



2021-2023 Strategic Plan



INTRODUCTION

As the fifth most populated county in Michigan, Genesee County is a hub for commerce, culture, employment and education. While the region is no stranger to crisis—most recently presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic downturn—its residents, businesses and organizations regularly prove that they are up for the challenge. As the community continues to persevere, Flint & Genesee Group (FGG) supports the region through its commitment to developing business, talent and place. This is a collaborative effort, both within the organization as well as with community partners, and is one that aims to improve the quality of life for residents and position the region as a choice destination for businesses, residents and tourists alike.

As Flint & Genesee Group looks ahead, the organization is pleased to share its 2021-2023 Strategic Plan, which consists of five main components:



This document aims to serve as a guide for the Group and its employees in how they set goals and go about their work over the next three years. It also serves as a resource for community partners, funders and other key stakeholders seeking to better understand the organization and its role within the Flint & Genesee community.

PLANNING PROCESS

In March 2020, the Group’s executive leadership tasked an interdepartmental team with guiding the process for updating the organization’s Strategic Plan. The organization had made considerable progress on the previous plan, which outlined the strategic goals and objectives for 2018-20, including:

- Rebranding the Chamber as the county’s lead Economic Development Agency
- Restructuring the organization to reduce barriers to effectiveness and efficiency
- Establishing a countywide Economic Development Plan that sets vision and creates sustainable systems for partners to collaborate for growth

As part of the process, the planning team benchmarked strategic plans of other chamber organizations, which were reviewed for content, voice and design. Next, the team collected community data and internal staff input. This included holding employee focus groups centered on mission, vision and values; assisting in the action planning process for departments and divisions; and performing a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis with each of the organization’s divisions. Throughout the process, the team also often referred to the Forward Together vision goals to ensure that our organization was incorporating those economic indicators into our strategic goals.

A thorough analysis of this data and feedback informed the strategies, goals and objectives listed in the pages that follow. These updates were ultimately reviewed and approved by the Group’s Board of Directors in April 2021.

INTRODUCING FLINT & GENESEE GROUP

A NEW IDENTITY AND STRUCTURE

In 2019, the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce underwent a branding initiative to help address organizational barriers to effectiveness and efficiency, as outlined in the organization’s previous strategic plan. This initiative resulted in a new brand architecture, including a parent brand—Flint & Genesee Group—and four separate division brands that work together to increase the economic success of Genesee County and its residents.

Flint & Genesee Group Structure

The business functions of Flint & Genesee Group are comprised of divisions and departments. The organizational structure is shown in Figure 1.

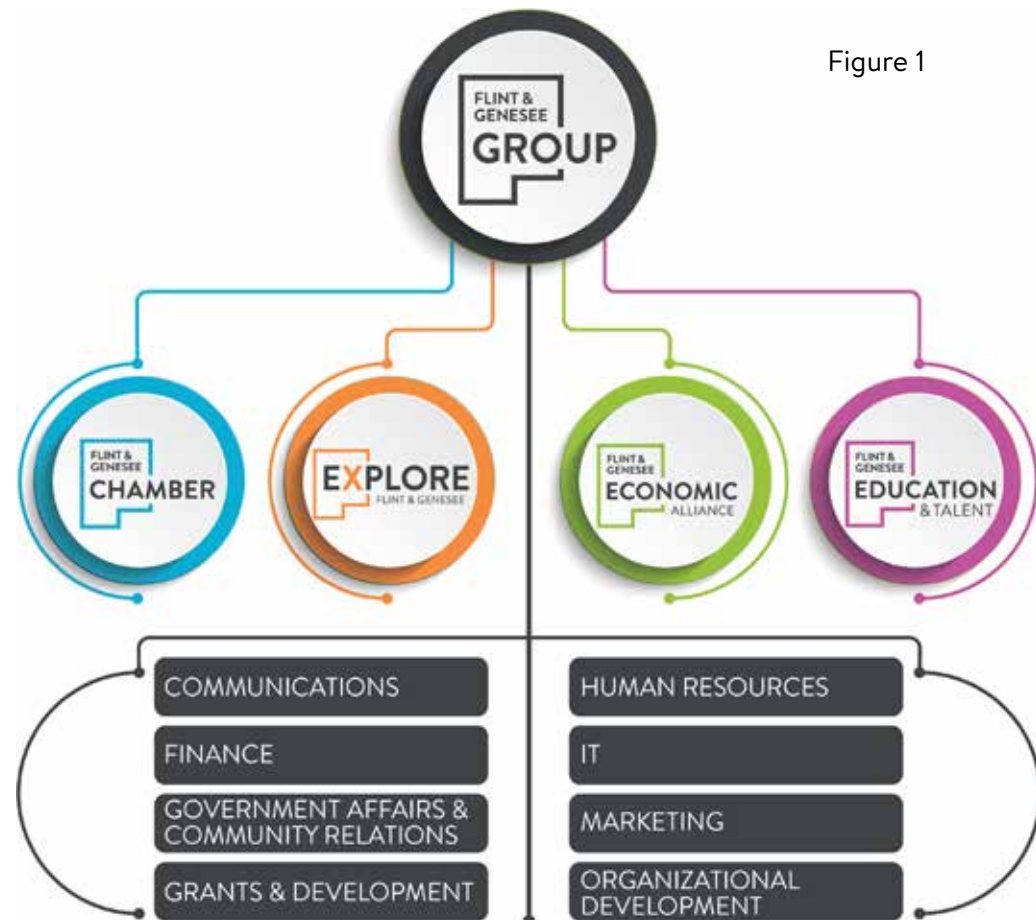


Figure 1



Flint & Genesee Group Vision, Mission and Core Values

<p style="text-align: center;">VISION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">In 2040, Genesee County is a top-five community in Michigan based on jobs, talent, livability, and equity.</p>	<p>CORE VALUES</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">MISSION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Maximize economic and community growth through collaborative partnerships and promotion of the region.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">LEAD FROM EVERY LEVEL</p> <p style="text-align: center;">We thrive when there is leadership at all levels and throughout the organization. Employees have not only the ability—but the responsibility—to lead. We also recognize leadership in others and empower our colleagues to ask questions, make decisions and take action.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">BE INCLUSIVE TO ELEVATE ALL</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Our diversity and inclusion efforts are a priority. We will claim success when everyone succeeds, so we create opportunities for everyone’s voice to be heard. We intentionally seek out all perspectives and look for ways to incorporate their feedback in work impacting our organization and community, remembering we go farther together.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">BE EXCELLENT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">We want the best for our community and the best for our organization. So, when others say, “Good enough,” we ask what we can do to raise the bar. We push boundaries and exceed expectations. We tackle projects with ambition, with innovation and without fear of failure.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">RESPECT YOUR IMPACT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What we say and do matters. It directly affects those we work with and those we serve. We value the time and workloads of others and make a point to meet our deadlines, turn in quality work and demonstrate civility in our interactions. By taking our jobs seriously, we show that we hold each other in high regard and support an environment of trust and respect.</p>



Board and Division Governance

The restructuring of the organization’s boards is just one example of how Flint & Genesee Group’s new branding has presented opportunities to ensure board and organizational effectiveness. Moving forward, Flint & Genesee Group will be advised and governed solely by the Board of Directors, which oversees the management of the organization’s business and affairs.

Additionally, each division of Flint & Genesee Group will adopt an Advisory Committee, providing the opportunity for divisional leadership to receive strategic input directly from subject matter experts within the appropriate field. A representative from each division’s Advisory Committee will be identified to also sit on the Board of Directors.

These committee representatives will be responsible for sharing details on the work happening at the divisional level to the larger Board. This will equip the board members with the context needed to make informed decisions regarding organizational policies, finances and strategic direction.



Flint & Genesee Group Governing Board

Board of Directors
Up to 19 members



4 Advisory Committee Representatives

Up to 3 Elected Officials

1 RLC Representative

Up to 11 other Community/Business Leaders

Division Advisory Committees



Advisory Committee Details

Purpose/Role:
Help design and implement strategy

Size:
Up to 17 members

Meeting Frequency:
Bi-monthly

Financial Commitment Required:
Not required, but encouraged

Terms of members:
Staggered; minimum two year term, maximum three terms

Board Positions:
Chair and Vice Chair

CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

INFLUENCES DRIVING OUR WORK

A variety of outside factors influenced the direction of the 2021-23 Strategic Plan. The following information provides a look at the state of the city, region and organization while the plan was being created.

The Pandemic

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Since then, in Michigan, statewide shutdowns, mass unemployment, mask mandates and cleaning supply shortages have been a constant reminder of the effects of the deadly disease.

The reality for many businesses was that without government aid and grants, their long-term survival was at risk. During one of the most difficult times of this pandemic, May 2020, the state unemployment rate was 21.3 percent. Genesee County saw an unemployment rate of over 30 percent during this same time, as opposed to 5.6 percent in May 2019 a year prior. Additionally, 48,000 workers in Genesee County lost their jobs in April 2020 while the number of jobs available dropped by nearly 45,000 compared to March.

Flint & Genesee Group responded by adapting to the situation and making several changes to its daily operations. For one, the organization began to lead and administer various efforts to help small businesses in the area to stay open. At a time when the pandemic required personal protective equipment for staff, services and supplies to deep clean facilities and contactless payment systems, many businesses did not have the ability to implement these changes due to high costs as well as shortages. Additionally, the closure of schools and higher education institutions completely disrupted our Education & Talent programs, creating chaos for staff, students and families. Flint & Genesee Group and its divisions immediately took action and altered methods of delivery for all of our services. Those changes and long-term alterations to our strategic goals will be detailed further in this document.

Community Data

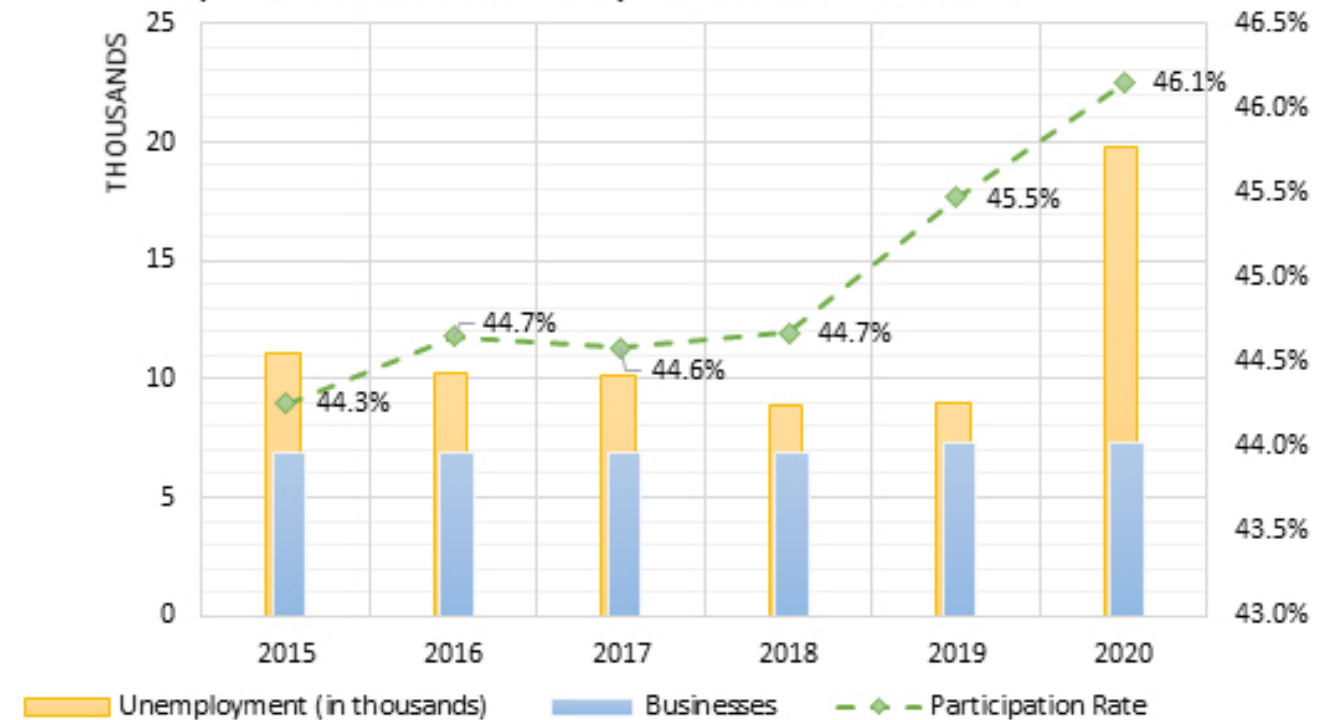
The following tables showcase county-level data that are primary indicators for the economic vitality of the region. Our organization tracks this data year-over-year to understand the impact of our work and to identify trends that allow us to strategically plan for challenges.



Graph 1 provides the annual unemployment, number of businesses, and the labor force participation rate from 2015-2020

- The labor force participation rate has risen 1.8 percentage points from 44.3 in 2015 to 46.1 in 2020;
- The business community has grown by 410;
- If a 54% increase in 2020 is to be considered an outlier, then unemployment is trending downward at a rate of 5.5% each year

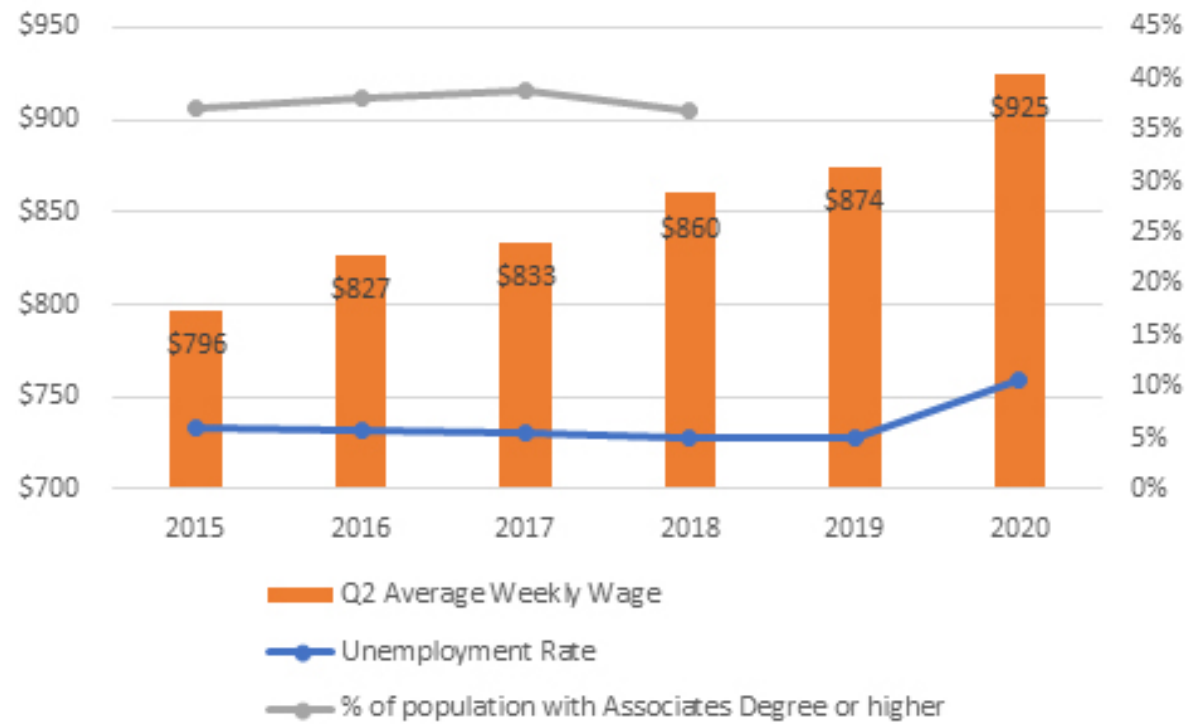
Graph 1 - Genesee County Economic Overview



Graph 2 provides information about the labor force from 2015-2020

- The average weekly wage during summer has risen an average of 2.9% each year;
- With the exception of a 5.7 point jump in 2020, the unemployment rate had steadily declined a total of 1.2 points by 2019;
- On average, 38% of the population has attained an associate’s degree or higher.

Graph 2 - Genesee County Labor Force



Graph 3 depicts the annual changes in GDP, Poverty, and Net County Migration from 2010 – 2018.

- Real GDP has grown 2.3% since 2010;
- Poverty within the county has decreased by 2.2 percentage points;
- The county saw an average of 6,200 residents leave each year

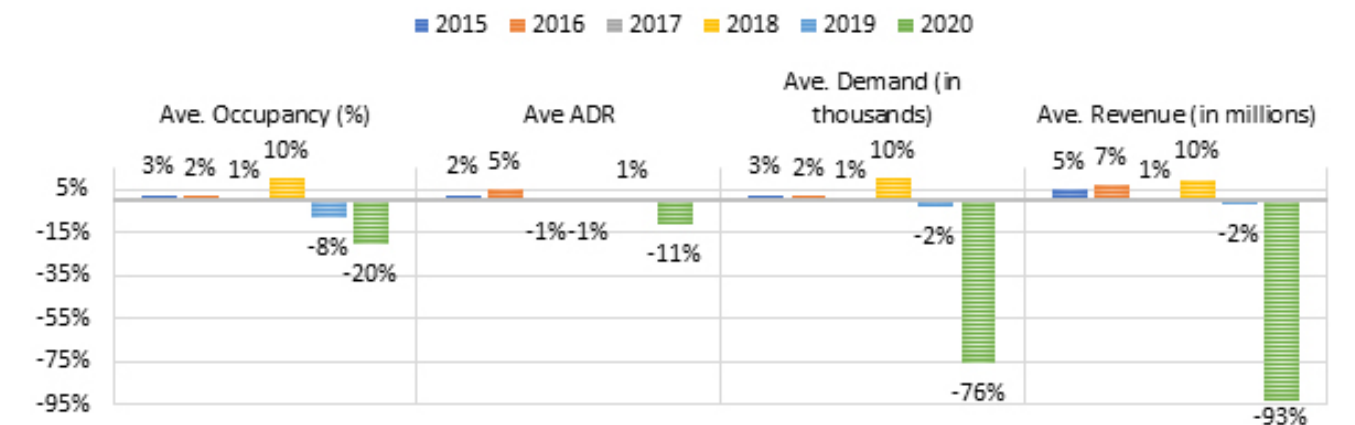
Graph 3 - Genesee County 2010-2018



Graph 4 presents the average annual percent changes in occupancy, average daily rate, demand, and revenue from 2015-2020.

- The industry lost all of the gains of the previous 3 years in 2019 and 2020 by every measure;
- With the exception of average daily rate, the hospitality industry was performing well from 2015-2018.

GRAPH 4 - GENESEE COUNTY HOSPITALITY DATA ANNUAL % CHANGE (2015-2020)



Some of the work of these divisions also factors into data points being collected for the 2040 Forward Together Vision for Economic Vitality.

Forward Together: Top 5 County in 2040 Economic Vitality Indicators			
Indicator	Genesee County	Rank out of 83 Michigan Counties	Current #5 Data Point (County)
Average Wages (Private)	\$901/wk	25	\$1,090/wk (Macomb)
Net In-Migration	-1,000	78	+524 (Newaygo)
Post-Secondary Educational Achievement	31%	29	47% (Kalamazoo)
GDP Growth Rate	0.88%	49	2.16% (Clare)
Family Poverty Rate	15%	78	7% (Barry)

Community Scorecard	
Metric	2020 Score
Economic Mobility	6.8%
Household Income	+3.8%
Workforce Participation	58%
3rd Grade Reading Proficiency	-2.6%
SNAP Recipient Households	8.5%
Total Jobs	+1.5%
Number of Businesses	(7,334) -1.6%

The Economic Development Model

The 2018-2020 Strategic Plan identified economic development as the core function of the entire organization. Economic development at the Flint & Genesee Group utilizes a three-pronged approach to improving the economic well-being and quality of life of a community. The work involves creating a place that offers high-value amenities and services, where talented, skilled people want to be and businesses and entrepreneurs want to locate and grow. When these three things converge, the economy will be vibrant and prosperous for people of all ages and incomes. Therefore, to grow the economy, the work must include developing business and entrepreneurs, developing talent and developing place.

- Business** The Flint & Genesee Economic Alliance and Flint & Genesee Chamber are the primary divisions that support the needs of Business in our region and utilize the resources of our partners to address their challenges and opportunities for growth and success. The Flint & Genesee Chamber supplements the needs of Business by boosting their capacity with training opportunities, increasing visibility in the community and creating business-to-business connections.
- Talent** Talent development, retention, and attraction are critical pieces to the economic development model followed by the Flint & Genesee Group. Employers are constantly seeking a highly skilled and prepared workforce that can meet their business demands. Flint & Genesee Education & Talent is responsible for preparing current job seekers and the next generation of workers for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Through this division, residents of all ages are provided access to a continuum of services that can be entered at any point and places them on a pathway to employment.
- Place** In terms of economic development, Place or placemaking, builds local community advocates, retains talent and business and makes our community attractive to new businesses, prospective residents and visitors. Explore Flint & Genesee supports this effort through promotion of tourism and the industries that surround it - hotels, restaurants, area attractions, sports/recreation, and event spaces.



KEY AUDIENCES

To develop business, talent and place, Flint & Genesee Group works with a variety of audiences across the region. With Flint & Genesee Group’s mission of maximizing economic growth, businesses are the key focus audience we serve. A “business” can take many forms and Flint & Genesee Group will continue to serve and define businesses as employers, ranging from small to large, including for-profit and nonprofit, and entrepreneur to well-established.

In 2020, the stability of the global economy was shaken to its core and revealed extremely sensitive populations within the economy that were made most vulnerable. Most notably, this included the small business community, travel and hospitality industries and minority-owned businesses. In the coming years, the entire Flint & Genesee Group will devote more energy across all the business divisions in assisting these specific audiences as they recover, stabilize and thrive in the post-pandemic environment.

Flint & Genesee Group will strategically focus on supporting the local labor pool to assist current job seekers and prepare the workforce of tomorrow. Flint & Genesee Education & Talent is our organization’s primary resource to connect residents of all ages to a continuum of services that prepares them with skills needed for the jobs and careers of tomorrow and provides more equitable access to educational opportunities to advance their skills even further for high wage careers. This is done ultimately to develop the local workforce and meet the needs of employers locally and retain residents. Inversely, the other divisions of the Group help to connect employers facing talent shortages and needs to those in our programs and other workforce agencies.

Geographically, Flint & Genesee Group serves audiences primarily in Genesee County and the City of Flint, while serving as an economic hub for the surrounding seven-counties known as the I-69 Thumb Region. A majority of the work done is right here in the region; however, to address the loss of population and to attract new, diverse employers, efforts for outreach at a state or national level are often times required. Over the next three years, significant energies will be utilized to market Flint and Genesee County to bring revenue, investment, jobs and people to the community. This effort will be supported by the Explore Flint & Genesee division through tourism and destination marketing aimed at introducing and promoting the region to new and outside visitors, meeting planners, and travel associations through positive messaging.

In order to achieve the most impact in our community and reach our audiences, Flint & Genesee Group maintains partnerships with public and private agencies, residents and many others to meet our goals. This is called out in our mission statement. Without these partnerships, the Group would not have the full capacity to carry out our work, nor the shared vision for success that sets our goals. These



partnerships vary in formality, but ultimately create mutually beneficial relationships that allow for sharing of resources, leadership, data and information that advances our community forward together.

The following table shows each business division within Flint & Genesee Group and a list of audiences they work with to achieve their purpose.

FLINT & GENESEE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE	FLINT & GENESEE EDUCATION & TALENT	FLINT & GENESEE CHAMBER	EXPLORE FLINT & GENESEE
Audiences Served	Audiences Served	Audiences Served	Audiences Served
Businesses Entrepreneurs Site Selectors	K-12 Students Higher Ed Students Parents/Caregivers Opportunity Youth Population	Small Businesses -Large Business (RLC) Nonprofits	Hoteliers Meeting Planners Regional Leisure & Tourism Industry Visitors/Conventions
Partnerships	Partnerships	Partnerships	Partnerships
Funders (Private & State) Municipalities County/State Governments Community Partners/ Resource Agencies	Funders (Private & State) K-12 School Districts (Administrators) Higher Education Institutions Vendors Community Partners/ Resource Agencies Employers	Committees Municipal Partners	County Commissioners Airport Travel Michigan Genesee County Parks
Priority Audiences for 2021-2023	Priority Audiences for 2021-2023	Priority Audiences for 2021-2023	Priority Audiences for 2021-2023
Small Businesses Minority-Owned Businesses	Students & Families Employees	Small Businesses	Small Businesses Hotels/Attractions Visitors Residents

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The 2021-2023 Strategic Plan of Flint & Genesee Group will achieve its mission to maximize economic and community growth by focusing efforts toward the following goals and objectives.

GOAL 1

To grow, retain and attract businesses to Genesee County by connecting them to resources needed to advance prosperity of Genesee County residents. Over the next three years, the Economic Alliance will create 1,500 jobs and \$100 million in private investment, in addition to connecting jobs to 500 local workers.

Flint & Genesee Economic Alliance

Objectives	Strategies/Tactics
Retain existing businesses and associated jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage/build relationships and connect clients to resources through retention visits with local businesses Help connect employers and job seekers through FGG Education & Talent programs and other workforce agencies
Facilitate the growth of existing and new businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grow businesses by surveying the business community Manage the small business support center Collaborate with municipal and state government partners to provide incentives
Capture the growth of existing small businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serve small businesses by providing technical assistance and coaching Connect businesses to resources or talent Cultivate an entrepreneurship ecosystem and established investor network
Attract new businesses, new jobs, and investment to the county	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attract future employers by developing sites, giving site tours to site selectors, lead generation services, and through shared place branding activities with Explore Flint & Genesee



GOAL 2

Further the individual and collective success of small businesses in Flint & Genesee to build a stronger local economy. By following a new service delivery model that is tailored to local small businesses, by the year 2023, the Flint & Genesee Chamber will add 286 new members, attain a membership retention rate of 80%, and attain small business membership of 90% of overall membership base.

Flint & Genesee Chamber

Objectives	Strategies/Tactics
Offer a suite of packages that help businesses and nonprofits to reach their audiences and increase their revenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide visibility, networking, and engagement opportunities for small businesses to connect to customers and other businesses in the community.
Improve business efficiency and effectiveness through situational awareness and capacity-building programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share/communicate information, resources, and news on economic conditions that influence business decisions Provide trainings designed to increase capacity for staff and improve business operations
Create movements, initiatives, or forums where small business collectively benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve access to capital and other technical support through partners and other business divisions Establish collective movements and advocacy Create community connections Partner with other Chambers and associations

GOAL 3

To promote the lifelong educational and economic empowerment of Flint & Genesee residents by reducing barriers to participate in high-quality, out-of-school-time spaces and local workforce training programs. By 2023, Flint & Genesee Education & Talent will serve at least 2,500 students in YouthQuest. In other programs we will conduct 14 job fairs and provide residents access to over 660 hours of skills training.

Flint & Genesee Education & Talent

Objectives	Program	Strategies/Tactics
Provide access to effective, high-quality programming and resources to support the educational and career success of Flint & Genesee talent from K-12 and beyond	YouthQuest Summer Youth Initiative Flint Promise Opportunity Youth Career Edge	Work with external evaluators to implement a continuous quality improvement process Provide staff with access to professional development tailored to students' needs Provide pre-employment training and summer employment experiences to students
Collaborate with and promote local education and workforce development partners to improve academic and career outcomes for residents	YouthQuest Summer Youth Initiative Flint Promise Opportunity Youth Career Edge	Partner with local educational and workforce development organizations to promote participation in existing opportunities for academic enrichment, workforce training, and career readiness services available to the Flint & Genesee workforce Use public spaces such as webinars and job fairs created through programming and events to support the cross-promotion of local partners.
Design programs with elements that engage the community, magnify youth voice, and empower families	YouthQuest Flint Promise Opportunity Youth	Create opportunities within E&T events and programs to allow for youth and community members to share their voice.

GOAL 4

Increase tourism and drive economic impact in the region through strategic marketing, public relations, and sales. By the end of 2023, Explore Flint & Genesee will collaborate with partners in business and government to book 16,500 hotel stays and host 120 meetings and group events (i.e., conventions and tournaments).

Explore Flint & Genesee

Objectives	Strategies/Tactics
Increase leisure travel to Flint & Genesee by 16,500 hotel bookings	Tell the authentic story of Flint & Genesee to positively influence perception Refine advertising and promotion in response to new travel trends and visitor behaviors Improve visitor experience Partner to support hospitality industry Engage residents and attractions in the success of the travel economy
Increase meeting and group travel to Flint & Genesee by 120	Refine market sales strategy in response to travel trends and meeting planner needs Support meeting planners to instill confidence in Flint & Genesee Help partners, hotels, and attractions navigate best practices and safety guidelines Collaboratively market Flint & Genesee with regional partners Partner with industry membership organizations to amplify promotion of Flint & Genesee

FLINT & GENESEE GROUP

LOOKING FORWARD

Strategy: Focus on attracting and retaining talent to help build a thriving economy and community in Flint & Genesee

Flint & Genesee Group has long focused on the importance of bolstering the region's workforce through talent development initiatives. However, area businesses still have trouble finding the talent they need to fill jobs and grow. While increasing net-in migration is a common problem across the state, a local talent shortage may impede the region's future economic prosperity. Research from the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives tells us that attracting and retaining talented workers is a key component of economic development. Furthermore, the threat of a shrinking population and workforce, and its potential impact on the business community, is further outlined in the county-wide Forward Together Vision for Economic Vitality. To address this challenge, the organization will explore tactics that will:

- Strengthen partnerships with local colleges and universities to encourage early student integration into the community through live, work and play amenities
- Provide opportunities for young talent to find their passion for our region through community-building committees and non-profit board service opportunities
- Connect talent to local employment opportunities through internship programs and career fairs
- Continue to provide talent development opportunities for workers currently living in the region
- Build leadership capacity through leadership development programming
- Foster growth opportunities for small businesses owners and entrepreneurs through mentorship and grant programs
- Create a talent attraction program that targets individuals looking to relocate, who may or may not have previous ties to the region



Strategy: Focus on the needs of those hit hardest during the time of the pandemic and be more inclusive to small and minority-owned businesses going forward

While talent has remained a high priority issue for local employers for some time now, the year 2020 and economic crisis created by the pandemic revealed vulnerabilities to major contributors of the economy. Flint & Genesee Group's past and current crisis response efforts, along with national/state/local data, revealed just how vulnerable small businesses; the travel, entertainment, hospitality industries; and minority-owned businesses were to the disruptions in everyday life caused by COVID-19.

In addition to struggles endured by the pandemic, access to financial relief was hindered by ongoing years of systemic racial tensions and challenges that have long prevented minority-owned businesses from advancing and growing. Flint & Genesee Group immediately began to address these tensions internally and also in the community by co-chairing a sub-committee of the Racial Inequities Task Force on business and banking.

To address these issues going forward, the organization will do the following:

- Dedicate more staff time to small business support and assistance
- Promote and prepare small businesses for financial services, such as loans and grant funding to stabilize and expand their operations
- Continue to convene community, business, financial services leaders to develop strategies for equitable access to capital
- Provide direct financial assistance to the small business community through grant programs when funding is available
- Introduce and implement the new Flint & Genesee Chamber membership model that is more inclusive to small businesses

Strategy: Drive economic growth in Flint & Genesee under a new, strengthened identity and with our collaborative partners

The previous strategic plan for 2018-2020 called into action several organizational-wide efforts that spoke to the strength and efficiency of our organization and to position ourselves as a leader of economic development in Genesee County while drawing on our collaborative partnerships to develop a vision for future economic success. Planning efforts to address rebranding, organizational structure, and creating a comprehensive economic vision for the county were initiated during the previous plan and roll out of those initiatives in 2021 will require them to be implemented and closely monitored to achieve success. Some of the tactics that will be introduced include:

- Introduce and promote the new brand of Flint & Genesee Group and business divisions within
- Establish Flint & Genesee Group/Flint & Genesee Economic Development Alliance as the county's lead economic development agency through new branding and education of our new identity and strategic focus areas in the community
- Implement new organization and governance structure that increases the organization's impact, streamlines efficiency, and addresses internal functional conflicts
- Streamline the organizational budget and clarify revenue sources and expenses under the new structure
- Identify and seek out enterprise-wide funding with more diverse, flexible resources under the new structure
- Develop new and enhance current business division Advisory Committees that provide input and accountability to set goals, share data and information, and influence daily work efforts
- Lead in the Forward Together Vision for Economic Prosperity plan by addressing the elements of business development, talent retention and attraction, and placemaking efforts



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