

Quad Cities 5-Year Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan

Spring 2024

Quad Cities 5-Year Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan – Spring 2024

Executive Summary

The Quad Cities emerges as a vibrant regional hub, welcoming entrepreneurs, intellectuals, skilled professionals, and visitors. With its array of higher educational institutions, well-connected airport, thriving industries, and abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, the region shines bright. However, challenges such as workforce shortages, childcare accessibility, and housing affordability loom large, demanding immediate and long-term solutions. To unlock its full potential while addressing these hurdles, the Quad Cities must embrace a unified regional approach, pooling resources from public, private, and philanthropic sectors.

Through a collaborative effort between the Prescott Chamber of Commerce Foundation and CivicSol, a comprehensive regional economic development strategy has been crafted, reflecting inputs from over 125 stakeholders and a thorough quantitative analysis. Key findings highlight the region's eagerness for collaboration, its growing population and job market, investment prospects, significance of small businesses, tourism potential, educational resources, housing concerns, and the pivotal role of nonprofits.

Economic Development Strategy

The Quad Cities' economic strategy aims to harness the region's potential and chart its economic destiny, uniting stakeholders from various sectors to drive progress. The strategy revolves around five key goals:

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Everybody's region

- Form a Quad Cities regional coalition for economic development.
- Advocate for policies supporting regional growth.
- Foster partnerships across municipalities and county departments.

Goal 2: Everybody's future

- Enhance business environment through expansion initiatives.
- Develop infrastructure to support business growth.
- Activate outdoor, recreational, and agricultural sectors.
- Implement tourism master plan and explore aerospace innovation.

Goal 3: Everybody's small biz.

- Connect students with regional opportunities through "Campus Quad Cities" initiative.
- Expand skill training programs and reimagine young professionals' initiatives.
- Address childcare and housing challenges to retain talent.

Goal 4: Everybody's talent

- Support small businesses through resources and mentorship.
- Promote "buy-local" campaigns and showcase entrepreneurial diversity.
- Curate destination experiences to drive traffic to small businesses.

Goal 5: Everybody's destination

- Develop unified regional brand and marketing materials.
- Promote arts, culture, and recreation to attract visitors.
- Establish communication plan to share successes with stakeholders.

In essence, this strategic plan lays the foundation for the Quad Cities' inclusive economic growth, emphasizing collaboration, innovation, and community engagement. Together, we can propel the Quad Cities into a thriving, dynamic regional powerhouse.

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**The Quad Cities:
A dynamic regional destination for everybody –
entrepreneurs, thinkers, talent, and visitors alike.**

The Opportunity

The Quad Cities stands as an attractive destination for visitors, skilled talent, and investment. Punching above its weight, the region boasts higher educational institutions, a well-connected airport, and growing industry sectors, and unmatched outdoor recreation access.

However, the area is grappling with increasing workforce shortages, as well as challenges related to childcare and housing affordability. These issues pose both short-term and long-term challenges.

To fully realize its growth potential while effectively addressing these mounting challenges, the Quad Cities must adopt a regional approach to economic prosperity. This involves bringing together communities across the Quad Cities and collaboratively leveraging the resources of the public, private, and philanthropic sectors.

In doing so, it is imperative to concurrently plan and strategize for the long term, employing a range of policies and partnerships to drive impactful change.

To support the creation of Quad Cities Regional Economic Development Strategy, the Prescott Chamber of Commerce Foundation partnered with CivicSol to discover the region's assets and chart a future forward for regional collaboration and cooperation. In doing so, CivicSol performed a comprehensive demographic and economic assessment that evaluated the County's performance across a variety of metrics as compared to a set of benchmark communities. The team also evaluated Quad Cities' industry clusters to guide future business attraction and expansion efforts. Finally, the team complemented this research with stakeholder engagement to address Quad Cities' challenges and opportunities for the future. Over the course of this engagement, we spoke with more than 125 regional stakeholders.

State of the Quad Cities Region

1. Quad City business and community stakeholders are excited to collaborate on a shared economic development agenda.

Strategic planning for regional economic development is paramount in cultivating resilient growth and prosperity within the Quad Cities. By customizing strategies and implementing a deliberate action plan to harness Yavapai County's distinctive assets and resources, regional leaders can seize collective opportunities and tackle local challenges, helping to fill the void in public leadership.

The tightly-knit Quad City community places a strong emphasis on mutual support, and adopting this collaborative regional approach is more effective than the sum of its individual parts.

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2. A region on the rise, Yavapai County is experiencing noteworthy population and job growth, and becoming more diverse.

The Quad Cities are experiencing rapid growth, attracting a surge of new residents, businesses, and job opportunities. This expansion is particularly noticeable among retired individuals, with the population of those aged 60 years or older increasing by 18%. At the same time, the region is undergoing increased diversity, and job growth is surpassing the state average.

While this growth presents numerous opportunities, it also poses challenges for the area. Rising housing costs, varied perspectives on managing development and growth, and the necessity for a robust workforce are among the key considerations.

3. Investment opportunities exist in Yavapai County's emerging industries and growing sectors like healthcare, providing pathways to family-supporting jobs and ensuring regional resilience.

Many young professionals and recent graduates in the Quad Cities express concerns about the limited diversity of professions and the difficulty in finding well-paying jobs, prompting them to consider leaving the region. However, there are promising opportunities for growth.

Investing in infrastructure, particularly by leveraging the robust aviation and flight program at Embry-Riddle University and tapping into the potential of Agriculture and the Outdoor economy, could pave the way for new industries in Yavapai County. Likewise, growing the region's healthcare sector and exploring opportunities in logistics, advanced manufacturing can further contribute to the region's industry diversification.

4. Small businesses within Yavapai County not only contribute to its identity, but they offer a pathway to wealth generation.

More than 4,700 small businesses are the heart of Yavapai County's growth, contributing significantly to the region's economic vitality and also shaping its identity. Benefiting from Arizona's favorable business climate, Yavapai County's genuine quality of place — public safety, history, heritage, and natural environment — makes it an excellent place to start a business.

Once in the County, businesses benefit from collaboration with other entrepreneurs and engagement with various chambers and business support organizations. However, many Quad City small businesses have raised workforce favorability and reliability as challenges that need to be addressed.

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5. Yavapai County's Tourism and Hospitality sector is important for the region's identity and economic future.

Yavapai County's natural beauty serves as a magnet for those seeking outdoor activities. Beyond the allure of outdoor adventures, Yavapai County boasts a rich cultural scene, with museums, arts, and a festive reputation as "Arizona's Christmas City," making it an appealing destination for both visitors and potential residents.

While tourism and hospitality undoubtedly contribute to the region's destination appeal, it's essential to recognize that it should not be the sole focus of economic development. Instead, it can be viewed as a "front porch strategy," serving as an invitation for further investment and the attraction of new residents.

6. Prescott College, Yavapai College, and Embry-Riddle University boast robust talent pipelines; however, they are detached from the local economy and community.

With three higher education institutions and a nationally ranked public high school, Yavapai County stands as an educational hub. More than 20,000 students currently attend the region's colleges. However, despite this influx of students, there is a notable trend of graduates not choosing to remain in the area after completing their education, making young graduates Yavapai County's greatest export.

When educational institutions act as community anchors, they play a vital role in rooting students and graduates in the region. This involvement creates a "stickier" community by fostering regional loyalty and deepening talent pipelines that connect students with local employers.

7. Quad Cities' young professionals are drawn to the region's vibrant lifestyle but are limited in professional growth and leadership opportunities.

Young professionals are attracted to Yavapai County because of its quality of life, work-life balance, family-friendly atmosphere, and abundant outdoor access. However, they encounter challenges, including limited upward mobility, rising housing costs, and a shortage of networking opportunities.

Although a young professional network is in place, it is in the early stages of redevelopment and lacks clear purpose. Many have expressed the view that the region would greatly benefit from a young leader's training and engagement initiative.

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8. Yavapai County's housing challenges are exacerbating its workforce challenges. And growing childcare costs makes this more acute.

Yavapai County, once a community with an affordability advantage, is now grappling with rising housing costs. This challenge is further compounded by growing resistance to redevelopment and the area's outdated land-use planning policies and practices.

Simply put, an increasing number of residents, particularly young professionals and service-sector workers, find themselves unable to afford a home in Yavapai County. The housing challenge in Yavapai has evolved into a workforce problem, necessitating a reframing and reevaluation of the region's approach to development.

Moreover, limited childcare options and the associated escalating prices are exacerbating the situation. The lack of affordable housing or accessible childcare forces viable talent to explore alternative living options elsewhere.

9. Yavapai County is an attractive destination for visitors, skilled talent, and investment – more than a retirement town.

Storytelling plays a pivotal role in driving economic development. A captivating narrative possesses the ability to draw people in, making it a tool for attracting both investments and new residents to a region. Yavapai County boasts a unique story that deserves to be shared. Unfortunately, a significant portion of the region's external messaging narrowly characterizes it as a retirement town.

By reassessing and reshaping the region's narrative to highlight its destination assets, educational infrastructure, and entrepreneurial spirit, a more cohesive story can be crafted.

10. Quad Cities' nonprofit and philanthropic partners are important drivers of inclusive prosperity.

In light of Yavapai's growing diversity, it is crucial to institute equitable planning measures. The Quad Cities are particularly fortunate to experience thriving volunteerism and active philanthropic engagement. Local nonprofits and philanthropic organizations are dedicated to promoting inclusive prosperity by supporting various aspects, such as arts and culture, underserved communities, food accessibility, and community engagement.

Looking ahead, these organizations will continue to contribute significantly to the overall well-being of Yavapai County, ensuring that its evolution aligns with the principles of shared prosperity.

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Economic Development Strategy

The Quad Cities region is a growing, dynamic community that represents the very best opportunity in Arizona. Punching above its weight with dynamic educational institutions like Yavapai College, Prescott College, and Embry-Riddle, a growing economic base driven by opportunities in business services, healthcare, outdoor recreation, and more, and an unparalleled quality of life, the Quad Cities area has everything that's needed for long-term economic growth and success.

The Quad Cities' economic development strategy will help Yavapai County realize its vision and take control of its economic future. It will bring together the private sector, philanthropic community, residents, and public sector leaders to coordinate their resources and efforts to drive better results. The strategy focuses on building a formal regional coalition to drive economic development for the Quad Cities, in the absence of a coordinated public sector approach. It emphasizes promoting a business climate that is supportive of both legacy businesses and emerging enterprises and promising entrepreneurs. The strategy also brings a focus on ensuring the region has a robust talent pipeline to support future growth and expansion. And finally, it puts forth a plan for creating a destination brand that speaks to investment, talent, and visitors alike.

The defined goals, strategies, and tactics of the economic development strategy will enable stakeholders to understand their specific roles and encourage cross-regional collaboration. In doing so, regional leaders can leverage resources to maximize the impact of investment and improve equitable outcomes. This five-year plan is flexible. The Quad Cities' economic development priorities will evolve as Yavapai County grows and the economy changes. Community leaders should examine the strategy at least annually to identify deficiencies and opportunities and to update the plan to address changing needs.

These are the five goals of the 5-Year Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan:

Goal 1: Everybody's region.

We will establish a Quad Cities regional coalition to unlock our economic potential.

Goal 2: Everybody's future.

We will create a world-class business environment that propels us into an innovative future.

Goal 3: Everybody's small biz.

We will support the small businesses and entrepreneurs that make the Quad Cities unique.

Goal 4: Everybody's talent.

We will invest in the talent that will fuel the future of the Quad Cities.

Goal 5: Everybody's destination.

We will promote and celebrate the Quad Cities as a destination for families, professionals, and visitors.

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Goal 1: Everybody's region.

We will establish a Quad Cities regional coalition to unlock our economic potential.

Regional economic development and cooperation are vital for the growth and prosperity of Yavapai County. By fostering collaboration among neighboring communities, the Quad Cities can pool resources and expertise to attract and support businesses, create job opportunities, and enhance infrastructure. A unified approach to economic development ensures that the entire Quad Cities region benefits from shared successes, leading to an improved quality of life for residents.

The evidence:

- With nearly 250,000 residents, Yavapai County is Arizona's fourth largest county and has grown by 7% in the past five years.
- In cultivating resilient growth and prosperity within growing communities like the Quad Cities, strategic planning for regional economic development is paramount.
- With effective planning, the Quad Cities can ensure equitable outcomes, leverage collective resources, maximize impact, and avoid duplicative efforts.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess implementation and impact.

- **Stakeholders engaged:** Tracking the number of stakeholders engaged in the creation and development of the Quad Cities regional economic development coalition.
- **Implementation committees:** Assessing the committees and associated participants supporting the implementation of the strategy.
- **Resources raised:** Counting the dollars raised to support the regional economic development efforts in the Quad Cities.
- **Policies supported:** Counting the number of policies supported.

Strategy 1.1: Collaborate with area Chambers to assess the Quad Cities' economic development ecosystem and available resources.

Collaborating with area Chambers to assess the Quad Cities' economic development ecosystem is vital for fostering a comprehensive understanding of the region's greater opportunities and challenges. In doing so, this collaborative effort can help identify and leverage available resources, enabling strategic planning and targeted initiatives that contribute to sustainable economic growth and community development in the Quad Cities area.

Action items:

- Develop an inventory of groups throughout the Quad Cities providing economic and business development services.
- Create a survey to identify the breadth and depth of economic development services, staffing and funding.
- Distribute the survey and collect responses from regional groups throughout the Quad Cities.
- Align and organize resources around regional strategy and use them to inform Strategy 1.2.

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Strategy 1.2: Form a collaborative regional partnership dedicated to advancing the implementation of the Quad Cities Economic Development Strategy.

Economic development is a team sport. Forming a collaborative regional collective for the implementation of the Quad Cities Economic Development Strategy will help ensure that the region fosters shared expertise and resources, promoting the Quad Cities' economic growth and sustainability through a unified approach.

Action items:

- Utilize the Quad Cities Economic Development Strategy Steering Committee to actively contribute to the formulation of a formal regional partnership, aligning with and implementing regional strategies.
- Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of best practices across Arizona and the U.S. in establishing effective Regional Economic Development Organization (EDO) alliances.
- Engage with an advisor/consultant to facilitate the establishment of a robust governance framework and partnership structure.
- Craft a compelling funding pitch and strategy aimed at identifying and securing resources to foster collaboration and support the Quad Cities' development initiatives.

Strategy 1.3: Advocate for policies and encourage civic engagement that supports regional development, contributing to the overall growth of the Quad Cities.

A regional ecosystem that has aligned public policies is essential to supporting quality job growth and firm creation. By promoting policies that prioritize regional development and actively engaging citizens in civic activities, the Quad Cities can ensure sustained growth and lay the foundation of an interconnected region that comes together to overcome obstacles and challenges in the policy, city, and county permitting arena.

Action items:

- Develop an evaluation framework to determine which policies to promote and create public engagement around. Support the framework creation with a communications and advocacy plan.
- Pilot the framework around an issue of relevance in the Quad Cities, evaluate its impact, and apply the lessons learned in future endeavors.

Strategy 1.4: Foster partnerships across city and county departments throughout the region, enhancing a business-focused approach to navigating processes and accessing services.

An efficient and navigable city and county permitting process is crucial for fostering economic development by streamlining the barriers to business expansion. Simplifying the permitting procedures in the Quad Cities will reduce bureaucratic hurdles, expedite project timelines, and encourage entrepreneurs to invest in the region. A user-friendly permitting system will not only attract new businesses to the Quad Cities but also promote job creation and overall economic growth.

Action items:

- Establish a committee comprising city representatives tasked with assessing and enhancing the small business journey across a range of regional services. This evaluation will encompass areas such as business development, real estate services, permitting/development, health/fire inspections, and more.
- Create a comprehensive regional guide titled 'How to Open a Business in the Quad Cities.' Ensure the guide is accessible in multiple languages and formats, including print and electronic versions.

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Goal 2: Everybody's future.

We will create a world-class business environment that propels us into an innovative future.

A thriving business environment is essential for economic development. By actively collaborating with current employers and prospective stakeholders in the Quad Cities, the region can strengthen existing relationships and effectively communicate the benefits of conducting business in Yavapai County. This strategic approach will not only boost business development but also distinguish the region within Arizona, paving the way for a more innovative future.

The evidence:

- Yavapai County has a GRP of \$9 billion, a low unemployment rate of 5%, and steady job growth of 9%, keeping pace with Arizona and outpacing the U.S. average.
- Median earnings in the Quad Cities have grown by 28% in the past five years, a rate 20% higher than the state and national averages.
- Continued support and engagement create investment opportunities in Yavapai County's emerging industries and growing sectors, such as healthcare, business services, manufacturing and more, offering pathways to family-supporting jobs and ensuring regional resilience.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess implementation and impact.

- **Business engagement:** Tracking the support given to regional employers through roundtable discussions, visit and resource needs.
- **New businesses:** Tracking the number of new businesses and whether they align with target clusters and strategies.
- **Employment (total, by cluster and by project and strategy):** Counting total jobs generated and whether they are tied to specific sectors or strategies.
- **Regional visitors:** Measuring various visitation metrics (total visitors, hotel occupancy, etc.).

Strategy 2.1: Execute a business expansion and retention initiative to build relationships with Quad Cities' employers, both legacy and emerging.

Building relationships with both new and existing businesses is crucial for economic development in the Quad Cities. While new businesses bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and diverse skills to the community, maintaining relationships with existing Quad Cities businesses ensures stability, retention of local talent, and the preservation of institutional knowledge. A robust business visitation initiative is essential for fostering relationships, while collecting real-time data to drive necessary policy changes.

Action items:

- Host annual cluster working groups – Healthcare, Business Services, E-Commerce/ Distribution, and Manufacturing – to identify specific cluster needs and growth opportunities.
- Build a formal regional business visitation plan for Quad Cities' businesses, interviewing at least 60 employers annually.
- Utilize these and other engagement tools to identify opportunities and needs and report key findings systematically, informing Strategy 1.3.

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Strategy 2.2: Develop, in collaboration with the Arizona Department of Commerce, a cluster-focused site-selection initiative.

By cultivating relationships with site selectors, Quad Cities' economic development professionals can glean insights into upcoming projects and investment opportunities. Similarly, forging connections with site selectors can enhance the visibility of the Quad Cities among businesses seeking to expand or relocate to Arizona. To maximize impact, regional leaders must ensure that the Quad Cities region shares leads in the most efficient manner and employs promotional materials and tactics that are current and aligned with the latest data and research.

Action items:

- Strengthen regional processes for responding to incoming Requests for Information/Proposals (RFIs/RFPs); ensure AZ Commerce partners understand the process.
- Refine and build a target site-selection list and conduct community outreach at least biannually.
- Host appropriate inbound Yavapai County visits, tours, and trade missions with target companies, investment representatives, and site selectors.
- Attend commercial development trade shows to increase exposure for Quad Cities' business attraction efforts: CoreNet Global, NAIOP, Site Selectors Guild, ULI, ICSC, Select USA, and more.
- Create appropriate cluster marketing and attraction materials. Profiles should be made available in print, presentation, and web/electronic format, and should include materials designed for the Quad Cities' partners' website.

Strategy 2.3: Develop the real estate, land, infrastructure, and financial tools to support business expansion.

To promote business expansion in the Quad Cities, it is imperative to establish a comprehensive framework integrating real estate, land, infrastructure, and financial tools. Ensuring alignment across these key components is crucial to laying a foundation for sustainable and measurable growth. This framework will equip growing enterprises in Yavapai County with the necessary tools and resources essential for scaling amidst an ever evolving and increasingly competitive economic landscape in Arizona and the U.S.

Action items:

- Partner with various city, town, and county officials, as well as the Northern Arizona Council of Governments, to maintain and evaluate development assets: land, infrastructure, and incentives.
- Advise key stakeholders on development policies to support economic growth throughout the region and align with cluster needs.

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Strategy 2.4: Activate an outdoor and recreational cluster strategy.

Yavapai County's natural beauty serves as a magnet for those seeking outdoor activities. With features such as Prescott National Forest, Granite Dells, Watson Lake, and more, the Quad Cities region is poised to support an outdoor and recreational cluster strategy. With this strategy in place, the Quad Cities can attract tourists and visitors, build, and grow businesses that reflect its outdoor identity, and help establish support for ensuring the stewardship of the region's natural amenities.

Action items:

- Convene a working group for those interested in supporting the Quad Cities' outdoor recreational cluster.
- Inventory the Quad Cities' outdoor recreational cluster assets, including businesses, outdoor amenities, brand, and more.
- Consider issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) to study the region's outdoor cluster and develop appropriate support strategies.
- Conduct the study, disseminate the results, and implement recommendations to influence business attraction and expansion efforts.

Strategy 2.5: Engage partners to expand Yavapai County's agriculture and food sector.

Engaging partners to expand the Quad Cities' agriculture and food sector will help foster economic growth, promote local sustainability, enhance visitor-based industries, and ensure food security for the regional community. Additionally, a thriving agricultural sector can also bolster the region's identity, creating new businesses and jobs that will make the region more unique.

Action items:

- Collaborate with the Prescott Farmers Market, Experience Prescott, and others to inventory the Quad Cities' food and agricultural assets.
- Bring together agriculture and food sector stakeholders to better understand what policies and strategies could support the expansion of the sector.
- Incorporate those strategies into regional business planning and destination development; appoint an industry expert/advocate as the point person for advancing these efforts.

Strategy 2.6: Execute the regional tourism master plan to grow the region's visitor economy.

The Quad Cities area is renowned for its vibrant cultural offerings, encompassing museums, arts, and a festive identity as "Arizona's Christmas City," making it an attractive choice for both tourists and prospective residents. Approximately 9,600 individuals are employed in accommodation and tourism services within the region, significantly bolstering its economy and allure as a destination. By implementing the area's tourism master plan, the Quad Cities can further enhance its quality of life, ensuring sustainable growth in its visitor numbers.

Action items:

- Engage the Tourism Advisory Committee to help guide the development of an updated tourism master plan.
- Conduct a strategic planning process, ensuring alignment with the Quad Cities Regional Economic Development Strategy.

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Strategy 2.7: Explore the opportunity of an aerospace and flight "innovation district" in partnership with Embry-Riddle, Yavapai College, and the airport.

With the goal of creating a dynamic ecosystem, an innovation district is a designated area that fosters collaboration and innovation by bringing together various entities, such as businesses, research institutions, startups, and educational facilities. With the aviation assets at Embry-Riddle, Yavapai College, and the airport, the Quad Cities are positioned to explore the creation of a quince district that can propel the growth of innovative startups and enterprises.

Action items:

- Assemble an advisory committee, including Quad Cities Regional partners, entrepreneurs, and Embry-Riddle officials, to guide an innovation district economic development plan.
- Catalog "innovation district" best practices across North America, especially for smaller communities, focusing on programming and placemaking efforts.
- Create a plan, ensuring alignment with Quad Cities' economic development strategy, Embry-Riddle programming/research, and various regional/community start-up programs.

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Goal 3: Everybody's small biz.

We will support the small businesses and entrepreneurs that make the Quad Cities unique.

Small businesses not only contribute to the distinctive character of a community but also serve as a crucial avenue for wealth generation. In the Quad Cities region, there are over 4,700 small businesses that help make the community unique and authentic. Establishing an ecosystem in Yavapai County that nurtures small businesses, supporting them from inception to expansion, not only reduces entry barriers for new ventures but also ensures that established enterprises are resilient for the future too.

The evidence:

- Local cluster jobs, especially those driven by Quad Cities small businesses, make up a significant portion of the region's economy – 19% larger than the U.S. average.
- The region's share of entrepreneurs is 9% higher than the state average and 39% higher than the national average.
- Arizona has a favorable tax environment; its 4.9% corporate tax rate is one of the lowest in the nation, making it an ideal state to support entrepreneurship.
- The Quad Cities region's share of women-owned businesses (19%) is on par with the state and national averages.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess implementation and impact.

- **Entrepreneurial impact:** Track the business success and revenue impact of entrepreneurs that interact with regional small business programs and ecosystems.
- **Workforce-readiness participation:** Counting the number of participants in the regional workforce readiness initiative.
- **Buy-local participation:** Measuring the number of regional businesses participating in the buy-local campaign.
- **Placemaking initiatives:** Counting the number of regional placemaking initiatives supported.

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Strategy 3.1: Provide technical, educational support, and capital resources to facilitate the growth and scaling of small businesses in Yavapai County.

To foster the expansion and scalability of small businesses in the Quad Cities, regional economic development efforts must meet the needs of its entrepreneurial community, including technical assistance, networking, mentorship, and more. By offering and leveraging these resources to entrepreneurs, the Quad Cities region can continue to cultivate a vibrant small business ecosystem.

Action items:

- Promote, in collaboration with SBDC and SCORE, an online hub/calendar for small-business coaching, encompassing business plans, marketing strategies, and succession plans. Additionally, support networking opportunities and financial resources tailored to Quad Cities businesses.
- Coordinate with regional small business training partners to offer resources for existing and prospective entrepreneurs, including “How to Start a Business” webinars, calendar of resources, and more.
- Host quarterly working group sessions with small business capital providers in the County, understanding their offerings and capacity.
- Conduct a biannual business owner survey to track business perceptions and indicators in the Quad Cities; utilize results to inform programming.
- Provide ribbon-cutting events and other promotional awareness for new Quad Cities businesses.

Strategy 3.2: Develop a workforce readiness/ pre-employment initiative tailored for employees of small businesses in the Quad Cities.

Quad City small businesses need a reliable talent and employment pipeline if they hope to continue offering high-quality services and amenities. A regional pre-employment training initiative for employees of Quad Cities' small businesses will ensure employees have the essential skills—such as basic employment onboarding, customer service, and more—needed to excel in their roles.

Action items:

- Convene an advisory panel of Quad Cities businesses and educational partners to drive the development of a pre-employment training initiative, which must be informed by the private sector.
- Survey area businesses to understand pre-employment skills needed and identify gaps among entry-level employees.
- Explore best practices of other pre-employment training programs across Arizona, especially those with a focus on retail and business services.
- Seek funding and educational partners to support program design, curriculum development, and implementation.
- Launch a pilot initiative and evaluate its effectiveness and impact, adjusting the program as necessary.

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Strategy 3.3: Pilot a multi-generational mentorship program among entrepreneurs in the Quad Cities area.

Many small businesses in the Quad Cities have discussed the importance of mentorship as a crucial factor for their success. A regional small business mentorship initiative can ensure that new entrepreneurs and business owners in the Quad Cities gain access to practical insights from those who have successfully launched and operated businesses in the region. By doing so, these business owners can improve their chances of success in a competitive business landscape in Yavapai County.

Action items:

- Evaluate, in partnership with Score and other support organizations, other entrepreneurial mentoring programs across Arizona; utilize the lessons learned to inform program and matchmaking design.
- Identify a regional partner to help develop and administer the initiative.
- Survey Quad Cities entrepreneurs to determine interest in serving as mentors versus mentees.
- Consider how to implement the mentorship program into a welcoming and 'how to open a business' initiative in the Quad Cities.

Strategy 3.4: Promote a "buy-local" campaign within the Quad Cities to encourage support for local businesses.

By creating a buy-local campaign in the Quad Cities region, economic development officials can stimulate local economic activity, support small businesses, and strengthen community identity. In doing so, the region will retain increased wealth in the community, foster local job creation, and enhance the overall destination experience for residents and visitors alike.

Action items:

- Convene Quad Cities businesses and area Chambers to assess the effectiveness of promotional efforts aimed at encouraging local purchases.
- Review "buy local" campaigns from other communities, extracting valuable lessons and applying them to the Quad Cities region.
- Create a systematic and measurable approach/plan that can be sustained over time and easily measured.

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Strategy 3.5: Market the diversity of Quad Cities' entrepreneurs to showcase the rich and varied entrepreneurial landscape.

The most effective way to promote entrepreneurship in the Quad Cities is by celebrating the diversity of its current entrepreneurs and businesses, from authentic retail experiences to fun brewpub experiences and more. City officials can do this through small business spotlights, business awards, cultural and heritage promotion, placemaking, and more.

Action items:

- Develop a systematic approach to identifying diverse small businesses and start-ups in the Quad Cities to profile.
- Promote Quad Cities' successes across multiple communication platforms: Chamber and partners' websites, blogs, social media, direct emails, and more.

Strategy 3.6: Curate destination experiences that attract visitors and drive traffic to small businesses in the Quad Cities region.

Quad Cities economic development and DMO partners can create and promote destination experiences that attract visitors and drive traffic to small businesses in the Quad Cities region. These experiences could range from heritage and cultural to holiday-focused and special events.

Action items:

- Support the creation of an inventory of Quad Cities' small business destination assets, including shopping, entertainment, art, food, breweries, and more.
- Collaborate with Experience Prescott, Arizona State Tourism Office, and other destination partners to package and promote the Quad Cities region as a destination.
- Develop curated destination experiences for Quad Cities regional residents and visitors; test ideas on social media.

Strategy 3.7: Establish a coordinated, regional placemaking and programming initiative to support businesses in the region's downtowns.

Placemaking can help to create a distinct identity and sense of place for the downtown areas in the Quad Cities. This can foster a stronger connection with the local residents and encourage visitors to support local businesses.

Action items:

- Convene a working group of downtown, downtown and neighborhood partners to drive placemaking collaboration throughout Yavapai County.
- Catalog underutilized spaces throughout the County to understand potential placemaking uses and limitations.
- Develop a County-wide placemaking framework.
- Support initiatives and events that advance the placemaking framework and drive visitors and customers to Quad Cities' businesses.

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Goal 4: Everybody's talent.

We will invest in the talent that will fuel the future of the Quad Cities.

Economic development today is intricately linked to talent attraction and retention. In the Quad Cities, educated and skilled young professionals serve as the region's primary export. Collaborating with educational partners such as Prescott College, Yavapai College, and Embry-Riddle University, the region must enhance its effectiveness in connecting graduates with clear career opportunities and pathways. Moreover, addressing challenges like growing housing unaffordability and rising childcare costs is crucial, while providing engagement opportunities for young professionals to connect with each other and actively participate in the region's development.

The evidence:

- With a median age of 54, the Quad Cities region is significantly older than the U.S. average. Its prime talent pool is 33% smaller, emphasizing the importance of talent attraction and retention.
- Educational attainment varies across the County, 28% of residents have a B.A. or higher, and 25% of residents have a HS diploma.
- Yavapai County's share of residents with a B.A. or higher has grown 9% in the past five years.
- Three in ten people moving to the Quad Cities region have a B.A. or higher.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess implementation and impact.

- **College graduates and graduate retention:** Measuring the number of college students that participate in "Campus Quad Cities programming and the retention rate of university graduates.
- **Talent engagement:** Tracking the needs and partnering with the development community to help provide access to smaller-footprint workplaces.
- **Millennial talent:** Tracking the share of residents 25 to 34.
- **Leadership participants:** Counting the number of residents 25 to 45 engaged in the regional leadership initiative.

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Strategy 4.1: Launch a “Campus Quad Cities” initiative focused on improving the connection between students and the region, including internships, volunteer opportunities, and placemaking activities.

To ensure that students who are educated in the Quad Cities stay in the region, it's essential that they develop an affiliation or attachment to the area. To do this, the Quad Cities must improve internships connecting students to interesting and meaningful employment, offer volunteer opportunities, and create placemaking events that showcase the vibrancy of the region. Research has shown that students who build a relationship with a community are more likely to stick around after graduation.

Action items:

- Convene an advisory group comprising university representatives, including students, faculty, and administrators, as well as private-sector leaders, to provide advice on enhancing the connectivity of regional colleges and universities, involving students, faculty, and staff, to the Quad Cities.
- Explore best practices for "town-grown" initiatives, such as Campus Philly.
- Develop and implement a small pilot initiative (e.g., classes in downtown Prescott, volunteering, internship fair, etc.) to assess its impact. Scale the initiative in subsequent years based on the evaluation results.

Strategy 4.2: Grow skill training programs for in-demand career pathways such as healthcare and business services, and more.

Local talent development, driven by private sector needs, is vital. Even more so, we have to hold onto the talent that we are training, placing them directly in our employment pipelines. While the region is celebrating new degree offerings in healthcare and business services, we have to continue to work with educational partners — Yavapai College, Prescott College, and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University — to ensure we are looking to develop degree programs that are aligned with regional talent needs.

Action items:

- Partner with Yavapai College to grow enrollment to new BS degrees in nursing and business.
- Engage Quad Cities' higher education partners and traded-sector employers quarterly to discuss needed training programs.
- Create and administer a biennial survey to identify training gaps for entry-level and middle-skill opportunities in Quad Cities' growing industry sectors.
- Utilize survey findings to support the creation of a pilot for the establishment of new programs or as support to increase the enrollment of existing ones.

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Strategy 4.3: Reimagine the Prescott Young Professionals program.

Young professionals are attracted to the Quad Cities because of its quality of life, work-life balance, family-friendly atmosphere, and abundant outdoor access. However, they often encounter a shortage of networking and professional opportunities. Efforts are underway to reimagine the Prescott Young Professionals program to support value-added networking and professional development opportunities.

Action items:

- Provide resources for those leading the Prescott Young Professional program to undergo a strategic planning process for the initiative. It is crucial that the expanded initiative is regional in nature.
- Consider implementing new programming to offer networking functions, professional development, award recognition, volunteer opportunities, and more. Ensure that the program is adequately funded.
- Actively promote the successes of young professionals in Yavapai County.

Strategy 4.4: Build upon the impact of the Prescott Area Leadership initiative, better connecting young leaders to non-profit board and leadership opportunities.

The Prescott Area Leadership Initiative offers future leaders the opportunity to connect with one another while building a pipeline for future civic leaders within the Quad Cities. As participants complete the program, they should be matched with volunteer board leadership opportunities in the area. This will help ensure that the region's philanthropic organizations are tapping into a new generation of ideas and leaders.

Action items:

- Continue to support the Prescott Area Leadership initiative while expanding its influence.
- Encourage a diverse range of residents and Chamber members to apply for the Prescott Area Leadership program and create promotional materials that showcase the program's diversity.
- Expand the scholarship fund to facilitate broader participation in the program.
- Establish a pipeline of participants connecting them to non-profit and philanthropic organizations, facilitating opportunities for Leadership program participants to join boards.

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Strategy 4.5: Advance a regional childcare initiative to address growing supply constraints and costs.

Affordable childcare is a growing economic development challenge across the country, including in the Quad Cities. Many families and young professionals in the Quad Cities have identified this issue as one of the most significant burdens for their households. By improving childcare options and affordability, the Quad Cities region has an opportunity to address a regional affordability challenge but also increase the area's labor participation rate that is significantly lower than the national and Arizona averages.

Action items:

- Evaluate Yavapai County's childcare ecosystem to gain a comprehensive understanding of existing gaps and needs.
- Support the growth and expansion of childcare enterprises in the Quad Cities by providing capacity-building and technical services. This builds upon the strategies outlined in Strategy 3.1.
- Identify state and federal funding and policy opportunities aimed at closing the childcare gaps.

Strategy 4.6: Initiate a regional housing study to evaluate the potential for workforce housing and mixed-use development.

The Quad Cities region is grappling with rising housing costs. An increasing number of residents find themselves unable to afford a home in the region. The housing challenge in the Quad Cities has evolved into a workforce problem, necessitating a reframing and reevaluation of the region's approach to development

Action items:

- Assemble a diverse steering committee—regional city officials, residents, developers, and business and community leaders—to help guide the Quad Cities' regional housing study.
- Explore past housing studies of peer communities in an effort to devise an effective RFP.
- Hire a firm to evaluate the region's housing opportunities and challenges and to make recommendations on future initiatives and programs; look to the Northern Arizona Council of Governments to manage RFP process and study.

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Goal 5: Everybody's destination.

We will promote and celebrate the Quad Cities as a destination for families, professionals, and visitors.

Storytelling and marketing play a crucial role in regional development. A cohesive regional brand, designed to appeal to potential investors, talented individuals, and visitors, can significantly contribute to destination development. It has the power to generate excitement and foster engagement within the community. By leveraging its unique quality of place, the Quad Cities region can effectively convey that it transcends the label of a mere "retirement community." Instead, it is a vibrant destination where visitors, professionals, and businesses alike can thrive.

The evidence:

- The Quad Cities region attracts thousands of visitors annually, and a large share of these visitors become full-time residents.
- Among its peers, the region ranks in the "middle of the pack" for its presence on social media and sites such as TripAdvisor.
- The region lacks a unified brand to support its economic and destination development efforts.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess implementation and impact.

- **Online presence:** Tracking the engagement of online marketing efforts (website, e-newsletter, social media).
- **Destination experiences promoted:** Identifying the cultural, arts, and recreational experiences promoted.

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Strategy 5.1: Develop a unified regional destination brand to bolster investment, attract talent, and draw visitors.

A regional unified destination brand for the Quad Cities can serve as a powerful tool for driving economic growth, attracting investment, retaining skilled talent, promoting tourism, and fostering collaboration among community stakeholders, ultimately contributing to the prosperity of the area.

Action items:

- Evaluate Quad Cities' brand and positioning for economic development, talent attraction, and investment.
- Hire a destination branding firm to support the Quad Cities' brand development; create a new brand and ensure regional buy-in.

Strategy 5.2: Create regional marketing materials (website, brochure, etc.).

Developing regional marketing materials is critical for supporting united regional economic development efforts. These materials will help showcase the unique attributes, resources, and opportunities in the Quad Cities. They will play a pivotal role in attracting investment and fostering overall economic prosperity within the region.

Action items:

- Refresh regional economic development marketing materials (websites, social media, and more) to reflect new positioning.
- Create new promotional materials and channels as needed.

Strategy 5.3: Promote and market arts, cultural, and recreational experiences in the Quad Cities as part of the region's tourism initiatives.

By marketing and promoting its arts and cultural experiences, the Quad Cities region can attract a greater number of visitors, generate increased revenue, create additional jobs, support local artists and organizations, enhance the region's image and identity, boost its competitiveness and appeal, foster a sense of community and pride, and ultimately benefit both tourism and economic development.

Action items:

- Support the creation of an inventory of Quad Cities' arts and cultural experiences.
- Collaborate with destination partners to package and promote Yavapai County as an arts and cultural destination.

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Strategy 5.4: Establish a comprehensive communication plan to disseminate successes and achievements to regional policymakers, stakeholders, and the community.

To ensure support for the region's economic development strategy grows, it is critical that Quad City leaders continue to communicate the impact and results they are having in the community. To do so effectively, a communications plan that outlines audiences, tactics, and channels is essential.

Action items:

- Develop and execute quarterly communications for Quad Cities' business, economic development, and community partners.
- Provide briefings and updates to various regional City and County Councils regarding economic development efforts.
- Host an annual "State of the Region" summit.

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Steering Committee Members

Throughout this process, the Prescott Chamber Foundation had a robust Steering Committee to help guide the development of the strategy. These members were selected to represent the Quad Cities region and provide their expertise, both within their respective industries and their deep knowledge about the community.

Thank you, to our steering committee members:

Cindy Blackmore

Mike Fann

Dr. Barbara Morris

Gilbert Davidson

Angela Harmon

Jeremy Murdock

Darla DeVille

Gillian Haley

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