

# Tri-State Development Summit Strategic Plan

Northeast Missouri Southeast Iowa Western Illinois

**ADOPTED 2014**

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# Tri-State Development Summit

## Strategic Plan

### **Who We Are** *History and Background*

#### **A Brief History**

In 1993, flooding on the Mississippi River wreaked havoc in the Midwest. As rising water closed bridges, highways, railways and barge traffic, the tri-state area of Northeast Missouri, Southeast Iowa and Western Illinois learned that a common transportation network was the lifeline of their economies.

Born of the need to cultivate working relationships beyond state boundaries, a committee of five organized the first Tri-State Development Summit in 1996. Nine Summits have taken place since 1996, rotating among the three states and hosting hundreds of leaders, including Governors from all 3 states, U.S. Senators and Congressmen and speakers of national significance.

#### **Location**

The tri-state region is made up of 14 counties in Western Illinois, 13 counties in Northeast Missouri and 8 counties in Southeast Iowa. Having 35 counties working together to address common issues gives our region a powerful advantage. According to the 2010 Census, the region has a population of 682,263 and land area of 18,815 square miles. That means our united voice represents a population greater than three states and the District of Columbia and a land area larger than nine states.

The 35 counties comprising the tri-state region are:

#### Illinois

Adams, Brown, Cass, Fulton, Hancock, Henderson, Knox, McDonough, Mercer, Morgan, Pike, Scott, Schuyler and Warren

#### Iowa

Davis, Des Moines, Henry, Jefferson, Lee, Louisa, Van Buren and Wapello

#### Missouri

Adair, Clark, Knox, Lewis, Macon, Marion, Monroe, Pike, Ralls, Randolph, Schuyler, Scotland and Shelby

#### **Mission**

Bringing together tri-state area leaders to define common issues; to develop an on-going dialogue to effectively address those issues; and to improve the quality of life of the entire tri-state region through economic development activities.

#### **Leadership Structure**

A Steering Committee guides the work of the Tri-State Development Summit. It is made up of volunteer officials from all three states who set policies for the organization and monitor the ongoing work of the task forces. The Steering Committee has an agreement with Great River Economic Development Foundation to facilitate the Summit. This includes coordinating the bi-annual event and task force meetings as well as completing administrative work such as bookkeeping and record-keeping.

## **Task Forces**

There are four task forces which meet regularly throughout the year to discuss common issues and opportunities for collaboration throughout the tri-state area:

- Connectivity
- Housing
- Tourism
- Transportation

Each task force has a “Mini Steering Committee” made up of one representative from each state. Members are called upon occasionally to speak on behalf of the task force, gather data and take the lead on projects on behalf of their state.

In addition to the four formal task forces, the Summit has five areas of interest: Agriculture, Emergency Response, Entrepreneurship, Media and Workforce Development. While these areas do not have formal task forces, Summit leadership remains aware of these issues and will support specific projects or call special meetings on an as needed basis.

## **Where Are We Now?** *Regional Assessment of Existing Conditions and Economic Opportunities*

### **Accomplishments**

Since 1996, Summit Task Force committees have been the driving force behind a number of accomplishments in the tri-state region, including:

- Achieving the development of nearly 1,300 miles of regional highway priorities.
- Promoting regional tourist attractions through collaborative marketing pieces.
- Creating opportunities for entrepreneurs to network and grow their businesses.
- Expanding affordable housing opportunities for workers in the tri-state area.

### **Driving Forces**

There is no arguing the tri-state region shares common issues. The area shares a common workforce, utilizes the same educational and healthcare facilities, exchanges goods and services and depends on the same river, rail and roads to move products and people in and out of the region.

Arguably the most important feature is the Mississippi River. Its flooding first brought residents together more than 20 years ago, and it plays a critical role in moving the products that keep the tri-state area competitive in the global marketplace. Maintaining and updating the waterways infrastructure is of utmost importance to the region both from a navigation standpoint - including lock and dam infrastructure – and a flood control standpoint - to protect industries and agricultural land that keep the region working.

There is a direct correlation between the grains (corn and soybeans) that dominate traffic on the Upper Mississippi River and the agriculture sector that is a driving force in the tri-state economy. Farm employment in the region accounts for hundreds of thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in earnings, not to mention the numerous value-added products which are manufactured here.

One of the biggest challenges and biggest opportunities the region faces is that of a stagnant or declining population. As with many rural areas in the Midwest, people in the tri-state area have been migrating to urban population centers and the average age of the population is steadily increasing. One way to ensure the economic vitality of the region is to look at ways of retaining and recruiting a younger workforce.

In November 2013, the Tri-State Development Summit was designated a “Great Region” by USDA. The designation acknowledges the Summit’s regional approach to creating economic opportunity and job creation in rural communities. It also affords the Summit an opportunity to take advantage of USDA training, technical assistance and funding to support regional projects and collaboration.

## **Where Do We Want To Be?** *Economic Development Vision; Critical Issues & Opportunities*

### **Vision**

To speak with a united voice on regional issues and collaborate on challenges to ensure a bright future for the region.

### **Critical Issues to be Addressed in order to Achieve the Vision**

The success of the region will be measured by its ability to retain and attract businesses and talent. However, there are many factors beyond the control of the Summit which may inhibit that success. So the Summit works in four key areas to improve the overall business climate and quality of life in the tri-state region in order to make it a more welcoming place to live and work.

Connectivity: A critical factor in business location decisions and workers choices about where to live is the ability to access high-speed internet. Ideally, businesses prefer redundant service to supply their locations and prevent downtime in case of an outage from one service provider. Citizens expect fast, affordable service to take advantage of all the features available to them such as streaming videos and remote offices. The challenge to providing that fast, redundant service is the time and cost associated with installing the infrastructure and ensuring a return on investment for the service provider, especially in the most rural areas of the region.

Housing: Adequate housing – like highways, healthcare and high speed internet – is necessary to achieve desired growth in a region. Without it, the region has a lower quality of life and less of a chance to retain and attract the workers needed to sustain successful businesses. Affordable housing for workers at all levels must be available across the region.

Tourism: There is an inherent difficulty in marketing a region of this magnitude to prospective visitors and current citizens. This is especially true in times of economic uncertainty and limited funding. There are individual locations and attractions to promote while making sure not to lose sight of the region as a whole.

Transportation: The Transportation Task Force can point to decades of success including nearly 1,300 miles of highways completed. The group is now looking at a more comprehensive transportation network, including inland waterways infrastructure, and its number one challenge to further success is lack of state and federal funding for transportation infrastructure projects.

## **Critical Opportunities to be Addressed in order to Achieve the Vision**

By speaking with one voice and presenting a united front on key issues, the region can have a big impact. The Summit provides the organization and framework for bringing tri-state leaders together to establish a common voice and identify opportunities for collaboration.

Connectivity: The Connectivity Task Force can encourage the expansion of broadband throughout the tri-state area by facilitating discussions between service providers and major employers and helping to educate citizens on the value of subscribing to those services. Additional infrastructure means the opportunity for new, high-tech jobs, including those from innovative entrepreneurs, and an increase in population from those who are able to work remotely in rural areas.

Housing: The creation of affordable workforce housing can increase community pride, help attract industry and improve property values and the community tax base. The Housing Task Force has embarked on some unique projects which have tri-state implications. One such program has federal inmates building houses behind prison walls. In turn people with low to moderate incomes buy the houses after receiving intensive home-ownership classes and pre-purchase training. This program and ones like it will help increase affordable housing options for the region's workforce.

Tourism: The tri-state area is rich in tourism and quality of life opportunities. The Tourism Task Force is charged with marketing these opportunities to current and potential citizens and visitors. Making the public aware of the region's assets can bring additional tourism dollars into the tri-state economy and inspire more people to call the region home.

Transportation: A dynamic group of transportation leaders and highway coalitions have been assembled to address common issues. The Transportation Task Force is positioned to build on past success and set new and expanded transportation priorities. The task force advocates for highway corridors, rather than point-to-point roads, and river and rail infrastructure improvements that will have positive impacts on the entire region making them more appealing to government agencies.

With all of these opportunities to be addressed, there is consideration of the Great Regions designation. The designation comes with technical assistance from USDA through at least 2015 to support the Summit in its efforts to enhance economic development activities and promote the quality of life in the tri-state area.

## **Public and Stakeholder Engagement**

To be successful and ensure the projects and initiatives supported by the Summit are beneficial to the entire region, involvement from all 35 counties will be required. The Summit commits to increasing outreach to all the counties and continuing to communicate regularly with all interested stakeholders. Adding contacts from USDA officials in all three states will help to increase awareness and engagement.

## **How Do We Get There?** *Economic Development Strategy; Regional Implementation Agenda* **Economic Development Strategies to Achieve the Vision**

Facilitating the task force conversations gives individual counties, communities and organizations a platform in which to work together and have a more profound impact. The Summit can assist by identifying sources of funding for broadband, marketing and workforce housing projects within the region, and promoting the products and services that are available in those areas. The Summit will also continue to advocate for transportation infrastructure projects that will benefit the region.

Working together, the region is stronger than an individual county. Being organized and branded as a three-state, 35-county “state of mind” opens a variety of opportunities for increased recognition and funding that would not be available otherwise.

### **Priority Project Selection Criteria**

In order to streamline its efforts, the Steering Committee has outlined the following criteria for selecting initiatives the Summit will facilitate and support. Steering Committee members must be able to answer “yes” to a majority (3 of 5) of these questions for the project to be included in the Summit’s priorities.

- Does the project advance the Summit’s Vision and Mission?
- Is the project supported by one or more of the Summit’s task forces or does it fall in one of the Summit’s areas of interest?
- Will the project have a positive impact on a majority of the Summit’s 35 counties?
- Is the project supported by any federal or state agencies, or could it be if endorsed by the Summit?
- Does the project have a clear plan or implementation process that will allow the Summit to monitor its effectiveness?

If the Steering Committee finds a majority of these questions to be true of a given initiative, it can then be supported by the Summit. Support includes, but is not limited to, making stakeholders aware of the initiative and writing in favor of any requests for funding the project applies for.

### **Public Participation Plan**

The strength of the Summit comes from its numbers and its ability to work together across borders. The most obvious show of support for the Summit comes from public participation in the bi-annual gathering. On average, 350 business leaders and political officials meet to network and learn more about common issues. The Summit will continue to organize this event, attract high-level speakers and encourage involvement in this way.

Between bi-annual Summits, stakeholders will receive regular communications via the organization’s email newsletter and website, [www.tristateofmind.org](http://www.tristateofmind.org). Through these tools, the Summit Steering Committee and facilitators will share updates about task force projects and other initiatives being supported, regional events and opportunities for networking.

In addition to participating in the bi-annual Summit and at the task force level, the public can also illustrate support of the Summit and its efforts by becoming a sponsor. The ongoing facilitation needed to keep the Summit successful requires considerable staff time. Financial contributions are sought prior to each bi-annual Summit, but anyone is welcome and encouraged to give on an annual basis.

## **How Are We Doing?** *Performance Measurements*

### **Performance Plan and Metrics**

The Steering Committee will assess the performance of the Summit task forces and individual projects and initiatives on an annual basis. Taking into account the group’s progress as well as the overall economic condition of the region, the Steering Committee will recommend continued support or offer suggestions for improvement. The progress will be reported to the Steering Committee by the Summit facilitator. Any task force or project specific questions will be directed to the Mini Steering Committee for the task force in question or to the individual(s) who sought Summit support of the project.

The public will have an opportunity to review progress in the form of task force reports at each bi-annual Summit. These will be communicated as presentations during the event and/or written reports included in the program. Anyone with questions about the progress of a task force or initiative or its benefit to the region, should direct those concerns to the Steering Committee for explanation.

While having a region of this size spanning three states and innumerable jurisdictions creates a powerful economic development force, it also limits the Summit's ability to measure the specific impacts of the its efforts. Some goals will continue to be measured, like the number of highway priorities completed, but the real effects of the Summit will be demonstrated by a region speaking with a united voice on common issues and illustrating an improved quality of life for its residents.