



2018-2020

# STRATEGIC PLAN

**Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce**



# INTRODUCTION

**Flint & Genesee is a unique, multi-cultural community in the heart of Mid-Michigan with a history rich in innovation and industry. As the community continues to prove its resilience through reinvention, the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce (FGCC) is committed to strengthening and supporting the region. The FGCC is dedicated to driving the economic engine that moves Flint & Genesee forward, ultimately improving the quality of life for residents and making the region a destination of choice for businesses, residents and tourists. The Chamber actively works to develop business, develop talent, and develop place, directly through its own programs and services, as well as collaboratively with partners who share common interests.**

In accordance with this commitment, the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce is pleased to share its 2018-2020 Strategic Plan. This plan was designed to build on momentum created over the past three years and ensure the future success of the organization. In a year-long planning process, a staff-led planning team set out to clarify the following:

|                         |                                   |                                 |                               |  |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>1.</b>               | <b>2.</b>                         | <b>3.</b>                       | <b>4.</b>                     | <b>5.</b>  |
| <b>Who is the FGCC?</b> | <b>Where does the FGCC exist?</b> | <b>Who does the FGCC serve?</b> | <b>What will the FGCC do?</b> | <b>What will the FGCC look like in the future?</b> |

The planning process provided great insights into the ways the FGCC currently operates and also revealed multiple fundamental challenges in the business model. In light of these conclusions, the product of this work is a strategic plan that will be used to drive three new approaches that set the stage for a new way of creating the most economic impact.

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## Planning Process

In February 2017, the Chamber's executive leadership tasked a cross-functional team with guiding the process for updating the organization's Strategic Plan. There was early consensus that the new iteration of the Plan would be a refresh to the existing 2015-2017 document. At the 2017 Annual Meeting, the Chamber's Operating Board approved the existing Mission, Vision, and Core Values, and later the Vision Statement was edited and Guiding Principles added.

This document focuses on audiences and partnerships, sustainability, and goal measurement initiatives already underway, and will provide Chamber staff with a clearer vision and connection between daily efforts and top organizational priorities.

As part of the process, the planning team benchmarked strategic plans of other chamber organizations available through the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, reviewing for ideal content, voice, and design. Next, the team collected community data, internal staff input, and external stakeholder and partner input. This extensive collection of qualitative and quantitative information was gathered through a variety of methods including surveys, focus group sessions (with staff, boards, and community), and consultant-led research of the local economic development ecosystem. A thorough analysis of the collected data informed the strategies, goals and objectives, included in the document that follows.

# 1.

## WHO IS THE FGCC?

The FGCC defines itself through the following mission, vision, core value statements, and guiding principles.

Maximize economic and community growth through collaborative partnerships and promotion of the region.

**MISSION**

**VISION**

The people and businesses of Flint & Genesee County will have abundant opportunities to thrive and grow.<sup>1</sup>

**CORE VALUES**

**Integrity:** We are trusted to do the right things with conviction, courage, and transparency.

**Credibility:** We are responsible and accountable for our agreements and actions.

**High Standards:** We strive to deliver the highest quality service.

**Inclusiveness:** We actively pursue diversity, inclusion, collaboration and equitable treatment of all stakeholders.

**Leadership:** We lead change, challenge ourselves and inspire the community to achieve greatness.

**Respect:** We are professional, courteous and welcoming in all our interactions.

<sup>1</sup>Note: This community-focused vision may change based on community input in future planning efforts.

## Guiding Principles

1. We support the stability and vitality of our local businesses.
2. A prepared workforce that meets the demands of businesses is essential.
3. Our priority is to retain businesses, members, and residents.
4. We believe diversity and inclusivity are key to economic success.
5. We work regionally for local benefit.

## Chamber Structure

The business functions of the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce are comprised of action groups and departments. The organizational structure is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 – The Chamber's Action Groups and Departments Structure

# 2.

## WHERE DOES THE FGCC EXIST?

### FGCC and the Economy

High quality of life and economic prosperity are signs of a growing community. This is accomplished when value is high for businesses, when there is available and qualified talent, and when communities offer a vibrant place to live. Each gear shown in Figure 2 relies on the success of the others. Moving forward in one area without the other stunts economic growth. For this reason, supporting the stability and vitality of our local businesses is our charge.

As Genesee County's economic development agency, the Chamber acts primarily as a driver of **Business**. The Chamber's Economic Development action group along with its many partners, serve a range of businesses, from large and mid-sized economic base firms to small businesses and start-ups that also employ residents and improve communities. Small businesses are supported by the Chamber as a whole, but especially through the value-add programs and services provided through Member Services, and supplemented with capacity-building business training programs.

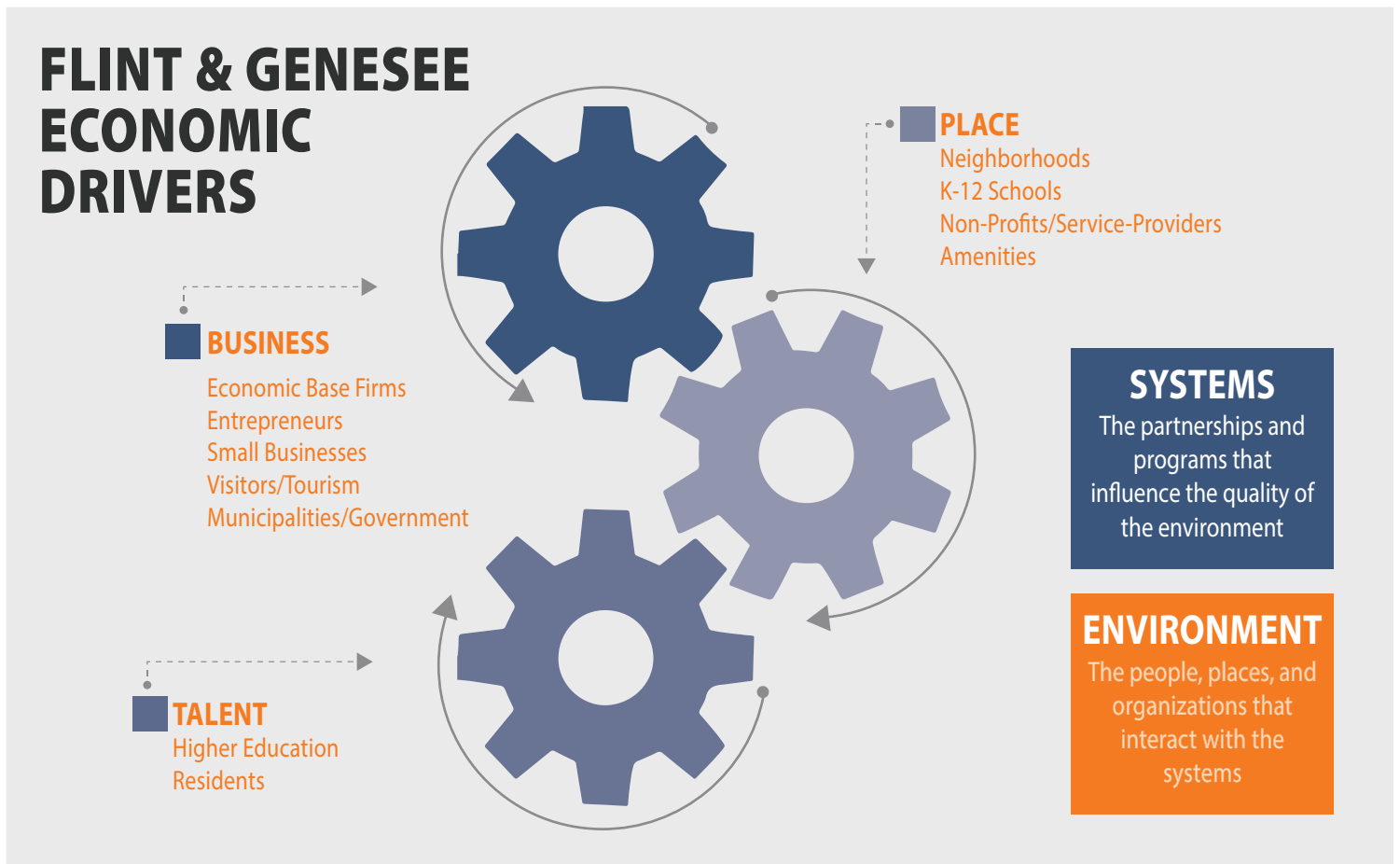


Figure 2 – The Chamber drives the gears of the economy to varying degrees, with Business being the primary focus of service.

Tourism, driven primarily by the Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) and hosted by the Chamber, serves as an important economic driver for business development, as well as talent attraction and retention. Like the Economic Development team, the CVB helps to bring new dollars into the community that support businesses and create jobs for residents. To attract tourists, the CVB relies on the quality of the resources and attractions available in our community, and is tasked with ensuring the region is marketed to highlight those assets. This promotion of **Place** builds local community advocates, retains talent and business, and makes our area attractive to new businesses, prospective residents, and visitors.

When the Business system gear is optimally turning, employers need a prepared workforce to respond to the demands of the economy. The Chamber supports the **Talent** system by preparing current job seekers and the next generation of workers for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Through Education & Training, the Chamber effectively connects residents of all ages, but especially those residing earlier in the workforce pipeline, with the skills (hard and soft) that make them productive members of the community. Not only are Chamber programs preparing new workers, but through business trainings, a host of capacity-building resources are provided in order to meet the demands of businesses.

In order for Flint & Genesee to thrive, all gears need to turn, with direct and symbiotic engagement within their environment. A sticky gear slows the rest of the system, making it important for the Chamber to understand the opportunities to influence and support our key audiences and the partners that keep the rest of the gears turning.

## Data

The planning team utilized qualitative data by collecting input from diverse audiences; county and city-level quantitative data provided context for the environment in which we work and informed overall strategy, goals, and priorities. Figure 3 shows the various sources of qualitative feedback and quantitative data used in the development of this plan.

## QUALITATIVE DATA

**MEMBERS, AMBASSADORS, COMMITTEES**

• Member Survey

**ED PARTNERS**

• Ecosystem Study

**BOARD**

• Facilitated Meeting

**STAFF**

• Staff Focus Groups

**COMMUNITY**

• Listening Sessions

## QUANTITATIVE DATA TAKEAWAYS



Genesee County unemployment rates are on a downward trend, but lag the state and are significantly worse for the City of Flint. (Michigan: 4.6%; Genesee County: 5.1%; Flint: 9.5%)



The population of Genesee County is projected to continue on a downward trajectory.



The civilian labor force has declined or remained stagnant in Flint and Genesee County respectively, over the past ten years. However, the number of available jobs has increased and is projected to continue to grow.



The Median Household Income in Flint is 41% less than the County and 50% less than the State.

Figure 3 – Stakeholders feedback and economic indicators helped determine the Chamber's Goals & Objectives.

Quantitative data points represent information gathered in November 2017 and include the following data sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information & Strategic Initiatives, and Economic Modeling Specialists International (EMSI).

# 3.

## WHO DOES THE FGCC SERVE?

The primary beneficiaries of the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce services are businesses. However, “businesses” can be defined in a variety of ways. Figure 4 illustrates the ways in which all Chamber action groups are able to meet the needs of businesses and employers, ranging from large to small, for-profit to non-profit, established to start-up.

In addition, Chamber action groups provide services to additional groups like: funders, meeting planners and organizers (in and out of the county), and grassroots groups. The Chamber also identifies several key target industries that have maximum impact on the region’s economic and community growth. These include, but are not limited to: Manufacturing, Health Care, TDL (Transportation, Distribution, Logistics), and IT/Back Office Services.

Geographically, the Chamber serves the I-69 Thumb Region, Genesee County, and the City of Flint, in a variety of ways. While Economic Development’s activities are focused primarily within the County, the Chamber also serves as administrator of regional economic

development activities across seven counties. When appropriate, the Convention & Visitors Bureau and Education & Training align activity and benefit from this regional partnership as well.

Education & Training programs are provided throughout Genesee County, with the majority of participants and employers located within or around the City of Flint. While Genesee County is always the beneficiary of Chamber efforts, Economic Development and CVB resources are often invested in reaching companies, site-selectors, meeting planners, and visitors outside of the region – including state or national-scale outreach efforts. These two groups specifically aim to bring revenue, investment, and jobs into the community from outside.

The Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce, through the work of its action groups, adds value to audiences by delivering a variety of services in the three main areas of economic development.

### BUSINESS

#### Current Activities:

- Business Attraction
- Business Retention
- Technical Assistance
- Government Contracting
  - Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC)
- Access to Capital
  - Small Business Grant Program
- Capacity Building
  - Membership
  - Visibility
  - Networking

### TALENT

#### Current Activities:

- Talent Development
- Afterschool
  - YouthQuest
- Workforce Development Training
  - TeenQuest/SYI
  - Career Edge
- Talent Retention
  - Flint Promise
- Leadership Development
  - Leadership NOW
  - Business Training

### PLACE

#### Current Activities:

- Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Uptown Reinvestment Corporation
- Regional Economic Development



| CURRENT AUDIENCES SERVED                                      | MEMBER SERVICES | ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT | CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU | EDUCATION & TRAINING |
|---|-----------------|----------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Small Business  |                 |                      |                              |                      |
| Mid-Large Businesses  |                 |                      |                              |                      |
| Hospitality Businesses  |                 |                      |                              |                      |
| Non-Profits, Faith-Based, K-12 Schools, Higher Ed             |                 |                      |                              |                      |
| Start-Ups, Entrepreneurs                                      |                 |                      |                              |                      |
| Primary Audience     Secondary Audience     Tertiary Audience |                 |                      |                              |                      |

Figure 4 – Across the Chamber’s four business functions, all business levels/employers are served.

## Partnerships

The Flint & Genesee Chamber works toward its mission by delivering services to public and private agencies and entities in and outside of the county. Some of our closest partners include:

- Educational institutions
- Parks/arts and cultural organizations
- Downtown Development Agencies
- Non-profits
- Workforce development agencies
- Municipalities, Genesee County, State of Michigan, and federal government agencies, and elected officials
- Private businesses
- Financial Institutions
- Economic Development Service-Providers
- Functional partners that perform related activities or make our work possible – i.e. regional partners, other chambers of commerce, funders, site selectors, media, etc.
- Community development agencies
- Residents and families
- Volunteers

Collaborative partnerships are a part of the Chamber’s mission, and allow the Chamber to reach its audiences and accomplish its goals. For this to work, it is paramount that the Chamber’s partners have the capacity to carry out key functions, and sometimes that means that Chamber resources are utilized to support shared success. Partnerships vary in formality, but often include mutually beneficial activities, such as providing resources, leadership (board or otherwise), technical assistance, project leads, sponsorships, event/activity coordination, data, promotion, or advocacy. Increasing capacity and aligning partners to address these areas is essential to achieve economic stability.

# 4.

## WHAT WILL THE FGCC DO?

The strategic goals and objectives outlined for 2015-2017 were developed with the holistic work of the Chamber in mind. Bringing together the activities of all action groups and departments was a unique challenge, as it was the first time a singular vision for all units had been set. Looking ahead to 2020 prompted this strategic planning team to evaluate the clarity and relevance of existing strategic planning language.

Following the Logic Model adopted for the enterprise metrics framework, the strategic planning team agreed that:

- Goal statements should describe outcomes (changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, behavior, or conditions that indicate progress toward achieving mission and objectives).

- Objective statements should be measurable, and describe outputs (amount of product created or services delivered).

The updated goal statements outlined below reflect commonalities in work that were not addressed in the 2015-2017 strategic plan, and clarify some conflicting or ambiguous language.

### Goals & Objectives

The 2018-2020 Strategic Plan of the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce will achieve its mission to maximize economic and community growth by focusing efforts toward the following goals and objectives.

## BUSINESS

### Goal #1: Be a relentless force for facilitating economic growth in Genesee County

#### Objectives

1. Increase the number of new jobs created in Genesee County by at least 1,000 in the next three years
2. Facilitate \$100 million of private investment made in Genesee County by 2020

#### Strategies

- Build trusted relationships with decision-makers
- Connect businesses to resources and solutions to meet individual needs
- Share the Genesee County story

### Goal #2: Build a strong business community that furthers the collective and individual success of businesses in Flint & Genesee

#### Objectives

1. Reach and maintain a member retention rate of 85%
2. Increase total membership to 1,400

#### Strategies

- Focus on connections and relationships
- Personalize service, resources, solutions, and content
- Create a sense of community belonging

## TALENT

**Goal #3: Support the success of our region's growing workforce with K-12 career preparation programs and adult talent development**

### Objectives

1. Increase the number of students in the career and college pipelines
2. Assist Flint/Genesee employers with talent needs
3. Partner with and promote opportunities provided by other local, state, and federal workforce/talent stakeholders

### Strategies

- Provide programming within the K-12 school system that supports academic and professional success
- Highlight job opportunities and pathways for the next generation of workers
- Offer training programs for teens and adults that respond to the needs of employers
- Connect employers with trained job-seekers using tools, events, and incentives/resources
- Participate and lead partnerships and programs that influence systems that lead to vocational and academic success for young people in our community

## PLACE

**Goal #4: Improve the perception of Flint & Genesee to increase tourism and drive business in the region**

### Objectives

1. Attract travelers and visitors to the region
2. Be a destination of choice for meeting planners and groups

### Strategies

- Create brand advocates inside and outside of the region
- Build and strengthen partnerships with regional hospitality organizations, attractions, and front-line service providers
- Build and strengthen relationships with meeting planners and industry partners
- Market Flint & Genesee as a destination of choice
- Highlight and emphasize unique destination assets
- Tailor messaging to market-specific audiences

# 5.

## WHAT WILL THE FGCC LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE

The strategic planning process, along with qualitative and quantitative data revealed several key questions, concerns, and fundamental conflicts that could pose challenges for the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce and the local economy over the next three years. In order to achieve the organization's goals, while also becoming a better, more efficient entity, three new strategies will be pursued over the next three years.

### **Strategy: Rebrand the Chamber as the county's lead Economic Development agency**

Lagging rates of growth as compared to the State, feedback from community partners, and self-reflection, have revealed a gap in leadership and lack of unified vision for economic development. While the Chamber has been accepted as the County's lead economic development agency by State and Federal partners, within the county, the organization struggles to be recognized by municipal entities, business leaders, and service-provider partners as the primary driver of economic growth. This is likely due, in part, to the placement of this essential community function within a Chamber of

Commerce. While the FGCC consistently describes itself as an untraditional Chamber, the organization struggles to overcome the perceptions associated with a traditional membership organization. Furthermore, the partners within the Economic Development ecosystem of Flint & Genesee County, are looking for leadership and vision, but have limited capacity to serve in this role themselves. In response to this challenge and to better drive economic development, a re-brand helps establish the organization as a thought leader and convener.

## Strategy: Restructure the Organization

Rebranding the organization, sets the stage to consider other organizational barriers to effectiveness and efficiency. Within the Chamber the challenges vary, and are likely results of historical mergers, rapid growth, structural changes, and expanded community influence. These challenges were additionally documented in the 2016 Sustainability Plan. Concerns came through in conversations with staff and stakeholders, but they are not unique to the FGCC. Research with the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, tells us that it is not uncommon for larger, conglomerate Chambers like the FGCC to experience unintentional structural barriers to maximizing impact.

To address this challenge the organization will examine a new organizational model that will:

- Emphasize Economic Development as the organization's main charge, with Business, Talent, and Place as the functional framework for the organizational structure
- Realign existing functions of the action groups (Economic Development Convention & Visitors Bureau, Member Services, and Education & Training) to drive economic stability and vitality
- Solidify strategic vision with economic success as the focus

- Create powerful brands/identities that best represent Business, Talent, and Place
- Better communicate to external audiences what value the organization provides to them
- Address functional and value-add conflicts
- Streamline the organizational budget and clarify revenue sources and expenses
- Allow for pursuit of enterprise-wide funding with more diverse, flexible resources
- Create efficient, streamlined, action-driven staff structure
- Clarify metrics and measurement to monitor and drive economic growth
- Clarify policy/advocacy agendas
- Strengthen community impact and involvement
- Streamline boards, advisory groups, and oversight
- Improve connectivity between business functions
- Create consistency and alignment between legal entities under the organization's umbrella

## Strategy: Establish a Countywide Economic Development Plan that sets vision and creates a sustainable system for partners to collaborate for growth

While municipalities and regional partners have undertaken master planning processes, there does not exist a countywide economic development strategy that accounts for the interconnected economic drivers: business, talent, and place. An effective plan will consist of shared perspective, shared intent, and coordinated action among Economic Development partner organizations and municipalities. Building relationships through outreach and collaborative planning efforts, will be

a key element to producing a plan and, more importantly, executing it over time. As the Chamber rebrands itself with Economic Development as its primary function, it will serve as the facilitator of the process, while the plan itself will be owned by, and reflective of, the partners and the community. Diverse investment from municipalities and other sources will be required to plan and sustain the more collaborative system created during the planning process.

# SUMMARY

Successful organizations must respond to stakeholder demands and changes in their marketplace by innovating to stay relevant, effective, and sustainable. The Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce developed this 2018-2020 Strategic Plan with this in mind. A year-long planning process conducted by internal staff revealed several inherent challenges and provided a rationale for internal change, as well as a gap in community-recognized economic development leadership. It also helped establish an important premise for our work:

A thriving economy needs business. Business needs available, qualified talent. Attracting and retaining talent requires a desirable place to live. As such, the key aspects of developing the economy are:

- **Business - providing the tools for businesses to develop, keeping the value of their location in an area high, while keeping costs low;**
- **Talent - providing talent through key development, retention, and attraction initiatives; and**
- **Place - providing a resource-rich environment where people want to live and play.**

To achieve these conditions, the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce must execute new strategies based upon leadership, proper structure, relationship-building, and active partner engagement over the next three years.

FLINT  GENESEE  
*Chamber of Commerce*

