



Erie County
Economic Development
Corporation

Strategic Plan

2020-2023

Dear Reader,

As Dean of Erie County's higher education institution, Bowling Green State University – Firelands College, I strongly believe in the interdependence of education, economic development, and regional progress. As such, it's an honor to serve on the Board of Directors of Erie County Economic Development Corporation and to have the



opportunity to serve as the chair of ECEDC's Strategic Planning Committee. Determining how best to bring wealth and jobs to our community is no small task. In building this plan, our process included a broadly distributed stakeholder survey. Using our learning from the survey, we gathered nearly 50 stakeholders for a visioning retreat – our participants' smiling faces can be seen later in this document. From there, our committee got to work. Special thanks to Erie County Commissioner Pat Shenigo, Milan Township Trustee Dan Frederick, and private developer John Hoty for devoting their time and expertise to this committee. In the following pages you will see the foundational elements of a community's strong economic development strategy combined with an innovative and wide-reaching vision for what this region can become. We appreciate your support of this endeavor.

Andrew Kurtz



Aerial view of Sandusky Bay, Joey Cassel

Introduction to Erie County Economic Development Corporation

Mission: To grow economic opportunities for individuals and businesses and facilitate the creation and retention of jobs through collaborative and comprehensive economic development programs.

In order to advance its mission, Erie County Economic Development Corporation will focus on the following areas:

- ▶ Business attraction, retention, and expansion, including small business development and entrepreneur support
- ▶ Workforce attraction and development
- ▶ Regional economic development and brand awareness
- ▶ Organizational strength and relevance

Erie County Economic Development Corporation is often referred to, and will be throughout this plan, as [ECEDC](#)



FOCUS: BUSINESS ATTRACTION, RETENTION, AND EXPANSION, INCLUDING SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEUR SUPPORT

GOAL 1: ECEDC will assist new and existing businesses considering an investment in Erie County with high-quality data, community and resource navigation, and industry-driven research in order to support informed, efficient decision-making.

To advance the economic success of Erie County, Erie County Economic Development Corporation assumes a business-oriented economic development approach, where the agency's efforts are focused on assisting business with specific endeavors that will ultimately increase our community's wealth and resources. A business-oriented model of economic development impacts job growth and retention by providing services directly to job creators and business owners. Moreover, by diversifying services within the business space, ECEDC can grow economic opportunities for large and small companies, the well-established business and the start-up, acknowledging the complexity and diversity of our local economic environment, while providing excellent service to all. In order to effectively serve businesses at all levels and in all industries, it is imperative that ECEDC maintains strong relationships with strategic partners such as TeamNEO, JobsOhio, Great Lakes Innovation and Development Enterprise, and BGSU Firelands.





At the same time, it is important to recognize that adopting a business-oriented approach to economic development does not come at the expense of the larger community and that economic development generally is to be understood as the development of an ecosystem of prosperity that includes not just business and industry, but community institutions and especially residents. ECEDC will ensure that, while business attraction, retention, and expansion will remain the foundation of its mission, it will coordinate with public and private partners to bring balance to the organization and to work for the larger public good.

GOAL 2: ECEDC will serve as the central point of contact and coordinating body for prospective businesses looking to establish operations in Erie County.

For business attraction efforts, ECEDC will serve as the JobsOhio network partner for new business attraction leads and will maintain relationships with municipalities, brokers, realtors, site selectors, and others to ensure a full understanding of market trends, regional need and available properties. ECEDC will also maintain a property database for the county, enabling the organization to develop metrics based on views and saves in the database, sites submitted for leads, lead-generated contacts and discussions, assistance provided through database leads, and project wins.

GOAL 3: ECEDC will target existing businesses for retention and expansion.

ECEDC will focus on business outreach in order to meet retention and expansion metrics such as new capital investment, jobs retained and created, project wins, companies interviewed, and assistance given. In doing so, ECEDC recognizes the diversity of industry sectors represented in Erie County, including manufacturing, healthcare, professional services, and tourism and entertainment. ECEDC will retain and expand this industry base by leveraging resources and connections; providing employer education; identifying expansion opportunities; seeking supplier attraction opportunities; gathering testimonials; engaging business leadership; and advocating for improvements to infrastructure.





BA Marketing Solutions



Quarry Hill Orchards

GOAL 4: ECEDC will champion new and small business development through the Regional Incubator for Sustainability and Entrepreneurship (RISE).

In pursuit of business development and entrepreneur support, ECEDC will provide otherwise inaccessible core services to entrepreneurs, including on-on-one advising and milestone mentoring, networking and education events, and technical assistance. Metrics of success for RISE include new businesses started, new jobs created, entrepreneurs consulted, assistance provided, and entrepreneurs engaged in events. ECEDC will continue to expand RISE by working with municipalities to develop process diagrams and “starter kits” for new businesses; developing a systematic pipeline of talent and ideas with BGSU Firelands; and engaging youth and the greater community in entrepreneurial activities.



The Maca Root



North Shore Running Store



FOCUS: WORKFORCE ATTRACTION AND DEVELOPMENT

GOAL 5: ECEDC will engage with school districts and higher education on career development initiatives, focusing on high-demand industry sectors and living-wage career pathways.

ECEDC recognizes that its work with education is an important part of an ecosystem that not only promotes and supports the career aspirations of young people, but does so in a way that roots career aspirations to a sense of place. Thus, a broader conception of career preparation will link students to specific industry sectors and will also underscore the importance of community, civic-mindedness, service, and in the special case of Erie County, environmental awareness. Since the structure of public, private, and higher education is complex, involving numerous individuals working to meet a range of goals, ECEDC's role will be confined to initiatives that seek to connect education with corporate partners, industry sectors, or government/foundation-led opportunities which focus on regional economic growth. The Erie County Business Advisory Council (BAC), made up of leaders in education, business, and the non-profit sector, will continue to be the primary means by which ECEDC will engage with school districts on economic development initiatives that showcase careers in specific industry sectors. ECEDC will build on the success of the FutureMakers program, to expand similar programming to other industry sectors, including tourism/hospitality, healthcare, and professional services. Additionally, ECEDC will support programming designed to promote "entrepreneurial thinking" throughout the spectrum of education, including regional higher education. Through the Erie County BAC, ECEDC will also focus on developing and distributing data and analytics relative to economic/employment trends to key individuals in the region.

GOAL 6: ECEDC will foster regional workforce development and talent attraction by becoming the fiscal and administrative body responsible for ensuring the success of Firelands Forward initiatives.

Funded by a three-county consortium of businesses, foundations, governmental bodies, and educational institutions, the 2019 Firelands Forward report on the region's workforce was also made possible through ECEDC's leadership and organizational support. The resulting analysis recommends the region invest a minimum of \$370,000 annually to fund three full time equivalent employees responsible for implementing strategies contained therein. Although the reporting structure for these employees has yet to be determined, ECEDC will assume a lead role in the daily functions of this new unit and will be responsible for achieving the metrics outlined in the report. Initial priority initiatives of the Firelands Forward work include facilitating K-16 career connections and working with existing employers to increase entry level worker retention rates. Economic development organizations, like ECEDC, were believed to be a key alliance for this type of work due to their research capabilities, resource access, and existing networks in both the education community and business community.



FOCUS: REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BRAND AWARENESS

GOAL 7: ECEDC will take a more proactive role in public discussions on regional economic development issues. In doing so, ECEDC will develop metrics to determine when mission-informed advocacy is appropriate.

As a mission-driven organization with limited human resource capacity, ECEDC's primary focus is client-facing initiatives that result in new business attraction and existing business retention and expansion. Acknowledging that economic development matters are often connected to matters of state and local public policy, ECEDC does not typically take a position on these issues, but rather works to guide and support clients as they navigate through government regulation and in their efforts to secure project support from public entities. This service to clients will remain an essential part of ECEDC's mission. However, ECEDC also recognizes that public policy and investments are critical ingredients in the creation of an environment and climate conducive to business growth and attraction. Moreover, changes to existing policy may impact, positively or negatively, the region's economic landscape. Thus, it is important to recognize that, through its close relationship with business, education, and government, ECEDC is uniquely positioned to gain insight and provide feedback on how policies and investments may advance the region's economy.

Going forward, ECEDC will leverage all of its resources to activate its role in advocating on behalf of issues it deems important to the growth of north-central Ohio's economy. Working with the Board of Directors, ECEDC will develop metrics that will enable it to evaluate issues and opportunities and determine the appropriate response, knowing that every position taken will have opposing viewpoints, even among ECEDC investors and clients. Evaluations will include qualitative and quantitative analyses and using software-based economic development tools (e.g. EMSI and Implan) to understand impact. Independent of the position ultimately taken, ECEDC will use this process of evaluation as an opportunity to educate its supporters, clients, and investor. As always, ECEDC endeavors to be a preferred source of economic development information, including legislative matters, for its clients as well as local, state, and federal policy makers.



GOAL 8: ECEDC will play a role in regional economic development initiatives, including workforce development, planning, and regional branding efforts, to maximize impact, minimize overlap, confusion, and “competition” between organizations.

Regional economic development is influenced by an array of individuals and organizations. For its part, ECEDC focuses its efforts in driving investments from new and existing businesses in the community, including entrepreneurs and small-business owners. ECEDC also leverages its resources to better understand issues facing these stakeholders, such as workforce development and talent supply. At the same time, ECEDC recognizes that economic development activity also encompasses such things as tourism and visitor experience, a sense of place, quality of life, residential development and improvement, and more. The issues are many, as are the organizations working to impact and improve them. While ECEDC cannot and should not position itself to lead on every issue related to the vitality of the region, it can and should position itself as an informed, supportive, and influential partner with like-minded organizations working to advance the region.

Understanding that a networked and collaborative ecosystem will result in better results for the entire community, ECEDC will work with key partners such as the JobsOhio network, Lake Erie Shores and Islands, the Firelands Partnership, the Chambers of Commerce and Main Streets to identify mission overlap, points of collaboration, and where needed, address areas of perceived competition. ECEDC will work with all partners, including government and educational institutions, to address key economic issues as identified by our stakeholders and through independent research and consulting. In the near-term, these issues will include talent attraction, retention, and development, regional identity and branding, and the region’s strategic plan.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH AND RELEVANCE

ECEDC will inspire a vocal and engaged Board of Directors as well as its investors and stakeholders, to advocate on the importance of economic development and for key initiatives on behalf of ECEDC.

The ECEDC Board of Directors has been the organization's most vocal advocate, providing valuable input on key initiatives that have helped the director and her staff to grow internally, and more importantly, that have created conditions leading to regional economic development. As new opportunities emerge, including transformational projects in the City of Sandusky, the ECEDC Board must be empowered to expand its advocacy role to new channels. ECEDC leadership will provide opportunities for board advocacy by expanding the breadth and depth of its communications, including a scaled-up annual meeting event and more frequent investor meetings.

Although the Board will enjoy expanded opportunities to advocate on behalf of ECEDC as a regional economic driver, as communications evolve in both quantity and quality, investors and other stakeholders will be inspired to do the same, with the goal of growing the investor-base from below. Going forward, it will be

important for ECEDC to continue to promote economic activity and best business practice through professionally produced and strategically deployed communications to investors. ECEDC leadership will also identify a small group of individuals – board members, investors, community leaders – especially chosen to become ambassadors for initiatives when the need arises.



**ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITIES
JOB CREATION
& RETENTION
BUSINESS INVESTMENT**



Business attraction, retention, and expansion, including small business development and entrepreneur support



Workforce attraction and development



Regional economic development and brand awareness

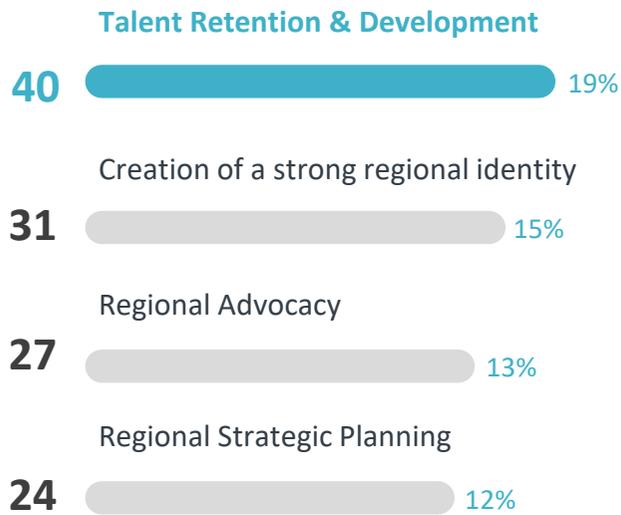
Organizational Strength & Relevance

APPENDIX

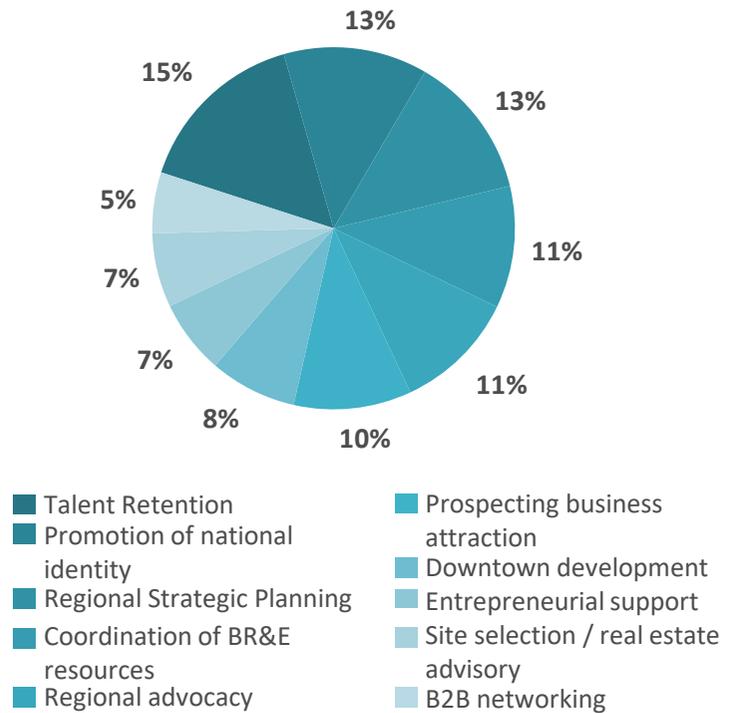
Data, information, and results from 2019 Stakeholder Survey and Strategic Planning retreat.

Development Opportunities

ECEDC's survey sent to stakeholders on most pressing needs for Erie County (based on 55 responses)

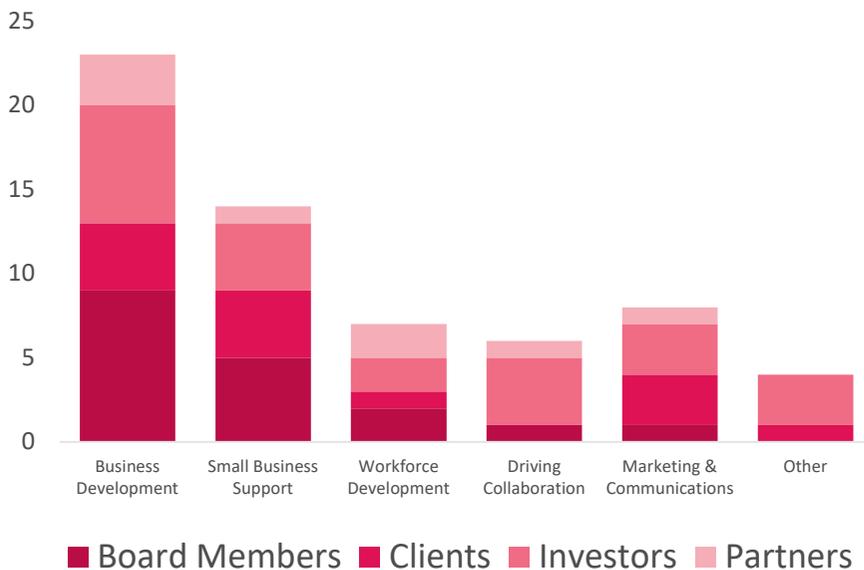


What Erie County Needs More Of



Areas ECEDC has greatest level of impact

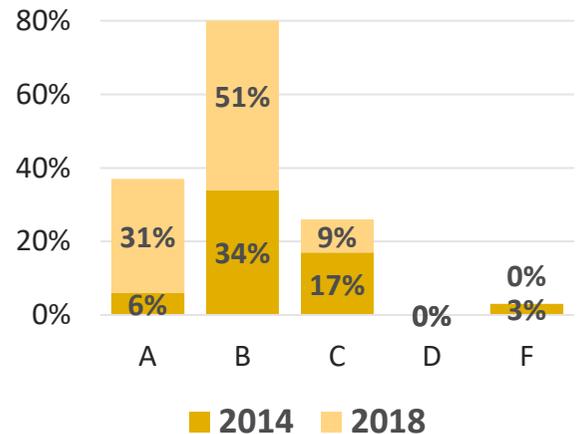
ECEDC impact survey, N=46



ECEDC Performance

Q. How would you grade ECEDC's economic development efforts? 2014 (n = 33) vs. 2018 (n = 67)

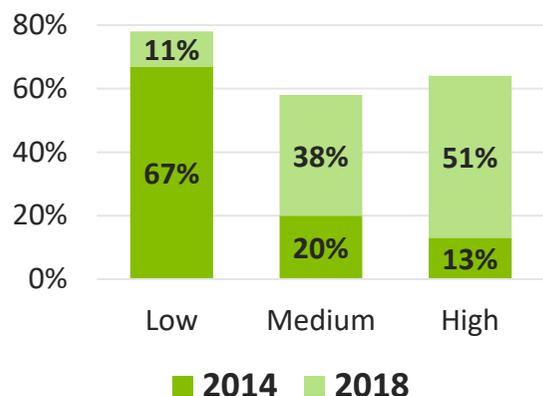
Survey results demonstrate **higher ratings across the board for ECEDC over the past 4 years**



Awareness of ECEDC

Q. How would you characterize your overall awareness of ECEDC? 2014 (n = 33) vs. 2018 (n = 67)

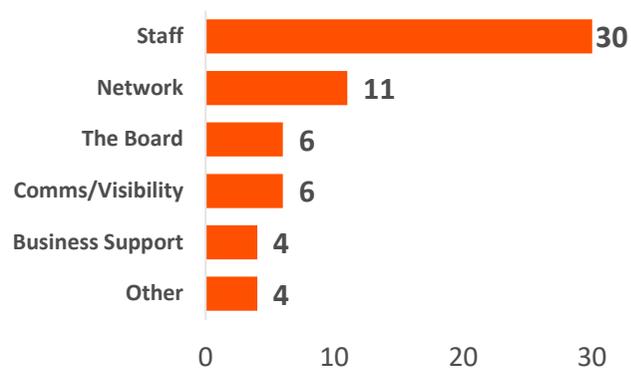
Survey results show that awareness of ECEDC as an organization has **vastly improved in the past 4 years**



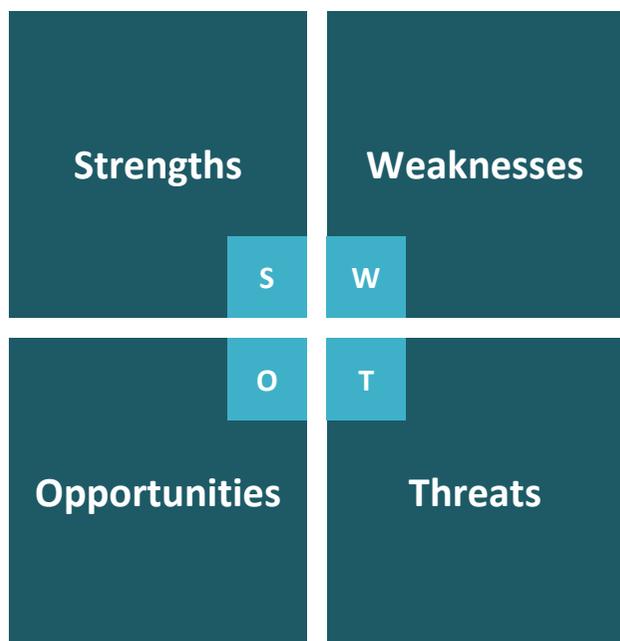
ECEDC Key Strengths

Q. What are the key internal strengths that have contributed to the organization's success?

Survey respondents listed **ECEDC's staff as its greatest strength**



ECEDC's 2019 SWOT analysis



Strengths

- Credibility of board and staff in the community
- 3 years of positive cashflow and new investors
- Historic attraction of Mucci farms / increased project activity
- RISE program filling service gaps in the area
- Wealth of connections to community and development resources
- Partnership with region and state through Team NEO, JobsOhio & OEDA

Weaknesses

- Staff capacity
- Financial resources
- Few ECEDC owned services and programs
- Awareness of ECEDC in public and non-traded sector businesses
- Understanding of ECEDC among partners and local government officials

Opportunities

- Increasing momentum and economic activity
- Improved relationships with civic and local governments
- Establishment and ability to grow earned revenue
- Expansion of RISE and Firelands Forward as regional programs
- Growing interest in ECEDC marketing and communications

Threats

- Economic disruption, geopolitical trends
- Finite opportunities for fundraising and development
- Financial vulnerability with public investors
- Difficulty in establishing priorities, metrics, and ROI
- Political fragmentation and investment in hyper local economic development



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