable industry sectors that are important to the Region’s economic growth and wellbeing: advanced manufacturing with optics, agribusiness, and clean and renewable energy. The FLREDC now reaffirms and expands upon the strategies and actions laid out in that document.

Workforce Ecosystem Alignment

The Finger Lakes' workforce ecosystem encompasses many organizations and programs, and the FLREDC process has helped us to take important steps toward a stronger systems-based approach. Collaboration is stronger than it was, but more work remains to be done to ensure that workforce development activities are complementary, address the full continuum of training and social needs, leverage best practices, and offer seamless, transparent, and accessible career development pathways that result in job placement for our residents.

Regional partners and employers are also aware of inequities in hiring and job opportunities. Black and Latino residents are two-and-a-half to three times more likely than White counterparts to experience unemployment in our Region.⁹ Nationally, people with disabilities have a labor force participation rate of 40.4% and unemployment rate of 7.8%, compared to 78% and 3.5% for people without disabilities.¹⁰ Better workforce ecosystem alignment has the potential to unlock the value of a more diverse and expansive talent pipeline.

While aligning workforce development efforts with evolving industry sector needs has been an ongoing FLREDC strategy, there is still a need to forge a truly harmonized regional approach to workforce development. Eighty percent of participants in a Public Information Session (outlined more thoroughly later in this Plan) indicated that they did not feel their local workforce development options were well known and easy to navigate. Building upon the Region's past efforts to increase the exchange of ideas and improve collaboration will enable workforce development partners to streamline workflow, reduce inefficiencies, and better measure and evaluate our Region's workforce investments to assess overall system efficiency and effectiveness. A more streamlined workforce development ecosystem will be more accessible to all workers while enabling employers to adroitly navigate talent recruitment, retention, and retirement.

⁹ Source: RMAPI

¹⁰ Practices. October 2023. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/research-evaluation/statistics>. Accessed November 2023.



▲ Governor Kathy Hochul at the Finger Lakes Workforce Development (FWD) Center.

Training, Career Exposure and Advancement

Successful workforce recruitment and retention is closely tied to workers' ongoing skill development and ability to pursue opportunities for career advancement, as well as training programs that are flexible and adaptable to changing industry needs. Since 2011, the FLREDC's workforce strategies have leveraged the Region's robust network of high-quality educational institutions and promoted greater awareness of in-demand, rewarding career pathways. These strategies are still important, but we must now work to ensure that career awareness and training opportunities reach populations that remain underrepresented in the target industry sectors, are historically excluded from advancement opportunities, and are not fully benefiting from the Region's economic successes. Being intentional about inclusion and equity will unleash the growth potential of our workforce-constrained target industry sectors.



FWD CENTER

The Forward Center at Monroe Community College on the downtown Rochester campus features 50,000 square feet of flexible training space that provides local residents and incumbent workers with the ability to obtain industry credentials and associate degrees for high-demand occupations including: mechatronics, machine process control, 3D printing, technical trades, healthcare and more.

Recognizing that our K-12 students are tomorrow's Finger Lakes workforce, the FLREDC strongly supports growing the talent pipeline by exposing youth to information and experiences about a variety of regional career pathways. The FLREDC's *2022 Workforce Development Strategy* emphasized K-12 career exploration, including through the creation of microcredential programs for high school students and greater career and technical education (CTE) programming in high schools. These remain relevant workforce strategies today and should continue to be implemented across the Region, including through leveraging the expertise and unique assets of our Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) facilities, programs, and leadership. Our higher education institutions are also powerful regional assets for providing flexible training for individuals of all ages relevant to in-demand occupations, our priority sectors, and skilled trades.

Matching these education resources with experiential opportunities, such as apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, co-ops, and internships, is critical to expanding and diversifying our workforce, and in turn, enabling our industries to grow. Programs incorporating an "earn-and-learn" approach will accelerate the pathway for learners into skilled employment, and will provide career transition and advancement opportunities for people who must continue supporting their families while they participate in education programs.

In examining current and projected industry and demographic trends, the following key workforce pipelines need targeted investments in training and related supports over the next several years:

- The healthcare and life sciences industries are experiencing a workforce crisis as a result of lasting pandemic effects and preexisting inadequacies.
- The acceleration of climate change has generated substantial need for a green jobs pipeline to bolster related sectors that can support the energy transition and enhanced sustainability. In particular, there is a growing need for contractors that are trained to deploy existing and new technologies related to energy efficiency, renewable energy, electrification, and a more sustainable built environment.
- With our Region's quickly advancing technological connectivity, there is a need for broadband installation and maintenance workers. There is substantial investment anticipated in broadband expansion throughout the Region over the next 5-10 years, which is critical for business growth and for supporting residents' economic opportunity, health, and education. There is currently not a sufficient workforce to support anticipated installations, operation, and maintenance of that infrastructure.
- The Region is part of the federally-designated NY SMART I-Corridor Tech Hub, which will require investments in semiconductor fabrication and adjacent industry job opportunities and training.

Workforce Supports

Our Region's economic growth is constrained by the barriers that many people face to entering and remaining in the workforce. The FLREDC is committed to supporting programming that unlocks the value of untapped and underrepresented talent pools and enables all of our residents to benefit from economic expansion. It is our vision that anyone who wants to work should be able to access the resources and tools needed to mitigate these barriers. As such, we will continue to prioritize the provision of highly accessible wraparound supports for workers and learners. Although these services can cover a broad spectrum of activities, in our Region we are focused on addressing three primary categories: transportation and mobility, child care, and social supports.

Transportation and Mobility

Transportation is a longstanding challenge in the Region due to its expansive geography and vast rural areas. Public transportation infrastructure in the majority of municipalities and counties is severely limited and does not meet the needs of many residents, workers, and employers. As suggested in the *2022 Workforce Development Strategy*, the FLREDC encourages the ongoing investigation into, and potential creation of, a Regional Transportation Management Association that would help develop and implement transportation solutions to enhance all residents' connectivity to employment centers. Transportation and mobility projects should align with existing transportation goals and plans, such as those of the Genesee Transportation Council (GTC). The 2045 Long Range Plan commissioned by the GTC in June 2021 offers hyper-local data on transformation and needs, with suggestions on equity, sustainability, and economic development strategies that can be leveraged and advanced by future projects.

Our Region's rural residents and businesses bear the brunt of the burden generated by insufficient, inefficient public transportation. Public transportation stops short of some of the Region's largest employers. We must support solutions for this "last-mile gap," such as expansion of on-demand and multi-modal transit services or the creation of seamless transitions between different forms of transportation. Further, the FLREDC will prioritize economic development projects that would be sited within walking distance from existing public transportation routes and population centers, and encourage collaboration between the employers and local public transportation providers.

Transportation and mobility issues are not exclusive to rural areas. Even within denser population centers, public transportation can be insufficient and unreliable and suffers from outdated assets in need of maintenance. The threat of climate change makes this an important juncture for reinvestment in transportation infrastructure, both public and private, that promotes transition away from fossil fuels. Innovation—a hallmark of the Finger Lakes—holds the key to solving transportation and mobility issues. Already, micro mobility solutions like scooters and bikes have become widely available, particularly within cities and around higher education campuses. The FLREDC will encourage and support initiatives and infrastructure investments that promote active transportation, micro mobility, and the transition to electric vehicles.

Child Care

A common employment hurdle for many households is access to reliable, affordable, nearby child care. Today, households themselves are solely responsible for addressing their child care needs, but this is not a sustainable solution for most families, particularly those with resource constraints and those living far from employment centers and child care providers.

The pandemic exacerbated existing child care shortages, the effects of which are still felt today, and many families struggle to reconcile structured full-time jobs with meeting the other needs of their families. The lack of child care led to a disproportionate number of women exiting the workforce during the pandemic, although data and research indicate that women have returned to the workforce. In the Finger Lakes Region, the labor force participation rate of women aged 20 to 64 increased from 75.2% in 2016 to 75.7% in 2019, to 76% in 2021—the labor force participation of men stayed relatively steady around 80.5% during this time period. Participation by women with children under 18 years old increased from 77.2% in 2016 to 79.3% in 2019 and stayed steady at that level in 2021, although participation by women with only children under 6 continued to increase from 2019 to 2021.¹¹ This is indicative of a slowdown in participation growth among women since the pandemic. Brookings explored this in some depth at a national level, concluding that "...mothers with young children's labor force participation has accelerated post-2020 to exceed pre-pandemic levels. But precious little of this change is likely the consequence of a supportive policy context. More can be done to continue to support women's labor force participation in the United States."¹²

Employers have an opportunity to attract and retain workers by easing the burden of child care. Offering child care support and resources would also allow companies to exercise inclusivity and equity by bringing more women, especially from underserved communities, into the workplace. The *2022 Workforce Development Strategy* highlights two strategies to improve child care for the workforce. The first of these is the provision of technical supports and incentives to employers to increase accommodations for parents, such as adaptable schedules and child care backup options. The second strategy is to partner with employers to understand the level and type of child care needed in different communities, and to collaborate to identify innovative solutions that promote workforce retention and employee success.

¹¹ American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Employment Status Table (S2301)

¹² Bauer, Lauren and Sarah Yu Wang. "Prime-age women are going above and beyond in the labor market recovery." Brookings Institution, August 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/prime-age-women-labor-market-recovery/>.

Social Supports

Each worker is unique and starts from a different place when approaching economic participation. Greater access to varied and individualized social supports, such as language-related assistance, financial literacy training, mental health care, legal services, etc., can make a substantial difference for individuals, employers, and the regional economy. There are many examples of such programming in the Finger Lakes, but they can be difficult to find or access. Our Region must strive to create an ecosystem of resources that workers are aware of and comfortable accessing, whether it be through a trusted workforce intermediary, a one-stop online platform, or some other approach. The FLREDC also sees the value in encouraging employers to engage in providing and referring these supports, the costs of which can be small in comparison to the cost of high employee turnover and unfilled positions. Finger Lakes workforce partners intend to take a leading role in proving this concept and providing clear metrics that demonstrate the economic return on investments that mitigate these barriers to sustained employment. The proposed Workforce Ecosystem project within the Challenge Proposal (Part 3) would convene workforce development partners and facilitate the creation of more streamlined workflow, transparency, and data collection.

Conclusion

These three pillars—ecosystem alignment, robust training and career exposure, and workforce supports—will help to broaden the workforce pipeline, better align skills with in-demand occupations and changing employer needs, and ensure more equitable access to employment and advancement. Our Challenge Competition Proposal, as outlined in Part 3 of this Plan, is built around this strategy.

Strategies to Support/Promote

Enhance alignment, transparency, and accessibility of the workforce development ecosystem

- Better align the workforce development system to improve collaboration and understanding among partners. (2022 Workforce Strategy)
- Make the workforce ecosystem more transparent, accessible, and adaptable for all employers and residents of the Region.
- Create, implement, and track common performance metrics to monitor workforce programming outcomes regionally, including a measure related to job placement.

Grow career exposure and advancement programming

- Expand opportunities for K-12 students to become aware of, connect with, and learn from regional employers that will ultimately help students take advantage of local career pathways, with the ultimate goal of job placement within the Region. (2022 Workforce Strategy)
- Provide technical assistance to employers to strengthen internal advancement pathways for incumbent workers.
- Leverage the workforce and higher education assets in the Region to provide flexible and relevant training for in-demand occupations and growing industries.
- Improve connections between employers and training/educational institutions to provide "earn-and-learn" opportunities like apprenticeships, co-ops, and internships to ensure greater access to advancement at all income levels.
- Connect all workforce programming to grow talent pipelines for and job placement in in-demand occupations and growing industries.



▲ ROC with your Hands, RochesterWorks.

Build a system of support for workers

■ Invest in transportation and mobility infrastructure

- + Encourage and support the inclusion of active transportation, micro mobility, and EV facilities through related infrastructure investments and upgrades.
- + Create seamless transitions between different forms of transportation to accommodate last-mile connectivity.
- + Expand on-demand and multi-modal transit services that can more efficiently serve rural areas.
- + Evaluate the potential for establishing a Regional Transportation Management Association. (2022 Workforce Strategy)
- + Support projects that align with the Genesee Transportation Council's Unified Planning Work Program, Long Range Transportation Plan, and Transportation Improvement Program.
- + Incentivize projects that create jobs near public transit and population centers (cities, villages, downtowns), and encourage greater collaboration between employers and public transportation providers.

■ Support the expansion of child care services

- + Cultivate partnerships and incentivize projects that expand access to child care throughout the Region, including second and third shift care where appropriate.
- + Facilitate connectivity between the workforce ecosystem and human services agencies providing support to families and child care providers.

- + Work with employers to better understand the level and type of child care needed in different areas of the Region, and to identify opportunities for collaboration and innovative solutions. (2022 Workforce Strategy)

- + Provide technical supports and incentives to employers to increase accommodations for working parents, such as adaptable schedules and child care backup options. (2022 Workforce Strategy)

■ Provide individualized social supports

- + Create individualized support services to proactively address traditional and emerging barriers to entry into the labor force, particularly to increase participation and retention rates of underserved populations. These could include language supports, financial literacy training, mental health care, or legal supports and services, among others. (2022 Workforce Strategy)
- + Ensure that workers are aware of and comfortable accessing support services provided through workforce development partners and human services agencies.
- + Leverage and continually improve existing systems that catalogue support services and effectively connect people with those services.

CORE FOCUS AREA 4

Quality of Life

Prior regional plans have highlighted the exceptional quality of life in Finger Lakes Region, citing the numerous cultural amenities, recreational activities, low cost of living, and nationally-ranked schools and healthcare available for residents and visitors. Our high quality of life remains a key driver for economic development, particularly in this environment where talent attraction and retention is so critical to business growth. By welcoming new residents and businesses, our Region will maintain and expand local tax bases and provide viable careers that sustain families and grow community wealth. Expanding the tax base will enable the financing of infrastructure improvements, quality school districts, and the creation and maintenance of amenities without increasing individual property owners' tax burdens.

Since the creation of the Strategic Plan twelve years ago, the Region has worked diligently to improve quality of life by supporting many priority projects aimed at making our communities more inviting and well-rounded hubs of business and leisure, some examples of which are highlighted throughout this section. In this updated Strategic Plan, we put explicit emphasis on three strategy areas most critical to improving quality of life in the Finger Lakes: placemaking, tourism, and housing.



▲ Governor Kathy Hochul announces the Village of Perry as the Downtown Revitalization Initiative Round 6 winners.

Placemaking

Placemaking strives to create well-designed and well-maintained public spaces that promote community, physical and mental health, economic vibrancy, the natural environment, and safety and accessibility. Festivals, farmers markets, public art, parks, and “buy local” initiatives are common examples of placemaking activities that allow people to connect with and enjoy communities throughout our Region. These efforts contribute to retaining current residents, but also help non-residents, like tourists or talent being recruited by local businesses, see themselves living here.

Local government budgets constrain communities' ability to invest in placemaking efforts despite their desire to enhance quality of life. It often requires funding beyond what tax revenues and local philanthropy can support to launch new events, beautification efforts, and safety initiatives.



Credit: Communications Bureau, City of Rochester.

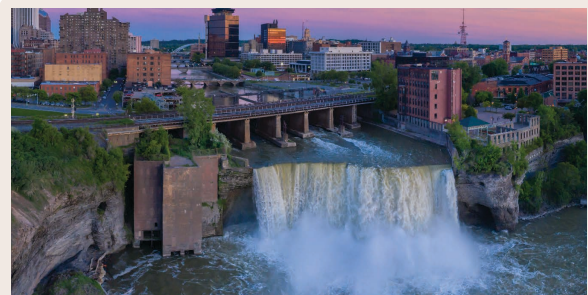
INNER LOOP REDEVELOPMENT

The conversion of a sunken urban highway into a 1.5-mile corridor connected neighborhoods to downtown and create a diversity of housing stock and unique retail and tourism assets. The project has generated additional economic development investments and enhanced community vibrancy. The continuation of the infill of the inner loop to the north has enormous opportunity for environmental and social justice projects.

Downtown areas are the center of placemaking, where residents and visitors can shop locally, interact with each other, and enjoy local arts and entertainment. Many downtowns in our Region—and Upstate New York as a whole—struggle with storefront vacancies, blight, and disinvestment. New York State’s Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) and New York Forward programs have enabled select cities, towns, and villages to invest in their downtowns, restoring historic buildings, improving safety and accessibility, and reinstating main streets as centers of commerce and community. Some communities have also established—or plan to establish, as in Rochester—Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), which can be a useful tool for enhancing aesthetics, increasing foot traffic and property values, and growing small business and entrepreneurship within designated districts. However, there are more communities that need support, and additional programming and technical assistance could help to make downtowns throughout the Region more welcoming, vibrant, and inclusive.

Connectivity is also a critical quality of life issue, particularly in the more rural areas of our Region. Residents’ heavy use of roadways for commuting and completing errands strains existing transportation infrastructure. Tourists exacerbate the strain on infrastructure as they travel to attractions

throughout the Region. As noted in the Built Environment section, there is a vast need for expanded transportation capacity in the form of improved roadways and public transportation programs. Even in revitalized downtowns, local residents and tourists struggle to find transportation, and public transit routes stop short of some of the Region’s largest employers. Stakeholders in the Region would like to see transportation systems that provide connectivity within and between communities, and ones that connect like attractions to each other (e.g. transit between outdoor recreational assets). As a regional example, the Genesee Valley Trail Town Initiative was funded by USDA Rural Development and the Northern Border Regional Commission in 2020 to develop a network of Trail Town hubs along the Genesee Valley Greenway State Park and Genesee River corridor. The program aims to boost outdoor recreation, create more resilient communities, and support post-COVID recovery in participating communities. Many respondents to an FLREDC quality of life survey, further described in the “Public Input” section of this report, highlighted pedestrian safety and enhanced mobility as important ways that municipalities and community leaders can support quality of life.



ROC THE RIVERWAY

The ROC the Riverway combines 28 projects along the Genesee River, connecting Rochester’s downtown waterfront with dynamic, welcoming spaces. The projects vary from the completion of the Genesee River Trail to upgrades to riverfront community facilities. This includes the creation of High Falls State Park and the transformation of the Broad Street Aqueduct, both unique assets that are unrivaled anywhere in the country.

Even just Phase 1 of this program is resulting in targeted, transformational change for the community. The FLREDC continues to support this initiative as its full vision comes to fruition.



 Credit: Matt Kelly (Hunt Country Vineyards)

Although the Finger Lakes Region thrives in the warm and verdant summer months, winters present both a challenge and an opportunity for placemaking. During this time of year, the steady stream of visitors dries up and residents cocoon themselves at home. The creation of winter festivals and events, as well as expansion of opportunities for winter recreation, offer avenues for visitors to live like locals and residents to remain connected to their communities. Additionally, shopping locally throughout the holiday season supports businesses that otherwise lose significant cash-flow in the off-season, inhibiting the potential year-round vibrancy of downtowns. Our wine industry and picturesque lakes, which are already well-leveraged, offer further opportunities for placemaking with the expansion of canal trails, connecting downtowns to lakefronts where possible, and creating a greater diversity of events.

Though many communities may wish to utilize placemaking to improve quality of life, many require assistance in the identification and facilitation of resources to make placemaking a reality. The strategies outlined in this Plan aim to make our regional communities more attractive places to live and work by supporting the activation of underutilized public spaces, the creation of inviting and accessible downtown environments, the exploration of efficient multi-modal transportation systems and roadway connectivity, and the encouragement of local consumption and tourism in the winter and shoulder seasons.

Tourism

Tourism is a key pillar of our Region's economy, and its assets frequently overlap with quality of life assets. Creative expansion of our tourism industry and assets is intertwined with our focus on placemaking and quality of life. Our Region has bountiful natural beauty and a vibrant culture centered around agriculture, arts and entertainment, and outdoor recreation. In particular, the Region has experienced great success and recognition as an exceptional wine region, and more recently this has expanded to craft beverages more generally. However, there are many more assets the Region has to share with visitors. Tourism offers individuals and businesses a tantalizing first taste of the Region that can encourage visitors to return as residents. Many communities have already capitalized on the abundance of beauty and activities, leveraging the thriving wineries and fine-dining experiences, rich history, proximity to Niagara Falls, and outdoor recreation. A majority of respondents to the Council's quality of life survey rated the areas of "arts, culture, and tourism" and "parks, trails, and recreation" as high quality and performing well in the Region.

Despite an active and growing tourism industry, it is challenged by staffing shortages, rising costs, a severe shortage of visitor accommodations in rural areas of the Region, and inadequate public infrastructure. For instance, in Livingston County, there are just three hotels that offer an insufficient number of rooms to support visitors to Letchworth State Park, let alone expanding tourism opportunities. The Region and our communities must pay special attention to tourism-related challenges and create targeted and specific solutions to fully realize the industry's

potential. We have strong tourism themes on which to innovate and build—craft beverages, the outdoors, history, art and culture, family friendly travel, youth and amateur sports, and sustainability. But to grow our tourism industry and expand its local impacts will require investment in physical community facilities and infrastructure. In addition to transportation improvements, as noted above, the following investments would bolster the tourism industry in the Finger Lakes:

Investments to Bolster Finger Lakes Tourism Industry

Facilities

The Rochester Riverside Convention Center in downtown Rochester attracts many visitors to the Region. However, there is a lack of mid-sized meeting space in Rochester and the Region overall, limiting the types of events our Region is able to host. Building out this middle area offers opportunities for both tourism and placemaking efforts.

Tourism partners see sporting venues as a way to attract events and people to the Region. While sports travel took a hit in 2020, it has otherwise been increasing year over year since 2009. In 2021, sport-related traveler spending in the US was \$39.7 billion. However, New York only ranks in the top 10 states for select types of facilities.¹³ Additional sporting venues could allow for the buildout of a youth and amateur sports culture, bringing in tournaments, teams, and families to stay overnight. However, any projects in this realm should be supported by a local feasibility study that confirms viability, appropriateness, and positive impact for the community.

The Region needs to support capital projects, programming, and increased capacity at existing venues and cultural sites.

Accommodations

There is a shortage of overnight accommodations for visitors throughout the Region, particularly in more rural areas. Short-term rentals impact individual communities in different ways, sometimes requiring regulation to protect housing affordability and sometimes providing critical accommodations in communities without hotels. Expanded accommodation is needed for both short-term and seasonal visitors. Depending on the local community context, this could include short-term RV accommodations, increased short-term rentals through conversion of vacant downtown upper stories or accessory dwelling units, or the redevelopment of existing hotels. Each of these solutions would enable the Region to capture travelers passing through to their final destinations or looking to specifically enjoy the Finger Lakes experience.

Sustainability

The tourism partners engaged in this process are very cognizant of both the value and fragility of the Region's natural resources. While leveraging and promoting outdoor recreation and natural beauty successfully attracts visitors, we must be careful to do so responsibly and without over-burdening those resources. Respondents to the quality of life survey echoed this, with many noting that the protection and preservation of natural resources is a key quality of life factor.

Broadband

As discussed elsewhere in this plan, broadband is a critical service for businesses and residents, but it also plays an important role for tourists in deciding where to stay and what attractions to visit within our Region.

¹³ Stoll Strategies. "The Stoll Report on Sports Facilities." November 2023.



📷 Credit: Matt Kelly (Hunt Country Vineyards)

Organizations dedicated to advancing the tourism industry in the Finger Lakes are working hard to share what makes our Region so wonderful and create new attractions for tourists and residents to explore. These efforts frequently expand beyond the nine-county REDC footprint, and as such require collaboration among municipalities, counties, and REDC regions to be successful. For instance, the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance has succeeded in introducing a bill to Congress that would create a National Heritage Area in the Region. The National Park Service conducted a National Heritage Area Feasibility Study of the Finger Lakes in 2019 at the direction of Congress. The Study found that the

Finger Lakes' nationally important and distinctive landscape and identity make it a viable National Heritage Area candidate. Additionally, the 14-county area represented by the Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council received a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration to pursue sustainability as a part of a larger outdoor recreation initiative. Using a strategic marketing campaign, the Council will promote outdoor recreation, with a focus on first-time visitors. The Council supports and encourages the advancement of these efforts to leverage the Region's unique qualities to attract people and businesses alike.



📷 Credit: HomeInTheFingerLakes.com

CENTER FOR GREAT WOMEN

The National Women's Hall of Fame rehabilitated and expanded usable space to allow for more of a comprehensive museum experience, cataloging the stories of the 302 Hall of Fame inductees.



STRONG MUSEUM OF PLAY

The museum constructed a 90,000 square foot expansion to create new interactive exhibits. To complement this expansion, it also completed construction on a new Welcome Atrium and gateway building known as the Portal of Play (the POP!). These projects are anticipated to increase visitation to nearly 1 million annual onsite guests, many from out of state. They also enhance the outcomes of the Inner Loop Redevelopment project.



📷 Credit: www.ILoveNY.com

FLX DESTINATION CENTER

Located at Sampson State Park in Seneca County, this Center shows the true potential of public-private partnerships in tourism. The Center offers 20 new seasonal campsites, a multi-use event center, exhibits highlighting Sampson military history and the history of the craft beverage industry, and the only public fueling station on Seneca Lake.

Housing

If one of the purposes of placemaking and tourism efforts is to convince people to move to Finger Lakes communities, it follows that there must be quality housing available across income levels. Quality of life is synonymous with where and how people live; quality, affordable homes promote physical, mental, and community health. In the Council's quality of life survey, 81% of respondents indicated that housing quality, affordability, and availability in the Region "needs improvement," and it was the top area that respondents wanted the REDC to focus on over the next ten years with respect to quality of life.

Housing and rent prices are increasing across the nation, pricing potential first-time homeowners and long-term residents out of communities. This increase, while beneficial for some incumbent homeowners, the real estate industry, and often times local governments who collect property taxes, can hurt the long-term economic wellbeing of communities and many residents as it reduces the ability of individuals to generate wealth. Affordable homeownership across a wide range of incomes can provide stability and rootedness for workers and families, and is a step towards community wealth generation. However, as noted in the State of the Region, median sale prices through most of the Region are continuing to increase quickly. From Q3 2022 to Q3 2023, 7 of 9 counties saw an increase in median sale price that was higher than the State's increase, and 5 of those counties saw increases of greater than 10%. In Wyoming County, the median sale price increased by \$39,500 (from \$150,500 to \$190,000), or 26.2%.¹⁴ This level of increase substantially increases the income threshold required to purchase a home.

The Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI) focuses on enabling the upward mobility of Rochester residents, which requires housing reform—a priority policy area for RMAPI. Currently, housing in Rochester is inequitably distributed and of poor quality. High costs and unsafe conditions force families to move frequently, negatively impacting quality of life and community connectivity. RMAPI is working to provide more affordable and accessible housing for Rochester residents by increasing awareness of housing and utility subsidies, supporting new home construction and rehabilitation, strengthening state and local affordable homeownership efforts, and encouraging amendments to code enforcement that keep landlords accountable.

A range of rental housing is also crucial for the health of a community, ideally providing quality, safe housing options for everyone – from young families to seniors. Reducing housing-related cost burdens will enable more households to pay off debt, increase savings, and invest. Further, residents that are not cost-burdened by housing can spend a greater share of their incomes in other areas of the local and regional economy, encouraging economic stability and growth.

¹⁴ Source: New York State Association of REALTORS, Inc. (NYSAR) 3rd Quarter 2023 Quarterly Indicators Report

While the Finger Lakes currently enjoys relatively affordable housing compared to the State as a whole (as outlined in the State of the Region), rising costs and increasingly unmet demand threaten this status. Stakeholders identified a number of challenges in the Region's housing market, as well as some promising solutions:

Housing Market

Costs

Housing costs in some areas have doubled since 2020, and mortgage rates are the highest they have been in 25 years, adding to existing barriers for buyers, sellers, renters, contractors, and developers. Rising costs are widening the financing gap for the development of housing that is affordable to the Region's workforce and seniors (60-120% AMI). Expanded capital supports for developers to supplement existing funding and homebuyer programs would help to advance the development of these housing products.

Zoning

Current zoning laws and land use regulations in some communities are outdated and inhibit innovation in the housing space, and in some cases are exclusionary of affordable housing strategies (e.g. higher-density development, manufactured housing, and co-ops). Creative, flexible zoning solutions would enhance the feasibility of and incentivize additional housing development that uses land more efficiently and adheres to smart growth principles, although it is important that such solutions also uphold community goals and vision.

Workforce

There is a severe lack of contractors that are properly trained, certified, and insured to work on large development projects, particularly affordable development. Capacity building support for smaller contractors, via lines of credit through CDFIs, technical assistance, and/or partnerships with larger contractors, would advance existing pipeline projects and encourage developers to pursue additional projects. Many local landlords and small-scale developers have exited or reduced their participation in the market. Training and technical assistance for those interested in this type of activity would encourage local ownership of rental properties.

Although part of the solution to improving quantity, affordability, and quality of the housing stock is constructing new housing units, it is not the sole solution. There is substantial opportunity throughout the Region to rehabilitate vacant housing, renovate existing homes, or adaptively reuse vacant buildings for housing development. Capital funding support for these types of projects can offer a path to additional homeownership and rental units, while utilizing existing infrastructure and smart growth principles. This aligns with the results of the Council's quality of life survey, in which historic preservation and reuse of blighted properties was a common theme when respondents were asked what municipalities, non-profits, and other regional leaders can do to improve quality of life.



SIBLEY SQUARE REDEVELOPMENT

This downtown Rochester project reactivated over one million square feet of a former department store. The square is now home to nearly 200 businesses and over 400 residents, all of whom contribute to the commercial ecosystem carefully fostered by the project's developers. This includes the Mercantile, which offers an array of independently operated food vendors, and NextCorps, the University of Rochester affiliated high tech incubator.

Many survey respondents also emphasized sustainability as a critical quality of life component. Prioritizing energy efficiency, electrification, and proper weatherization throughout the housing stock will also impact affordability and sustainability. Where appropriate, investments to extend infrastructure to sites that could support dense housing development would also help communities to advance housing goals.

Conclusion

The challenges, solutions, assets, and strategies associated with placemaking, housing, and tourism are highly interrelated and critical to our Region's quality of life. Although the Finger Lakes has benefited from many improvements to its quality of life since the previous Strategic Plan, we have more work to do. The FLREDC has listened to the feedback and advice of residents, tourists, businesses, and municipal leaders and supports a range of interconnected strategies to address quality of life challenges. Through collaboration, advocacy, and continued communication, our Region can rise to the top as the place to live, work, and visit.

Strategies to Support/Promote

Enhance and expand the housing stock to meet the needs of workers and residents across income levels.

- Study short-term rentals on a county-by-county basis to understand where the market can absorb them and where housing availability is suffering as a result of conversions. Use these results to create individualized strategies and approaches that will balance housing and tourism for the whole Region.
- Build capacity among general contractors and contractors in the Region by providing:
 1. technical assistance and resources to help GCs obtain the various certifications, insurances, etc. they need to participate in affordable housing projects;
 2. flexible lines of credit, potentially through or in partnership with a CDFI, to small contractors so they can cashflow larger projects; and
 3. technical assistance and a streamlined certification process for MWBE contractors.
- Assist regional not-for-profits and land banks in accessing funding to rehabilitate vacant housing and build new housing that is affordable to households with income of 60% – 120% AMI.
- Facilitate conversations among developers (for profit and not-for-profit), land banks, state and federal agencies, and communities to rethink how housing is built in the current environment and innovative options for homeownership, including density, lot sizes, connections to infrastructure, maintenance requirements, etc. Provide related technical assistance with zoning updates and identifying developable parcels for new models.
- Explore the role of quality manufactured housing units in workforce and affordable homeownership, and provide technical assistance in identifying and addressing barriers (e.g. exclusionary zoning, etc.).
- Assist homeowners, particularly seniors and low-income households, in improving resiliency and affordability through investments in energy efficiency, weatherization, more reliable materials, and systems with lower maintenance costs, as well as building new housing with these factors in mind.
- Develop programming to assist new local developers in building skillsets around property management, housing investment, landlord operations/regulations, etc. to support expanded local ownership and investment. Explore the Syracuse Landlord Training Program as a model.
- Develop new ways, or restore old programs, to incentivize mixed income multifamily development.
- Provide resources and technical assistance to help housing-related organizations build internal capacity.
- Promote local adoption and use of relevant NYS Real Property Tax Law exemptions to support development of needed housing products.
- Identify new strategies to address the increase in unhoused individuals and families. Consider “housing first” policies and models that would help to prevent homelessness.

Utilize placemaking strategies to increase community and economic vibrancy.

- Identify and facilitate resources to help communities activate underutilized public spaces through art, markets, events, recreation, etc.
- Work with businesses in downtowns and main streets to create a welcoming environment even when they are closed.
- Assist communities and not-for-profits in accessing resources and technical assistance to successfully reactivate vacant upper stories in downtowns and main streets.
- Assist communities in developing, funding, and implementing strategies to improve personal safety and perceptions of safety.
- Incentivize efforts that bring remote workers back into downtowns.
- Improve public access to water in lakefront communities.
- Enhance roadways to generate greater connectivity within and between communities, and to allow for greater accessibility and safety for pedestrians, bikers, and other multimodal users.
- Encourage and incentivize local consumption and regional tourism in the winter months.
- Facilitate additional resources to create unique experiences for residents and tourists, such as art trails, behind-the-scenes tours, historical exploration, etc.
- Explore strategies for on-demand and multimodal transportation systems that will serve small and rural communities more efficiently and comprehensively.

Leverage and expand tourism assets to increase quality of life for residents and to attract new talent.

- Develop ways to communicate where publicly available rest rooms, water filling stations, charging/Wi-Fi, and tourism information can be accessed at different times of the week and day.

- Leverage marketing, branding, signage, and wayfinding to raise awareness about the Finger Lakes Region, emphasizing its diversity of assets and offerings, to encourage more overnight stays by visitors that would otherwise pass through. Utilize themes like craft beverages, outdoor recreation, history, arts and culture, and culinary experiences to bolster tourism in the shoulder seasons.
 - + Leverage assets across county borders to collectively promote the Region to tour operators, particularly those serving visitors to Niagara Falls.
- Facilitate additional funding and resources for capital projects and infrastructure that support both residents and visitors, particularly in relation to:
 - + Expanded access to broadband and publicly available Wi-Fi.
 - + Cultural, event, and recreational facilities throughout the Region, including adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings and facilities that can accommodate youth and amateur sporting events and tournaments.
 - + Outdoor recreation, such as boat launches, interaction points between trails, signage, wayfinding, rest rooms, and innovative transportation services to expand the experiences and reach of outdoor recreators.
- Expand overnight accommodations throughout the Region, carefully considering the local context and appropriate forms of accommodations for each community.
 - + Expand the availability of short-term RV accommodations to capture travelers passing through the Region.
- Support the development of the Finger Lakes Region as a National Heritage Area.
- Support small business development and entrepreneurship with funding, technical assistance, and marketing to enhance the local experience for local and visiting consumers. Consider the intermunicipal Letchworth Gateway Villages initiative as a model.
- Support efforts to create and promote sustainability-focused practices by tourism partners and visitors.

PUBLIC OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

To ensure that the updated Strategic Plan reflects the vision and values of the Finger Lakes Region's diverse communities, the FLREDC implemented a multi-faceted public engagement program. The program was designed to share information, solicit feedback and public input, gather insights on past efforts and best practices, and ultimately sharing the final Strategic Plan with stakeholders and the public.

FLREDC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

- **Share Information:** The primary goal was to disseminate information about the Strategic Plan update project to members of the REDC, its Workforce & Talent Working Group, community partner agencies, and the general public. This step aimed to ensure transparency and keep stakeholders informed about the planning process.
- **Seek Feedback:** Seeking feedback from the Steering Committee, Workforce & Talent Working Group, and other key regional partners was a critical aspect of the engagement plan. The insights gained in this process were instrumental in shaping the goals and strategies within the Strategic Plan.
- **Gather Feedback on Prior Efforts:** The engagement activities aimed to gather feedback on previous development initiatives and efforts. This process helped in understanding what had worked well and what had not, and in identifying existing gaps that needed to be addressed.
- **Provide Opportunities for Public Input:** Inclusivity was a core principle of the engagement plan. The plan included opportunities for the general public to review and provide input on the draft Strategic Plan's goals and strategies. This ensured that the community's voice was integrated into the Plan's development.
- **Share the Final Plan:** Following finalization of the Strategic Plan, it will be shared widely to ensure transparency and accountability.



▲ FLREDC Public Meeting at GCC. Credit: Courtesy Genesee Community College

Public Engagement Activities

The following public engagement activities sought to foster an inclusive and participatory approach to updating the Strategic Plan, taking into account various regional communities' voices and perspectives. The insights gathered from these activities played a crucial role in shaping goals and strategies in the Strategic Plan.

Public Engagement Plan. The Public Engagement Plan was prepared to outline the strategy for engaging the community throughout the Strategic Plan update process.

Steering Committee Meetings. Over the course of four months, a project Steering Committee met four times. These meetings served as a platform for stakeholders to discuss and deliberate on important matters and offer input and guidance as the goals, policies, and strategies were developed for the draft plan.

Quality of Life Survey. A quality of life survey was developed and distributed online among the general public to gather feedback on their experiences, needs, and aspirations for the Region. This survey aimed to assess how community members view a variety of quality of life factors and identify areas for improvement.

Interviews & Focus Groups. A series of roundtable discussions was convened to address specific aspects of the strategic plan, including:

- **Infrastructure:** Focused on the improvement of public facilities, transportation, and utilities.
- **Tourism:** Explored strategies to boost tourism and promote regional attractions.
- **Placemaking:** Explored initiatives to create attractive, vibrant public spaces.
- **Housing:** Discussed availability and affordability of housing options and housing-related challenges in the Region.
- **Workforce & Talent:** Explored ways to enhance training, ecosystem capacity, support systems, and career exposure/advancement.
- **Sustainability:** Discussed strategies for mitigating and managing impacts of climate change.

- **Equity:** Discussed the need for greater attention to implementation, clarity of language around equity topics within the Plan, and improved process in incorporating equity and inclusion into the Region's plan and deliberations.

Community Information Session. The FLREDC hosted a community information session, which was an opportunity for members of the public to learn about the Strategic Plan update, ask questions, and provide feedback.

Meetings of the FLREDC. The FLREDC members convened meetings to launch the planning process, provide input on the Challenge Proposal topic, and review and discuss regional economic development priorities, strategies, and initiatives. These meetings allowed FLREDC members and key stakeholders to collaborate and prioritize strategies for the Region's growth and prosperity.

Quality of Life Survey Summary

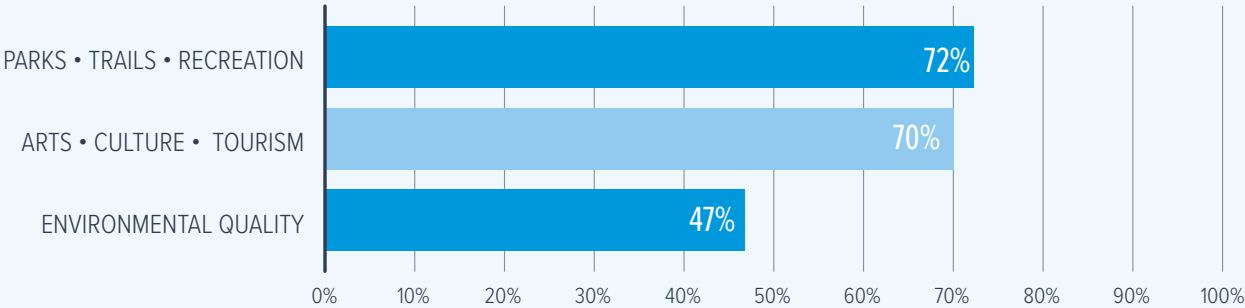
This online survey asked members of the public for feedback about a variety of quality of life factors in the Region by asking what they felt is working well, what needs improvement, and what is most important for the FLREDC to consider over the next ten years.

Respondents were asked to rate the quality and performance of the following factors (in no particular order):

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 Community services and resources (for low-income, homeless, aging, youth) | 7 Economic atmosphere (local/small business activity, access to goods and services, business growth) | efficiency for pedestrians, bicycles, cars, and transit) |
| 2 Diversity, equity, and inclusion | 8 Jobs and income (job availability, opportunities for advancement, training for new skills, sufficient wages/incomes) | |
| 3 Community health and accessible health care options | 9 Environmental quality (water, air, natural resources) | |
| 4 Child care options | 10 Parks, trails, and recreation (quality, accessibility, proximity) | |
| 5 Housing (supply, affordability, quality, and variety) | 11 Arts, culture, and tourism | |
| 6 Education (K-12, higher education, vocational) | 12 Transportation (safety and | |

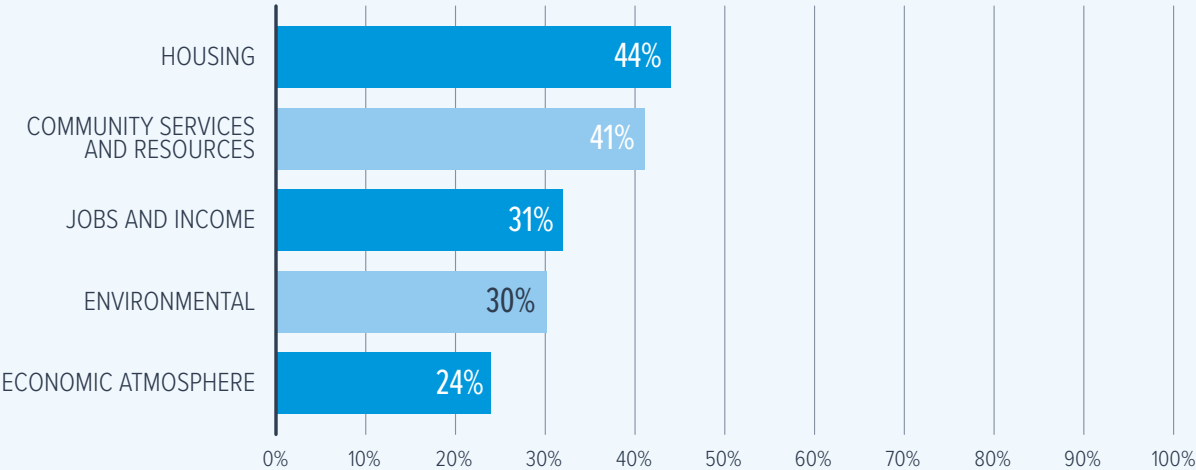
HIGH QUALITY/PERFORMING WELL

Respondents considered these regional attributes to be performing well:



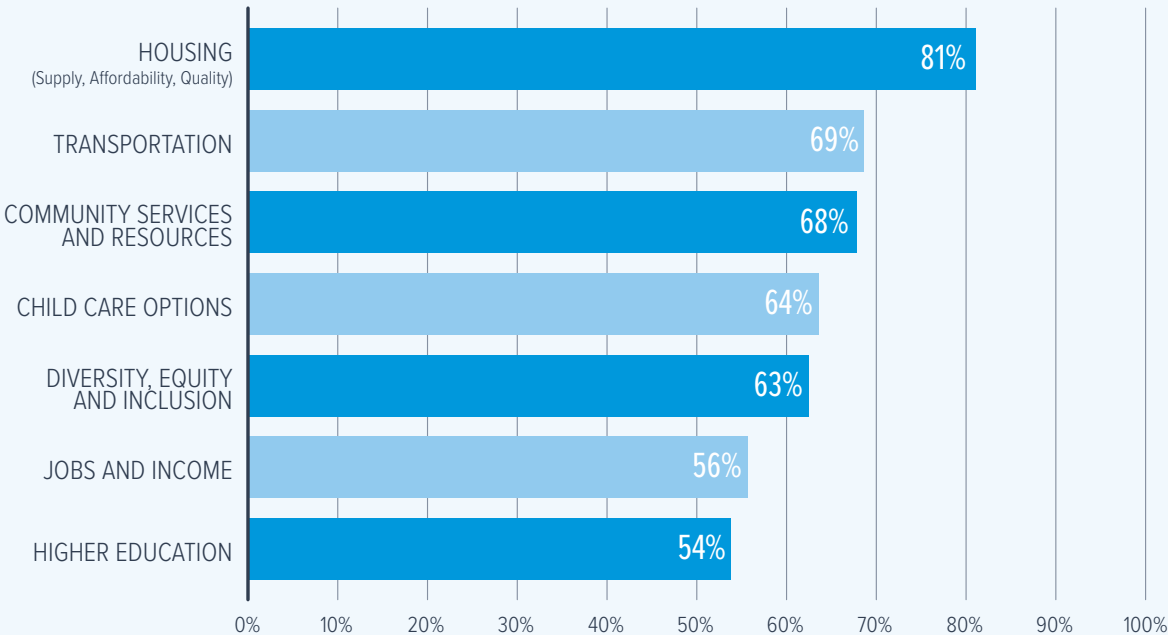
Respondents were also asked which quality of life factors the FLREDC should focus on over the next ten years.

Respondents selected the following as their top priorities:



NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Respondents considered these regional attributes to be in need of improvement:





▲ Front Facade, Healthy Living Campus, Genesee County. 📷 Credit: Genesee County Economic Development Center

Respondents were also provided an opportunity to provide open-ended responses and comments. The comments express a range of concerns and suggestions related to the Finger Lakes Region. Some common themes and sentiments include:

- **Affordable Housing:** Many respondents expressed concerns about the availability and affordability of housing in the Region. They highlight the need for more affordable housing options and the challenges faced by low- and middle-income residents.
- **Transportation:** Several comments mention the need for improved public transportation options, as well as the importance of pedestrian and cyclist safety. Accessibility and mobility are key concerns.
- **Education:** Educational issues, particularly the performance of the Rochester City School District, are a recurring theme. Many believe that improvements in K-12 education are necessary.
- **Environmental Concerns:** The comments emphasize the importance of protecting the environment, preserving natural resources, and addressing climate change. Many called for sustainable development and eco-friendly practices.
- **Economic Development:** Some respondents suggest that economic development efforts should be aligned with eco-friendly and sustainable principles. Many respondents called for an expansion of job opportunities in the Region.
- **Tourism and Recreation:** The Finger Lakes Region's potential as a tourist destination is recognized, and there is a desire to promote tourism, recreation, and cultural assets.
- **Community Services:** Coordination of community services, support for families, and accessibility to resources are mentioned as important aspects of improving quality of life in the Region.
- **Regional Planning:** Many respondents called for enhanced regional cooperation and planning, especially in the face of potential population growth due to climate migration. Efficient land use and development were also named as priorities.
- **Social Equity:** Many respondents consider it important to address economic disparities and promote diversity and inclusion in the Region's economic and social realms.

The survey comments collectively reflect a broad array of concerns and recommendations related to the Finger Lakes Region, with a strong emphasis on affordability, sustainability, education, and environmental preservation.

Survey respondents were also asked to suggest actions that municipalities, non-profit organizations, and other regional leaders could do to improve quality of life. Key themes include:

1 Child Care and Education

- + Provide more grants to child care centers to gain high-quality services.
- + Address urban and rural child poverty and improve the quality of education in schools.

2 Public Safety and Policing

- + Focus on better policing and public safety.
- + Address homelessness and housing insecurity and address crime in downtown Rochester.

3 Bipartisanship and Governance

- + Advocate for more bipartisan collaboration among policymakers.

4 Infrastructure and Public Services

- + Repair roads and fill potholes.
- + Enhance public transportation and address transportation safety.
- + Provide public water and wastewater infrastructure to underserved areas.
- + Increase investment in green initiatives and clean energy.
- + Improve transparency in government spending.

5 Economic Development and Jobs

- + Encourage wage and benefit improvements in the private sector.
- + Support local businesses, promote workforce development, and diversify the economy.
- + Develop and support more housing with accessible transportation.

6 Community Inclusion and Kindness

- + Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion to address discrimination.
- + Encourage community unity and decrease polarization.
- + Support programming that improves and empowers low-income and diverse communities.
- + Foster open, communicative relationships with communities.

7 Environmental Conservation

- + Protect the environment, including water resources, lakes, and green infrastructure.
- + Encourage recycling, use of clean energy, and reduced reliance on landfills.

8 Healthcare and Mental Health

- + Provide more mental health support.
- + Seek ways to offer low/no-cost community spaces for groups.
- + Fund health resources, including dental and mental health care.

9 Transportation and Urban Planning

- + Invest in biking infrastructure and develop safer sidewalks.
- + Promote sustainable, walkable, and bikeable communities.
- + Implement zoning codes that encourage community development.
- + Prioritize accessible public transportation.

10 Social Services and Inclusivity

- + Improve access to social services and resources.
- + Expand services for low-income housing, support the homeless, and provide for diverse community needs.
- + Focus on economic growth and inclusion.

11 Taxation and Fiscal Responsibility

- + Lower property taxes and reduce the tax burden on residents.

12 Community Collaboration

- + Promote collaboration and co-operation across all sectors.
- + Centralize information sources for residents.
- + Facilitate regional planning and streamline access to resources.

13 Solid Waste Management

- + Advocate for the implementation of the proposed solid waste management plan.

These responses encompass a wide range of community concerns and suggestions for improvement, emphasizing the need for co-operation, inclusivity, and better governance across various sectors.



▲ Rick Hill and Sean O'Rourke, Finger Lakes Community College Advanced Manufacturing Program. 📷 Credit: Rikki Van Camp

WORKFORCE AND TALENT WORKGROUP UPDATE

The Workforce and Talent Workgroup includes more than 60 individuals representing private businesses, industry associations, educational institutions, community organizations, and local governments. In developing the *2022 Workforce Development Strategy*, the Workgroup inventoried the regional workforce and identified in-demand jobs and skills. That strategy focused on workforce development efforts in three tradeable sectors: advanced manufacturing with optics, agribusiness, and clean and renewable energy. This Strategic Plan update builds on the recommendations from that effort, expanding the focus to include other target industry sectors and further emphasizing equity and sustainability as foundational values.

In developing this Strategic Plan and the Challenge Competition Proposal, the Workgroup co-chairs convened to solidify the vision for the workforce ecosystem, which informed strategy development and priorities. Then a series of information sessions was held with Workgroup members to review and gain feedback on the identified priorities and strategies for the Plan update. Workgroup members were asked to share ideas for projects to be included in the Challenge Proposal, as well as data from their respective organizations regarding current training and workforce programming. This data was used in a pilot gap analysis to map where there are shortfalls in workforce and skill development resources compared to the skillsets regional employers are demanding.

The Workgroup then convened to review and provide feedback on the refined strategies and Challenge Competition Proposal before they were incorporated into the Strategic Plan. At this meeting, the Workgroup members in attendance expressed support for the strategies and priorities ultimately reflected in this Strategic Plan.



▲ FLREDC Public Meeting at GCC.

📷 Credit: Courtesy Genesee Community College

PART 3

CHALLENGES COMPETITION PROPOSAL

CHALLENGE OVERVIEW

The Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council (FLREDC) has selected Workforce Development as its Challenge Proposal topic. Our proposal is designed to drive powerful workforce development outcomes through improved ecosystem alignment and an emphasis on job placement and equity. Our plan will position our Region for private sector growth enabled by a strengthened, skilled labor force, and ensure that regional prosperity is broadly shared among communities and residents of the Region.

To arrive at our selection of this topic, FLREDC members first participated in a poll ranking their top three priorities among the provided topics, and the poll results were discussed at the August 10, 2023 FLREDC meeting. Workforce and Population/Talent were the top two identified topics in the poll, although the poll comments indicated that equity should be a priority within all of the topics. Considering this, the FLREDC collected and considered some initial data on the top topics, outlined in the box to the right.

The FLREDC members had a spirited and candid conversation about the interconnectedness of many of the Challenge topics, particularly workforce, talent, blight, housing, and tourism. Ultimately, the members concluded that the Region is best positioned to leverage, expand, and connect existing investments and programming in workforce development. A \$10 million investment in our workforce development ecosystem will have truly transformational impact on the Region.

Regional Workforce

- ✓ 60.5% labor force participation rate
 - + Lower than pre-pandemic (62.0%) and national (62.5%) levels, but higher than State (60.1%).
- ✓ 28.2% of the workforce is overqualified for the jobs currently offered
- ✓ 3.3% Regional unemployment rate, the lowest since 2017
- ✓ Top “common” skills (also known as soft/human skills): customer service, management, sales, Microsoft Office, leadership
- ✓ Top “specialized” (technical) skills: marketing, strategic planning, process improvement, event planning, project management
- ✓ Net exporter of labor (more commute out than in)
- ✓ Top occupations with workforce gaps: first-line supervisors of production and operating workers, electrical engineers, civil engineers, computer user support specialists, project management specialists, machinists

Regional Population/Talent

- ✓ Region has become more diverse
 - + U.S. Census Bureau Diversity Index Score increased from 34.6 to 42.7 between 2010 and 2020
- ✓ Private sector employment increased by 1.2% since 2022
- ✓ Population increased 0.5% between 2010 and 2020

The FLREDC has identified three potential projects to constitute our Challenge Proposal, which we believe would ensure effective use of the \$10 million as they are ready to proceed if awarded. Together they represent a system-wide approach that aligns with the three pillars of the Workforce Development Core Focus Area of this Strategic Plan update, providing impact at the ecosystem, training, and worker social supports levels. Although these projects will be led by a specific set of sponsors, many workforce development partners across the Region will contribute to their success. The combination of these interconnected activities will result in:

- Better alignment of the regional workforce ecosystem, including enhanced workflow and tracking;
- Greater supports that allow for greater representation and participation among underserved and underemployed populations, thus expanding the workforce pipeline and providing more equitable access to economic opportunity;
- A sharper focus on career exposure and advancement; and
- Greater ability to track job placement success on a system-wide basis.

While the final consideration and selection of projects would be considered upon award of the Challenge Proposal funding, the tables below outline the identified FLREDC Challenge Proposal projects, and each are detailed on the following pages.

1

Implementing a Workforce Development Ecosystem in the FL Region

Implement a 2-year project to develop a baseline workforce development ecosystem that supports both providers and community members.

THEMES

Ecosystem: collaboration, transparency & performance metrics, cross-sector knowledge transfer.

LEVERAGE

Existing investment in and infrastructure of the **MyWayfinder** system.

2

Scaling HyFlex Education for Smart Work Force

Address need for adaptable **technical workers** across entire high-tech ecosystem. **HyFlex** scheduling creates opportunity across the Region and allows adult participants to continue working while learning.

THEMES

Career exposure & advancement: K-12, underemployed, learn & earn.

LEVERAGE

FLCC facilities, FLCC efforts with regional school districts to acquire **HyFlex** equipment for distance learning, & additional funding sources.

3

Good Jobs Finger Lakes

Multi-sector collaboration to expand the workforce pipeline through new and expanded curriculum offerings, career pathways and social support programs, and tailored outreach, recruitment, and engagement in the community.

THEMES

Worker training & supports: learn & earn, transportation, social supports, housing development.

LEVERAGE

Existing CCDBG, WIOA, and operating budgets of the backbone organizations.


















ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS OF TRAINING PROGRAMS

Previous regional workforce studies have identified skills needed by our employers. The Monroe Community College Economic & Workforce Development Center conducted a Workforce Skills and Demand Analysis for the Finger Lakes Region for time period of April 2020 through March 2021. This analysis projected that job postings seeking high tech skillsets would be grow significantly through 2023, calling out clusters such as IT automation, internet of things, artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, distributed computing, and machine learning. At the time, hard to fill career clusters included image analysis, micro manufacturing, internet security, water energy, and content delivery network. Emerging career clusters included hardware description languages, optics, internet security, wind energy, and virtual private networks. These results point to the emerging needs and trends that the Region had already identified, and that we are continuing to work to address today.

Assessments of this kind have been helpful in guiding our regional workforce partners, but there has not to date been a true gap analysis mapping skills being developed by the Region's training providers to the skills for which employers have the greatest need. The FLREDC Workforce & Talent Workgroup devised an innovative approach to this mapping and collected data on the gaps between industry skills needs and existing training programs.

We first utilized the Lightcast Labor Market Analytics data set, using the cumulative regional job postings over the last three years (September 2020 – September 2023) to determine the specific job skills required by employers in the Region. We then identified the ten most frequently required job skills in each of the following sectors: advanced manufacturing and optics, agribusiness, clean and renewable energy, software and information technology, and healthcare and life sciences. We also identified the top 15 common skills most requested by employers.

FLREDC CHALLENGE PROPOSAL PROJECTS

	Next Generation Manufacturing and Optics, Photonics, and Imaging	Agriculture and Food Production	Clean and Renewable Energy	Healthcare and Life Sciences	Software and Information Technology	Budget
Lead Sponsor Program						
TogetherNow Implementing WD Ecosystems						\$1,235,976
Finger Lakes Community College Scaling HyFlex Education				Life Sciences specifically		\$2,031,700
RochesterWorks (with FLPPS, RTMA, Common Ground Health and UNICON) Good Jobs Finger Lakes			Via contractors trained to deploy tech	Healthcare providers specifically		\$6,732,324

We then surveyed a representative group of training providers in the Finger Lakes Region, including community colleges, BOCES programs, and sector-specific trade groups. In this survey, we asked how much emphasis was placed on training the identified skills: Main Focus, High, Some, or None.

The Lightcast data results were then normalized on a scale of 0 to 10. For example, a skill with the most demand would have a score of 10, and a skill with no demand would have a score of 0. The training provider responses were similarly scored. A skill that is being treated as a Main Focus by regional training providers would have a score of 10, and a skill with no training emphasis would have a score of 0. Using the normalized scores for both the employers (skill demanders) and the training providers, we then measured skills training gaps in the Region.

Specialized (Technical) Skills. In all five industry sectors analyzed, all of the top ten specialized skills had a greater demand than was being supplied by the training providers. The detailed breakdown for each sector is illustrated in **Figures 1-6**.

We also developed an overall skills gap score for each sector, which scales from 0 to 100. A 0 score means that all desired skills are being adequately supported by existing training programs, with higher scores representing a larger gap. The table below shows the results of that analysis, with agribusiness having the largest training gap.

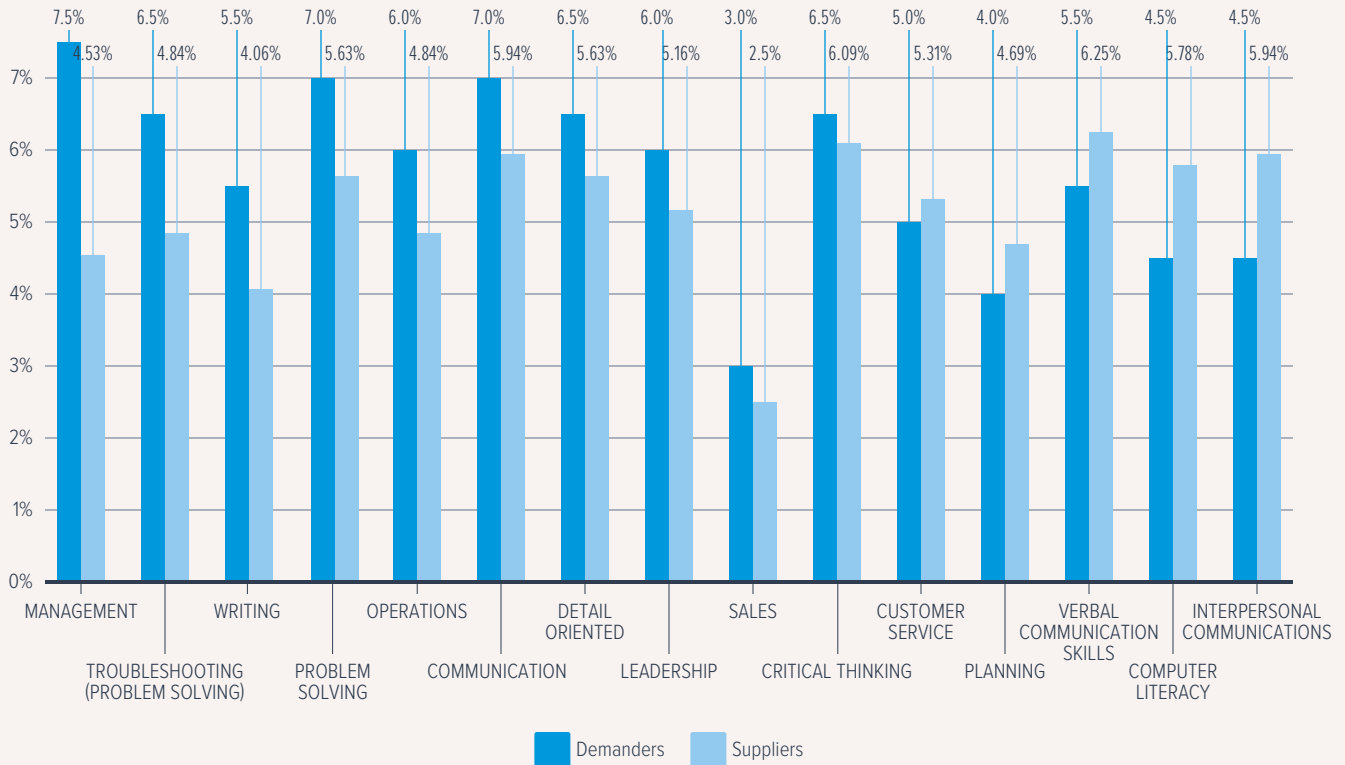
Common (Soft/Human) Skills. The analysis of common skills (Figure 6) presents a much more optimistic picture, with an overall skills gap of just 7.81 and with a few skills—customer service, planning, verbal communications, computer literacy, and interpersonal communications—receiving more emphasis from regional training providers than would be suggested by employers' expressed needs.

This type of quantitative gap analysis will empower policymakers and training providers with the data and insights required to innovate in their workforce development programming to generate real impact, improve the availability of skilled local workers, and prepare residents for rewarding careers in high-growth industry sectors. This was a condensed pilot analysis, and a broader set of data could yield more comprehensive and actionable results. However, it is clear that there is still some disconnect among workforce development providers, as well as between these providers and industry partners. Moreover, quality training programs are only effective if they can be easily identified and utilized by people seeking to advance their careers. This reinforces the Region's need for greater alignment and active coordination within our workforce development ecosystem, as well as more flexible training opportunities and further access improvements.

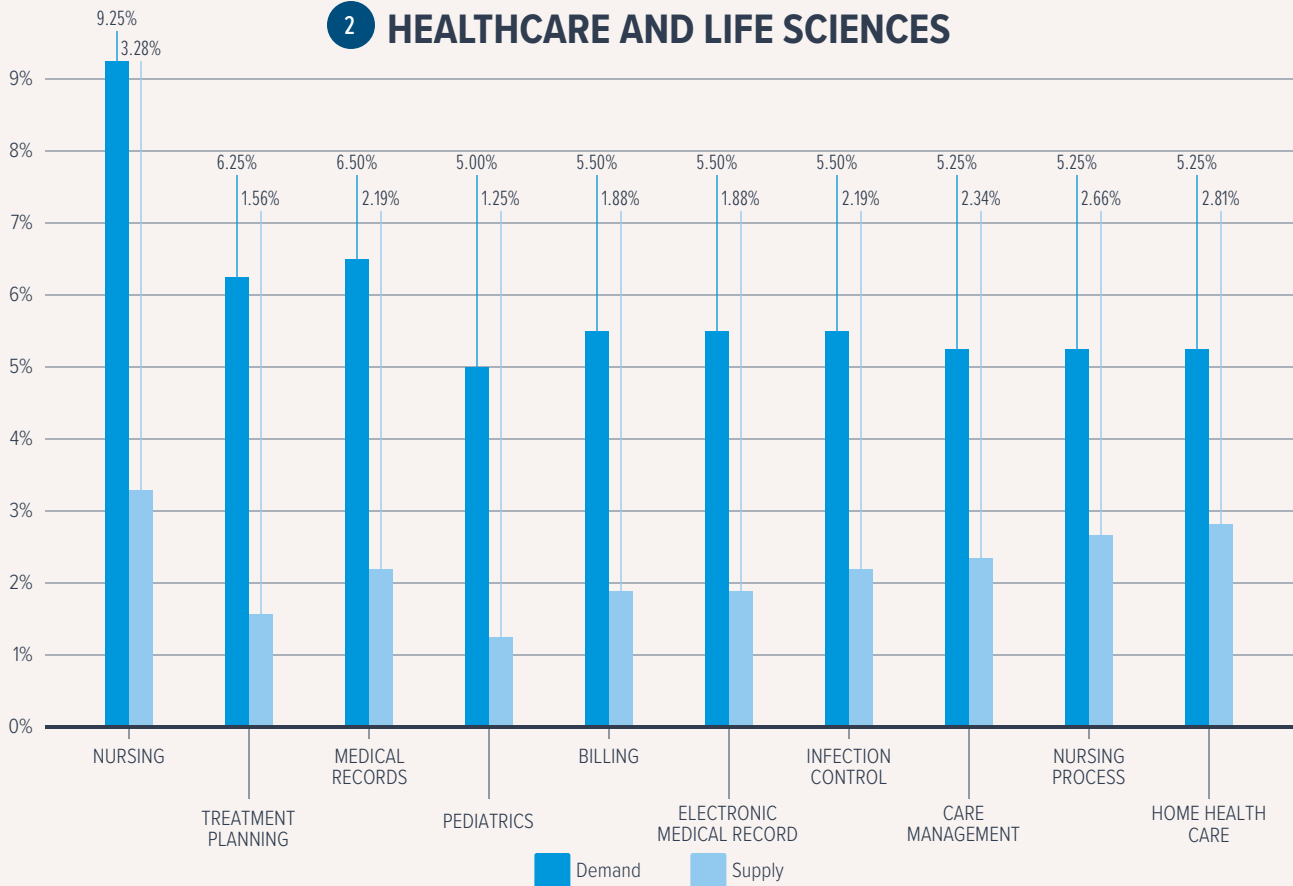
Specialized Skills

SECTOR	
Next Generation Manufacturing and Optics, Photonics, and Imaging	28.47
Agriculture and Food Production	42.38
Clean and Renewable Energy	33.00
Software and Information Technology	25.69
Healthcare and Life Sciences	37.22

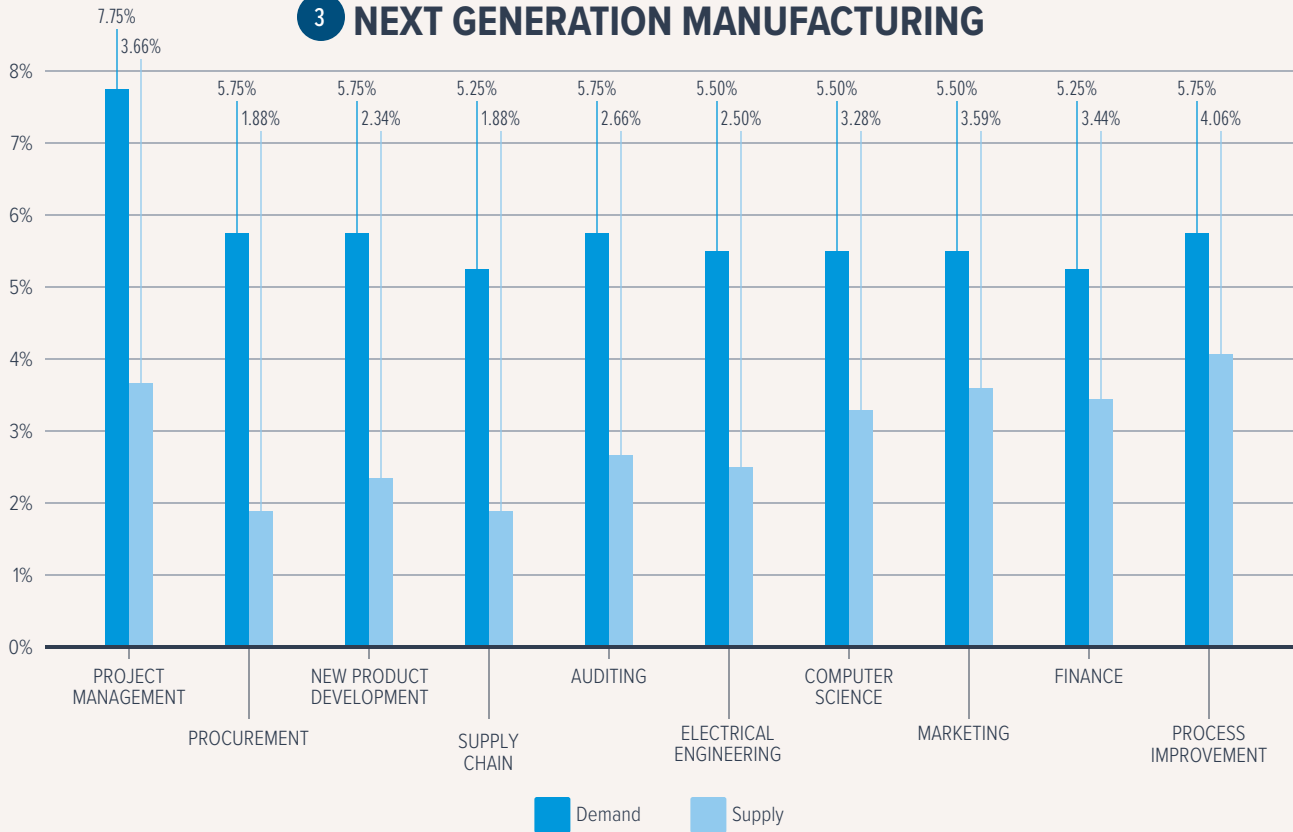
1 COMMON SKILLS



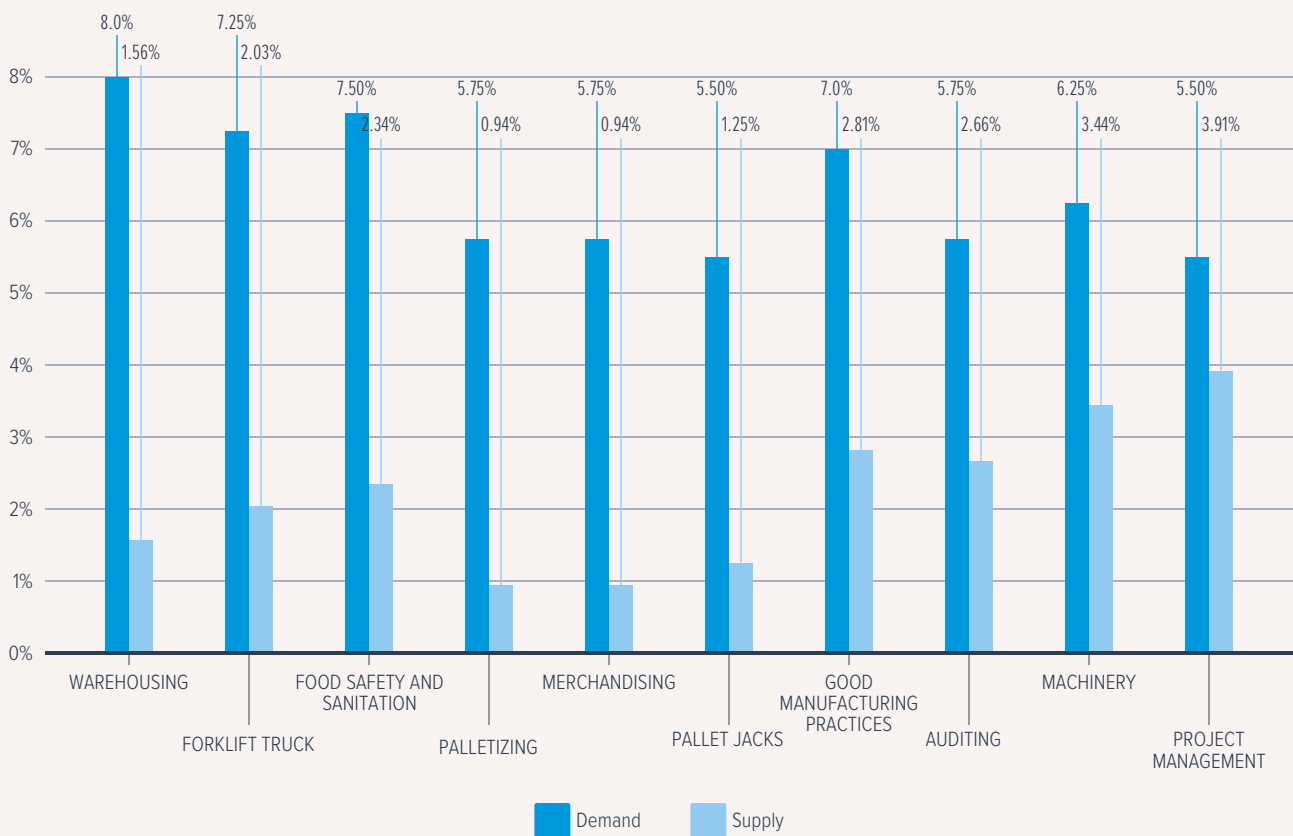
2 HEALTHCARE AND LIFE SCIENCES



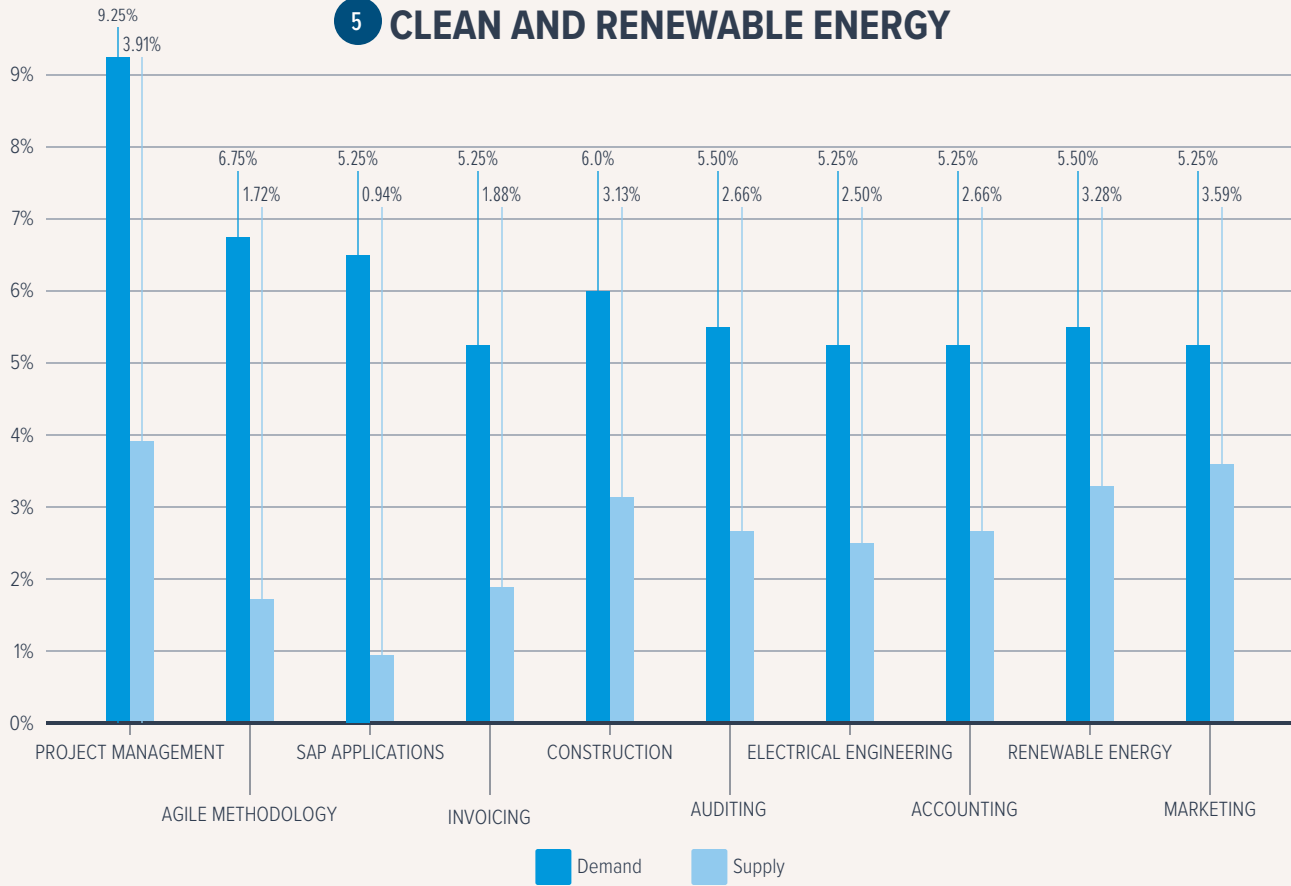
3 NEXT GENERATION MANUFACTURING



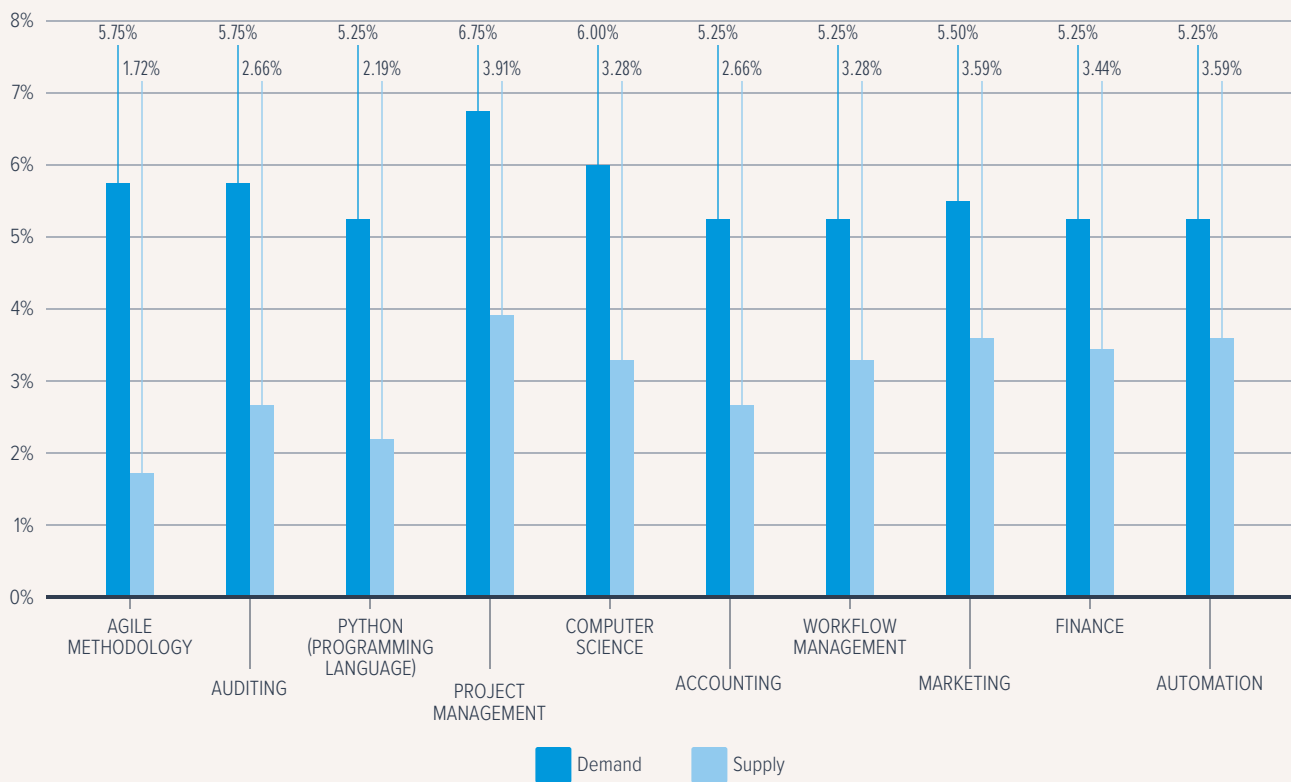
4 AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PRODUCTION



5 CLEAN AND RENEWABLE ENERGY



6 SOFTWARE AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY



CHALLENGE PROPOSAL PROJECTS

FINGER LAKES WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM

TogetherNow (previously Systems Integration Project, a recipient of URI funding in partnership with United Way) will deliver a project designed to organize the existing workforce development partners and their offerings into a true collaborative regional ecosystem model that enhances access, utilization, and outcomes. This concept borrows from best practices around the proven concept of workforce intermediaries, or collaborations that align and address gaps in the local system to bridge investment and need, such as calibrating workforce supply and demand.¹⁵ An ecosystem approach will provide for greater collaboration, communication, tracking, and streamlined workflow for all of the partners. This project will build upon the Region and State's prior investment in the *MyWayfinder* system, a digital tool created to support both providers and community members in navigating the complex system of 3,000+ services in the Greater Rochester area. It features a comprehensive community resource directory, standardized screening, closed loop referral, service utilization dashboards, and more.

¹⁵ Brachman, Lavea. "Amid economic and racial crises, legacy city collaborations point a path forward." Brookings Institution, September 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/amid-economic-and-racial-crisis-legacy-city-collaborations-point-a-path-forward/>

This Workforce Development Ecosystem project will break out into two phases over two years. In the first phase, we will incorporate workforce development partners and programming into the *MyWayfinder* system and work with partners to organize workflow, identify gaps and overlap, and determine clear metrics for success. This process of convening, collaborating, and trust building is intended to create a more connected and accessible workforce development system for everyone. The second phase of the project will incorporate wraparound service providers to ensure that workers and individuals can seamlessly navigate the ecosystem and access various supports they may need to participate in training programs. This system will ultimately strengthen the other two proposed

Challenge projects by creating a robust platform for referrals and collaboration. This component of the proposal is the smallest investment, but is also the piece that will pull all of the components of workforce development together, making the whole ecosystem more transparent and accessible to all.

Objectives

- Document current state of the Finger Lakes workforce development ecosystem, including an analysis of customers, stakeholders, industry dynamics, environment, and provider realities.
- Convene workforce development ecosystem stakeholders to identify pain points and opportunities. Use this analysis to collaboratively design, test, and implement integrated workflows that drive ecosystem functionality. Examples include standardized workflows for assessment, referral, and navigation.
- Expand the *MyWayfinder* Community Resource Directory to include all counties in the Finger Lakes Region (adding Genesee, Orleans, Wyoming, and Yates Counties), via an enhanced partnership with the 211s, hotlines that provide information about essential community services, supporting these counties. Ensure all components of the workforce development ecosystem are identified in the Community Resource Directory.
- Recruit and train workforce development ecosystem providers in key workflows, supported by the *MyWayfinder* digital tool.
- Convene wraparound service providers to identify pain points and opportunities. Use this analysis to collaboratively design, test, and implement integrated workflows that drive ecosystem functionality.
- Establish baseline information on the performance of the workforce development ecosystem and define gaps, goals, and metrics that will guide future work.



▲ GLOW With Your Hands, Barilla (2023). Credit: Genesee County Economic Development Center

Target Audience

The target audience for this project is individuals who are seeking sustainable employment and enhanced job skills. The project will center on the experience of the individual. Other impacted stakeholders include workforce development providers, wraparound service providers, the FLREDC, and New York State.

Outcomes

- Convene three geographically focused collaborative workgroups to assess, redesign, and implement a Workforce Development Ecosystem across the Finger Lakes Region. Incorporating a geographic component will ensure that solutions are developed and deployed to meet the needs of targeted users, while concurrently leveraging common and connected infrastructure.
- Pilot (plan, implement, improve) six integrated service delivery solutions prior to scaled implementation of the Workforce Development Ecosystem.
- Connect at least 20 workforce development providers to the *MyWayfinder* system.

- Connect at least 20 additional wraparound services to the *MyWayfinder* system.
- Develop, test, and implement service pathways (workflows) that support an individual’s transition from “Not OK” to “Good” in the Income and Employment domains as tracked by the *MyWayfinder* system.
- Establish baseline data on system performance so that improvement targets can be set.

Leverage

- *MyWayfinder* system and infrastructure.
- Existing collaborations of the Workforce & Talent Workgroup.
- Data collected during the Monroe County Workforce System Scan (July 2023).

SCALING HYFLEX SMART WORKFORCE FOR HIGH-TECH ECOSYSTEM

The Finger Lakes Community College *HyFlex* Smart Systems Technologies (SST) program (www.flcc.edu/SST) addresses the need for adaptable technical workers across entire high-tech ecosystem (advanced manufacturing & optics, clean & renewable energy, and healthcare and life sciences), especially at small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that have challenges filling positions that require a unique mix of technical and communication skill sets. *HyFlex* refers to the combination of in-person and remote learning, as well as flexible scheduling, to accommodate a greater diversity of learners. The *HyFlex* model (www.flcc.edu/HyFlex) offers an opportunity for students in high schools across the Region to access remote classes, as well as scheduling that allows incumbent and underemployed workers to access training outside of their workday. This offers “earn and learn” opportunities, meaning that adult learners do not need to sacrifice existing income streams while advancing in or changing careers.

SST combines training curriculum with industry exposure via business visitations, apprenticeships, internships, and co-ops. The program has operated on a small scale for about ten years and already collaborates with 50 businesses across industries in the Region. The proposed investment would at least triple participation and make one-time investments that will help to sustain the program into the future. Participants in the program include high school students, underemployed individuals, and incumbent workers. The program has a 90%+ job placement rate before graduation.

Objectives

- Draw 90 to 180 high school students into high-tech careers.
- Supercharge *HyFlex* learning with remote interactivity for traditional students, incumbent workers, and underemployed liberal arts graduates.
- Strengthen the adaptable workforce for SMEs through targeted co-op experiences with 50+ businesses providing 270 hours of hands on experience and *HyFlex* class scheduling that creates broader opportunities for geographically, demographically, and economically diverse populations.

Knowledge & Hands-on Skills for Industry 4.0

- Sensors and data acquisition (myDAQ, Arduino, NVIDIA Jetson)
- Data analytics (Excel, LabVIEW)
- Process modeling (LabVIEW, Multisim, MATLAB)
- Process and machine control (PLCs)
- Robots and cobots (collaborative robots)
- Digital twins (e.g. of wind power or smart grid infrastructure)
- Augmented Virtual Reality (AR/VR)
- Industrial applications of machine learning and AI
- High School Career Exposure & Skill Building Activities:
 - High school students register for the course “SST 116 Introduction to Careers in High-Tech Ecosystem” (3 credits) every year on Friday mornings.
 - Ten students each from ten high schools will visit ten businesses.
 - Up to half of the students enter FLCC, matriculated in SST degree program.
 - Summer workshops for high school educators (visualizing math, Excel, LabVIEW, Arduino, Multisim).
 - *HyFlex* scheduling options, including totally remote education, increase access to the degree program. Co-op would still be in person.
 - Students are matched to individual business requirements for a paid co-op (270 hours); businesses have been recruited across industries.
 - Program maintains its current 75% completion rate in two years (~3x national rate for tech programs), and almost all current students have full-time jobs before graduation.
 - Equipment is secured for remote access and enhanced training through use of technologies like digital twins and AR/VR.

Project Advantages for Upskilling Underemployed & Incumbent Workers

- Reskills/upskills underemployed liberal arts graduates without a break in their current employment and income stream.
- *HyFlex* scheduling allows incumbent workers to pursue AAS degree and new skills, leading to improved retention and enabling work teams leverage new technical capabilities to solve emerging challenges.
- Incumbent workers complete co-op requirement as a part of their job (using SST technical skills, including quality improvement).
- Students graduating from SST program can pursue online baccalaureate degree in Technology Management at Alfred State College, an attractive career growth pathway.

Outcomes

- Cumulatively add 80 to 160 high-tech engineering technicians to the regional high-tech ecosystem over three years.
- Cumulative three-year economic impact of \$20M-\$40M, an ROI of 10x-20x; cumulative six-year impact of \$80M-\$160M. (Over the past decade, the estimated cumulative economic impact of graduates of the SST program was \$100M).

Leverage

- *HyFlex* Smart Systems Technologies program.
- Efforts by FLCC to assist school districts in securing funding to acquire distance learning technology, growing the geographic reach for the high school component of the program.
- FLCC's Victor Campus Center, which includes specialized equipment and lab space.
- Existing business partnerships.

GOOD JOBS FINGER LAKES

The Good Jobs Finger Lakes partnership, primarily coordinated by RochesterWorks, Inc., Rochester Technology and Manufacturing Association (RTMA), Finger Lakes Performing Provider System (FLPPS, a New York State Workforce Investment Organization), Common Ground Health (CGH), and Construction Co-operation and Education Trust (dba UNiCON), seeks to support hundreds of participants in overcoming barriers to employment, as well as train them for good, in-demand jobs in the Region. The key to this project is the establishment and capacity building of three industry backbone organizations, including the creation of related outreach specialist and supportive services coordinator positions within each. The three backbone organizations will be RTMA for advanced manufacturing, FLPPS for healthcare, and UNiCON for skilled trades. These organizations will support the workforce needs of their respective industries by working with employers to create clearer career and training pathways internally, as well as supporting workers in accessing wraparound services. Outreach specialists will recruit workforce participants with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, referring and placing participants in classroom and/or work-based training programs, which will result in a quality job with participating businesses. Throughout the training period, supportive service coordinators will provide or connect learners with the wraparound services they need for successful program completion.

One goal of this Challenge project is to demonstrate how additional worker supports to overcome a variety of training and employment barriers are more cost-effective than worker turnover, as well as how a more inclusive recruitment and onboard approach adds value to the business. We anticipate that this outcome will encourage employers to invest directly in supports that will improve retention and advancement (e.g. transportation, backup child care, legal assistance, etc.). In doing so, the program will expand workforce opportunities for populations that might otherwise be left behind as the regional economy grows. Good Jobs Finger Lakes will connect participants with training programs such as the FLCC *HyFlex* program and the Monroe Community College Forward Center. Further, supportive service coordinators will leverage the proposed upgrades to the *MyWayfinder* system and enhanced collaboration of the workforce ecosystem to connect participants with appropriate service and training providers.

Manufacturing-related training will provide a strengthened skill base not just for our Next Generation Manufacturing sector, but also our Agriculture and Food Production and Clean and Renewable Energy sectors. And the Skilled Trades component of this project will help expand the qualified workforce needed for housing development and the deployment of sustainable building technologies and energy efficiency measures.

Good Jobs Finger Lakes was originally conceived and planned as an application to the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) Good Jobs Challenge. Although it was not funded by that particular resource, the recent planning for that initiative provides an excellent foundation for this Challenge project, having aligned three industry-based backbone training organizations and recruited over 100 participating businesses. FLPPS, in collaboration with CGH, healthcare employers, and training partners, has developed a robust Career Pathway and Social Support Program model. This program has been implemented with healthcare employers, five regional community colleges, and community-based organizations to provide education and economic mobility opportunities to nursing and human and social service professionals. Further, using ARPA funds, FLPPS is implementing three large-scale workforce development programs in Monroe County to address critical workforce shortages in long term care, allowing us to leverage learnings from all of these experiences as we implement this Challenge project. Lastly, FLPPS and CGH convene a Finger Lakes Region Workforce Consortium that is comprised of key stakeholders that can support this project.

Target Demographics

Good Jobs Finger Lakes will benefit employers, participants, training providers, and other stakeholders throughout the nine-county Finger Lakes Region.

- A portion of participants will be employed workers trained through FLPPS Learning Management System, which offers an extensive library of training courses across a variety of common and specialized skills.
- Other participants will be distributed geographically in proportion to the working-age population.
- The program will target women, BIPOC, youth, people with disabilities, veterans, and justice-involved individuals.

Plan to Mitigate Identified Barriers

- We will address the lack of career opportunity awareness through outreach strategies to promote rewarding, viable employment pathways in our key industry sectors.
- In addition to the *MyWayfinder* system, the FLPPS Learning Management System (LMS) will be used to increase awareness of and utilization of supportive services. This will help to address participants' barriers to training and employment through enhanced access to supportive services, including:
 - + Transportation supports,
 - + Child care supports,
 - + Access to computing devices and broadband internet service,
 - + Assistance with public benefits applications,
 - + Tutoring services to address academic difficulties, and
 - + Miscellaneous supportive services, which may be used to cover other specific and emergency needs.
- Disability resource coordinators in the three local Workforce Development Board territories will work with training providers and employers to address the need for reasonable accommodations for participants with disabilities.
- An outreach specialist will help each learner create a training plan and outline the steps of their intended career pathway. This specialist will track participants through each step of this plan.

Training Period

The Good Jobs Finger Lakes initiative will feature intensive one-on-one engagement with participants, particularly before and during the training period. This engagement will entail the following activities:

1. Classroom training providers will expose participants to contact with employer partners. Training providers will communicate with the referring outreach specialist to provide them with names of participants who have not received a job offer before the end of training. (Participants in work-based training are already employed, and their employers will regularly evaluate their progress).



► 2023 CollegeFest. Credit: Mountain House Media

2. Supportive services coordinators will follow up with participants throughout the training period, with contacts increasing in frequency as the training end date approaches, to ensure a successful transition to employment.
3. American Job Center partners will offer WIOA career services such as resume development, interview skills development, career planning, and job search assistance during the last 60 days of the training period. These services will be offered on site at the training facility for larger training cohorts or one-on-one for individual participants.
4. The outreach specialist will assist participants with job placement.
5. We will explore the potential need for development of a soft skills curriculum, as suggested by representatives from all the industry sectors of focus, or better utilization and alignment of existing soft skills training opportunities with industry needs.

6. Assess ability to leverage the FLPPS LMS and digitized training and/or certification programs to increase accessibility for new recruits and students.

Leverage

- Good Jobs Finger Lakes' existing engagement with 16 training partners, including community colleges, four-year colleges, and K-12 schools. (The initiative expects to engage additional partners upon project launch).
- Prior EDA Good Jobs Challenge proposal development efforts, including the commitment of over 100 participating businesses.
- Existing Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), WIOA, and operational funding and capacity of backbone organizations.

FLPPS LMS and Career Pathways and Social Support Program model and other existing workforce development programs.



Finger Lakes
Regional Economic
Development Council

