



# **ONWARD: A PATH FOR REGIONAL GROWTH.**

A five-year strategic plan to power  
southeastern Wisconsin's next chapter.

**MMAC**  
METROPOLITAN MILWAUKEE  
ASSOCIATION OF COMMERCE

# Table of Contents

<b>3</b>	Letter from the President
<b>4</b>	Executive Summary
<b>5</b>	Introduction
<b>6</b>	Process
<b>8</b>	Regional Overview
<b>10</b>	Regional Analysis: SWOT
<b>12</b>	Strategic Goals
<b>13</b>	Goal Metrics
<b>14</b>	<b>Talent</b> Develop and retain a robust labor market that fuels long-term economic prosperity.
<b>18</b>	<b>Growth</b> Accelerate and sustain economic growth by attracting strategic investment that drives job creation.
<b>22</b>	<b>Livability</b> Position southeastern Wisconsin as a vibrant destination by advocating for the quality of life that makes a region a great place to live, work and play.
<b>24</b>	Conclusion
<b>26</b>	Appendix

## Letter from

# The President

### Create new opportunities for the future.

bold | ambitious | direct

Our work is not to predict the future, but to shape it with clarity, courage and conviction. This plan represents our collective vision for how we can build on the strengths of our region and create new opportunities for the future. The goal is to present something bold, ambitious and direct.

Milwaukee, often referred to as ‘the good land,’ earned its name from the convergence of three rivers that created a rich and sustainable environment. That image still resonates today—not only in our natural assets but as a symbol of the forces now shaping southeastern Wisconsin’s economic future.

**Manufacturing**—our historical strength. Though it looks different today, Milwaukee remains a global powerhouse—home to hundreds of companies of every size that design and produce goods for markets worldwide.

**Technology**—the force transforming every sector. Not a standalone industry, but the current that drives progress in manufacturing, healthcare, biotech, financial and professional services. From automation to AI, technology is reshaping how Milwaukee competes and grows.

**Workforce**—the best in the world. The solid work ethic of Wisconsin’s workforce, reinforced by strong educational institutions, continues to shape our regional identity.

What follows is an honest look at where we’ve been, where we are and where we must go—**onward**. This plan does not suggest that MMAC or its affiliates alone drive the region’s economic future. Instead, it offers a clear analysis of the hurdles we must overcome and the opportunities we must seize. Above all, it is a call to align around a shared direction—and to row together toward it.



**Dale Kooyenga**  
MMAC President & CEO

# Executive Summary

**MMAC'S VISION: A globally competitive region that fosters high-value jobs to sustain a vibrant quality of life for all.**



**TALENT:** Develop and retain a robust labor market that fuels long-term economic prosperity.

**GROWTH:** Accelerate and sustain economic growth by attracting strategic investment that drives job creation.

**LIVABILITY:** Position southeastern Wisconsin as a vibrant destination by advocating for the quality of life that makes a region a great place to live, work and play.

These metrics will be used to evaluate the success of our goals over the next five years.

Real Per Capita Income	⇒	Improve Milwaukee's ranking to 7 <sup>th</sup> or higher among peer metros.
Population Change	⇒	Grow by 3% across the region by 2030.
Job Growth	⇒	Add 9,700 new jobs at an average wage of \$69,800.
New Capital Investment	⇒	Secure \$4.5 billion in new capital investment.
Economic Gap Reduction	⇒	Improve the metro's standing on measure of well-being—currently 50 <sup>th</sup> on the African American Index and 40 <sup>th</sup> on the Hispanic Index.





## Introduction

In February 2024, the seven-county Milwaukee region stood at a pivotal moment, reshaped by a global pandemic, rapid advances in artificial intelligence and shifting geopolitical dynamics. Even amid these forces, the region attracted landmark investments and launched pioneering commercial ventures. These developments brought both challenges and extraordinary opportunities, underscoring the need for a bold reimagining of our regional strategy.

At that time, MMAC began developing a five-year strategic plan to guide the organization's role in advancing the region's long-term economic prosperity. This plan charts a course for growth by leveraging regional strengths and fostering collaboration, aimed at making our region globally competitive with the fastest-growing economy in the Midwest.

**“For our business community, presenting—and now executing—a strategic plan is essential to staying competitive in the global economy.”**

**Austin Ramirez**  
CEO, Husco | MMAC Board Member

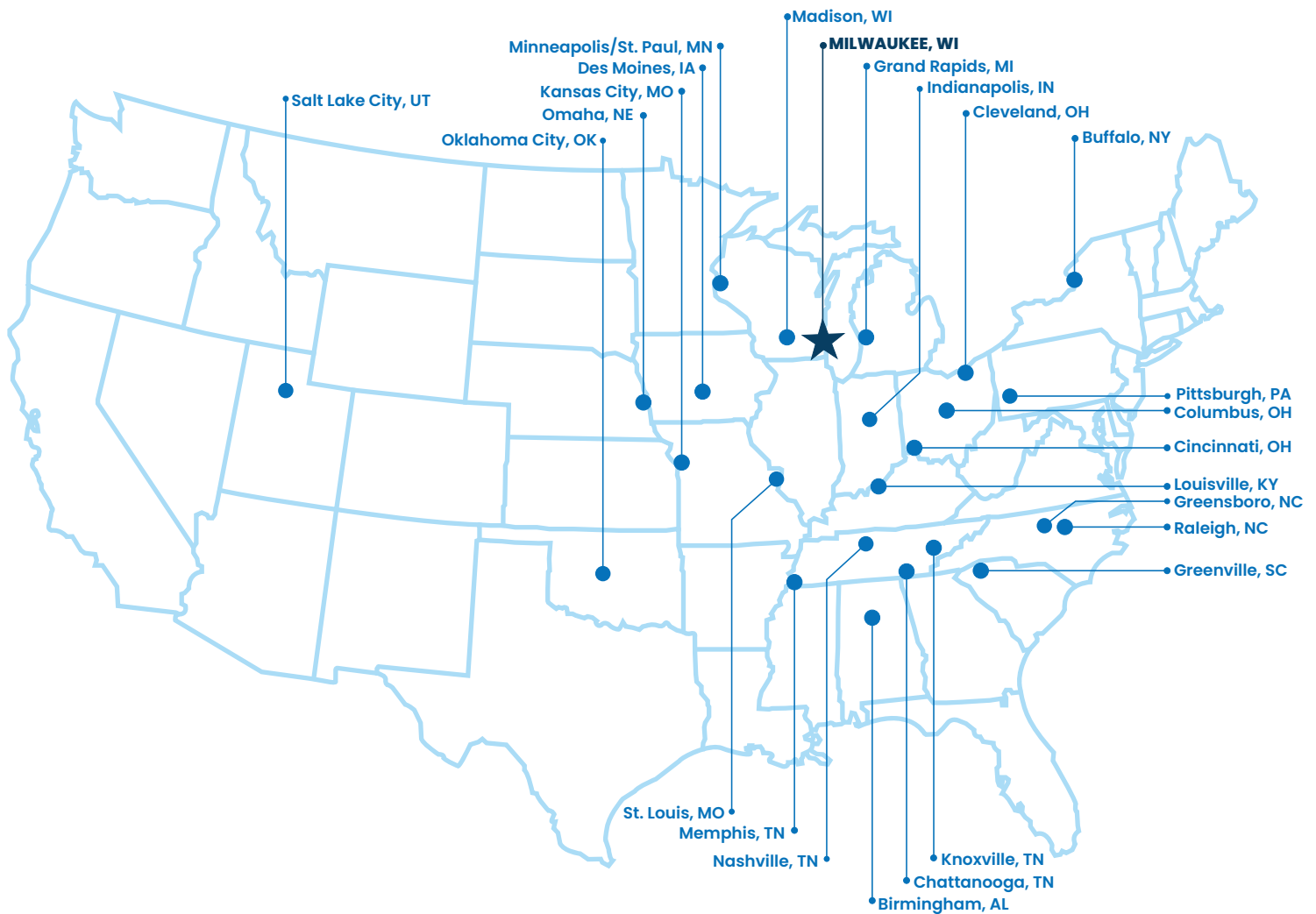


# Process

A review of economic strategies from more than 50 U.S. cities and metropolitan areas was further focused on 24 comparable metros, including Milwaukee's six Midwestern peers. From there, we took a closer look at these peers and identified common themes, challenges and key differences. This offered insights into programs and solutions that could be adaptable to southeastern Wisconsin. Alongside this qualitative review, quantitative analyses compared Milwaukee with similar regions.

## Benchmark Metros

These 24 peer metros helped evaluate Milwaukee's performance and will be used for ongoing comparison as we track progress toward our goals.



For this document, the Milwaukee region (a.k.a region) refers to the seven counties of southeastern Wisconsin. The Milwaukee metro (a.k.a Milwaukee or metro) area is defined as Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha counties. Peer metro areas follow the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) definitions of MSAs. While this is a regional plan, regional-level data is not available, so metro-level data has been used for comparison.

## 25 Peer Metros by Real Per Capita Income

1	Nashville	\$67,818
2	Omaha	\$67,445
3	Madison	\$65,864
4	St. Louis	\$65,259
5	Raleigh	\$63,761
6	Indianapolis	\$63,743
7	Minneapolis-St. Paul	\$63,384
<b>8</b>	<b>MILWAUKEE</b>	<b>\$62,950</b>
9	Kansas City	\$62,296
10	Pittsburgh	\$62,132
11	Des Moines	\$61,408
12	Salt Lake City	\$60,726
13	Cincinnati	\$60,589
14	Cleveland	\$60,287
15	Birmingham	\$59,744
16	Oklahoma City	\$58,930
17	Louisville	\$57,676
18	Columbus	\$57,435
19	Grand Rapids	\$56,997
20	Knoxville	\$55,727
21	Memphis	\$54,061
22	Buffalo	\$53,836
23	Chattanooga	\$52,708
24	Greensboro	\$50,276
25	Greenville, SC	\$49,969

Data source: 2023 U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis



**Compared to peer metros,  
MILWAUKEE REALIZED\***

**SLOWER GROWTH**

**MODERATE PROSPERITY**

**HIGHER-THAN-AVERAGE  
EDUCATION LEVELS**

**SIGNIFICANT RACIAL AND  
ETHNIC DISPARITIES**

**WE CAN BE BETTER.**

\*Refer to Appendix A Peer Metro Data

## Regional Overview

Southeastern Wisconsin—defined as the four-county metro area of Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha, along with Kenosha, Racine and Walworth counties—is home to more than 2 million residents and a \$157 billion economy, serving as the state's economic engine.

The region's location is served by highways, rail, an international port and a major airport, all anchored by the state's largest city. Proximity to Chicago puts it in a 'mega region' of roughly 10 million people, further strengthening its role as a U.S. economic hub.

Fueled by industries such as manufacturing, food and beverage, healthcare, financial and professional services, the region is recognized for its leadership in machinery and automation and has experienced significant growth in biotech. Southeastern Wisconsin has remained a haven for headquarters, ranking 5<sup>th</sup> among U.S. metros for Fortune 500 companies per capita.

Education fuels the talent key to this vitality. Prestigious institutions such as the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, Marquette University, Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE) and the Medical College of Wisconsin produce a highly skilled workforce while driving research and innovation. A strong network of technical colleges—including Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) and Gateway Technical College—further prepares talent for high-demand fields.

Beyond its economy, the region offers an exceptional quality of life, located on a Great Lake, with professional sports teams, cultural amenities, a vibrant dining scene and abundant outdoor recreation in its parks, trails and natural spaces.

Together, the region's demographics, industrial base, workforce capabilities and cultural assets create a strong foundation. Comparative analysis with peer metros highlights both advantages and challenges, guiding how to prioritize opportunities to strengthen southeastern Wisconsin's future.

## Region At a Glance

See Appendix A for peer metro comparison



# 2M

**Population**

# 1,080,000

**Labor Force**



# \$77,919

**Median Household Income**



**Milwaukee's Fortune  
500 companies:**

**fiserv.**

**KOHL'S**

Johnson  
Controls

ManpowerGroup®

Northwestern Mutual

**Rockwell  
Automation**

WEC  
Energy Group



**3.2%**  
**Unemployment**  
**rate** (2024)

**+28.1%**  
**GDP Growth**  
(2018-2023)

**\$157B**  
**GDP** (2023)

**14.1%**

**Total Manufacturing workers**  
**as share of total employment**  
(2024)



# Regional Analysis

A comprehensive SWOT analysis grounded the strategic plan with a clear view of the regional landscape. It highlights assets and challenges to prioritize initiatives and define next steps. These insights ensure our goals are both ambitious and attainable.

## STRENGTHS

The following highlights underpin our competitive advantage and shape a path for increased prosperity.

### Manufacturing Leader

- The metro area has among the highest concentration of advanced manufacturing jobs in the U.S., with 98,000 workers employed in the sector.
- Productivity per manufacturing worker in Milwaukee is 25% higher than the national average.

### Resiliency

- Designated a climate haven by CNBC (2022) due to minimal exposure to hurricanes, wildfires, floods and tornadoes.
- Historically, the region has been shielded from extreme economic volatility due to its diverse mix of industry sectors.

### Accessibility

- Shortest average commute time in the U.S. among major metros at 21.7 minutes (American Community Survey, 2023).
- Strategic location along Lake Michigan with proximity to Chicago and the Great Lakes.
- Served by major highways, rail, an international airport and an expanding port.

### Cultural Amenities

- Ranked No. 3 Best Big City in the U.S. by Condé Nast Traveler readers (2024) for arts, culture and dining.
- MLB (Brewers) and NBA (Bucks) franchises, along with professional hockey and Division I athletics put the region near the top in per capita access to major league sports.

### Education

- Wisconsin is ranked No. 7 in K-12 education and No. 10 in higher education by U.S. News & World Report.
- Diverse K-12 options—public, choice and charter—that support family needs and workforce development.

The logo for MMAC, consisting of the letters 'M' and 'M' in a stylized, bold, blue font.

## WEAKNESSES

An honest assessment of our weaknesses helps target improvements and shape effective responses.

### Below Average

- Population (-1.2%) and labor force (-0.4%) decline over the ten-year period ending in 2024.

### High Taxes

- Wisconsin's tax structure places a heavy burden on small and mid-sized non-manufacturing and non-agriculture businesses, as well as upper-middle-class households—ranking 30<sup>th</sup> for corporate taxes and 35<sup>th</sup> for individual income tax. Overall, the state stands 19<sup>th</sup> on the Tax Foundation's 2025 State Tax Competitiveness Index.

### Racial Gaps

- Large racial prosperity gap—ranking 25<sup>th</sup> for Black and 22<sup>nd</sup> for Hispanic when comparing median household income as a percentage of White non-Hispanic households among peer metros.

### Aging Infrastructure

- Aging infrastructure requiring significant investment to support future growth.

# OPPORTUNITIES

The region boasts strong attributes, but opportunities reveal untapped potential and promising avenues for future growth.

## Catalytic Investments

- Leverage emerging industries that have recently invested billions in the region.

## Talent Migration

- Attract workforce from other regions dissatisfied with lack of opportunities and cost of living—particularly from Illinois, Minnesota and Michigan.

## Higher Education

- Wisconsin's strong post-secondary education system, ranked No. 10 nationally, provides a competitive advantage in developing a skilled workforce.

## Manufacturing Reshoring

- Capitalize on the renewed focus on reshoring and nearshoring manufacturing in the U.S.

## K-12 Education

- Improve outcomes for Milwaukee's K-12 schools to prepare thousands of students for successful entry into the workforce. Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), the city's largest K-12 system, currently reports a 68% graduation rate, 9% reading proficiency and 12% math proficiency.
- Opt in to the federal tax credit program, foster an environment that rewards excellence and invest strategically in regional schools and students.

## Biotech Hub

- Leverage investment and organic growth tied to the federal biotech hub designation.

AC

# THREATS

Like many peer regions, southeastern Wisconsin faces significant threats—underscoring the need for a focused, strategic response.

## Non-attainment Zone

- The region is at risk of becoming a 'serious non-attainment' zone as classified by the EPA due to out-of-state emissions—an unfair burden that raises costs for Wisconsin businesses and can hinder new investment.

## Regulatory and Tax Challenges

- Wisconsin ranked 30<sup>th</sup> for corporate tax burden on the Tax Foundation's 2025 State Tax Competitiveness Index.
- Complex and restrictive regulatory environment that increases costs and slows business growth, with regulatory accumulation growing 2.3% from 2020-2023, making Wisconsin the 13<sup>th</sup> most regulated state in the U.S. (Mercatus Center, George Mason University).

## Lack of Affordable Housing

- Shortage of 40,000 affordable rental units and the 16<sup>th</sup> worst city for renters (2024 Forbes Advisor study) in the City of Milwaukee.
- Severe shortage of single-family homes, with inventory ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest among major U.S. metros (American Enterprise Institute).

## Workforce Challenges

- With population growth projected at less than 0.5% over the next 10 years, Milwaukee's competitiveness depends on talent attraction, making restrictive immigration policies a critical threat to our regional economy.



# Strategic Goals

This five-year strategy aims to position our region as globally competitive, with the fastest-growing economy in the Midwest. As southeastern Wisconsin competes with other regions for investment and talent, we must set ambitious goals that chart a clear path to sustainable growth. We have built this strategy around the three most critical priorities for our region—talent, growth and livability.



## **TALENT: Develop and retain a robust labor market that fuels long-term economic prosperity.**

*Cultivate a resilient and competitive labor market that supports both employees and employers by aligning workforce skills with evolving industry*

## **GROWTH: Accelerate and sustain economic growth by attracting strategic investment that drives job creation.**

*Foster the growth of established and emerging companies and strategically attract new businesses that strengthen the region.*

## **LIVABILITY: Position southeastern Wisconsin as a vibrant destination by advocating for the quality of life that makes a region a great place to live, work and play.**

*Collaborate to expand housing opportunities, protect cultural amenities, foster relationship-building and address the needs of the business community, strengthening our region's amenities.*

*“As a business leader actively navigating a growing company and the demands of family, Milwaukee’s livability allows for balance uncommon in most metros. Our region’s accessibility, navigability and cultural amenities make more possible here in terms of quality of life.”*

**Lori Richards**

CEO, Mueller Communications | MMAC Board Member





## essential for evaluating success

# Goal Metrics

These metrics will be used to evaluate the success of our goals over the next five years.

### REAL PER CAPITA INCOME



Measures a region's average income per person, adjusted for inflation and allowing reliable comparisons between different locations over long periods.

---

**Improve Milwaukee's ranking to 7<sup>th</sup> or higher among peer metros.**

### POPULATION CHANGE



Measures the region's capacity to develop the talent needed to support growth.

---

**Grow by 3% across the region by 2030.**

### JOB GROWTH



Projects M7's goal of jobs created by corporate attraction and expansion projects, generating a combined annual payroll of \$677 million.

---

**Add 9,700 new jobs at an average wage of \$69,800.**

### NEW CAPITAL INVESTMENT



Projects M7's target for total value invested in business expansions or new company relocations to the region.

---

**Secure \$4.5 billion in new capital investment.**

### ECONOMIC GAP REDUCTION



Broad indicator of prosperity for all, encompassing wealth, employment, income, home ownership and opportunity.

---

**Improve the metro's standing on measure of well-being—currently 50<sup>th</sup> on the African American Index and 40<sup>th</sup> on the Hispanic Index.**

# TALENT

## Develop and retain a robust labor market that fuels long-term economic prosperity.

*Cultivate a resilient and competitive labor market that supports both employees and employers by aligning workforce skills with evolving industry needs while creating opportunities for all.*

A workforce of skilled lifelong learners is essential for the region's prosperity. Our ability to educate and advance the skills needed to meet an ever-evolving economy is at the core of our resilience.

### K-12 Education Strategy

For decades, the Association has championed parent choice as the cornerstone of building high-quality K-12 education—supporting schools across Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), independent charters and private institutes. Ensuring families have choices, providing equitable and adequate funding and transparently sharing outcomes are critical to driving quality education.

While significant progress has been made, too many students remain behind grade level in reading and math. That is why we remain focused on strengthening K-12 outcomes. Academic achievement is the first step in building a pipeline of talent that fuels the growth of southeastern Wisconsin's employers.

Our education strategy is built on four interlinked goals.

#### Better Funding

- Equitable per pupil funding across public, choice and charter schools.
- Increasing investment in early childhood programs.
- Raising special education funding to better match costs.

#### Improved Accountability

- Pushing for academic and operational reform in Milwaukee Public Schools.
- Advocating for consistent, reliable state assessments that provide stakeholders with information on student proficiency.

#### Consistent Partnerships

- Expanding programs to connect students with local businesses.

#### Talent Development

- Launching campaigns to attract and retain high-quality educators.
- Creating pathways for aspiring teachers without bachelor's degrees.

**ACTION: Translate the multi-year Education Strategy into measurable actions and results.**

\*See Appendix B for full Education Strategy & Legislative Agenda.

### Establish a Scholarship Granting Organization

The One Big Beautiful Bill created the first-ever federal K-12 tax credit scholarship program. Beginning in 2027, individuals can receive a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit of up to \$1,700 for donations to Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs). These funds will be distributed as scholarships to eligible students for a broad range of educational needs.

**ACTION: Advocate for Wisconsin to opt in to the new federal program and establish a certified SGO that channels private donations to serve students across various school systems, enhancing educational opportunities and outcomes.**





## Facilitate Career Pathways Programs

Partnering with local businesses, schools and workforce organizations, we will connect education to real-world opportunities and create clear pathways from classrooms to career through:

### Be the Spark

“You can’t be what you can’t see” serves as the guiding principle behind Be the Spark career exploration program for K-12 students. This initiative introduces students to diverse career pathways, helping them envision expanded horizons. Through real-world experiences and connections to local businesses, students explore new possibilities and build relationships that can shape their future careers.

**ACTIONS:** Collaborate with education partners and regional stakeholders to identify gaps in existing programming and areas where new initiatives can make the greatest impact. Create opportunities that align student interests with the needs of local employers.

### Teamship

The District C Teamship program is an innovative internship experience that prepares high school students for the modern workforce. Working in small teams, students tackle real challenges from businesses of all sizes—including startups, corporations, nonprofits and tech firms—gaining valuable skills while delivering meaningful solutions.

**ACTION:** Partner with District C to introduce the Teamship program in nine additional schools in 2025-26, building on the current MPS partnership and broadening regional access to hands-on career learning.



## LAB Midwest Robotics

MMAC’s Community Support Foundation partnered with LAB Midwest to install training equipment in four local schools during the 2024-25 school year. The equipment and curriculum offer students a comprehensive introduction to robotics, mechatronics and automation, preparing them for careers in high-demand technical fields.

**ACTION:** Continue the partnership and assess opportunities to scale the program across the region.

# TALENT

**Develop and retain a robust labor market that fuels long-term economic prosperity.**

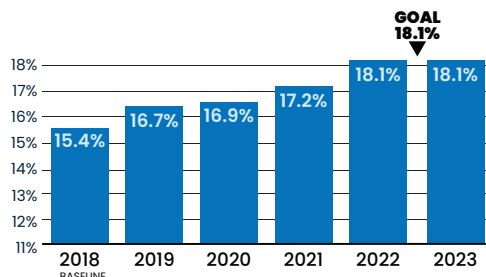
*Cultivate a resilient and competitive labor market that supports both employees and employers by aligning workforce skills with evolving industry needs while creating opportunities for all.*



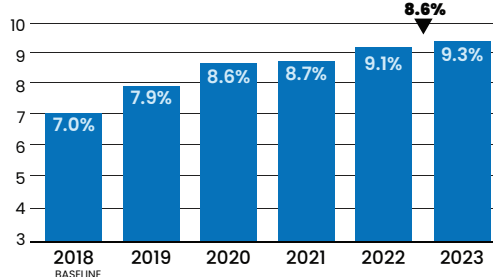
## Region of Choice

Launched in 2018, the Region of Choice (ROC) 1.0 initiative served as a cornerstone of regional talent strategy until its conclusion in 2024. ROC 1.0 focused on workplace inclusion, increasing the representation of Black and Brown employees and managers across pledge-signing companies. The initiative successfully engaged businesses and community leaders, making the region more attractive to top talent and aligning workforce development with the evolving needs of the economy. Over its tenure, ROC 1.0 also strengthened connections between employers, educational institutions and prospective employees, laying the groundwork for the region to continue attracting and retaining the skilled workforce needed for long-term economic success.

**Black & Brown talent  
as a % of total employment**



**Black & Brown talent  
as a % of total management**



As a mid-sized region, we must be more tightly aligned to remain competitive. We must engage all our valuable talent. The next phase of this strategy, branded as ROC 2.0, will build on this principle by uniting employers around shared goals for talent, ensuring southeastern Wisconsin competes effectively with larger, more populous regions.

**Action: Execute the ROC 2.0 plan found in Appendix C.**





## Launch a Talent Fellowship

The Orr Fellowship in Indianapolis has become a nationally recognized model for attracting and retaining top graduates by immersing them in high-growth companies and connecting them deeply to their community. Its success underscores a simple truth: When young professionals feel engaged to one another and rooted in their city, they are more likely to stay, grow their careers and contribute to long-term regional prosperity. By fostering professional growth and community connections, programs like this strengthen talent retention, develop future leaders and build a pipeline of innovators.

**Action: Explore the Orr Fellowship model and adapt for Milwaukee to provide recent graduates with hands-on experiences, mentorship, leadership development and strong professional networks.**

## Promote Milwaukee's Talent Value Proposition

In today's competitive labor market, communities that succeed in attracting and retaining talent do more than promote jobs—they tell a compelling story about why people should build their lives there. Employers can highlight career opportunities, but it takes a united community voice to showcase the broader advantages of a region. Elevating southeastern Wisconsin's story of livability, quality of life and opportunity will give local employers an edge in recruiting, while ensuring our region stands out as a destination of choice for all.

**Actions: Introduce a concierge-style program, providing ready-to-use materials that ensure a consistent, compelling narrative about the region across industries. Begin with a targeted initiative in education to help local districts and schools recruit and retain teachers.**

## All-In Milwaukee

All-In Milwaukee is a college completion program supporting high-potential, low-income students with scholarships, advising and career connections, helping them graduate, begin meaningful careers in Milwaukee and strengthen the region's talent pipeline.

**Actions: Fulfill our \$600,000 commitment. Support integrating program graduates into the regional business community after college.**



## Milwaukee Tech Hub

Milwaukee Tech Hub is a coalition of businesses, academic institutions and community organizations working together to grow the region's technology ecosystem. Its mission is to attract and develop tech talent, support innovation and entrepreneurship. Milwaukee ranks 8<sup>th</sup> among peers with comparable tech labor pools.

**Actions: Support Tech Hub's efforts to grow startups, innovation and workforce training, positioning Milwaukee as a leading tech destination. Emphasize the integration of technology in manufacturing, food and beverage, healthcare and water industries.**

# GROWTH

**Accelerate and sustain economic growth by attracting strategic investment that drives job creation.**

Foster the growth of established and emerging companies and strategically attract new businesses that strengthen the region.

The ‘makers’—engineers, innovators who design, produce and implement physical products and systems, are the backbone of the economy. These manufacturers will anchor the region’s continued progress. Additionally, newer industries in biotech and healthcare are helping define us as a leader in life sciences. Rounding out this diverse economy is a hub of financial and professional services.

Founded by MMAC in 2005, Milwaukee 7’s (M7) mission is to attract capital investment and jobs. M7 serves as the regional economic development team working in collaboration with the seven counties of southeastern Wisconsin: Milwaukee, Waukesha, Racine, Kenosha, Ozaukee, Washington and Walworth.

In 2024, M7 developed a three-pronged strategy to guide results over the next five years: concentrate on the region’s key sectors, strengthen awareness with site selectors and expand outreach in Europe.

## M7’s Success (2005 – 2024)

**139**  
Projects

**\$8.4B**  
Capital  
Investment

**32,140+**  
Jobs

**\$2B**  
Annual Payroll

**\$74,974**  
Average wage

**17%**  
Above regional  
average

## M7 Wins: Delivering Results for the Region



## Target Companies in Key Industries

Building on industries that drove economic development success for nearly two decades, M7 has refined its focus to target sectors with the strongest potential to fuel long-term growth by meeting future global demand.

**ACTION:** Attend industry-specific conferences, leverage data analytics and execute targeted mission trips to identify companies looking to expand or relocate.



## Increase Awareness with Site Selectors

Site selectors serve as trusted advisors to companies. Their evaluations of a region's workforce, infrastructure, business climate and quality of life often determine whether an area wins or loses major investments.

**ACTIONS:** Engage site selectors through in-person relationship-building, as well as digital communication strategies. Participate in events with decision makers that will yield the most productive opportunities.



## Increase European Outreach

Foreign direct investment into the U.S. has accelerated over the past four years, driven by shifting geopolitical dynamics and rising global risk. This creates new opportunities to attract foreign manufacturers seeking to establish or expand their presence in the North American market.

**ACTIONS:** Participate in more economic development missions to Europe. Strengthen relationships with country-specific representatives, trade associations and key stakeholders. Maintain southeastern Wisconsin's EB-5 regional center status, ensuring continued access to international investors seeking to participate in U.S. development projects.

## Non-attainment Zone

Most of the region's emissions come from outside the state. However the EPA has designated much of the Milwaukee region a 'non-attainment zone,' meaning air quality levels do not meet federal ozone standards. If this 'non-attainment zone' status is allowed to progress, it will place a crushing regulatory burden on companies here through stricter permits, higher compliance costs and limits on potential expansions.

**ACTION:** Challenge the EPA's designation and amend the Clean Air Act.





# GROWTH

**Accelerate and sustain economic growth by attracting strategic investment that drives job creation.**

Foster the growth of established and emerging companies and strategically attract new businesses that strengthen the region.



## Advocate for Business-friendly Environment

Wisconsin's higher taxes and complex regulations strain small and mid-sized businesses, slow growth and make the state less competitive. Simplifying regulations and reducing costs are critical to a more business-friendly climate. The Manufacturing and Agriculture Activities Tax Credit (MAC) has helped Wisconsin keep a competitive edge and sustain a top spot in manufacturing jobs per capita.

**ACTIONS: Champion tax cuts and reforms at the state and federal levels that ease burdens on businesses and promote economic growth. Fight to sustain the MAC.**

## Industry Clusters

Unique geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, suppliers, research institutions and talent drive innovation and competitiveness. By fostering collaboration in these clusters, regions can accelerate growth, attract investment and strengthen their global reputation.

**ACTION: Advance the work of FaB Wisconsin and The Water Council to position their industries for growth locally and globally.**



## Biotech Hub

Wisconsin's designation as a federal biotech hub positions the state as a leader in life sciences and medical innovation. Centered in Milwaukee and Madison, this hub unites research institutions, health systems, startups and global companies to attract investment and create high-quality jobs.

**ACTION: Leverage the federal biotech hub designation to attract investment, foster collaboration and position the region as a leader in life sciences.**



An aerial photograph of the Milwaukee skyline, featuring the Pabst Pavilion (a sail-shaped building) in the foreground, the city's downtown area with various skyscrapers in the background, and a body of water in the lower foreground. The image is partially covered by a dark blue overlay on the right side.

**“Our commitment to  
Talent, Growth and  
Livability isn’t just  
a framework—it’s a  
promise. By investing  
in people, innovation  
and community,  
we’re building a  
region that doesn’t  
just compete  
—it thrives.”**

**Steve Booth**  
Chairman & CEO, Baird  
MMAC Board Chair





# LIVABILITY

**Position southeastern Wisconsin as a vibrant destination by advocating for the quality of life that makes a region a great place to live, work and play.**

Collaborate to expand housing opportunities, protect cultural amenities, foster relationship-building and address the needs of the business community, strengthening our region's amenities.

A high quality of life fosters belonging and well-being, which translates into a more productive, engaged workforce. Affordable housing, accessible healthcare, strong schools, recreational amenities and a vibrant cultural scene all make a region an attractive place to live and work. Livability is not only about the physical environment—it's also about building communities where people feel connected, supported and inspired to contribute to regional growth and prosperity.



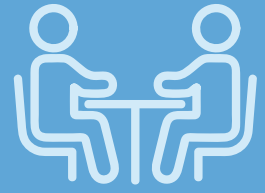
## Expand Residential Housing

Milwaukee has been recognized as one of the nation's hottest rental markets—a sign of a region on the rise, but also a growing challenge for housing affordability. To meet demand, housing supply must increase substantially, closing a gap estimated at 40,000 units. Ensuring a sufficient mix of housing options at all income levels is essential to sustaining the region's competitiveness and quality of life.

The Milwaukee Development Corporation (MDC)—affiliated with the Association since 2003—is the region's long-standing civic developer. MDC helps catalyze economic growth by facilitating real estate development, supporting business expansion and engaging in civic building. It has driven catalytic investments in key areas such as the 30<sup>th</sup> Street Industrial Corridor, Menomonee Valley and near northwest neighborhoods.

**ACTIONS: Employ MDC to address the region's housing needs. Advocate for laws and zoning changes that will expand housing supply, with a focus on workforce housing in the City of Milwaukee.**

\*See Appendix D for MDC Strategy.



## Entertainment and Cultural Amenities

From professional sports to world-class arts, festivals and music—cultural amenities play a vital role in shaping the vibrancy and appeal of the region. These assets provide residents and visitors alike with shared experiences that extend beyond work and home. Professional teams like the Brewers and Bucks and the world-renowned Summerfest generate pride and put us on the national stage. These amenities strengthen the region's attractiveness and reinforce southeastern Wisconsin as a dynamic place to build a future.

**ACTIONS:** Advocate for the protection and enhancement of Milwaukee's current and future cultural and entertainment amenities—including professional sports teams, venues, festivals, performing and visual arts—recognizing their role as community assets that strengthen the region's appeal to residents, visitors and businesses. Support The Iron District development as a transformational sports and entertainment hub.

## Position Milwaukee as a Vibrant Destination

By leveraging its existing channels and partnerships, the Association plays a pivotal role in amplifying the region's reputation as a desirable place to live and work.

As a non-partisan, issue-focused organization, the Association has earned a reputation for access and influence at every level of government, standing out as an effective civic voice.

**ACTIONS:** Align marketing efforts with City and regional campaigns, sharing success stories and testimonials. Deploy resources to address the needs of the business community, ensuring the region remains attractive, competitive and thriving.





## Conclusion

This five-year strategic plan establishes a strong foundation for building a thriving and resilient regional economy. By focusing on growth, talent and livability, the Association is positioning southeastern Wisconsin to attract investment, develop a skilled workforce and strengthen the region as a place where people and businesses can succeed. The initiatives outlined—ranging from substantive improvements in K-12 education to eliminating our non-attainment zone status—reflect a commitment to long-term prosperity. Working alongside businesses, educational institutions and community partners, MMAC is equipping the region to take full advantage of its opportunities to flourish as a vibrant, competitive and attractive destination for talent and investment.





# Appendix A

## Population & Population change (2014 – 2024)

Metro	Population	10 yr. % change
Raleigh	1,538,127	23.9%
Nashville	2,136,796	19.1%
Greenville, SC	990,287	15.0%
Des Moines	746,375	14.8%
Knoxville	961,216	12.3%
Oklahoma City	1,494,339	11.8%
Indianapolis	2,167,589	10.7%
Madison	701,143	10.6%
Salt Lake City	1,272,441	10.5%
Omaha	991,173	9.7%
Columbus	2,194,001	9.6%
Kansas City	2,234,010	7.9%
Chattanooga	586,341	7.7%
Minneapolis-St. Paul	3,724,490	7.1%
Grand Rapids	1,168,213	6.6%
Greensboro	794,302	6.4%
<b>USA</b>	<b>336,486,167</b>	<b>5.7%</b>
Cincinnati	2,283,914	5.4%
Louisville	1,371,017	4.4%
Birmingham	1,190,011	4.2%
Buffalo	1,159,173	2.1%
Cleveland	2,159,981	-0.3%
St. Louis	2,794,397	-0.4%
<b>M7</b>	<b>2,026,679</b>	<b>-0.7%</b>
Memphis	1,330,487	-0.9%
Pittsburgh	2,423,670	-0.9%
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>1,556,976</b>	<b>-1.2%</b>

## Median age (2024)

Metro	Median Age
Pittsburgh	42.9
Cleveland	41.7
Buffalo	41.1
Chattanooga	40.6
Knoxville	40.5
St. Louis	40.4
Louisville	39.5
<b>M7</b>	<b>39.4</b>
Birmingham	39.1
<b>USA</b>	<b>39.1</b>
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>39</b>
Greenville, SC	38.9
Greensboro	38.8
Minneapolis-St. Paul	38.5
Cincinnati	38.4
Kansas City	38.3
Raleigh	37.8
Grand Rapids	37.2
Indianapolis	37.2
Madison	37.2
Des Moines	37
Memphis	37
Nashville	37
Columbus	36.9
Omaha	36.8
Oklahoma City	36.3
Salt Lake City	34.3

## % of Population high school or higher (2024)

Metro	Percentage
Madison	95.8%
Pittsburgh	95.2%
Minneapolis-St. Paul	94.1%
St. Louis	93.6%
Des Moines	93.3%
Kansas City	93.2%
Raleigh	92.9%
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>92.8%</b>
Buffalo	92.5%
Cincinnati	92.5%
Omaha	92.5%
Grand Rapids	92.4%
Columbus	92.1%
Cleveland	91.9%
Nashville	91.6%
Salt Lake City	91.6%
Louisville	91.5%
Indianapolis	91.2%
Knoxville	90.6%
Birmingham	90.2%
Chattanooga	89.9%
Memphis	89.6%
Oklahoma City	89.4%
Greenville, SC	89.3%
Greensboro	88.2%

## % of Population Bachelor's degree or higher (2024)

Metro	Percentage
Raleigh	50.6%
Madison	49.9%
Minneapolis-St. Paul	45.3%
Nashville	40.5%
Columbus	40.1%
Kansas City	39.7%
Des Moines	39.5%
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>39.4%</b>
Omaha	39.3%
Indianapolis	38.6%
Pittsburgh	38.3%
St. Louis	38.3%
Salt Lake City	38.1%
Cincinnati	37.7%
Grand Rapids	36.0%
Buffalo	35.8%
Greenville, SC	34.7%
Cleveland	34.2%
Birmingham	33.8%
Oklahoma City	33.4%
Louisville	32.8%
Chattanooga	32.4%
Knoxville	32.4%
Greensboro	31.6%
Memphis	31.2%

## Median household income (2024)

Metro	Income
Raleigh	\$102,144
Salt Lake City	\$100,548
Minneapolis-St. Paul	\$97,928
Madison	\$89,714
Nashville	\$88,800
Des Moines	\$85,446
Omaha	\$84,524
Kansas City	\$83,785
Columbus	\$82,938
St. Louis	\$81,679
Grand Rapids	\$81,541
Cincinnati	\$81,489
Indianapolis	\$80,239
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>\$77,919</b>
Pittsburgh	\$77,214
Greenville, SC	\$75,881
Chattanooga	\$75,076
Birmingham	\$74,954
Louisville	\$74,305
Knoxville	\$74,184
Oklahoma City	\$72,930
Cleveland	\$72,532
Buffalo	\$72,300
Memphis	\$68,124
Greensboro	\$66,072

## Average earning per Job (2024)

Metro	Earnings
Minneapolis-St. Paul	\$90,836
Salt Lake City	\$88,470
Madison	\$85,533
Raleigh	\$85,001
Nashville	\$84,954
Des Moines	\$82,799
Pittsburgh	\$82,126
Columbus	\$81,693
Cleveland	\$81,048
Indianapolis	\$80,961
Cincinnati	\$80,913
Kansas City	\$80,725
St. Louis	\$80,508
Buffalo	\$80,239
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>\$80,159</b>
Louisville	\$77,738
Birmingham	\$77,314
Omaha	\$76,022
Memphis	\$75,109
Knoxville	\$74,901
Chattanooga	\$72,477
Oklahoma City	\$71,319
Grand Rapids	\$70,555
Greenville, SC	\$68,868
Greensboro	\$68,387



# Appendix A

## Job Growth (2014–2024)

Metro	Population	10 yr. % change
Raleigh	810,060	2.9%
Nashville	1,241,856	2.6%
Salt Lake City	901,703	2.3%
Chattanooga	303,148	1.7%
Greenville, SC	484,629	1.7%
Knoxville	475,086	1.6%
Indianapolis	1,205,253	1.5%
Grand Rapids	658,466	1.4%
Des Moines	445,838	1.3%
Oklahoma City	766,418	1.3%
Columbus	1,207,134	1.3%
Louisville	755,426	1.1%
Madison	452,119	1.1%
Kansas City	1,215,937	1.1%
Cincinnati	1,198,683	0.9%
Birmingham	589,764	0.8%
Minneapolis-St. Paul	2,139,091	0.7%
Omaha	556,813	0.6%
Memphis	703,525	0.6%
St. Louis	1,505,595	0.5%
Greensboro	396,355	0.5%
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>899,702</b>	<b>0.2%</b>
Cleveland	1,135,839	0.0%
Buffalo	566,849	0.0%
Pittsburgh	1,225,739	-0.2%

## Real Per Capita Personal Income (2023)

Metro	Earnings
Raleigh	\$67,818
Omaha	\$67,445
Madison	\$65,864
St. Louis	\$65,259
Raleigh	\$63,761
Indianapolis	\$63,743
Minneapolis-St. Paul	\$63,384
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>\$62,950</b>
Kansas City	\$62,296
Pittsburgh	\$62,132
Des Moines	\$61,408
Salt Lake City	\$60,726
Cincinnati	\$60,589
Cleveland	\$60,287
Birmingham	\$59,744
Oklahoma City	\$58,930
Louisville	\$57,676
Columbus	\$57,435
Grand Rapids	\$56,997
Knoxville	\$55,727
Memphis	\$54,061
Buffalo	\$53,836
Chattanooga	\$52,708
Greensboro	\$50,276
Greenville, SC	\$49,969

## Net Migration (2022)

Metro	Net Migration	Rate per 1,000 pop.
Knoxville	11,091	11.89
Greenville, SC	10,739	11.20
Chattanooga	4,800	8.36
Raleigh	12,098	8.17
Nashville	14,934	7.21
Oklahoma City	7,320	5.01
Greensboro	2,988	3.81
Indianapolis	3,161	1.49
Louisville	1,600	1.18
Kansas City	962	0.44
Birmingham	479	0.41
Cincinnati	895	0.40
Des Moines	223	0.31
Grand Rapids	1	0.00
Omaha	-499	-0.51
Columbus	-1,896	-0.88
St. Louis	-4,032	-1.44
Cleveland	-3,349	-1.55
Madison	-1,199	-1.75
Pittsburgh	-4,966	-2.04
Memphis	-2,956	-2.21
Minneapolis-St. Paul	-8,584	-2.33
Buffalo	-2,876	-2.48
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>-4,517</b>	<b>-2.90</b>
Salt Lake City	-8,256	-6.52

## Black Median Household Income (2023)

Metro	% of white non-hisp. ACS 5 year
Greensboro	67.0%
Nashville	64.3%
Chattanooga	61.8%
Louisville	61.0%
Knoxville	60.1%
Columbus	59.4%
Salt Lake City	59.3%
Greenville, SC	59.2%
Birmingham	58.6%
Oklahoma City	57.6%
Raleigh	57.5%
Indianapolis	56.2%
Memphis	55.0%
St. Louis	54.8%
Grand Rapids	54.7%
Kansas City	54.1%
Omaha	54.1%
Minneapolis-St. Paul	53.6%
Buffalo	53.1%
Des Moines	52.7%
Pittsburgh	52.1%
Cincinnati	51.2%
Cleveland	50.1%
Madison	49.5%
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>44.1%</b>

## Hispanic Median Household Income (2023)

Metro	% of white non-hisp. ACS 5 year
Pittsburgh	90.9%
Chattanooga	83.7%
Greensboro	83.4%
Knoxville	81.2%
Grand Rapids	80.4%
Greenville, SC	77.7%
Nashville	77.6%
Salt Lake City	77.0%
Cincinnati	76.7%
Louisville	76.7%
Indianapolis	76.5%
Omaha	75.7%
Minneapolis-St. Paul	75.5%
St. Louis	75.1%
Oklahoma City	73.8%
Kansas City	73.5%
Des Moines	72.8%
Madison	72.5%
Columbus	72.0%
Birmingham	70.7%
Memphis	67.0%
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>65.9%</b>
Raleigh	63.9%
Cleveland	63.8%
Buffalo	53.7%

# Appendix A

## Labor Force (2014 - 2024)

Metro	2014	2024	Chg. 2014 to 2024	% chg. 2014 to 2025
Raleigh	632,251	846,574	214,323	33.9%
Nashville	919,428	1,161,120	241,692	26.3%
Salt Lake City	602,340	738,178	135,838	22.6%
Oklahoma City	648,066	774,437	126,371	19.5%
Greenville, SC	403,211	480,290	77,079	19.1%
Chattanooga	251,247	291,583	40,336	16.1%
Indianapolis	985,622	1,141,881	156,259	15.9%
Des Moines	359,083	413,159	54,076	15.1%
Columbus	1,031,220	1,159,080	127,860	12.4%
Knoxville	403,132	453,001	49,869	12.4%
Madison	372,160	411,249	39,089	10.5%
Omaha	477,672	527,754	50,082	10.5%
Grand Rapids	573,676	632,235	58,559	10.2%
Kansas City	1,095,839	1,200,396	104,557	9.5%
Cincinnati	1,085,670	1,174,292	88,622	8.2%
Minneapolis	1,917,394	2,070,359	152,965	8.0%
Louisville	650,372	700,469	50,097	7.7%
Birmingham	537,842	571,613	33,771	6.3%
Greensboro	357,833	372,173	14,340	4.0%
St. Louis	1,449,337	1,486,168	36,831	2.5%
Memphis	613,812	625,966	12,154	2.0%
Cleveland	1,089,153	1,099,978	10,825	1.0%
Buffalo	554,873	557,312	2,439	0.4%
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>824,625</b>	<b>821,270</b>	<b>-3,355</b>	<b>-0.4%</b>
Pittsburgh	1,259,989	1,237,709	-22,280	-1.8%

## Unemployment rate (2024)

Metro	Rate
Madison	2.4%
Nashville	2.8%
Birmingham	2.9%
Minneapolis	2.9%
Des Moines	3.0%
Omaha	3.0%
Oklahoma City	3.1%
Raleigh	3.1%
Chattanooga	3.2%
Knoxville	3.2%
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>3.2%</b>
Salt Lake City	3.2%
Kansas City	3.6%
Pittsburgh	3.6%
St. Louis	3.7%
Cleveland	3.8%
Greenville, SC	3.8%
Indianapolis	3.8%
Buffalo	3.9%
Columbus	4.0%
Grand Rapids	4.0%
Greensboro	4.0%
Memphis	4.1%
Cincinnati	4.2%
Louisville	4.5%

## Gross Domestic Product (2023)

Metro	GDP
Minneapolis	\$350,710,432
St. Louis	\$226,548,910
Nashville	\$204,861,124
Indianapolis	\$199,197,977
Cincinnati	\$198,888,723
Pittsburgh	\$194,229,253
Kansas City	\$185,746,211
Columbus	\$182,087,631
Cleveland	\$173,135,607
Salt Lake City	\$147,519,150
Raleigh	\$133,081,325
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>\$130,856,689</b>
Memphis	\$102,934,012
Oklahoma City	\$100,054,101
Louisville	\$97,751,023
Omaha	\$92,356,612
Buffalo	\$90,716,457
Birmingham	\$84,566,170
Grand Rapids	\$82,311,400
Des Moines	\$74,062,506
Madison	\$66,115,608
Knoxville	\$64,382,649
Greenville, SC	\$63,357,431
Greensboro	\$52,925,956
Chattanooga	\$42,381,201

## GDP GROWTH (2018-2023)

Metro	2018	2023	% chg.
Nashville	\$137,012,094	\$204,861,124	49.5%
Salt Lake City	\$99,939,694	\$147,519,150	47.6%
Raleigh	\$90,869,370	\$133,081,325	46.5%
Knoxville	\$44,921,630	\$64,382,649	43.3%
Des Moines	\$53,303,198	\$74,062,506	38.9%
Chattanooga	\$30,528,556	\$42,381,201	38.8%
Indianapolis	\$143,663,365	\$199,197,977	38.7%
Omaha	\$67,142,997	\$92,356,612	37.6%
Greenville, SC	\$46,398,619	\$63,357,431	36.6%
Columbus	\$134,348,386	\$182,087,631	35.5%
Kansas City	\$138,895,330	\$185,746,211	33.7%
Louisville	\$73,119,138	\$97,751,023	33.7%
Cincinnati	\$148,905,658	\$198,888,723	33.6%
Birmingham	\$63,509,748	\$84,566,170	33.2%
Grand Rapids	\$61,833,918	\$82,311,400	33.1%
St. Louis	\$170,514,475	\$226,548,910	32.9%
Memphis	\$77,803,073	\$102,934,012	32.3%
Buffalo	\$68,671,998	\$90,716,457	32.1%
Madison	\$50,086,353	\$66,115,608	32.0%
Cleveland	\$133,796,772	\$173,135,607	29.4%
Minneapolis	\$271,637,576	\$350,710,432	29.1%
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>\$102,817,770</b>	<b>\$130,856,689</b>	<b>27.3%</b>
Greensboro	\$42,186,533	\$52,925,956	25.5%
Oklahoma City	\$80,043,804	\$100,054,101	25.0%
Pittsburgh	\$158,041,004	\$194,229,253	22.9%

## Manufacturing Employment Concentration (2024)

Metro	Mfg. % of total
Grand Rapids	19.1%
Chattanooga	15.0%
Greenville, SC	13.8%
<b>Milwaukee</b>	<b>13.6%</b>
Greensboro	13.5%
Louisville	12.5%
Cleveland	12.1%
Cincinnati	11.1%
Knoxville	10.7%
Minneapolis	10.3%
Buffalo	10.0%
Madison	9.3%
Indianapolis	8.8%
St. Louis	8.8%
Kansas City	8.3%
Nashville	7.9%
Pittsburgh	7.9%
Birmingham	7.8%
Salt Lake City	7.6%
Omaha	7.3%
Columbus	6.9%
Memphis	6.5%
Des Moines	5.9%
Oklahoma City	5.4%
Raleigh	4.7%



## Appendix B



# 2024-2027 EDUCATION STRATEGY & LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

As business leaders in the community, it is crucial to support and engage in efforts to enhance education across all levels. By taking the lead in this area, businesses can play a pivotal role in shaping the future workforce of our region.

**110,882**  
PUBLICLY FUNDED  
STUDENTS

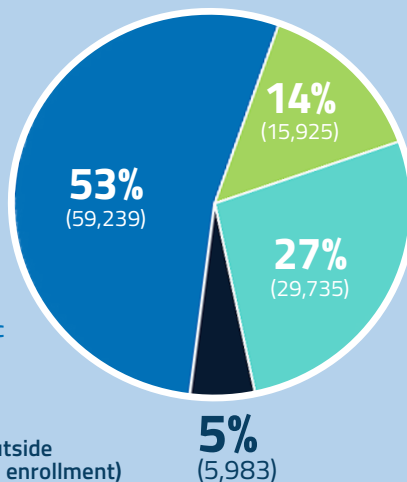
PUBLICLY FUNDED  
SCHOOLS

**34** Public charter  
schools

**36** Milwaukee public  
schools (MPS)

**91** Private  
schools

Public schools outside  
Milwaukee (open enrollment)



Collaboration with early childhood programs and other related efforts ensures children receive a strong start, while partnerships with post-secondary institutions help align educational programs and policies with the needs of our modern economy.

Additionally, supporting adult education and upskilling initiatives ensures the current workforce remains competitive and prepared for evolving industry demands.

### GOALS FOR K-12 EDUCATION IN CITY OF MILWAUKEE SCHOOLS

#### 1. BETTER FUNDING

to help cultivate a skilled, innovative and diverse pool of talent.

#### 2. IMPROVED ACCOUNTABILITY

by collaborating to reform MPS, support charter school authorizations and improve the accuracy of state education assessments.

#### 3. CONSISTENT PARTNERSHIPS

through collaboration among various stakeholders including teachers administrators, parents, students, and community organizations.

#### 4. TALENT DEVELOPMENT

is crucial for attracting and retaining high-quality teachers and administrators.

# Appendix B

## Goal 1: BETTER FUNDING

### Objective 1

#### Close the funding gap for charter and private school students

Current 2024-25 School Year	
Milwaukee Public Schools	\$15,609
Public Charter Schools	\$11,729
Private Schools (K-8 Students)	\$10,237
Private Schools (9-12 Students)	\$12,731

### Objective 2

#### Expand voucher, "once in, always in" to all dependents in a household

Change the current state law so that once a student qualifies for the voucher program, their siblings and other dependents of the family or tax filer(s) should also automatically qualify for the program.

### Objective 3

#### Increase 4K from .6 to .7 FTE for funding purposes

4K (pre-kindergarten) students receive 60 percent of the funding that K-12 students get, but they still need resources similar to what a typical elementary or middle school student would require.

### Objective 4

#### Increase special education funding from 33% to 50% of cost by 2035

Crucial in Milwaukee Public Schools, where one in five students receive special education services.

## Goal 2: IMPROVED ACCOUNTABILITY

### Objective 1

#### Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) reform

- Work with partners to support a grassroots movement in the city that demands increased reforms from MPS.
- Change the timing of school board elections from spring to fall.
- Collaborate with the mayor, governor, legislature, and potentially the county executive and DPI Secretary to implement reforms for the MPS Board.

### Objective 2

#### Reinforce & Protect Charter School Authorizers

- Strengthen city council support for Charter School Authorization.
- Engage with the new University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Chancellor to ensure continued Charter School Authorization by UWM.
- Advocate for Charter School friendly board members on Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) Board.

### Objective 3

#### Improve the reliability of the State Report Card

The WI Department of Public Instruction (DPI) renamed the performance levels and lowered cut scores for the state assessments (e.g., Forward Exam, ACT) which creates the following issues:

OLD LEVELS	NEW LEVELS
Below Basic	Developing
Basic	Approaching
Proficient	Meeting
Advanced	Advanced

- By reducing cut scores, students could reach higher performance levels with lower proficiency (meeting grade-level standards).
  - Scores are no longer aligned with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Proficiency for grades 3-8.
  - The new state standard for considering a student proficient on the ACT is a score of 19, lower than the score of 22 which experts say indicates a student is ready for college or a career.
- Creates inconsistent comparisons with previous years.
- This raises achievement scores, which will only benefit wealthier schools and districts.

# Appendix B

## Goal 3: CONSISTENT PARTNERSHIPS

### Objective 1

#### Give high school students visibility to career pathways

Continue and expand MMAC's **Be the Spark | Teamship program** that connects local businesses with students to introduce career opportunities and inspire the next generation of workers.

### Objective 2

#### Incorporate the latest technology and talent demand into high schools

**Manufacturing Automation Grant:** Create scalable classes that integrate area high school curriculum into southeastern Wisconsin automation and manufacturing industry.

### Objective 3

#### Establish initiatives that strengthen connections between Milwaukee high school students and the business community

- Sponsor 30 students annually through the nonprofit organization  All-In Milwaukee that provides comprehensive support to low-income and underrepresented local students to help them succeed in college and beyond.
- Identify Milwaukee high school graduates attending HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities)  and maintain strong connections with them throughout their college journey to support their success and future contributions to our community.
- Build a thriving young professional community in Milwaukee by attracting top college graduates and retaining local talent, driving long-term business growth and innovation.

*Additional potential partners:*



## Goal 4: TALENT DEVELOPMENT

### Objective 1

#### Attract and retain educational talent

- Foster a supportive ecosystem for educators by developing a **"MMAC Teacher of the Week"** program that emphasizes the value of educators, showcases success stories, and potential attracts new talent interested in working in a supportive, collaborative environment.
- Create marketing material and presentation specific to the region that resonates with current and prospective educators so that schools can effectively communicate the benefits of teaching in the region, thereby attracting and retaining high-quality education talent.

### Objective 2

#### Expanding teaching opportunities for future educators without bachelor's degrees

Allow individuals without bachelor's degrees to teach summer school if the individual is enrolled in or has been admitted to an accredited institution of higher education.

### Objective 3

#### Allow the summer term to qualify for student teaching

By qualifying the summer term for student teaching, schools can attract and retain educational talent by providing a more flexible, expedited, and engaging pathway into the teaching profession.

### Objective 4

#### Acknowledge teacher preparation programs as alternative licensure paths for non-degree holders

Recognize established teacher preparation programs as a viable alternative licensure pathway for individuals who do not possess a bachelor's degree.



## Region of Choice 2.0: A Proposal for Advancing Talent, Inclusion, and Regional Competitiveness

### ROC Background

In 2018, MMAC launched the first iteration of the Region of Choice (ROC), a workplace inclusion initiative designed to increase the representation of Black and Brown employees and managers across pledge-signing companies. The effort was rooted in a clear business imperative: Milwaukee companies needed to strengthen their ability to attract and retain top talent in an increasingly competitive labor market. ROC was a strategy to expand access to the full pool of available talent, especially among groups that had been disproportionately underemployed and underrepresented in leadership.

By 2024, 130 companies representing 125,000 employees had completed the five-year pledge, surpassing the original goals and driving measurable improvements in representation.

### Changed Talent Development Environment

On the heels of ROC 1.0's success, the environment for workplace inclusion has shifted. The focus on race-based targets is less tenable, requiring a broader framing that resonates with today's workforce and business climate. The next phase must advance talent engagement, inclusion and competitiveness by adopting a "for all" approach — one that centers employee experience and reinforces that belonging is essential for every member of the workforce.

ROC 1.0 rightly addressed the urgent underrepresentation of Black and Brown talent. ROC 2.0 builds on that foundation by broadening belonging to the entire workforce. This shift challenges us to think differently, but it also positions Milwaukee employers to be more competitive by engaging talent more deeply, across more dimensions and at every level of inclusion work.

This shift in how we think about inclusion is underscored by Milwaukee's unique talent realities — our size, growth trajectory, and demographics make the stakes even higher. This is the Talent Imperative.

### Talent Imperative

Milwaukee's metro — home to 1.47 million people (38th largest in the U.S.) — has grown by less than 1% since 2010, while comparable regions expanded by over 4%. That disparity underscores our urgency: we must educate local students, retain existing talent, and attract new professionals to ensure competitiveness in a still-growing economy.

Milwaukee is one of the most diverse mid-sized metros, with 38% of residents Black, 21% Hispanic/Latino, 5% Asian, and just 32% White non-Hispanic.. Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) — our



# Appendix C

largest district — serves nearly 90% students of color, with over 80% from limited-income households. Yet only 68% of MPS students graduate on time, trailing significantly behind state averages.

These numbers reflect the barriers to building a workforce pipeline that reflects our population and sustains our region. ROC 2.0 responds to this reality. It unites employers around shared strategies that deepen talent pathways, broaden the talent pool's sense of belonging, and position Milwaukee as a region of choice.

## Business Leadership's Feedback

MMAC developed a plan to gather insights from Milwaukee employers on how they've adapted to changes in the workforce environment. The goal was to understand not only how companies are navigating shifting expectations, but also how the business community can stay competitive by aligning talent strategies with today's realities. To capture both executive perspective and practitioner experience, MMAC engaged leaders across industries and company sizes through the following convenings:

- **CEO Interviews:** Ten one-on-one conversations with chief leaders from ROC pledge-signing companies provided direct insight into business priorities and talent challenges.
- **ROC Rep Listening Sessions:** Two sessions with 60 HR and DEI practitioners who had served as company representatives during ROC 1.0, sharing lessons learned and on-the-ground realities.
- **ROC Taskforce Convenings:** A standing group of 15 inclusion practitioners, active since 2018, offered guidance and helped shape the discovery process.
- **CHRO Roundtable:** A convening of 60 Chief Human Resource Officers tested themes and provided a broad view of practitioner needs and employer expectations.

## ROC 2.0 Framework

The next iteration of the Region of Choice builds on ROC 1.0's success while adapting to today's climate. Instead of demographic-specific goals, this framework emphasizes engaging the full workforce and improving the employee experience — positioning Milwaukee employers to compete by creating workplaces where people see opportunity, belonging and a long-term future.

This framework was shaped by direct feedback from CEOs and enriched with insights from HR and DEI practitioners across industries. When asked about ROC's first chapter, how their own strategies are shifting, and what they want from a collective effort moving forward, CEOs consistently emphasized the following priorities:

- **Inclusive Competency for Managers (7/10):** CEOs emphasized the need to equip middle managers with tools, training, and accountability for inclusive hiring and retention.
- **Pipeline Access (10/10):** Every leader stressed simplified, "plug-and-play" early-career and K–12 pipelines aligned with workforce planning.

# Appendix C

- **Language & Framing (7/10):** CEOs called for business-grounded language that highlights belonging, leadership development, and access to opportunity — avoiding “DEI” labels while keeping focus on talent and culture.
- **Metrics That Matter (6/10):** Leaders favored measuring belonging, employee experience, and access to opportunity over demographic quotas, while still valuing disaggregated data for insight.
- **A Shared Story (6/10):** CEOs urged shifting the regional narrative to highlight progress, celebrate wins, and showcase Milwaukee as a place where inclusion drives competitiveness.

These priorities form the backbone of the proposed ROC 2.0 framework, centered on “for all” talent programs that are practical for employers and meaningful for employees.

## Proposed Programs

The ROC 2.0 program framework is designed to help Milwaukee employers compete more effectively for talent by engaging leaders, strengthening pipelines and elevating the region’s brand. Together, these programs give employers practical tools to build stronger managers, connect more easily with future talent and strengthen Milwaukee’s reputation as a region where people want to work and grow.

- **Regional Talent Summit** — An annual region-wide convening that brings together talent attraction and retention professionals to share best practices, explore talent trends, design solutions to shared challenges and strengthen our shared definition of inclusion and belonging. This summit currently exists as a joint program offering between MMAC and Visit Milwaukee, but would take on an expanded form as a ROC 2.0 offering. It combines the popular ROC DEI Summit with the broader “for all” scope of the Talent Summit to serve an estimated 400 practitioners each year.
- **Talent Attraction & Retention Series** — A bi-monthly convening for HR leaders, talent practitioners and culture champions to learn from experts and peers about developing talent brands, cultivating cultures and establishing practices that attract top talent from all backgrounds. The series will explore topics like the language of inclusion, how to responsibly use disaggregated talent data (and what to do when disparities appear), designing inclusive programs that speak to every employee and rebranding diversity, so all employees see themselves in it.
- **Professional Development Series for Managers** — A cross-company learning experience, offered in recurring sessions, that equips people leaders with the skills to engage every employee, foster transparency and ensure equitable access to opportunity. This program builds manager capability and peer networks across organizations, with a focus on aligning leadership actions with the intention of inclusion.
- ***Be the Spark* (K-12), All-In MKE & Internship Pipelines** — An ongoing set of turn-key programs that connect employers to the future talent pool—from early education through college. *Be the Spark* is an incumbent MMAC program developed to establish early connections between

# Appendix C

students and local career possibilities. Under ROC 2.0, *Be the Spark* will expand to offer employers options to connect with students in classrooms, on field trips to company and college campuses or virtually throughout the year. In addition, ROC 2.0 will establish partnerships with local colleges and trade schools to connect employers to qualified interns ready to begin their careers in Milwaukee.

As part of this commitment, MMAC proposes to partner with organizations producing strong outcomes in preparing students for careers. One example is All-In Milwaukee (AIM), which helps high-potential students from limited-income backgrounds navigate college and launch careers. 91% of AIM scholars are on track to graduate, compared to just 14% of Milwaukee students, and 89% of AIM graduates are working or pursuing graduate school in Wisconsin. Through ROC 2.0, MMAC will support partners like AIM to scale these outcomes and strengthen the region's future talent pool.

- **ROC Branding Milwaukee Campaign** — A storytelling campaign, active year-round, showcasing compelling stories about Milwaukeeans who have grown their lives and careers in the region. The campaign curates stories told through audio, video, photos and interviews to present a dynamic and diverse view of living and working in Milwaukee. Content will be made available to employers and community partners for recruiting and retention purposes, while also branding ROC 2.0 as a “for all” talent initiative.

## Reporting and Metrics

We propose anchoring this work in an annual **ROC Talent Competitiveness Report** — a benchmarking tool that highlights how Milwaukee employers are performing on the measures that matter most: engagement, turnover, offer acceptance, intern-to-hire conversion, promotion and advancement equity, manager effectiveness, investment in training and relocation/retention success.

While ROC 2.0 would not require mandated data sharing, CEOs and practitioners alike emphasized that regional benchmarking is essential for credibility. The report would be paired with **CEO and CHRO convenings** to interpret results, spotlight strategies that work and recognize companies leading the way.

Participation offers employers not just data, but actionable intelligence and peer recognition — while giving the region a shared story of progress that strengthens Milwaukee's reputation as a place where talent can thrive.

## Talent Input & Community Design

This proposal offers a framework for the next wave of Region of Choice, built on CEO feedback and aligned with the shared priorities of business leaders. To complete the framework and build buy-in, we propose a series of design thinking sessions and focus groups as part of the official launch. These sessions would invite talent from across industries, career stages and backgrounds to help craft program

# Appendix C

elements that reflect their workplace experiences and priorities. The inclusive nature of this process also reinforces the message that this work is “for all,” signaling a broader and more modern approach than ROC 1.0.

We will also engage MMAC affiliates The Business Council (TBC), the African American Leadership Alliance of Milwaukee (AALAM), and the Hispanic Collaborative (HC) as key partners in this process. Their involvement, along with others, ensures the framework reflects the perspectives and priorities of communities that are critical to Milwaukee’s long-term talent competitiveness.

## Collective Design Process

- **Design Thinking Session** — An expert-facilitated, half-day session to refine topics for the Talent Attraction & Retention Series, capturing diverse perspectives on what employees need from employers.
- **Focus Groups** — A series of sessions to inform the Professional Development Series for Managers, student and intern engagement, and the Branding Milwaukee Campaign, ensuring programs reflect lived experience.
- **HR & Practitioner Session** — A meeting with ROC 1.0 Representatives and regional HR leaders to review the framework, provide feedback, and refine final design elements.

By engaging talent directly in program design, we can deliver a framework that employees see as authentic and that employers can trust as a competitive advantage.

## Conclusion

ROC 1.0 proved that collective action can deliver measurable results. ROC 2.0 builds on that success, evolving from demographic-specific goals to a broader, inclusive framework that strengthens Milwaukee’s competitiveness. By equipping managers, streamlining pipelines, celebrating shared progress and co-designing with talent, ROC 2.0 positions the Milwaukee Region as a region of choice — a place where all employees can thrive and where businesses can attract, retain and grow the workforce required for long-term success. The question for employers is not whether to act, but how to move *together* to secure our region’s economic future.



## Appendix D



### **Milwaukee Development Corp. (MDC)**

**Mission:** A partnership for catalytic real estate development that supports a vibrant Milwaukee for all.



### **Milwaukee Urban Strategic Investment Corp. (MUSIC)**

**Mission:** Rebuild and revitalize challenged urban communities through real estate redevelopment to improve all lives.

## STRATEGIES

- 1** Leverage real estate industry expertise.
- 2** Provide gap funding to catalyze projects.
- 3** Invest in community projects or initiatives.
- 4** Acquire and develop real estate

## FOCUS

- 1** Expand housing (workforce, senior, etc.)
- 2** Boost emerging local developers
- 3** Leverage catalytic real estate opportunities

## Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Notes

WWW.MMAC.ORG

# **ONWARD:** **CHARTING A PATH FOR REGIONAL GROWTH.**

301 W Wisconsin Ave., STE 220  
Milwaukee, WI 53203

*Modified*  
*October 7, 2025 9:13 AM*