

2025–2030

THE SPRINGFIELD AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN



PRODUCED BY





Over the past 15 years, the 10-county Springfield region has outpaced both Missouri and the nation in job growth.

The overall economic expansion and the increase in the number of businesses in the Springfield metro area have significantly exceeded state and national averages. Recent population growth has been more than twice the national average, and the growth of the prime-age labor force is more than five times that of the state. Unemployment remains very low. By most measures, the Springfield area's economy is robust and highly successful.

However, some headwinds are on the horizon. The pace of economic change is accelerating, and complacency poses a risk to any region. By working together, area leaders can proactively address any weaknesses and ensure that the local economy capitalizes on emerging opportunities.

The goal of this effort was to develop a strategic plan and action agenda aimed at enhancing the area's competitiveness and diversifying the economy by identifying key opportunities. Additionally, it sought to assess the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce's operational readiness, resource alignment, and role within the region's economic ecosystem.

All strategy development starts with a clear understanding of the current economic landscape and the emerging trends that will impact the businesses and residents of the Springfield area in the future. The next step involves determining the aspirations of local stakeholders for the future and aligning these goals with what is realistically achievable. The final and most crucial step is to identify and implement specific actions that will propel the Springfield area from its current state to its desired future. Successful strategic actions are typically specific, realistic, actionable, appropriately resourced, and measurable. They also recognize the necessity of effective collaboration with various stakeholders to achieve the desired outcomes.



THE CURRENT COMPETITIVE POSITION OF THE SPRINGFIELD AREA

NATIONAL TRENDS LIKELY TO IMPACT THE SPRINGFIELD AREA

National and global megatrends have introduced unprecedented uncertainty and competitive challenges across America, while simultaneously creating new opportunities for bold regions to thrive. Although change often brings disruption, it also presents significant opportunities. With foresight, strong leadership, adequate resources, and targeted strategic actions, the Springfield area can turn the coming years into its most successful period yet.

WHAT ARE THE NATIONAL TRENDS IMPACTING THE SPRINGFIELD AREA'S FUTURE?

The demographic shifts we are witnessing today have been anticipated for the past three decades. Nationally, our population will continue to age and diversify, while family sizes will continue to decline. The birth rate has been halved over the past two generations, leading to a steady decline in domestic labor force growth. As a result, the Springfield area will need to compete for population and labor force growth through a combination of strategies: retaining more high school and college graduates, attracting domestic immigrants, increasing labor force participation among existing residents, and welcoming more foreign-born workers.

Competition among communities for talent and population is intensifying, and recently released data indicates that winners and losers are already emerging in this race. The availability and growth of the labor force will be a critical determinant of the Springfield area's future economic trajectory.

Technological advancements are reshaping the future of every industry. In manufacturing, the ongoing integration of the Internet of Things (IoT) and energy transformation is now being joined by emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and spatial

computing. These innovations have the potential to both displace and create millions of jobs. The logistics sector, which has been the fastest-growing sector in the Springfield area in recent years, is being transformed by big data, product sensors, autonomous vehicles, drones, and process automation.

To capitalize on these and other technological shifts, successful regions must actively encourage and support automation, upskill their existing workforce, and align their available and ready product mix (buildings and sites) to meet new just-in-time demands. At the same time, the Springfield Chamber must continuously support the needs of existing businesses, both large and small, while identifying new sector targets that can strengthen and diversify the regional economy.

Geopolitics and geo-economics have significantly reshaped American business since the early 1990s, but we are now facing unexpected changes. The emphasis on free-trade globalization, which has been the bipartisan public policy for the past 35 years, is rapidly unraveling. Many experts believe that escalating superpower tensions between the United States and China will compel multinational companies to rethink their labor sources, production capacity, supply chains, and logistics options. The trends of reshoring, nearshoring, and forming new trading alliances are expected to disrupt existing plans while also creating new opportunities.

The United States' new industrial policy, characterized by massive investments in targeted manufacturing sectors, is generating new jobs and expanding domestic capacity. Springfield, with its broad manufacturing base, is well positioned to benefit from this shift. With adequate labor, infrastructure, and ready-to-use buildings and sites, the area should experience continued manufacturing growth.

Minimizing risk is increasingly becoming a critical factor in locational decision-making. The COVID-19 pandemic, the recent surge in major weather disruptions, heightened concerns about crime, worker health, and widespread political discourse have all contributed to making risk management a top priority for companies as they plan their long-term growth strategies.

Over the past decade, the frequency of weather-related disasters causing over \$1 billion in damage has steadily increased, reaching a record 28 events in 2023. This trend is now reflected in rising insurance rates. Crime rates spiked in 2020, and although they have decreased in many parts of the country, they remain above pre-pandemic levels and are a concern for stakeholders in the Springfield area. Additionally, American health and life expectancy, which began declining even before the pandemic, have been further impacted by recent declines in mental health. This is exemplified by an 80-year high in suicide rates, which is affecting worker availability and productivity.

Business timeframes have become significantly shorter. Investment decision cycles are now more compressed, and key competitiveness factors include the availability of ready-to-occupy buildings, ready-to-build sites, streamlined and predictable review and permitting processes, and the ability to provide rapid, sophisticated responses from economic development professionals. Springfield’s private sector leaders, large employers and emerging local entrepreneurs, have highlighted the need for improvements in the review and approval processes and have stressed the importance of strengthening the region’s economic development capacity to remain competitive.

Leadership is more crucial than ever to achieving success, and the growing complexity of challenges demands increased collaboration. As the rising risk trend demonstrates, the issues vital to business growth and profitability have broadened. To remain competitive, regions like Springfield must now address these multifaceted challenges through enhanced cooperation among groups involved in economic, community, and workforce development. Effective leadership, coupled with strong partnerships, will be essential in navigating these complexities and driving sustained regional growth.



Workers often commute across multiple counties and even state lines, creating labor sheds that extend beyond local boundaries. Issues like housing and childcare are regional in nature, and crime is not confined by geographic borders. An individual’s quality of life is shaped by amenities and opportunities that stretch beyond their home city or county. What defines quality of life—whether it is the sense of safety, the affordability of housing, the quality of schools, or the availability of recreation and entertainment—varies from person to person.

The brand, image, or narrative of a region is a complex blend of images, data, stories, and experiences. Addressing the challenges that shape this narrative requires sustained collaboration across the public, private, philanthropic, and non-profit sectors. These issues transcend political boundaries, necessitating more effective coordination between the Chamber, and city, county, regional, and state entities. Successful collaboration depends on strong, engaged leaders with the organizational capacity to foster and sustain these cooperative efforts over time.

No region can assume that its economy will remain static; the first question to address is what can be done to ensure that the coming years bring greater prosperity for the Springfield area and its surrounding cities and counties. The second question is to determine the role the Springfield Chamber can play in fostering this growth and improvement, and how these goals can be achieved in the most efficient and effective manner.

THE SPRINGFIELD REGIONAL ECONOMY TODAY: A SNAPSHOT

Most of this snapshot focuses on the Springfield, MO Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Additionally, it highlights the surrounding counties that contribute to the labor shed supporting the Springfield economy. In this snapshot, the five counties that make up the Springfield, MO MSA will be referred to as the “Springfield Metro.” When discussing the broader labor force that includes the ten counties within the Springfield Regional Economic Partnership, the term “Springfield Region” will be used.

EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES

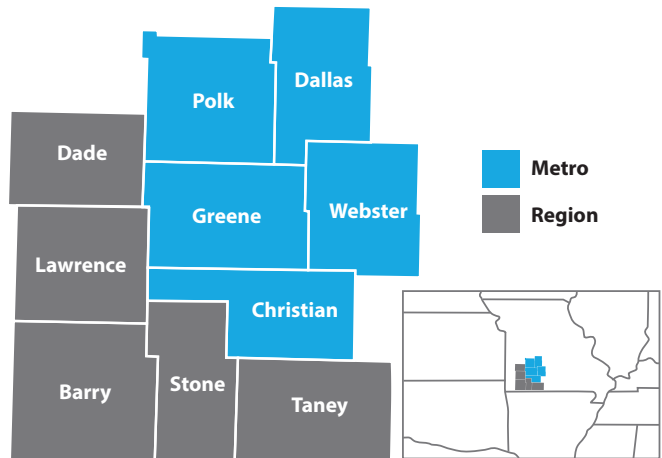
In the Springfield Metro, key economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment, and the number of establishments have all surpassed their pre-pandemic levels. The term “establishments” refers to the number of business locations with payroll in a given area, meaning a single company can operate multiple establishments. Between 2018 and 2023, establishment growth has been steady, with notable increases in sectors such as elderly healthcare services, real estate agencies, long-distance trucking, and landscaping services. Real GDP has also experienced consistent growth during this period.

Over the past two decades, the Springfield Metro has experienced job growth rates that have consistently outpaced both national and state averages. Economic forecasting models suggest that this accelerated growth is likely to continue over the coming decade.

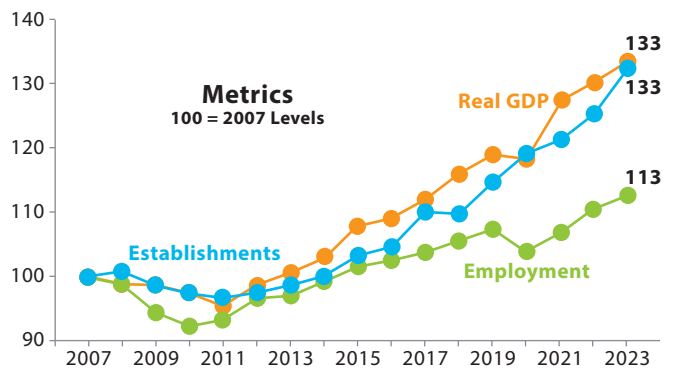
Employment growth in the Springfield Metro has outpaced every other metropolitan area in Missouri over the past four years, with a rate more than double the state average.

Over the past two decades, the Springfield Metro has experienced job growth rates that have consistently outpaced both national and state averages.

Counties of the Springfield, MO Metro and Region



Springfield Metro Economic Change



Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast

The Springfield Metro ranks 67th in terms of job growth, placing it comfortably within the top ten percent. From 2019 to 2023, the Springfield Metro added 10,702 jobs.

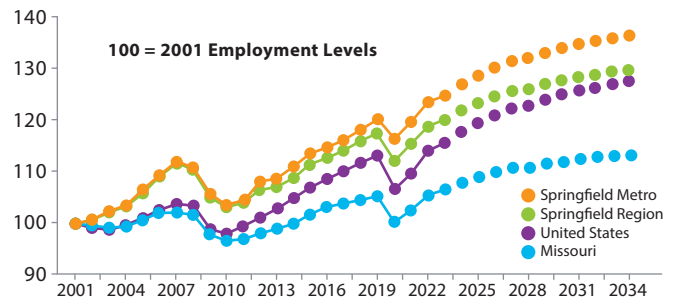
There are 927 metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas across the United States, and the Springfield Metro ranks 67th in terms of job growth, placing it comfortably within the top ten percent. From 2019 to 2023, the Springfield Metro added 10,702 jobs. Moreover, Springfield is among the 424 areas nationwide that have surpassed their pre-pandemic employment levels.

Although unemployment rates in the Springfield Metro and surrounding area have risen slightly over the past few months, they continue to remain below both state and national averages. Average annual earnings per worker in Springfield are on an upward trend, now surpassing levels that were predicted before the pandemic. "Earnings" include both salaried wages and the financial benefits associated with a job, such as healthcare and retirement benefits, reflecting the total compensation offered to employees.

The most recent data from the 4th quarter of 2023 shows that private sector workers in the Springfield Metro were averaging approximately \$1,056 per week in wages, representing a 30 percent increase since 2019, which roughly aligns with national inflation rates. However, when adjusting for the cost of living, earnings in the greater Springfield Region are lower than those in the metro area. Despite this, the adjusted wages in both the metro and the region remain below state and national averages, which can pose challenges for talent recruitment.

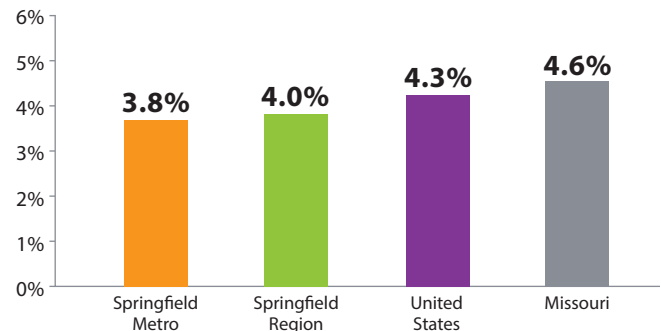
A significant factor contributing to these regional earnings differences is the industry and occupational makeup of the local economy. The Springfield Region's economic structure, which may have a higher concentration of lower-wage industries, plays a crucial role in influencing overall wage levels and competitiveness in the labor market.

Historical and Predicted Employment Trends



Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast

Unemployment Rates by Area, June 2024

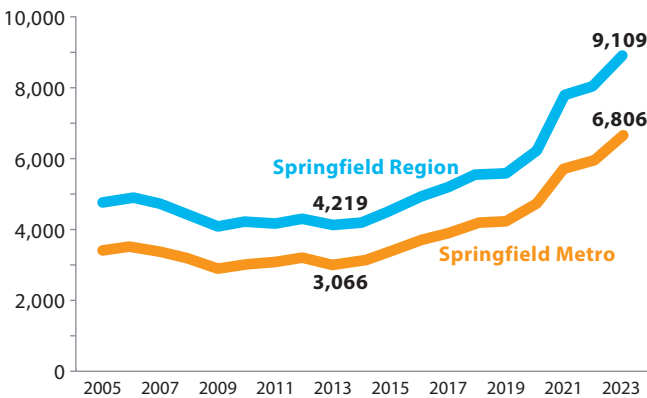


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

NEW BUSINESS INCORPORATIONS

In 2023, new employer business formations in the Springfield Metro and Region reached record highs. The surge in new business formations began in 2020 and has continued to remain elevated above pre-pandemic levels. Currently, new business starts are more than double their level from a decade ago. The Chamber supports entrepreneurship through a partnership with the efactory at Missouri State University and other partnerships.

Annual Business Formations by Area



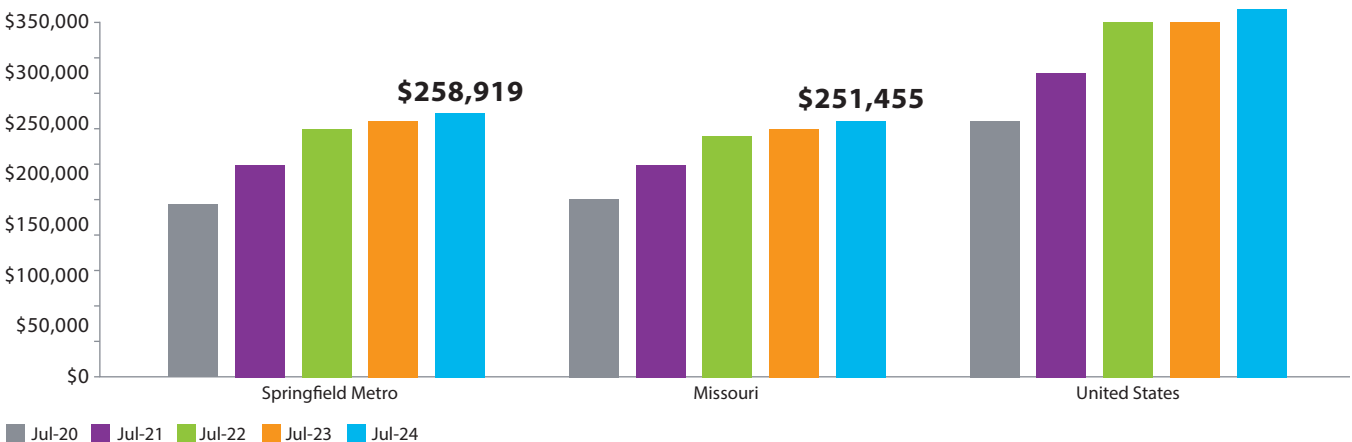
Source: US Census Bureau

BUILDING PERMITS & REAL ESTATE MARKETS

In the second quarter of 2024, the Springfield Metro saw 399 new private sector housing units permitted, a decrease of 25 units compared to the same period in the previous year. The average value of these private sector residential units was \$320,470 per unit, with most of the permits issued for single-family homes. Despite challenges in the national real estate market, the number of single-family units permitted in the Springfield Metro has shown an upward trend in recent years. Multifamily housing permits, while more sporadic in the area, have seen significant activity with large projects coming online recently.

In July 2024, there were 633 residential property sales closed in the Springfield Metro, marking a 7 percent increase compared to July of the previous year. The inventory of homes for sale also saw a significant rise, increasing by 46 percent from 931 properties to 1,360 over the past year. Additionally, the average number of days a property remained on the market increased from 8 days in July 2023 to 18 days in July 2024. Despite these changes, the typical home value in the metro experienced a year-over-year increase of 3.3 percent from July 2023 to July 2024.

Typical Home Value by Area



Source: Redfin and Zillow

THE SPRINGFIELD REGION'S ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Given the current state of the regional economy, assessing the Springfield region's competitiveness involves evaluating five key areas:

- **Workforce Quantity and Quality:** Typically measured by net migration, labor force growth, educational assets, and the quality of life that attracts people to live in the area.
- **Business Climate:** Factors such as taxes, regulations, and the legal environment.
- **Infrastructure:** Including roads, water, energy, air services, and housing.
- **Innovation Assets:** Such as research and development, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and the presence of advanced industries.
- **Risk Factors:** Including weather, crime, public finances, and political stability.



Three approaches were used to determine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The first approach involves assessing how competitive Missouri is compared to other states. Corporate decisions to invest in a location often start with an evaluation of the state's business climate. Over the past nine years, Missouri's economic performance and overall competitiveness have improved, driven in part by actions initially recommended in the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Missouri 2030 plan.

The state now ranks among the 10 lowest in the country for business costs and is ranked 12th best for taxes by the Tax Foundation. Significant recent investments in infrastructure and worker training are expected to yield positive results in the coming years. However, there are still areas that require attention, including tort reform, efforts to attract labor force growth, and improvements in quality-of-life factors such as public safety. Since 2019, the state's population of 25- to 64-year-olds has declined by 28,000, making a turnaround in this demographic critical for future economic success.

The second approach involved engaging local stakeholders through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Survey respondents were asked to rank two dozen competitive factors on a scale from major weakness to major strength. The areas identified as major weaknesses included crime, housing availability and costs, the availability of skilled labor, and the availability of buildings and sites. Conversely, regional strengths were reported to be higher education, outdoor recreation, quality of life, highway accessibility, and healthcare facilities.

The third approach involved comparing the Springfield MSA to competitor metros. The Chamber provided a group of peer and aspirational metros for this analysis. While the Springfield metro is smaller than the other metros, its recent population and employment growth ranked in the middle. On the positive side, Springfield had the lowest cost of living, but it also had the highest crime rates, the lowest educational attainment, and the lowest gross domestic product per capita.

This research, along with additional stakeholder input, highlighted key areas for future focus and improvement.

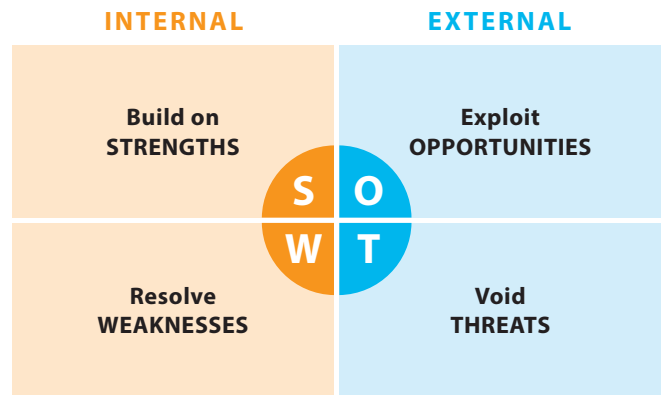
The Springfield region’s **competitive strengths** include a growing population, a low cost of living, a diversified economy that is not overly dependent on a single employer or sector, a central location advantageous for national logistics, proximity to nature and outdoor recreation, strong education and healthcare infrastructure, and a history of robust community collaboration.

The **weaknesses** identified include low wages, challenges in retaining and attracting young professionals, insufficient infrastructure, a difficult development process, a limited inventory of utility-served, ready-to-build sites, a lack of workforce housing, and crime—though some believe the perception of crime is worse than the reality. Other concerns include homelessness, the absence of a unifying regional brand, a tendency to think too small, and worries that community collaboration is not as effective as it once was or could be.

Stakeholders identified several **opportunities** for the Springfield region, including expanding the local manufacturing base, leveraging natural resources more effectively, building on the strength of the regional health systems, capitalizing on the growth of remote work opportunities, developing a more compelling regional brand, improving the structure and delivery of economic development, and strengthening and better engaging local leadership.

The **threats** to sustaining growth and improving quality of life in the Springfield region are believed to include slowing economic growth unless the labor force expands, failure to expand or extend the necessary infrastructure for growth, not addressing the development review process, growing anti-development sentiment in the city of Springfield, the potential loss of a major employer, not prioritizing crime reduction, and failing to improve and align leadership.

SWOT Analysis



Stakeholders generally agreed that the following priorities should be central to the Chamber’s new five-year strategy:

- **Improving Workforce Development and Education:** Collaborating with partners to enhance the skills of the local workforce, including initiatives to strengthen K-12 education, expand vocational training, retain college graduates, and engage adults not currently in the labor force.
- **Aggressive Business Attraction and Economic Development:** Leading efforts to improve the business climate, attract new businesses, create jobs, and support entrepreneurship.
- **Strengthening Advocacy Efforts:** Advocating for policies that promote a better business climate.
- **Supporting Infrastructure and Quality-of-Life Investments:** Pushing for investments that enhance infrastructure and overall quality of life in the region.
- **Addressing Affordable Housing and Living Costs:** Coordinating private and public collaboration to creatively tackle the affordable housing and living costs crisis.
- **Promoting Broad Regional Collaboration and Inclusivity:** Leading efforts to foster broad, inclusive regional collaboration and ensure that all community members are included in the region’s growth and development.

FIVE STRATEGIES THAT WILL SHAPE THE REGION'S FUTURE

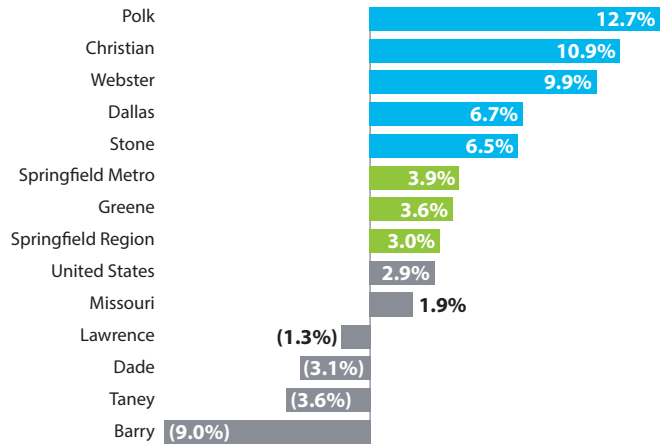
PLANNING FOR NEW REGIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

There is significant variation within the regional economy, with the number of jobs in each county ranging from over 183,000 in Greene County, where the city of Springfield is located, to just over 1,750 in Dade County. Most jobs in the region are concentrated in Greene County, but job growth is occurring most rapidly in the collar counties surrounding Greene County.

Six of the ten regional counties saw higher employment levels in 2023 compared to 2019, with Polk, Christian, and Webster counties experiencing particularly high growth rates. However, four of the ten counties have not yet returned to their pre-pandemic employment levels.

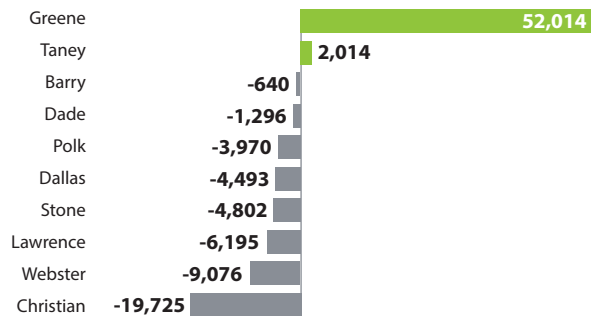
Commuting patterns across the region typically involve daily migration to Springfield and Greene County, as job growth in the center of the metro area attracts residents from surrounding regions. The primary occupations drawing talent from outside the metro include transportation and material moving, administrative support, and food preparation jobs.

Job Change by Area, 2019–2023



Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2024.3

Springfield Region — Net Commuters by County, 2023



Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2024.1

The anticipated growth in both housing and employment in the collar counties will require enhanced regional planning and collaboration to effectively manage development and ensure balanced growth across the entire region.

GROWING THE LABOR FORCE

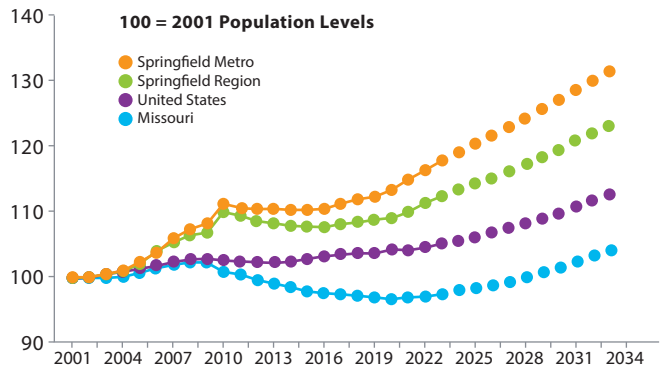
The available labor force has been a limiting factor on growth for the Springfield region. To drive labor force growth, the focus must be on increasing domestic and foreign-born in-migration, raising the labor force participation rate, and addressing the natural population decline by mitigating the effects of declining birth rates. With birth rates continuing to fall, the emphasis should be on the other avenues for growth, involving the collaboration of dozens of organizations.

A very positive trend for the Springfield area in terms of future workforce development is the growth in its prime-age workforce, despite ongoing labor shortage concerns expressed by local employers. The region has seen, and is expected to continue seeing, an increase in its working-age population. Both the Metro and the broader region have consistently outperformed the Missouri state average in adding working-age residents, which bodes well for future economic growth.

Population growth in the region has predominantly occurred within the Metro area, with four of the ten regional counties experiencing a loss of prime-age residents in recent years. A significant portion of the increase in the prime-age population is attributable to domestic migration, with people from other parts of the country moving to the region. The average annual growth over the past five years has far exceeded the growth of the previous five years. While most of this in-migration is directed toward the Metro area, the surrounding counties within the greater region are also seeing net gains in migration. Whether this trend continues will be a crucial indicator for future growth.

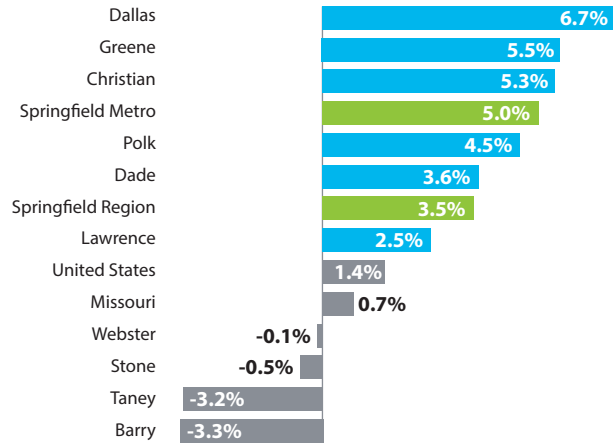
The proliferation of remote work may also contribute to workforce scarcity. The flexibility of working from home has enabled some workers to relocate to areas with high-quality amenities and lower costs of living while maintaining employment with companies based outside the region. According to data from the one-year American Community Survey by the US Census Bureau, the remote work trend is slightly less pronounced in the Springfield Metro compared to national and state averages. In 2022, 11.3 percent of metro residents reported working from home, compared to 15.2 percent nationally.

Historical and Predicted Prime-Age Population Trends



Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2024.1

Prime Age Population Change by Area, 2019-2023



Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2024.1

With near-record low unemployment, few new workers will come from those currently unemployed. However, unemployment data only accounts for residents actively seeking employment; those who have stopped looking for work are no longer counted in the labor force. Identifying and reengaging workers who have left the labor force but could potentially reenter presents an opportunity to expand the region's workforce. In the Springfield Metro, labor force participation rates align with the national average, but in the greater Springfield Region, these rates are lower.

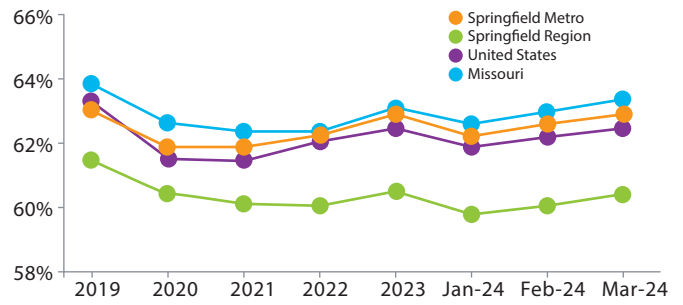
With demographic shifts resulting in a smaller pool of available talent, employers are increasingly turning to foreign workers to fill their roles. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, international migration to the U.S. slowed, further exacerbating workforce challenges. Data shows that foreign-born individuals account for a growing percentage of the population in the Springfield Metro, and they are contributing at even higher rates to the metro's workforce. However, this contribution is still only a fraction of the national rate.

ADDRESSING THE RISING COSTS OF HOUSING

Historically, Springfield has been an affordable place to live, with home prices reflecting this trend. However, the pandemic and the shift to remote work have caused housing prices to surge. During this period, the typical housing price in the Springfield Metro rose to levels slightly higher than the Missouri state average, marking a shift in the region's affordability. While these increases in the housing market can benefit those who have already purchased homes and intend to stay, they can pose significant challenges for first-time homebuyers.

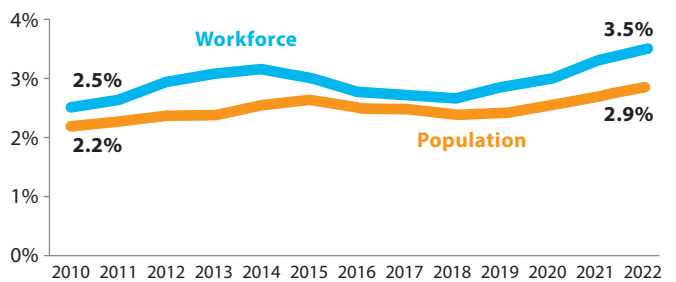
Furthermore, the rise in home prices has also led to an acceleration in rental rates. Rent prices have increased in tandem with the spike in home values in recent years. When housing costs are examined relative to incomes, data from Greene County shows that 32.5 percent of households spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing (whether mortgage or rent). This figure is very comparable to the national average, despite the region's relatively lower housing costs. Affordability will continue to be a challenge in regions across the U.S., including those with lower costs of living.

Labor Force Participation Rate by Area



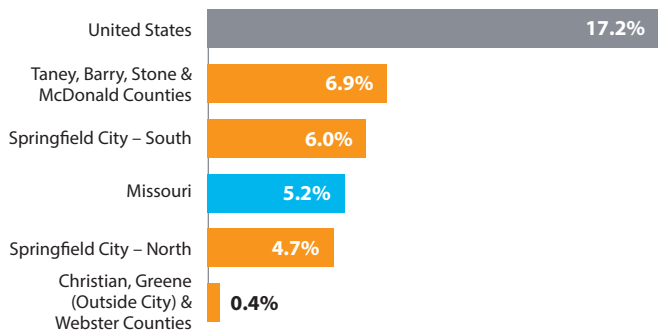
Source: Lightcast 2024.3

Metro Foreign Born as a Percentage of Total Population and Workforce



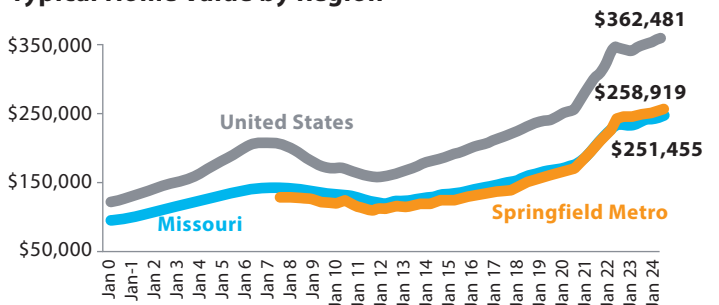
Source: EL calculations based on US Census Bureau 5-Year ACS estimates

Foreign Born Workers As a Percentage of Total Employment by Area, 2022



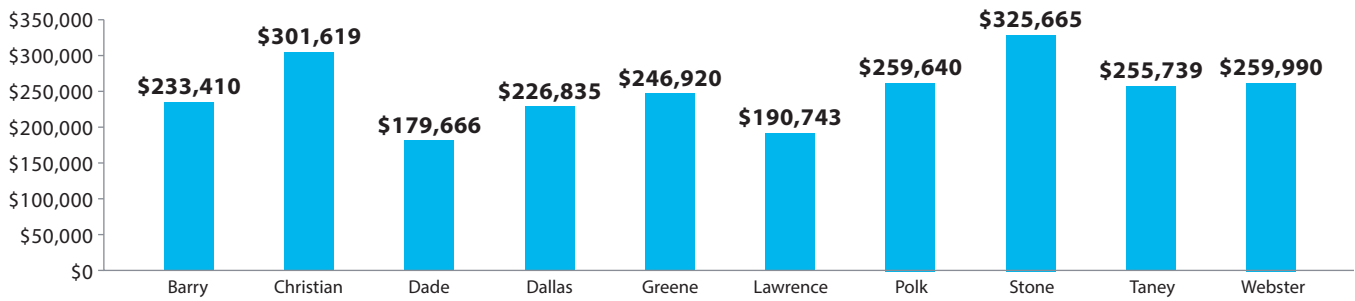
Source: EL calculations based on US Census Bureau microdata, 1-Year ACS

Typical Home Value by Region

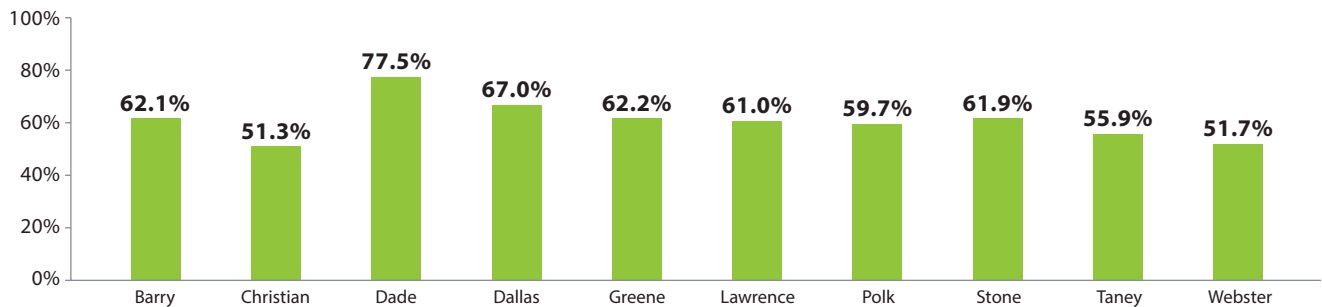


Source: Zillow (2024)

Average Home Value by County



% Change in House Value by County (July 2019 – July 2024)



Source: Zillow 2024

MATCHING HIGH IN-DEMAND JOBS, SKILLS, AND TRAINING

Analyzing labor market data can help the Springfield Chamber and local workforce development stakeholders identify the jobs with the highest demand and the best opportunities for residents and workforce training programs. While many high-demand positions have experienced sustained growth in the metro since 2019, this trend is not consistent across all roles. Some top-demand jobs in the Springfield Metro have seen a decline in net employment. Despite the overall decrease in job availability in certain sectors, the ongoing rate of retirement and turnover continues to create a need for a steady influx of new applicants each year. For example, the demand for postsecondary teachers is driven not by a surge in new positions, but rather by high turnover and retirement rates within the profession.

Most of the high-demand and high-opportunity occupations require either a bachelor’s degree or an advanced degree (highlighted in blue). Just four of the top-demand positions typically do not require a bachelor’s degree for entry-level roles. An analysis of data from

postsecondary institutions in the Springfield Region indicates a significant increase in completions in health professions, computer science, and physical science disciplines over time. However, completions in business, education, engineering, and mathematics & statistics have either declined or plateaued in recent years.

The chart below highlights the top-demand jobs within the Springfield Metro that do not require a bachelor’s degree or higher education but pay at least \$45,000 annually. Many of these high-demand occupations are crucial to the manufacturing industry, including roles such as welders, mechanics, electricians, and pipefitters. Additionally, the list includes positions in the legal, sales, and business support sectors.

An analysis of postsecondary completions data in the Springfield Region reveals that health professions are the leading field of study for degrees and certificates below the bachelor’s level. However, despite the continued demand for trade-based training programs, such as precision production and mechanical repair, there has been negligible growth in the output from these training programs.

Springfield Metro Top Occupations by Demand, Growth and Wage

	AVG. ANNUAL OPENINGS	2019-2023 JOB CHANGE	MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS
Registered Nurses	628	1,089	\$60K
Postsecondary Teachers	281	-409	\$67K
Accountants and Auditors	269	423	\$56K
Sales Reps, Wholesale & Mfg, Non-Technical	174	-266	\$56K
Software Developers	154	394	\$96K
Business Operations Specialists	126	296	\$61K
Project Management Specialists	96	139	\$75K
Cost Estimators	89	208	\$59K
Lawyers	73	136	\$104K
Nurse Practitioners	54	133	\$104K
Financial Products Sales Agents	43	14	\$57K
Claims Adjusters, Examiners and Investigators	41	25	\$62K
Telecommunications Equip Installers & Repairers	39	-45	\$61K
Industrial Engineers	39	72	\$77K
Computer Systems Analysts	38	-56	\$82K
Computer Occupations, All Other	37	41	\$79K
Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanics	35	28	\$58K
Network & Computer Systems Administrators	35	-35	\$65K
Pharmacists	34	-96	\$131K
Data Scientists	34	107	\$66K

Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2024.3

Springfield Metro Top Occupations by Demand, Growth and Wage — Requiring Less than a Bachelor's Degree

	AVG. ANNUAL OPENINGS	2019-2023 JOB CHANGE	MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS
Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	837	600	\$56K
Sales Reps, Wholesale & Manufacturing	174	-266	\$56K
Welders, Cutters, Solderers & Brazers	160	77	\$46K
Sales Reps of Services	144	121	\$46K
Diesel Engine Mechanics	140	239	\$49K
Electricians	111	-8	\$50K
Insurance Sales Agents	111	117	\$50K
Licensed Practical Nurses	100	-161	\$47K
HVAC & Refrigeration Mechanics & Installers	98	182	\$48K
Police & Sheriff's Patrol Officers	75	-2	\$50K
Plumbers, Pipefitters & Steamfitters	71	45	\$49K
Computer User Support Specialists	66	-158	\$51K
Paralegals & Legal Assistants	66	19	\$45K
Sheet Metal Workers	58	132	\$47K
Construction Equipment Operators	52	78	\$48K
Coating & Painting Machine Operators	49	55	\$45K
Payroll & Timekeeping Clerks	41	82	\$45K
Cargo & Freight Agents	41	68	\$46K
Claims Adjusters, Examiners & Investigators	41	25	\$62K
Medical Records Specialists	39	-48	\$48K
Radiological Technologists & Technicians	39	39	\$52K
Telecommunications Equip, Installers & Repairers	39	-45	\$61K
Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanics	35	28	\$58K
Aircraft Mechanics & Service Technicians	33	47	\$53K

Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2024.1

PREPARING FOR EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

Considering the rapid economic and business changes previously discussed, sustained efforts are needed to replenish and diversify the jobs that will be lost. Traded clusters, which are groupings of industries serving markets beyond their immediate geographic area—whether internationally or domestically—are vital to this effort. In the Springfield Region, these clusters are essential as they generate the revenue needed to sustain local sectors such as entertainment, retail, and personal services.

Traded clusters typically represent less than 40 percent of a region’s employment, yet they are generally responsible for 50 percent or more of a region’s income and innovation. In evaluating the Springfield Region, 53 traded clusters were assessed based on recent growth, location quotients, wages, and total employment.

Mapping Springfield’s clusters reveals a highly diversified economy, with 16 different clusters showing employment concentrations above the national average. The most concentrated cluster among these is the downstream metal products cluster, which has significant employment in areas such as metal window

and door manufacturing and fabricated structural metal production. The region’s economy is primarily dominated by manufacturing and distribution traded clusters, with fewer knowledge-based clusters.

This broad economic diversification helps protect the region against downturns in specific industries. However, the lack of concentration in higher-wage industries limits local purchasing power. Since 2019, some medium and large clusters, including downstream metal products, performing arts, hospitality and tourism, and livestock processing, have seen a reduction in net jobs. On the other hand, ten other highly concentrated clusters have experienced job growth during the same period. Additionally, there are several emerging clusters characterized by lower Location Quotients (LQs) that are also showing net job growth.

The traded clusters with the largest employment in the Springfield region include Distribution and E-commerce (17,527 jobs), Hospitality and Tourism (11,512 jobs), Business Services (10,114 jobs), and Education and Knowledge Creation (9,091 jobs). Over the past four years, the clusters that have added the most new jobs are Distribution and E-Commerce (+2,397 jobs), Food Processing and Manufacturing (+592 jobs), and Education and Knowledge Creation (+472 jobs).

Fastest Growing Traded Clusters in Springfield Region

	2019-2023 JOB CHANGE	2023 EMPLOYMENT	2023 AVERAGE EARNINGS
Distribution and E-Commerce	2,397	17,525	\$57K
Food Processing & Manufacturing	592	4,298	\$77K
Education & Knowledge Creation	472	9,091	\$44K
Communications Equipment & Services	317	1,677	\$76K
Construction Products & Services	307	2,281	\$76K
Recreation & Small Electric Goods	300	924	\$76K
Machinery Production	300	2,801	\$74K
Automotive	288	2,087	\$68K
Agriculture Inputs & Services	211	1,643	\$46K
Transportation & Logistics	197	8,434	\$80K
Water Transportation	145	194	\$69K
Biopharmaceuticals	111	193	\$108K
Paper & Packaging	108	641	\$85K
Lighting & Electrical Equipment	108	1,320	\$77K
Upstream Chemical Products	102	183	\$83K
Downstream Chemical Products	57	250	\$72K
Printing Services	55	798	\$52K
Furniture	50	427	\$58K

Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2024.1

Over the past five years, eighteen clusters in the Springfield region have each added a net total of 50 or more jobs.

Over the past five years, eighteen clusters in the Springfield region have each added a net total of 50 or more jobs. Notably, much of the growth within the distribution and e-commerce cluster originated from the general warehousing industry, which saw its employment double. Additionally, several manufacturing-based clusters, including food processing, construction products, machinery production, biopharmaceuticals, and lighting equipment, have also experienced significant growth.

This distributed growth likely reflects strong underlying competitive factors for manufacturing across the region, rather than specific strengths within individual clusters. As a result, targeted marketing efforts toward any single cluster may not be as effective as broader-based marketing aimed at site selectors.

The education and knowledge creation cluster has seen job gains driven by growth at state universities and advancements in research and development within the life sciences sector. Many of these rapidly growing clusters not only contribute significantly

to employment but also offer some of the highest average earnings in the region. These higher wages are pivotal in stimulating further economic growth, as workers are likely to spend or invest their earnings within the regional economy, thereby creating a positive feedback loop that supports local businesses and services.

While traded clusters are key drivers of regional economies, local clusters constitute a substantial portion of the workforce and face similar workforce challenges. A region's ability to attract traded clusters often hinges on the effective functioning of its local clusters, which were more significantly impacted by the pandemic lockdowns. By 2023, many of Springfield's local clusters have rebounded from this disruption. Notably, the local real estate and local commercial clusters have seen the largest workforce increases since 2019. Local health services rank as the top local cluster in terms of employment, with strong growth in this sector. However, the average wages in most local clusters are lower than those in traded clusters, which creates challenges in attracting and retaining workers.

Springfield Region Local Clusters

	2023 EMPLOYMENT	2019-2023 JOB CHANGE	2023 AVERAGE EARNINGS
Health Services	40,703	1,265	\$78K
Hospitality Establishments	27,333	199	\$26K
Real Estate, Construction & Development	20,975	2,389	\$63K
Education & Training	14,532	-1,081	\$62K
Motor Vehicle Products & Services	13,441	906	\$72K
Retailing of Clothing & General Merchandise	12,440	435	\$34K
Food & Bev Processing & Distribution	11,476	-57	\$46K
Commercial Services	11,035	176	\$57K
Community & Civic Organizations	10,893	535	\$31K
Government Services	9,956	99	\$67K
Personal Services	7,172	64	\$38K
Financial Services	5,924	72	\$84K
Logistical Services	4,770	737	\$64K
Household Goods & Services	4,622	689	\$50K
Entertainment & Media	3,210	-153	\$48K
Utilities	2,337	-671	\$81K
Industrial Products & Services	989	-17	\$61K

Source: EL calculations based on Lightcast 2024.1

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS 2025-2030

To implement these strategies over the next five years, strong Chamber leadership, increased collaboration with other groups, and continuous monitoring of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be essential to evaluate progress and make necessary adjustments.

BUILD A BETTER LOCAL PRODUCT AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

- Encourage local governments to implement a comprehensive permitting and regulatory review process to create clarity, predictability, and efficiency.
- Work with partners to ensure 5-10 “ready” sites of 25 to 500 acres across the region.

INCREASE RESOURCES AND AGGRESSIVELY MARKET FOR NEW INVESTMENT TARGETS

- Target industries with recent success and higher-than-average wages to raise the regional wealth and average family incomes.
- Increase targeted in-person marketing to site selection consultants.
- Hold a bi-annual event for site selectors to visit the area and raise awareness.
- Conduct a supply chain analysis for existing anchor companies and target gap companies for visits.
- Refine the economic development brand narrative. Conduct a digital audit to understand how users engage with the content on existing Chamber and partner websites. Supplement this with a search engine optimization audit, content audit, and social media audit.
- Develop additional “news” content and project to targets.



The below four programs are already part of the portfolio of programs offered in the region. Where appropriate the priority should be to ensure that each program has the maximum desired impact.

- ✓ **LiveInSpringfieldMO.com**
- ✓ **The Network for Springfield’s Young Professionals**
- ✓ **CampuSGF**
- ✓ **GO CAPS**

INCREASE THE REGIONAL LABOR FORCE GROWTH RATE

- Populate social media with livability videos and testimonials about living in the area.
- Develop a program to welcome foreign-born workers and help them assimilate to the area.
- Champion reentry programs for ex-offenders like Missouri's Reentry 2030.
- Focus a new onboarding program for young professional stickiness.
- Improve childcare availability and affordability.
- Partner with other groups active in regional branding and talent attraction to align messaging.

ADDRESS QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES

- Prioritize crime reduction, expand the housing supply with a focus on planned mixed-use communities, publicize K-12 success stories, and build and promote outdoor recreation options.
- Build an image and video library to share with the HR departments of regional businesses, highlighting quality of life.
- Advocate for evaluating of updating zoning regulations across the region to encourage more housing development, specifically targeting housing types of interest to younger people, including single-family homes on small lots, apartments, townhomes, condominiums, duplexes, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs).
- Continue to support downtown development of entertainment and restaurant options.
- Collaborate closely with other groups to avoid duplication and build synergy.

CREATE PRIVATE SECTOR OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORK EXPERIENCES AND RETRAINING

- Increase funding for K-12 Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming and expand the participation in CTE courses and career pathways.
- Consider creating a regional Workforce Coordinator position to assist businesses in facilitating workplace exposure and work experiences for K-12 and community college students. This could include activities like business speakers in schools, site visits, business mentoring, job shadowing, internships, part-time and summer jobs, and apprenticeships.
- Develop a regional internship and apprenticeship electronic matching database and promote it through K-12 and higher education partners.
- Continue to provide resources for young professional programs and internships targeted at college students, and expand these efforts to universities in Columbia, St. Louis, Kansas City, and other Midwest cities within 300 miles.
- Promote the new worker retraining funds to area employers.

ENSURE ADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR GROWTH

- Work with county and city public officials to aggregate and publish a combined capital improvement plan detailing upcoming infrastructure improvements for the region.
- Create a comprehensive regional map of infrastructure availability.
- Fund a comprehensive assessment of future unmet infrastructure needs to accommodate expected growth.

CHAMBER ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The Springfield Chamber has a long history of successfully leading the region's economic growth and development. As part of the Springfield Regional Strategy, an organizational assessment of the Springfield Chamber was conducted to determine how best to successfully execute the recommendations in this report.

The assessment process included a review of three key areas:

- **Operations:** A review of national chamber comparative operations data.
- **Effectiveness:** An analysis of the Chamber's activities against outcomes to assess the effectiveness of its strategic goals.
- **Leadership:** An evaluation of stakeholder expectations and a GroupLead Assessment of board efficiency and effectiveness.

OPERATIONS

Chambers of Commerce are tailored to the unique needs of the communities or regions they serve. Their goals and implementation strategies are specifically designed to act as the voice of business, employers large and small, and to support local economic growth. The Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) provides an Annual Chamber Operations Benchmark Report, which offers comparative data on key aspects of Chamber operations, categorized by the size of the chamber's budget and the type of chamber function.

The Springfield Chamber falls into the Category 4 Chamber, with an annual operating budget of \$2M-\$5M and functions that include General Business Growth and Economic Development. Comparatively, the Springfield Chamber **operates as a financially healthy organization with consistent funding**



support, as compared to many of its counterparts across the country. Both its annual revenue and membership retention rate have remained consistent and exceed the national average for similarly sized chambers that also function as economic development organizations. Additionally, the Chamber has maintained a balanced mix between dues and non-dues income, a diversification of revenue streams that many chambers in this category struggle to achieve.

The Springfield Chamber's program and staffing structure is robust, with 25 staff positions dedicated to providing ongoing programmatic expertise to the organization and its members. In addition to the CEO, the Chamber has staff assigned across five divisions, each offering specific content expertise. This team supports 22 committees and manages approximately 30 projects, programs, or events annually. **The size of the Springfield Chamber's staff exceeds the national average for Category 4 chambers by 25%**, including both overall Chamber staff and Economic Development staff.

The Springfield Chamber operates as a financially healthy organization with consistent funding support, as compared to many of its counterparts across the county.

EFFECTIVENESS

A key driver of capacity in chambers of commerce is the level of activity and the effectiveness of that activity in achieving the organization's goals. The Springfield Chamber develops a *Strategic and Annual Action Plan* that outlines the planned goals and activities across its five program divisions. The Chamber's annual Program of Work details the specific activities planned for its 22 committees, roundtables, and task forces. In addition to these structured activities, the Chamber produces over 30 different types of events and programs to support these committees and the broader Chamber membership. The Chamber also publishes an annual report that identifies and quantifies those activities, providing evidence of participation and outcomes.

The staff at the Springfield Chamber are actively engaged in achieving the organization's key goals and those specific to their departments. They produce programs, host events, track legislation, promote Springfield and regional websites to attract talent and investment, and work on business recruitment and expansion.

The Chamber maintains strong engagement with members and the broader community through various committees, programs, events, and projects. Altogether, the Springfield Chamber provides over 363 engagement opportunities annually for its members and the greater Springfield community.

There is clear numerical evidence of the volume of activity and its impact on increasing the Chamber's total sponsorship and program revenue. However, two important organizational questions remain unanswered:

- 1 **What is the real net cost** of each activity or program to the Chamber when staff time expenditures are accounted for?
- 2 **How effective** are these activities in furthering the Chamber's and Springfield's vision for success?

Currently the Chamber does not track staff time across these engagements. Implementing a structure to allocate staff time to specific activities would allow the Chamber to determine the real net revenue of each activity. Additionally, the Chamber does not have a system in place to categorize activities in relation to the broader success goals of both the organization and the Springfield economy.

The typical chamber operating model was not designed to track cost indicators against outcomes across multiple customer bases, which often results in a wide array of activities with little clear connection to achieving the shared community or organizational vision. However, an increasing number of chambers have begun deploying additional methodologies to better determine effectiveness.

LEADERSHIP

The effectiveness of the Chamber's leadership was assessed in two ways:

- 1 Springfield Chamber members and community leaders were asked to share their opinions on the Chamber's leadership in its role as the region's designated economic organization. This feedback was gathered as part of the stakeholder engagement process.
- 2 The Springfield Chamber's Board of Directors participated in a leadership assessment tool to evaluate their views on the board's overall effectiveness and efficiency.

When individuals were asked during the stakeholder engagement process how well the Chamber performed as leaders, most participants expressed the belief that the Chamber was shying away from providing the "bold" leadership needed to move the region forward in the current environment. There was consistent and strong **support for the Chamber to take a more assertive role in leading the region's economic development strategy and growth.**

An increased level of leadership and execution will be essential to ensure that staff activities align with the priorities of the board and investors.

The **GroupLead Profile assessment tool** was used to evaluate the collective effectiveness of the board of directors and identify ways to increase their impact. The group rated the Springfield Chamber above average on 9 of the 15 indicators and below average on 6 of the 15 indicators.

The highest scores were given for being “interpersonally savvy,” “sharing commitments,” “navigating political dynamics,” and “managing information and conflict.” The lowest scores were assigned to “creating new and different ideas,” “managing strategic propositions,” “utilizing ambiguities,” and “measuring progress.”

The assessment revealed several specific areas for improvement. The results indicated that many board members felt the board was avoiding risk, was uncomfortable with the possibility of failure, could improve in gathering broader group input on measuring progress, and was slow to make decisions. However, there was also general agreement that the board excelled at building broad community relationships, was contemplative, and solicited staff ideas. The assessment also highlighted areas where opinions about performance diverged. Notably, there were different views on exhibiting mutual trust, measuring progress, and creating new and innovative ideas, suggesting that these topics may benefit from further discussion within the board.

Members of the SBDC Board also completed a GroupLead assessment, and the scores were generally lower than those of the Chamber Board, with only one of the fifteen dimensions rated higher than the national benchmark. The lowest ratings were in the areas of “managing strategic proposition,” “focusing on priorities,” “measuring progress,” and “managing vision and purpose.” However, the respondents felt that the SBDC Board performed well in “navigating political dynamics,” “being interpersonally savvy,” and “managing

information.” The greatest divergence in rankings occurred in the areas of “measuring progress,” “creating new and different ideas,” and “making timely decisions.”

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Springfield Chamber is a financially strong and well-staffed organization with a robust and expansive Annual Action Plan. However, priorities that the stakeholders are looking for the Chamber to address are bold and challenging. To address these initiatives effectively, the Chamber will need to go beyond convening, collaborating, and providing programming. An increased level of leadership and execution will be essential to ensure that staff activities align with the priorities of the board and investors. A new focus on Return-On-Investment (ROI) should guide the planning and reporting of the annual program of work.

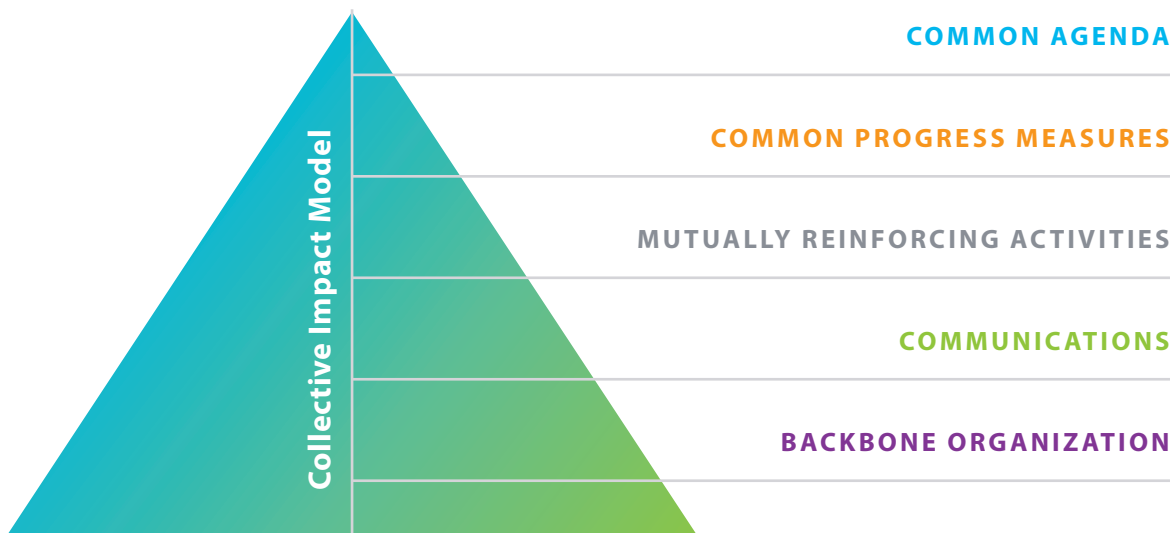
To achieve this, the Chamber should:

- **Prioritize the Chamber’s Regional Leadership Role and Serve as the “Voice of Business”:** Emphasize the Chamber’s leadership role in the region and its responsibility as the primary advocate for the business community. Rebrand the organization as the “Springfield Regional Chamber: The Voice of Regional Business.”
- **Position the Chamber as a Thought Leader on Regional Economy and Competitiveness:** Develop new content and engage in aggressive public awareness campaigns to establish the Chamber as a leading authority on the regional economy and competitiveness.
- **Clarify and Differentiate Roles:** Create a clear internal understanding and an external narrative that differentiates the roles of the Chamber, the SBDC, and LORE ensuring all organizations complement each other effectively.

- **Strengthen Collaborative Economic Development Relationships:** Review and enhance collaborative relationships and agreements with key partners to maximize resources and outcomes in economic development.
- **Evaluate the Cost and Value of Annual Activities:** Implement an internal system to more effectively evaluate the cost and value of the Chamber's programs, events and committees.
- **Adopt a Mission-Driven Allocation Model:** Use a structured methodology, such as a Mission-Driven Allocation model, to deploy resources and measure outcomes, ensuring that key priorities are being met. Adopt Entrepreneurial Operating System as the means forward.
- **Develop Measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):** Establish a set of measurable KPIs to guide the evaluation of the Chamber's activities and impact.
- **Integrate Strategic Efforts with Other Organizations:** Work with other organizations to align their strategic efforts with those of the Chamber, potentially using a Collective Impact Model as a foundation for joint planning and collaboration. Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

The collective impact model is based on five foundations:

- **Groups with shared or common agenda:** Stakeholders share a vision and agree on actions to create change for specific challenges or opportunities.
 - **Continuous communication:** Regular meetings and transparent communication to build trust.
 - **Mutually reinforcing activities:** Stakeholders coordinate a set of differentiated activities with both joint and individual responsibility.
 - **Shared measurement system:** Collecting data and measuring results using a common set of performance measures.
 - **Backbone support:** An independent or mutually agreed on organization that provides the collaborative capacity needed to achieve the goals, funded staff provides ongoing support.
- **Enhance Board Engagement and Impact:** Strengthen the engagement and impact of the Chamber Board to ensure that it effectively supports the Chamber's strategic goals and initiatives. Support SBDC board development with a strategic planning retreat focused on board operations, strategic focus and Key Performance Indicators.



KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (METRICS TO MEASURE SUCCESS)

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be established for both the community and the organization.

To enhance transparency and provide consistent economic information, the Springfield Chamber should develop a public-facing dashboard that tracks key economic indicators. This dashboard would offer a clear and accessible way to monitor the region's progress, comparing it to other parts of the state and to Missouri as a whole.

COMMUNITY ECONOMY KPIs

Diversification of Jobs and GDP:

- **Job Diversity Index:** Measure the distribution of employment across different sectors.
- **Sector Contribution to GDP:** Track the percentage of GDP contributed by various industries.

Overall Population and Labor Force Growth:

- **Population Growth Rate:** Annual growth in regional population.
- **Labor Force Growth:** Increase in the size of the active labor force.

Wealth:

- **Average Wage Growth:** Year-over-year growth in average wages.
- **Income Growth:** Median household income growth rates.
- **Poverty Reduction:** Percentage decrease in poverty rates over time.

Labor Force Participation:

- **Participation Rate:** Percentage of the working-age population that is employed or actively looking for work.

Infrastructure Capacity:

- **Water and Sewer Capacity:** Track capacity and usage rates of regional water and sewer systems.
- **Road Infrastructure:** Measure the quality and capacity of road networks, including traffic flow and congestion levels.

SPRINGFIELD CHAMBER & SBDC KPIs

New Jobs and Investments from Projects Touched:

- **Job Creation:** Number of new jobs generated through SBDC projects.
- **Investment Value:** Total capital investments resulting from SBDC efforts.

Number of Local Companies Assisted:

- **Business Assistance Count:** Total number of local companies receiving support or services from the Chamber and SBDC.

Product Expansion Numbers (Buildings and Sites):

- **Site Development:** Number of new or expanded sites and buildings ready for business use.

Fundraising Overall:

- **Total Funds Raised:** Aggregate funds raised by the Chamber and SBDC annually.
- **Private Fundraising:** Amount of private sector funds raised.

Impact:

- **Impact Analysis:** Economic impact of specific projects, including job creation, income generated, and community benefits.

Community Reach:

- **Citizens Touched:** Number of community members engaged or impacted by Chamber and SBDC initiatives.

County/City Specific Results:

- **Geographical Impact:** Breakdown of economic outcomes by county and city, showing specific results in each area.

CHAMBER INTERNAL KPIS

Total Chamber Members:

- **Membership Count:** Total number of active Chamber members.

New Chamber Members:

- **New Memberships:** Number of new members joining the Chamber annually.

Member Renewal Rate:

- **Renewal Percentage:** Percentage of members renewing their membership each year.

Growth in Annual Revenue:

- **Revenue Growth Rate:** Year-over-year growth in total revenue.

Growth in Non-Dues Revenue:

- **Non-Dues Revenue Growth:** Increase in revenue generated from non-dues sources, such as events and sponsorship.

Revenue per Member:

- **Average Revenue per Member:** Total revenue divided by the number of members.

Attendance at Chamber Events:

- **Event Participation:** Average attendance at Chamber-hosted events.

Board Member Attendance Percentage:

- **Board Engagement:** Percentage of board members attending meetings and events.

Ranking by Board of Annual Performance Audit:

- **Performance Rating:** Board's evaluation of the Chamber's annual performance, typically rated on a scale or through a formal audit process.

Success in Mission Driven Performance Model goals:

- Checklist of mission performance attainment developed annually by the board.

These KPIs provide a comprehensive framework to measure the effectiveness of the Chamber's strategies, monitor progress toward key goals, and ensure alignment with the broader economic development objectives of the Springfield region.



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Area Chamber of Commerce

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