



## 2024-26 STRATEGIC PLAN | FINAL

*The Calhoun County Economic Development Corporation is a non-profit organization formed to undertake a unified economic development effort within Calhoun County Iowa. Assistance is provided to community organizations in their pursuit of local development efforts.*

Adopted by the Calhoun County Economic Development Corporation  
Board of Directors on: January 19, 2024

## Mission

Enhance business retention, start-up, and growth, so as to increase both employment opportunities and the tax base. The organization also devotes resources to improve quality of life and to promote the county as a desirable place to live and work.

# Collaborating for the **FUTURE**

## Overview

The Calhoun County Economic Development Corporation (CCEDC) recognized the essential need to develop a comprehensive 3-year strategic plan, envisioning a trajectory that not only addresses identified needs but also aspires to elevate the landscape of economic development in Calhoun County. In pursuit of this vision, the CCEDC engaged Emerge Marketing Solutions to collaboratively develop the 2024-26 CCEDC Strategic Plan.

This plan signifies a paradigm shift, delineating priorities for strategic evolution while establishing clear-cut goals, objectives, and actionable measures. The planning process included a preparatory phase and a stakeholder ‘huddle-up’ session. Subsequently, two planning sessions were conducted in tandem with the CCEDC executive director, culminating in a presentation to the CCEDC board. The plan underwent a thorough review and revision process, ultimately securing adoption by the CCEDC Board of Directors. This strategic blueprint is poised to enact positive transformations, aligning the organization with its core priorities and fostering sustainable economic development in Calhoun County.

The following word cloud conveys the ideas, priorities, and connections that were identified during the planning session. This visual presents a shared understanding of priorities and identifies patterns to engage and align stakeholders, fostering collaboration and commitment to the strategic objectives outlined in this strategic plan.



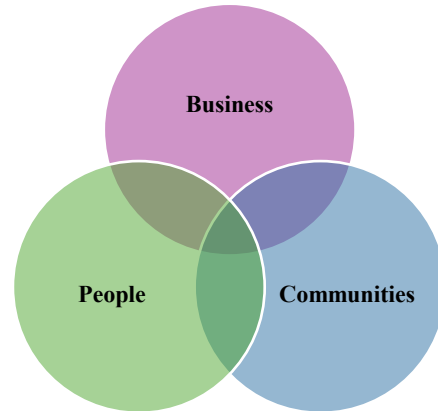
## Pillars of Success

CCEDC has identified three pillars of success that will establish a strong foundation for the organization. No matter which priority is identified or prioritized, these core components working together will help CCEDC fulfill its mission effectively. These priorities build upon the 2016-18 strategic plan and serve as the basis for the organization’s future strategic direction.

- **Collaboration:** We will build synergistic partnerships for collective success.
- **Communication:** We will ensure effective two-way communication with stakeholders.
- **Capacity Building:** We will build capacity by investing in our people, resulting in a robust community and workforce.

## Collaborative Approach

In an effort to be most successful, it is imperative that the CCEDC has engaged leadership through collaboration and partnerships; leadership development; and succession planning. The organization will leverage the efforts of the state's economic development strategy and take a three-pronged approach to economic development that involves the businesses, communities, and people that make up Calhoun County. In all efforts outlined in this plan, a three-way partnership should be explored for greatest impact and synergies.

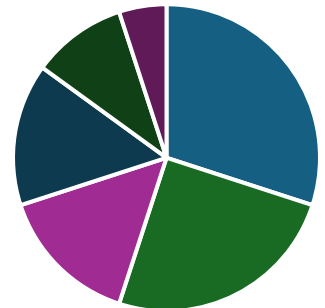


## Target Audiences

### 1. Current Top 10 Calhoun County Businesses & Their Leaders:

- a) Gain Baseline Data for Employee Count, Revenue, Growth Trends:
  - Conduct a detailed analysis of the top 10 businesses, including their current employee count, revenue, and growth trends over the past five years.
  - Identify key industries and sectors contributing significantly to the local economy.
  - Assess the impact of these businesses on employment and revenue generation for the county.
- b) Identify Resources Needed (Financial, Programming, Leadership Development):
  - Work closely with business leaders to understand resource needs.
  - Determine financial needs for expansion or development projects.
  - Explore opportunities for collaborative programming or shared resources.
  - Identify leadership development needs to ensure sustainable growth and succession planning.
- c) Enhance Relationships to Capitalize on Opportunities and Address Challenges:
  - Pinpoint key challenges and opportunities for growth in these businesses.
  - Recognize potential areas of collaboration among businesses to strengthen the overall economic landscape.
  - Establish communication channels for ongoing feedback and engagement with business leaders.

Suggested Priority



- Top 10 Businesses
- Majority County Players
- Mid-Level Existing Business
- Doing Business in Calhoun
- Emerging Business
- External Business

**2. Major County Players (but do not impact Tax Base):** Explore ways to collaborate with non-tax base contributors for mutual community benefit.

- a) **State of Iowa (Prison):** Develop a strategy to encourage state investment in the county, considering the prison's impact on employment and potential for community development.
- b) **County-Based School Districts:** Establish relationships with school district administration to understand their needs beyond funding, such as infrastructure support, community involvement, and enhanced educational programs such as work-based learning initiatives. (South Central Calhoun School District; Manson Northwest Webster School District; Southeast Valley School District; Pocahontas Area School District; Newell-Fonda School District)
- c) **Stewart Memorial Hospital:** Foster mutually beneficial relationships that contribute to the overall well-being and prosperity of the county including community health & vitality, workforce development, business retention & expansion, emergency preparedness, and public policy advocacy.
- d) **Utility Providers:** Engage with utility providers (REC, WebCal, MidAmerican Energy, Windstream Communications, Mediacom, Twin Lakes Utilities) to ensure reliable infrastructure support and funding for businesses and residents.

**3. Mid-Level Existing Businesses:**

- a) Identify challenges and opportunities related to business transitions and growth and facilitate support.
- b) Assess the growth potential and facilitate resources to support their needs.
- c) Identify opportunities for mentorship and support programs that foster growth.

**4. Businesses Located Outside the County but Doing Business within Calhoun County:**

- a) Identify businesses operating in the county without physical presence.
- b) Assess the impact on the local economy and explore potential collaborations or partnerships.

**5. Emerging Businesses**

- a) Facilitate discussions to identify resources needed (funding, business incubation, infrastructure/facilities, marketing support, mentorship, etc.)
- b) Encourage collaboration among emerging businesses, fostering an ecosystem where companies can share resources, knowledge, and experiences to collectively drive economic development.

**6. External Businesses That Could Re-Locate to Calhoun County:**

- a) Identify businesses in the region (neighboring counties) or in similar industries that could benefit from relocating to Calhoun County.
- b) Develop strategies to attract and incentivize relocation.

This outlined approach aims to create a comprehensive strategy that addresses the specific needs and opportunities presented by each audience segment, fostering a holistic and sustainable economic development plan for Calhoun County.

## Strategic Priorities

### **Priority #1 - Existing Business Support**

Research has shown that nearly 80% of new job growth and investment within a community comes from businesses that are already located there. This makes business retention and expansion efforts an integral part of our economic development strategy. (According to the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, “to create jobs and build strong economies, focus on producing more home-grown entrepreneurs and on helping startups and young, fast-growing firms already located in the state/community to survive and to grow — not on cutting taxes and trying to lure businesses from other states.”)

#### **Objective 1.1: Gain a thorough understanding of the business climate in Calhoun County.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director; Business Development Committee*

*Timeline: Start Jan. 2024/ongoing (establish consistent plan for annual check-ins)*

*Success Indicators: % visits completed, survey/report data entered, monthly progress reports presented.*

#### **Objective 1.2: Develop a comprehensive database (CRM) to track short- and long-term economic development opportunities.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director; Executive Board*

*Timeline: Established by Q2/2024; updates ongoing*

*Success Indicators: dynamic CRM up & running; consistent usage for all status updates; utilization of data for decision making/communication; % of accurate contact data*

#### **Objective 1.3: Implement consistent communications to strengthen relationships, build trust & leverage support between CCEDC and stakeholders.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director; Board of Directors, 3<sup>rd</sup> party communications manager(s)*

*Timeline: Established by Q3/2024; updates ongoing*

*Success Indicators: established internal & external communications plan; % of board members providing meeting reports; monthly electronic communication to stakeholders.*

#### **Objective 1.4: Serve as a resource hub for business financing opportunities.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director; Board of Directors, 3<sup>rd</sup> party finance partners*

*Timeline: Established by Q4/2024*

*Success Indicators: informational resource for RLF; established list of 3<sup>rd</sup> party finance partners; ED training; ongoing communication about available resources.*

#### **Objective 1.5: Leverage local, regional, and statewide resources for business incubation, acceleration, and growth.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director; Hub 712, Western Iowa Advantage*

*Timeline: Established by Q3/2024*

*Success Indicators: consolidated list of available resources; consistent communication of those resources; engaged businesses utilizing resources; actual business start-up, growth, and transition.*

## **Priority #2 Workforce Preparedness**

Prioritizing workforce preparedness in rural Iowa is vital for economic vitality, diversity, and adaptation to global trends. According to recent data, a well-prepared workforce attracts business, fostering growth and supporting community resilience. In Iowa and furthermore Calhoun County, where agricultural and technological sectors intersect, workforce readiness is especially crucial. Skilled individuals reduce unemployment, encourage entrepreneurship, and enhance stability, preventing outmigration. The investment in workforce preparedness is strategic, addressing challenges and improving the overall well-being of our local communities not only today, but in preparation for future challenges/changes in the workplace. This proactive approach ensures economic development, sustains a skilled, resilient workforce, and will contribute to Calhoun County's long-term success.

### **Objective 2.1: Foster collaborations between existing industry and educational institutions to enhance development opportunities for existing workforce.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director, existing employers, secondary & post-secondary educators*

*Timeline: Established by Q4/2024*

*Success Indicators: identify skills development needs; business leaders report satisfied/engaged workforce.*

### **Objective 2.2: Foster collaborations between existing industry and educational institutions to enhance workforce preparedness for graduating students.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director, County-based school district administration, Iowa Central Community College*

*Timeline: Established by Q4/2024*

*Success Indicators: strong relationships established with school administration and ICC; implement programs for skills training; hold a county-wide and/or school-based career fair.*

### **Objective 2.3: Replicate successful workforce attraction efforts in Calhoun County.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director, identified steering committee.*

*Timeline: Established by Q4/2024*

*Success Indicators: establish & share best practices for attracting non-traditional workforce; replicate a successful workforce attraction program; recruit additional VISA/TN workers to the county; create a welcome program to ensure successful transition to community.*

### **Priority #3 Community Development & Capacity Building**

Community development in a rural context encompasses a multifaceted approach aimed at enhancing the overall well-being, sustainability, and quality of life for residents in rural areas. Since quality of life is leading to job selection, it is imperative that investments in the county are made to ensure residents enjoy the communities they live and/or work in. Additionally, with the aging population of Calhoun County, it is necessary to build capacity among the next generation of community leaders to ensure success and longevity within the private and public sectors.

#### **Objective 3.1: Identify local partnership & funding opportunities that enhance the ability of CCEDC to stimulate community development.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director, Board of Directors, city leaders, WIAD*

*Timeline: Established by Q2/2025*

*Success Indicators: strong relationships established with partner organizations; partnership & funding opportunities list that can be shared with communities/people/businesses.*

#### **Objective 3.2: Cultivate engaged leaders across the county and beyond by initiating a Leadership Calhoun program.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director, identified steering committee representing multiple county organizations*

*Timeline: Established by Q4/2024*

*Success Indicators: established leadership program; annual visits to state & national legislature; ongoing engagement with alumni; more people stepping up to hold elected and volunteer leadership roles.*

#### **Objective 3.3: Facilitate a multi-faceted housing initiative in Calhoun County.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director, Housing task force, Representation from engaged communities (city councils)*

*Timeline: Established by Q1/2025*

*Success Indicators: housing task force formed; issues/needs identified; housing plan completed, increase the average age of housing stock in Calhoun County.*

- Advocate to county and city administration to review existing building codes and reduce zoning barriers and unnecessary or outdated regulations to ensure ease of building/renovation.
- Encourage collaboration among employers to work together to establish effective housing for workers.
- Share best practices from local businesses/developers (Sunnyview Independent Living, Twin Lakes – new construction, Gemberling Excavating (TN/VISA workers) for successfully adding additional housing.
- Be an advocate for the importance of housing in Calhoun County and emphasize the impact it has on workforce and economic development.

#### **Objective 3.3: Advocate for investments in quality-of-life amenities and services, as these are the leading driver for workforce attraction and a predictor of economic vitality.**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director, Board of Directors, city leaders*

*Timeline: Established by Q1/2025*

*Success Indicators: Local investments in quality-of-life amenities/services*

## **Priority #4 Business Attraction & Recruitment**

Business attraction and recruitment are critical priorities for Calhoun County Economic Development, particularly for creating high-quality jobs that bolster the county's tax base and meet the demands of modern families and younger generations. This strategic focus not only addresses housing affordability challenges but also mitigates trailing spouse issues and enhances small business sustainability. By attracting businesses that provide well-paying opportunities, Calhoun County can foster economic growth, community vibrancy, and a desirable "quality of place" that appeals to a diverse and skilled workforce.

### **Objective 4.1: Develop the Calhoun County Business Park**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director, Board of Directors*

*Timeline: Established by Q2/2024*

*Success Indicators: inquiries about properties in the business park; established marketing plan; site tours/presentations; property sales in the park.*

### **Objective 4.2: Support Communities with Ordinance Recommendations**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director, City Councils*

*Timeline: Q1/2026*

*Success Indicators: Updated data and ordinances*

### **Objective 4.3: Re-visioning Abandoned Buildings – Flipping Calhoun**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director, City Councils*

*Timeline: Q1/2026*

*Success Indicators: Number of homes renovated, number of engaged entrepreneurs.*

### **Objective 4.4: Catalyst Grants – City & County Collaboration**

*Responsibility: CCEDC Executive Director, City Councils*

*Timeline: Q1/2026*

*Success Indicators: Number of new Catalyst Grant awards*