

2024-2026

STRATEGIC VISION & GOALS



**GREATER
FREEPORT
PARTNERSHIP**

PREPARED BY :

next level
PARTNERS FOR BIG IDEAS

ABOUT

In February 2024, the board of directors and staff at the Greater Freeport Partnership engaged in a planning process to set strategy for the organization to implement over the next few years.

This Strategic Vision & Goals statement is the result of this process. It contains an overarching vision for the Greater Freeport Partnership and the impact the Partnership will create. The plan focuses on six areas to help the Partnership create the most immediate impact while understanding that the work of the Greater Freeport Partnership is long-term and will happen over years and decades.

To help keep the partners and community informed and engaged in the work, progress measures have been developed that will be used to monitor and communicate how the Partnership is working and what impact it is having on communities in Freeport and Stephenson County.

2050 VISION

(OUR PURPOSE)

The Partnership strives to be the driving force for a prosperous future where strategic economic solutions ignite opportunity for growth. We envision a thriving life for our residents that embraces diversity and upholds a strong business community. Our relentless commitment to our community's well-being and economic success sets us on a path to creating a dynamic and inclusive Freeport and Stephenson County.

MISSION

(HOW WE ACT TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS)

The Greater Freeport Partnership is a catalyst for dynamic economic growth fostering an inclusive environment where businesses thrive, and our community prospers. We are dedicated to nurturing new opportunities while enriching the fabric of Freeport and Stephenson County.

2024-2026 FOCUS AREAS

- ▶ **Business Retention & Expansion**
- ▶ **New Business Development & Attraction**
- ▶ **Marketing the Region**
- ▶ **Visitor Attraction**
- ▶ **Advocacy & Policy**
- ▶ **Building GFP Capacity**

BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

Results Statement

We engage with existing businesses on a continuous basis to better understand their needs. We identify solutions to challenges, connect businesses with resources, and celebrate and promote their successes. We foster public-private partnerships that develop infrastructure, land, and investment to help companies in our region grow, create jobs, and invest sustainably in their future. Our efforts to support existing business results in a vibrant downtown, full business parks, and new companies arriving to meet the needs in our market. In turn, our business partners participate and invest in communities throughout Stephenson County and in the Greater Freeport Partnership.

Indicators

- Public & Private Investment (\$)
- Jobs (# new & retained)
- Wage Growth (avg \$ wage)
- Commercial Construction (\$ & sqft new and renovated existing space)
- Investment in GFP (# of members & \$ investment)

Strategies & Progress Measures

Strategy 1 – Business info-action visits – fully fund & staff a program to meet regularly & confidentially with leaders of companies (all sizes & types) to identify needs, connect resources and take action on identified trends.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Staff identified/assigned – budgeted
- ▶ Progress Measure – Establish and continually update a list (map) & categorize all Stephenson County businesses
- ▶ Progress Measure – Format or establish a new database/software to track visit data (searchable, sortable, actionable)
- ▶ Progress Measure – Business visits (#, biz type, biz size)
- ▶ Progress Measure – Track follow-up actions taken to address business needs or identified trends (#, stories)

Strategy 2 – Business info-action surveys – fully fund & staff a program to gather information from businesses 2x per year to identify needs, trends, and ideas to support business growth.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Survey format, survey tool, & database established
- ▶ Progress Measure – Response rates (#, %)
- ▶ Progress Measure – Actions taken to address business needs or identified trends (#, stories)

BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

Strategies & Progress Measures (continued)

Strategy 3 – Business info-action roundtables – fully fund & staff a program to engage businesses in a round table format 4x per year – to create ideas to support business growth.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Participation in roundtables (#)
- ▶ Progress Measure – Actions taken to address business needs or identified trends (#, stories)

Strategy 4 – Workforce development initiative – establish & facilitate an employer-led workforce initiative that convenes partners with a role to play in workforce development, including employers, educators, workforce programs, etc. to address workforce challenges using a Collective Impact approach.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Define workforce needs that can be addressed using a targeted approach
- ▶ Progress Measure – Participation among partners (#, sector)
- ▶ Progress Measure – Clear, actionable needs and steps for addressing the need are identified
- ▶ Progress Measure – Funding & other resources are provided to support the work (\$)
- ▶ Progress Measure - Identify key partners to engage minority employment sectors

NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & ATTRACTION

Results Statement

We understand and promote the assets in Freeport and Stephenson County and build on the strengths of our existing businesses and workforce to attract new businesses. We make information about the available land, facilities, infrastructure, and resources easily accessible, and we share it intentionally and strategically. The Partnership is known as a one-stop-shop for business development and expansion.

Strategies & Progress Measures

Strategy 1 – Targeted new business program - target new businesses based on needs of existing businesses (suppliers, symbiotic competitors, supply chain partners, etc.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Ideal businesses identified from existing companies through business info-action programs (#, type of biz)
- ▶ Progress Measure – Database of targeted businesses is established
- ▶ Progress Measure – Outreach & incentive packages are in place & being marketed
- ▶ Progress Measure – # targeted businesses in database, # outreach, meetings, site tours, etc.

Strategy 2 – Business growth & expansion sites - identify, map, & develop available sites for new businesses and existing business expansion. Include land, facilities, downtown buildings & office space in this database.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Properties mapped, including list of assets, e.g. water, power, road access, etc.
- ▶ Progress Measure – Key properties are promoted and matched properties are included in RFI's
- ▶ Progress Measure - # properties available, # that get used for business growth

Strategy 3 – Explore housing development barriers – by convening a group of developers from within and outside the area to identify barriers in developing workforce housing and ideas for addressing the barriers.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Collecting data from employers that housing is a barrier to workforce recruitment
- ▶ Progress Measure – One or two convenings completed
- ▶ Progress Measure – Learning shared with board & stakeholders
- ▶ Progress Measure – Action steps identified, completed
- ▶ Progress Measure - Collect data on existing housing options for all economic levels & compare disparity with identified need

Indicators

- New business development (# of projects)
- Public-Private Investment (\$)
- Jobs (# new and retained)
- Wage Growth (avg \$ wage)
- Commercial Construction (\$ & sqft)
- Investment in GFP (# & \$)

NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & ATTRACTION

Strategies & Progress Measures (continued)

Strategy 4 – Growth & expansion incentives clearinghouse – clarify available incentives, streamline processes & supports for accessing incentives, provide expert services to businesses seeking incentives.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Each available incentive is clear & fully understood by Partnership staff experts
- ▶ Progress Measure – Each available incentive is clearly marketed
- ▶ Progress Measure - # incentive “coaching” sessions, # incentive applications, # successful incentive awards

Strategy 5 – Foster entrepreneurship & small business growth (define – small business) – continue existing small businesses development & support programming to spark new business growth.

- ▶ Progress Measures – Develop and implement a system for tracking the business support services that are provided (# of entrepreneurs assisted; type of assistance offered; referrals made to other resource partners)
- ▶ Progress Measures – Create active and passive educational programming and resources for entrepreneurs and small businesses. (# of programs; # of people accessing programs)
- ▶ Progress Measures - # of Ribbon Cuttings
- ▶ Progress Measure - Design & implement a microloan program
- ▶ Progress Measure - When grant programs are available, promote programs and assist applications (# of individuals assisted; # of grants awarded)

MARKETING THE REGION

Results Statement

We help businesses learn about the region's shovel-ready sites, infrastructure, and workforce to show them the opportunities for growth and work in Freeport and Stephenson County. We help prospective businesses and employees learn about the cultural, entertainment, and natural amenities to show them Freeport and Stephenson County is a great place to live and work. Our communications are focused, intentional, and evaluated for impact.

Indicators

- Business Requests for Information/Proposals (# received; # respond to)
- Web/Social/3rd Party statistics
- New Residents (#)
- New Companies (#)

Strategies & Progress Measures

Strategy 1 – Market Freeport & Stephenson County to companies (employers)

- Progress Measure – Target audience identified (which companies, sectors)
- Progress Measure – Assets, message, campaign clearly defined
- Progress Measure – Budget for outreach campaigns (\$)
- Progress Measure - # outreach, # inquiries

Strategy 2 – Market Freeport & Stephenson County to people (employees – returning/new residents)

- Progress Measure – Campaign developed representing inclusive culture
- Progress Measure – Budget for outreach campaigns (\$)
- Progress Measure - # outreach, # inquiries

Strategy 3 – Market the Partnership as the navigator for new companies and people interested in the area.

- Progress Measure – Clear referral process adopted by all stakeholders to refer new companies and new people interested in Freeport & Stephenson County to the Partnership
- Progress Measure - # referrals by partner/stakeholder
- Progress Measure - # referrals web/social/marketing
- Progress Measure - # inquires from companies - people
- Progress Measure - # minority and women-owned businesses, referrals, and meetings

VISITOR ATTRACTION

Results Statement

We engage and attract visitors to experience the cultural, natural, and historical places that can only be found in Freeport and Stephenson County area. We engage and communicate with the people who plan events, and manage the places where visitors stay, eat, play, and visit to learn about their needs, develop solutions, and align our messaging to make it easy for visitors to come to our community for a day or to stay.

Indicators

- Visitor requests for information (#)
- Visitors (#)
- Overnight Stays (#)
- Occupancy Rate of Hotels (%)
- Average Spend (\$)
- Investment in GFP (# & \$)

Strategies & Progress Measures

Strategy 1 – Hotel & event space expansion – evaluate the potential and market the need for more hotel rooms and an event venue.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Appropriate data collected to verify need & opportunity for additional hotel rooms and an event venue
- ▶ Progress Measure – Potential site locations identified
- ▶ Progress Measure – Outreach to potential developers
- ▶ Progress Measure - # hotel rooms, occupancy rates, event space available

Strategy 2 – Strengthen tourism partnerships – through regular meetings, outreach, & information sharing with area leaders from attractions, accommodations, and events.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Semi-annual convening, share info, expertise, get info, engagement
- ▶ Progress Measure – Leverage database to learn & address needs of tourism partners
- ▶ Progress Measure – Grow email list (possible shared email strategy w/partners) (#)

Strategy 3 – Encourage investment in attractions – work with leaders of area attractions to identify needs and resources to revitalize or even expand area attractions.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Convene attraction leaders to learn about needs, challenges, opportunities
- ▶ Progress Measure – Identify resources & supports
- ▶ Progress Measure – Visitors at attractions (#), investment in attractions (\$)

VISITOR ATTRACTION

Strategies & Progress Measures (continued)

Strategy 4 – Niche visitor itineraries – create visitor itineraries for niche markets, art, golf, wine, etc. for multi-day stays.

- ▶ Progress Measure – 3-5 itineraries established
- ▶ Progress Measure – Updated visitor packets include itineraries
- ▶ Progress Measure – Itinerary downloads (#)

Strategy 5 – Refined event strategy – rethink our approach and role in hosting and supporting events in the community.

- ▶ Progress Measure - # events, impact on the Partnership mission
- ▶ Progress Measure – Identify criteria & roles for event (e.g. support, partner, leader) with attention to all demographics and audiences
- ▶ Progress Measure – Partnership role is clear for all events going forward

Strategy 6 – Downtown Main Street vibrancy – continue to build on successful redevelopment of Freeport’s downtown and support rural community efforts to revitalize downtown/Main Street corridors.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Support Freeport’s downtown redevelopment efforts
- ▶ Progress Measure – Implement 2nd story residential strategies
- ▶ Progress Measure – Engage rural communities to identify their downtown/Main Street corridor needs & strategies

ADVOCACY & POLICY

Results Statement

We value & foster public-private partnerships to improve the business environment in our region and to advocate for policies and procedures that make doing business in Freeport & Stephenson County cost-effective and easy. We also value and foster business partnerships that create value for residents in our region through sustainable business practices, good-paying jobs with benefits, and investment and participation in the community.

Indicators

- Relationships with regional, state, and national officials (# of communications)
- Partnerships with advocacy organizations (# of memberships/affiliations)
- Relationships with other municipalities in Stephenson County (# of communications)

Strategies & Progress Measures

Strategy 1 – Advocacy staffing – identify a model to support regular advocacy work by allocating staffing resources to the 501(c)6. Consider rebranding the 501(c)6 to align with the Partnership model.

- Progress Measure – Evaluate board and member support to advocacy work
- Progress Measure – Advocacy goals & workload identified
- Progress Measure – Staff need vs. consultant approach evaluated
- Progress Measure – Advocacy staffing/support in place, regular communication with legislative & policy partners is ongoing

Strategy 2 – Advocacy agenda – establish an advocacy agenda (initially focused to a few economic development/tourism needs) for the Partnership.

- Progress Measure – Identify a legislative officer (board member)
- Progress Measure – Advocacy agenda in place, published
- Progress Measure – Advocacy marketing materials complete & shared via 501(c)3
- Progress Measure – Educate members and public on the role of the Partnership's c6

Strategy 3 – Informed legislative partners – establish a program to keep local, state, regional, & federal legislators informed of the needs and focuses of Partnership members.

- Progress Measure - Shared agenda in place
- Progress Measure – Annual visit or site tours established
- Progress Measure – Regular updates happening between Partnership & legislators

BUILDING GFP CAPACITY

Results Statement

We understand the needs of our stakeholders and invest in the Partnership to effectively meet those needs. Our board and staff are skilled, knowledgeable, and effective in their positions, and representative of the community. Members of the business community, government partners see service on the Partnership board as an important & highly valued opportunity.

Indicators

- Board Membership (full)
- Board is filled with CEO level leaders; all size & sectors
- Staff is knowledgeable & has the tools it needs
- Board & Staff are representative of the community

Strategies & Progress Measures

Strategy 1 – Refine Partnership staffing model – map ideal staffing model and fill existing openings (and future) to work towards this ideal model. The model should align with the strategic focus of the organization.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Ideal staffing model is developed w/applicable position descriptions
- ▶ Progress Measure – Existing openings are filled based on new model & descriptions
- ▶ Progress Measure – Staff & strategy evaluations show improved impact on Partnership goals

Strategy 2 – Strengthen board – identify roles and sectors that need to be represented on the board to increase engagement, connections, and impact in the community.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Review & formalize board makeup & size
- ▶ Progress Measure – Create board member role description and application process
- ▶ Progress Measure – Create board evaluation – self-evaluation completed by board annually to evaluate the boards performance
- ▶ Progress Measure – Formalized board orientation in place

Strategy 3 – Grow membership – to expand our impact and connections with the community.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Prospect list in place & this role is championed by a staff member and a board member or small committee
- ▶ Progress Measure -Clarify membership value proposition for business stakeholder and tourism stakeholders at base level & investor level.
- ▶ Progress Measure – Grow investor membership by 10% (from January 1, 2024 base numbers) in 2025 & 2026 (\$)
- ▶ Progress Measure - Grow base membership by 10% (from January 1, 2024 base numbers) in 2025 & 2026 (\$)

BUILDING GFP CAPACITY

Strategies & Progress Measures (continued)

Strategy 4 – Alternative revenue streams – expand fee-for-service opportunities as appropriate to increase opportunities for ongoing revenue.

- ▶ Progress Measure – Identify new grant revenue opportunities
- ▶ Progress Measure – Identify fee-for-service model that can create new revenue streams

Strategy 5 – Rockford partnership – work with Rockford CVB to support Partnership tourism marketing.

- ▶ Progress Measure – recover \$\$ for tourism promotion in Freeport and Stephenson County



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