Data-Driven Collaboration at the Regional Level: Economic and Workforce Development in Rockford, Illinois

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Creating a Thriving Region

- Brainpower 21st Century Talent
- Innovative Business
- Innovation Entrepreneurship Supports
- Creative, Capable, Healthy People
- Dynamic Clusters
- Quality, Connected Places
- New Narratives
- Innovative Hot Spots
Understanding the Current State of the Regional Economy and Workforce

- Identify regional industry clusters
- Place clusters in national/international context
- Engage with regional industry leaders
- Articulate evidence-based challenges and opportunities
- Connect the dots
Addressing the Challenges

• Industry partners report 50% of engineering workforce turning over in the next five years
• Student college and career readiness lacking in local public school outcomes
• Public education and safety issues make it difficult for companies to attract and retain talent
• Innovation and entrepreneurship efforts not well organized or supported
Maximizing the Opportunities

• Rockford region has more than 200 aerospace companies, including several Tier One providers
• Tier One and supply chain companies organized into Rockford Area Aerospace Network
• Federal grant helped energize collaboration around innovation, cluster branding, small business development and workforce development
• $200 million Woodward expansion creates job and generates optimism
Collaboration Accelerators

• Develop a shared vision
• Inspire involvement of familiar leaders and nurture emerging leaders
  • Tap into and transform functional networks
  • Link and leverage resources and attract new resources as needed
Growing our Own Regional Engineering Workforce

- Higher education, industry and economic development leaders developed collaborative workforce development solution
- NIU baccalaureate completion program in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, delivered on the campus of Rock Valley College
- Guaranteed internship interviews and employment interviews with local industries
- Experiential learning and labs at local manufacturers
- Student support/pipeline development with local K-12 schools
- Industry partners leading $6 million “Engineering Our Future” fundraising campaign ($4.5 million pledged to date) for facility renovation, faculty and scholarships
NIU EIGERlab Innovation Network

Innovation, acceleration and product development in the Northern Illinois Region
Contact information

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