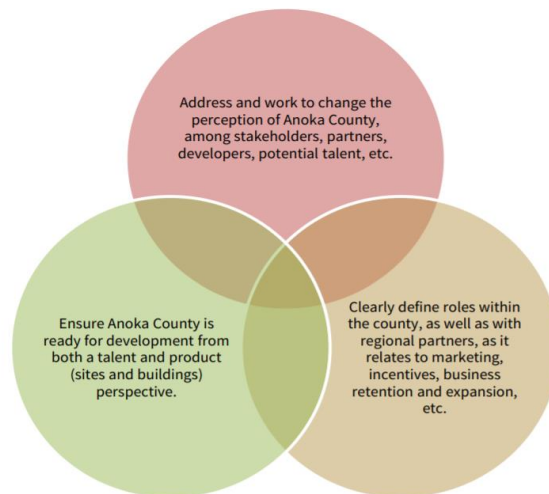


Anoka County Regional Economic Development (ACRED) 2021 Strategic Plan

Overview

The Anoka County Regional Economic Development partnership was formed in 2018 after the Anoka County/Connexus Energy/MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce economic development recruitment study was completed by Ady Advantage. This study has three overall goals identified for Anoka County that were development after a work session with stakeholders in 2017. These goals include:

1. Address and work to change the perception of Anoka County, among stakeholders, partners, developers, potential talent, etc.
2. Ensure Anoka County is ready for development from both a talent and product (sites and buildings) perspective.
3. Clearly define roles within the county, as well as with regional partners, as it relates to marketing, incentives, business retention and expansion, etc.



The following strategies were developed to help Anoka County meet its three goals, as outlined on the above. The strategies fall into the categories of alignment/regionalism, readiness and marketing. Tactics within each strategy can be found as attachments to this plan.

In 2020, the economy swiftly shifted towards an ongoing recession due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. It is important our strategy in 2021 reflects the needs of our current economy while remaining in alignment with the County's long-term economic development vision. The following goals are a subset of the Anoka County Business Recruitment plan identified by the stakeholders in Anoka County as priorities for 2021.



2021 Goals

Alignment and Regionalism

1. Improve communication to business leaders and area stakeholders in Anoka County.
2. Improve Business Retention and Expansion outreach and collaboration among county-wide stakeholders.
3. Develop a roadmap for the future of the ACRED partnership budget by the end of 2021

Marketing

1. Continue the momentum of brand recognition with internal and external partners.
2. Assist stakeholders to promote local organizations and investment into our small business community.
3. Increase online marketing presence on platforms and connections.
4. Market the MN Technology Corridor and continue to promote opportunities for further partnerships.

Readiness

1. Promote financial resources for existing small businesses and entrepreneurs for COVID-19 relief and refine incentives for expanding companies.
2. Assist communities in the MN Tech Corridor and throughout Anoka County that have sites ready for development to conduct shovel readiness checklists and/or certifications.
3. Continue partnerships with the Anoka County Workforce Board and CareerForce Center to ensure the county workforce is ready for the regrowth of the economy.
4. Assist in the infrastructure improvements needed to increase economic development competitiveness by providing resources, aiding in connections and advocacy.

2021 Goal Implementation & Action Plan

Alignment and Regionalism

- **Goal 1: Improve communication to business leaders and area stakeholders in Anoka County**

Implementation:

- Continue to update Constant Contact database with business, real estate, community and other stakeholder contacts. Categorize contacts for strategic outreach. Report growth in this data base quarterly
 - Communicate through consistent quarterly Economic Development newsletters to broader audience. In addition, communicate to targeted audiences about events and new financial resources available to businesses.
- Keep the ACRED COVID Relief WebPage and Handout updated with the latest resources available to businesses and nonprofits affected by COVID; review weekly. Assist in the administration on local relief grants when or if funding is received. Offer assistance to communities with program promotion or guidelines.
- Continue to host ACRED Partnership meetings with a topic focus in the following categories: business retention, COVID-19 business resources, incentives for new projects, watershed district opportunities for partnership, and readiness.
- Connect with area chambers quarterly via meetings or one on one phone calls with Executive Directors or presidents at each chamber.
- Connect with banking, credit union, and CPA/accounting leaders when there are new resources to help area businesses through the pandemic. Include this audience in the ACRED quarterly newsletter. Ensure the quarterly newsletter offers information about regional incentives such as PACE financing or utility incentives.

- **Goal 2: Improve Business Retention and Expansion outreach and collaboration among county-wide stakeholders**

Implementation:

- Host a BRE Workshop in Q2 2021 with all chambers and cities present, Connexus, Xcel Energy and County leadership (Workforce, Open to Business). Discuss red flags, how to follow up on these.

- Develop continued relationships with real estate leaders and bankers to ensure they understand these “red flags” and know how to follow up on these leads. Track any project wins.
 - In addition, ensure they know what resources ACRED can provide to them when working on projects.
- Track number of visits in the county quarterly that are done
- Host at least 2 virtual “business summits” targeting minority and woman owned business leaders to help bridge communication to this business community that is less connected
- **Proactive Visits**
 - In Q1, gather list of fastest growing industries in the Metro in Anoka County. Reach out to stakeholders where employers are located to see if they need support in reaching out to these companies
 - Track industries at risk of job loss by utilizing Greater MSP’s recovery dashboard and “at risk matrix.” Share this list with stakeholders to help in their outreach strategies in Q1 and Q2.
- **Goal 3: Develop a roadmap for the future of the ACRED partnership budget by the end of 2021**

Implementation:

- Develop a sustainable budget for 2022 and future years that will help grow the activities of the partnership and develop a reserve to update the Adv Advantage Economic Development Roadmap in 5-10 years.
- Engage community stakeholders throughout this discussion starting in the end of Q3 or early Q4
- Utilize the latest census information to update the cost sharing model on more current population numbers

Marketing

- **Goal 1: Continue the momentum of brand recognition with internal and external partners.**

Implementation:

- Real Estate Community Brand Recognition
 - Continue partnerships with the real estate community by speaking at MN Real Estate Journal events, Site Selector events and the UpRiver Real Estate Event. At least 8 real estate events in total (4 MN Real Estate Journal, UpRiver event and 3 other real estate related events)

- Other stakeholders
 - Continue to speak/promote the region and provide resources for doing business in the county at events such as city, chamber, business association, or rotary meetings quarterly
 - Provide the target industry and the regional profile(s) to stakeholders to support marketing efforts, while elevating the communication of the county's economic development brand semi-annually, or with any new significant property listing where the broker or community asks for assistance in marketing the property.
- **Goal 2:** Assist stakeholders to promote local organizations and investment into our small business community.

Implementation:

- In Q1, work with the County Communications team to develop a catchy phrase, marketing and video for shopping locally and supporting small businesses in Anoka County.
- Provide all cities, downtown associations, shopping center owners, chambers and other stakeholders with this marketing material to add to their own efforts to support our small business community throughout the year.
- **Goal 3:** Increase online marketing presence of ACRED and connections.

Implementation:

- Use platforms including but not limited to the ACRED LinkedIn page, the www.anokacountysuccess.org website and more. Post weekly on the ACRED page about projects, new financing available, events. Etc.
- Utilize the video that was created by SkyEye films to promote the county on LinkedIn quarterly and at events. Allow cities, chambers or other stakeholders to use this video to promote the region throughout the year.
- Invite stakeholders such as key business leaders, real estate professionals, and community partners to follow the ACRED LinkedIn page. Increase followers from 150 to 250 by 2022.
- Work with state partners such as Greater MSP, DEED and the MN Marketing Partnership to connect with out-state site selectors and ensure Anoka County is at the table when opportunities arise (number of meetings events will be dependent on partners).

- **Goal 4:** Market the MN Technology Corridor and continue to promote opportunities for further partnerships

Implementation:

- Continue to follow up on monthly website traffic reports for the tech corridor in partnership with Greater MSP and DEED. Follow ups made within 2-4 weeks of receiving each monthly report.
- Host quarterly stakeholder meetings to progress in the corridor initiative such as site readiness, infrastructure improvements, new partnerships and data discovery.
- Coordinate with stakeholders to respond to RFPs from Greater MSP, site selectors, brokers, etc. that the Tech Corridor would be a good fit for.
- Market the Data Center Study conducted with Excipio consulting to promote the cost advantages for data centers to locate within the corridor. Identify what deliverables from the study are transferable to other sites within the corridor and the County by the end of Q1.
- Use leads generated by the corridor as an opportunity to promote other sites within the County by responding to project requests with sites that meet their specs in the corridor and outside the corridor in the other areas of Anoka County.
- Continue the partnership with Greater MSP and DEED to promote and develop the MN Tech Corridor through the MN Marketing Partnership, and the Greater MSP partnership plan with the tech corridor.

Readiness

- **Goal 1:** Promote financial resources for existing small businesses and entrepreneurs for COVID-19 relief and refine incentives for expanding companies.

Implementation:

- Add additional information to the COVID-19 matrix and COVID-19 resource list when new resources become available or old resources expire
- Host meetings with city, chamber or other stakeholders when new resources for businesses become available to share information and collaborate when possible.
- Create a one stop shop on the ACRED website for resources for new businesses in Anoka County. List state resources, open to business and more on the taxes and incentives page by Q2 2021
 - Host a workshop with stakeholders and the subcommittee to develop this resource list by Q2 2021.

- **Goal 2:** Assist communities in the MN Tech Corridor and throughout the county that have sites ready for development to conduct shovel readiness checklists and/or certifications.

Implementation:

- Review properties within the Anoka county that are off the market quarterly. Support the property stakeholders to help prepare more information or marketability of the sites by creating documents that outline the specifics of a site in order to make sharing information about off-market properties easier.
 - Coordinate with stakeholders to conduct shovel readiness certifications when requested, site list checklists or certified building programs to prepare these properties for RFP and increase their competitiveness
- **Goal 3:** Continue partnerships with the County Workforce Board and CareerForce Center to ensure the county workforce is ready for the regrowth of the economy.

Implementation:

- **Support Job Recovery in the County**
 - Partner with DEED and the Workforce Board to track data semi-annually. Understand where permanent job losses will end up in Anoka County after the economy fully reopens, what industries are seeing job growth and where the gaps in talent and skills are.
 - Promote and aid in partnerships that assist in the solutions to talent shortages and gaps by making connections with stakeholders working on similar initiative or connecting employers with talent initiatives at the Job Training Center, chambers or area colleges.
- **Goal 4:** Assist in the infrastructure improvements needed to increase economic development competitiveness by providing resources, aiding in connections and advocacy.

Implementation:

- **Internet/Fiber Improvements**
 - Continue to work with community partners to make improvements to the internet and fiber connectivity issues in the County. Ensure all underserved communities have an outline on how to aid in improvements by the end of 2021.
 - Be a resource to community partners to find solutions to internet issues by continuing involvement with MAPCED, the rural broadband initiative and the Blandin Foundation annually.



ANOKA COUNTY
Regional Economic Development

Positioned for Success

- Provide advocacy for the benefits of upcoming highway projects such as at the Highway 10 and 65 improvements by sharing the project information with stakeholders such as real estate developers, brokers and prospecting businesses.